Decolonizing Higher Education: Exploring Student Representative Council's (SRC) Perspectives

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DEDICATION

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go". Joshua 1:9

I dedicate this study to my daughter, Sibusisiwe Khumalo, for her support, sacrifice, and strength.

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ABSTRACT

Decolonisation as a concept has been in existence for many years within the higher education context. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of debates and articles, both nationally and internationally, about the decolonisation of higher education. The South African context was escalated through a series of student movement protests. Protests such as *#FeesMustFall, #RhodesMustFall,* and other national protests intensely affected South Africa's higher institutions between 2015–2016 and gave prominence to the decolonisation of higher education in South Africa. The University of KwaZulu-Natal, which was used for this study, was forced to close when students' demands to decolonise the curriculum intensified. The rationale for this study was to conceptualise the understanding of the Student Representative Council (SRC) of decolonisation in higher education and their contribution towards the call to decolonise the university. The purpose of the study was to explore the SRC's perspectives of decolonising the curriculum. The study was done using a qualitative case study and a conceptual framework. The case study method is widely utilized by researchers to delve deeply into a specific situation, event, or entity, offering a comprehensive perspective. The five SRC presidents were selected to participate in semi-structured and focus group interviews. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. It was found that the SRC's perspectives about the decolonisation of higher education were distinct, congruent, and unambiguous. They were not advocating for the eradication of Western knowledge in the curriculum, but rather for its decentralisation. The literature presented in the study showed that many scholars think that the decolonisation of higher education is critical and yet a debatable discourse in the 21st century as many scholars across the world are moving towards a more congruent and borderless notion of education and responsiveness. Further, literature presented in the study highlights the notion of keeping a tenuous balance in our process to decolonise higher education, as we cannot be ignorant of the reality that 21st century is dynamic in unprecedented ways. The study found that the SRC's perspectives of decolonisation is centred around the idea of an intervention strategy that is needed as a way of dismantling Eurocentric thoughts. A question may arise in terms of how this can be achieved. Reconciling the Westernised Eurocentric and the Africanised indigenous curriculum, meaning, a curriculum that is culturally sensitive does not mean discounting certain components of Western knowledge constructs that benefit African societies. In this way, learning becomes meaningful (Shizha, 2013). Further, the study found that there is no alignment in terms of operations and consultations between university management and the SRC pertaining to students' issues.

Therefore, the research concludes by providing recommendations for future studies pertaining to the issues around a better understanding of roles of engagement between SRC and university management.

Keywords:

Colonisation, decolonisation, South African higher education, Student Representative Council, decolonised curriculum

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CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW, CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES

1.1 Introduction

The structure of South African higher education during the apartheid era was intentionally skewed to uphold the power and privileges of the ruling White minority (Matola et al., 2019). Presently, South Africa remains entangled in the legacy of coloniality and apartheid, perpetuating the socio-economic and political oppression of the Black majority (Heleta, 2018). The enduring influence of colonial ideologies is evident in the continued dominance of Eurocentric perspectives within South African universities, hindering the full realisation of transformation (Le Grange, 2016). Scholars such as Adebisi (2016); Le Grange, (2016b); Mashau, (2018); Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Zondi (2016) converged in highlighting the pressing need for a decolonisation initiative to address the persistent colonial discourse in post-colonial and postapartheid South Africa. This study encompasses multifaceted objectives spanning the social, economic, and political realms. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2014) emphasised the role of higher education institutions in perpetuating coloniality, reiterating their function as sites for the reproduction of such systems.

The colonial legacy has profoundly impacted higher education curricula as well. University courses largely reflect Eurocentric perspectives rooted in colonial and apartheid knowledge paradigms, which fail to connect with the lived experiences of Black South Africans (Chetty & Knaus, 2016). This trend in education has led to the elevation of European and global Northern customs and worldviews at the expense of indigenous knowledge systems (Jabosung et al., 2019), ultimately marginalising and eroding native wisdom. (Adebisi; Le Grange, 2016) further argue that this fixation on European ideals has resulted in the marginalisation and dilution of indigenous knowledge, leading to a call for a movement to decolonise the organisational structure of South African universities and the academic disciplines they house.

The demand for decolonising higher education increased significantly in 2015 and 2016, during the impactful student protests collectively known as *#FeesMustFall*. This movement sought to challenge the dominance of Eurocentric perspectives within academia and aimed to reshape higher education in a more inclusive and diverse manner. Through a mobilised effort, students advocated for the overhaul of curricula to dismantle the Eurocentric framework. The movement's rallying cry, encapsulated by the hashtag #EnoughIsEnough, conveyed a sentiment of urgency and determination (Mashau, 2018). Going beyond the struggle against the enduring legacy of apartheid, this student-led movement extended its objectives to address the remnants of colonialism. Emerging from the heart of this movement were numerous student

leaders who voiced their disillusionment with the post-apartheid higher education system, asserting that it remained entrenched in oppressive structures and was inadequately responsive to the specific needs of the current context. Chasi et. al (2019) underscored the notion that the "post" in "post-apartheid" holds limited significance, as the higher education landscape perpetuates a negation of authentic historical societal and human relations.

The efforts of student protesters and leaders in South Africa, who ardently championed the cause of decolonising higher education, were aimed at capturing the attention of both government authorities and university administrators. Their primary goal was to protest and give voice to what Chasi et. al (2019) referred to as "Black pain". This research focuses on the Student Representatives Council's (SRC) role, seeking their insights and active engagement in advocating for the decolonisation of the curriculum. The SRC's perspective on the decolonisation of higher education was invaluable in examining the essence of educational reform, especially considering their pivotal role in driving the movement.

1.2 Focus and Purpose of the Study

This qualitative case study focuses on the perspectives of SRC presidents from various campuses within a higher education institution situated in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The primary objective revolves around the concept of decolonising higher education, specifically within the context of curriculum reform. The motivation for this research stemmed from the student-led protests, which primarily advocated for changes in the higher education curriculum. The study concentrated on understanding how the SRC presidents perceived and engaged with the process of decolonising the curriculum. The participants targeted for this investigation were the SRC presidents from the five different university campuses. The primary objective was to capture a range of diverse experiences and viewpoints concerning the decolonisation of the curriculum. This section proceeds to provide a clear definition of decolonisation within the scope of this study and subsequently outlines the rationale behind focusing on this topic through the lens of the SRC. Furthermore, the section elaborates on the nature of the SRC, their role in institutional governance, and their involvement in the transformative process of curriculum reform.

1.3 Location of the Study

The research took place within a university situated in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. In this study, five members from the SRC were chosen, each representing a different campus. This institution is positioned to the west of the Durban area and boasts a diverse student body. After analysing data from the institution, it is evident that a significant proportion of student's hail

from schools classified as quintiles 1 to 3, indicating their origins in socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds marked by substantial impoverishment within their communities. Notably, there is a smaller portion of the student population originating from various provinces across South Africa, resulting in a rich linguistic diversity given their diverse home languages. The student population is a mix of various racial groups, and the institution also accommodates international students, primarily from neighbouring regions and the broader African continent. Spanning the KwaZulu-Natal province, the institution is spread across five campuses. It is worth mentioning that during the 2015/2016 protests instigated by the *#FeesMustFall* movement, the institution under scrutiny also experienced disruptions, necessitating a halt in academic operations due to intensified student demands for a curriculum that reflects decolonisation.

1.4 Background of the Study

In 1994, South Africa's newly established democratic government embarked on a mission to revolutionise higher education, pledging to address the legacy of apartheid (Matola et al., 2019). This transformative agenda aimed to confront the deeply entrenched social and economic inequalities inherited from the apartheid era, which had fostered discriminatory practices. The efforts to enact this agenda did not succeed, resulting in a system where institutional norms, curriculum, and language continued to reflect colonial influences (Knight, 2018). Supporting this viewpoint, Menon and Castrillón, (2019) contended that the student protests of 2015/2016 laid bare the persistent lack of transformation in the curriculum. Although several strategies were implemented to reshape higher education institutions, including policies such as the *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education*, as well as the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion, and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions, these initiatives failed to yield tangible outcomes. This failure was starkly evident in the student movements such as *#FeesMustFall* and *#RhodesMustFall* during 2015/2016, which acted as catalysts for advancing the discourse on decolonising higher education.

1.5 Rationale

The rationale behind undertaking this study on decolonising higher education in South Africa stems from the imperative to address prevailing perceptions on this matter within the country. As demonstrated by the *#FeesMustFall* movement of 2015/2016, deficiencies in the curriculum became apparent, and student protests unveiled their dissatisfaction with an educational system that was originally designed to serve the interests of colonialism and apartheid (Meda, 2020;

Menon & Castrillón, 2019). The curriculum plays a pivotal role in the process of decolonising higher education, yet elucidating its concept requires a clearer exposition, drawing from scholarly discourse.

Concurrent with Grumet (1981), the curriculum within higher education can be construed as the narratives relayed to students about their historical, current, and prospective contexts. The curriculum serves as a structured and deliberate conduit for imparting a fusion of knowledge and competencies that align with societal requisites (Higgs, 2016). It transcends the notion of a mere documented plan, delving into the realm of lived encounters. This entails embracing fundamental principles and beliefs associated with learning, comprehension, knowledge, academic disciplines, communal dynamics, and individual uniqueness (Higgs, 2016; Jabosung et al., 2019). Thus, it becomes imperative to probe into the way students, including the SRC, interact with the existing university curriculum and how this curriculum enriches their realworld experiences.

The enduring impact of South Africa's colonisation and apartheid history reverberates through its education system, engendering persistent inequalities and power imbalances. This historical legacy has entrenched Eurocentric teaching and exclusionary practices within higher education. Consequently, the voices of marginalised individuals, particularly Black students, have been historically marginalised and relegated from participatory roles. As a response, the movement for decolonisation has emerged within higher education, aiming to rectify historical disparities and injustices within academic institutions (Chasi et. al, 2019). This movement involves a critical reassessment and deconstruction of colonial frameworks, mindsets, and knowledge paradigms that continue to exert dominance over academia (NdlovuGatsheni, 2021). Its objective is to foster an inclusive, equitable, and culturally representative educational framework that acknowledges and honours the diverse backgrounds and histories of its student body. Central to this transformation are the perspectives of students themselves, who stand as direct stakeholders influenced by the policies, practices, and curriculum of higher education.

The Student Representative Councils (SRCs) are democratically elected entities that serve as the voice of students within higher education institutions. They serve as a crucial platform for student involvement, activism, and representation. The SRC plays a vital role in championing student rights, influencing institutional policies, and fostering a strong sense of community among students. These councils engage in various activities such as advocacy, lobbying, and negotiations with university administrations, governmental bodies, and other stakeholders. Their focus is on addressing critical concerns like tuition fees, housing, education quality,

student support, and campus safety (Tabane et al., 2003). A noticeable trend has emerged over time, particularly among South African higher education institutions, where students, including those at the university under study, have expressed dissatisfaction with the existing curriculum. The 2015/2016 protest movement at various South African universities, including the one in question, amplified these grievances. The core issues were centred around rising fees, which had adverse effects on students' well-being, academic performance, and overall learning experience.

The repercussions were particularly pronounced among Black students, who found it challenging to keep pace with the rigorous curriculum, consequently exacerbating pre-existing educational inequalities. In response, students are advocating for a curriculum that is more balanced and adaptable. This revised curriculum should enable deeper learning, encourage critical thinking, and facilitate the practical application of knowledge. Students are pushing for an educational approach that prioritises their well-being, embraces interdisciplinary perspectives, and creates opportunities for personal growth and exploration. To explore the potential impact of these changes, the current study aims to investigate the role of the SRC in driving these curriculum developments.

1.6 Tracing the Roots of Curriculum Decolonisation Debate in South Africa

The discourse on curriculum decolonisation in South Africa emerges from a broader movement aimed at reshaping the remnants of colonialism's influence on education. This movement is deeply rooted in the intricate history of colonisation, apartheid, and the subsequent struggle for liberation and equity. Its fundamental objective is to counterbalance the dominance of Eurocentric perspectives and counteract the sidelining of indigenous knowledge systems within the educational framework. The inception of the curriculum decolonisation dialogue can be traced back to the anti-apartheid movement and the wider conversation about decolonisation across Africa (Gumede, 2018). The apartheid era saw a starkly segregated educational system in South Africa, heavily infused with the ideologies of the apartheid regime. This educational paradigm predominantly propagated a Eurocentric worldview while downplaying the histories, cultures, and knowledge systems of indigenous African communities (Le Grange, 2020).

Following the dismantling of apartheid in 1994, a renewed focus emerged on overhauling the education system to rectify historical injustices and foster societal unity. The transformation of the curriculum became a central tenet of this endeavour, with a call for the infusion of indigenous knowledge systems and the deconstruction of colonial perspectives (Mudaly, 2018) A significant milestone in this discourse was marked by the introduction of the Revised

National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) in 2002. The RNCS aimed to construct a more comprehensive and pertinent curriculum by interweaving indigenous knowledge systems and local contexts into the fabric of teaching and learning (Education, 2011). It underscored the imperative of celebrating cultural diversity and confronting the ingrained biases of Eurocentrism within the realm of education.

The *#RhodesMustFall* movement, which emerged in 2015 at the University of Cape Town (UCT) marked a significant turning point in the ongoing discourse (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). This movement, originating from the demand for the removal of a statue commemorating Cecil John Rhodes, a British colonialist and mining tycoon, served as a catalyst for broader discussions on institutional racism and the imperative for decolonising higher education. The nationwide dialogue it ignited encompassed not only the physical presence of monuments but also delved into the profound domain of curriculum transformation.

In the aftermath of the movement, momentum surged behind the debate on curriculum decolonisation, capturing the attention and engagement of an array of stakeholders: educators, students, researchers, and policymakers. This collective involvement has translated into policy formulations, a notable example being the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) by the Department of Basic Education (Du Plessis & Mbunyuza, 2014). This policy underlines the significance of decolonising the curriculum, representing a notable stride toward inclusivity and a more equitable pedagogical landscape. It is imperative to acknowledge the intricate and multi-faceted nature of the curriculum decolonisation discourse, characterised by a tapestry of perspectives and strategies. Addressing these multifarious dimensions is a central objective of the current study, aiming to facilitate inclusivity, especially concerning the practical enactment of curriculum changes, the curation of course content, and the evolution of pedagogical methodologies.

1.7 Understanding the Role of SRC

Student leadership within South African universities is undergoing a period of dynamic transformation, marked by a sense of restlessness and a pursuit of change. The evolving landscape of higher education, exemplified by events like the *#FeesMustFall* movement in 2015/2016 and similar initiatives at the institutional level, has underscored a compelling demand for substantial shifts in the outward manifestations and engagement of student leaders (Pule, 2022). This imperative for change is further complicated by the enduring legacies of colonisation and the intricacies of class struggles, which contribute to the intricate tapestry of student leadership in the realm of higher education (Pule, 2022). Within this intricate web, the

concept of student leadership takes on multifaceted dimensions. For this study, the focus is directed towards the member-based framework, represented by the SRC. Student leadership, in this context, is conceptualised as a systemic construct comprising an intricate interplay of diverse subsystems, encompassing political organisations, campus leadership, and more (Luescher-Mamashela, 2013). Central to the governance of public higher education institutions, the SRC holds a pivotal role as an integral stakeholder, a status enshrined and regulated by South Africa's Higher Education Act 107 of 1997 (Republic of South Africa, 1997). This legislative framework empowers higher education institutions to establish structures and facilitate processes that cultivate inclusive spaces wherein differences are not only deliberated but also negotiated through participatory and transparent mechanisms.

The historical power structures rooted in colonial legacies still exert a significant impact on our universities, shaping an institutional environment that is not always conducive to the success of many Black students (Costandius et al., 2018). This has given rise to a dissonance between the admission policies that allow Black students into higher education and the cultural and linguistic expectations imposed by the institution itself (Luckett, 2016). Consequently, these students often face repeated setbacks, eventually leading to academic exclusion (Luckett, 2016). This cycle prompts the SRC to step in, responding to cases reported to their offices. In these instances, the SRC engages in negotiations with university management, aiming to prevent academic exclusion. Should these attempts fail to yield results, students often turn to protest as an alternative means of expression.

To facilitate effective and efficient governance of public higher education institutions, both the SRC and management must comprehend and appropriately apply higher education legislation. This understanding ensures that the SRC can actively and substantively participate in institutional governance. To achieve this, access to information, consultation, dialogues, and communication partnerships between the SRC and management are paramount. The information outlined played a crucial role in shaping the questions posed to the SRC and informed the interviews that delved into their perspectives. These insights served as pivotal themes in the study, constituting the study's conceptual framework. This framework provides a lens through which the SRC's involvement and participation in public higher education institutions can be comprehended.

1.8 Research Objectives

The objectives guiding this study are:

- To explore the SRC's understanding of decolonisation in higher education.
- To investigate how the SRC will contribute to the decolonization of higher education.
- To establish how the SRC think decolonisation can be achieved in South African higher education.

1.9 Research Questions

The following research questions originated from the discussion of the importance of studying the impact of a SRCs in the decolonisation of higher education. The research questions describe the purpose of the study in finding out how to explore the SRC's understanding of decolonisation of higher learning institutions and their involvement in tackling widespread challenges of decolonisation of curriculum on how this takes place and why.

Questions:

1. What is the SRC's understanding of decolonisation higher education?
2. How will the SRC contribute to the decolonisation of higher education?
3. How does the SRC hope to achieve decolonisation in South African higher education?

1.10 Brief Overview of Research Methodology

The research methodology adopted for this study was qualitative in nature, chosen to effectively comprehend the role of the SRC within the context of higher education, specifically in relation to the decolonisation of the curriculum. The selection of this methodology was guided by an ontological perspective that views the phenomenon as subjective and multifaceted (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The decisive factor is defining a case study lies in selecting the individual unit under study and establishing the boundaries of its setting (Flyvbjerg, 2011). As the primary research instrument, I immersed myself within the participants' experiences to gain insights into their subjective realities. This approach allowed for flexibility in adapting the research instrument during data collection (Gentles et al., 2015). Through this qualitative process, I was able to intricately describe the mechanisms through which the SRC influences transformative changes in institutions of higher learning.

The study's design was rooted in the interpretivist paradigm, aimed at interpreting, and comprehending the phenomenon. The choice of this paradigm was influenced by epistemological considerations regarding the researcher's relationship with the participants and the knowledge that can be derived from their perspectives (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In this paradigm, the researcher seeks to understand the phenomenon through the diverse and distinct realities of the participants (Myers & Avison, 2002). The interpretive paradigm was particularly suitable due to the exploratory nature of the study, given the limited existing knowledge on the subject.

1.11 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study extends to various stakeholders, including the SRC, decisionmakers, government officials, higher institution managers, lecturers, and education researchers. For the SRC, the study offers insights into their role in the decolonisation of higher learning institutions. By addressing challenges, they can navigate the unique landscape of South African higher education, engaging with governance and policy changes effectively. Decision-makers stand to gain a comprehensive understanding of the transformative shift required in higher education curricula. This understanding becomes especially critical considering recent events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the need for adaptable and relevant educational approaches. Therefore, the decolonisation process should consider how the acceptable curriculum would be envisaged.

1.12 Limitations of the Study

Initially my intent in the study was to do face-to-face interviews. The sudden and unexpected outbreak of the Corona Virus prompted the need for virtual interviews as opposed to the initial face-to-face interviews. The participants agreed, but at a crucial moment one would site network or connectivity issues. I then interviewed my participants to talk about specific matters pertaining to SRC participation in decolonisation of curriculum and their contribution or lack of contribution.

Another limitation of the study concerns the purpose and size of the study. Since the interviews were conducted during COVID-19 lockdown, I was unable to have big sample size, and the group interviews that I had also planned were cancelled. Hence, the study is exploratory in nature, which means that the phenomenon is not well known in the literature. As such, I decided to do a small-scale qualitative study to understand the role the SRC play in term of decolonisation of higher learning institutions. The method used to collect data were pitched at obtaining detailed descriptions of decolonisation.

1.13 Chapter Summary

This chapter provides a synopsis of the study starting from its outset focus and purpose which provides the highlights of the study that mentions the role of the SRC. The SRC, as used in this study, is then defined before laying out the important components that represent the decolonisation of higher education. Thereafter, I clarify the rationale behind the study, which is entrenched in the study of higher education institutions changing their curriculum delivery and refocusing away from the western monopoly on education in South Africa. The research questions derived from the rationale and steered the choice of methodology used. with the chapter closes with a discussion on the significance and limitations of the study.

1.14 Chapter Outline

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter one provided the origin of the idea of inquiring into the SRC's understanding of decolonisation of higher education. This chapter formulated arguments, which constituted the reasons for conducting such a study. The importance of the SRC was highlighted, and the need to explore their role further is done through research questions as well as the form and type of methodology used.

Chapter Two: Literature review

This chapter presents the literature pertinent to the SRC and argues that their functional aspects have received less attention and point to protests such as the *#FeesMustFall* movement. The literature points out that some of the challenges raised during the call for a decolonised curriculum through the *#FeesMustFall* movement have still not been addressed. Several studies were explored to contextualise this phenomenon and to provide in-depth arguments on decolonisation.

Chapter Three: Conceptual framework

This chapter presents the various concepts that formed a conceptual framework of the study. The concepts include coloniality; the impact of coloniality on SA curriculum; the coloniality of language; decolonisation; decolonisation as a national project and decentralisation of western knowledge; national project and curriculum; and national project and language. These concepts were relevant in determining the extent to which higher education can be decolonised through the lenses of the SRC.

Chapter Four: Methodology

Chapter four focuses on the research design and methodology of the study, looking at the data collection for qualitative research, and the validity and reliability of the instruments. Data analysis is discussed, followed by the identification of the sampling methods that are used. The chapter ends with a discussion on credibility, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

Chapter Five: Data presentation key findings and discussion

The findings are presented in this chapter, as well as the analysis of the data. This chapter focuses on presenting and theorising the data. The study adopted a thematic analysis approach, presenting themes that emerged from the data collection process.

Chapter Six: Conclusion and recommendation

This final chapter focuses on the findings, discussion, and recommendations of the study. A summary of the study is provided, followed by a summary of the literature review and the findings in relation to the theoretical framework to make sense of the findings.

1.15 Conclusion

This chapter presented an overview of the study. It is where the researcher introduced the title, focus, research objectives and research questions. The location of the study was outlined, and a rationale was provided for conducting the study. The problem statement of the study was highlighted, where the researcher explained the problem which the study will focus on. The conceptual framework of the study, research aim, objectives and questions were explained. The research design and methodology, as well as the data collection for the study were briefly discussed. Ethical considerations were elaborated on, followed by an overview of the limitations and division of chapters.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a literature review conducted under three thematic areas, such as the SRC's understanding of decolonisation in higher education; the contribution made by SRC towards decolonisation of higher education and the perceptions of SRC in achieving decolonisation of higher education in South Africa. These three themes indicate that students understanding of decolonization in this context is in conflict with those that are in power and decision makers, hence the students then contribute in two different manners, first one being more radical and protest in nature, while the second one seems to take discussions to management. Unfortunately, there is no substantive achievement of decolonization through the eyes of the SRC. The themes were generated from the three research objectives. The details of the literature review are presented as follows.

2.2 Theme 1: The SRC's Understanding of Decolonisation of Higher Education in South Africa

2.2.1 Decolonisation Within the South African Context

The prospect of decolonisation within the context of South Africa is undeniably tangible. As highlighted by Knaus and Brown (2017), the momentum for decolonisation is being propelled by the dynamic activism of university students. Nevertheless, Cloete et al. (2015) posited that the prevailing paradigm of knowledge creation within universities remains entrenched in systems of authoritative control, standardisation, grading, record-keeping, categorisation, and consequences. Furthermore, he contends that these models of knowledge generation have deepseated roots in post-colonial histories. The persistent challenge arises from the inherent elitism and racial biases that continue to permeate universities to a significant degree (Knaus & Brown, 2017; Le Grange, 2018; Mbembe, 2015). This situation places a burden on students, often compelling them to resort to protests as a means of amplifying their voices. This array of catalysts underpinning student protests underscores the multifaceted motivations for dissent, one of which crucially encompasses the imperative to decolonise academia.

In the wake of South Africa's transition to democracy, it is disheartening to observe that higher education continues to perpetuate the legacies of colonialism and apartheid as pointed out by (Cloete et al., 2015). This raises the question about South Africa's course of action, as the prevailing curriculum, institutional norms, and knowledge generation, which were originally

crafted to advance colonial agendas, persist and thrive in an era that proclaims democratic values and independence. Oyedemi (2020) points out that when black students are admitted into historically White universities, they are challenged by a university's culture that is so antagonistic that one must metaphorically relinquish one's identity to navigate it. This statement underscores the deeply entrenched hostility that some Black students encounter, rendering them marginalised within an educational landscape that continues to echo the racially discriminatory divisions of apartheid South Africa (Oyedemi, 2020).

Studies aptly referred to this persistent predicament as 'technical independence', illustrating how individuals' autonomy is intricately entwined with international financial institutions, multinational conglomerates, and systems of control that extend to educational and cultural domains (Le Grange, 2016a; Mbembe, 2016). These systems, which are still oppressive still dominate the hard-won post-apartheid freedom in South Africa. While post-democracy South Africans certainly enjoy certain privileges, a great number of privileges remain with an underlying level of oppression (Delgado & Mulder, 2017). Fundamentally, the legacy of past injustices endures, overshadowing the present and casting doubt upon the full extent of South Africa's progress. As such, it becomes imperative to confront and reshape the institutions and narratives that perpetuate these oppressive patterns, breaking free from the history marred by colonialism and apartheid. Only then can a future be created that embodies the democratic ideals that are striven for.

Since 1994, universities have shown limited progress in embracing diverse traditions and alternative knowledge systems in a fresh and exploratory manner. Despite the introduction of new policies and frameworks advocating transformation, change, and shifts in institutional culture, the fundamental epistemological foundations have remained largely unchanged. While policies may exist, the commitment to put them into practice appears lacking (Education, 2011). This persistent situation in the South African higher education system can be likened to a continuation of colonial influence, perpetuating dominant identities rather than dismantling hegemony (Heleta, 2016). This viewpoint is shared by scholars Le Grange (2016b) and Mbembe (2015), who asserted that a significant issue within South African institutions is their Western-centric orientation. These universities draw inspiration from and aspire to emulate a prevailing model rooted in Eurocentric epistemology. This canon not only normalises colonialism as a standard form of social interaction, but also neglects other forms of knowledge while disregarding the exploitative and oppressive aspects of colonial history. The present-day societal disparities can be traced back to the inception of colonialism.

According to the findings of Delgado and Mulder (2017), the essence of colonialism revolved around the propagation of European ways of thinking while suppressing indigenous knowledge systems in pursuit of South African land and resources. The colonial powers strategically employed social institutions, including churches, schools, and higher education establishments, to perpetuate and accentuate social disparities (Delgado & Mulder, 2017). These institutions were wielded as tools to mould individuals' thoughts and behaviours, effectively quelling any emergence of critical consciousness within the African population. This shows that the disparities within the educational framework were deeply ingrained, both formally and informally. In alignment with this context, Mbembe (2015) asserted the presence of a Eurocentric curriculum that was initially designed to subjugate intellectual freedom but continues to exert influence even within a democratic society. This insight accentuates the urgency for a process of decolonisation within higher education, serving to dismantle the entrenched barriers of oppression and social inequality that persist within the present-day system.

The ramifications of the persistence of Eurocentric interpretive lenses within the higher education system can have profound implications for the future trajectory of South Africa. Should the higher education system remain entrenched within the confines of Eurocentric paradigms, it raises important questions about the potential course of South Africa's development. The historical introduction of Eurocentric knowledge to Africa was underpinned by prejudiced assumptions, portraying African peoples as lacking in logic, rationality, and religiosity. This prejudiced perspective thus influenced the design of curricula, tailored to perpetuate these discriminatory notions. The urgent call for the decolonisation of higher education stems from these underlying reasons. This involves not only revisiting what is accepted as valid knowledge, but also re-evaluating the very structure and purpose of the university itself. By embracing decolonisation, South Africa's higher education system can break free from the confines of Eurocentrism, fostering a more inclusive, diverse, and contextually relevant educational experience. The success of South Africa's future hinges on its ability to liberate its higher education system from the chains of Eurocentric thought. Embracing a decolonised approach would foster a broader understanding of knowledge, acknowledging the richness of diverse perspectives and cultures. Such a transformation could propel South Africa toward a more equitable and enlightened future, where education is a true catalyst for social progress and empowerment.

2.3 Theme 2: Contributions Made by SRC Towards Decolonisation of Higher Education in South Africa

2.3.1 Proposal for Curriculum Reform in Higher Education

The recent wave of student protests in South Africa, advocating for accessible, high-quality, and culturally inclusive education, has catalysed a renewed focus on the imperative of decolonising higher education in the country. This movement has prompted various higher education institutions to engage in specific initiatives aimed at unpacking the concept of decolonisation and its profound implications for their core mission of delivering excellence in higher education (Sathorar & Geduld, 2018). The impetus for addressing the issue of decolonising the curriculum gained momentum in South Africa when students expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of transformation in course content across universities. This concern prompted a comprehensive revamp of curricula at many institutions as they conducted what could be described as a "macro-review" (Mbembe, 2016 and Sathorar & Geduld, 2018).

A scholarly literature underscores the pivotal role that the *#FeesMustFall* protests played in bringing to light the prominence of outdated, colonially influenced subject matter being taught within university walls (Sathorar & Geduld, 2018). Moreover, the instructional methodologies employed often mirror Western pedagogical approaches, which may not resonate effectively with the diverse student body, leading to hindrances in their academic advancement. A telling video circulating on social media featured the SRC president of the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) articulating the enduring presence of racial dynamics within lecture halls and the design of the curriculum itself. This observation has caused a collective call for a substantial overhaul of the educational content and structure across all institutions of higher learning in South Africa, aiming for a comprehensive and holistic transformation.

It is essential to recognise that higher education operates on a global scale, reflecting its diverse and unique nature (Rauschert & Byram, 2018). This perspective leads some scholars to view the process of decolonising higher education as a collective and time-intensive endeavour (Higgs, 2012). Decolonising higher education involves addressing the historical biases of colonial-era education and requires a philosophical framework that values diversity, empowers through knowledge creation, and fosters African community engagement in educational progress (Higgs, 2012). Scholarly literature largely agrees on the essence of curriculum decolonisation. This approach does not dismiss Western knowledge outright, but rather aims to decentralise and deprovincialise Europe while reclaiming indigenous knowledge systems (Letsekha, 2013). Presently, knowledge production within South African higher education

lacks contextual relevance. As a response, some scholars, such as Letsekha (2013), proposed exploring Africanisation as a knowledge production model. Africanisation entails adapting teaching and learning processes to align with African realities and circumstances. However, this concept requires further exploration and development.

The discourse surrounding the decolonisation of higher education offers a multi-faceted perspective of its essence. Chilisa (2012) identified five distinct phases within the decolonisation process, each contributing to a comprehensive transformation: rediscovery and recovery, mourning, dreaming, commitment, and action. The initial stage, rediscovery, and recovery, involves the reclamation of colonised peoples' historical, cultural, linguistic, and identity-based facets. It marks a process of reconnecting with one's heritage that was previously suppressed or marginalised. The phase of mourning encapsulates the act of grieving the sustained assault on the identities and social realities of oppressed populations across the globe. This mourning is a recognition of the ongoing harm and serves as a catalyst for the subsequent phases.

Dreaming, the next stage, draws upon the power of history, indigenous knowledge systems, and worldviews to conceive alternative prospects. For instance, in the realm of higher education, this translates to envisioning a curriculum that is distinct from the conventional one. Commitment materialises when individuals within academia and student bodies evolve into political activists who ardently advocate for the inclusion of marginalised voices in the university curriculum. This commitment underscores the significance of embracing diverse perspectives. Finally, action emerges as the pivotal juncture where aspirations and commitments materialise into concrete strategies for societal transformation. This underscores the interconnectedness of altering both the curriculum and the broader university landscape. Effectively, the curriculum's decolonisation is intrinsically linked to the transformation of the institution's culture, administration, governance, and structural systems. In essence, Le Grange's framework accentuates the holistic nature of decolonising higher education. It is not merely confined to revising curricula, but rather, it necessitates a broader movement towards societal change. By progressing through these phases, higher education can fully embrace its role in fostering a more inclusive, diverse, and equitable learning environment.

In the debate surrounding the decolonisation of higher education, a notable trend has emerged where students have taken it upon themselves to champion movements aimed at dismantling colonial and apartheid-era ideologies entrenched within universities (Boni & Walker, 2016). The concept of decolonising higher education is portrayed as a gradual and intricate process

involving the relinquishing of colonial power across bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic, and psychological dimensions (Badat, 2017; Radcliffe, 2017). Although this process is not exempt from challenges, it is crucial to avoid dismissing it as implausible. Building upon this foundation, the objective of this research is to delve into the perspectives held by the SRC concerning the decolonisation of higher education. This study explores the thoughts, knowledge, and lived experiences of the SRC members within the broader context of decolonisation in higher education. Acknowledging that decolonisation is a time-intensive undertaking demanding substantial resources and a collaborative endeavour (Higgs, 2012), this research also seeks to probe how the SRC within a specific university situated in the province of KwaZulu-Natal conceptualises decolonisation, the factors shaping their viewpoints on this notion, and their assessment of its significance.

2.3.2 SRC's Influence on Institutional Governance

From the outset of African universities, student leaders initially held limited authority in university governance, as the primary decision-making power resided with the board of trustees (Nthontho et al., 2019). Notably, Latin-American students had more substantial roles in university governance (Altbach & Knight, 2007). However, the global movement towards democratising universities compelled university administrations to involve and acknowledge student leaders as a vital stakeholder group responsible for matters affecting their welfare. This shift was prompted by widespread student protests in the 1970s across many developed countries, advocating for institutional reforms, particularly in student governance and leadership within higher education institutions.

During South Africa's apartheid era, historically Black universities marginalised students from participating in decisions that impacted student development (Mthethwa & Chikoko, 2020). This exclusion was rooted in discriminatory legislation associated with the apartheid government's policies. Concurrently, South African higher education confronted various challenges, including enrolment, fee distribution, academic quality, and the overall well-being of students following the end of apartheid (Mthethwa & Chikoko, 2020; Uleanya et al., 2019). Students struggled to voice their concerns about tuition, academic programmes, and accommodation issues due to disparities in education access. Therefore, the higher education sector experienced a surge in student protests, intensifying pressure on university governance to enact meaningful change.

In 1997, South African higher education underwent a transformative shift with the introduction of the SRC through the Higher Education Act of 1997. This marked a significant departure, as

the SRC gained formal representation within institutional governance structures. This empowerment allowed the SRC to actively advocate for students' academic interests, effectively positioning them as a conduit between students and the management. At the core of this development was the opportunity for students, through the SRC, to engage with university leadership on pertinent matters, particularly the pressing issue of free education that held prominence in South Africa during that era. The SRC's mandate extended to student development advocacy, prompting its inclusion in key decision-making bodies such as the university Council, Senate, and the Institutional Forum, the latter being the highest advisory body. The genesis of this change lay in the response of institutional governance to student mobilisation against discriminatory practices in higher education. As students rallied against these issues and pressed for recognition of the SRC, the decision to grant the SRC a formal role was emblematic of a more inclusive and equitable direction for higher education, especially within the context of Historically Black Universities.

Moving ahead 23 years, and the SRC continues to hold its formal seat within the institutional governance structure. Yearly selections by the student body determine the composition of the SRC, entrusting these representatives with an active role in university decision-making. The specifics of their responsibilities vary annually, shaped by the evolving interests of students, faculty, and staff. However, despite the strides made, the concept of student representation remains a topic of contention.

While Tamrat and Teferra (2018) posited that student representation wields a formal and factual ability to influence higher education decisions, it is acknowledged that a disconnect exists between theory and practice (Bunda et al., 2012). The impact of student involvement, while positive, is noted to be constrained in terms of achieving substantive and meaningful participation.

In the realm of decolonisation within higher education, the Wits SRC took a pronounced stance. By championing the *#FeesMustFall* movement, they sought to facilitate the transformation of academia into an all-encompassing, decolonised space. Le Grange's (2016a) exploration of the *#FeesMustFall* campaign underscored that the SRC, alongside the broader student body, harboured a collective aspiration to decolonise the university, positioning this aspiration at the heart of their cause. Recent scholarly literature has observed that the SRC often fails to receive the required attention in higher education governance, both in theory and practice (Lac & Cumings Mansfield, 2018; Tamrat & Teferra, 2018). Given the recent urgent quest for decolonisation of higher education, university management has been faced with an increase in

student protests, especially in the South African context, which resulted in the *#FeesMustFall* protests in 2015 and a talk of unrest, even on social media supporting this campaign. This study does not assume that students' protests are because of a lack of involvement. Instead, it intends to explore how the SRC perceive the decolonisation of higher education and how they have come to that understanding.

The recurring student protests in South African universities can be understood as a foreseeable response to the longstanding history of students reacting vehemently against the legacy of colonial education. These protests often escalate into instances of violent clashes between students and specialised security forces, sometimes even involving the police, thereby transforming many campuses into arenas of conflict. Stuurman (2018) highlighted that these student demonstrations are driven by a quest for 'Black power' and equitable access to quality education. Furthermore, there exists a prevailing sentiment among students of feeling displaced and estranged, a sense of being marginalised upon entering an institutional environment that feels profoundly disconnected from their identity. Long (2018a) proposed that the process of decolonising South African higher education has been confined to a localised perspective. This notion implies that only individuals of a particular background, such as Black people representing Black interests or women advocating for women's issues, are deemed legitimate spokespersons. This concept assumes that only those who have experienced oppression are qualified to voice concerns of the oppressed. Presently, this notion is circulating and gaining traction, which raises concerns about its potential hazards.

2.4 Theme 3: Perceptions of SRC in Achieving Decolonisation of Higher Education in South Africa

2.4.1 Role of Higher Education in South Africa

Higher education in South Africa holds a pivotal role in driving the nation's progress and transformation. Comprising universities, universities of technology, and comprehensive institutions, this sector falls under the purview of the Department of Higher Education and Training. This department shoulders the responsibilities of formulating policies and allocating funds. According to Majee (2019) previously entrenched in racial segregation and limited accessibility due to apartheid, the higher education landscape has since witnessed substantial efforts to rectify these historical disparities and offer equitable access to quality education following the democratic transition in 1994. The government's emphasis on expanding the higher education sector, particularly for those historically disadvantaged, underscores a major challenge: the access and affordability conundrum. Though strides have been taken to enhance

enrolment rates, notable gaps persist. Financial impediments, suboptimal infrastructure, and inadequate preparation at the secondary level thwart the prospects of many prospective students. Remedial measures encompass a range of financial aid programmes, scholarships, and bursaries designed to support underprivileged students.

While South African universities have made commendable strides in research and global rankings, there remains scope for refinement. Cultivating collaborations between academia, industry, and research establishments is actively encouraged to stimulate innovation and address societal dilemmas. Additionally, an ascending emphasis on decolonising curricula and knowledge creation seeks to weave in diverse perspectives and indigenous knowledge systems. Inclusivity and transformation stand as paramount considerations in South African higher education. Ongoing endeavours to diversify the academic workforce and amplify the representation of marginalised groups such as women, people with disabilities, and individuals from varied racial and ethnic backgrounds are evident. Concurrently, there are endeavours to establish inclusive learning environments that honour diversity, challenge discrimination, and promote societal unity. Challenges persist, but a concerted commitment from the government, researchers, and stakeholders is propelling proactive measures to tackle these issues, aiming to ensure that higher education becomes accessible to all South Africans, thereby fueling the nation's holistic advancement.

2.4.2 The Role of Colonisation, Apartheid and Democracy of Higher Education in South Africa

Redefining the historical context, the process of colonisation, often referred to as the "Scramble for Africa," commenced with the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. During this conference, major European powers such as Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, Italy, and Spain formalised the division of Africa. This division led to economic and political exploitation, along with cultural devastation of African nations. This exploitation took the form of both physical colonisation and the colonisation of the collective mindset of the inhabitants. This pattern of colonisation was evident in South Africa, which was officially colonised in 1652. European settlers occupied land and established dominance over indigenous African populations. This history of colonisation is closely intertwined with the evolution of higher education in South Africa. Throughout the colonial and apartheid eras, universities were segregated based on race. Notably, education for White students was of superior in quality, while Black students were subjected to basic and menial training under the Bantu Education Act. Black universities were established but operated under substandard conditions with minimal infrastructure. In essence,

the university system itself bore the marks of colonial and apartheid influences, indicating the need for a comprehensive effort to decolonise academia and rectify past injustices.

Despite the transition to democracy in 1994, South African higher education still predominantly reflects Eurocentric knowledge production. While strides have been made to address inequalities stemming from apartheid policies, the essence of higher education remains skewed. Social transformation is highlighted as a pivotal avenue for decolonising higher education. The imperative to decolonise higher education is firmly entrenched in the contemporary social transformation agenda, signifying its importance in reshaping the educational landscape.

2.4.3 The Purpose of Decolonising Higher Education in South Africa

The decolonisation of higher education aims to recognise and empower individuals who were historically marginalised and denied their inherent humanity and the right to intellectual autonomy. The discussion highlights that race has historically shaped hierarchies of knowledge, social dynamics, and power structures within higher education, reflecting the unfolding of euromodernity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). However, despite the passage of twentyfour years since South Africa's first democratic elections, there are concerns raised by Sathorar and Geduld (2018) that true freedom has not yet been fully realised, and the process of decolonising higher education has progressed slower than anticipated. This sentiment is shared by other researchers, Fomunyam (2017) and Mbembe (2015), who viewed South African higher education as persistently resistant to transformation, portrayed the current situation as a challenging and in an unclear phase. This situation raises questions within South African society about the apparent gap between the initial democratic goals and the present situation. In response, scholars Mbembe (2015) and Sathorar and Geduld (2018) emphasised the need to break free from this oppressive condition and advocate for a reversal of the colonisation process. They assert that by undertaking this decolonisation journey, the path towards achieving epistemic freedom of thought and knowledge can be paved.

The decolonisation of higher education in South Africa calls for a transformative process that challenges the dominance of Eurocentrism as the prevailing cultural ideology. This transformation aims to reassert and celebrate African culture and identity within the global context that shapes higher education. As emphasised by Oyedemi (2020), this endeavour necessitates a united endeavour, demanding collective action. Nyoni (2019) stressed that the African community must embark on a shared communal project to decolonise higher education.

Such a project seeks to shift away from the entrenched Eurocentric and hegemonic influences inherited from colonialism and apartheid, promoting a more inclusive cultural landscape.

To achieve this, a sustained and rigorous commitment to critical engagement is vital, as advocated by Adebisi (2016) and Mampane et al. (2018). This commitment refrains from perpetuating the unfounded belief that local or indigenous knowledge is inferior. The ultimate goal of this ongoing process is to reinstate the nation's autonomy and independence, a sentiment echoed by Cloete et al. (2015). Through this approach, a chance arises to restore power to those historically disempowered, ultimately paving the way for an ideal South African society. Moreover, Nyoni (2019) emphasised that people should be entitled to basic rights, including freedom, social justice, equality, human dignity, and the right to select educational curriculum frameworks. In essence, the pursuit of decolonisation in higher education is a multifaceted opportunity to reshape the educational landscape, cultivating an environment that honours diverse cultures and perspectives while enabling individuals to flourish and contribute to a more inclusive and empowered society.

The existing body of literature strongly emphasises the necessity of decolonising South African higher education to foster inclusivity and promote equity within society. This imperative is highlighted by authors who underscored the critical and contentious nature of this discourse in the 21st century (Ammon, 2019; Chasi et. al, 2019; Fomunyam, 2019; Hlatshwayo & Fomunyam, 2019a, 2019b). In today's era of globalisation and internationalisation, the call for decolonisation of higher education remains paramount (Ammon, 2019; Chasi et. al, 2019; Fomunyam, 2019) originally established upon European paradigms aimed at imposing Eurocentric perspectives and colonisation of thought, the outdated agenda of higher education no longer aligns with the transformative goals required in the contemporary world.

The process of decolonisation in the realm of higher education presents a multifaceted challenge, as depicted by various viewpoints (Badat, 2017; Chaka et al., 2017; Fomunyan & Teferra, 2017; Gumbo & Msila, 2017) that assert the need to establish a shared understanding of decolonisation among diverse stakeholders in academia. Importantly, it is crucial to differentiate between what decolonisation does and does not entail. According to Adam (2020), Johnson et al. (2020) and Oyedemi (2020), decolonisation does not necessitate a retreat to precolonial African culture, given the dynamic and evolving nature of culture. Instead, it requires a deliberate engagement with both the colonial past and its lasting influences. The goal is to unearth valuable knowledge from history that can be applied meaningfully in the present (Mungwini, 2013).

Furthermore, decolonisation is not confined to addressing historical colonialism alone. It also extends to the examination of contemporary legacies, necessitating a reimagining of higher

education in South Africa (Mungwini, 2013; Oyedemi, 2020). This reimagining process is instrumental in fostering innovation across technological, cultural, scientific, and economic dimensions. By doing so, decolonisation becomes a catalyst for addressing persistent challenges within South African higher education, paving the way for transformative solutions.

2.4.4 Decolonisation of the Curriculum in Institutions of Higher Learning

For South Africa to thrive economically, culturally, and politically, a robust postsecondary sector is essential, and academic institutions should play a pivotal role in moulding the envisioned future (Teferra & Altbach, 2004). The discussion about decolonisation of the curriculum in South Africa is significant, particularly because the Western model of academic organisation remains unchallenged (Le Grange, 2016a). It is against this background that many studies on decolonisation of higher education raise questions of whether the curriculum meets the needs of society in the South African context and what should be added or removed from the curriculum to ensure that it achieves its objective, which is inclusivity and de-hegemonising Eurocentrism as dominant cultural ideology.

Discussions about decolonisation of higher education put forward the different perspectives in relation the curriculum's responsiveness to contextual needs and foregrounding indigenous knowledge and experience, and eradicating Eurocentric or global north experiences which has dominated the curriculum content for centuries. While scholars focus on issues relating to the responsiveness to the call for decolonisation of higher education, this study seek to focus more on what is regarded as important, the voice that should matter in the decolonisation process, the perspectives of a student body, as represented by a students' council. The question here is what students' representatives think should take priority in the decolonisation process in terms of organisation, pedagogy, or curriculum.

At this point, it is necessary to delve into educational systems in other jurisdictions to understand the extent to which issues on decolonisation in higher education has been dealt with. In Kenya, around the late 1960s, any reconsideration of the curriculum had to grapple with essential issues related to location, viewpoint, and alignment, as highlighted by (Garuba & Guardian, 2015). This means that East Africa and Africa needed to be placed at the centre of teaching, learning and research at Kenyan universities. This echoes the works of the famous Kenyan writer Ngungi wa Thiongo, whose work titled "*Decolonising the Mind*", captured the attention of researchers in 1992. He argues that curriculum decolonisation is critical for social economic development. His position about this curriculum decolonisation is relevant to our situation, thereby contributing to our understanding of the problem. This has direct implication

on the expectations and demands that will be put forward to those particularly the SRC, who will lead the discourse within institutions of higher education.

The curriculum, as observed in various jurisdictions, predominantly reflects a Eurocentric perspective, perpetuating the dominance and privilege of White and Western influences. According to Nwadeyi (2016), the impact of colonialism, apartheid, and other means of reinforcing White supremacy extends beyond just the political and economic realms for African people. These influences have permeated every facet of life, and their consequences persistently linger in the South African curriculum. Despite the political freedom that was achieved in 1994, many structural imbalances, inequalities and injustices remain as barriers for the emancipation of South Africans. Such imbalances could be felt in institutions of higher learning where the effort of the SRC is relevant for change. This stems from the view that while political freedom has filtered and found a home in institutions of higher education, those who represent these political structures are yet to be seen as effective agents of change in the process of decolonisation. It is against this background that this study seeks to delve into the perceptions of the SRC on decolonisation. Perhaps suggestions would be sought to improve the situation.

While the western character of South African higher education curriculum and organisation remains unchallenged, the student-led protests in 2015/2016 precipitated this renewed interest and emphasised many reasons for students' dissatisfaction. Since 2015, when South Africa witnessed the movement known as *#FeesMustFall* towards transformation of academia into a more inclusive space, a movement was also formed against institutional racism that exists within these spaces, against heterosexual, patriarchal and liberal capitalist values which characterise the country's universities (Le Grange, 2016a). These include inadequate student funding, high drop-out rates, post-school alienation and exclusion due to lack of proficiency in the medium of instruction and delivery modes (Le Grange, 2016b). Furthermore, within the discourse of decolonisation, we should interrogate the aspects of the South African higher education system in terms of its identity, architecture and culture, and if they need to be maintained or changed (Hungwe & Ndofirepi, 2022; Mheta et al., 2018). This means that when considering decolonising higher education, there ought to be initiatives that involve both local and global perspectives, the perspectives of young people, producing an education system grounded in indigenous knowledge and integrate international world views (Mampane et al., 2018). Drawing from arguments raised, one may conclude that for decolonisation to yield effective results, there needs to be robust research that will go into the depths of the construct as a mechanism to develop curricula that is tailored to meet the requirements and life backgrounds of students in South Africa.

Postcolonial emerging economies inherited the education systems of their colonisers. Therefore, the curriculum fell prey to oppression that was created by colonialism (Mampane et al., 2018). As a result, the education system presents students with an element of inferiority considering that African home languages are treated as vernaculars that must not be used at school. Inevitably, this attributes to inferiority built into the system that was intentionally designed to undermine the educational and skills development of the colonised (Mampane et al., 2018). Le Grange (2016a) presented reasons as to why decolonisation is vital. He asserts that the anger and frustration of students who feel disconnected is unmistakable and actions need to be taken. Further, decolonisation is necessary to address the consequences of initial and subsequent phases of colonialism, as well as contemporary forms such as neo-colonialism and neoliberalism. Furthermore, Le Grange (2016a) asserted that the initial phase of colonialism involved the subjugation of both the physical territories and the inhabitants of the colonised regions.

The second generation of colonialism was the colonisation of the mind through disciplines such as education, science, economics, and law. Lastly, Le Grange (2016a) asserted that neoliberalism can be understood to hold three core tenets: (i) a commitment to individual liberty and a reduced state, (ii) a shift in policy and ideology against government intervention; (iii) a belief that market forces should be allowed to be self-regulating. In other words, neoliberalism holds the view that there is a change in the role of the state from that of provider (of basic needs of citizens) to that of monitor and regulator. This takes away academic freedom from universities and has effects on what the university stands for. It also leads to the notion of universities being run as enterprises, compromising some privileges such as increased student fees. This can be viewed as a compromise to the university's notion of free pursuit of knowledge.

2.4 Conclusion

Numerous challenges exist in the endeavour to decolonise the higher education curriculum in South Africa, and the individuals responsible for developing curriculum decisions play a crucial role in addressing these issues. This chapter explored the SRC's perspectives within the context of decolonisation of higher education institutions. Reflecting on a decolonised curriculum involves a thoughtful examination of how our local universities influence global markets, standardization, and knowledge on a global scale (Mahabeer, 2020). Hence, there is a critical need for the higher education department to devise practical alternatives for a curriculum that is contextually appropriate, challenging prevailing Western-centric knowledge systems. In the

next chapter I discuss the concepts essential to the issue of decolonising higher education in relation to exploring and interrogating the SRC's perspectives on the subject.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 Conceptual Framework

The objective of this chapter is to elucidate and explore the fundamental concepts crucial to the issue of decolonisation of higher education in relation to exploring and interrogating the SRC's perspectives on the subject. This study was underpinned by the following constructs: coloniality; decoloniality; decolonisation and decolonisation as a national project in relation to the curriculum, language, and decentralisation of western knowledge constructs. These constructs are critical to this study for the purpose of an exploration of the historical, social, political, and cultural dimensions of the colonial experience and its aftermath.

This conceptual framework of coloniality, decoloniality, decolonisation, and decolonisation as a national project provides a lens through which scholars, activists (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021) and policymakers can analyse and address the complex and multifaceted challenges posed by the legacy of colonialism. It acknowledges the need for a comprehensive approach that goes beyond political independence to address the deep-rooted structures and ideologies that continue to perpetuate inequality and injustice within higher education institutions in South Africa.

3.1.1 Coloniality

Many scholars conceptualise coloniality as the enduring structural and cultural impact of colonization, encompassing mental, emotional, and agential tendencies in states of existence that persist long after the departure of colonisers (Maldonado-Torres et al., 2018). According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021), coloniality is an administration that came because of colonisation, whereby the colonists came to Africa, conquered, and dominated people of colour at a particular time. Further, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) asserted that colonisation can be regarded as an event that took place and, when formal colonial rule eventually ended, it instituted colonialism. In this case, the colonisers not only seize control of the colonised through direct physical means, but they also establish an intricate power system that alters the lives of the people by perpetuating relations of exploitation, domination, and oppression between the coloniser and the colonised. Even though colonisation may have been an event that took place and eventually ended, coloniality as a power structure continues as an epistemic project that invades the mental universe of a people (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020). For instance, objects like statues and various artifacts perpetuate control and influence well beyond the immediate period of colonial rule over the African population. The physical resistance of colonisation, such as carrying a gun, is

not enough to fight, in Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2020) terms, crimes such as epistemicide (where people are killed and their pre-existing knowledge is displaced); linguicide (killing and displacing the languages of a people and imposing another), and culturicide (where cultures of a people are killed and replaced). Mgqwashu (2019) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020) further asserted that to reverse such a process requires serious interventions such as dealing with the consciousness and the psyche because colonialism internalised and routinised.

3.1.1.1 The Impact of Coloniality on SA Curriculum

According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021), colonialism operates like an intimate enemy. It is within people, just like a parasite. The condition of coloniality in the South African curriculum is at a state of uncertainty, as explained by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021), in terms of whether the knowledge that brought us to the present can take us to the future. According to Heleta (2018) the South African higher education curriculum remains Eurocentric and is rooted in colonial and apartheid knowledge systems. Secondly, it is disconnected from the realities and lived experiences of Black South Africans. The element of Whiteness or northern epistemologies in Ndlovu-Gatsheni's terms, continue to dominate institutional cultures. Moreover, according to Heleta (2018), Whiteness functions as the unarticulated framework of regulations and standards that sustain the momentum of institutions in a particular trajectory. This trajectory perpetuates the enduring impact of the apartheid era, quietly and cognitively degrading and marginalising Black South Africans through the educational system. Heleta (2018) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020) agreed that dehumanisation and marginalisation have been absorbed by Black South Africans wittingly and unwillingly. Nonetheless, the persistence of cultures marked by power hierarchies, compliance, fear, and the suppression of voices continues in educational settings that reflect and mirror these dynamics in the post-apartheid era. Considering the fact that the curriculum remains White and Eurocentric and that it is intertwined with the institutional culture poses a challenge on the curriculum transformation. One may conclude that the institutional environment is not conducive to curriculum reform and therefore continues to carry the painful history of colonialism and racism.

3.1.1.2 The Coloniality of Language

The language debate in the decolonisation discourse within higher education is a significant indicator of the higher education sector's progress in transforming the epistemic encounter for students Motala & Sayed, 2021). Further, the language as medium of instruction, if interrogated, can lay a foundation from which decolonisation can proceed. Coloniality of African languages in higher education entails that African languages are not treated seriously

as languages of teaching, learning and research (Sayed et al., 2019). This problem dates to the early period, whereby universities came with colonial languages of instruction for research, teaching, and learning, and over time colonialist cultures too (de Sousa Santos et al., 2022). Cloete et al. (2015) noted that the colonisers struggled to acknowledge and comprehend the fact that African individuals (those who were colonised) possessed the capability to convey intricate cosmological, social, scientific, erotic, and economic concepts. This difficulty arose from the colonisers' perception of the colonised individuals as inferior and animalistic. This suggests that those who were colonised were perceived as subhuman, lacking any sophisticated means of communication, specifically devoid of language. As a result, there emerged the very colonisation of being human into human and subhuman (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021).

The current curriculum being used at universities in South Africa is dominated by the English language and students are expected to conform to it. The increased intricacy and challenges imposed on the educational journey of Black students who lack a foundation in this language create constraints on their ability to access knowledge (Sayed et al., 2021). As a result, African students are unable to engage meaningfully in the pedagogic acts, and it further privileges those who were schooled in English as their dominant language. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) observed that colonialism persists as a power structure by acting as both a metaphysical process and an epistemic project. It infiltrates the cognitive realm of individuals, causing a disruption from their familiar knowledge and transforming them into acknowledging what colonialism introduces. Further, he argues that it then results in the commitment of crimes such as epistemicide (killing and displacing pre-existing knowledge); linguicide (killing and displacing the languages of a people and imposing another one) and culturecide (killing and replacing the cultures of a people). During the colonial encounter, the colonisers perceived indigenous people in speaking their tongues as doing less than expressing knowledge (Sayedayn, 2021). The statement denies African people humanity and, therefore, automatically denies them epistemic virtue.

3.1.1.3 Coloniality as Decentralisation of Western Knowledge Construct

Mamdani (2019) argued that the modern African university, as it exists today, was constructed based on a European framework and had one mission to accomplish: to colonise the minds of students and perpetuate a Eurocentric vision of society. To him, and many other scholars (Heleta, 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021), the university (referring to most universities as they follow this model) initiated a colonial project with the aim of cultivating scholars with universal values of excellence, independent of specific circumstances. These scholars were intended to

play a leading role in the civilising mission, showing unwavering dedication without any hesitation or regret. Coloniality embedded in knowledge suggests that one geographical space in the world is the teacher of the world, and it continues to perpetuate the notion of objectsubject relationship and not subject-to-subject in the learning spaces. In Fomunyam's (2017) perspective, the 21st century must not indulge in the luxury of excellence without hesitation and regret. This is because the university plays a central role in Africa's development initiative and the overall transformation of the continent. The important task is to think of what it means for Africans to learn in a non-colonial way, both epistemologically and pedagogically (NdlovuGatsheni, 2021). Such a curriculum/system would challenge what Ngungi wa Thiongo (1992) explained as cognitive empire (metaphysical empire), which operated through the denotation of a "cultural bomb" at the centre of the victims' societies, causing various dissonances and alienations. Put in other words, Ngungi wa Thiongo (1992) explained that the colonisers got a few natives, emptied their hard disk of previous memory, and downloaded software of European memory. However, a key consequence of these processes has been epistemicides, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. As stated by Ndlovu-Gatsheni in 2021, coloniality operated by suppressing various ways of understanding, generating knowledge, and shaping perspectives.

The prospects of a non-colonial curriculum should be discussed, as understood by scholars. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021), a curriculum free from colonial influence emphasises that every individual is born into authentic and rightful knowledge systems, acknowledging the multitude of diverse ways of understanding. This would ensure that we restore epistemic freedom and cognitive justice (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). Undoing such a procedure necessitates adopting a fresh perspective and questioning the prevailing narrative that associates progress, virtue, and civilisation solely with European standards (Heleta, 2018). A non-colonial curriculum would challenge the epistemology which continues to racialise, categorise and analyse the global population based on a hierarchy of superior and inferior races. Additionally, Heleta (2018) contended that colonial education and knowledge systems were instrumental in advancing and enforcing Eurocentric perspectives, thereby eliminating and suppressing indigenous memories, knowledge, and worldviews. Therefore, higher education should play a role in exposing and fighting against the exploitation of colonies for the material benefit of the European colonisers. According to Mamdani (2019), colonialism not only introduced Western academic theories but also ingrained the belief that theory originates exclusively in the West.

This led to the expectation that academic pursuits in other regions should align with Western theories. Therefore, like Mamdani, one may conclude that the lack of fundamental

epistemological shifts in curriculum within the higher education sector was not coincidental, but it is due to the fact that there were no discussions about curriculum transformation in higher education after 1994 to include any significant deliberations regarding the curriculum and the dominance of Eurocentric perspectives (Heleta, 2018).

3.1.2 Decoloniality

The common understanding of decoloniality among scholars is grounded on its function of being a critique to coloniality and as an essential effort for liberation with the goal of emancipating the world from global colonial dominance (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021; Le Grange et al., 2020). According to Le Grange et al. (2020), decoloniality is premised on three concepts: coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge, and coloniality of being.

Exploring the discourse on the epistemic decolonisation of higher education in South Africa is essential, as scholars have argued that African knowledge paradigms are not adequately integrated into the Westernised curriculum. The existing knowledge structures are seen as foreign and colonised, with the current curriculum reflecting colonial and apartheid perspectives, thus lacking connection to the lived experiences of many Black South Africans (Le Grange et al., 2020; Fomunyam, 2019). Coloniality is not over in South African higher education and has become highhanded and continues to hinder the inclusion of alternative knowledge forms into the higher education system. However, decoloniality is standing as a critique of the dominant Eurocentric model (Le Grange et al., 2022).

3.1.2.1 The Impact of Decoloniality on the Curriculum

The primary purpose of the higher education curriculum is to play a role in advancing the national development goals of South Africa's Vision for 2030, as outlined in the National Development Plan 2030 (2013). Given the acknowledged colonisation of the higher education sector and its perceived significance, it is crucial for higher education to remain steadfast and unwavering in its commitment to producing graduates who are not content with the existing conditions in their communities, without retreating, compromising, relenting, or equivocating, as emphasised by Modiba (2019).

Additionally, scholars indicate that there is something profoundly wrong when the dominant curriculum, originally created to serve the interests of colonialism and apartheid, persists within South African universities even during the era of liberation (Mbembe, 2015; Modiba, 2019).

This signifies that there ought to be a process whereby South African higher education is actively engaging in the reconsideration and reconstruction of epistemic colonialism and

curriculum dishonesty within the context of post-colonial and post-apartheid South Africa. This transformative process is commonly known as curriculum decoloniality (Asea, 2022). Decoloniality covers all aspects of academic life, from socio-economic, political, and religious issues.

3.1.2.2 Decoloniality of Language

According to Mashau (2018), decoloniality serves not only as a political instrument for resistance but also functions as a social movement, providing Black individuals with the opportunity to reshape their identities and assert their humanity within the context of being Black and African in their respective social contexts. An aspect of crime committed by colonialism was linguicide (the killing and displacing the languages of a people and imposing another's). Contributions by Adebisi (2016) and Kaschula (2016) suggest the potency of language as a means of communication is particularly pronounced in shaping social ideologies related to inclusion and exclusion. Kaschula (2016) argued that language and culture are the nucleus in creating an environment for students conducive to inclusivity rather than exclusivity. In the present era, there is a prevalent misconception that knowledge predominantly aligns with Eurocentric perspectives, leading to the undervaluation of Afrocentric elements such as language, implying that they are deemed less significant.

Mashau (2018) discussed the continual use of English as a dominant language in our education system promotes the marginalisation of the indigenous knowledge system. Scholars such as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) and Ngungi wa Thiong'o (1992) stated that during the era of colonial domination, English emerged as the primary language of education, leading to the gradual erosion of indigenous culture and knowledge systems. This linguistic shift also subjected Black communities to mental control imposed by their colonisers. This is regarded as an activity that is dehumanising, devastating, and yields disempowering outcomes at the end. It has often been said in literature that the colonial power matrices still heavily influence the higher education system, including the curriculum and language, hence the need for a decoloniality turn today. In support of this claim is Mashau (2018), who argued that the implementation of the decoloniality turn project provides Africans with an enabling environment. This space is not only for resisting the dominance of Western hegemony across various aspects of life but also for utilising African and decolonial ways of knowing to redefine the identity and future of the African people.

3.1.3 Decolonisation

It is almost impossible to talk about decolonisation without talking about colonisation, which is why the discussion focuses on coloniality as being the constitutive underside of euromodernity (against various modernity), and decoloniality as a necessary liberation struggle aimed at freeing the world from global coloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). By 1900, nearly all of Africa (including Ghana, Kenya, Algeria, and South Africa) was colonised by European nations. Following World War II, numerous regions in Africa sought autonomy using methods of warfare, diplomatic efforts, and demonstrations. From 1945 to 1975, more than 40 African nations gained independence, yet these newly established countries encountered diverse challenges in the aftermath of their independence. For example, in 1957, Ghana became the first former British colony to gain independence. At the time, Ghana was led by Kwame Nkruma, a young nationalist who was the driving force for independence. Leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah and Kenyatta championed the cause of Pan-Africanism, promoting the unity of Africans globally to foster increased collaboration in achieving independence and putting an end to colonialism and imperialism.

In Algeria, the post-war French government was determined to maintain control in Algeria. The country had a substantial French settler population, vineyards, and oil and gas fields. However, in 1954, an Algeria revolt broke out, resulting in a war which was brutal to both sides. In 1962, the French withdrew, and Algeria gained its independence. It is said in literature that none of the several wars for independence in sub-Saharan Africa matched the Algerian struggle in scale. In South Africa, independence was gained in 1910, but the government was entirely controlled by minority Whites. The political activity on the part of Black people was through the formation of African National Congress (Agupusi) which was formed in 1912. By the 1950s, a strict system of racial segregation laws known as apartheid enforced prejudice and oppression of the Black majority. The struggle against apartheid was demonstrated through violence in the whole of South Africa. Among many leaders of the African National Congress, Nelson Mandela was arrested and imprisoned for over 25 years. The struggle for equality continues in the 1990s and led to apartheid being dismantled and Nelson Mandela was released from prison.

The new African states suffered challenges such as overpopulation, corruption within governments, widespread hunger, and starvation due to droughts, health concerns such as malaria and HIV, government instability which led to political overthrows, military regimes, and violence. It goes without saying that what was happening in society had a significant impact on universities. In the case of South Africa, (Heleta, 2016) noted that eurocentrism, racism,

segregation, and epistemic violence were not products of the apartheid state, but rather through the establishment of the universities by the British colonialists. In South Africa, colonial universities were established by colonisers as both symbols and disseminators of European civilisation (Heleta, 2016). The role of colonial universities was to promote the White supremacy and develop the White youth to maintain and further expand colonial society. Basically, the role of university was part and parcel of the colonial project.

After the apartheid system was established in 1948, the policies in higher education were shaped by the concept of race, or rather the politics of race (Heleta, 2016). The institutions were designed for the exclusive use of particular racial groups. The governance system in these universities were collegial and authoritarian. Further, Heleta (2018) argued that during apartheid, the entire higher education system served to construct and to maintain the social, political and economic features of the apartheid order. This was done through the systematic under-qualification of the majority of the Black population. The colonial, universities in South African played a role in in maintaining the segregation and oppression. Moreover, Mamdani (2019) argued that the higher education system, even when it was opposed to apartheid politically, it was deeply affected by it epistemologically.

Historically, Black universities were established for a different purpose all together, to train Black people to serve the colony and the apartheid state (Heleta, 2018). This was accomplished through the efforts of individuals in various fields, including educators, government officials, and administrative personnel. Black universities contributed to the preservation of the broader socio-political agenda of apartheid through this mechanism. Through this system, students were trained to be servants of their White masters. As in the case of White universities, the administrative structures within Black universities often exhibited a strong authoritarian nature, with White Afrikaners holding significant influence. These individuals were instrumental in shaping intellectual and academic priorities, rooted in the apartheid era, and predominantly led by White academics.

One of the drivers of colonialism and imperialism was the belief that colonialists were superior beings, on a mission to save and civilise the “uncivilised” people in the colonies (Heleta, 2018). Further, Heleta (2018) explained that colonisers believed themselves as being providers of supervision and guidance to the weak and childlike people in the colonies. Such a perspective/behaviour by colonialists is viewed by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) and Hungwe and Ndofirepi (2022) as dehumanising, thus calling for decolonisation by means of unlearning that one geographical space in the world cannot be teacher of the whole world.

Decolonisation is understood as a process of undoing of colonialism. According to Mokou decolonisation refers to the gesture of de-linking from coloniality. To put it differently, decolonisation focuses on severing ties with colonialism to enable those who were colonised to discard the ingrained attitudes, perspectives, and values imposed by the colonial rule. Moreover, this disconnection facilitates the amplification of previously marginalised voices, underscoring the significance of diversity, variety, and distinction (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Literature shows that there are three reasons as to why colonisers wanted to colonise Africa, namely, to control trade, mineral resources and to sell manufactured goods to Africans. These may be summed-up as a movement towards political, economic and epistemic decolonisation (Mamdani, 2016).

3.1.4 Decolonisation as a National Project and Decentralisation of Western Knowledge

The discussion clearly shows that the history of South African higher education is a history of exclusion and marginalisation based on race and inequality. According to Heleta (2018) and Adebisi (2016), one of the most destructive effects of colonialism was the subjugation of local knowledge as the universal knowledge, leading to a curriculum that was unapologetically Eurocentric. It follows then the critical step in decolonising the South African higher education curriculum to address the historical nature of the quality of education and infrastructure at universities. The challenge currently faced is that two decades after the end of apartheid, the curriculum at South African universities is still largely Eurocentric (Heleta, 2016). Further, Heleta (2018) argued that as the curriculum is rooted in the colonial and apartheid disposition, it continues to loot and humiliate Africa and its people. Following 1994, the transformation plan should have involved a shift from the colonial and apartheid knowledge system. This change would mean moving away from a curriculum that was employed as a means of exclusion to one that is democratic and encompasses all forms of human thought. However, scholars note that higher education has failed to change the curriculum since the demise of apartheid.

The higher education curriculum is still Eurocentric and continues to marginalise Africa and is full of patronising views and stereotypes about the continent (Heleta, 2016). The current higher education curriculum perceives European and White values as the standards on which the country's education system is based, basically seeking to universalise the West and provincialise the rest (Heleta, 2016; Molefe, 2016). Such a curriculum does not critically interrogate the outcomes/impacts of a history of patriarchy, slavery, imperialism, colonialism, White supremacy and capitalism (Molefe, 2016). One may conclude that the current curriculum

is a reproduction of the epistemological blindness that continues to silence other knowledges and ways of creating knowledge. Heleta (2016) argued that the challenge presented by this curriculum is that it continues to make students ignorant of most of the world, in particular Africa, which he regards as epistemic violence imposed on students by South African academia.

There is no argument about the importance of decolonisation of the curriculum in South African universities. Decolonisation of the curriculum should take an approach whereby it focuses on the rejection of values, norms, customs and worldviews imposed by the former colonisers (Heleta, 2016). Kaya and Seleti (2014) argued that a decolonised curriculum must reject the utilisation of dominant Western worldviews of knowing and knowledge production as the only way of knowing. A decolonised curriculum would reject the notion that Europe cannot be seen as the all-knowing and all-important canon upon which human knowledge rests and through which White supremacy and Western domination is maintained (Heleta, 2016). According to Oyedemi (2020), decolonisation of the curriculum would minimise powerful forms of students protests at universities which often come from frustrations with continued experience of exclusion and oppression, even in the postcolonial era. Further, the decolonised curriculum implies acknowledging African roots of knowledge in philosophy, arts, geometry, and architecture prior to the European awakening. In other words, decolonisation of the curriculum should take an approach whereby the histories, innovations, myths, cultures, science, and knowledge production from diverse cultures for academic scholarship within the dominance of local histories and realities (Odeyemi, 2020). This approach is called a polycentric approach, and allows for intercultural epistemology and, most importantly, disrupts the subject-object dualism of Eurocentrism. Heleta (2016) stated that the decolonisation of the curriculum is about Africans seeing themselves clearly in relationship with themselves and other selves in the universe. This notion is raised as a question of relevance, which is discussed as follows.

The curriculum must be decolonised in the context of post-apartheid South Africa and its location in Africa and the world. Literature teaches us that decolonisation of the higher education curriculum should not be viewed as a historic problem event but must link it to the here and now, the ever-present reality of many South Africans (Heleta, 2016). As the elimination of Eurocentrism in the curriculum must not only take the form of physical and material injustices, but it should also focus more on the injustices in the knowledge production (Heleta, 2016; McKaiser, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021).

Jansen (1999, pp.110-111) further emphasised that:

> *Content matters, and it matters a great deal when a European-centred curriculum continues to dominate and define what counts as worthwhile knowledge and legitimate authority in South African texts and teaching, it matters very much in the context of the inherited curriculum, informed by apartheid and colonialism, in which only the more readily observable, offensive racism has been skimmed off the top.*

Decolonisation, as a national project, requires South African higher education to deconstruct and dismantle the Eurocentric epistemic hegemonies that is currently dominating the universities. The consensus among scholars, such as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) and Heleta (2016), is that universities must completely rethink, reframe and reconstruct the curriculum and bring South Africa, and Africa to the centre of teaching, learning and research. This leads to an important question of what it means to learn in a decolonised curriculum and if it means isolating and/or Africanisation of the curriculum. There must be a discussion about whether decolonisation intends to localise the curriculum in such a way that it gives no room for other knowledge systems.

According to Heleta (2018), decolonisation for the curriculum as a national project means bringing to the centre the African ways of knowledge in teaching, learning and research. Other explanations suggest that decolonisation as a national project means tracing multiple genealogies of knowledge and displacing the centrality of Eurocentric knowledge exceptionalism (Odeyemi, 2018). Put in other words, it means a process of decentring Western knowledge and inserting indigenous and African knowledge. From the discussion of what decolonisation as national project means, it is important to further discuss what it does not mean in terms of the relation between Eurocentric and Indigenous knowledge systems.

First, decolonisation of the curriculum will not neglect other knowledge systems and global contexts (Odeyemi, 2018). Universities have a role to play, which is to produce graduates who will compete at a global level and who are capable of functioning in the complex world that we live in. South Africa aspires to actively participate in Africa, contribute to the BRICS group, and engage globally in various aspects such as economic development, international relations, politics, and conflict resolution (Odeyemi, 2018). Therefore, South Africa must develop graduates who possess knowledge about the world and all its complexity.

Second, the call to decolonise the curriculum in South Africa does not advocate for antiWestern sentiment and it does not discourage students to learn from the West and the rest of the world (Letsekha, 2013). The decolonisation project merely means that education must be free from

Western epistemological domination, Eurocentrism, epistemic violence and worldviews that were designed to degrade, exploit and subjugate people in Africa (Heleta, 2016). Further, decolonisation of the curriculum implies that South Africa needs to be critical of the global knowledge and not merely accept anything from the global North as the norm. The keyword from this discussion is the *norm* and *freedom from* the domination and epistemic violence, which emphasises the need for decentring of Western knowledge systems and not (necessarily) to do away with, but also it gives strength to the argument that decolonisation is about justice that addresses the epistemic violence of colonial knowledge and colonial thought (Crawford et al., 2021). The process of decentring western knowledge systems in higher education curriculum would be make it relevant to the material, historical and social realities of the communities in which universities operate (Letsekha, 2013).

South Africa needs to produce graduates who can compete in the global market but more importantly who will be able to address the epistemic violence of colonial knowledge that continues to dominate and serve the colonial power over Africa. As mentioned by NdlovuGatsheni (2021), decolonisation does not only recognise diversity in ways of knowledge but more importantly restores epistemic freedom and cognitive justice. Therefore, decolonisation of the curriculum in higher education will enable graduates the ability to rewrite the histories and humanity which was seized and denied by Europe (Heleta, 2018). Decentralising the Eurocentric knowledge system and inserting an indigenous knowledge system will challenge the assumption that the Western knowledge system constitutes the only basis for higher forms of thinking. It is in this way that the South African curriculum can be responsive towards socioeconomic issues and market demands as a tool that allows for inclusive and well-resourced education in South African education context.

3.1.4.1 National Project and Curriculum

Decolonisation as a national project came about because of the student protests in 2015 and 2016. The protests started with students demanding free education under the banner *#FeesMustFall*. The protests escalated complaints about artworks which depicted colonial icons, such as Cecil John Rhodes statue, *#RhodesMustFall* at UCT, which they wanted removed (Murris, 2016). These protests were significant in that they brought into focus the call for decolonisation of the higher educational system in South African universities (Chisholm et al., 2018). It is thus of paramount importance that the issue of decolonisation of the curriculum as a national project is not ignored, because the curriculum is the primary vehicle of knowledge generation in higher education (Ajani, 2019). It is time for South African academia to dismantle

the notion Western models of scholarship which clearly reject knowledge about colonised Africa (Heleta, 2016; Higgs, 2016; Le Grange, 2016, Zembylas, 2018).

A curriculum is defined by Madeleine Grumet as the stories that we tell students about their past, present and future (Grumet, 1981). This view of the curriculum is relevant to the decolonisation discussion as it challenges the higher education in South Africa to choose/explore which content to teach students about their past, present and future. A curriculum is defined by Jansen (1999) as curriculum as planned and curriculum as lived, taking into consideration how the curriculum is experienced by lecturers and students. The decolonisation project may use, as a basis, the notion of legitimating the curriculum as lived, but without discarding the curriculum as planned, to allow for a creative and transformative higher education system. Curriculum is also distinguished between three broad perspectives: the explicit, hidden and null curriculum (Le Grange, 2016). The explicit curriculum entails module frameworks, prescribed readings, assessment guidelines, etc. The hidden (implicit) curriculum refers to what students learn regarding the prevailing culture and the values upheld by the university. Universities must determine whether they wish their students to wholly overlook indigenous wisdom when educating them about their historical, current, and future perspectives (Meda, 2020). In other words, the institutions must determine whether they prefer their students to primarily study Eurocentric and Western theories, without providing them chances to explore indigenous knowledge systems. Therefore, there ought to be a debate about decolonisation of the curriculum in the national decolonisation agenda.

Conceptualisation of the decolonisation of the curriculum does not have a single approach. It needs to be open to experimentation (Le Grange, 2016b). This is because decolonisation is viewed in different ways. What is common, among scholars, is that decolonisation will lead to colonised people being able to rediscover and recover what is rightfully theirs, in this case, their own ideologies, identities, language, history and cultural principles (Chilisa, 2012). According to (Le Grange, 2016b), rediscovering and recovering involves reclaiming ways knowing that which was denigrated during the colonial and apartheid periods. (Meda, 2020) further explained that it includes revising the curriculum by replacing content which was aimed for the growth and development of the colonial agenda.

An inquiry was conducted by Le Grange et al. (2020) that focused on how South African universities have taken steps to decolonise their curricula in response to the demands raised during the student protests in 2015/2016. They concluded that decolonising the curriculum relate to what and whose knowledge and ways of being are included in education programmes

(Le Grange et al., 2020). Another conceptualisation of the decolonisation of the curriculum highlights the notion of wholly replacing the western knowledge in university programmes, and it also involves decentring Western knowledge. One may note that these scholars advocate for placing western knowledge on an equal position with other knowledges, such as indigenous. Decentralisation of western knowledge does not mean destroying, but rather refers an integrative approach which accommodates both indigenous and Western knowledge. This approach is the total opposite to what is termed as radical approach, which is the outright rejection of the Western knowledge (Meda, 2020).

3.1.4.2 National Project and Language

Following the events of 1994, with the decline of imperialism and apartheid, there was an expectation for the emergence of a fresh perspective on a democratic South Africa. This new vision was anticipated to shift the narrative that had previously marginalised Africans (Musitha & Mafukata, 2018). Further, Kgobe and Sebola (2021) argued that one of the transformations since the start of democracy should have been that of focusing on ceasing the colonial education system. However, the South African higher education has witnessed overflowing disparities, an absence of assets and staff, and a total disregard of the constitutional right of learning in a language of choice (Fomunyam & Teferra, 2017). The demand to decolonise higher education in South Africa aims to address the consequences of historical laws and practices that were racially discriminatory, particularly in the realm of language.

According to (Oparinde, 2019), the need to decolonise language derives from linguistics imperialism, whereby colonial languages dominated indigenous languages. In this way, nation states favoured a single language and actively aimed to eliminate alternative languages, compelling their speakers to transition to the predominant linguistic form.

The language policy that pitted English against African languages has resulted in the formation and perpetuation of a divided society characterised by two distinct classes: the privileged elite in power and the marginalised common citizens (Kgobe & Sebola, 2021). The historical account of English in South Africa indicates its imposition on the local population. The people of South Africa were not merely passive acceptors of English; rather, the language gained prominence both formally in educational institutions and informally on farms. Consequently, English is perceived as the language associated with authority in the region.

Language is the most useful asset of authority, but it remains a hindrance to decolonise higher education in South Africa (Musitha & Mafukuta, 2018). Clearly, the country cannot benefit from a colonised educational system that intended to confine portions of the society to only

English, disregarding the African languages altogether. Chaka et al. (2017) added that if a colonised people use a colonial language to write their literatures, they will be unable to regain their selfhood and recover their cultures, economics, and politics from the colonial strangle hold. Kgobe and Sebola (2021) and Masenya (2021) argued that language learning and indigenous knowledge system must be at the focus of the national decolonisation agenda. Wa Ngung'o (2020) recognised the important role that languages play in national identity, history, and culture, and as such supports the critical need for linguistics decolonisation. It goes without saying that the use of the English language continues to dominate indigenous languages within academic settings as it is considered the medium of instruction in South Africa. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021), the use of English in the context of the colonial state is considered an aspect of linguicide, a symbolic violence.

3.2 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the researcher delved into the various constructs that formed a conceptual framework of the study. The constructs include coloniality; decoloniality; decolonisation and decolonisation as a national project in relation to the curriculum, language, and decentralisation of western knowledge constructs in South Africa higher education. This framework was relevant in determining the extent to which South African higher education can be decolonised through the lenses of SRC.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the research paradigm, which is qualitative approach and the research design, which is a case study. This chapter highlights the advantages and disadvantages of the research methodology selected for the purposes of the study. This is followed by a discussion on sampling, a description of the participants, and the methods of data collection and data analysis. Ethical considerations, validity and rigour, and limitations of the study are described. The section concludes with an in-depth exploration of potential biases within the study.

4.1.1 Research Paradigm

This study was underpinned by the interpretivist paradigm. According to Sefotho (2015), it is important for researchers to determine the chosen research paradigm early in their research in order to give the research an "illuminated direction". This research paradigm has permitted an in-depth look at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) SRC's perspectives of decolonisation. Research in the interpretivist paradigm is foregrounded on the assumption that reality is a subjective phenomenon which is individually constructed (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Scotland, 2012). It thus follows that there are many realities and many subjective truths because people construct meaning in diverse ways (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The argument made in this study is that the SRC encounters unique experiences as they interact with leadership at the university.

The study further argues that the SRC is best suited to provide insight on the conceptualisation of decolonisation by students and what leads to that conceptualisation. These arguments hold ground because interpretivist theorists believe in the notion that knowledge is socially constructed and has traits of being culturally derived, meaning that it is those who are located within a context and those participating in that context are able to understand the social world of their context (Cohen & Arieli, 2011; Scotland, 2012). Based on this presumption, the SRC's conceptions of decolonisation of higher education may lead to an understanding of how they view the future of higher education in the context of decolonisation.

Interpretative methodologies therefore focus on understanding phenomena from the perspective of those experiencing the event (the participants) and afford them the space to be able to give interpretations and meanings of their experiences. The researcher at best attempts to avoid dominating the narratives and relies on the participants' perspectives as much as

possible (Creswell, 2009; Scotland, 2012). In this study, the data was generated through semi structured interviews and a focus group interview to uncover the multiple truths held by the participants. During interviews, participants' voices had the centrality in the narratives being offered. A qualitative approach was also adopted to keep in line with the interpretive paradigm.

4.1.2 Research Approach

The study adopted a qualitative approach as a research design. A qualitative approach was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the way in which the SRC perceives and is involved, as a governance structure of the students' sector, in the decolonisation process of the university. Qualitative research approach is characterised by its representation of the views and perspectives of the participants by investigating the contextual conditions within which they live with the intention of providing insights that may explain human social behaviour (Yin, 2012). The reason for opting for this qualitative approach was to investigate diverse realities by engaging directly with participants and understanding their behaviours and actions within the study's context (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). One may define the qualitative approach as a method that seeks to uncover how and why individuals behave and think in certain ways, including their experiences and attitudes (Roestenburg et al., 2021). It is mostly applied to examine issues relating to the ways in which individuals organise, relate to, and interact with their societies.

In accordance with the aims of a qualitative design, the study has generated in-depth textual data examining the lived experiences and conceptions. In this process of eliciting data, the researcher continually made sense of the data from the data generation phase through to the data analysis stage. Furthermore, qualitative research requires an understanding of the phenomenon within its context (Agius, 2013), therefore it is relevant for this study. The researcher was fully aware that the SRC's experiences in the context of decolonisation of higher education can only be understood within this context and cannot be generalised to all universities.

As this is qualitative research, the methodology used does not encompass ordinal or numerical values, but rather relies on verbal data. Qualitative research is naturalistic since it focuses on real-world situations as they naturally unfold (Agius, 2013; Roestenburg et al., 2021). Its focuses are on the "why" rather than the "what," studying the social phenomena in its natural setting. This research conforms to the qualitative approach and asks the "how" questions to filter the understanding of the phenomenon from those being studied. The reason behind this

type of questioning is to enquire about complex situations. Multiple questions will be asked on a single phenomenon to capture the complexities of human behaviour (Agius, 2013).

4.1.3 Research Design

This study adopted a case study research design. According to Yin (2012), the case study approach is particularly useful when there is a need for an in-depth examination of people or a group of people, or a phenomenon of interest, in a natural, real-life context. My research involved gathering information in a natural setting through face-to-face interactions with the participants. Therefore, I found a case study to be suitable because I was able to obtain high level and detailed data which combined both objective and subjective information, thus enabling an in-depth understanding of the data (Yin, 2012). It was through a case study approach that the researcher was able to explore the SRC's understanding and participation of decolonisation of higher education using more than one lens for a clearer understanding.

This research study focused on a single case, namely, the SRC presidents from each of all UKZN campuses, investigating their perspectives of decolonisation of higher education. Each SRC president represented one of the five campuses of UKZN. A key benefit of this approach lies in the intimate collaboration between the researcher and participants, facilitating the sharing of their narratives (Yin, 2012). According to Creswell (2014), the research methodology to be used in a study is determined by both the nature of data to be used and the problem to be investigated. Furthermore, the verbal data, obtained from interviews, was analysed with respect to the methodology, which is qualitative (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Maree, 2010).

This study is a case study using semi-structured interviews and one focus group interview to generate data. This case study examined and documented the intricate dynamics and evolving interactions of real-life events, human relationships, and other factors in a distinct instance, recognising that contexts are both unique and dynamic (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). The real-life event of the *#FeesMustFall* movement in South Africa has shown that the SRC wants to change the unbending rules and policies that have dominated South African institutions of higher learning over the years. These rules and policies, such as language policy and a colonised curriculum, have led to oppression and segregation in South African higher education, and these have been at the core of the fight against apartheid education before 1994 (Gumbo & Msila, 2017).

The utilisation of the case study approach was fitting and pertinent for the goals of this study, as it enabled the researcher to successfully attain the research objectives (Maree, 2010). The

case study approach should be considered when the researcher seeks to answer the "how" and "why" questions. This study investigated "How SRC presidents understands and participate in the decolonisation agenda at university" and "Why SRC presidents think higher education should be decolonised". By studying real-life contexts, case studies offer insights into the complexities and dynamics of these situations, allowing the researcher to explore and report on the unique characteristics and interplay of the higher education curricula in operation. It can also be learnt from studies by Creswell (2014) and Maree (2010) that a case study may be used to explore, describe and explain a phenomenon. Based on this concept, the researcher intended to carefully gather and analyse qualitative data such as interviews and a focus group interview to generate a rich and detailed account of the subject. The reason for using this methodology was to obtain in-depth information and understanding on how decolonisation is conceptualised by the SRC.

4.2.3 Selection of Participants and Research Sites

In qualitative research, emphasis is placed on distinct characteristics of the population and on phenomena (Pham, 2018). The purpose and design of the research has aided in directing me in the selection of participants for this study. This research has therefore adopted a purposive sampling technique. In this type of sampling, participants are chosen based on being wellinformed through having the experiences and knowledge of the phenomenon (Cohen & Ariel, 2011; Creswell & Clark, 2011). The criteria for the purposive selection of the participants include:

(i) Being a registered student within the university.

(ii) Elected president of the campus based SRC.

(iii) Student had to either be an undergraduate or postgraduate during participation in the study.

For purposive sampling, experience and knowledge are significant, but it is equally important to choose participants who will be accessible and willing to participate. In this study, I chose five SRC presidents, one in each campus. The process of recruitment has included having individual meetings with each of the elected members of the campus based SRC's to explain the nature and purpose of the study, their rights to participation, including their right to withdraw from participation at any point of the research was deemed necessary without any consequences to them, expectations as participants and process of data collection. Those that

agreed to participate in the research process were then selected as participants for the study. The five participants were selected. The reason behind my sample size is because the university in which the interviews were conducted has five campuses, each with a SRC elected by the students of the respective campus. The president of the campus based SRC was a participant. Purposive sampling involves the researcher intentionally selecting specific individuals to be included in the study (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, Creswell (2014) stated that in purposive sampling, the researcher chooses individuals who exhibit a particular set of characteristics, either in their entirety or in a manner highly relevant to their behaviour, aligning with the research questions.

4.2.4 Biographical Description of Participants

A total of five participants were used in this study, made up of three men and two women.

Name of participants	Positions held by Student Representative Council	Number of years as student leader	Gender of participants
1.Participant A	President	2	Male
2.Participant B	President	3	Male
3. Participant C	President	4	Female
4.Participant D	President	3	Female
5. Participant E	President	4	Male

4.2.5 Data Collection Methods

This section discusses the actual data collection process.

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews

The main source of data collection methods for the required data was the semi-structured, in-depth interviews which the researcher conducted (Yin, 2012). Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were used to generate preliminary data and are preferred by most researchers

because they do not follow any order of questioning. Semi-structured interviews may allow the researcher to probe and explain the participants' responses (Creswell, 2014). The intention of the semi-structured interview process was to have a discussion based on pre-determined questions which was presented to participants, after which I then did a follow-up with a focus group interview for further probing and interrogation of the information required. The one-on-one semi-structured interviews with each of the participants was conducted at a time and place convenient for them and was done with due diligence to the restrictions of the Covid-19 national lockdown. Some of the interviews were conducted online through the platform Zoom to ensure the compliance and safety of participants. These interviews delved deeply into the focus area of the study, drawing on concepts and issues obtained during the follow-up interviews.

Semi-structured interviews may be characterised by flexibility in the sequence of questions that are asked (Cohen & Ariel, 2011). In this study, semi-structured interviews were used because of their flexibility, and because they allow the researcher to interact with participants, and to probe and generate in-depth data.

According to Gilstrap (2009), semi-structured interviews promote the exchange of views and ideas between two to many people on a certain topic of research. He further teaches that semistructured interviews provide a gateway to getting "inside a person's head," while stimulating the relationship between the interviewer and the participant. This method of data generation seeks to help the researcher gain better access to the participants.

Focus Group Interview

The secondary source of data collection methods was one focus group interview with the same group of participants. The reason to use a focus group interview as a data collection strategy was to explore if there was consensus and similarities in the participants' responses when compared with one-on-one interviews. The focus group discussion is frequently used as a qualitative approach to acquire a profound comprehension of social issues (Nyumba et al., 2018). This instrument is used to obtain data from a purposively selected group of individuals. The focus group took place at a boardroom at the institution as the national lockdown level was permitting at the time. Only one focus group discussion took place. According to Nyumba et al. (2018), social sciences discourse puts the importance of understanding human perspectives at the centre stage of research. Therefore, this research used this instrument to uncover the SRC's perspectives of decolonisation of higher education and values.

The focus group had a pre-session preparation where I had to ensure the seating arrangement followed the Covid-19 regulations. Also, I had to check if the recording equipment was in good condition to record the discussion. I facilitated the meeting myself, ensuring that I observe all protocols of the focus group discussion, such as proper introduction of myself, consent, and confidentiality. The discussion was relaxed and focused on the SRC's perspectives of the notion of decolonisation of higher education and how they thought they could contribute in the call to decolonise higher education. The discussion highlighted the challenges which they faced but also opportunities in terms of what they thought they could achieve in this regard.

4.3 Data Analysis and Focus on Five Issues Including Ethical Consideration

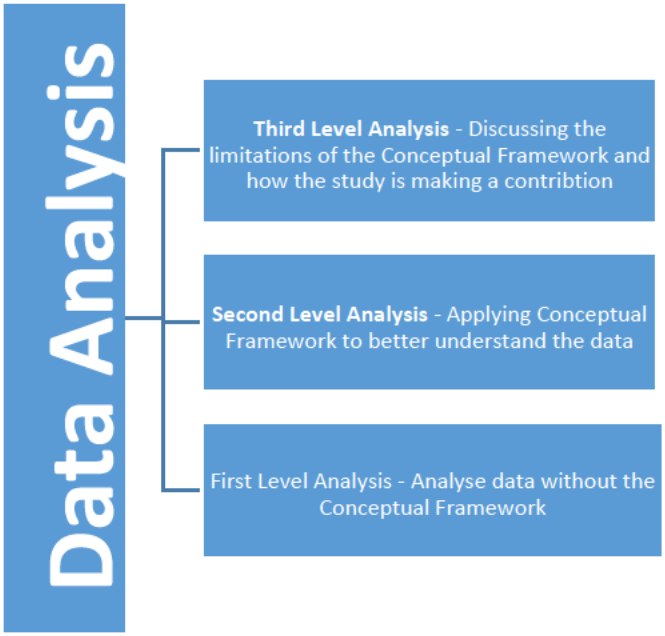

Figure 4.1: Graphical representation of the thematic analysis of data

4.3.1 Data Analysis Process

The data analysis process commenced with the transcription of the recorded interviews and discussion. The data was recorded on the Zoom voice recorder as well as a digital voice recorder and was transcribed into written words. The digital voice recorder allows full recording and is efficient, more than written notes taken during interviews. The data was transcribed verbatim before the analysis. My transcription was first handwritten and thereafter typed by the researcher. I used five different colours to differentiate between interviewees. Thereafter, I created themes based on the common elements embedded within responses (Maree, 2010). Similar themes or information was grouped together in different columns. The identification of

themes was based on the entire database of responses that have been generated. This process is called an inductive process, as themes that emerged from the text as opposed to being informed by pre-set theoretical constructions. In this approach, I was able to identify common themes and patterns and further detect relationships among identified themes and categories.

4.3.2 Ensuring Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of a research study is significant to the assessment of its value (Creswell, 2021; Maree, 2010). Cresswell (2021) and Maree (2010) further asserted that there are four principles in qualitative research used in ensuring trustworthiness in a study: credibility. transferability. dependability. and confirmability. The work of Lincoln (1994) and Guba & Lincoln (1994) has been used as fundamental to measure trustworthiness in qualitative research. For a study to be seen as making contribution to the development of knowledge, the study must conform to some forms of widely acceptable quality guidelines (Loh, 2013).

Amankwaa (2016) held that ensuring the reliability of a research study and its comprehension can be accomplished by addressing the subsequent concerns:

- Theoretical validity pertains to how effectively the researcher's report connects the studied phenomenon to a broader theoretical framework.
- Evaluative validity concerns whether the researcher was sufficiently impartial in presenting the data without introducing judgments or evaluations.
- Descriptive validity pertains to the factual accuracy of the narrative. It implies that qualitative researchers must guarantee that they do not distort anything observed or heard, nor fabricate events based on inferences.

In this study, the researcher has made an ethical consideration to the search for truth and knowledge in an open, free, and transparent manner.

4.3.3 Credibility

The notion of guaranteeing credibility is of the utmost importance in terms of ensuring trustworthiness of the findings. Credibility entails that the researcher takes action to ensure that what has been captured in the research findings is truthful and correct (Maree, 2010; Creswell, 2013; Loh, 2013). To achieve credibility, I developed a rapport with the participants so that a sound relationship of trust could be established. Through trust and rapport, participants may freely share their stories with the researcher. Moreover, because of the explanatory nature and in-depth engagement needed to solicit the stories, Roulston (2010) suggested multiple

engagements are needed with the participants so as to gain a holistic account of one's understanding.

To ensure credibility, I have ensured that the participants see themselves as co-researchers by firstly thoroughly explaining the study to them and the potential benefit it may have for them. It is important for them to see that by tapping into their experiences and understandings, they themselves are gaining insights and have a powerful space for introspection and even growth.

4.3.4 Transferability

Transferability is important as the study must seek to ascertain the extent to which the findings of the study can be applied to others in similar situations and contexts (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Loh, 2013). They further assert that in qualitative research, transferability seeks to establish whether the findings will be relevant or of use to others in the same space, whether for research or for practice. Bunda et al. (2012) and McLean et al. (2019) explained that transferability involves determining the suitability of applying research outcomes to comparable situations and discoveries. It is enhanced by the description on the site participants and procedures used to collect data. This means that the purpose of transferability is to establish the generalisability of a study's findings in other similar contexts. In this study, it is justifiable to interpret the findings as applicable to various other types of public higher education institutions in South Africa that share similarities with those examined. This is because all public higher education institutions are guided by the same legislation, the Higher Education Act, 1997.

While Maree (2010) suggested that it is not the researcher's work to provide a guide for transferability, it is, however, important that the researcher provides an adequate database to allow transferability judgments to be made by others. In this criterion, sufficient details of the campus in which each of the participants lead will be provided.

4.3.5 Dependability

Dependability involves assessing whether the procedures employed in the research are clear and transparent. Under this criterion, I maintained a reflective research journal to record all the steps and decisions undertaken throughout the research process. The research journal will ensure that transparent and clear processes are followed while conducting the study.

4.3.6 Confirmability

According to Bertram and Christiansen (2014), confirmability is a process that deals with researcher objectivity. Furthermore, it considers whether the findings reflect the lived and

reallife experiences of the participants. One may argue that subjectivity in qualitative research is not easily avoidable, just like in the dependability section. However, I intend to keep a research journal to document all processes undertaken during this study.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

Farrimond (2012) mentioned that, within a hierarchical group, institution, or organization, it is customary to seek approval from gatekeepers or key authorities before approaching other participants. This permission can be discussed in person and then formalised in writing, ensuring access to the field and protecting the rights of the study participants. I had to obtain ethical clearance for my study, which forms part of UKZN research ethics policy. I obtained ethical clearance after my research proposal was accepted by the ethics committee. The informed and consent forms from gatekeepers and participants were approved by the committee and I obtained gatekeepers' permission to enter the field of study. Given the hierarchy of the organisation, I sought the written permission of the Dean of UKZN to conduct the study. The gatekeepers were provided with the procedures, risks and benefits of the study, including a description of the confidentiality and the voluntary nature of participation of the study.

After securing approval from the gatekeepers, I proceeded to obtain consent from the participants. Consistent with this protocol, individuals participating in the study were requested to sign an informed consent form to safeguard their autonomy. This document provided comprehensive details about the study, including its purpose, procedures, and the potential risks and benefits associated with participation. The confidentially of the participants was safeguarded by pledging that information they provided would not be disclosed without their permission. The SRC participants were notified that pseudonyms would be employed in lieu of their actual names to uphold their privacy. They were made aware that the research data would be deleted after the required data retention period. Moreover, participants were assured that their involvement in the study was voluntary, and they retained the freedom to withdraw at any point without facing any adverse consequences.

4.5 Conclusion of the Chapter

The chapter was presented in the following manner, firstly outlined the ontological and epistemological stance taken in the study, research approach and the research methodology used for producing the data. Secondly, it outlined the data analysis process and how the themes developed for the study and concluded with issues ensuring trustworthiness, credibility,

reliability, and ethical considerations. The next chapter provides data presentation, analysis, and findings.

CHAPTER FIVE

KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter reports the summarised discussion of the study's key findings, which are limited to the SRC at UKZN. A thematic analysis approach was used in this study. The data analysis method was used to identify, analyse, and report on themes within the data collected to ensure that there was order, structure and meaning to the data collected (Schurink et al., 2011). Data were collected using instruments that are interlinked, namely a focus group and one-on-one interviews. This thematic analysis allowed the researcher to identify areas of adherence to or divergence from concepts/topics that were being discussed during the set of interviews. The findings were presented in tabular form. Table 5.1 shows the themes of the study, and Table 5.2 presents a list of participants of the study.

5.1.1 Presentation of data

The data presented were related to the theoretical framework, concepts in the literature review, and most importantly, to the three research questions. This chapter seeks to show how the SRC understands the issue of decolonisation of higher education at UKZN and explored the SRC's thoughts on finding ways to contribute towards a decolonised university. Further, this chapter explored the challenges involved in implementing a decolonised curriculum. The data gathered in the study is analysed and discussed considering the following questions:

1. What is the SRC's understanding of decolonisation in higher education?
2. How will the SRC contribute to the decolonisation of higher education?
3. How does the SRC hope to achieve decolonisation in South African higher education?

Table 5.1: Emerging themes of the study

Main Themes		**Sub-Themes Themes**
1	The SRC's understanding of decolonisation in higher education	Decolonisation as a political and epistemological liberatory project
2	The perceptions of SRC in achieving decolonisation of higher education in South	The language debate: linguistic decolonisation
		Implications of decolonisation of the curriculum

	Africa	Decolonised curriculum equals a transformed society
3	The contribution made by SRC towards decolonisation of higher education	Positionality of the SRC in relation to decolonisation
		Decolonisation as a revolution
		Decolonisation as a possibility for multi-disciplinary curriculum

Table 5.1, I present the findings thematically. According to the table, every main theme generated a sub-theme. It can be observed that the first main theme "SRC's understanding of decolonisation in higher education" generated the sub-theme of "decolonisation as a political and epistemological liberatory project". This theme demonstrates the SRC's understanding of decolonisation of higher education in South Africa. This finding is consistent with the claim made by Delgado and Mulder (2017) argued that colonialism aimed to promote European ways of knowing while suppressing indigenous epistemologies in the quest for South African land and resources. It can, therefore, be established that decolonisation in higher education has political connotations that needs to be reconsidered.

The second main theme which is the "perceptions of SRC in achieving decolonisation of Higher Education in South Africa" generated three sub-themes, which are "language debate: linguistic decolonisation," "implications of decolonisation of the curriculum," and "decolonised curriculum equals to a transformed society". This second main theme demonstrates that the SRC has clarity about the extensive issues that need to change in the higher education system. According to Jabosung et al. (2019), the decolonisation of higher education is all about changing the praxis of theory and practice, language, pedagogy, contextual relevance, curriculum, partnerships, social justice and academic make-up. Therefore, the SRC's perceptions indicate that decolonisation of higher education should be about recognising and appreciating differences, which in a way, is dealing with legacies of colonialism.

The third main theme of the contribution made by SRC towards decolonisation of higher education generated three sub-themes: positionality of the SRC in relation to decolonisation; decolonisation as a revolution; and decolonisation as a possibility for multi-disciplinary curriculum. This theme demonstrates that through the student protests of 2015-2016, students under the leadership of the SRC called for the decolonisation of higher education. The contribution made in this regard was the demand by the SRC for equal access to the universities. This finding is coherent with Costandius et al. (2018), who claimed that issues such as the

decolonisation of universities, the low number of Black South Africa scholars and colonial institutional culture were raised at UCT, Rhodes University and Stellenbosch University during the 2015-2016 student protests. The conclusion drawn in this regard is that SRC do understand that there is a need for change, hence they are voicing, as a way of contribution to the decolonisation process, the need for introspection.

Table 5.2: List of participants for the study

One-on-one Interview		
Participant A	Edgewood Campus	One interview
Participant B	Medical School	
Participant C	Westville Campus	
Participant D	Howard College Camps	
Focus Group Interview		
FG1	Howard College Camps	One interview
FG2	Westville Campus	
FG3	Edgewood Campus	

5.2 The SRC's Understanding of Decolonisation in Higher Education

The SRC's understanding of decolonisation in higher education emerged as the main theme. Under this main theme, a sub-theme emerged of decoloniality as a political and epistemological liberatory project. The details of the sub-theme are presented as follows.

5.2.1 Decolonisation as a Political and Epistemological Liberatory Project

Drawing from the data presented, it seems that the SRC's perspectives on decolonisation is varied and includes a process conceptualisation, the undoing or dismantling the relations of power, and conceptions of knowledge that foment the reproduction of racial and geo-political hierarchies in South African higher education.

Participant A defined the concept along the line's transformation and equality:

> *In education, decolonisation refers to the elimination of colonial epistemology and social practice to concentrate our own epistemology and social practice. It refers to the maintenance of the knowledge, language, and overall system culture of African and South African universities. Decolonisation can also be explained as the process of*

exposing and dismantling various forms of settler power in African learning institutions.

Participant B further defined the concept along the lines of justice and injustices:

Decolonisation means undoing what the injustices have done by the colonisers. Unveiling or going back to a system that should have been fair and just to all.

The participants' discussion of their understanding of the concept showed that Black students are made to think and talk about their situations, but not on their own terms. It is necessary for the decolonisation process to focus on freeing the African higher education curriculum from the vestiges of colonialism that, as a result, have ensured that the curriculum remains largely colonial in nature and, therefore, lacking relevance and responsiveness (Modiba, 2019). As Mamdani (2016) suggested, the decolonisation of the higher education curriculum should establish mechanisms to prevent global north initiatives, like globalisation and internationalisation, from reasserting colonial influence over the curriculum after the decolonisation process is concluded. Mamdani (2016) further underscored that decolonisation should promote an African approach and solutions to address African challenges. This suggests that the current state of the curriculum is culturally and contextually irrelevant and nonresponsive to the living conditions of its recipients.

The Focus Group mentioned that:

The system is made to tell a narrative for Black students, however, not by Black students. The curriculum is full of concepts from Europe and not Africa, and there is a need to uplift African ways of knowledge. There is a need to Africanise the curriculum so that it may meet the needs of African people.

Participant C defined the concept, limiting its scope to the South African context:

In the educational context, decolonisation means that the education is being shifted from promoting colonial legacies. This then means for me that it is embracing the education systems of our country that was colonised previously without filtering it with the education system of the former colonisers.

The findings have highlighted the issue of transformation conceptualisation whereby there is a shift from a Eurocentric curriculum to an African-centred education system which implies rethinking. The SRC perceives the importance of Africanisation which should confront the inherited colonial education system. Amongst the three dimensions, as mentioned by Matsiliza (2019), the political construct of decolonisation is associated with the "undoing" of the colonial

apartheid order. Furthermore, since the colonial period higher education system was dominated by colonial thoughts and ideological influences in ideologies, decolonisation is regarded as a reactional process. Hendrick and Young (2017) asserted that the goal of decolonisation is for formerly colonised nations to achieve political independence, avoiding the dissemination of knowledge that is influenced by colonial tendencies propagated through neoliberal approaches and ideologies. From the participants' responses, when asked about their conceptualisation of the notion of decolonisation of higher education, the SRC mentioned that there is a need for a holistic rethink and re-evaluation of the knowledge system and content in the curriculum.

Participant D mentioned:

> *I understand decolonisation as action, fighting against colonial legacies. In the educational context, decolonisation means that the education is being shifted from promoting colonial legacies. This then means for me that it is embracing the education systems of a country that was colonised previously without filtering it with the education system of the former colonisers. Decolonisation of higher education is a call to transform the higher education spaces so they can be more Pan-African rather than being Eurocentric.*

The first theme is presented as an understanding that decolonisation of the curriculum is about the dismantling of coloniality and the enactment of curriculum power entanglement. This will ensure that all students, regardless of their backgrounds, are given opportunities to genuinely participate and contribute to the knowledge construction process (Modiba, 2019).

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017) argued that Africans need to be cautious about falling into the trap of normalising and universalising coloniality as an inherent state of the world. This is because Eurocentric education has come to be perceived as the sole valid and legitimate form of socialisation and humanity throughout different periods and geographical spaces. Furthermore, he advises that decolonisation must be used as a tool to unmask, resist and destroy coloniality because it produced a world order that can only be sustained through a combination of violence, deceit, hypocrisy and lies Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013). The idea to recentre African epistemologies in higher education serves to expose African scholarship to the global platforms and ensuring that we universalise African epistemologies in the internationalisation agenda.

It can be learned from the findings that decolonisation emerged as a political movement aimed at dismantling colonial powers to achieve independence for a colonised nation such as South Africa. One of the main goals of decolonisation has been to challenge and transform the ways

in which knowledge is produced and understood. The SRC has shown that they understand decolonisation as a process that is aimed at challenging and transforming the dominant knowledge systems that emerged from colonial structures which continue to oppress the higher education space.

Further, decolonisation as both a political and epistemological liberatory project, seeks to address historical injustices, empower marginalised communities, and create a more inclusive and equitable higher education system. It can be seen from the data presented that the SRC would like to see decolonisation as a tool that involves not only changing political structures but also challenging and transforming the underlying ideologies, knowledge systems, and cultural paradigms that have been shaped by colonial histories.

5.3 The Perceptions of SRC in Achieving Decolonisation of Higher Education in South Africa

The perceptions of SRC in achieving decolonisation of higher education in South Africa emerged as the main theme. The three sub-themes emerged from the main theme, which are the language debate (linguistic decolonisation), implications of decolonisation of the curriculum and decolonised curriculum equals to a transformed society. These sub-themes are presented as follows in detail:

5.3.1 The Language Debate: Linguistic Decolonisation

The second theme identified is that of linguistic decolonisation. The language debate among participants was identified as an important aspect in the call to decolonise higher education. According to Adebisi (2016) and Kaschula (2016), language is a powerful tool of communication, but it also has an impact in the social ideologies of inclusion and exclusion.

Participant A mentioned that:

> *Language is a big issue at the university. At the first point of contact when students come (for the first time) to the university, they are welcomed and addressed in English in the pamphlets, registration venues and the distribution of information to students. As soon as they come into the university, they immediately feel lost and there is no sense of belonging due a language that is foreign. The non-academic programmes are vital to begin with as students come across many steps before coming across the curriculum even though the curriculum is the core.*

The extract is a clear indication that the issue of language is a continuation of student marginalisation at South African universities. Language is regarded as a powerful tool, especially in the social ideologies of inclusion and exclusion (Adebisi, 2016; Kaschula, 2016) and South African universities need to negotiate an identity of belonging for students (Oparinde, 2019). This is critical for South African universities as they work towards acknowledgement of language and culture being the nucleus in creating an environment that is inclusive and not exclusive. Further, Oparinde (2019) asserted that language is a strong driver of information dissemination, therefore there is an important need for linguistic decolonisation.

The focus group noted that:

> *The issue of language is pivotal in the discussion of decolonisation of higher education. Language is a means of communication but also represents culture. Language transmits culture, when you are reading in a language that is not your mother tongue, automatically your culture is not included in that learning process. So, you are learning about the culture of people who once colonised you. The education system from primary level to university is designed to reproduce a generation that is oppressed even at times when we are supposed to be free, hence the freedom is a so-called freedom.*

In this extract, participants expressed the need to decolonise language. What was emphasised during the discussion was the relationship between culture and language as concepts that are coexisting. Kaschula (2016) suggested that universities should thoroughly address the language issue as an integral component of a more profound transformative discourse, given its perceived neglect in higher education. He contended that the issue of the African voice being silent can be addressed by assessing the way in which language informs the teaching and learning across disciplines. The current state of the higher education curriculum disregards the notion that all knowledge is knowledge and how indigenous knowledge underpins African languages (Oparinde, 2019). There is consensus among scholars, such as Oparinde (2019) and Vila and Bretxa (2014), about the role of Africa's indigenous languages to be used as languages of instruction in higher education considering that it is a powerful tool of communication, especially in the social ideologies of inclusion and exclusion. This necessitates South African universities to strive for negotiating a sense of belonging for students, as language and culture are regarded as central in establishing an inclusive rather than exclusive environment. In the present condition, knowledge is often misunderstood to be predominantly Eurocentric, with Afrocentric aspects of knowledge perceived as less significant.

The social transformation of post-apartheid higher education is still characterised by the domination of the colonial language, English, which continues to marginalise the indigenous languages after many years of gaining independence from colonialism (Mahabeer, 2020). There is consensus among scholars that decolonisation will only succeed if Africans begin to realise that the colonial matrices of power dominate pedagogies and epistemologies which continue to discriminate and alienate Africans (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). The colonial power in the use of language continues to socialise African people into hating Africa and liking the Europe and America that continues to reject them (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). He continues with this argument that this challenge begins when the child sets their foot in school, church and university, whereby they learn to hate and neglect the knowledge they possessed before coming to school and are taught to regard it as folk knowledge, barbarism and superstitions (NdlovuGatsheni, 2013). Students begin to be told that speaking mother tongue is a sign of being primitive and some schools inflict direct punishment to learners who speak mother tongue within school premises. The indigenous languages are therefore relegated to the backseat with the colonial languages being preferred and endorsed as the language of instruction in institutions of learning. The confusion comes into play in this regard when we must decolonise the curriculum and language policies in the very same institutions that are rooted in White supremacy. It will be a difficult task for Black peoples' experiences to be accepted in the curriculum or their languages to have equal status to that of colonial language without some sort of resistance (Heleta, 2016).

It is clear that South African universities do not afford equal status and resources to all indigenous languages. Wa Thiong'o (1992) argued that there is a need to decolonise universities by teaching African languages. Similarly, Mbembe (2016) stated that a decolonised university in Africa should put African languages at the centre of its teaching and learning. This argument stems from the fact that colonialism goes hand in hand with monolingualism, whereby only the English language enjoys prestige.

The challenge is that today's higher education system, which claims to be liberated, does not challenge the predominant hegemonic practice. This practice has demeaned African indigenous knowledge and must be displaced from the central position of what students are learning. For this practice to discontinue, decolonisation must take place (Le Grange, 2016a). According to Mkhize and Ndimande-Hlongwa (2014), universities in South Africa and Africa have historically relied on foreign languages, which has led to them becoming a basis for social discrimination and inequality. Similarly, Ndimande-Hlongwa and Ndebele (2017) and Soler

and Gallego-Balsà (2019) argued that the dominance of English in South African higher education continues to marginalise (official) indigenous languages.

In a study focused on investigating the decolonisation of the engineering curriculum, Fomunyam (2017) emphasised the significance of the language of instruction, pedagogy, and the teaching and learning process, including its underlying theory, in the education and training of students. Therefore, it has been established that there is a need to instruct and inform students in a language that they completely understand.

5.3.2 Implications of Decolonisation of the Curriculum

Another theme that emerged during data analysis was the notion of the discomfort of having to let go of the system that people are used to and more importantly the issue of recolonisation of the system in the process of trying to find a curriculum that is fit for context. A different view among the participants were concerns that correcting colonisation might impact internationalisation negatively. This view emanated from an understanding that entails an exclusion of Eurocentric models and a return to Africanisation. The discussion indicates that the participants felt that it would not be good for Africa to exclude itself from the global body of knowledge. Fomunyam (2019) argued that the process of decolonisation needs to factor in internationalisation because South African universities need to keep pace with both economic and academic globalisation. According to Teferra (2008), internationalisation has been part of Africa's higher education sector dating way back to its developmental stages. He goes on to argue that we should make note of the development trajectories of African higher education and points out that we also need to investigate the contribution of this legacy to the current day. In his article "*From 'dumb' decolonisation to 'smart' internationalisation*" he further argued that:

> *Analysing, articulating, and critiquing the state of contemporary African universities in the context in which they were initially conceived and developed – in other words, under the tutelage of colonial entities and paradigms more than half a century ago – ignores the transformational growth and diversity the continent has registered* (pp. 7379).

This suggests that universities are universal in nature. They are global entities. Teferra (2019) added that it thus challenges the responsible authorities and bodies to ensure to make African universities relevant and internationally desirable ("*From 'dumb' decolonisation to 'smart' internationalisation*"). Teferra (2019) argued that African universities need to be careful not to allow global north initiatives such as globalisation and internationalisation to recolonise the curriculum. He stressed that decolonisation should advocate for an African approach in its

knowledge system. However, Du Preez (2018) stated that internationalisation is perceived as a threat to decolonisation and might lead to recolonisation by cunning international forces.

Participant C mentioned that:

> *I have realised that this concept is doable and good on paper but in practicality it is proving to be a challenge. The challenge comes from people fearing change in a sense that decolonisation would mean that people leave behind what they use to know for something that will be foreign to them although it is part of themselves. In the educational context decolonisation then would mean forsaking the methods of teaching adopted from foreign countries who previously colonised us, leaving and letting go of the curriculums, educational culture, and the entire education system. Now the question is, are we ready to start implementing our own in the name of decolonising? I foresee a situation whereby internal colonisation would be our daily bread, where recolonisation would be within the country subordinating a certain group of people in favour of one group.*

It emerged from the extract that the South African higher education system is not ready for a decolonised curriculum and higher education system. The findings suggest that the South African higher education might not be ready in terms of adequate resources to adopt the decolonisation agenda. In the argument raised by Teferra (2019), higher education needs to transition from "dumb" decolonisation monologues to contemporary and "smart" internationalisation dialogues that articulate discourses with the aim to strategically situate Africa at the centre of the global political and economic scenes. The prior extract does not necessarily disregard the need for a decolonised curriculum, but she does not think that decolonisation is the solution to our challenges, rather it would lead to what she calls "internal decolonisation".

Participants also raised an issue of non-implementation when decolonisation is concerned. During the discussion, **Participant D** stated that:

> *I strongly believe that we are still going to discuss the concept of decolonisation repeatedly with no successful attempts of really implementing it. Another factor to decolonisation being a mere concept although it is worth discussing, is corruption. Those who are benefitting from colonial legacies would do anything to hinder decolonisation processes. The funny part is that the same people who are "supporting" decolonisation are enrolling their kids in schools that do not promote decolonisation.*

So, it is like decolonisation for them, but I am good with colonial legacies in the name of securing my children's future.

The perspective from Participant D agrees with Long (2018b) that the term decolonisation has no fixed meaning, therefore regarding it as an empty signifier. Long (2018b) further asserted that many people in the higher education sector do not understand the meaning of this term therefore it may become an unachievable project. The thinking that decolonisation is a political wave stems from the fact that colonisation was founded on a political agenda (Jansen, 1999). This leads to a perception that decolonisation is a political 'buzzword' that would yield no consistent results. Evident from participants' responses is the link to decolonisation being perceived a passing wave. These participants do not foresee any commitments in this regard.

5.3.3 Decolonised Curriculum Equals to Transformed Society

South Africa faces distinct challenges, rooted in its historical narratives, that require acknowledgment and confrontation. These include epistemic racism that excludes African histories and epistemologies (Methula, 2017), therefore it is critical for a university system to be sensitive to and cognisant of such factors. **Participant A** said:

I would like to see at the end of this project a prosperous society. Universities are a microcosm of the society, therefore what happens in the society is a minor version of what takes place at the university. Institutions becoming a prosperous community simply means having institutions of higher learning that will firstly acknowledge that there are inequalities within our society. Therefore, the first point is that when they admit students, for instance, they must have that in their minds, meaning know they will be working with students who are different. This should be accommodated even by the admission policy needs to consider someone who is coming from rural context (Nongoma) and someone from an urban context (Kloof).

Seemingly, the SRC's anticipation of the outcome of the call for decolonisation is based on the need for a university to be responsive to the needs of society.

Participants mentioned during the **focus group** that:

There is a need to uplift Black students' lives through giving access to higher education. In this way, higher education will be deco modified.

As outlined by Mgqwashu (2016), the process of decolonisation should align with the fundamental objectives of the university, addressing the societal needs and adapting to the

evolving landscape of teaching, learning, and research within South African universities. The participants were clear in their response that they would like to see a shift from the colonial and apartheid idea of South African higher education system as a whole, to a transformed, decolonial South African, within a context whereby higher education is not reduced to a commodity which is only accessible to the middle and upper classes (Daniel, 2020). He further asserted that since the student protests called for free education for all, it became a symbol for decolonial practice, as it aspires for a decolonial future of knowledge production at South African universities (Daniel, 2020)

It is evident in the data presented that the SRC perceived decolonisation process to challenge and possibly undo the effects of colonialism in South African higher education. The data presented indicates the SRC's dissatisfaction with the imposition of the coloniser's language in South African higher education, and the notion that it continues to marginalise and suppress indigenous languages. Therefore, linguistic decolonisation should seek to reverse these impacts and empower indigenous languages by incorporating indigenous languages and cultural practices into curricular and teaching methods. The SRC recognises the importance of language as a fundamental aspect of identity, culture, and knowledge transmission, therefore, believing that linguistic decolonisation should acknowledge that linguistic diversity contributes to the richness of the global cultural landscape.

5.4 The Contribution Made by the SRC Towards the Decolonisation of Higher Education

The contribution made by SRC towards decolonisation of higher education emerged as the main theme. Under this main theme emerged three sub-themes, namely the positionality of the SRC in relation to decolonisation, decolonisation as a revolution, and decolonisation as a possibility for multi-disciplinary. Details of the sub-themes are presented as follows.

5.4.1 Positionality of the SRC in Relation to Decolonisation

What also emerged from the data is that the SRC raised the issue of how they would like to reconstruct the governance system in terms of their involvement. As they try to push forward the agenda of decolonisation, they feel that their voice, as a SRC, has limited reach due to a system that segregates and is predominantly neo-liberal.

During the focus group discussion, **Participant A** indicated that:

> *"The management must first understand and accept that the SRC, as representatives of the student body, they are important stakeholders, formal structure and the main stake*

holders in the business of higher education. Management does not look beyond the body of the SRC member in the structure. This leads to disempowerment of SRC because they end up being "student liaison officers instead of student representatives at council. SRC simply conveys messages from management to students and vice versa".

Further, **Participant B** mentioned:

"The fact that students' protests are becoming more violent indicate that the SRC has no voice in the governance structure. This leads to students engaging into a strike, but you find that management would want to attack the SRC at an individual level. The reason behind this is that once the students realise they do not have a leader or someone that represents their interests they decide to lead themselves, hence the increase in the number of protests and the issue of violent protests".

Participant E:

"To be precisely I would say there are many challenges in the attempts to decolonise the institution. Among those challenges is that you would expect that as a Black person, as the transformation continues, many young Black student leaders, now that our institutions are governed by Black/African academics, the executives, you would expect a lot of changes in terms of the way of addressing student needs and student issues. However, we have established that at some point those who were colonised with us, once they've joined the system, they become the system themselves. I would conclude by saying that there are severe challenges in terms of decolonising the institution. There is a lot of resistance from the management side, if you have Vice Chancellor (VC) who grew up at Mtubatuba and today he's a Vice Chancelor (VC) from UCT. Now if there is a student protest you would expect that the VC would understand and seek to attend the issues raised by students or the SRC, but you find that the very same VC would respond in a very negative manner, showing no sympathy and understanding to students including students of colour".

The participants showed concern of the detachment that exist between higher education institutions and the community which they' are servicing. The participants feel that there needs to be a deconstruction of the "ivory tower" mentality amongst members of the management team in order to work together with the SRC towards a curriculum that is relevant, responsive and inclusive. Modiba (2019) argued that universities need to deconstruct the "ivory tower" so as to empower academics to know and understand the socio-political realities and how to deal

with such realties as they strive to decolonise the system. Importantly, decolonisation of the curriculum cannot ignore other factors such the value and contribution of the student body in the decolonisation process.

5.4.2 Decolonisation as a Revolution

Decolonisation of higher education is not without challenges in relation to the experiences of the SRC at the university. During the data presentation, the SRC indicated that one of the biggest challenges in this regard is related to decolonisation being a revolution. During the focus group, **Participant C** indicated that:

> *"South Africa has never won the revolution. If a country has won the revolution, it cannot coexist with its enemy, instead it must be at liberty to redefine how they live. As reference, when Cuba won the revolution, they decided to convert all the churches to schools, those that had been found and owned by the capitalists' government".*

What qualifies decolonisation as a revolution is its violent process, which is marked by chaos and uncertainty (Osman & Maringe, 2019). The SRC indicated that the challenge lies with the discriminatory governance practices on economic hegemonic epistemological foundations of knowledge production, therefore causing a limitation on African students to even gain access to higher education. Therefore, the revolution becomes the epicentre of the fight for academic freedom and independence on matters pertaining to curriculum, and both academics and students can co-construct their curriculum.

Participant C from Focus Group**:**

> *"Decolonisation is also understood to raise questions around putting price tags to access to education as it's form of blocking the other races to access higher education and to access knowledge. If you enter a shop, you can only buy what you can afford, which is why we say the system needs to be decomodified".*

Mbembe (2016) asserted that it is unfortunate that universities today are large systems of authoritative control, and standardisation of gradation, accountancy, classification, credits and penalties. This is owed to the episteme of reducing universities to institutions run and managed like industries which leads to incompetent, shallow, and consultancy cultures that are nonacademic in nature (Methula, 2017). The notion of reducing universities to businesses of knowledge production has been an ongoing challenge, and Stewart (2007) stated that the World Bank has been one of the culprits in spreading an objectivist and apolitical notion of knowledge

production. Universities are portrayed as businesses offering knowledge, packaged, and branded in the form of teaching programmes for sale to interested clients. According to Conradie (2011), this is highly reductionist.

It is against this background that Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Zondi (2016) suggested that decolonisation of the university should encompass, among other things, consideration of structural changes, curriculum transformation, an epistemological paradigm shifts from Eurocentric knowledge to Africa-centred knowledge. A change of universities' cultures and systems that are not alienating as well as increased and affordable access to education.

During the focus group interview, **Participant B** indicated strongly that the issue of commodifying higher education continues to exclude students who are African and who are affected by issues of inequality, raising the following argument:

> *"Questions around putting price tags to access to education as it's a form of blocking the other races to access higher education and to access knowledge. If you enter a shop, you can only buy what you can afford – the system needs to be decomodified".*

According to Methula (2017), gaining knowledge involves more than purchasing products or acquiring skills, it entails the deliberate process of developing disciplines and academic virtues that cannot be merely purchased. Therefore, the pursuit of knowledge must not be quantified in financial transactions, nor should it be reduced to a consumerist quest for students. There is an alignment in this regard on what the participants are saying and what is presented by literature, i.e., that the true mandate of the university is not to produce information that is shallow, uncontextualised and without theoretical substance in research, tuition, teaching and community engagement, as this would prove irrelevant and exclusive (Methula, 2017).

Adding on to the debate about decolonisation as a revolution, **Participant A** advised that:

> *We have established that at some point those who were colonised with us, once they've joined the system, they become the system themselves. I would conclude by saying that there are severe challenges in terms of decolonising the institution.*

The philosophical theorist for African Renaissance, which underpins this study, advises that African scholars who have dedicated their scholarship towards emancipation of Africa, must come together and pull resources for the good of Africa. Asante (2018) stated that there are some efforts in this direction, but they are weak. From the data, the participants conceptualised it as part of the system that continues to keep Africans as subjects, depriving them of any African agency.

5.4.3 Decolonisation as Possibility for Multi-Disciplinary Curriculum

It is clear from the discussions that the issue of decolonisation in higher education remains complex and a divisive especially if we are to consider the history and diversity of the higher education institution in the country. According to Fomunyam (2017), discussions about decolonisation within the context of historically Black or disadvantaged tertiary institutions will reveal different sets of meaning and understanding as opposed to discussing the subject of decolonisation in a historically White or advantaged tertiary institution. Furthermore, these differences are highlighted when one considers the differences in institutional cultures and dynamics, resources (both human and material) and funding. However, Mamdani (2016) argued that if the decolonisation project is handled well, the higher education curriculum has the potential to develop and transform to its context. Issues such unemployment, poverty and inequality could be eradicated in the communities in which these institutions are situated.

To support this idea, **Participant C** stated:

> *It must be put clearly that many institutions in KZN and whole of SA, the rate of students' protests is high. You would also find that the issues faced by students are similar – hence universities strike around the same time every year. This means that there is a big problem which management should be giving attention to. Same at national level, we all agree that we should expropriate the land but not putting action to it. We talk about decolonisation, but no work is put towards it as a project/revolution.*

Secondly, Participant B indicated that the SRC has limited contribution in the university governance structures, therefore leading to situations of protests.

Participant B said:

> *"At universities, as much as we sit in the structure of governance, we still need to have a common understanding that we need to decolonise the institution. The first point of departure is for members in the governance structure to acknowledge that students are just as important members in decision-making. Challenge is that the SRC is not recognised in the governance structure. At the structures where the SRC sit to represent students, management already has a stronger position in terms of decision making and influence. It is not a matter of presenting students' challenge for management's intervention but instead of challenging ideas you find that management would challenge even the physical concepts such age and merely not recognise the SRC member at all".*

The point that is coming across from the extract is the issue of resistance experienced by the SRC from university management. They pointed out that they would appreciate if management would recognise them as an important member in governance and as one of the stakeholders of the institution. This is one way of understanding decolonisation as Fomunyam and Teferra (2017) stated that the concept of decolonisation is contextual in nature. It is understood differently by different people in the higher education environment. To support this claim, Fomunyam (2017) advised that the calls to decolonise South African universities was due to different reason such as the fall of the Rhodes statue at UCT, while at the universities in Pretoria and Stellenbosch the focus was on the fall of Afrikaans. At UKZN, it started with the statue of King George, while at Rhodes University it was about changing the name of the university. For some of these institutions, aspiring to change the name was important and contributed towards a decolonised curriculum. Like the data obtained for this study, the SRC deemed it important that management recognise their voice in the governance structures as a way of decolonisation of the higher education system. This may be regarded as a contextual need with regards to decolonisation of the curriculum.

5.5 The Findings

The previous discussion presented a thematic analysis of the findings as they were collected from participants. This section presented and analysed the findings with respect to theoretical tools adopted in this study to make sense and meaning of the data. According to Sesanti (2019), the inequality that exists in Africa through colonialism and colonisation has been sustained through Eurocentric education which sought to displace African's cultural knowledge, replacing it with a European cultural knowledge system. Further, he argues that decolonisation struggles such as the *#FeesMustFall* movement are an expression of the SRC's determination to push for the inclusion of diverse perspectives and voices in the curriculum. The notion of decolonisation continues to be a discourse in higher education and may succeed, to some extent, to provide academic freedom in higher education (Le Grange, 2021; Sesanti, 2019). However, the colonisation continues beyond Africa's artificial independence. The conceptual framework underpinning this study allows one to understand the SRC's perspective and point of view as they understand and attach meaning to their involvement of decolonisation project in higher education.

5.6 Curriculum Decolonisation

The main finding in the discussion is the SRC's focus on rediscovering traditional African ways of knowledge and prioritisation of human dignity and inclusiveness as a prerequisite. This may

involve challenging standards and laws governing higher education with the aim to transform higher education so that it represents a broader range of cultures, histories, and worldviews. In support of this notion, Sesanti (2019) stated that the role of higher education towards a more culturally relevant curriculum is critical. Without decolonisation in place, there is no relevance in the curriculum and there exists no responsiveness to students' conditions in the wider society. In this way, universities remain spaces where Black students assimilate heteronormative Whiteness in order to fit in and function in a post-apartheid South Africa (Boonzaier & Mhkize, 2018; Modiba, 2019). This observation is with reference to the centrality of diversity and inclusion in the knowledge system. The SRC advocates for not just a decolonised higher education system, but more specifically an education that meets the needs of its contexts (Sesanti, 2019). This notion highlights the need for a transformed higher education system, one that does not resemble the pre-1994 socio-economic order and hegemony (Makhubela, 2018).

5.7 Representation and Participation

Transformation through decolonisation of the curriculum would deal with issues of exclusion of Black students in unequal contexts of universities and focus more on students' cultural backgrounds to inform the curriculum. There is consensus in the literature that it is unacceptable in the new democracy that South Africa still utilises a curriculum that continues to undermine Black students' psychological and cultural wellbeing, consistently creating feelings of inferiority. Secondly, a curriculum that disregards the importance of language but most importantly a curriculum that that is incapable of communicating the complexities of knowledge that is shared at universities is also unacceptable (Badat, 2017). Central to this argument is the issue of inclusivity, and the important role of students' participation in higher education.

Some participants indicated that:

> *"Our problems emanate from the system; we need to transform the system. When we transform the system, the academics need to integrate ideas together to respond to a particular need. So why call it a system? Because there's no way that we can say focus one aspect of decolonisation, therefore academics must come together and put a clear proposal to deal with the different aspects of the higher education, economics, basic and higher education, social cohesion, to present to the government structures for the freedom and transformation of the South African people. Also, we should not neglect the issue of the dictatorship of the colonist countries. In the universities they are in the capital cities – education and capital there's a link. We need to undermine the wage*

labour/system so that we will have people who are interested in staying at the university and be involved in the knowledge production".

The argument emanates from the fact that while South Africa made significant progress in addressing historical inequalities, the challenges relating to exclusion and inequality in higher education remain unresolved (Machingambi, 2020).

During the interview discussion, the SRC presented another theme phrased as "resistance" from university management on matters pertaining to student matters.

Participant A said:

"Among those challenges is that you would expect that as a Black person, as the transformation continues, many young Black student leaders, now that our institutions are governed by Black/African academics, the executives, you would expect a lot of changes in terms of the way of addressing student needs and student issues. However, we have established that at some point those who were colonised with us, once they've joined the system, they become the system themselves".

The participant presented a perspective that there is a need for university management to understand the students' subjectivity and understand that students are faced with multiple forces as they negotiate issues of access and sustaining their wellbeing at university (Ramrathan, 2019). According to Vorster and Quinn (2017), following the end of apartheid, South African universities focused their transformation agenda on improving access for Black students. Ramrathan (2019) asserted that widening access to universities was used as an instrument for developmental purposes of the nation and to end the impoverishment of the majority of the people of South Africa, especially after the devastation of apartheid. However, the issue of widening access into higher education was and continues to be a complex issue (Ramrathan, 2019; Vorster & Quinn, 2017). The issue of widening access to higher education has been used as a discourse of transformation. However, the university management did not consider the significant structural and cultural change in relation to students' demographics (Zembylas, 2018). These scholars further asserts that universities did not pay enough attention to the problematic institutional cultures as well as their colonial structure and pedagogical practices (Vorster & Quinn, 2017; Zembylas, 2018). As a result, the university system seems to further marginalise students from impoverished communities and defeats the purpose of widening access for Black students who are mostly subjects of socio-economic, health,

personal and other issues that have an impact on students' wellbeing while at university (Ramrathan, 2019).

5.8 SRC's Contribution Towards Decolonisation Agenda

Many scholars have presented the ongoing debates about the effectiveness of the education system in promoting psychological and cultural well-being of Black students. Furthermore, the SRC has an important task of ensuring diverse representation within academic institutions for addressing power imbalances that may affect the student body at large.

When the participants were asked about their contribution, as the SRC, towards decolonisation, they said during the **focus group**:

> *"When we get into the revolution you come to a point where if there is no resolution, I can break walls and rebuild it later for as long as I am able to get what I want and getting my voice heard".*

The statement was mentioned in the context of students' frustration and desperation to gain the attention of those in positions of power in higher education. Socio-economic and health issues such as financial aid, adequate student accommodation, adequate facilities and resources are the main cause of many students' protest actions. Such issues lead to violent protests which are led by SRC, cessation of academic operations and of the university's business as students push forward their demands. Ramrathan (2019) stated that the violent protests are as a result of students' frustration at the slow pace of change at the university. Decolonisation remains at the centre of students' protests at universities. This is why Friedman (2018) said that "if you want change in South Africa, create a crisis – then stand by to negotiate a way out of it". This means that the students' uprising in 2015 did not come as a surprise because it has always been the case and protests continue to be predictable to date. In these protests, student leaders (SRC) often attempt to sit down with university management and those in authority, to bring to fore their challenges and claim for human rights. However, they are not seen in a positive light. They are seen as disruptive, ill-disciplined, and politically motivated in their actions (Ramrathan, 2019). Nevertheless, the scope of student's uprising and their demands remain notable (Daniel, 2020).

South Africa has experienced the significant impact of students' uprisings, along with their associated demands. Student movements have historically played a significant role in advocating for social, political, and educational changes. Similarly, the *#FeesMustFall* movement had a significant impact that shaped the higher education sector. The decolonisation

of the higher education curriculum, as one of the main demands of the 2025/2016 students' movements, led to constructive changes in the South Africa education landscape. The students demanded attention and they got it.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the process of decolonization within higher education is multifaceted and varies across institutions. Each university addresses decolonization differently, tailored to its unique challenges. This chapter aims to explore decolonization through the lens of Student Representative Councils (SRCs) within one university, focusing on their efforts to achieve a curriculum that reflects decolonized perspectives. The study, therefore, makes the following key recommendation, as presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The issue of decolonisation of higher education is undoubtedly important, and the debate on decolonisation of UKZN is just as important, considering that, like most South African universities, it is based on a Western model of academic organisation. This study focuses on this notion in relation to the SRC's perspectives and their involvement in the call to decolonise the higher education curriculum. As mentioned in the introduction of the study, decolonisation is a broad term and is understood differently by different people, especially in the higher education landscape (Mheta et al., 2018).

6.2 Summary of the Study

This study's intention was to explore the key issues in the decolonisation discussion from the perspective of the SRC, taking into consideration the debate as presented by leading scholars. The study did not intend to define the term, but to stimulate the discussion (with the participants) that may lead to a better understanding of what decolonisation entails at UKZN. The emphasis was therefore placed on why it is important to decolonise as well how the participants would like to see the decolonisation process unfold.

It can be learned from the data collection process that there was resilience by the SRC towards the colonial model of academic organisation of the university, whereby they feel unimportant, unconsidered on issues, and have little input in decision making. Even though the participants did not have similar views of decolonisation, it was clear in their responses that they thought it was a necessary response to colonialism and apartheid in the South African higher education system. Further, it is noted from the findings that decolonisation is a sensitive and complicated issue, and it is important to the student body at large. As indicated, the South African higher education space was affected with various student protests from 2015-2016, with one of their demands calling for the decolonisation of how students are being taught at universities (Shokane & Masoga, 2018). The student representatives' understanding of the notion of decolonisation of the curriculum ensures their contribution towards the transformation agenda of the university. This study acknowledges that the participants at UKZN understood the notion of decolonisation of higher education curriculum based on their experiences in their respective campuses. Experiences may differ from other SRCs in other contexts/universities. Therefore,

the participants' contributions in this study cannot be applied to a wider population of the students.

The massive student protest in South Africa known as the "Fees Must Fall" that started in late 2015 demanded the decolonisation of the higher education curriculum. This student movement unleashed social power that challenged the established political order and brought university management to its knees (Booysen & Africa, 2016). South Africa witnessed a situation whereby students demanded the university management and government to change the foundational values and their ideological base, as well as whole transformation of the higher education system. The SRC was at the forefront of these protests, especially in universities like Wits, UCT, and Rhodes. Therefore, the experiences of the SRC in this regard may differ due to direct and indirect involvement in the situations where the protests were intense. Although, the participants at UKZN did not show any signs of ignorance on this topic and they were eager to respond and expand on their responses. The responses were adequate to strengthen the extant literature and the theoretical framework underlying the research study. The participants were specific in terms of how they would like to see decolonisation of the curriculum unfold. They understood what their needs are, and they were adequate to give a perspective behind the students' call to decolonise through a protest.

The SRC appeared to interpret decolonisation of the higher education curriculum through the influences of wa Thiong'o (2020); Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) and Mamdani (2019), to name a few. Their views in this regard are not necessarily the same but this gave them a common ground to explain the challenges they encounter daily of being alienated by the curriculum they are taught and assessed on. The consensus among scholars Chilisa (2019), Long (2018) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2019) is that decolonisation must enable the worldviews of those who have suffered a long history of oppression and marginalisation. The literature supports the notion (by the participants) that there is a need for African scholars to come together and conduct research that decolonises the epistemology and methodologies and produce knowledge that will redress social ills (Shokane & Masoga, 2018). The participants were clear in their discussion that they do not want to learn a curriculum that is not relevant and not inclusive, but rather the curriculum that recognises their own lived-experiences, culture and accommodates diverse native South African languages.

Most participants indicated that they support the call to decolonise the higher education curriculum in their one-on-one interviews and focus group interviews. However, there was some reservation from some participants, who indicated that the country is not ready for such

a transformation project. What was noted during the data collection process is that those that did not support the decolonisation of the curriculum were quiet during the discussion of the focus group. During the discussion, the participants who demanded the decolonisation of higher education curriculum spoke more forcefully about the importance of decolonising the higher education curriculum, while those who did not were passive on the need for it. This could be caused by the fact that the discussion during the focus group also highlighted challenges faced by students, which in most cases lead to protests, and these challenges affect all students at the ground level. It is also established from the discussion that some participants had different perspectives on prioritising decolonisation but preferred focusing on internationalisation that can put African scholarship on the global map. Seemingly, what was common among all participants was how they all felt it was important for the student governance body to be acknowledged by university management as the SRC can help resolve issues that can lead to protests. When the SRC is not acknowledged, it means the SRC's voice is not being heard.

It is evident from the literature that the higher education curriculum has previously been used as an instrument to oppress, segregate and an exercise of hegemonic power over African communities (Modiba, 2019). As a result, higher education was robbed of its role as a tool for national development and reconciliation. In the context of higher education transformation, decolonisation would mean undoing and reversing the higher education curriculum colonisation (Modiba, 2019). Through decolonisation of the higher education curriculum, both the SRC and the student body at large can be free from having to conform to the oppressive and non-inclusive system, and eventually become active participants in the knowledge production. The undisputed fact about decolonisation is the element of its many stakeholders Modiba (2019) who legitimately need to have their voices heard and who need to be freed from psychological slavery. However, it is important to note that decolonising the curriculum remains a process rather than a once off event.

The findings showed that decolonisation should be used as a tool for community renewal and benefit (Msila, 2017). The implication here is that graduates who are recipients of a decolonised curriculum can become more useful and contribute to an enhanced standard of living in their communities. In this way, the curriculum would prove to be useful and relevant in terms of responding to the contextual needs of the students. It is against this background that the study recommends that higher education institutions must create platforms where the university community, including academics, management and SRC are included in these conversations.

The curriculum decolonisation dialogue is important especially if it includes the student representatives, because in this way it ensures a representational curriculum that does not privilege one party against the other and allows management to deal with students' challenges in their respective rapidly changing communities (Modiba, 2019). Decolonisation of the curriculum therefore requires multiple stakeholders to decolonise the curriculum to address equity and to accommodate diverse students' needs.

It is important to note that there are two approaches to decolonisation of higher education. First, a radical approach where Western knowledge is rejected outright (Le Grange, 2021). Second, the integrative approach, which seeks to accommodate both indigenous and Western knowledge. The SRC's responses showed that they believe the latter is possible, because decolonisation does not mean turning back time by moving from modernity to ancient times (Meda, 2020). Decolonisation does not require taking away the technological advancement and regress to ancient time, as South Africa is currently in the digital era. This study recommends that university management and stakeholders involved in the transformation agenda of higher education, must rethink ways of integrating indigenous knowledge into the curriculum so that students can access knowledge within their immediate environment. The challenge that the SRC and much of the literature are presenting is the fact that the dominant knowledge system which is currently in use was used as a tool during colonialism and apartheid periods. This is the basis of an argument by Mbembe (2016), that something is profoundly wrong in South African higher education system where a curriculum which was initially designed to meet the needs of colonialism and apartheid should continue well in the liberation era. Le Grange (2016b) called for a "serious" redress of this colonial model of academic organisation especially now that we are in post-apartheid times. The challenge that has to be addressed by the decolonisation agenda is the fact that "the curriculum that served the master during the colonial and apartheid periods influences the current education system in South Africa" (Meda, 2020).

The management team of UKZN predominantly constitutes academics and their roles include managing issues pertaining to teaching and learning, curriculum development, research, registration, student life and human resources (Fitzgerald & Searle, 2016). The SRC is allowed to represent the student body at the senate, where the appointed SRC members can report on matters pertaining to student life for students on campus. Furthermore, Fitzgerald and Seale (2016) argued that the management teams at universities prefer to focus on areas of core business and core experience and manage a host of other services through a high level contract management capacity. Their focus is mostly on making decision about the actual knowledge

production business which could be their institutional and social mission, which are their most important priorities. This way, the universities are run or rather managed by the executive teams which are complex for student representatives to comprehend within a short space of time (such as one academic year).

6.3 Recommendations

This study recommends that the SRC should take it upon themselves to learn and acquire knowledge and insight in terms of how universities are managed to better engage and address the student body's needs with the management.

From the participants' submissions, it is recommended that every university's SRC should research more about the notion of decolonisation of the curriculum to gain insights into the phenomenon as they engage university management bodies. This will allow for good debates and solution-seeking conversations between Student Representatives and university management, especially on issues pertaining to their needs and demands. This may positively reduce frequent student protests and impact the SRC positively. Also, university management bodies such as the Dean of Student Affairs should encourage the SRC to read extensively outside their academic requirements. This allows them to possess an adequate and in-depth understanding of the management dynamics as to how to resolve issues without resorting to protests, which disrupt academic activities and also lead to wanton destruction of school properties (Ndamane, 2018). The institutions have adequate information to capacitate student leaders to think critically on matters pertaining to decolonisation of the curriculum and should endeavour to organise workshops for student leaders on this phenomenon.

It is also recommended that the university should adopt a student governance approach that is more inclusive at management levels, even lower than the senate. The data presented in this study showed that participants felt that their voices were not recognised and their role at senate level was reduced to being a "student liaison officer's voice [rather] than a student representative." Therefore, the faculties can create spaces in their executive teams for the SRC to have a seat and to represent on student matters. This can benefit both the students and the university management so that proposals are made with consensus. This will avoid a situation where students feel like the university's management is imposing on them or failing to consider their grievances with a sense of urgency. This allows the SRC to see their role as representatives of the student body, which receives the desired acknowledgement and is acknowledged to present matters in their very own context. These dialogues once again would help prevent the protests which students believe are the only way their voices can be heard.

6.4 Limitations and further research

These are some of the limitations of the study:

- The collection of data was conducted during the height of Covid19, therefore many participants were not available as per the schedule.
- The loadshedding also posed a limitation in terms of connectivity due to time frames being different.
- Some of the participants were unable to log-on due to shortage of data.

Lastly, the study recommends future research on how to develop a curriculum that includes and celebrates diversity. There is a need for comprehensive or larger studies that can engage many SRC members across many of South Africa's higher education institutions, to address the decolonisation of higher education system at the national level.

6.5 Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to explore the SRC perspectives of the decolonisation of the higher education system. The objective was to explore the extent which the selected student representatives embraced or rejected the call to decolonise the curricular. The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. What is the SRC's understanding of decolonisation in higher education?
2. How will the decolonisation of higher education shape the sector through the lens of the SRC?
3. How does the SRC hope to achieve decolonisation in South African higher education?

The findings of the study revealed that the SRC embraced the call to decolonise the higher education curriculum. Though some of the participants registered their concerns about the university and the higher education system's readiness to decolonise the curriculum. Their concerns about the readiness were largely based on the demand for time, resources, and financial constraints, which will hinder the process of decolonisation. Most of the participants support the call to recentre African epistemologies and to embrace African languages in the curriculum. Due to the nature of this research, the participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality concerning their identities. This was done to ensure that the participants provided full information that responded to the research questions. The rationale for the phenomenon was driven based on the student protests at various campuses from 2015/2016,

labelled the *#FeesMustFall* and *#RhodesMustFall* student protests. The unfolding events during these protests prompted the researcher to explore through this study how the SRC felt about the involvement of the SRC during these protests. As reported in the methodology, the participants for this study were members of the SRC who were usually at the forefront of the student protests as leaders of the student body.

The findings in chapter five strongly indicated that there is always resistance experienced by the SRC from university management on issues pertaining to the livelihood and wellbeing of students on campus. Further, challenges that students are confronted with during registration include accommodation issues and inadequate funding. The most crucial factor that students face during classes is the confrontation of the Eurocentric curriculum that continues to oppress and alienate Black students. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds find it difficult to fit into universities and are therefore not accommodated in the transformation agenda. Conversely, the higher education system is colonised and is detached from its community, being monologue-driven instead of dialogue-driven. The participants made it clear in the discussions that the SRC will continue to fight the system, to challenge the status quo and to stand against any form of oppression against university students. Hence, it is the mandate of SRC to ensure that the Black students are given the opportunities they deserve, and to be active participants in the higher education system.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethical clearance certificate

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

10 November 2020

Ms Tyzer Khumalo (204001183)
School Of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Ms Khumalo,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00001111/2020
Project title: Decolonizing Higher Education: Exploring Student Representative Council's (SRC) Perspectives
Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 06 March 2020 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL** on the following condition:

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 10 November 2021.
To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa
Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 **Email:** hssrec@ukzn.ac.za **Website:** http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics
Founding Campuses: Edgewood | Howard College | Medical School | Pietermaritzburg | Westville
INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix B: Gatekeeper permission

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

11 January 2019

Miss Tyzer Khumalo (SN 204001183)
School of Education
College of Humanities
Edgewood Campus
UKZN
Email: khumalot9@ukzn.ac.za

Dear Miss Khumalo

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) towards your postgraduate studies, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

"Decolonizing Higher Education: Exploring Student Representative Council (SRC) Perspectives."

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by conducting interviews with Student Representative Council presidents at UKZN.

Please ensure that the following appears on your notice/questionnaire:

- Ethical clearance number;
- Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
- Consent form is attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by user before he/she fills in questionnaire;
- gatekeepers approval by the Registrar.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using 'Microsoft Outlook' address book. Identity numbers and email addresses of individuals are not a matter of public record and are protected according to Section 14 of the South African Constitution, as well as the Protection of Public Information Act. For the release of such information over to yourself for research purposes, the University of KwaZulu-Natal will need express consent from the relevant data subjects. Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

MR S[redacted]S MOKOENA
REGISTRAR

Appendix C: Letter of permission for participants

40 Park View Drive
Pinetown

3610
January 4, 2019

Dear Participant

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

My name is Tyzer Khumalo (204001183), I am currently studying towards a Masters degree in Higher Education with the University of KwaZulu-Natal. As part of the requirements of this degree, I am conducting a research project in which I explore student representatives' conceptualization of decolising higher education.

The study is titled: "**Decolonizing Higher Education: Exploring Student Representative Council (SRC) Perspectives".** The main aim of the study is to understand the SRC's perspectives of decolonizing higher education, how they have come to such understanding and what they hope to achieve concerning decolonisation.

There will be interviews of all five SRC presidents in all five campuses of UKZN. The interviews are expected to take a maximum time of 60 minutes.

Participants' anonymity and confidentiality throughout research as well as in the final dissertation will be assured. SRC members will not be identified in the report, I will use pseudonyms. Participation is purely voluntarily, therefore participants are at liberty to withdraw from the study at any given time and there are no negative consequences should they wish to withdraw participation. I guarantee that the information you provide will only be used for the research purposes and it will be stored safely in the University for five years and be destroyed after. For further enquiries, I have provided my supervisor's information.

Please be advised that participation does not equal to any form of reward or payment, it is voluntarily. Please note that the date, time and venue for the interview discussions will be arranged in consultation with participants and the researcher will ensure that the participants are not supposed to be on duty during the time of the interviews.

Should you have questions and problems related to the study, please feel free to contact me by email: khumalot9@ukzn.ac.za/Tel:031 260 3405 or my supervisor, Professor P. Ramrathan by email: ramrathanp@ukzn.ac.za.

You may also contact the Research Office through:
P. Mohun
HSSREC Research Office,
Tel: 031 260 4557 E-mail:
mohunp@ukzn.ac.za Yours Sincerely
Tyzer Khumalo (Miss)

Appendix D: Participant declaration

DECLARATION

I…… (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

If you are willing to be interviewed, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	willing	Not willing
Audio equipment		
Photographic equipment		
Video equipment		

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT DATE

……

……

Appendix E: Interview questions

Focus group semi-structured interview questions:

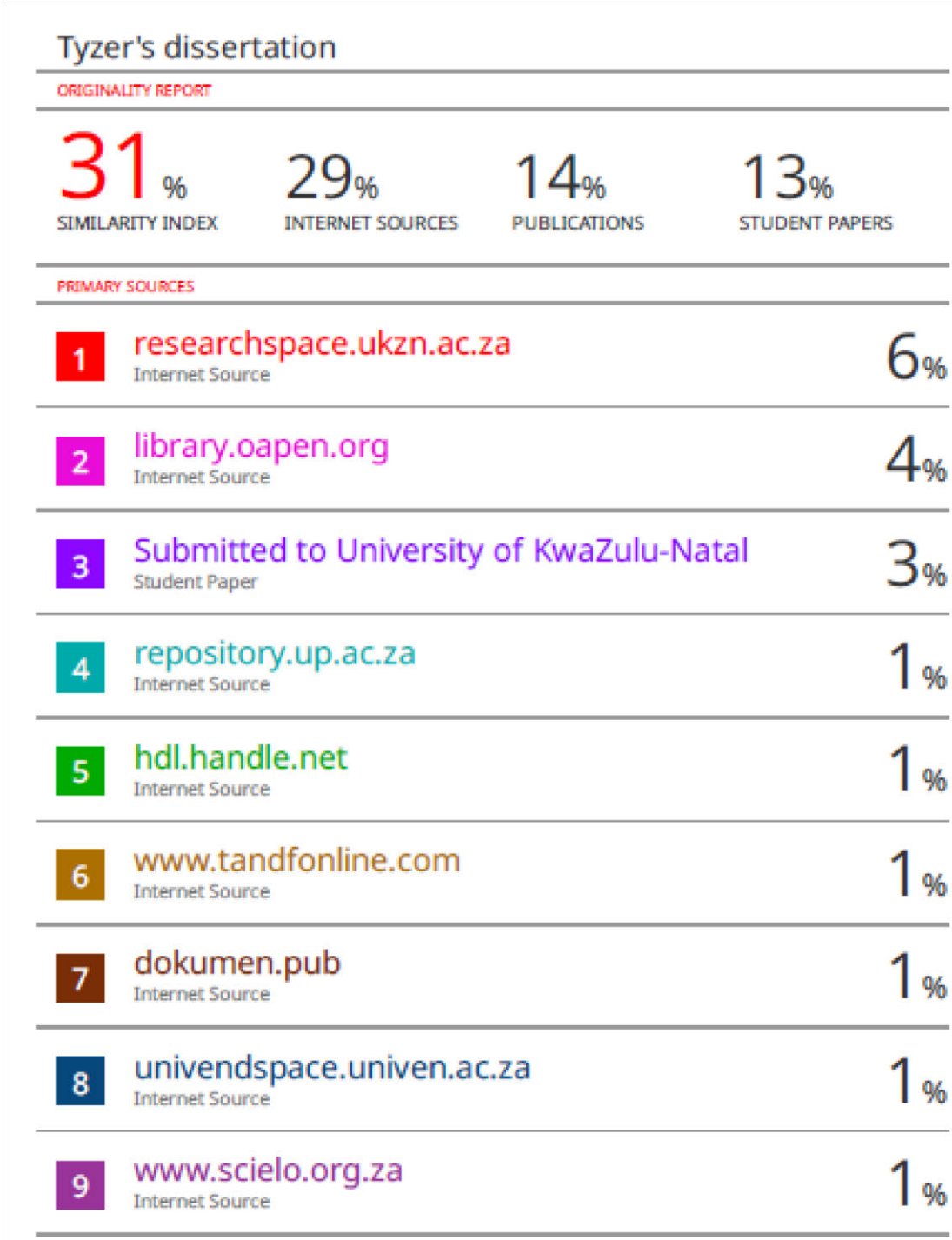
1. There has been a lot of discussion about decolonisation, what is your understanding of decolonisation in a higher education context?
2. Have you encountered different ideas about decolonisation, can you trace back to the early discussions and then to now and how you shaped your ideas.

3. Is decolonising higher education important and if so how should SRCs contribute?

Semi-structured ono-on-one interview questions:

1. What is decolonisation?
2. Have you been involved in initiatives towards decolonisation?
3. If yes, how have you been involved?
4. Why did you see the need to be involved?
5. Did your involvement record any success?
6. What were those successes?
7. Were there challenges in attempts to decolonise the university?
8. If yes, mention the challenges.
9. What do you want to achieve by decolonisation of university?
10. Why do you want to achieve what you intend to achieve in the context of decolonising higher education?
11. In your view, do you think decolonisation would be a solution to the needs of the immediate community of the university?
12. What, in your view, do you think takes priority in decolonisation, the curriculum or nonacademic programmes?

Appendix F: Plagiarism report


Tyzer's dissertation

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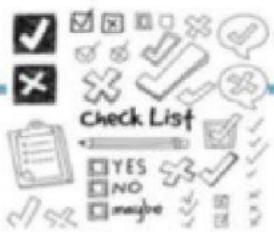
Appendix G: Editor's certificate



Helen Bond
IMPELA EDITING SERVICES
impelaediting@gmail.com
079 395 5873

09 January 2024

CERTIFICATE

Tyzer Khumalo

Dear Tyzer

Thank you for using Impela Editing Services to edit your Master's dissertation entitled "Decolonizing Higher Education: Exploring Student Representative Council's (SRC) Perspectives".

I have proofread for errors of grammar, punctuation, spelling, syntax and typing mistakes. I have formatted your work and checked the references (this means checking the formatting). I have used the APA 7th edition academic writing and referencing style. I believe your work to be error free.

PLEASE NOTE:
Impela Editing accepts no fault if an author does not make the changes suggested or makes changes to a document after a certificate has been issued.

I wish you the very best in your submission.

Kind regards

[redacted]
Helen Bond (Bachelor of Arts, HDE)