AUTHOR:
Dr M.C. Kgari-Masondo[1] iD
Dr P. Chimbunde[2] iD

AFFILIATION:
[1]University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

[2]Seke Teachers College, Zimbabwe

PROGRESS OF AN AFRICAN STUDENT DURING COVID-19 AND BEYOND IN HIGHER EDUCATION: RE-COLONISATION OF DECOLONISATION?

ABSTRACT

Following the closure of educational institutions, after the outbreak of COVID-19 in December 2019, even though grossly unprepared, universities sent their students home and adopted the online teaching approach to continue with the education of their students. However, little was done to assist most African students who were living in the rural context and trying to shake off the constraints of colonisation. Using the decolonisation lens, this qualitative case study used the lecturers' personal experiences and observations from the South African and Zimbabwean higher education context to report on the educational progress of the African student during COVID-19. Discussions of the two lecturers who communicated via WhatsApp, telephone and email were thematically analysed to generate data. Findings suggest that while the online teaching was regarded as the only way forward in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, it had remnants of colonialism that hampered the progress of the African student; thereby derailing the decolonisation project. The study suggests the employment of Umuntu Akalahlwa pedagogy as it safeguards humanisation of all students to avert the re-colonisation of the decolonised. The rationale for this article is thus to contribute towards the need for Umuntu Akalahlwa pedagogy in higher education given the background of COVID-19 and the socio-economic status of the African student.

Keywords: *COVID-19; decolonisation; higher education; rural context; re-colonisation; Umuntu Akalahlwa pedagogy.*

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The general populace across the globe expressed concern over the tremendous impact of COVID-19 on education, its leadership and students. More so, it had multiple challenges for lecturers in higher education (HE) given the dearth of online teaching and learning (T&L) technologies, methodologies and content considering the socio-economic status of students in low-income countries. Locating the lecturers' auto-ethnographies in the study of the impact of

COVID-19 on rural students in the African context has remained an uncharted area. As such, this study is African lecturers' self-reflections on how *Umuntu Akalahlwa* pedagogy could assist the marginalised students in rural Africa to escape re-colonisation by navigating how their needs can be met during a context such as COVID-19 bearing in mind their economic backgrounds. The significance of this study is its contribution to scholarship, on issues of re-colonisation of "decolonisation" juxtaposed to issues concerning online learning and rural students (Ndlovu-Gatseni, 2015a).

When COVID-19 was declared a pandemic on 20 March 2020, countries in all corners of the world implemented national school closures; affecting students (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020). The outbreak of COVID-19 and the emergence of online teaching presents concerns for researchers and educators in contexts as diverse as India (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020), China (Bao, 2020), Greece (Karalis & Raikou, 2020) and Morocco (Hibbi, Abdoun, & El Khatir, 2021) and deepened our understanding of the ramifications of COVID-19 on educational matters. For example, a growing number of universities across the world were reported to have either postponed or cancelled all campus events such as workshops, conferences, sports (both intra- and inter universities), and other activities (United Nations, 2020). The trenchant challenges posed by COVID-19 were exacerbated by the fact that the online teaching in African universities was still at the embryonic stage and most of them were caught unprepared. As posed by Karalis and Raikou (2020) universities had moved rapidly to transition various courses and programmes from face-to-face to online delivery mode. This move was bound to render teaching and learning (T&L) a difficult undertaking for lecturers and students. Studies across the globe report that, with the spread of COVID-19, countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, North America and South America have announced or implemented school and university closures and most universities have enforced localised closures (Viner *et al.,* 2020). However, a scan through recent research reveals that the move to an online environment took place overnight, and that most HE institutions were totally unprepared (Sutton & Jorge, 2020). The sudden adoption of online teaching in response to challenges posed by COVID-19 brought one good thing: it demonstrated how poorly HE was prepared for a radical change in instructional delivery (Bao, 2020). In light of that concern, Viner *et al.* (2020) suggest that we should rethink new approaches for digital delivery of experiential education. There was therefore a need to unpack the dimensions of the best practices and the appropriate pedagogy during this unprecedented and disruptive period of COVID-19 in developing countries, where lecturers were already battling to teach students from low strata of the social classes of the society. Most researches from December 2019 to date concentrated on management practices (Viner *et al.,* 2020), students' perspectives (Adnan & Anwar, 2020) and the imminent challenges (Qian *et al.,* 2020; Yuan, 2020). Little research was undertaken to present self-reflections by university lecturers on their experiences in teaching using online teaching, especially in the rural context of Africa. More so, from research undertaken, no study has been undertaken on issues of re-colonisation of decolonisation and issues in relation with online learning and rural students during the COVID-19 context. Hence, the study sought to assess the educational progress of the African student during COVID-19 in HE and how this is linked with re-colonisation of decolonisation. Another objective of the study is to suggest some strategies to avert challenges posed by the COVID-19 induced online learning and teaching approaches.

In South Africa and Zimbabwe, most students in HE are black and come from rural ecological settings. As a result, they struggle with connectivity and obtaining necessary

instruments required for online teaching, which are essential during this era of COVID-19. Therefore, the narratives in the unofficial arenas tend to slide to the view of re-colonisation of the marginalised African students since they lack resources to engage with online learning. This is due to what Ndlovu-Gatsheni regards as:

> Euro-North American-centric modernity as a broad discursive terrain that produced the slave trade, imperialism, colonialism and other systemic, structural and coercive external impositions constituted an epic form of disruption of the historical development of the continent (2015a: 12).

African areas are underdeveloped because it is taken as a norm that their inhabitants are the underclass and as such do not deserve better. Even after the decolonial period black areas continue to be under resourced. This paper emphasises the need for shaping ahead the unfinished projects of decolonisation of the modern world system and combatting re-colonisation. Generally, the article reveals how global imposed designs and colonial mediums of power actively work to unsettle and restrain African development. African countries vigorously feed to the global situation of certifying underdevelopment of their countries. As put by Mudimbe, Africa is sealed in continuing the "paradigm of difference" that demotes its standing in world affairs and questions its influence on human civilisation, progress and development (1994: xii). The "paradigm of difference" is a dominant theme of coloniality, which reproduced an Africa that was and is considered primitive, underdeveloped, unscientific and irrational. Hence Quijano perceives coloniality as "a constitutive element of global model of capitalist power"; grounded on the imposition of a racial and ethnic classification of the global population as the cornerstone of that model of power and it operates on the material and subjective levels of everyday social existence (2000: 342). As a result, institutions, including HE, suffers the negative impacts of such underdevelopment under which students enrolled in their institutions live. COVID-19 exposed the level of disregard for the poor especially African areas where most students live, which are underdeveloped with no electricity, limited water supply, poor infrastructure and no access to networks.

This article exposes that the manner in which rural areas are treated indicates coloniality as little is done to invest in such areas which results in dire ramifications towards people who reside in them especially students during this period of COVID-19. This is articulated well by Mamdani that, through colonisation the "native is pinned down, localised, thrown out of civilisation as an outcast, confined to custom, and then defined as its product" (2013: 2-3). Many students from Zimbabwe and South Africa who study in HE could not engage in online T&L due to issues of connectivity and electricity, and such students live in rural ecology as depicted in the narratives of lecturers in this study. Universities in both countries tried their utmost best to navigate the connectivity issues by inviting students to residences. But the government failed to see the urgency of improving rural areas by speeding up installation of electricity and network powers. This is the niche of this paper as debates in academia also miss the global agenda of decolonisation as we discuss issues of COVID-19 and its impact on education because issues of development and progress have to be key for all – despite race or locality.

The main aim of the paper is to investigate how the educational progress of the African student was affected and what could be done to curb the looming crisis of re-colonisation of the marginalised in society, to ensure uniform and quality education despite the hurdles of online T&L in HE. Chief in our contribution to scholarship is "who" are our students in African universities and "where" do they come from? In this article, we report on how to decolonise

the online pedagogy through employing *Umuntu Akalahlwa* to cater for the African student and offset re-colonisation which appears imminent in HE during COVID-19 and beyond. Our understanding of the COVID-19 situation and its impact on the progress of the Africa student in HE is of value to scholarship that celebrates the decolonisation of the university curriculum and its pedagogy that does not cater for integration of all students especially those who cannot engage in online T&L because of connectivity and related issues. Therefore, Zeleza resolved that "African history has yet to rid itself of the epistemic violence of imperialist historiography" (2005: 1).

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In order to contextualise this study, it is imperative to unpack key concepts to provide the reader with an understanding of what re-colonisation and *Umuntu Akalahlwa* pedagogy entail.

2.1. Re-colonisation

In this study, re-colonisation is derived from the term colonisation, which connotes domination of the colonised way of life including its epistemology. Re-colonisation in education refers to those disparities arising from the lack of unified or uniform education offered by different bodies that "set the stage for rising conflicting expectations and inequalities in life" (Nyamnjoh, 2015: 15). Consequently, decolonisation of the curriculum, content and pedagogy is indispensable.

2.2. *Umuntu Akalahlwa* pedagogy

Umuntu akalahlwa is the Zulu idiom inferring that a person cannot be thrown away or abandon humanity when things get tough for them. Masondo (2018 cited in Kgari-Masondo & Masondo, 2019) says that, the idiom – *Umuntu Akalahlwa* focuses on two facets, that is, (a) the obligation of humanity to care and love others, and (b) dealing with nonconformity. This means that for AmaZulu this idiom indicated that there is inherent value in each person and therefore must be treated in a humane manner. We consider Geduld and Sathorar (2016) who see pedagogy as determined by how, when and by whom it is ratified, a philosophy of education, informed by positionalities, ideologies and standpoints of lecturers and students. This also acknowledges their relationship to each other and their relationship to structure and power. To decolonise the pedagogy implies emphasising humanisation which, is directed by compassion, care, respect and love for others, their identities, history and experiences. This is what *Umuntu Akalahlwa* embraces of which Fataar (2018) argues it addresses the notion of knowledge redistribution and identities of students.

In essence, *Umuntu Akalahlwa* pedagogy emphasises participation of all learners. This suggests that it is a strategy that addresses diversity, reconciliation and promotes social cohesion, mediating inequalities and continuities within HE in the face of COVID-19. The pedagogy defies the colonial governmentality project that ensured that the colonised African people lose their African partiality as they were replicated by the colonial patterns as objects. The pedagogy fights against the anguish of Africans against estrangement and deprivation that was executed through a mixture of colonial adaptation policies, indirect and direct rule, obligatory particularism and ghettoization, and even "dilution in a nameless universalism" (Gallagher 2009: 34). *Umuntu Akalahlwa* pedagogy in the context of COVID-19 and beyond promulgates autonomy of the disadvantaged African students who cannot engage in online T&L due to diverse reasons including connectivity by ensuring that T&L is an inclusive global norm that forces those in power to seek creative ideas to not leave any student behind in

T&L. As suggested by Ndlovu-Gatsheni "decolonisation must robustly engage with Euro-North American-centric epistemology that continues to sideline knowledge from other parts of the world that is more relevant to the realities of the struggling peoples of Africa" (2015: 33). *Umuntu Akalahlwa* pedagogy provides insightful alternatives in HE if students are to benefit from the decolonisation project that they initiated and demonstrated during the FeesMustFall campaigns by ensuring that all knowledge must be integrated in T&L through Africanisation and indigenisation of education (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015b). Students also fought for free education so that no student is excluded from HE. The campaign is similar to the idiom of *Umuntu Akalahlwa* as it safeguards non-discrimination and exclusions.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The decolonisation lens was used in this paper. At the centre of decolonisation of the curriculum is the idea of considering the contexts of the learners, their cultures that are characterised by respect for all people and their culture and knowledge systems when constructing and implementing the curriculum (Chimbunde & Kgari-Masondo, 2020). Decolonisation considers the relationships between the goal of education, the context and content of education as well as the pedagogy of how it is distributed. Fataar (2018: vi) explained that decolonisation is constructed on a nullification of contemporary foreign training whose systematising attitude is aligned on modelling the people as foreign subjects and in the process "stripping them of their humanity and full potential". So by decolonising the curriculum, we are giving space to those historically marginalised to communicate from their frames of reference (le Grange, 2018). The decolonisation project had been built on a strong foundation as evidenced by much research whose foci are anchored in the need to respect the marginalised people, their culture and their knowledge systems (America & Le Grange, 2019; Charles, 2019; Fataar, 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Tafira, 2019). Decolonising the pedagogy therefore means creating spaces and resources for a dialogue among all members of the university on how to imagine and envision all cultures and knowledge systems in the curriculum, and with respect to how knowledge is being taught and how it frames the world (Charles, 2019). Charles explains that decolonising pedagogy helps us to recognise, understand and challenge the ways in which our world is shaped by colonialism. It also prompts us to examine our professional practices (2019: 3). This suggests that as lecturers we need to constantly self-reflect and interrogate how the content in HE is taught because decolonisation of knowledge is not about changing the content only but goes beyond that to encompass transforming the pedagogy. This is so because the way lecturers teach and students learn is of value.

We used the decolonisation lens to assess the educational progress of the African student in universities considering that these students were from different social classes with different socio-economic statuses. It also became useful in introspecting why online teaching marginalised students in universities and suggesting humanistic approaches lecturers could have used rather than the class-based pedagogies currently in use during the COVID-19 period. The decolonisation lens tallies with the *Umuntu Akalahlwa* pedagogy that denounces the disposal of people. The pedagogy promulgates all students must be respected and taught despite their context. This pedagogy is in line with the decolonisation pedagogy as it tackles the tension of whether decolonising HE is (in)commensurable with other social justice and transformation developments, not only in South Africa and Zimbabwe, but also internationally, particularly in relation to the extent to which decolonisation has become a global project. *Umuntu Akalahlwa* pedagogy as part of the decolonisation pedagogies is an important

political and pragmatic way that ensures education practitioners have to reflect critically on what it means to decolonise HE pedagogies in South Africa, Zimbabwe and globally by means of transformative education dialogues and practices that repossess humanity in knowing and knowledge construction. As clearly put by Mackinlay and Barney (2014: 54) "putting in conversation humanising pedagogies with decolonising discourses, the goal is to reconfigure those pedagogical practices through which HE continues to operate as a site of colonial power". Also, Fataar (2016) argues that a humanising pedagogy should declare the notion of knowledge reorganisation, that is, it requires providing acknowledgement of students' knowledge. This implies that in the midst of COVID-19 and beyond it is pivotal for the decolonisation agenda in HE not to neglect the context of the marginalised students from rural contexts who experience connectivity and other challenges inhibiting them from engaging in T&L.

4.   EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

Using the decolonisation lens, the study drew from the South African and Zimbabwean HE context to assess the educational progress of the African student during Covid-19. The case study deeply rooted in the qualitative approach, used auto-ethnography focusing on observations and experiences of two lecturers in HE to generate data on how students in universities were coping, given the outbreak of COVID-19 and the context of their rural background in the two countries. The case study was used because we were motivated to explore, seek understanding and establish the meaning of experiences from our perspectives since we were involved as university lecturers (Yin, 2014). We used the case study to investigate the African students' educational experiences and how these students understood the organisational context of their academic world, with the aim of gaining insight into how African universities interpreted and reacted to their COVID-19 experiences. The case study enables us to carry out the study in the natural setting of those experiences with results presented as narratives (Yin, 2014).

The term auto-ethnography was described by Reed-Danahay as a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context (Butz & Besio, 2009). We borrowed from Ngunjiri *et al.* (2010) who argue that auto-ethnography utilises data about self and context to gain an understanding of the connectivity between self and others. The study used the lecturers' personal teaching experiences as well as the context in which the lectures were conducted to discern how COVID-19 impacted on equality regarding the provision of education materials. This was in line with the arguments raised by McIlveen (2008) that the researcher using auto-ethnography consciously embeds him-/herself in theory and practice, and by way of intimate autobiographic account, explicates a phenomenon under investigation or intervention. We aimed to offer a way of giving voice to personal experience for the purpose of extending sociological understanding of how students were affected by the pedagogy changes posed by COVID-19. As such, the study was a self-reflection of two lecturers teaching in the Social Sciences (Social Change and Education to Masters of Education students as well as Economic History and Development to Honours students) in Zimbabwe and South Africa respectively. The use of our personal experiences was predicated on the basis that if lecturers in Africa were to be party to a global conversation on knowledge production and consumption, it was appropriate that it did so taking into account the interests and concerns of the lecturers. Auto-ethnographic in nature is based on highly personal accounts and practises of the author(s) (Sparkes, 2000). Personalised auto-ethnographic accounts of professional practice in

education, such as the ones in this article, can help to reconfigure power relations, introducing interpretations of experience and reconstructing practice communications. This is supported by Denshire who argues that the impact of auto-ethnography can be to "create discomfort through their challenges to traditional realist modes of representation" (2014: 840). The methodology is aligned with critical discourse analysis used in this article as it highlights matters of power irregularities, manipulation, exploitation and structural injustices (Blommaert & Bucean, 2000). This discourse relates with current debates globally of decoloniality as it concentrates on "mechanics and operations of colonial and re-colonial relations and the implications of imperial projects" (Simmons & Dei, 2012: 74).

We used our personal experiences as lecturers; observations of students' work and then engaged in telephonic, email and WhatsApp discussions to generate data. Our personal experiences assisted us to connect the self and the context in which students learnt during COVID-19 which confirmed views that auto-ethnography allows the researcher to draw on his or her experience to extend understanding about a societal phenomenon (Wall, 2006). As authors we are African by race and we grew up in a rural context where we experienced abject poverty. We could therefore use our experiences to understand the challenges students from low-income families experience as we share similar backgrounds. We observed the students' work and how they managed time and tasks given. The purpose of the online discussion was to ascertain and explore from each other as authors about our students' experiences and what we observed in our classes. The online prompts provided open-endedness in terms of responses, which was intentional.

Following the advice of Creswell and Poth (2017) on trustworthiness of the study, we adopted an approach that used multiple data sources namely personal experiences, observation and online discussion to generate multiple perspectives directed at obtaining a more complete interpretation of the phenomena. Thus, there was methodological triangulation. To avoid personal bias of the findings we used peer review, which entails consulting some associates who were in a similar context to re-interrogate the raw data (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

We employed a thematic analysis by reducing the size of the data through sieving the most relevant data and identifying common and noteworthy patterns relating to our experiences and observations of our students during COVID-19 while teaching. We then used these patterns as themes. In analysing data, we followed Maree (2012) and Patton's (2015) advice that data analysis must be done concurrently with data generation to curb accumulation of large volumes of data.

5. DATA PRESENTATION

The first narrative is that of a lecturer (Chris) who teaches at a university in KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. The students she teaches are mostly African and come from an underprivileged setting located in a rural context where homes are overcrowded, with a lack of electricity, running water and poverty is rife. The second narrative is that of Chimbu, a part-time lecturer at a university in Zimbabwe. His students are mainly from a rural context and come from poverty-stricken homes. The two lecturers took a self-reflective narrative inquiry approach to make meaning from their observation of their students' experiences while teaching in HE during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chris observed the following from her students:

My observation of my students is that they were keen to study because I received emails enquiring about how the university will help them get access to internet and also since most of them were from rural areas. Many lecturers made matters worse as they emphasised the poverty of students with no solutions to how these students can be assisted to learn online despite their connectivity issues. To me it sounded as if these lecturers were endorsing re-colonisation as they were putting poverty as a buffer rather than understanding that the students not long ago used to study up to university level before the introduction of the online teaching. Yes online was the major buffer but other alternatives could be implemented. Students in my university were provided with Wi-Fi-routers and data. Initially my university was confused on what to do and it looked as if the poor were going to be left behind as many reside in rural areas without access to electricity and network. As one of my African students said, the university by not taking their economic background into consideration and the failure by the government to exert financial means to improve rural areas is like *"balahliwe"* (disposed) as the poor. But eventually decisions were made and it was decided in South Africa by the Minister of Higher Education Mr Blade Mzimande that no student must be left behind in the context of COVID-19. Those without laptops were given the gadgets through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). The students from rural context who did not have access to network were allowed back to campus. Such ventures that my university implemented were pivotal in navigating negative impact to the decolonisation agenda. The Fourth Industrial Revolution requires students to learn to use technology and it is important to encourage that. Some of my students mentioned that they want to engage in online learning as long as data is provided and there are ways of assisting with connectivity issues. My university thus allowed students with connectivity issues to come to residences at university but they were not taught using face-to-face they continued to learn online. This truly shows that we cannot allow decolonisation to halt due to challenges students experience, creative measures must take place to safeguard what students fought for when they demanded FeesMustFall and decolonisation of the curriculum.

Chimbu mentioned that:

After the closure of universities in Zimbabwe, soon after the outbreak of COVID-19, the students and I were overnight asked to embark on online T&L. A video on how to conduct the lectures was sent through e-mail by the coordinator, suggesting the employ of Google classroom – one of the virtual learning platforms. I was then asked to contact the five students located in rural parts of the countries which was done telephonically.

Joining the Google classroom by the students took long and thus was a challenge. Lectures notes and assignment were sent and the reaction time was long. That ignited my motivation to unearth the challenges the students were experiencing. My sociology courses had taught me to study the students' background in order to understand why they learn and behave the way they do. Face-to-face interaction was impossible due to the COVID-19 induced lockdown. I then checked their social records from my database I kept. The social record revealed that most of my African students were located in areas where mobile network connectivity was a challenge. My students mentioned that mobile connectivity was poor especially in some peripheral rural areas of Zimbabwe. This adversely affected them in joining the Google class platform and it was taxing to do research for their assignments yet they were expected to meet deadlines for submission. Besides network connectivity, data purchase was a tall order because of poverty.

I remembered well how we lived in the rural areas as a student growing up. ICT gadgets were a preserve of the rich. My students mentioned that they had no laptops except for smart phones. Some indicated that WhatsApp data bundles were cheaper than internet data. The students pleaded for [the] university to partner with mobile network providers in providing them with reasonably cheaper data so that all of them could benefit from HE. This suggested one strategy that HE could rope in to ensure that the decolonisation

project progresses even during COVID-19 and beyond. So the introduction of the Google class was not aligned with the contextual realities in HE, as well as the background and material conditions faced by the majority of African students. This then was re-colonisation in the making if HE neglects to reshape the pedagogies to embrace students from marginalised context. Reconfiguring pedagogies which are sensitive to African students from rural ecological settings remains locked in human intellect and has to be unpacked for the betterment of society. My university called students to attend a once off 2 to 3 days of face-to-face interactions with lecturers where social distance was maintained. The face-to-face interactions in a controlled environ[ment] was a stop-gap measure to retard the re-colonisation as that allowed all students to gain equal access to HE which colonisation had earlier restricted.

Drawing from the two lecturers' experiences, it emerged that the way the universities treated the students revealed that there was non-involvement and participation of students in deciding how they were to learn during the COVID-19 period. Yet, one critical imperative for the fidelity implementation of the decolonisation project is to embrace the student in all activities that had to do with their education. It was also revealed from the lecturers' narratives that poverty was described as a buffer to online teaching. The perspectives drawn from those experiences could be construed as re-colonisation since the way lecturers, through their universities, treated the students was against decolonisation. For instance, Chris narrated that lecturers could not provide an alternative way to deal with the poverty that could have been proffered through consulting the students.

From the two lecturers' discussions and narratives, the study revealed that internet connectivity and availability of modern instruments was a challenge that worked against the progress of the African student. The two universities later realised that there was a need to reconfigure and restructure their pedagogy to allow the African student to access education. The approaches taken by universities to ensure no student was left behind shows that the universities had other options other than to follow the online route. Following the online mode only could be understood as re-colonisation. We argue that re-colonisation emerges only if African universities, which were inherited from the colonial past and were decolonised, resort to modern technology in response to the COVID-19 pandemic without respect to the African student coming from very poor rural areas. Both narratives exposed that COVID-19 influences decolonisation pedagogy as the African student was affected negatively due to the socio-economic context from which many students come. In South Africa online teaching continued as indicated by Chris's narrative while in Zimbabwe Chimbu's reflection indicates that online was not a complete success and his university had to utilise face-to-face teaching for 3 days. This partly explains why decolonisation is still a dream both locally and globally. But sharing our insights and observations with each other as colleagues from different universities and countries meant that we were willing to learn from our obliviousness, T&L and improve our practice through discussion in order to mediate factors that impact negatively on decolonisation and revamp re-colonisation in HE. We encouraged each other to make decisions and find solutions together.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

We used thematic analysis to reduce the amount of data by separating the most relevant data and identifying common and noteworthy patterns relating to our experiences and observations of our students during COVID-19 while teaching and learning, and how that relates to decolonisation and re-colonisation in HE. To analyse our self-reflection narratives, we used

written archival documents, papers and scrapbooks as well as other secondary sources such as articles, books, online literature and newspapers to supplement the gaps. The key themes identified from our reflection journals were teased out based on the connection with the purpose of this paper, which ensured credibility and trustworthiness.

6.1. Internet connectivity and re-colonisation

From our personal experiences and observation, it emerged that online teaching at universities was, at this moment of the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the pedagogies that could be used. This was confirmed by Naciri et al. (2020) who argue that the use of mobile learning allows learning anytime, anyplace and anywhere; hence, it is a good alternative during COVID-19 though it has its own limitations. For the success of the online teaching to be realised, it needs preparation in terms of content, internet connectivity, the choice of a suitable online platform and provision of related materials. The lack of modern instruments such as laptops and data can be construed as re-colonisation because that disposes the African student and limits his/her participation in the education system as emphasised by the decolonisation project. It emerged from the narratives of the two lecturers that while online teaching was one of the choices available, it presented challenges related to internet connectivity and the COVID-19 induced lockdown. Some of the solutions to engage students in online T&L are part of re-colonisation because rurality stopped students from continuing with online learning because of infrastructure. The state in both countries never took firm decisions on improving rural areas to ensure that connectivity issues will be alleviated. This is part of what Ndlovu-Gatsheni regards as the ramifications of colonisation and other systemic, structural and coercive external impositions that they constituted an epic form of disruption of the historical development of the continent (2015a: 12). But it is important for Africans to fight against decolonisation and re-colonisation as indicated by Chris's narrative.

Chris's university ended up allowing students who struggled with connectivity to reside at the university campus so that online T&L could be used during the COVID-19 period. The online T&L was therefore negatively affected by a lack of connectivity. This finding was also consistent with several studies (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Daniel, 2020; Karalis & Raikou, 2020; Naciri *et al.,* 2020) which succinctly claimed that lack of access to fast, affordable and reliable internet connections hindered the process of online learning especially for those who were living in rural as well as marginalised communities. But the fact that the government never saw the agency of improving rural areas especially where Africans reside shows that, the decolonisation agenda is far-fetched globally. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni attested to the fact that; "… while African people continued to make history after the colonial encounters and even under direct colonialism, they were no longer able to do so outside coloniality" (2015a: 18). This infers that Africans must ensure they fight colonialism and not allow its resurfacing by building their countries to meet the demands of the changing globalised world.

Chimbu's narrative explains how in Zimbabwe his students could not fully engage in online learning, therefore, his university resorted to face-to-face teaching for three days to supplement the online T&L. The university did not engage in online T&L and succumbed to challenges of connectivity that were beyond their capabilities. He mentioned that "my university called students to attend 2 to 3 days of face-to-face interactions with lecturers where social distance was maintained. The face-to-face interaction in controlled environs was a stop-gap measure…" This means the educational progress of the rural student was disturbed by poverty as witnessed at the two universities where the data were generated. But the ways of navigating

rural students' challenges to engaging in online T&L were different in both universities. In Chris's context, online T&L continued but in Chimbu's it was halted and replaced by face-to-face teaching. The question arises; how are countries going to navigate towards the Fourth Industrial Revolution if the governments do not see the agency of improving underdeveloped countries and areas? As such, incessant glitches in network connectivity and related costs defeated the feasibility of the online teaching in Chimbu's university and became the preserve of a few at the expense of many African students who reside in rural settings This means the overnight change from traditional classrooms to online learning had resulted in completely different learning experiences for students in the same university and country. This became some form of re-colonisation of de-coloniality as students, despite their economic context, were not afforded other means such as providing data as occurred in Chris's university. Such alienation occurred because of colonial underdevelopment and the government's failure to exert financial means to improve such areas that form part of *ukulahlwa* (See student in Chris's narrative). Chris maintains that:

> The Fourth Industrial Revolution requires students to learn to use technology and it is important to encourage that. Some of my students mentioned that they want to engage in online learning as long as data is provided and there are ways of assisting with connectivity issues. My university thus allowed students with connectivity issues to come to residences at university but they were not taught using face-to-face they continued to learn online.

Inherent in this observation, was that online teaching in some universities like Chimbu's was in another manner alienating rather than embracing by not continuing to integrate the Fourth Industrial strategies of technological empowerment of students despite their social and economic context. This is so because it perpetuates exclusion and dehumanisation of some sections of students, which is against the decolonisation project that celebrates respect for all in knowledge construction; how that knowledge is distributed and the strategies of delivering it. Students in Chris's context are not against online T&L but they need infrastructure to engage in such learning so that they can participate in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Their plea is aligned with *Umuntu Akalahlwa* pedagogy as they maintain that no student must be left behind but progress must occur. This indicates that there is no urgency in ensuring the decolonisation agenda globally by improving areas and countries that were colonised so progress can occur. As mentioned by Chris that, "…we cannot allow decolonisation to halt due to challenges students experience, creative measures must take place to safeguard what students fought for when they demanded FeesMustFall and decolonisation of the curriculum". The proposed rehabilitation by Chinweizu (1987) is that of "decolonising the African mind", which Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015a) argues "is proving to be very difficult in a context where coloniality is still actively working to hail Africans into embracing coloniality as a dominating worldview". In this context it implies that, African governments need to take responsibility and develop their African states that are underdeveloped.

Drawing from our personal experiences and WhatsApp discussions, it emerged that the modern education systems in Africa had their origin in colonialism. We, therefore, argue that the state of poverty in African communities was created by humans during the colonial period in which resources meant for them were expatriated to develop the West. It was not by choice, but the African students are victims of colonial circumstances that again disadvantage them in HE during this pandemic. But other universities such as Chris's indicated that re-colonisation of colonisation cannot be allowed to persist as they went and bought data and

ensured those who reside in a rural context and struggle with connections come back to the university and continue with online learning and teaching. But colonialism continues to live with the African student in HE in the form of re-colonisation as reflected in Chris's narratives where lecturers viewed poverty as a buffer to online learning. As argued by Morreira (2015) that whilst colonialism may have been and gone, the colonial matrix of power was still very much seen, lived and felt in the present day.

6.2. *Umuntu Akalahlwa* pedagogy and the online teaching and learning

It arose from personal experience, observations and WhatsApp discussions that while online T&L was appropriate during this time of the COVID-19 crisis, the mode was to work well if complemented with other strategies drawn from the decolonisation pedagogies. For Chris, students at her university who encountered problems of data and internet connectivity were asked to stay close by the university to access the university facilities and continue learning online and not face-to-face T&L. Chris mentioned that poor students felt dehumanised and discriminated against since the university was not forthcoming with data and strategies to not leave any student behind in terms of T&L. She revealed that, "…one of my African students said, the university by not taking their economic background into consideration is like *'balahliwe'* (disposed) as the poor." As for Chimbu, his university conducted a controlled face-to-face interaction between students and lecturers for about 3 days where social distancing was practised. His students suggested HE partner with internet service providers in providing cheap data bundles. From this finding, we argue for community participation in assisting all students with data that can be used for online learning by African students. Otherwise the progress of the African student will lag behind those who have access to data and the internet. When this happens then it becomes anti-humanisation, which the *Umuntu Akalahlwa* pedagogy does not embrace because it rejects the disposal of other students.

The significance of this study was that there is a stronger need for HE to rethink outside the box and reconfigure strategies to complement the online T&L and ensure decolonisation and not to leave any student behind. We argue that online T&L is here to stay beyond COVID-19 but should not somehow discriminate against sections of our African students in HE. As such, use of the *Umuntu Akalahlwa* pedagogy remains an area for exploration that can alleviate problems in the context of disasters such as COVID-19. This suggests that if COVID-19 induced online teaching continues without taking aboard the *Umuntu Akalahlwa* pedagogy then a vicious cycle could occur in which the underprivileged remain cosseted in their poverty. Once redress fails, students could face re-colonisation of the mind after completing the uneven and selective HE. As explicitly put by Fishbane and Tomer (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic exposed that many white students were advantaged due to access to infrastructure compared to other races. This suggests that, due to the "long-standing notions of being founded on racial classification and hierarchisation of human population" students will continue classism, racism and discrimination, and Ndlovu-Gatsheni argues that it "must be totally rejected" (2015a: 33).

Considering the COVID-19 induced online teaching, those advantaged by the old education system before the pandemic enjoyed on the pretext of merit or their socio-economic status to do their HE work, thereby positioning themselves in the upper rungs of the society, which confirms what colonial education did. This stresses the perspective that colonisation was resurfacing as re-colonisation during the COVID-19 period because the COVID-19 induced online learning was incompatible with the pursuit of real social responsiveness and genuine collective interests (Nyamnjoh, 2012). This was particularly so when we look at the

participation of the poor African student in the educational activities during the COVID-19 period as emerged from the narratives and the observations in this study. In order to increase the participation of the African student, this article argues that there is a need to contextualise and decolonise the pedagogy as suggested by Charles (2019). *Umuntu Akalahlwa* pedagogy provides insightful alternatives in HE if students are to benefit from the decolonisation project that they initiated and demonstrated during the FeesMustFall campaigns.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study revealed many gaps in the development of online T&L because mobile connectivity was poor, especially in peripheral rural areas of developing countries. The socio-economic challenges plaguing developing countries were highly taxing on students in terms of incurring cost for data bundles, which are expensive. Therefore, it is imperative for universities to partner with mobile network services in providing students with reasonably priced data bundles. If possible, universities can cushion students from economic challenges by organising the crediting of data bundles to students and lecturers' mobile numbers for academic purposes to buffer the re-colonisation process that is beckoning in HE if not abated.

Governments globally must expedite development of rural and areas inhabited by the poor. COVID-19 has exposed the disregard of such settings and this paper has highlighted how such underdevelopment has affected students especially the poor residing in rural areas who are mainly African. Not improving rural areas contributes to re-colonisation as it indicates discrimination and disregard of the African people as insignificant and not worthy of progress. Electricity, network poles and proper infrastructure must be critical for the governments globally if the Fourth Industrial Revolution and decolonisation can be realised.

There is a greater need for HE to reclaim the decolonisation of the pedagogy by inserting *Umuntu Akalahlwa* pedagogy to complement the online T&L approach in the context of COVID-19 and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which both demand the use of modern technology by students. This will go a long way in reaffirming the decolonisation project that is under threat of re-colonisation in the face of COVID-19 and beyond.

8. CONCLUSION

While COVID-19 has and continues to threaten human life it has proved to be a litmus test for HE to show the seriousness in pushing further the decolonisation project beyond such pandemics. This paper indicates that education has been the battleground of the poor and rich and as a result, HE T&L approaches still neglect the integration of the context of the poor so they can enjoy quality education and "no student is missed". COVID-19 has underlined the stringent gaps between the poor and rich students and that little has been done by the governments and HE to bridge and make sure that the poor enjoy quality education amidst their challenges to resources. Given that backdrop, marginalisation of African students in HE has been heightened by this scourge, where insufficient and discriminatory access and availability of the internet affected students' capacity to participate in digital learning. As such, HE, through the online pedagogy, remains a site for colonial power and contestations among students of different socio-economic status. To ameliorate this position, which reflects the re-colonisation of the decolonisation project, the study proposes the employment of *the Umuntu Akalahlwa* pedagogy that is embedded in the decolonisation pedagogies to complement the online learning and teaching in order to make HE embracing rather than alienating. The call

for this paper is how can we ensure that decolonisation remains at the centre of HE and African students are not alienated from enjoying quality education during and beyond the COVID-19 period?

Through the reflections of two lecturers, one from South Africa and the other from Zimbabwe HE institutions, the paper has indicated that we have to move away from silencing students' context when we adopt teaching strategies that are accorded as significant but due to political propaganda are pushed to the periphery. For example, the narrative of a Zimbabwean lecturer depicted a scenario of students being forced into face-to-face teaching due to the fact that they come from a rural poverty context and had no means of access to network and data. The South African lecturer mentioned that, at her university students from rural contexts and those without network access were also recalled to campus to use university facilities but continued with online T&L. This indicates that HE has to be at the centre of the Fourth Industrial Revolution by being creative at all times on how they can best engage technology in T&L despite the context of students. Therefore, this paper warns against HE engaging in re-colonisation of decolonisation by not integrating online T&L as it occurred in other universities during the COVID-19 period. Hence, the study proposes *Umuntu Akalahlwa* as a possible strategy of ensuring that HE does not engage in re-colonisation of decolonisation by excluding students from poor backgrounds to engage in education based on their social setting. This calls for the government, teachers, lecturers and everyone globally who strives for equality, respect and tolerance to defy research received that undermines the "other" people's context (poor) and teach integrating all social contexts to safeguard that no student is left behind when teaching. The paper is a contribution to the topical global debate on decolonisation by stating that the poor students who are African and their social setting must be considered in HE while constructing T&L strategies, especially during the era of COVID-19 and beyond.

REFERENCES

Adnan, M. & Anwar, K. 2020. Online learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic: Students' perspectives. *Journal of Pedagogical Sociology and Psychology,* 2(1): 45–51. https://doi.org/10.33902/JPSP.2020261309

America, C. & Le Grange, L. 2019. Dekolonisering van die kurrikulum: 'n Kontekstualisering van Ekonomie en Besigheidstudieonderrig [Decolonising the curriculum: Contextualising economics and business studies teaching]. *Tydskrif Vir Geesteswetenskappe*, 59(1): 106–124. https://doi.org/10.17159/2224-7912/2019/v59n1a7

Bao, W. 2020. COVID-19 and online teaching in higher education: A case study of Peking University. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, 2: 113–115. https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.191

Blommaert, J. & Bucean, C. 2000. Critical discourse analysis. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 29*(1), 447-466. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.29.1.447

Bozkurt, A. & Sharma, R.C. 2020. Emergency remote teaching in a time of global crisis due to CoronaVirus pandemic. *Asian Journal of Distance Education,* 15(1): i–vi.

Butz, D. & Besio, K. 2009. Autoethnography. *Geography Compass*, 3(5):1660–1674. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2009.00279.x

Charles, E. 2019. Decolonizing the curriculum. *Insights,* 32(24): 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1629/uksg.475

Charles, M. 2019. Effective teaching and learning: Decolonizing the curriculum. *Journal of Black Studies,* 50(8): 731–766. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934719885631

Chimbunde, P. & Kgari-Masondo, M. C. 2020. Representation of the Zimbabwean2015–2022 Social Studies curriculum: Teachers' perspectives on challenges and "Ubuntulising" curriculum change and implementation. *Perspectives in Education,* 38(1): 269–282. https://doi.org/10.18820/2519593X/pie.v38i1.19

Chinweizu. 1987. *Decolonizing the African mind*. Lagos: Pero Press.

Creswell, J.W. & Poth C.N. 2017. *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (fourth edition). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Cucinotta, D. & Vanelli, M. 2020. WHO declares COVID-19 a pandemic. *Acta Bio-Medica: Atenei Parmensis,* 91(1): 157–160.

Daniel, S.J. 2020. Education and the COVID-19 pandemic. *Prospects,* 49: 91–96. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-020-09464-3.

Denshire, D. 2014. On auto-ethnography. *Current Sociology,* 62: 831–850. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392114533339

Fataar A. 2016. Towards a humanising pedagogy through an engagement with the social–subjective in educational theorising in South Africa. *Educational Research for Social Change,* 5(1):10–21. https://doi.org/10.17159/2221-4070/2016/v5i1a1

Fataar, A. 2018. Decolonising education in South Africa: Perspectives and debates. *Educational Research for Social Change*, 7(1): vi–ix.

Fishbane, L. & Tomer, A. 2020. *As classes move online during COVID-19, what are disconnected students to do?* Available at https://www.brookings.edu/blog/theavenue/2020/03/20/.

Gallagher, M. 2009. Aime Cesaire and Francophone postcolonial thought. In C. Forsdick & D. Murphy (Eds.). *Postcolonial thought in the French-speaking world* (pp. 31–41). Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. https://doi.org/10.5949/UPO9781846319808.002

Hibbi, F.Z. Abdoun, O. & El Khatir, H. 2021. Coronavirus pandemic in Morocco: Measuring the impact of containment and improving the learning process in higher education. *International Journal of Information and Education Technology,* 11(1): 30–33. https://doi.org/10.18178/ijiet.2021.11.1.1485

Karalis, T. & Raikou, N. 2020. Teaching at the times of COVID-19: Inferences and implications for higher education pedagogy. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences,* 10(5): 479–493. https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v10-i5/7219

Kgari-Masondo, M.C. & Masondo, S. 2019. "For peace sake": African language and xenophobia in South Africa. *Journal of African Foreign Affairs,* 6(3): 87–102. https://doi.org/10.31920/2056-5658/2019/6n3a5

le Grange, L. 2018. Decolonising, Africanising, indigenising, and internationalising curriculum studies: Opportunities to (re)imagine the field. *Journal of Education*, 74: 5–18. https://doi.org/10.17159/2520-9868/i74a01

Mackinlay, E. & Barney, K. 2014. Unknown and unknowing possibilities: Transformative learning, social justice, and decolonising pedagogy in indigenous Australian studies. *Journal of Transformative Education,* 12(1): 54–73. https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344614541170

Maree, K. (Ed.) 2012. *First steps in research.* Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

McIlveen, P. 2008. Auto-ethnography as a method for reflexive research and practice in vocational psychology. *Australian Journal of Career Development,* 17*(*2): 13–20. https://doi.org/10.1177/103841620801700204

Morreira, S. 2015. Steps towards decolonial higher education in Southern Africa? Epistemic disobedience in the humanities. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 53(2): 287–301. http://jas.sagepub.com/content/early/2015/03/30/0021909615577499. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909615577499

Mudimbe, V.Y. 1994. *The Idea of Africa*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Naciri, A., Baba, M.A., Achbani, A. & Kharbach, A. 2020. Mobile learning in higher education: Unavoidable alternative during COVID-19. *Aquademia,* 4*(*1): ep20016. https://doi.org/10.29333/aquademia/8227

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J. & Tafira, K. 2019. The invention of the global South and the politics of South–South solidarity. In E. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh & P. Daley (Eds.). *Routledge Handbook of South–South Relations* (pp.127–140). https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315624495-9.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. 2015a. Genealogies of coloniality and implications for Africa's development. *Africa Development, XL*(3): 11–38.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. 2015b. Decoloniality as the future of Africa. *History Compass,* 13(10): 485–496. https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12264

Ngunjiri, F.W. Hernandez, K.A.C. & Chang, H. 2010. Living autoethnography: Connecting life and research. *Journal of Research Practice,* 6*(*1): 1–17.

Nyamnjoh, F.B. 2015. Potted plants in greenhouses: A critical reflection on the resilience of colonial education. *Africa Journal of Asian and African Studies,* 47(2): 129–154. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909611417240

Patton, M. Q. 2015. *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (fifth edition). Newbury Park, CA. SAGE.

Qian, X., Ren, R., Wang, Y., Guo, Y., Fang, J., Wu, Z.D., Liu, P.L. & Han, T.R. 2020. Fighting against the common enemy of COVID-19: A practice of building a community with a shared future for mankind. *Infectious Diseases of Poverty,* 9(34): 2–6. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40249-020-00650-1

Quijano, A. 2000. The coloniality of power and social classification. *Journal of World Systems,* 6(2): 342–386. https://doi.org/10.5195/jwsr.2000.228

Simmons, M. & Dei, G. 2012. Reframing anti-colonial theory for the diasporic context. *Postcolonial Directions in Education,* 1(1): 67–99.

Sparkes, A.C. 2000. Autoethnography and narratives of self: Reflections on criteria in action. *Sociology of Sport Journal,* 17(1): 21–43. https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.17.1.21

Sutton, M.J.G. & Jorge, C.F.B. 2020. Potential for radical change in higher education learning spaces after the pandemic. *Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching,* 3(1): 1–4. https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2020.3.1.20

United Nations. 2020. *Policy brief: Education during COVID-19 and beyond*. Paris: UNESCO.

Viner, R., Russell, S., Croker, H., Packer, J., Ward, J., Stansfield, C., Mytton, O. & Booy, R. 2020. School closure and management practices during coronavirus outbreaks including COVID-19: A rapid narrative systematic review. *SSRN Electronic Journal Review,* 4: 397–404. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3556648

Wall, S. 2006. An autoethnography on learning about autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods,* 5(2): 146–160. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500205

Yin, R.K. 2014. *Case study research: Design and methods*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Yuan, J. 2020. Important practice of fighting against novel coronavirus pneumonia: Building a community with a shared future for mankind. *International Journal of Social Science and Education Research,* 9(1): 2–6. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40249-020-00650-1

Zeleza, P.T. 2005. Banishing the silences: Towards the globalization of African history. Unpublished paper presented at the *11th CODESRIA General Assembly Conference*, Maputo, Mozambique, 6–10 December.