

## Self-directed open educational practices for a decolonized South African curriculum: a process of localization for learning

Jako Olivier<sup>a,1</sup>

<sup>a</sup>North-West University – Potchefstroom (South Africa)

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### Abstract

This conceptual article explores self-directed localized open educational practices for a decolonized South African higher education curriculum. From the historical context, language demography and especially due to student protests regarding the curriculum the need for a decolonized South African curriculum is evident. In this article, an overview is presented about the context-specific issues in relation to decolonization and language. It is proposed that in order to move towards a decolonized South African curriculum, there should be a self-directed learning approach to open educational practices which would involve carefully planned and supported localization efforts. This process also implies acknowledging both internal and external localization as done in a structured or even student-driven manner. Furthermore, localization means drawing on translations study theories pertaining to specifically dynamic equivalence. This approach would require increasingly accommodating languages other than English in the higher education context and as such language attitude planning efforts are needed. Finally, open educational practices would require an open ongoing process which provides agency to South African teachers and students to use the language of their choice to engage with content applicable and relevant to their contexts. In addition, this would imply including indigenous knowledge in order to address the needs of a decolonized curriculum. In conclusion, this article presents some practical recommendations towards self-directed localized open educational practices for a decolonized South African higher education curriculum.

**KEYWORDS:** Self-directed Learning, Open Educational Practices, Open Educational Resources, Decolonization of the Curriculum, Localization.

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### 1. Introduction

South African higher education has been impacted by student protests and a grassroots campaign to decolonize the university curriculum (cf. Jansen, 2019; Lange, 2019; Le Grange, 2019). In addition, within the South African and the wider African context in the literature and educational practices the idea of decolonizing knowledge is not new and has been a reaction to the hegemony of Western or colonial

knowledge structures (Le Grange, 2019). Despite a history of efforts to counter the influence of the country and continent's colonial past, Western knowledge still predominates especially in higher education. Consequently, the need has been expressed for a change in the curriculum and this article attempts to address this issue through this conceptual consideration of the affordances of self-directed open educational practices and localization in this context.

The multilingual nature of the country (Olivier, 2011) has also contributed to the complexity of the context as 11 languages are recognized officially but there are more than 25 spoken in the country (Maseko & Vale, 2016; Ssebbunga-Masembe, Mugimu, Mugagga & Backman, 2015) while mainly English remains the major language of learning and teaching. In addition, despite many organizational changes in South African universities since the fall of apartheid and major changes in government and education after 1994 little has been done to address the nature of knowledge in the curriculum (Lange, 2019). This article aims to provide

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<sup>1</sup> corresponding author – email: [jako.olivier@nwu.ac.za](mailto:jako.olivier@nwu.ac.za)

options to address this gap.

This article explores the issue of decolonizing the curriculum in the South African context in terms of localized open educational practices (OEP) which relates to the use of open educational resources (OER) in the classroom. This focus is essential as it is considered that the OER movement aims to opening up access to knowledge through technology (cf. Pereira, 2007; Wiley, Bliss & McEwen, 2014). Part of this process is also allowing for the sharing, use and reuse of such knowledge. In addition, the possible advantages of OER in this context is evident from the literature (Olivier, Van der Westhuizen, Laubscher & Bailey, 2019). In this article, it is recommended that OEP are approached within the context of self-directed learning (Brockett & Hiemstra, 2019; Gibbons, 2002, De Beer & Mentz, 2019; Knowles, 1975).

Mulder (2009) acknowledges that “[c]olonialism and neo-colonialism severely affected and still affect the dissemination of knowledge in and on Africa” (p. 5). It is important to consider the role of OER in this context. In this regard, Amiel (2013) observes that OER can cross the divide between those who create and consume educational resources. Therefore, OER can be useful in countering what Jansen (2019) describes as “the regnant knowledge in the former colonies draws its authority from the West and, in particular, from the former colonial powers” (p. 14).

It is proposed that knowledge in the higher education context be adapted to address the needs of a changing South African student and wider academic community. This process implies some form of localization in order to make OER relevant for a South African context. Localization in this article, in agreement with Wolfenden and Adinolfi (2019), relates to both adaptation where the content is made relevant as well as translation where the text is converted from one language or language variety to another that is appropriate for the target learning context.

One way of addressing the curriculum concerns raised at the start of the article, is contextualizing and localizing content and within the context of this article specially OER. The UNESCO *Recommendation on OER* (UNESCO, 2019) also highlights the importance of OER being contextualized and localized.

Towards reaching these goals of creating OER that are locally, culturally and linguistically relevant, issues around decolonization and localization need to be considered. But such implementation should be related or even embedded within the OEP.

These aspects around a decolonized curriculum should also be considered within a wider context of learning that is supportive of diverse cultures, languages and knowledges. Consequently, this article should also be regarded within the wider scholarship of multicultural education especially in terms of technology integration

(cf. Morgan, 2014). In addition, this article aims to address the gap in the literature in terms of having theoretical frameworks regarding language accessibility in OER. In this regard, Oates and Hashimi (2016) observe that “[t]he issue of language accessibility remains an under-supported and under-researched need in developing the OER movement”.

Consequently, a further important consideration for this article is the issue of language status online and especially in terms of OER. In this regard, the hegemony of English within the context of OER is evident and this has sometimes led to the exclusion of certain language communities (cf. Cobo, 2013; Krelja Kurelovic, 2016; Oates & Hashimi, 2016; Olivier, 2018). This ties in with the need for not only contextualization of OER for specific contexts around the world but also specifically localization with regard to the languages used.

The research question posed by this conceptual article (cf. Jaakkola, 2020) is as follows: *What would self-directed localized OEP for a decolonized South African curriculum entail?*

## 2. Materials and Methods

In order to address the research question posed above, a conceptual study was undertaken for this article. In this regard this article, as is the case with conceptual articles, focused “primarily on theoretical advances without relying on data” (Yadav, 2010). The process involved a systematic search and selection of relevant key sources. Furthermore, a theory synthesis methodology was followed through exploring the intersections of self-directed open educational practices in terms of a decolonized South African curriculum by means of localization.

## 3. South African higher education context and the decolonization of the curriculum

As stated before, the South African higher education system has emerged from a racially segregated approach where basically only English and Afrikaans (both Germanic languages with roots in Europe) were used as languages of learning and teaching. After the fall of apartheid in the early 1990s the role of Afrikaans was diminished significantly (Olivier, 2014) due to associations of this language with the former apartheid regime as well as a decline in comparative student numbers who have this language as mother tongue at specific universities. Despite, constitutional recognition of additional nine other African languages as official languages and many efforts to include African languages in language policies and some

practices English is still the dominant language in South African universities (Olivier, 2018).

Due to the apartheid legacy university staff were historically mainly white and curriculums reflected a bias towards Western knowledge. It must be acknowledged that universities are and were not in fact homogenous and that there have been many exceptions to the rule. However, especially from the view of students the mentioned profile and bias remained a key issue. From the South African government, a number of efforts have been launched to transform higher education, but the urgent need for change came in the form of student protests.

A prominent protest was the Rhodes Must Fall protest at the University of Cape Town in 2015 which was aimed at removing a statue of a colonial-era statesman, Cecil John Rhodes. The protest was also supported by a highly successful social media campaign driven with the hashtag #RhodesMustFall. This protest quickly spread and the decolonization of the South African curriculum was demanded by students. (Cf. De Beer & Mentz, 2019; Jansen, 2019; Lange, 2019; Le Grange, 2019).

Since the protests noted here, many universities in South Africa have started with various efforts to work towards some decolonization of the curriculum. In addition, these efforts should also be regarded in the government's drive to support the inclusion of indigenous knowledge (cf. Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019) in the school context. Policy documents and legislation in South Africa also promote the idea of higher education being responsive to local needs, but in practice most efforts to change in this context was limited to the curriculum structure rather than the knowledge in the curriculum (Lange, 2019).

From the literature it is clear that decolonization is not a new concept and that it also pertains to intellectual decolonization (Le Grange, 2019). However, it is clear that the work around decolonizing the curriculum is not finished and that there is a need for an ongoing inclusive process where communities and students are also involved in the process. However, Le Grange (2019) observes that "students appear to invoke notions of decolonisation for symbolic reasons only, as these students and academics return to the settled curriculum after the protests" (p. 39). Therefore, the need for a continued and embedded is clear.

Contexts like annual protests by students around fees, language and accommodation as well as the COVID-19 pandemic has required universities to sometimes move to online content in a very short time. The #FeesMustFall campaign (cf. Le Grange, 2019) is a good example in this regard. This context has created the ideal milieu where localized OER could be utilized.

Consequently, this article proposes that using OER in OEP should be considered in any discussion around

decolonization of the South African curriculum. However, it is also important that the process or OEP be open and inclusive. In addition, it is proposed that self-directed learning, and in this case more specifically self-directed OEP, is considered in this context.

#### 4. Self-directed learning

In addition to the context of decolonization of the curriculum and the possible supporting resources like OER this article also promotes the importance of self-directed learning. The concept of *self-directed learning* is defined by Knowles (1975) as

*"a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies and evaluating learning outcomes"* (p. 18).

This process and student characteristic are considered in the higher education learning context, however, in this article the relevance of this concept for both decolonization and OEP is highlighted. Central to this discussion is also the self-directed learning ability of students to be able to identify material resources for learning. In addition, the relevance of self-directed learning extends from students to university lecturers as Mentz and De Beer (2019) state that teachers should also be self-directed themselves.

Self-directed learning is also relevant to this research as from literature this aspect is especially necessary in online environments which are typically also associated with OEP. In this regard, Lasfeto and Ulfa (2020) state that "[t]he level of self-directed learning readiness in using online technology is very significant to reach academic success" (p. 35). Self-directed learning also supports the creation of student-centered and collaborative spaces of learning (Lasfeto & Ulfa, 2020) which would be necessary for a more inclusive approach to OEP. Research has repeatedly proven the relevance of SDL for effective learning (Brockett & Hiemstra, 2019; Gibbons, 2002, De Beer & Mentz, 2019).

A key requirement for self-directed learning is the fact that options should be provided in terms of technologies (Lasfeto & Ulfa, 2020) but also in terms of content and language. In this regard, the availability of multilingual OER could be beneficial in multilingual contexts. In this regard, Valor Miró, Baquero-Arnal, Civera, Turró and Juan (2018) has shown how multilingual videos can be used effectively.

The inclusion of indigenous knowledge (cf. Ezeanya-

Esiobu, 2019) in the curriculum has been considered as a way to aid decolonizing the curriculum (Breidlid & Botha, 2015; De Beer & Mentz, 2019). Furthermore, the link and the affordances of self-directed learning and indigenous knowledge is also evident from the literature (De Beer & Mentz, 2019; Mentz & De Beer, 2019).

Importantly, De Beer and Mentz (2019) found that holders of indigenous knowledge, which is highly relevant for the decolonization of the curriculum, are self-directed learners themselves. In this context, De Beer and Mentz (2019) observe that the indigenous knowledge “holder’s learning is directed by finding innovative solutions to authentic problems” (p. 89).

Therefore, any OEP efforts within the context of decolonization should also foster self-directed learning in order to support student agency but also espouse life-long practices in this regard. In the next section, the issue of OEP are explored further.

## 5. Open educational practices (OEP)

The concept of OEP is defined by Wolfenden and Adinolfi (2019) as a “wide range of individual and collective practices inherent in conceptualising, creating, adapting, curating and sharing OER” (p. 327). It is clear that OEP depend on the use of OER. In this regard, OER was defined by UNESCO (2019) at the General Conference meeting in Paris in November 2019 as follows:

*“...learning, teaching and research materials in any format and medium that reside in the public domain or are under copyright that have been released under an open license, that permit no-cost access, re-use, re-purpose, adaptation and redistribution by others”.*

Central to OEP is open pedagogy and this pertains to the use of OER in practice. According to Wiley and Hilton (2018) open pedagogy is “the set of teaching and learning practices that are only possible or practical in the context of the 5R permissions which are characteristic of OER” (p. 135). In addition to David Wiley’s (2020) 5Rs, within the context of this article a sixth R is proposed:

*“Recontextualize – the right to append, adapt or modify content to be relevant to a specific learning context while considering existing biases and hegemony of knowledge from the West and the Global North”.*

This recontextualization relates to the concept of glocalization where the fusion of Western science and

indigenous knowledge at an epistemological level is implied (De Beer & Mentz, 2019). There is already evidence of good practices in terms of localizing open textbooks available online (cf. Jimes, Weiss & Keep, 2013). However, more can be done in this regard at higher education level. In addition, in this article OEP is regarded not only as a teacher-centered activity but rather a range of practices by teachers and students in a student-centered context where self-directed learning is fostered.

For the sake of this article, the revision of OER is prominent. Revising OER depends a lot on language and in the case of opening up the use of such resources implies localization and translation. In this context, Amiel (2013) notes that “[a]n often-ignored barrier to remix and revision is the English-language and western bias of the Internet and particularly OER” (p. 136). So, the challenge remains to situate OER in terms of language and content.

Similarly, Cobo (2013) states that there is a “need for a new understanding of access to content capable of addressing the cultural and linguistic barriers that exist beyond opening the access to resources” (p. 122). Hence, apart from the fact that the use of OER is impacted by access to technology (De los Arcos & Weller, 2018), the epistemological and linguistic access issues cannot be downplayed.

In the following discussion I explore what self-directed localized OEP for a decolonized South African curriculum would entail.

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1 Decolonizing content through translation and localization

Decolonizing the curriculum implies a reconsideration of certain content especially content associated with a colonial or neocolonial context. When it comes to the use of OER in higher education the bias in some OER towards the West or Global North (Wolfenden & Adinolfi, 2019) should also be considered.

Hence in the adaptation of OER a process of localization needs to be done in order to make the content relevant to a decolonized self-directed OEP. Localizing content is not a new concept (Wolfenden & Adinolfi, 2019) but the affordances of OER in this context can be extended in the South African context.

Wiley et al. (2014) acknowledge that localization is one of the most important but also least understood facets in terms of OER. In this regard, this article attempts at addressing this gap in the knowledge by exploring the intersections between self-directed OEP, OER, the decolonization of the curriculum and localization. Localizing OER implies rendering content in other

languages but also ensuring that the technology is appropriate for the context (Oates & Hashimi, 2016).

In essence, any efforts of adapting and localizing resources become a translation issue. Consequently, it is proposed in this article that practitioners within OEP draw on translation theories. Despite some attention to translation and the use of languages other than English in the scholarship of OER and OEP (cf. Amiel, 2013; Cobo, 2013; Oates & Hashimi, 2016), there is little focus on translation theory specifically in this context.

Wiley et al. (2014) refer to the “localization problem” in this context and emphasize localization should be done by a “local”. Consequently, localization implies some input from users of OER within the context in which it should be used and by implication could also extend to OEP agency among students and communities. Pereira (2007) also highlights the importance of content localizations by “local partners”, especially through the creation of pedagogical teams which could be supportive in collaborative localization (James et al., 2013; Wolfenden & Adinolfi, 2019) efforts. Tarasowa, Auer, Khalili and Unbehauen (2014) describe how crowd-sourcing could be used in the translation process of OER.

However, just as much as the fact that instructional design and creating a curriculum require very special skills in addition to in-depth subject knowledge, so should localization and translation also be considered as highly skilled activities. These issues prompt the need for collaborative work between different experts. The use of terminology like involving “locals” or “local partners”, as seen above, simplifies the actual needs in terms of localizing OER to the point of undermining the quality and reliability of successful OEP. Consequently, the key would be the users of OER: teachers. But in addition, any self-directed OEP could also involve instructional designers, curriculum specialists, translators and even lexicographers. The latter role is essential in the South African context as in many disciplines terminology would have to be developed or at least standardized.

Preparation is required for localization to be effective, but it does provide a number of advantages for teachers. In this regard, Wolfenden and Adinolfi (2019) showed how localization efforts can contribute to teacher agency, but they also note that it should draw on localisers’ knowledge and expertise.

If teachers are to be used in this context, they will have to be supported in order to understand not only the content but also the practices associated with specific OER. However, students could also potentially play an important role in this context.

In this article, it is proposed that localization is also viewed externally and internally. External localization usually happens prior to learning and it is consequently done by content experts with or without the aid of

language practitioners. While internal localization is done by students throughout the learning process. This can occur formally through structured localization activities which could be linked to certain learning outcomes. But this can also be done in a more unstructured or even covert manner in the sense of students localizing and specifically translating for their own needs. Such activities can even be called open translanguaging efforts.

The concept of *translanguaging* is described by García (2009) as an “act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages, in order to maximize communicative potential” (p. 140). So, for open translanguaging students make use of their own language resources, in a self-directed manner, in order to make support meaning-making from OER. In multilingual contexts like South African schools and universities this aspect can even be extended to multilingualism or what Makalela (2018) calls ubuntu translanguaging.

The distinction between interlingual, intralingual and intersemiotic translations (Jakobson, 1959; Mossop, 2016; Pârlog, 2019) is highly relevant for any adaptation of OER. Within specific OEP contexts a teacher might consider translating a resource from another language – within most contexts from English to another language – and this pertains to interlingual translation. Furthermore, intralingual translation might be even more common where an existing resource is adapted to be relevant to a specific context and hence the language of the source resource and target resource remains the same. While finally, in some instances a teacher might decide on adapting a resource from one modality to another (from a text to a video for example) and this relates to intersemiotic translation.

In any of these three ways of translation, the needs of a decolonized curriculum can and should also be considered. The translation of OER has also been addressed in the scholarship around OER (cf. Amiel, 2013).

A further translation-related concept which might also be of relevance for those working within OEP would be translation equivalence. Li (2018) traces the origins of a theory of equivalence back to the work by Federov in 1953 and highlights that equivalence has been central to Western translation theories since the mid-20th century. The concepts of dynamic equivalence and formal equivalence as conceptualised by Eugene Nida are also relevant. Formal equivalence emphasizes a translated text remaining faithful to the source text, while according to Nida (1964) dynamic equivalence relates focuses on the target audience receiving the same message through appropriate changes.

The challenge, therefore, remains on how teachers, students or other OER adapters could ensure dynamic

equivalence in their self-directed OEP especially within the context of a dynamic and decolonized curriculum. This would imply decolonization efforts in terms of languages and practices.

### 6.2 Decolonizing language

The issue of using languages other than English is imperative to any discussion on OEP and decolonizing the curriculum. In South African universities the prominence of English is clear (Lange, 2019; Olivier, 2018). Historically, English and Afrikaans were used in universities in the country, but after 1994 the use of Afrikaans has been diminished with some symbolic gestures towards recognizing African language formally through language policies but without extensive use of these languages apart from some limited good practices (cf. Maseko & Vale, 2016; Olivier, 2018).

The role of minority and underrepresented languages in terms of OER and OEP have been addressed in the literature. In this regard, Tiedau (2013) showed how a lesser-taught language such as Dutch could be promoted by means of OEP and Amiel (2013) recounted issues around the production of Portuguese OER. However, it is clear that for content in African languages there might be additional challenges as well in terms of terminology creation as well as standardization in spelling and orthography for example.

A further issue that needs to be addressed in terms of practices is to counter negativity towards African languages from the speakers of such languages who would in educational settings prefer English (Maseko & Vale, 2016; Ssebunga-Masembe et al., 2015) and a number of challenges in this regard (Magocha, Mutasa & Rammala, 2019). This is despite that fact that the advantages of content in the mother tongue are evident from the literature (Webb, 2006). In essence, the availability of multilingual OER would provide options to students without imposing mother tongue content on them.

Only through establishing policies supporting multilingualism and ensuring that they are enacted as well as promoting the use of African languages at individual level can any self-directed OEP be considered. Because, without the availability of languages as resources in the Knowlesian sense of self-directed learning (Knowles, 1975) decolonizing efforts would not be successful. In this regard, activities are needed in terms of language attitude planning (Olivier, 2018; Verhoef, 1998) through which attitudes to certain languages can be critically interrogated and changed. In this context, OEP can be addressed.

### 6.3 Decolonizing practices

A way in which OEP can be further decolonized is through emphasizing network-driven OER projects. The affordances of network-driven projects are stated by Mulder (2009) and in addition it is evident that this is already quite common in terms of the African context. Mulder explains that this approach, in opposition to content-centered and learner-centered approaches, are quite common on this continent due to cost considerations, creating a critical mass of expertise as well as the need for Western partner institutions having to create equal partnership with African partners for the sake of funding. However, an important aspect ignored by Mulder is the African cultural phenomenon of *ubuntu* which promotes a communal and sharing approach to education amongst other things. According to Letseka (2012) *ubuntu* relates to the African approach that “a human being is a human being because of other human beings” (p. 57) Hence, a network-driven approach to OEP could potentially also be of benefit in the South African context especially in countering information imperialism.

Decolonizing practices also implies accommodating more languages. Valor Miró et al. (2018) found that multilingual video subtitles were useful as OER, but also that automatic translations of subtitles had to be post-edited. Consequently, the role of subtitles as a way to accommodate multiple languages should not be ignored especially in terms of the affordances of bilingual and pivot subtitles (Olivier, 2011). In terms of pivot subtitles, this approach could even be extended to the translation of other OER as time could be saved if OER in closely-related languages are reused and adapted as necessary.

## **7. Recommendations**

From the discussion above some recommendations are made regarding self-directed localized OEP for a decolonized South African curriculum.

- Self-directed OEP should be informed not only by the historical and linguistic profiles of contexts such as the South African one, but also through considering student voices and needs.
- Decolonizing efforts should be regarded within a wider movement towards contextualizing and localizing or even glocalizing content. Furthermore, this process should be open and ongoing.
- It is essential that teachers and students are made self-directed in terms of addressing the needs of decolonizing the curriculum and localizing content to this end. This implies them having access but also being positive towards the use of especially African languages.

- OEP need to extend beyond retaining, reusing, revising, remixing and redistributing but also recontextualizing in order to address the hegemonies in terms of knowledge and embracing indigenous knowledge in the context of OER.
- It is proposed that network-driven (Mulder, 2009), participatory practices (Amiel, 2013) and collaborative authorship (James et al., 2013) as community-driven OER and OEP initiatives.
- Multilingual OER could be considered for multilingual contexts where content is provided in different languages in parallel. Such content should, however, still be localized and not be culturally neutral or generic. Such OER needs to then also be effectively describe through standardized metadata in terms of language, language variety and the target context.
- OEP should be structure to not only facilitate external localization as done by publishers, instructors and other content developers but also allow for opportunities for students to act in this capacity.
- The value of indigenous knowledge and indigenous knowledge holders should be considered in terms of OEP in order to contribute to the decolonization of the curriculum.
- OEP processes should involve not only teachers and students but could also involve instructional designers, curriculum specialists, translators and lexicographers.

## 8. Conclusion

This article agrees with Amiel (2013) as “[t]here is a need to foment the production of local knowledge and indigenous ways of knowing in order to foster adequate learning opportunities” (p. 136). To this end, it is proposed that any OEP be supportive of self-directed and act as a vehicle towards decolonizing the curriculum. In this way student agency and ownership in the education context can be ensured. Additionally, some of the steps and activities proposed in this chapter could potentially contribute towards wider cultural decolonization within the South African context, that remains to be explored empirically after wider adoption of self-directed localized OEP.

Self-directed localized OEP for a decolonized South African curriculum, therefore, entails an open ongoing process which provides agency to local teachers and students to use the language of their choice to engage with content applicable and relevant to their contexts. This should be done in the spirit of OER sharing or ubuntu but also with cognizance of quality needs which might imply appropriate peer review steps throughout the OEP. Self-directed localized OEP imply students

and teachers taking charge of the learning context towards opening up epistemological access for all South African students.

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