

DRAFT INDIVIDUAL PROJECT REPORT: TAU

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Project title: Decolonisation: Interrogating conceptual issues

Aim of the project

The urgency for a decolonised university curriculum in South Africa has been given mileage by the 2016 student protests. The quality and success of the decolonisation project the academy may develop hinges on clarity of understanding of what a decolonised curriculum is and looks like. This then necessitates the establishment of academic staff's understanding of the concept 'curriculum decolonisation'. The present study therefore, sought to establish Sol Plaatje University academic staff's diverse conceptions of curriculum decolonisation and its perceived manifestation in their own teaching specialisations.

Processes / Methods

Participatory research, which the present study adopted, cannot be canonised into a single, cohesive methodological strategy but seeks to match the method to the subject under study. It favours studies characterised by contextual structuredness and dynamism of meaning, as with the present study. Its main feature is the participation of all research partners in knowledge-generation. Within this participatory research, the interpretivist paradigm, which Denscombe (2014) sees as focusing on understanding and accounting for the meaning of participants experiences and actions, will be markedly manifest. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) see knowledge construction as being occasioned by descriptions of meanings of self-understanding. Participants in the study provided their own conceptions of decolonisation of the curriculum and how they envisage it would look like in their subject/ disciplinary specialisations.

Sampling

The proposed study has, as its population, all the academic staff in the School of Education at a South African University. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure representativeness among academic staff in terms of their status (early career, emerging and established academics as determined by their qualifications, designations and university teaching experience), gender, racial group, and teaching specialisation. Proportionate to the demographics of members within the School, the purposive sampling procedure yielded a sample of 12 participants (30% of the

population) whose characteristics are indicated in Appendix 1. Early career participants are labelled starting with letter A, Emerging academics with letter B and Established academics with letter C. The numbering after the letter differentiates the academics within the category.

Instruments

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used and allowed for a free-flowing directed discussion. An interview schedule of the questions that were asked is provided as appendix 2. The purpose was to generate a diverse range of views on few key questions to better understand conceptions held by academics (Liamputtong, 2011). The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent.

Data analysis

Analysis of data took a grounded analysis approach, characterised more by hypothesis generation than hypothesis testing; where categories/themes and analysis emerged from the transcribed and coded data, with minimal apriori assumptions. The discussion of findings was done in relation to terms related to decolonisation like Africanisation, Afrocentrism, transformation, indigenisation, localisation, decoloniality; and in relation to the levels at which decolonisation should occur (meta-theoretical level, theoretical level, methodological/pedagogical level, empirical level, applied knowledge level etc.). The figure below shows how the data collection and analysis merged in the study.

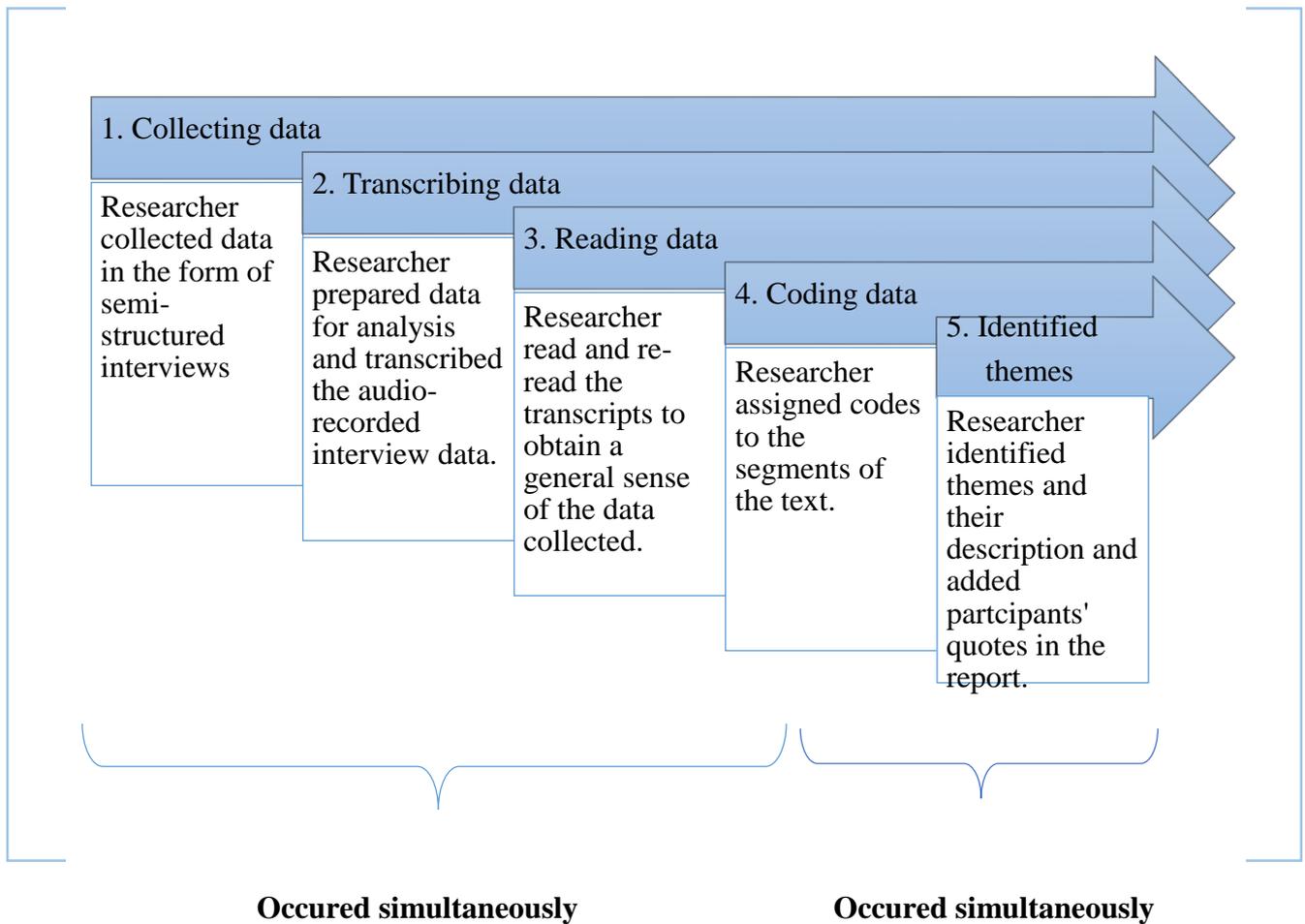


Figure 1: The qualitative process of data analysis (adapted from Creswell, 2012)

Ethical Considerations

The study complied with ethical protocols governing the conduct of research and to protection of the rights of participants in relation to, among other things, privacy (confidentiality and anonymity), informed consent (voluntary participation), and how the data are interpreted - honesty (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The researcher sought institutional consent to conduct the study, as well as written informed consent from the participants. Their right to withdraw their participation was guaranteed as was their right to privacy (avoiding identifying information in the texts, the audio-recording, transcriptions, and reporting of findings). In line with Lichtman's (2013) caution against misinterpretation, over-interpretation or fraudulent analysis of data, a reading and re-reading of data was made. Member checking of interview data for accuracy of its interpretation was done via e-mail to participants. The participant only got the data that pertained to their interview and the researcher's capturing and interpretation of it. The

data obtained was only used for the purpose of the study, with anticipated publication outputs. Permission to audio-record the interviews to ensure accurate capture of respondents' views was granted by the participants.

Outcomes

The study findings pointed to an almost unanimous affirmation of the need for the university to decolonise in order to be relevant and accommodative of the growing student diversity. The curriculum featured prominently as the preferred target of the decolonisation of the university. Academics cautioned against a wholesale overhaul of the whole curriculum in the name of decolonisation. Although the definitions of the term decolonisation varied, all definitions gravitated towards tailor-making and customising the university curriculum to variables like the students or the context; an admission of the misalignment of the university to the user systems. An analysis of the findings indicated a manifest conflation of decolonisation with Africanisation or Afrocentrism. Participants were most hesitant when it came to juxtaposing their modules in their current form and in the decolonised form should they be asked to decolonise them. It was apparent that not much thought had been put into the practicalities of the decolonisation of the curriculum. The study recommends greater institutional, cross- and inter-institutional engagements with the notion of curriculum decolonisation and the implementation thereof.

References

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- Liamputtong, P. (2011). *Focus Group Methodology Principles and Practice*. Sage: London.
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Study Sample characteristics

Participant	Gender	Age	Race	Highest Qualification.	Status	Teaching specialisation
A1	F	<35	White	Masters	Early career	Sciences
A2	M	>35	White	Masters	Early career	Afrikaans
C1	M	>35	Coloured	PhD	Established	Education
A3	M	<35	Coloured	Masters	Early career	Technical Drawing
B1	M	>35	Black	PhD	Emerging	Technology
A4	M	<35	White	Masters	Early career	Teaching Practice
B2	F	<35	Black	PhD	Emerging	English
A5	F	>35	Black	Masters	Early career	English
C2	M	>35	Black	PhD	Established	Maths
A6	M	<35	Black	Masters	Early career	isiXhosa
C3	M	>35	Black	PhD	Established	History
A7	F	>35	White	Masters	Early career	Afrikaans

Appendix 2: Interview schedule

1. Should universities decolonise?
2. Why should universities decolonise?
3. What aspects of the university should be decolonised?
4. What is decolonisation of the curriculum not? What would you caution academics against in an attempt to decolonise?
5. What then is curriculum decolonisation?
6. If you were asked to decolonise your module, what would go, what would remain, and what would be added?