



# Towards Decolonizing Agricultural Education in South Africa: A Systematic Literature Review

Shadreck Muchaku<sup>1&3</sup> , Hlekani M. Kabiti<sup>2</sup>  & Bernard N.Nthambeleni<sup>3</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Centre for Global Change, University of Fort Hare, Private Bag X1314, Alice, 5700, South Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Centre for Global Change, Walter Sisulu University, Private Bag X1, Mthatha, 5100, South Africa.

<sup>3</sup> Office of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal, University of Venda, Private Bag X5050, Thohoyandou, Limpopo, 0950, South Africa.

## ABSTRACT

Given South Africa's colonial legacy, which has displaced communities and restricted agricultural development, decolonising agricultural education is critical to promoting sustainable agricultural practices. Higher education institutions have a key role to play in reorienting agricultural education to equip graduates with contextualised knowledge and skills. While broader debates on the decolonisation of higher education are well established, agricultural education remains under-researched in this regard. Recognising the disciplinary diversity within universities, this study undertook a systematic review to identify practical strategies for decolonising agricultural education in South African higher education institutions. It explored how teaching, learning and research can be reconceptualised to reflect and respond to local realities, particularly the lived experiences of historically marginalised communities. The review was primarily based on literature from the Scopus database, supplemented by targeted, accredited articles selected according to a predefined screening strategy. The findings provide actionable insights for educators and policymakers that support the development of curricula and pedagogies that are both socially relevant and transformative. In doing so, the study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on decolonisation and provides a basis for rethinking agricultural education in a way that restores indigenous knowledge and promotes inclusive development.

**Keywords:** Decolonization, Agricultural Education, University Responsiveness, Africanisation

## INTRODUCTION

This article critically examines the decolonisation of education, with a particular focus on agricultural education (AE) in South Africa. AE plays a significant role in promoting agricultural productivity, economic development, and rural transformation across the African continent.<sup>1</sup> However, for AE to be effective and impactful, the knowledge produced and disseminated must align with the lived experiences, needs, and realities of local communities.<sup>2</sup> As Magaiza & Muchaku argue, university curricula should reflect and respond to contextual realities to ensure that learning remains meaningful and relevant.<sup>3</sup> In

<sup>1</sup> E. N. Raidimi and H M Kabiti, "A Review of the Role of Agricultural Extension and Training in Achieving Sustainable Food Security: A Case of South Africa," *South African Journal of Agricultural Extension* 47, no. 3 (2019): 120–30.

<sup>2</sup> Evelyn Roberta Nimmo, Robson Laverdi, and Alessandra Izabel de Carvalho, "What Is the Role of Public History and Environmental Oral History in Supporting Conservation through Agroecology?," *Conservation* 4, no. 1 (2024): 82–97.

<sup>3</sup> Grey Magaiza and Shadreck Muchaku, "Curriculum Enablement and Posthumanism: Pathways for Creating and Implementing a Community Development Curriculum," *Journal of Curriculum Studies Research* 5, no. 1 (March 14, 2023): 159–70,

---

**CORRESPONDENCE** – Shadreck, Muchaku Email: [shadreck.Muchaku@univen.ac.za](mailto:shadreck.Muchaku@univen.ac.za)

**PUBLICATION HISTORY** - Received : 28<sup>th</sup> July, 2025 | Accepted: 28<sup>th</sup> November, 2025 | Published: 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2026.

**TO CITE THIS ARTICLE** - Muchaku, Shadreck, Hlekani M. Kabiti, and Bernard N.Nthambeleni. "Towards Decolonizing Agricultural Education in South Africa: A Systematic Literature Review." *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 7, no.1 (2026): 298 - 310. <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20267123>

**COPYRIGHT AND LICENSING** - © 2026 The Author(s). Published and Maintained by Noyam Journals.

This is an open access article under the CCBY license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

South Africa, where the legacy of colonialism continues to shape social structures, addressing these contextual needs is not only desirable but necessary.

The literature affirms that colonialism entrenched Eurocentric knowledge systems in African education, systematically displacing indigenous epistemologies, marginalising local agricultural practices, and destroying traditional livelihoods.<sup>4</sup> This epistemic imposition not only reshaped AE but also institutionalised structural inequalities that continue to manifest in higher education today.<sup>5</sup> Colonial agricultural curricula devalued indigenous knowledge (IK) and promoted technocratic, externally derived models of agriculture, thereby entrenching epistemological hierarchies that persist today.<sup>6</sup>

Although political decolonisation has occurred, the ideological legacies of colonialism remain deeply embedded in academic content, pedagogical methods, and research priorities, continuing to result in forms of epistemic injustice. These entrenched frameworks hinder the integration of diverse, context-specific knowledge systems that are essential for creating an inclusive and transformative learning environment. Addressing these challenges necessitates a fundamental redesign of curricula and teaching practices, a redesign that reclaims, validates, and incorporates indigenous agricultural knowledge in an equitable and locally relevant manner. While scholarship increasingly addresses the decolonisation of education in general, AE continues to be severely neglected.<sup>7</sup>

The gap highlighted above is particularly critical considering that agriculture plays a central role in supporting rural livelihoods, ensuring food security, and shaping South Africa's sustainable development. In response, this paper explores two key questions: (1) What are the current barriers to decolonising AE in South Africa? and (2) What practical strategies can be employed to decolonise agricultural teaching and learning practices? The analysis begins with the assumption that decolonised AE can serve as a transformative platform for cultivating knowledge and skills that directly address real-world challenges in agricultural production, rural development, policy, and employment. However, realising this potential requires more than mere rhetorical commitment; it necessitates targeted, actionable interventions in curriculum, pedagogy, and research, supported by meaningful collaboration with affected communities and stakeholders. As Du Plessis argues, true decolonisation must transcend symbolic gestures to effect structural change.<sup>8</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

To this end, the paper adopted a systematic literature review approach, focusing on key areas such as teaching and learning, curriculum development, research engagement, and stakeholder involvement. These components are regarded as essential for facilitating sustainable and meaningful change in AE. The report commenced with an examination of the historical and contemporary landscape of AE in South Africa, underscoring the urgency of decolonisation efforts. Subsequently, it synthesised the existing literature to identify systemic barriers to transformation and presents evidence-based strategies for embedding decolonial principles in agricultural higher education.

The review employed purposive and snowball sampling methods to select pertinent academic sources, utilising search terms such as '*decolonizing agricultural education*', '*Africanization*', and '*curriculum transformation*'. These terms were integrated throughout the review process to ensure transparency, objectivity, and academic integrity. Importantly, the review was conducted independently

---

<https://doi.org/10.46303/jcsr.2023.12>.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Shizha, "Indigenous Epistemologies and Decolonized Sustainable Livelihoods in Africa," in *The Palgrave Handbook on Critical Theories of Education* (Springer, 2022), 465–80; Jonathan Jansen, Shireen Motala, and Marcina Singh, "Beyond Decolonisation: Criticism, Comparison and Conjectures from the Global South," *Comparative Education*, 2025, 1–12.

<sup>5</sup> Shamyia Karumbaiah and Jamiella Brooks, "How Colonial Continuities Underlie Algorithmic Injustices in Education," in *2021 Conference on Research in Equitable and Sustained Participation in Engineering, Computing, and Technology (RESPECT)* (IEEE, 2021), 1–6.

<sup>6</sup> Karumbaiah and Brooks, "How Colonial Continuities Underlie Algorithmic Injustices in Education"; Jansen, Motala, and Singh, "Beyond Decolonisation: Criticism, Comparison and Conjectures from the Global South."

<sup>7</sup> T. Van der Westhuizen, "Theory U and Individual Entrepreneurial Orientation in Developing Youth Entrepreneurship in South Africa," *Journal of Contemporary Management* 14, no. 1 (2017): 531–53; Shannon Morreira et al., "Confronting the Complexities of Decolonising Curricula and Pedagogy in Higher Education," *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* 5, no. 1–2 (2020): 1–18.

<sup>8</sup> P. Du Plessis, "Decolonisation of Education in South Africa: Challenges to Decolonise the University Curriculum," *South African Journal of Higher Education*, March 2021, <https://doi.org/10.20853/35-1-4426>.

and free from institutional or financial influence, which facilitated an unbiased assessment of the literature and its implications for policy and practice.<sup>9</sup>

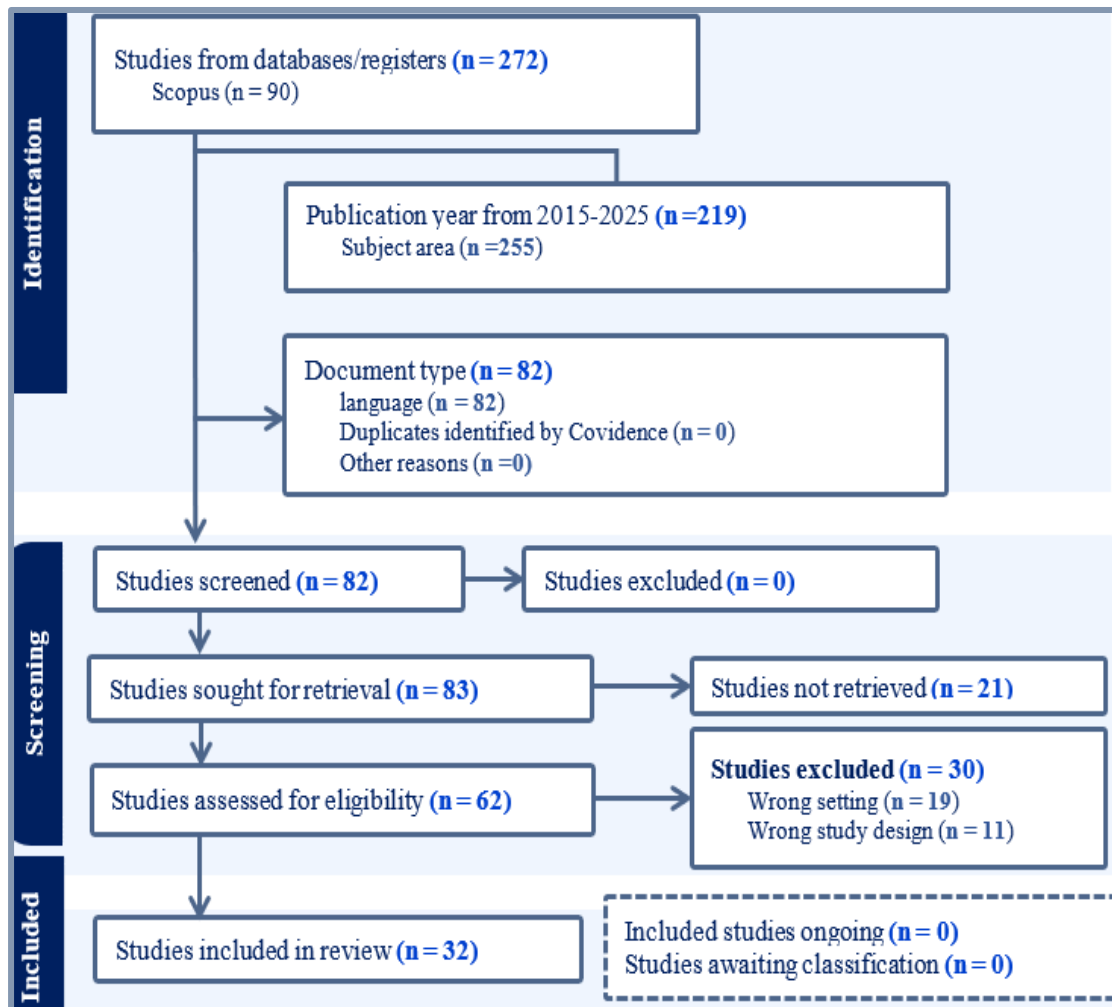


Figure 1 PRISMA diagram showing the step-by-step process during sampling.

The diagram above, created with Covidence software, illustrates the data mining and outcomes of the screening process phase (Figure 1). It shows the number of articles excluded and those selected for further analysis. This visual representation is crucial for demonstrating the rigor and transparency of the systematic review process, clearly outlining the criteria-based decisions made at each stage and ensuring the study's methodology is replicable and credible.

Table 1 shows how articles are extracted, screened, and included using Boolean operators.

Boolean operator	No of articles	Criteria
Set search alert Advanced query ("higher education" AND "agriculture") AND ("decolonization" OR "postcolonial") AND ("curriculum" OR "pedagogy") AND ("South Africa") AND PUBYEAR > 2014 AND PUBYEAR < 2026	219	By year – only articles published from 2016 to 2025

<sup>9</sup> Sascha Kraus et al., "Literature Reviews as Independent Studies: Guidelines for Academic Practice," *Review of Managerial Science* 16, no. 8 (2022): 2577–95.

(“higher education" AND "agriculture”) AND (“decolonization" OR "postcolonial”) AND (“curriculum" OR "pedagogy”) AND (“South Africa”) AND PUBYEAR > 2014 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "MULT") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "AGRI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "ARTS") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "SOCI"))	209	By subject area – multidisciplinary, social sciences and agriculture
( "higher education" AND "agriculture" ) AND ( "decolonization" OR "postcolonial" ) AND ( "curriculum" OR "pedagogy" ) AND ( "South Africa" ) AND PUBYEAR > 2014 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND ( LIMIT-TO ( SUBJAREA , "MULT" ) OR LIMIT-TO ( SUBJAREA , "AGRI" ) OR LIMIT-TO ( SUBJAREA , "ARTS" ) OR LIMIT-TO ( SUBJAREA , "SOCI" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE , "ar" ) )	76	Only journal articles
"pedagogy" ) AND ( "South Africa" ) AND PUBYEAR > 2014 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND ( LIMIT-TO ( SUBJAREA , "MULT" ) OR LIMIT-TO ( SUBJAREA , "AGRI" ) OR LIMIT-TO ( SUBJAREA , "ARTS" ) OR LIMIT-TO ( SUBJAREA , "SOCI" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE , "ar" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( SRCTYPE , "j" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE , "English" ) )	73	Language

As highlighted in the PRISMA flowchart, *Table 1* delineates a systematic, step-by-step methodology for selecting and screening literature from the extensive, multidisciplinary SCOPUS database. Specifically, the table illustrates the application of Boolean operators in data mining and segregation to refine the search parameters. A multi-stage literature segregation approach was employed to extract pertinent articles for the study, utilising targeted search terms such as "decolonization," "agriculture," "pedagogy," "postcolonial," and "curriculum" (see *Table 1*). The inclusion criteria were confined to journal articles published in 2016, thereby restricting consideration to articles from that specific year. The initial search yielded 219 articles, which were subsequently narrowed down to 73 that met the predefined criteria. From these, only 32 articles were available for download, prompting the identification of additional relevant studies through reference tracing within these documents, using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The main sample comprised studies published between 2016 and 2025; however, additional articles identified through snowball sampling were also included, regardless of their publication year, as they were cited in the selected studies from the 2016–2025 period. (see *Figure 1* and *Table 1*).

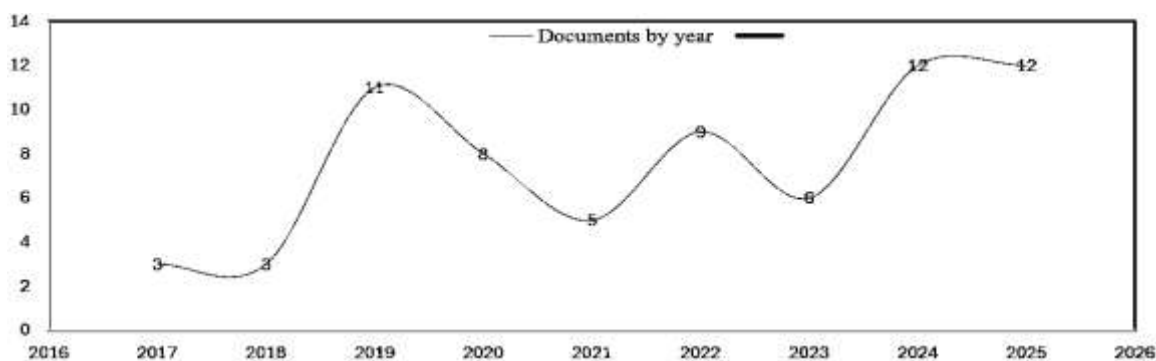


Figure 2: Number of relevant articles published each year, based on data from SCOPUS.

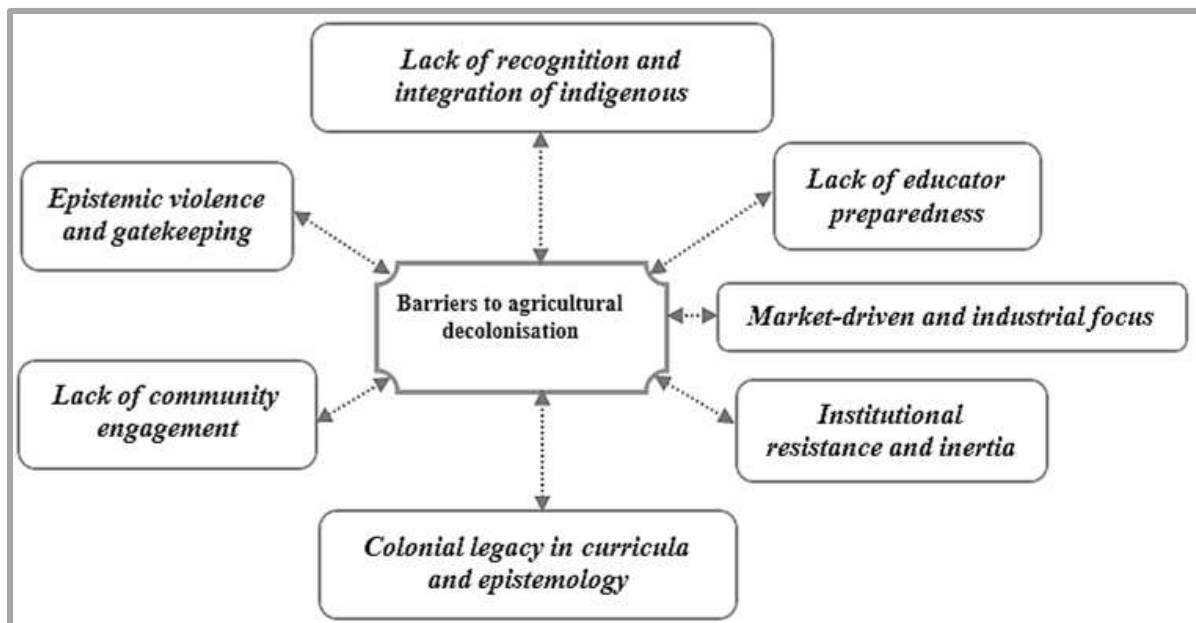
The results of the systematic literature search, illustrated in the line diagram, reveal a fluctuating yet overall increasing trend in the number of relevant publications from 2016 to 2025. In 2017 and 2018, scholarly activity was modest, with three publications recorded in each year (see *Figure 2*). A significant

increase was observed in 2019, which marked the first major peak with 11 publications. Although this momentum diminished in 2020 (8 publications) and further declined in 2021 (5 publications), an upturn was noted in 2022 with 9 publications (*Figure 2*). A slight decline occurred in 2023 (6 publications), followed by a sharp increase in both 2024 and 2025, with the highest output recorded in each year at 12 publications. This pattern suggests a growing scientific interest in the topic, particularly in the latter half of the decade. Consequently, the present study is both timely and necessary to build upon this emerging research momentum, address identified gaps and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of a field that is increasingly gaining academic and practical relevance.

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a pervasive disconnect between the current AE system in South Africa and the contextual realities of the communities it aims to serve.<sup>10</sup> The results suggest that although calls for the decolonisation of education are widely acknowledged within academic discourse, practical implementation remains inadequate. The prevailing Eurocentric paradigms continue to influence the structure, delivery, and content of agricultural curricula, thereby reinforcing historical inequities and marginalising indigenous knowledge systems (IKS).

### Barriers to promoting agricultural decolonisation in education



*Figure 3 illustrates the barriers to decolonizing AE*

#### Lack of educator preparedness

A significant and persistent obstacle to the decolonisation of agricultural education (AE), as illustrated in the literature reviewed (see *Figure 3*), is the limited capacity of educators to meaningfully integrate IKS into teaching and learning.<sup>11</sup> This limitation is largely attributable to the dominance of Eurocentric epistemologies in teacher education, which systematically marginalise Indigenous worldviews and exclude them from formal pedagogical training.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, many educators lack both the

<sup>10</sup> Nafiisa Sobratee et al., "Visioning a Food System for an Equitable Transition towards Sustainable Diets—A South African Perspective," *Sustainability* 14, no. 6 (2022): 3280.

<sup>11</sup> Catherine Manathunga et al., "Decolonisation through Poetry: Building First Nations' Voice and Promoting Truth-Telling," *Education as Change* 24, no. 1 (2020): 1–24.

<sup>12</sup> T. Letsekha, "The Integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Teacher Education: Challenges and Possibilities," *Journal of Education* 86, no. 1 (2021): 85–105; M. Keane and S. Malcolm, "Teacher Education and Indigenous Knowledge in South Africa: Challenges of Decolonisation," *Perspectives in Education* 37, no. 1 (2019): 65–78; Jansen, Motala, and Singh, "Beyond Decolonisation: Criticism, Comparison and Conjectures from the Global South."

epistemological foundation and the pedagogical tools necessary to integrate IKS in a manner that affirms local cultural practices and knowledge systems.<sup>13</sup> For instance, studies have demonstrated that science and agriculture teachers often possess a limited understanding or appreciation of IKS, resulting in superficial, symbolic references rather than substantive integration into the curriculum.<sup>14</sup> This epistemic separation not only perpetuates the dominance of Western knowledge systems but also erases Indigenous agricultural heritage, thereby undermining the relevance and inclusivity of AE.<sup>15</sup> Addressing this challenge necessitates more than mere curriculum reform; it requires comprehensive professional development, a reorientation of pedagogical approaches, and an institutional commitment to epistemic equity and transformation.<sup>16</sup>

### Epistemic violence and gatekeeping

The findings of this study demonstrate that epistemic violence, defined as the systematic marginalisation and devaluation of non-Western knowledge systems within the institutional framework, continues to shape AE in South Africa.<sup>17</sup> As illustrated in *Figure 3*, the dominance of Western epistemologies in agricultural curricula, frequently grounded in empirical, technocratic, and reductionist paradigms, results in the exclusion or trivialisation of indigenous and community-based (CB) agricultural knowledge.<sup>18</sup> This epistemological hierarchy not only perpetuates the colonial legacy but also institutionalises the notion that legitimate knowledge is derived exclusively from Eurocentric traditions.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, students from rural or indigenous backgrounds often experience epistemic alienation, wherein their lived experiences and cultural insights are rendered invisible or irrelevant within formal learning environments.<sup>20</sup> Such alienation undermines student engagement, restricts the contextual relevance of education, and impedes the development of locally adapted agricultural innovations. To rectify this imbalance, a deliberate decolonial approach to curriculum development is imperative, one that affirms the plurality of knowledge, legitimises indigenous epistemologies, and aligns learning with the social and environmental realities of all students.<sup>21</sup>

### Lack of community engagement

The decolonisation of AE necessitates the collaborative development of curricula with rural communities to meaningfully integrate IKS in ways that are contextually relevant and pedagogically sound (*see Figure 3*). While policy frameworks often advocate for the inclusion of IKS, academic institutions continue to rely heavily on Eurocentric epistemologies, resulting in curricula that either overlook or tokenise indigenous agricultural practices.<sup>22</sup> This epistemic imbalance marginalises CB knowledge and undermines students' capacity to critically engage with local agricultural realities. Empirical studies in Southern Africa reveal that although IKS is occasionally referenced in AE, its incorporation is typically

<sup>13</sup> Manathunga et al., "Decolonisation through Poetry: Building First Nations' Voice and Promoting Truth-Telling."

<sup>14</sup> M. Boikhutso, "Teachers' Perspectives on Integrating Indigenous Knowledge into Science Education in South African Schools," *African Journal of Research in Mathematics, Science and Technology Education* 24, no. 2 (2020): 170–81.

<sup>15</sup> Sobratee et al., "Visioning a Food System for an Equitable Transition towards Sustainable Diets—A South African Perspective."

<sup>16</sup> Lesley Le Grange, "Decolonising the University Curriculum," *South African Journal of Higher Education* 30, no. 2 (June 2016), <https://doi.org/10.20853/30-2-709>; C. Nhemachena, M. Mwale, and W. Mupangwa, "Curriculum Reform in Agricultural Education: Integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems for Climate Resilience in Southern Africa," *African Journal of Agricultural Research* 16, no. 5 (2021): 656–65.

<sup>17</sup> Le Grange, "Decolonising the University Curriculum"; Izelque Botha and Danitza Klopper, "Navigating Change: A Journey through Curriculum Review," *South African Geographical Journal*, 2025, 1–16.

<sup>18</sup> P. Higgs, *Curriculum Studies in South Africa: A Focus on Agricultural Education* (HSRC Press, 2016); J., Keevy and J. Jansen, *Higher Education Curricula in South Africa: Towards Transformation* (University of Pretoria Press, 2021).

<sup>19</sup> A. Mbembe, "Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive," *Public Culture* 28, no. 1 (2016): 1–14; Savo Heleta, "Decolonisation of Higher Education: Dismantling Epistemic Violence and Eurocentrism in South Africa," *Transformation in Higher Education* 1, no. 1 (2016): 1–8.

<sup>20</sup> B. Leibowitz and V. Bozalek, "The Role of Curriculum in Epistemic Justice: Towards a Decolonial Approach to Education," *South African Journal of Higher Education* 30, no. 2 (2016): 1–10.

<sup>21</sup> L. Swartz, L. Gibson, and S. Ngcobo, "Towards Epistemic Justice in Health Education: Lessons for Decolonising Curricula in Africa," *Medical Teacher* 45, no. 5 (2023): 505–13.

<sup>22</sup> T. Mabhaudhi, A. T. Modi, and Y. G. Beletse, "Challenges and Opportunities for Mainstreaming Indigenous and Traditional Vegetables into Food Systems in South Africa," *Sustainability* 11, no. 2 (2019): 501; T. Letsekha and V. Pitsoe, "Curriculum Transformation and Indigenous Knowledge Systems in South African Universities," *Higher Education Research & Development* 39, no. 3 (2020): 512–24.

superficial and lacks both epistemological legitimacy and practical utility.<sup>23</sup> The absence of meaningful integration not only reinforces the historical marginalisation of IK but also restricts the ability of students to contribute to transformative, community-centred agricultural development.

### **Market-driven and industrial focus**

The current AE system in South Africa remains significantly influenced by market-oriented and industrial paradigms that prioritise commercial, large-scale, and export-oriented agricultural models (see Figure 3). While these approaches align with the global economic agenda, they frequently exclude smallholder, subsistence, and indigenous farming systems that are essential to local food security and rural livelihoods.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, agricultural curricula often neglect agroecological knowledge rooted in specific local contexts, rendering graduates inadequately prepared to address the socio-ecological complexities of rural agriculture.<sup>25</sup> This unidimensional focus exacerbates urban-rural inequalities, contributes to the marginalisation of traditional farming communities, and undermines national strategies aimed at promoting inclusive, decolonised, and ecologically sustainable education.<sup>26</sup> A meaningful transformation in AE necessitates a shift towards the incorporation of diverse knowledge systems that advance social justice and environmental resilience. This approach ensures that education is tailored to local realities rather than merely catering to global markets.<sup>27</sup>

### **Lack of recognition and integration of indigenous knowledge**

The findings of this study highlight the lack of recognition and integration of IK in addressing climate change and biodiversity loss, which poses a significant challenge to the decolonisation of AE (see Figure 3). This exclusion not only leads to the loss of valuable agricultural practices but also diminishes the cultural identity and agency of learners from indigenous and rural backgrounds.<sup>28</sup> Nhemachena and Hansen assert that incorporating IKS into curricula enhances educational relevance and builds resilience by aligning agricultural training with community knowledge and ecological realities.<sup>29</sup> This study suggests that effectively integrating IKS requires us to move beyond tokenism.

### **Institutional resistance and inertia**

Institutional resistance remains a significant barrier to the decolonisation of AE, rooted in historically entrenched systems that perpetuate colonial power structures (see Figure 3). Universities often exhibit reluctance to revise Eurocentric curricula or to legitimise alternative epistemologies, reflecting a broader institutional inertia driven by conservative academic cultures and bureaucratic rigidity.<sup>30</sup> This resistance is further compounded by the underrepresentation of Black and Indigenous academics in leadership and curriculum development roles, which perpetuates epistemic gatekeeping and hinders meaningful transformation.<sup>31</sup> Overcoming this inertia necessitates a shift towards inclusive governance, the promotion of equity in academic staffing, and participatory curriculum development processes that engage local

<sup>23</sup> D. Chikodzi and B. Nyoni, "Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Their Marginalisation in Agricultural Education in Zimbabwe," *Journal of Rural Studies* 85 (2021): 214–21; J. Thakrar and P. Naidoo, "Indigenous Agricultural Knowledge in Higher Education: Moving beyond Tokenism," *Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension* 28, no. 4 (2022): 307–22.

<sup>24</sup> T., Sibanda and T. Ngcobo, "Smallholder Agriculture and Food Security in South Africa: Bridging the Gap between Policy and Practice," *Agrekon* 59, no. 3 (2020): 252–70.

<sup>25</sup> H. Lotz-Sisitka, M. Moyo, and S. Ranger, "Education for Sustainable Development in African Contexts: Decolonizing Epistemologies and Indigenous Knowledge," *Journal of Education for Sustainable Development* 10, no. 1 (2016): 36–48.

<sup>26</sup> J. Jansen, *As by Fire: The End of the South African University* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2017); J. W. F. Muwanga-Zake, "Epistemic Justice in African Higher Education: A Case for Decolonising Agricultural Curricula," *Journal of Education and Development in Africa* 12, no. 2 (2021): 25–41.

<sup>27</sup> J. Kamanzi and M. Wilson, "Participatory Learning and Indigenous Knowledge Integration in African Agricultural Education," *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* 12, no. 1 (2023): 123–37.

<sup>28</sup> O. C. Ajayi, P. A. Le Roux, and B. M. Campbell, "Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Climate Change Adaptation in African Agriculture: A Systematic Review," *Sustainability* 14, no. 4 (2022): 2103.

<sup>29</sup> C. Nhemachena, J. W. Hansen, and C. Jack, "Integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Climate Science: Lessons from Africa for Adaptation," *Weather, Climate, and Society* 7, no. 1 (2015): 33–46.

<sup>30</sup> Le Grange, "Decolonising the University Curriculum"; N. Maseko and S. Masuku, "Institutional Resistance to Decolonisation of Agricultural Education in South Africa," *Journal of Higher Education in Africa* 20, no. 1 (2022): 45–59.

<sup>31</sup> Heleta, "Decolonisation of Higher Education: Dismantling Epistemic Violence and Eurocentrism in South Africa."

communities and knowledge holders.<sup>32</sup> The literature increasingly emphasises the value of place-based education and participatory pedagogy as strategies for institutional change that can democratise knowledge production and dismantle historical hierarchies.<sup>33</sup>

### Colonial legacy in curricula and epistemology

The persistent influence of colonial ideology on AE is most evident in the continued dominance of Western scientific paradigms within the curriculum (*see Figure 3*). These paradigms frequently disregard local knowledge systems, resulting in a disconnect between the educational content and the lived experiences of numerous learners, particularly those from rural or indigenous communities.<sup>34</sup> This epistemic bias not only devalues indigenous agricultural practices but also alienates students whose cultural identities are excluded from the learning process.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, the education system fails to promote locally relevant solutions or empower graduates to support community resilience. Thus, decolonising AE necessitates a comprehensive restructuring of curricula to foster epistemic plurality, which includes recognising indigenous contributions as being equal to scientific knowledge.

### Strategies to Promote Agricultural Decolonisation in Education

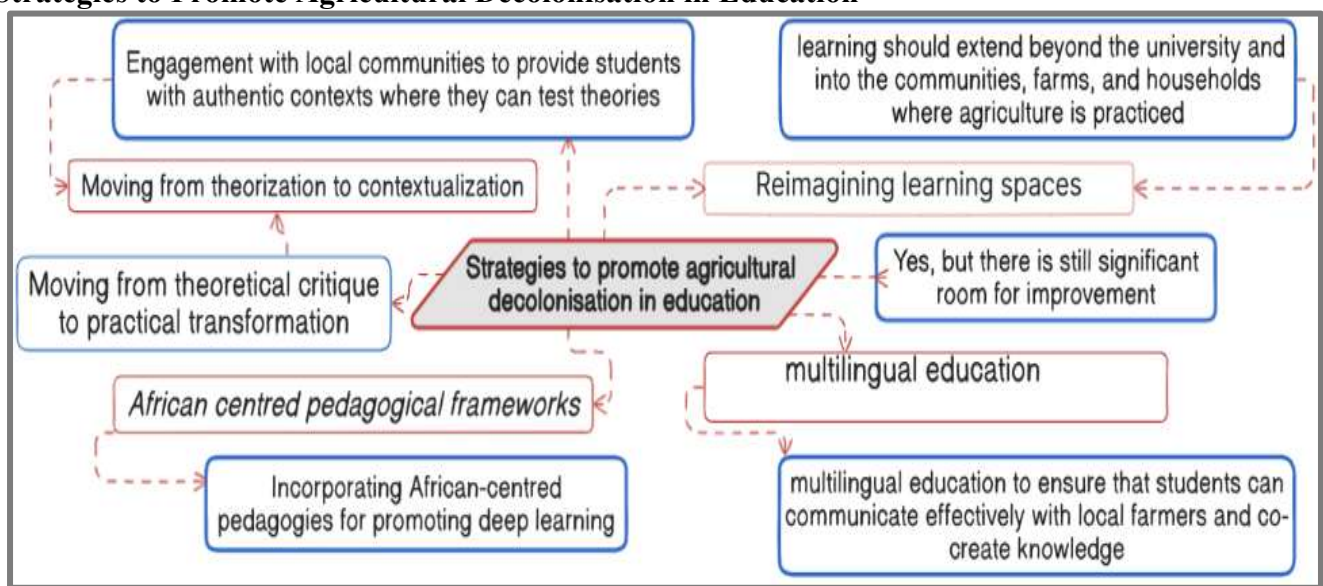


Figure 4 illustrates the strategies to promote agricultural decolonisation in education

### Moving from theorization to contextualization

The data revealed that a key barrier to the decolonization of AE is the persistence of rigid, standardised curricula shaped by colonial, extractivist models that prioritise commercial, large-scale production (see Figure 4). This entrenched orientation marginalises alternative epistemologies and agricultural practices rooted in local contexts. Sangwa and Mutabazi's argument for curriculum contextualisation is particularly relevant, as decolonisation can only move beyond rhetorical critique when it is grounded in practical, context-responsive transformation that reflects South Africa's social, historical and agrarian realities.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Mlamuli Nkosingphile Hlatshwayo and Innocentia Alexander, "We've Been Taught to Understand That We Don't Have Anything to Contribute towards Knowledge': Exploring Academics' Understanding of Decolonising Curricula in Higher Education," *Journal of Education (University of KwaZulu-Natal)*, no. 82 (2021): 44–59.

<sup>33</sup> E., Miller and Q. Mkabela, "Participatory and Place-Based Approaches to Curriculum Reform in African Agricultural Education," *Curriculum Inquiry* 53 (2023): 72–92.

<sup>34</sup> T. Moyo and T. Dube, "Revisiting Agricultural Education in Postcolonial South Africa: Towards an Inclusive Curriculum," *South African Journal of Education* 41, no. 3 (2021): a1435.

<sup>35</sup> L., Khumalo, N., Mashingaidze, and M. Sibanda, "Indigenous Agricultural Knowledge and Climate Resilience in Rural South Africa," *African Journal of Agricultural Research* 14, no. 5 (2019): 245–54.

<sup>36</sup> Sixbert Sangwa and Placide Mutabazi, "The Global Accreditation Paradox: Navigating the Tension Between Quality Assurance, Innovation, and Equity in Higher Education," *Innovation, and Equity in Higher Education* (August 26, 2025), 2025.

Participants emphasized the need for curricula that incorporate the lived experiences and agronomic expertise of smallholder and indigenous farmers, particularly from historically disadvantaged communities. In line with Roberts's curriculum orientations, AE must be reimagined as a tool for social transformation and civic engagement.<sup>37</sup> Such reorientation ensures that pedagogy is not only academically rigorous but also politically and culturally responsive. Recognising local knowledge as a legitimate epistemic resource enhances student engagement and bridges theory with the socio-ecological complexities of rural livelihoods. This necessitates the co-creation of curricula, sustained intercultural dialogue, and pedagogical frameworks that validate IK as dynamic, empirical, and complementary to scientific methods.

### **Teaching Methods Grounded in African Pedagogical Frameworks**

The findings further underscore that the decolonisation of AE requires fundamental pedagogical reform (see Figure 4). Participants articulated their dissatisfaction with prevailing teacher-centred approaches that marginalise student voices and disengage learners from their socio-cultural contexts. Instead, they advocated for African-centred pedagogies informed by behaviourist and cognitive theories rooted in local realities.<sup>38</sup> These findings align with Boughey and McKenna's assertion that effective learning entails both cognitive and behavioural dimensions.<sup>39</sup> Participatory methods, such as community-based learning, peer collaboration, fieldwork, and reflective assessment, were identified as essential for deep learning and student empowerment. These approaches facilitate students' critical engagement with agricultural challenges while valuing experiential knowledge. Participatory fieldwork and problem-based learning with local farmers were particularly noted for their capacity to foster critical consciousness. These methods address what Mann refers to as “*student alienation*” by creating inclusive learning environments wherein students perceive themselves as agents of change, capable of bridging knowledge systems.<sup>40</sup>

### **Multilingual education for epistemic justice**

Another critical insight emerging from the study is the role of language in shaping epistemic access (see Figure 4). The dominance of English in higher education, coupled with a limited accommodation of linguistic diversity, was found to inhibit both comprehension and meaningful community engagement. Echoing Mbembe's critique, the research emphasises the imperative for multilingual pedagogies to democratise knowledge production and dissemination.<sup>41</sup> Participants noted that the use of indigenous languages in teaching enhances students' ability to engage with local communities and contributes to more inclusive knowledge co-creation. Multilingual education affirms students' cultural identities while supporting the transmission of agro-ecological knowledge rooted in local contexts. Moreover, it strengthens the effectiveness of community extension work, thereby reinforcing the social utility of AE.

### **Reimagining learning spaces beyond the classroom**

The study interrogates the spatial rigidity inherent in traditional learning environments within higher education (see Figure 4). Classrooms constructed in accordance with Eurocentric standards frequently exclude community-based knowledge systems, thereby alienating students from the agricultural contexts in which they reside and engage. Participants advocated for learning spaces that transcend the university boundaries and extend into communities, farms, and households, environments where agricultural practices are actively engaged and experienced.<sup>42</sup> Such settings facilitate relevance, inclusivity, and authenticity in learning. Grounding education in the lived experiences of rural communities not only

<sup>37</sup> P. Roberts, “Curriculum and Social Transformation: Orientations in Curriculum Theory and Practice,” *Curriculum Studies* 47, no. 2 (2015): 223–38.

<sup>38</sup> L. C. Moll, “African-Centred Pedagogies: Theory and Practice for Transformative Education,” *Educational Research Review* 32 (2021): 100387.

<sup>39</sup> C. Boughey and S. McKenna, *Understanding Higher Education: Alternative Perspectives* (African Minds, 2021).

<sup>40</sup> Sarah J Mann, “Alternative Perspectives on the Student Experience: Alienation and Engagement,” *Studies in Higher Education* 26, no. 1 (2001): 7–19.

<sup>41</sup> Mbembe, “Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive.”

<sup>42</sup> R. Mampane, K. Motlhabane, and T. Mapotse, “Reimagining Learning Spaces for Indigenous Knowledge in South African Higher Education,” *International Journal of Educational Development* 61 (2018): 43–50.

enhances relevance but also reframes agriculture as a dynamic and entrepreneurial field, particularly for young people who often perceive it as stagnant or irrelevant. By spatially reconfiguring learning environments, it is possible to create platforms for innovation, sustainability, and rural transformation.

### **Building communities of practice: stakeholder-driven education**

The research further substantiates Seehawer's concept of communities of practice as foundational to decolonised AE.<sup>43</sup> Engaging with local communities provides students with authentic opportunities to apply theoretical frameworks, participate in reciprocal learning, and gain metacognitive insights into farming systems. Importantly, local communities are not viewed merely as recipients of knowledge but as co-producers and critical stakeholders in curriculum development, assessment, and feedback processes. This approach fosters a collaborative model of education in which knowledge is developed through continuous dialogue with the communities it is intended to serve. However, participants cautioned against extractive or tokenistic involvement, advocating for structured, respectful partnerships that enhance rather than disrupt local livelihoods and knowledge systems.

### **Empowering students as cultural and epistemic agents**

Finally, the study uncovers the often-overlooked epistemic and cultural assets that students bring to the learning environment. Drawing on Layman and Civita's concept of community cultural wealth, participants highlighted essential forms of capital, aspirational, linguistic, familial, and resistant, that are crucial for decolonizing AE.<sup>44</sup> However, these assets are frequently undervalued within dominant academic structures. The findings echo George and Wooden's assertion that higher education should promote personal and ethical transformation.<sup>45</sup> In this context, decolonized AE must extend beyond technical skills training to cultivate socially conscious graduates who can serve as agents of change in their communities. Realizing this vision requires pedagogical reflexivity and robust professional development for educators to internalize and implement decolonial principles in their teaching and assessment practices.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the aforementioned points, the decolonisation of AE in South Africa, particularly in relation to teaching and learning, is both necessary and achievable; however, it necessitates deliberate and sustained institutional commitment. Current barriers, such as Eurocentric curricula, limited inclusion of IKS and structural inequalities, continue to impede progress. Addressing these challenges requires practical, context-specific strategies that promote inclusive pedagogies, curriculum reform, and the empowerment of both teachers and students. If approached thoughtfully, the decolonisation of AE possesses significant potential to transform not only the educational landscape but also the broader societal perception of agriculture, positioning it as a culturally relevant and socially equitable discipline. This paper has identified critical barriers and proposed viable strategies to facilitate such change. To support this momentum, further empirical research is recommended to develop a comprehensive understanding of existing teaching and learning practices and to assess the impact of decolonisation initiatives. Ultimately, HEIs must prioritise the decolonisation of AE as a cornerstone of broader transformation efforts within South Africa's postcolonial academic and developmental context.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Ajayi, O. C., P. A. Le Roux, and B. M. Campbell. "Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Climate Change Adaptation in African Agriculture: A Systematic Review." *Sustainability* 14, no. 4 (2022): 2103.  
Boikhutso, M. "Teachers' Perspectives on Integrating Indigenous Knowledge into Science Education in

---

<sup>43</sup> Maren Kristin Seehawer, "Decolonising Research in a Sub-Saharan African Context: Exploring Ubuntu as a Foundation for Research Methodology, Ethics and Agenda," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 21, no. 4 (2018): 453–66.

<sup>44</sup> Emma Layman and Nicole Civita, "Decolonizing Agriculture in the United States: Centering the Knowledges of Women and People of Color to Support Relational Farming Practices," *Agriculture and Human Values* 39, no. 3 (2022): 965–78.

<sup>45</sup> Babu George and Ontario Wooden, "Managing the Strategic Transformation of Higher Education through Artificial Intelligence," *Administrative Sciences* 13, no. 9 (2023): 196.

- South African Schools.” *African Journal of Research in Mathematics, Science and Technology Education* 24, no. 2 (2020): 170–81.
- Botha, Izelque, and Danitza Klopper. “Navigating Change: A Journey through Curriculum Review.” *South African Geographical Journal*, 2025, 1–16.
- Boughey, C., and S. McKenna. *Understanding Higher Education: Alternative Perspectives*. African Minds, 2021.
- Chikodzi, D., and B. Nyoni. “Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Their Marginalisation in Agricultural Education in Zimbabwe.” *Journal of Rural Studies* 85 (2021): 214–21.
- George, Babu, and Ontario Wooden. “Managing the Strategic Transformation of Higher Education through Artificial Intelligence.” *Administrative Sciences* 13, no. 9 (2023): 196.
- Grange, Lesley Le. “Decolonising the University Curriculum.” *South African Journal of Higher Education* 30, no. 2 (June 2016). <https://doi.org/10.20853/30-2-709>.
- Heleta, Savo. “Decolonisation of Higher Education: Dismantling Epistemic Violence and Eurocentrism in South Africa.” *Transformation in Higher Education* 1, no. 1 (2016): 1–8.
- Higgs, P. *Curriculum Studies in South Africa: A Focus on Agricultural Education*. HSRC Press, 2016.
- Hlatshwayo, Mlamuli Nkosingphile, and Innocentia Alexander. “‘We’ve Been Taught to Understand That We Don’t Have Anything to Contribute towards Knowledge’: Exploring Academics’ Understanding of Decolonising Curricula in Higher Education.” *Journal of Education (University of KwaZulu-Natal)*, no. 82 (2021): 44–59.
- Jansen, J. *As by Fire: The End of the South African University*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2017.
- Jansen, Jonathan, Shireen Motala, and Marcina Singh. “Beyond Decolonisation: Criticism, Comparison and Conjectures from the Global South.” *Comparative Education*, 2025, 1–12.
- Kamanzi, J., and M. Wilson. “Participatory Learning and Indigenous Knowledge Integration in African Agricultural Education.” *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* 12, no. 1 (2023): 123–37.
- Karumbaiah, Shamyia, and Jamiella Brooks. “How Colonial Continuities Underlie Algorithmic Injustices in Education.” In *2021 Conference on Research in Equitable and Sustained Participation in Engineering, Computing, and Technology (RESPECT)*, 1–6. IEEE, 2021.
- Keane, M., and S. Malcolm. “Teacher Education and Indigenous Knowledge in South Africa: Challenges of Decolonisation.” *Perspectives in Education* 37, no. 1 (2019): 65–78.
- Keevy, J., and J. Jansen. *Higher Education Curricula in South Africa: Towards Transformation*. University of Pretoria Press, 2021.
- Khumalo, L., N., Mashingaidze, and M. Sibanda. “Indigenous Agricultural Knowledge and Climate Resilience in Rural South Africa.” *African Journal of Agricultural Research* 14, no. 5 (2019): 245–54.
- Kraus, Sascha, Matthias Breier, Weng Marc Lim, Marina Dabić, Satish Kumar, Dominik Kanbach, Debmalya Mukherjee, Vincenzo Corvello, Juan Piñeiro-Chousa, and Eric Liguori. “Literature Reviews as Independent Studies: Guidelines for Academic Practice.” *Review of Managerial Science* 16, no. 8 (2022): 2577–95.
- Layman, Emma, and Nicole Civita. “Decolonizing Agriculture in the United States: Centering the Knowledges of Women and People of Color to Support Relational Farming Practices.” *Agriculture and Human Values* 39, no. 3 (2022): 965–78.
- Leibowitz, B., and V. Bozalek. “The Role of Curriculum in Epistemic Justice: Towards a Decolonial Approach to Education.” *South African Journal of Higher Education* 30, no. 2 (2016): 1–10.
- Letsekha, T. “The Integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Teacher Education: Challenges and Possibilities.” *Journal of Education* 86, no. 1 (2021): 85–105.
- Letsekha, T., and V. Pitsoe. “Curriculum Transformation and Indigenous Knowledge Systems in South African Universities.” *Higher Education Research & Development* 39, no. 3 (2020): 512–24.
- Lotz-Sisitka, H., M. Moyo, and S. Ranger. “Education for Sustainable Development in African Contexts: Decolonizing Epistemologies and Indigenous Knowledge.” *Journal of Education for Sustainable Development* 10, no. 1 (2016): 36–48.

- Mabhaudhi, T., A. T. Modi, and Y. G. Beletse. "Challenges and Opportunities for Mainstreaming Indigenous and Traditional Vegetables into Food Systems in South Africa." *Sustainability* 11, no. 2 (2019): 501.
- Magaiza, Grey, and Shadreck Muchaku. "Curriculum Enablement and Posthumanism: Pathways for Creating and Implementing a Community Development Curriculum." *Journal of Curriculum Studies Research* 5, no. 1 (March 14, 2023): 159–70. <https://doi.org/10.46303/jcsr.2023.12>.
- Mampane, R., K. Motlhabane, and T. Mapotse. "Reimagining Learning Spaces for Indigenous Knowledge in South African Higher Education." *International Journal of Educational Development* 61 (2018): 43–50.
- Manathunga, Catherine, Paul Williams, Tracey Bunda, Sue Stanton, Shelley Davidow, Kathryn Gilbey, and Maria Raciti. "Decolonisation through Poetry: Building First Nations' Voice and Promoting Truth-Telling." *Education as Change* 24, no. 1 (2020): 1–24.
- Mann, Sarah J. "Alternative Perspectives on the Student Experience: Alienation and Engagement." *Studies in Higher Education* 26, no. 1 (2001): 7–19.
- Maseko, N., and S. Masuku. "Institutional Resistance to Decolonisation of Agricultural Education in South Africa." *Journal of Higher Education in Africa* 20, no. 1 (2022): 45–59.
- Mbembe, A. "Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive." *Public Culture* 28, no. 1 (2016): 1–14.
- Miller, E., and Q. Mkabela. "Participatory and Place-Based Approaches to Curriculum Reform in African Agricultural Education." *Curriculum Inquiry* 53 (2023): 72–92.
- Moll, L. C. "African-Centred Pedagogies: Theory and Practice for Transformative Education." *Educational Research Review* 32 (2021): 100387.
- Morreira, Shannon, Kathy Luckett, Siseko H Kumalo, and Manjeet Ramgotra. "Confronting the Complexities of Decolonising Curricula and Pedagogy in Higher Education." *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* 5, no. 1–2 (2020): 1–18.
- Moyo, T., and T. Dube. "Revisiting Agricultural Education in Postcolonial South Africa: Towards an Inclusive Curriculum." *South African Journal of Education* 41, no. 3 (2021): a1435.
- Muwanga-Zake, J. W. F. "Epistemic Justice in African Higher Education: A Case for Decolonising Agricultural Curricula." *Journal of Education and Development in Africa* 12, no. 2 (2021): 25–41.
- Nhemachena, C., J. W. Hansen, and C. Jack. "Integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Climate Science: Lessons from Africa for Adaptation." *Weather, Climate, and Society* 7, no.1(2015):33–46.
- Nhemachena, C., M. Mwale, and W. Mupangwa. "Curriculum Reform in Agricultural Education: Integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems for Climate Resilience in Southern Africa." *African Journal of Agricultural Research* 16, no. 5 (2021): 656–65.
- Nimmo, Evelyn Roberta, Robson Laverdi, and Alessandra Izabel de Carvalho. "What Is the Role of Public History and Environmental Oral History in Supporting Conservation through Agroecology?" *Conservation* 4, no. 1 (2024): 82–97.
- Plessis, P. Du. "Decolonisation of Education in South Africa: Challenges to Decolonise the University Curriculum." *South African Journal of Higher Education*, March 2021. <https://doi.org/10.20853/35-1-4426>.
- Raidimi, E N, and H M Kabiti. "A Review of the Role of Agricultural Extension and Training in Achieving Sustainable Food Security: A Case of South Africa." *South African Journal of Agricultural Extension* 47, no. 3 (2019): 120–30.
- Roberts, P. "Curriculum and Social Transformation: Orientations in Curriculum Theory and Practice." *Curriculum Studies* 47, no. 2 (2015): 223–38.
- Sangwa, Sixbert, and Placide Mutabazi. "The Global Accreditation Paradox: Navigating the Tension Between Quality Assurance, Innovation, and Equity in Higher Education." *Innovation, and Equity in Higher Education* (August 26, 2025), 2025.
- Seehawer, Maren Kristin. "Decolonising Research in a Sub-Saharan African Context: Exploring Ubuntu as a Foundation for Research Methodology, Ethics and Agenda." *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 21, no. 4 (2018): 453–66.

- Shizha, Edward. "Indigenous Epistemologies and Decolonized Sustainable Livelihoods in Africa." In *The Palgrave Handbook on Critical Theories of Education*, 465–80. Springer, 2022.
- Sibanda, T., and T. Ngcobo. "Smallholder Agriculture and Food Security in South Africa: Bridging the Gap between Policy and Practice." *Agrekon* 59, no. 3 (2020): 252–70.
- Sobratee, Nafiisa, Rashieda Davids, Chuma B Chinzila, Tafadzwanashe Mabhaudhi, Pauline Scheelbeek, Albert T Modi, Alan D Dangour, and Rob Slotow. "Visioning a Food System for an Equitable Transition towards Sustainable Diets—A South African Perspective." *Sustainability* 14, no. 6 (2022): 3280.
- Swartz, L., L. Gibson, and S. Ngcobo. "Towards Epistemic Justice in Health Education: Lessons for Decolonising Curricula in Africa." *Medical Teacher* 45, no. 5 (2023): 505–13.
- Thakrar, J., and P. Naidoo. "Indigenous Agricultural Knowledge in Higher Education: Moving beyond Tokenism." *Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension* 28, no. 4 (2022): 307–22.
- Westhuizen, T Van der. "Theory U and Individual Entrepreneurial Orientation in Developing Youth Entrepreneurship in South Africa." *Journal of Contemporary Management* 14, no.1(2017): 531–53.

## Declarations

**Funding:** This research did not receive any external funding

**Author Contributions:** SM conceptualised the paper, searched for literature, ran the Atlas ti, and developed the paper; KH conceptualised the paper, and reviewed the manuscript; BN conceptualised the paper, reviewed the paper, shared some relevant articles, and coordinated the paper writing.

**Acknowledgements:** There are no acknowledgements to make.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**Data availability:** The study sourced information from publicly accessible literature without creating new datasets. For more information, please consult the references provided in the article.

## ABOUT AUTHORS

Shadreck Muchaku is a Researcher and Adjunct Professor at the University of Venda. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in International Relations, a Master of Public Management, and a PhD in Rural Development, all from the University of Venda, South Africa. His research work at the University of Fort Hare spans several interdisciplinary areas, including climate change, community engagement, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), rural development, entrepreneurship education, conflict resolution, and governance.

Dr. Hlekani M. Kabiti is a researcher at the Centre of Global Change at Walter Sisulu University, South Africa. She holds training in Agribusiness Management, Agricultural Economics and Rural Development. Dr Hlekani Kabiti is recognized as a Y2 (emerging researcher) by the South African National Research Foundation. Her current research interests are multidisciplinary, encompassing small-scale farming dynamics, rural livelihoods, socio-economic aspects of food security and the impact of climate change on these.

Prof. Bernard Nthambeleni is the Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Venda situated in Limpopo Province, Republic of South Africa. Prof Nthambeleni is an accomplished and successful executive with more than 26 years' experience in the higher education sector relating to teaching, management, research management & research administration, capacity building programmes, research and development. He possesses a wealth of experience and a breadth of knowledge and pertinent experience in the higher education sector. He has authored a number of papers in a peer reviewed and occasional journals.