



Decolonizing Curricula in South African Higher Education Institutions: An Ethnographic Exploration

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Published: 11 May 2004 | **Received:** 24 December 2003 | **Accepted:** 11 April 2004

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DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.18798385](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18798385)

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Abstract

Decolonization efforts in education have gained momentum globally, particularly focusing on higher education institutions (HEIs). In South Africa, where apartheid policies deeply influenced curricula and pedagogies, there is an urgent need to address historical injustices through curriculum reform. The study employed a qualitative research design with semi-structured interviews and document analysis among faculty members, students, and administrators in selected HEIs. Data were analysed using thematic content analysis. Faculty members reported discomfort but also engagement in decolonizing curricula, often influenced by external mandates rather than internal pedagogical shifts. Students perceived a more inclusive curriculum, particularly regarding African history and culture, though some felt it was superficial or incomplete. Administrators supported the process yet struggled with resource allocation. Decolonization efforts are fragmented across HEIs in South Africa, driven by varying levels of faculty commitment and administrative support. While progress is evident, consistent and robust implementation remains a challenge. Developing a comprehensive framework for decolonizing curricula that includes clear guidelines, resources, and incentives for educators should be prioritised. Additionally, fostering cross-departmental collaboration can enhance the impact of these efforts. Decolonization, Curriculum Reform, Higher Education Institutions, South Africa

Keywords: *Decolonization, Curriculum Studies, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Ethnography, Postcolonial Theory, Heritage Education, Critical Pedagogy*

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