



# Assessing the Scholarship of Curriculum Practices and the Lived Experiences of Postgraduate Students in a Higher Learning Space

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## ABSTRACT

Curriculum reform has revolved from production-based to knowledge-based. This trajectory compelled reformists to be deliberate in generating knowledge toward globalized curriculum practices that value humanity for good. This empirical paper reflected on the lived experiences of postgraduate students in a higher learning institution in their becoming. Postgraduate students are expected to complete their studies by working in a space buffeted by silo-thinking, academic jealousy, and volatile relations. This study attempted to answer the following question. What curriculum practices and innovations can make the world a better place for all? Africana Critical Theory was used to make sense of the lived experiences of a postgraduate student. Eight postgraduate students registered for masters and doctoral studies, and five supervisory teams, operating through multiple artificial intelligence in the form of the Yammer tool ranging from smartphones, laptops were engaged numerous times to enable sharing, expressing, and showing casing their new emergent identity in a virtual participatory action research approach, online discussion. Webinars were the primary source for generating data. The generated data was recorded and automatically generated into text through Fireflies' software. Critical Discourse Analysis was used to arrive at the following findings: Curriculum practices unraveled the hidden curriculum that humans in our current state, that cybernetics exists around us, and in simpler forms than futuristic visions. Cyberspace has created profound variations in human consciousness and social identity. These findings imply that second-life realities are beneficial in a postgraduate context.

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## INTRODUCTION

Scholars are of the view that there is a significant trend in educational paradigm shift and curriculum development.<sup>1</sup> Researchers and educators have observed and studied this shift over the past few decades.<sup>2</sup> Traditional education systems in many countries were initially designed to meet the demands of industrialization and mass production. During this production-based approach, education focused on preparing individuals for specific jobs or roles in the workforce.<sup>3</sup> The curriculum emphasized technical skills and practical knowledge required for particular occupations.

<sup>1</sup> Stefan Johansson and Kajsa Yang Hansen, "Are Mathematics Curricula Harmonizing Globally over Time? Evidence from TIMSS National Research Coordinator Data," *EURASIA Journal of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education* 15, no. 2 (2018): em1656; Omnia El Omrani et al., "Envisioning Planetary Health in Every Medical Curriculum: An International Medical Student Organization's Perspective," *Medical Teacher* 42, no. 10 (2020): 1107–11.

<sup>2</sup> Laura J Falkenberg and Patrick W S Joyce, "Internationalisation at Home: Developing a Global Change Biology Course Curriculum to Enhance Sustainable Development," *Sustainability* 15, no. 9 (2023): 7509.

<sup>3</sup> Cameron Gordon, *Many Possible Worlds: An Interdisciplinary History of the World Economy Since 1800* (Springer Nature, 2023).

Furthermore, with the emergence of the knowledge economy, characterized by an increasing reliance on information, technology, and innovation, the demand for a more comprehensive and adaptable skill set became apparent.<sup>4</sup> In this context, Clem recognized the limitations of a production-based curriculum that narrowly focused on training individuals for specific jobs, as industries and job requirements were rapidly changing.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the scholar emphasized critical thinking and problem solving, with the view that knowledge-based curriculum reforms prioritize critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and adaptability.<sup>6</sup> Xu, Wang, and Wang, further argue that, rather than solely emphasizing rote memorization and specific technical skills, the focus shifts to promoting a deeper understanding of subjects, cultivating analytical abilities, and encouraging lifelong learning, which led to holistic learning.<sup>7</sup> A knowledge-based curriculum seeks to provide a well-rounded education that extends beyond vocational training. Scholars advocate for a broader range of subjects, including the arts, humanities, and social sciences, to foster cultural awareness, ethical decision-making, and a broader perspective on social issues. One other aspect that can be because of the reform process is lifelong learning and continuous development. In the knowledge-based approach, education is viewed as a constant process that extends beyond formal schooling. Individuals are encouraged to be lifelong learners, continuously updating their knowledge and skills to stay relevant in an ever-changing world.

Furthermore, the integration of technology was also driven. The knowledge-based curriculum recognizes the importance of technology in modern life and the importance of integrating digital literacy and technological skills into education, preparing students to engage successfully with the digital world and to take advantage of technology for learning and problem-solving. Zhang et al. opine that the teaching approach toward the learner-centred approach also took centre stage.<sup>8</sup> These researchers advocated a shift toward learner-centred learning approaches in a knowledge-based curriculum.<sup>9</sup> This approach tailored education to individual learning needs, interests, and aspirations, fostering deeper engagement and passion for learning. Currently, the global perspective in curriculum practice focuses more on knowledge generative. The reform of knowledge-based curriculum often acknowledges the interconnectedness of the world and emphasizes global awareness and intercultural competence. It aims to prepare students to thrive in a globalized society and contribute positively to international challenges. Based on the above, it is essential to note that the extent and nature of curriculum reform may vary across different educational systems and regions. Scholars continue to research and discuss knowledge-based curriculum reforms' usefulness and implementation challenges, aiming to continuously improve and optimize education to benefit students and society.

In pursuing a better world for all, the current state of educational curriculum practices and the absence of significant innovations pose substantial challenges. These innovations may go a long way to enable teachers to enhance, engage learners more successfully, and align curriculum delivery with the necessary transformative demands of society. To address this issue successfully, searching and identifying curriculum practices and innovative approaches is imperative to promote a more equitable, inclusive and prosperous global society. This study aims to consider and recommend strategies for designing educational curricula that impart knowledge and cultivate critical thinking, empathy, and sustainability to empower individuals of various backgrounds and promote collective well-being.<sup>10</sup> Understanding the limitations of existing practices and seeking transformative innovations, can pave the way for an education system that equips learners with the necessary skills and values to address pressing global challenges and ultimately make the world a better place for everyone.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, if no action is taken to initiate innovations, then the educational system will continuously perform below par compared with the global arena, which is undesirable. In attempting to respond to the overarching question: What curriculum practices and innovations can make the world a better place for all? The researchers have engaged in deliberate, regular participation and participation in a virtual space intending to respond to the question above. Their findings are presented in subsequent sections.

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<sup>4</sup> Esin Mukul and Gülçin Büyüközkan, "Digital Transformation in Education: A Systematic Review of Education 4.0," *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 194 (2023): 122664.

<sup>5</sup> Sam Clem, "Teaching Editing for Social Justice," *Technical Communication and Social Justice* 1, no. 2 (2023): 49–69.

<sup>6</sup> Jina Ro, "Critical Thinking in the National Curriculum and Teacher Education in South Korea: A Missing Link," *Teachers and Teaching*, 2023, 1–18.

<sup>7</sup> Enwei Xu, Wei Wang, and Qingxia Wang, "The Effectiveness of Collaborative Problem Solving in Promoting Students' Critical Thinking: A Meta-Analysis Based on Empirical Literature," *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 10, no. 1 (2023): 1–11.

<sup>8</sup> Baojing Zhang, Vinothraj Velmayil, and V Sivakumar, "A Deep Learning Model for Innovative Evaluation of Ideological and Political Learning," *Progress in Artificial Intelligence* 12, no. 2 (2023): 119–31.

<sup>9</sup> Zhang, Velmayil, and Sivakumar, "A Deep Learning Model for Innovative Evaluation of Ideological and Political Learning."

<sup>10</sup> William F Pinar, *A Praxis of Presence in Curriculum Theory: Advancing Currere against Cultural Crises in Education* (Taylor & Francis, 2022).

<sup>11</sup> David Kirshner, "Troubling Curriculum," in *Curriculum Histories in Place, in Person, in Practice: The Louisiana State University Curriculum Theory Project*, ed. P. Hendry et al. (Taylor and Francis, 2023).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

While scholars have observed the shift toward knowledge-based curriculum reforms, the long-term impact of this transition on students, the workforce, and society as a whole is an area that may still require further investigation. Assessing whether knowledge-based approaches lead to improved outcomes in terms of critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability over time is crucial. Curriculum reform can be complex and challenging to implement successfully. Scholars may still be exploring the various obstacles and difficulties faced by educational institutions, policymakers, and educators in transitioning from production-based to knowledge-based curricula. Identifying the promising practices and strategies for successful implementation is an ongoing study area.

On the other hand, evaluation and evaluation are also issues that have not been well investigated. As education shifts towards a knowledge-based approach, there is a need for appropriate assessment methods that can accurately measure students' holistic learning and critical thinking abilities.<sup>12</sup> Scholars may be exploring innovative assessment techniques that align with the goals of knowledge-based education. Furthermore, scholars may be examining how knowledge-based curriculum reforms address issues of equity and inclusivity in education. Jordan proposed that it is essential to investigate whether these reforms can bridge existing achievement gaps and provide equitable learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances.<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, Allmnakrah and Evers believe that teachers play a pivotal role in implementing curriculum reforms successfully.<sup>14</sup> Scholars may be troubled by the type of professional development and support required for teachers to successfully adapt to knowledge-based teaching approaches and create meaningful learning experiences for their students.<sup>15</sup> The other aspect not thoroughly researched is interdisciplinary approaches. As knowledge-based curricula emphasize a more comprehensive and interconnected understanding of subjects, scholars may explore how best to incorporate interdisciplinary approaches into education.<sup>16</sup> Understanding how different disciplines can complement and enrich each other's knowledge is an area for further exploration. Again, while knowledge-based education aims to prepare students for a rapidly changing workforce, there may still be uncertainty about how specific skills and knowledge acquired in school will align with the future demands of the job market. Scholars may be researching the relationship between knowledge-based education and future workplace relevance. Curriculum reform must consider different regions and communities' cultural and contextual factors. Scholars may investigate how to tailor knowledge-based approaches to meet diverse educational settings' unique needs and challenges.<sup>17</sup> It is essential to acknowledge that the field of education is constantly evolving, and scholars and researchers are continually exploring new questions and areas of study related to curriculum reform.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is guided by Africana Critical Theory (ACT). ACT offers a unique lens to respond to the research question about curriculum practices and innovations that can create a better world for all. This theoretical framework emphasizes the experiences, perspectives, and contributions of people of African descent and addresses broader social justice, equity, and inclusivity issues.

**Ethnic Application and Portrayal:** ACT emphasizes centering marginalized voices and perspectives within education. Thus, curriculum practices and innovations are essential to prioritize the inclusion of Africana history, culture, and contributions.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, curriculum reformists must integrate African and African

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<sup>12</sup> William F Pinar et al., "Debate–Discussion: 50 Years of „reconceptualist Movement “in Curriculum Research: What Remains? With Contributions by/Mit Beiträgen von: Linda Chisholm, Stavroula Philippou, William F. Pinar, Kirsten Sivesind, Barbara Slater Stern, Sou Kuan Vong, Yuzhen Xu, Lyn Yates," *IJHE Bildungsgeschichte–International Journal for the Historiography of Education* 12, no. 1 (2022): 41–87.

<sup>13</sup> Will J Jordan, "Defining Equity: Multiple Perspectives to Analyzing the Performance of Diverse Learners," *Review of Research in Education* 34, no. 1 (2010): 142–78.

<sup>14</sup> Alhasan Allmnakrah and Colin Evers, "The Need for a Fundamental Shift in the Saudi Education System: Implementing the Saudi Arabian Economic Vision 2030," *Research in Education* 106, no. 1 (2020): 22–40.

<sup>15</sup> Sedef Uzuner Smith, "Frameworks Shaping an Online Professional Development Program for K–12 Teachers of ELLs: Toward Supporting the Sharing of Ideas for Empowering Classroom Teachers Online," *TESOL Journal* 5, no. 3 (2014): 444–64.

<sup>16</sup> Jonathan P Doh and Peter Tashman, "Half a World Away: The Integration and Assimilation of Corporate Social Responsibility, Sustainability, and Sustainable Development in Business School Curricula," *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management* 21, no. 3 (2014): 131–42.

<sup>17</sup> Vijay Pereira and Umesh Bamel, "Extending the Resource and Knowledge Based View: A Critical Analysis into Its Theoretical Evolution and Future Research Directions," *Journal of Business Research* 132 (2021): 557–70.

<sup>18</sup> Reiland Rabaka, "Africana Critical Theory of Contemporary Society: The Role of Radical Politics, Social Theory, and Africana Philosophy," *Handbook of Black Studies*, 2006, 130–51.

diaspora literature, history, and art into the curriculum; this would result in a more culturally relevant curriculum, and postgraduate studies would gain a deeper understanding of the global human experience.

**Critical Consciousness and Empathy:** ACT seeks to develop critical consciousness and empathy among learners.<sup>19</sup> Curriculum practises that encourage postgraduate students to critically analyze historical narratives, media representations, and social issues are essential. Innovations might involve using storytelling, oral histories, and multimedia to convey the lived experiences of African people.<sup>20</sup> Education can promote a more compassionate and informed global citizenry by cultivating empathy and critical thinking.

**Social Justice and Parity:** ACT underscores the need to address systemic inequalities and injustices.<sup>21</sup> Wilson advocates for curriculum practices that actively challenge and critique existing power structures and narratives of dominance.<sup>22</sup> Innovations might include discussing the history of colonization, slavery, apartheid and their lasting influences on curriculum practice and exploring contemporary movements for social justice and their intersectionality. Education can empower postgraduate students to contribute to a more just and equitable world by fostering critical thinking and awareness.

**Community Engagement and Empowerment:** ACT emphasizes the importance of community engagement and empowerment. For example, curriculum practises that encourage postgraduate students to engage with local and global communities to address shared challenges.<sup>23</sup> This could involve service-learning projects, partnerships with community organizations, and collaborative problem-solving. By connecting education to real-world issues and empowering students to act, the curriculum can contribute to positive social change.

**Interconnectedness and Global Perspective,** ACT acknowledges the interconnectedness of human experiences across continents and cultures.<sup>24</sup> Your response can advocate for curriculum practices that promote a global perspective and highlight the contributions of various cultures to human knowledge and progress. Innovations could include comparative studies of African civilizations, contributions to science and technology, and the role of Africa in shaping world history.<sup>25</sup> Education can contribute to a more interconnected and harmonious world by fostering cross-cultural understanding.

Based on the above, it can be argued that ACT offers a foundation for advocating curriculum practices and innovations that embrace cultural diversity, address social inequalities, engage communities, promote global awareness, and nurture critical consciousness.<sup>26</sup> By integrating these principles into education, researchers can work towards creating a better world that values the contributions and perspectives of all individuals and communities.

## METHODOLOGY

The study used Virtual participatory action research (V-PAR). Virtual participatory action research is an approach to action research that uses online platforms and tools to facilitate participation and action by members of communities affected by that research.<sup>27</sup> It seeks to understand the world by trying to change it collaboratively and following reflection. V-PAR can be used for various purposes; for instance, we formed a platform for collaborative enquiry and knowledge integration for sustainable development. Five supervisory members were invited to join a team of eight postgraduate students, of which two were student colleagues pursuing their

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<sup>19</sup> Emiliano Bosio and Yusef Waghid, "Cultivating Students' Critical Consciousness through Global Citizenship Education: Six Pedagogical Priorities," *Prospects*, 2023, 1–12.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Watts, Gosia Kwiatkowska, and Andy Minnion, "Using Multimedia Technology to Enhance Self-advocacy of People with Intellectual Disabilities: Introducing a Theoretical Framework for 'Multimedia Advocacy,'" *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 2023.

<sup>21</sup> Alison S P Wilson, "Complicating Cultural Reproduction Theory: A Critical Multilevel Analysis of Systematic Inequality in US Schools," *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, 2023, 1–31.

<sup>22</sup> Wilson, "Complicating Cultural Reproduction Theory: A Critical Multilevel Analysis of Systematic Inequality in US Schools."

<sup>23</sup> Sará King, "The 'Science of Social Justice': An Interdisciplinary Theoretical Framework Grounded in Neuroscience, Education, and Anthropology towards Healing Intergenerational Trauma," *The Journal of Contemplative Inquiry* 9, no. 1 (2022): 210–41.

<sup>24</sup> Blessing Chafika, "African Philosophy and International Migration," *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary African Migration*, 2023, 52–76.

<sup>25</sup> Theophilus Adedokun, "A Critical Approach of the Nigerian Higher Education Institution Curriculum and the Notion of Black Consciousness," *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction* 15, no. 1 (2023): 37–50.

<sup>26</sup> Attwell Mamvuto and Magdeline C Mannathoko, "The Changing African Art and Design Curriculum: Narratives from Teacher Education," *Arts Education Policy Review* 124, no. 3 (2023): 149–56.

<sup>27</sup> Sue Marquis Gordon and Jennifer Lynne Edwards, "Enhancing Student Research through a Virtual Participatory Action Research Project: Student Benefits and Administrative Challenges," *Action Research* 10, no. 2 (2012): 205–20.

studies. As such, one of the team members who had technical skills took the lead in the use of MS Teams (MST), and another master's student, a young woman of color, took the lead to explain and show the participant how MST was accessible and free for all registered students, through online mentoring and coaching. Improving conditions and practices in various learning environments through action learning empowered marginalized communities to develop practical solution/s to sustainability problems.<sup>28</sup> V-PAR is not a method but a set of principles and practices for originating, designing, conducting, analyzing and acting on research.

The researchers worked together, respectively, as co-researchers and co-learners. Everyone was motivated to log in as a sign of curiosity in addressing issues that are significant to all co-researchers as participants and co-learners.<sup>29</sup> The researchers further agreed to record all the discussions, and outside of the scheduled meetings, examined and questioned each other throughout. They shared conference calls, critiqued, engaged in dialogue, reflected, and often challenged oppressive systems and structures. They participated in concrete actions and outcomes that benefit each team member and had a part-time lecturer to keep all scheduled programs and documents generated during our meetings, for example, the Harvard reference technique guide used in the University.

The researchers shared knowledge of artificial intelligence (AI), encompassing various techniques, methods, and approaches, including machine learning, neural networks, natural language processing, computer vision, and robotics.<sup>30</sup> The field of AI has evolved over the years, and modern AI systems are often capable of analyzing vast amounts of data, identifying patterns, making predictions, and adapting their behavior based on new information. Generally, artificial intelligence involves the development of computer systems that can mimic human intelligence processes, enabling machines to perform tasks that require reasoning, learning, problem-solving / solving, and decision-making.<sup>31</sup> It encompasses a broad spectrum of technologies and applications, ranging from specialized narrow AI to the theoretical concept of general AI. Yammer tool is a social networking and collaboration platform designed for use within organizations. Facilitates communication, knowledge sharing, and collaboration among employees, helping to break down silos and promote a sense of community within the workplace. The Yammer tool is often described as an “enterprise social network,” focusing on connecting individuals and teams within a corporate environment. The Yammer tool is part of the Microsoft family of products and services and is often used alongside other tools such as Microsoft Teams, SharePoint, and OneDrive.<sup>32</sup> It is beneficial for organizations that want to foster a more open and transparent communication culture, encourage collaboration across departments, and provide a platform for employees to share knowledge and insights. Fireflies uses artificial intelligence (AI) to automatically transcribe spoken conversations into written text which can save time and effort compared to manual transcription.<sup>33</sup>

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the paper's overall findings. Although six findings could be derivative in responding to the research questions, this article reports only on two significant findings that could be presented to provide a more detailed presentation of the study findings.

### 1. Curriculum practices unraveled the hidden curriculum that baffled humans in their current state

African Critical Theory focuses on the experiences, contributions, and challenges people of African descent face in various social contexts. It seeks to uncover hidden power structures, colonial legacy, and historical injustices. In the context of the given statement, ACT helps in exploring how curriculum practices reveal the hidden curriculum – the implicit values, assumptions, and ideologies often embedded in educational content and methods.<sup>34</sup> ACT encourages researchers to consider how these practices impact the representation, empowerment, and cultural awareness of individuals from African and African diasporic backgrounds. For instance, looking at the following extract from the MST meeting, participants raised the following:

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<sup>28</sup> Sara. Safari, “Virtual Empowerment: The Exploration of Leadership Aspirations of Young Nepali Girls Using Virtual Participatory Action Research.” (Antioch University, 2021).

<sup>29</sup> Renate Motschnig, “A Student-Centered Course on Communication and Teamwork Goes Virtual: Insights Derived via Participatory Action Research,” in *EdMedia+ Innovate Learning* (Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE), 2023), 897–910.

<sup>30</sup> Harry Surden, “Artificial Intelligence and Law: An Overview,” *Georgia State University Law Review* 35 (2019): 19–22.

<sup>31</sup> Ajay Agrawal, Joshua Gans, and Avi Goldfarb, “What to Expect from Artificial Intelligence” (MIT Sloan Management Review Cambridge, MA, USA, 2017).

<sup>32</sup> Mary Beth Pinto, “The Use of Yammer in Higher Education: An Exploratory Study,” *Journal of Educators Online* 11, no.1(2014):n1.

<sup>33</sup> Herbert Spencer Barber, “North American Fireflies of the Genus *Photuris*,” *Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections*, 1951.

<sup>34</sup> Reiland Rabaka, *Concepts of Cabralism: Amilcar Cabral and Africana Critical Theory* (Lexington Books, 2014).

Ms Kosloski (a PhD candidate): *“When I visited the admin section to change my registration status from full-time to part-time, I was confronted by a black male who was supposed to be helpful. And he said: ‘Look, I have registered you, and now you are registered; my work with you ends here!’”*

Mr Kangol (a PhD candidate): *“I experienced the same too. I realized there and there when he gave me the letter of registration that I was wrongly registered, and when I asked him to correct it, he said, ‘That thing doesn’t say anything; just be glad that I have registered you and be happy.’”*

Our Moses (a Master’s candidate): *“I also learnt a lot from him; he seems to think that he is indispensable and is doing us favors. It took me, my study leader, to physically come to him to request my registration be corrected.”*

### **An assessment of the extracts above using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a Tool**

The researchers examined the speech and spoken language to make sense of the discourses. This helped in the prudently thinking about language and communication to uncover underlying power dynamics, ideologies, and social structures. Using CDA, the researchers deconstruct the language used in the statement and explore its implications.

*“black male who was supposed to be helpful”*

The concept of “Male” symbolizes power, and people in high positions can wield that power. This can mean that some human beings, by being in an elevated position, can unconsciously perpetuate the old habits of people in powerful positions such as admin, more so those in an administrative position, to amplify how the postgraduate student endured the lived experience. The phrase “...who are supposed to be helpful” by implication shows that the postgraduate student was aware of the hidden curriculum, that had been endured by many in the past, whilst the transformation policies of higher learning institutions seem not to bring any change.<sup>35</sup>

Mr. Kango and Our Moses also echoed these views. “Curriculum practices” refers to the methods, content, and strategies used in education. “Hidden curriculum”: Implicit values, beliefs, and ideologies transmitted through education. “Humans in our current state” refers to individuals within the present societal context. “Curriculum practices unraveled the hidden curriculum.” This suggests that through curriculum practices, the previously concealed or unexamined aspects of the hidden curriculum are being exposed.<sup>36</sup> ACT encourages professionals to examine these hidden aspects and how they relate to the issues of cultural representation, identity, and power. CDA would explore how these practices are described and whether they are framed positively or critically.<sup>37</sup> “Humans in our current state”: This phrase implies that the analysis refers to the current social, cultural, and historical context. From an ACT perspective, it prompts one to consider how historical legacies, colonial influences, and ongoing inequalities shape the experiences of individuals, particularly those of African descent. The intersection of ACT and CDA allows the uncovering of the power dynamics and ideological influences embedded in curriculum practices. CDA helps in examining the language used to discuss these practices and reveals the assumptions and values that may be implicit in the statement. Reflecting on the above, using ACT as a lens and employing CDA as an analysis tool, scholars can critically examine the statement about curriculum practices unravelling the hidden curriculum.<sup>38</sup> This approach helps in exploring how curriculum practices control the representation, empowerment, and cultural awareness of individuals within the current societal context, especially from the perspective of people of African descent.

## **2. Cyberspace has created profound variations in human consciousness and social identity.**

ACT centers on the experiences, contributions, and challenges people of African descent face in various contexts.<sup>39</sup> It also examines power dynamics, colonial legacy, and historical injustices. In the context of the statement given, ACT encourages one to explore how technological advances, such as cyberspace, intersect with the experiences of individuals from African and African diaspora backgrounds. ACT further prompts the consideration of how historical contexts, social inequalities, and cultural representations influence how these variations in human consciousness and social identity manifest.<sup>40</sup> For example, during one of the webinars

<sup>35</sup> Paul Chilton, “Missing Links in Mainstream CDA,” *A New Agenda in (Critical) Discourse Analysis*, 2005, 19–51.

<sup>36</sup> Norman Fairclough, “CDA as Dialectical Reasoning,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies* (Routledge, 2017), 13–25.

<sup>37</sup> Teun A Van Dijk, “Multidisciplinary CDA: A Plea for Diversity,” *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* 1 (2001): 95–120.

<sup>38</sup> Rabaka, *Concepts of Cabralism: Amílcar Cabral and Africana Critical Theory*.

<sup>39</sup> Magnus O Bassey, “What Is Africana Critical Theory or Black Existential Philosophy?,” *Journal of Black Studies* 37, no. 6 (2007): 914–35.

<sup>40</sup> Cheryl E Matias, *The Handbook of Critical Theoretical Research Methods in Education* (Routledge, 2021).

featuring an expert from one of the leading Universities in South Africa, the following extract prompted the research team to contemplate their own journey of growth and development:

**Penguin** (technology expert): *“Due to the security and privacy measures implemented by most higher learning institutions, students working in education or curriculum design might find themselves unable to use Yammer or similar social networking platforms. The stringent regulatory requirements and the confidential nature of confidentiality operations require a controlled and secure cyberspace and communication environment. As a result, these institutions often restrict the use of external social identity and networking tools like Yammer to prevent potential data breaches, leaks of sensitive information, or unauthorized sharing of confidential data. Instead, employees in such institutions typically rely on internal communication and collaboration tools that adhere to strict security standards and compliance regulations, ensuring confidentiality and integrity.”*

### **Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a tool**

CDA is used as an analytical approach that examines language and communication to uncover power dynamics, ideologies, and social structures. Using CDA, researchers can deconstruct the language in the statement to reveal underlying assumptions and implications.

Analyzing the statement from a social perspective, it can be deduced that using the phrase: “The stringent regulatory requirements and confidential nature of confidentiality operations” necessitates a controlled and secure cyberspace and communication environment. As a result, these institutions often restrict the use of external social identity and networking tools such as Yammer to prevent potential data breaches.

The concept of “Cyberspace” refers to the digital realm of interconnected computer networks, including the internet. “Deep variations in human consciousness” implies significant changes in how people think, perceive and understand due to the influence of cyberspace. Reflective meetings of postgraduate students also allow open discussion, incorporate reflective critiques and group discussions into the curriculum and encourage students to articulate their thoughts and lived experiences related to consciousness, fostering a deeper understanding of their perspectives.<sup>41</sup> “Social identity” refers to how individuals define themselves concerning various social groups. Thus, this may lead to views on how “Cyberspace has created deep variations.” This phrase suggests that cyberspace has led to substantial changes in human consciousness. ACT encourages the investigation of these changes, especially how they may differ according to historical and cultural contexts.<sup>42</sup> CDA prompts the questioning of how the idea of “creation” is framed and what power dynamics are involved in attributing these changes to cyberspace.<sup>43</sup> For instance, “In human consciousness and social identity” implies that the analysis is centred on shifts within individual awareness and how people perceive their societal roles. ACT encourages further exploration on how these shifts interact with broader issues of identity, representation, and power.<sup>44</sup> CDA prompts the examination of the language used to describe “consciousness” and “identity” and how these terms are constructed.<sup>45</sup> Looking deeper into the extract above, it can be concluded that the lived experience of postgraduate students enables a critical exploration of how advancements in cyberspace influence human experiences and identities.<sup>46</sup> ACT also prompts the consideration of historical contexts and power dynamics that shape these variations. At the same time, CDA helps to dissect the language used to discuss these changes and uncover the underlying assumptions.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Curriculum Practices for a Better World**

Curriculum practices play a crucial role in shaping students’ learning experiences and preparing them for the future.<sup>47</sup> Educators and policymakers can consider implementing the following curriculum practices to make the world a better place for all:

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<sup>41</sup> Matias, *The Handbook of Critical Theoretical Research Methods in Education*.

<sup>42</sup> Nicholas C Burbules and Rupert Berk, “Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy: Relations, Differences, and Limits,” *Critical Theories in Education: Changing Terrains of Knowledge and Politics*, 1999, 45–65.

<sup>43</sup> Eunice Rojas, “Cultural Codes in the Soundtrack of Catalan Nationalism 1959–2019,” *Romance Notes* 60, no. 1 (2020): 207–16.

<sup>44</sup> Bassey, “What Is Africana Critical Theory or Black Existential Philosophy?”

<sup>45</sup> Fairclough, “CDA as Dialectical Reasoning .”

<sup>46</sup> Ruth Wodak, “Mediation between Discourse and Society: Assessing Cognitive Approaches in CDA,” *Discourse Studies* 8, no. 1 (2006): 179–90.

<sup>47</sup> Adedokun, “A Critical Approach of the Nigerian Higher Education Institution Curriculum and the Notion of Black Consciousness .”

- a) Designing curricula that emphasize academic subjects, social and emotional learning, critical thinking, creativity, and ethical values – this well-rounded education can help students become empathetic, responsible, and well-adjusted.<sup>48</sup>
- b) Integrating lessons that promote cultural awareness, intercultural understanding, and respect for diversity, preparing students to be global citizens who can contribute positively to a diverse and interconnected world.
- c) Encouraging project-based learning in which students work on real-world problems, fostering collaboration, problem-solving skills and applying knowledge to address issues that matter to communities and society.<sup>49</sup>
- d) Integrating the concepts of sustainability, environmental conservation, and responsible consumption into the curriculum.

This can help postgraduate students understand their role in creating a more sustainable and environmentally conscious future. This may also lead to the development of curricula inclusive of all learners, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or identities, enduring equitable access to education and supporting social cohesion.

## PROMISING PRACTICES FOR CURRICULUM TRANSFORMATION

Embracing innovative approaches can enhance the impact of curriculum practices and better prepare students for the complexities of the modern world.

**Technology Integration:** Incorporate technology as a tool for learning and collaboration.<sup>50</sup> This includes online resources, virtual simulations, and digital platforms that can provide personalized learning experiences.

**Experiential Learning:** Introduce experiential learning opportunities such as internships, community service, and field trips. These hands-on experiences can bridge the gap between theory and practice and cultivate real-world skills.<sup>51</sup>

**Adaptive Learning:** Implement adaptive learning technologies that tailor educational content and pace to individual student needs, enabling personalized learning journeys.<sup>52</sup>

**Gamification:** Use game elements in the curriculum to enhance engagement and motivation. Gamified learning can make the educational experience more interactive and enjoyable.<sup>53</sup>

**Cross-Disciplinary Integration:** Design interdisciplinary courses that combine multiple subjects to address complex, real-world problems,<sup>54</sup> encouraging holistic thinking and the application of knowledge across domains.

**Collaboration and Policy for a Better World:** Collaboration and policy changes are essential to create a better world through curriculum practices and innovations.<sup>55</sup>

**Teacher Professional Development:** Provide educators with continuous training and professional development to implement new curriculum practices and technologies.<sup>56</sup> **Stakeholder Engagement:** Involve students, parents, communities, and industry experts in curriculum development, ensuring the curriculum is relevant, responsive, and aligned with social needs.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Jessica Chan and Sibel Erduran, "The Impact of Collaboration between Science and Religious Education Teachers on Their Understanding and Views of Argumentation," *Research in Science Education* 53, no. 1 (2023): 121–37.

<sup>49</sup> Andrea R. Beauchamp, "Implementing Literacy Instruction Through Project-Based Learning" (Bethel University, 2023).

<sup>50</sup> Xiaoxue Du and Ellen B Meier, "Innovating Pedagogical Practices through Professional Development in Computer Science Education," *Journal of Computer Science Research* 5, no. 3 (2023): 46–56.

<sup>51</sup> Olayele Adelakun and Quang Bui, "Bridging the Gap between Education and Practice: The Case of ID Lab," 2023.

<sup>52</sup> Nanxi Meng, Tetyana K. Dhimolea, and Zain Ali, "AI-Enhanced Education: Teaching and Learning Reimagined," in *Bridging Human Intelligence and Artificial Intelligence* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 107–24.

<sup>53</sup> Nur Laily Lupita Sari and Ianatul Avifah, "STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE USE OF GAMIFICATION APPROACH IN GRAMMAR CLASS," *Indonesian Journal of Education (INJOE)* 3, no. 2 (2023): 227–34.

<sup>54</sup> Elina Kähkönen and Katja Hölttä-Otto, "From Crossing Chromosomes to Crossing Curricula—a Biomimetic Analogy for Cross-Disciplinary Engineering Curriculum Planning," *European Journal of Engineering Education* 47, no. 3 (2022): 516–34.

<sup>55</sup> Chan and Erduran, "The Impact of Collaboration between Science and Religious Education Teachers on Their Understanding and Views of Argumentation."

<sup>56</sup> Girma Moti Geletu and Dawit Mekonnen Mihiretie, "Professional Accountability and Responsibility of Learning Communities of Practice in Professional Development versus Curriculum Practice in Classrooms: Possibilities and Pathways," *International Journal of Educational Research Open* 4 (2023): 100223.

<sup>57</sup> Geletu and Mihiretie, "Professional Accountability and Responsibility of Learning Communities of Practice in Professional Development versus Curriculum Practice in Classrooms: Possibilities and Pathways."

**Policy Reform:** Advocate for policy changes that support innovative curriculum practices and equitable access to quality education, which could involve updating outdated regulations, funding models, and assessment methods.<sup>58</sup>

**Global Cooperation:** Foster international collaborations to share best practices and innovative approaches to education. Global partnerships can enrich curricula and expand students' perspectives.<sup>59</sup>

**Research and Evaluation:** Invest in educational research to assess the effectiveness of new curriculum practices and innovations. Evidence-based decision-making can guide continuous improvement.

## CONCLUSION

Exploring curriculum practices and innovations to create a better world for all is a complex and dynamic endeavor. Scholars have recognized a significant shift in educational paradigms and curriculum development over the years, moving from traditional production-based approaches to knowledge-based ones. This shift has been prompted by the changing demands of the knowledge economy, where adaptability, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills are highly valued. Traditional education systems, designed for industrialization, focused on preparing individuals for specific jobs. However, the demand for a broader skill set became apparent with the emergence of a technology-driven world. Scholars like Clem recognized the limitations of the production-based curriculum and advocated for knowledge-based reforms that prioritize critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and adaptability. This approach aims to provide a well-rounded education that extends beyond vocational training. A knowledge-based curriculum also emphasizes lifelong learning and continuous development. It recognizes the importance of technology integration, digital literacy, and preparing students to navigate the digital world effectively.

Moreover, learner-centred approaches gained prominence, focusing on tailoring education to individual needs and fostering engagement and passion for learning. In pursuing a better world, the integration of ACT offers a powerful lens. This theoretical framework underscores the significance of centring marginalized voices, addressing social justice, and promoting equity. Curriculum practices can be transformed by incorporating African history, culture, and contributions, fostering critical consciousness, empathy, and a sense of social responsibility. The integration of African perspectives enriches education by promoting cross-cultural understanding and challenging existing power structures. A range of innovative strategies can be embraced to make curriculum practices more effective in creating a better world. Technology integration, experiential learning, adaptive learning, gamification, cross-disciplinary integration, collaboration, and policy reforms are promising avenues. These approaches enhance engagement, personalized learning, and the development of practical skills required for a rapidly changing world. However, these curriculum transformations are not without challenges. Equitable implementation, teacher professional development, stakeholder engagement, policy changes, and assessment methods require careful consideration. Ensuring that reforms address issues of equity and inclusivity is crucial, and educators play a pivotal role in successful implementation. Ultimately, the journey to crafting curriculum practices for a better world is ongoing. As education continues to evolve, scholars and researchers are continually exploring new questions and areas of study. The intersection of knowledge-based education, cultural diversity, social justice, and technological advancements requires constant examination and adaptation. Education can play a transformative role in shaping a more equitable and prosperous global society by embracing innovative approaches, interdisciplinary perspectives, and inclusive strategies.

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