


Pedagogical relations as a decolonisation tool in African higher education: Reflection on the ethics of care, respect, and trust

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This article uses the findings obtained from a study that delves into the perceptions of students on their relationship with their higher education (HE) lecturers and how it affects their academic success, to respond to the issue of decolonisation in South African HE, and to approach the question of decolonising HE in Africa. The article argues that it is essential to prioritise student well-being, amplify their voices, and promote a caring culture towards addressing the issue of decolonisation in African education systems. The study shows that African HE students hold higher expectations of their lecturers beyond being professionals. This expectation includes respect for students' thoughts and incorporation of epistemology that aligns with fostering African development, culture and thoughts (without necessarily conforming to neoliberal norms). The four categories of the teacher's role, which include academic development, respect and trust, social relationships, and ethics of care are highly demanded by HE students. Borrowing the study outcome, this article holds the view that students' high expectations of their lecturers to foster social relationships should be channelled to incorporate the African student as a collaborator in the business of education and as a response to the demands of HE students to decolonise African education system. These four categories are not only institutional strategies for effective teaching and learning but also a way to address the non-inclusive impact of Western epistemology on historically racial institutions in Africa.

Contribution: This article proposes that adopting mainstream pedagogical relationships can be a powerful tool in incorporating the African students' thoughts and a step towards liberating the HE system in Africa. It recommends these four cardinal themes as institutional strategies for restricting teaching and learning that relegate students to the receiving end thus systems that refute students as collaborators of knowledge sharing especially at historically racial institutions.

Keywords: African higher education; student-teacher relationship; knowledge inclusivity; indigenous knowledge system (IKS); student well-being; knowledge transformation.

Introduction

The central focus of this article is to respond to the question of what could be done to reverse African students' perception and mindset that a higher education (HE) student and his or her rational capabilities are not respected in Africa. In other words, how do we build systems that communicate to African students that they can freely think and express their rational thoughts independent of the system that prescribes one superior way of thinking? The question of how Africa could build an educational system that allows for a diversity of knowledge epistemology in our schools without subscribing to neoliberal norms or perspectives is a sine qua non. The collaboration between students and teachers is crucial for effective learning, which raises another question of why the Western educational system does not view HE students in Africa as collaborators. Instead, the student is relegated to the receiving end while the teacher-knows-it-all practice prevails (i.e. according to the colonial system of education). The teacher-knows-it-all mindset in Africa needs to start considering the student as a corroborator. This is the only way to improve the students' sense of participation and belonging during knowledge sharing. The incorporation of the student as a collaborator in the business of knowledge creation and sharing remains a way to produce prospective scholars who would think in the context of African culture and for the development of the continent. Hence, education needs to be tailored to the African way to suit the African needs and context.

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The one-shoe-fits-all and a self-acclaimed monopoly of reliable knowledge standards of Western education have slowed down African development. This article intends to contribute to the search for a middle ground towards implementing decolonisation, as well as to spur debates and conversations regarding the way forward. There are historically racial universities around Africa that resist, downgrade and dismiss the decolonisation issue in African education as being unfounded, inconceivable, and an implausible quest (Vandeyar 2020). The surviving infrastructures of the colonial system that are found in various facets of African society such as higher education institutions (HEIs), church, and market are persistent indeed and would not give up without a fight (Onwuegbuchulam 2023). In this article, the teaching professionals such as tutors, lecturers, professors, and assistants are represented as teachers.

Study's significance

This article is significant because: (1) it promotes the importance of raising students' voices, well-being, and a caring culture as an integral part of higher institutions' teaching philosophy in Africa. It suggests ways to provide a good pedagogical relationship that would build a rewarding culture, which can empower the workforce to solve some of the nation's tough and context-based education challenges; (2) it proposes mainstream pedagogical relations that are African-oriented as a steppingstone and essential tool for the ongoing decolonisation of African education quest; and (3) it adds to the solution-finding literature *vis-a-vis* seemingly impossible demands of Africans to decolonise educational system in Africa. The article focusses on the vital issues concerning the transformation of HE in Africa, including decolonisation, language barriers, technology challenges, student participation, managing large-size classes, and ensuring student success and well-being. The article also highlights the need to break down the colonial structures that continue to exclude and undermine other epistemologies in HE. This article's literature review and discussion of findings set the tone for understanding decolonisation from the perspective of African students.

Research methods and design

This article utilised the findings obtained from a quantitative aspect of a study conducted at South Africa University. Choosing a university from South Africa is relevant to the study because it resonates with the historical background necessary for the study's validity and generalisation. The article critically reviews the findings of a study and presents it as a response to the issues of decolonisation in African education systems. The article applies the principles of systematic analysis with minimal stringent standards to review relevant literature. The review was organised into four steps: (1) identification of search keywords or terms; (2) using the keywords to search relevant literature using the search engine; (3) screening and coding the scope and relevance of identified literature which results in reducing

the volume of information; and (4) analyse and synthesise gathered information to craft this piece. To give concession to space constraints engenders the need to maintain a tight focus and scope by narrowing down the information to Africa and South African context. The key terms utilised for the primary search include African HE, student-teacher relationship, inclusivity of knowledge, developing nation and education challenges, student well-being, and HE. The secondary search was performed using mesh terms such as decolonisation of the education system in Africa, colonial knowledge hegemony, deconstruction of the colonial education system, as well as contextualising teaching and learning in African HEIs.

Theoretical framework

The study used social constructivism to investigate the teaching and learning relationship at the HE level. Social constructivist theory emphasises the internal and external connections involved in teaching and learning. The internal connections refer to the relationship between new information to be learned, previous knowledge, and beliefs. While the external connections describe the associations and influences between the individual, others, and the learning environment. The constructivist theory views pedagogical relationships through three main elements, which include mutual respect among students and between the teacher and students. Hence, it situates learning in the students' experiences and enables a constructivist perspective of knowing and learning. The social constructivist theory allowed the researcher to examine the HE students' perceptions of how they want to be treated by their teachers. Borrowing from this framework, the author of this article considers 'mutual respect' between the student and teacher as being limited if the students' voice and rational thought capabilities are suppressed by the same system intended to empower them (Onwuegbuchulam 2023). This enables the article to propose the elevation of students' voices and collaboration in creating the knowledge they share (as opposed to the prescriptions of the colonial system) as a way to approach the decolonisation of educational quest in Africa.

Literature review

Decolonisation according to African students aims to achieve knowledge inclusivity rather than rejecting the current colonial education system (Vandeyar 2020); the colonial dominance in Africa cannot submit without a fight (Foluke 2023; Onwuegbuchulam 2023). African student needs to believe that he or she is capable of rational thought and that his or her integrity, identity, dignity and uniqueness are respected by the system that educates him or her (Lumumba 2023). According to Owusu-Agyeman (2021), the relationship between teachers and students should reflect understanding. Unfortunately, the colonial system of education dictates how an African should think and express his or her thoughts, and at the same time excludes other knowledge epistemologies (Lumumba 2023). Owusu-Agyeman (2021) argues that respect should underpin the pedagogical relationship

between teacher and student, recognising that the two are inseparable when it comes to sharing knowledge. Student thought restriction, exclusion of basic knowledge of the country's natural resources, not having any unemployment fallback skills in the curriculum, limited code-switching in the mother tongue, mandatory teaching in colonial language, and the suppression of student voices are all signs of the colonial dominance that exists within African HEIs. Many teachers hide behind the veil of professionalism to perpetuate colonial(ist) agendas that are condescending and oppressive to the African people (Lumumba 2023). Most professionals are convinced that a shift from the colonial system singularity and arrogance of epistemology would lead to neoliberal norms (Onwuegbuchulam 2023). Whereas according to Africans, decolonisation is about the inclusivity of knowledge, liberation of thoughts and ideas, singularity of options and abandonment of indigenous knowledge system – IKS (Foluke 2023).

Meanwhile, the author of this article argues that the educational system in Africa perpetuates colonial conditions that reinforce 'systematic slavery'. Hence, the system prevents students from being taught relevant subjects that would improve their intellectual and socio-economic well-being according to their context (Malema 2019). For instance, even though mining is fundamental to the South African economy, there is no subject on mining in primary and secondary education curricula. Indigenous knowledge is also not taught in African schools, and what African students already know is often disregarded during teaching (Lumumba 2023). This raises the important question of, at what point would an African student be seen as a collaborator by their teacher? When would African students be considered capable of independent thought and able to contribute to their own intellectual development and well-being? The situation is not the same with Europeans studying through colonial education because Western education is founded on colonial epistemologies, philosophies, and forms of education (Onwuegbuchulam 2023). Maiangwa and Essombe (2022) argue that the infrastructure of colonialism upholds Western philosophy as the universal model of human rationality, leading to the belief that Western imperialism represents a set of practices, beliefs, and values that are inherently superior. Despite this self-proclaimed superior way of thinking continually influencing interactions between people who share knowledge in the HEIs of many African nations, development has been trifling (Foluke 2023). According to Maiangwa and Essombe (2022), this form of knowledge and epistemological hegemony and dominion presents Western practices as the 'objective' or universal standards, while indigenous African knowledge is both excluded and degraded. Malema (2019) asserts that the exclusion of African knowledge and ideas from mainstream education perpetuates the belief that Africans are inferior. Some teachers in African HEIs prefer to replace pedagogical relationships with 'professionalism', while others remain indifferent to the challenges facing most African HEIs, such as large class sizes, diversity issues, and lack of student voice and relevance (Owusu-Agyeman 2021).

However, decolonisation is not about retaliating against the exclusion of other epistemologies but is concerned with creating prospective academics whose thought processes and actions do not perpetuate or reproduce colonial structures (Foluke 2023; Maiangwa & Essombe 2022). Decolonisation should start in the classroom with student-teacher interaction, respect for student voice, ideas, and rationality, and a welcoming of knowledge diversity and epistemological plurality (Okoye 2022). Understanding colonialism as an engine of coercive power is critical in conceptualising decolonisation and the agency of the teacher (Foluke 2023). In South Africa, decolonisation should be seen as an active response to dismantling and discontinuing of the ongoing neo-colonialism (Maiangwa & Essombe 2022). Hence, from an African perspective, decolonisation should be viewed as a sustained effort to discontinue and deconstruct the epistemology that continues to reproduce colonialism and its effects. The responsibility of academics is to translate theories and practices that are context-dependent into context-based work in Africa (Onwuegbuchulam 2023).

Nonetheless, it is important to notice that in an African HEI context, teachers and students exist as a community and a good relationship between them is crucial (Okoye 2023). Hence, if teachers fail to maintain a positive relationship with their students, they fail in their duty. In Africa, some structures of education systems can hinder students from developing independent thought capabilities, which is detrimental to the relationship between teachers and students. Building a good relationship with students is important as it fosters trust, which African students value highly. Decolonialism is a struggle against colonial imperialism and its hegemonic influences, which would never give up without fighting (Foluke 2023; Lumumba 2023). In classrooms, the reality and possibility of code-switching depend on how the context has survived the conditions superimposed by the surviving infrastructures of colonialism that leave the student with no choice but to 'play along' or resist vehemently (Okoye 2023). This article presents pedagogical relation as a tool that establishes and maintains the climate and culture of trust, care and autonomy in the HE classroom. Pedagogical relationships are built on love, obedience, and authority (Owusu-Agyeman 2021). These relationships are greatly influenced by the powers held by the institution that empowers instructors (Friesen 2017). Despite the importance and impact of the institution's teaching philosophy, policymakers often neglect to pay adequate attention to the promotion of pedagogical relationships (Crownover & Jones 2018). In cases where racism, religious or political prejudices, and neglect of students' voices occur, the institution must prioritise the importance of pedagogical relationships (Hollweck, Reimer & Bouchard 2019). Owusu-Ansah and Kyei-Blankson (2016) propose the importance of academics to obtain relevant pedagogical knowledge, competencies and skills to deliver in terms of student-teacher relationships. This however implies that professionalism cannot replace pedagogical relations as some teachers would think (Lumumba 2023).

Parnes et al. (2020) emphasised that the importance of a strong pedagogical relationship has a direct correlation with student success, motivation, engagement, as well as performance and should be taken seriously.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the University of the Free State (No. UFS-HSD2019/0340/0905).

Results

The four categories of the finding include students' academic development, student support, social relationships, trust and respect.

Figure 1a shows that students have high expectations of their teachers in taking the lead on building and maintaining pedagogical relations. The co-option of the teacher by the curriculum that reflects the colonial system makes African students shift and delegate their participation in knowledge creation to their teachers. Students' academic development is a crucial aspect of education, and teachers play an essential role in facilitating learning. Teachers can help students reach their full potential, academically and personally, by creating a positive and engaging learning environment that meets the expectations of the students.

Students want to be supported and encouraged by their teachers, but it seems they also wonder when they are allowed to take ownership of their learning and achieve their goals. Effective pedagogical relationships between students and teachers are built on a foundation of mutual respect, trust, and open communication. Teachers who are committed to their students' academic development can make a significant impact on their lives and contribute to their success beyond the classroom. This should include allowing the students to think about their realities, and teachers to develop respect and understanding of the students' context realities.

According to Figure 1b, a significant proportion of students (50.6%) believe that teachers should acknowledge and take an interest in their academic achievements and success. This indicates that simply providing classroom education is insufficient for many students, who anticipate extra effort from their teachers in the form of interventions and interest in their academic accomplishments. Students also appreciate effective interventions outside the classroom that can help to build a stronger pedagogical relationship with their teachers. A very insignificant number of students strongly disagree or have no expectations when it comes to academic development responsibilities of their teachers. Over 75% of students in African HEIs are English second language (ESL) speakers,

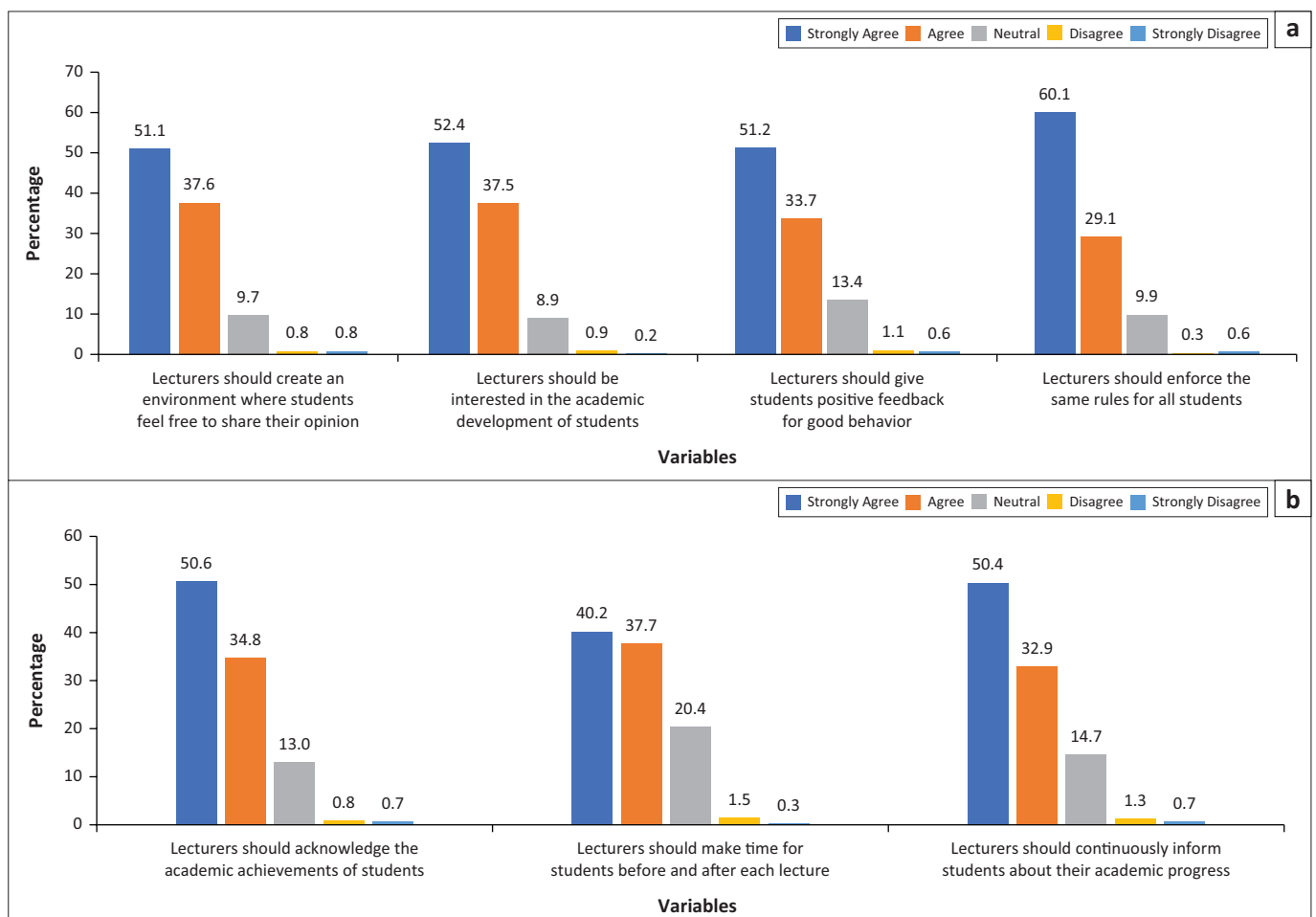


FIGURE 1: (a, b) Teacher's commitment to student academic development support.

and these students are likely to require more of their teachers' patience and time. Building a strong pedagogical relationship can help these students succeed beyond what professionalism alone can achieve (Owusu-Agyeman 2021). A reasonable number of students are neutral about this sentiment such that prospective study needs to illuminate that grey part. Concerning decolonial ideology, the neutral students seem to be apprehensive about the teacher's help and the nomenclature of student achievement. Are the teachers not being co-opted by the colonialist curricula?

Figure 2 shows that the majority of the students (61.6%) strongly believe that teachers should be more approachable to foster good social relationships and enhance learning. However, 31% were neutral about whether or not the teachers should take an interest in students' activities outside the classroom. This suggests that while students desire good social relationships, they also want some boundaries. Relating this to the decolonisation agenda, the importance of improving teacher competence in building pedagogical relationships could imply dissuading the curriculum-coopted teacher to start understanding decolonisation claims from the students' viewpoint (Okoye 2023). Also, mainstream pedagogical relation does not imply too much familiarity or being susceptible to neoliberal norms and perspectives (Onwuegbuchulam 2023). Rather, it is a question of inclusivity, and returning stolen power for the development of the African educational system as the real power and true weapon for liberation. The 'Lecturers should be approachable' could mean not only empathy on the side of the teacher but also seeing things from the students' perspective. About 40% of students feel that teachers should show a personal interest in their activities outside of the classroom and 100% of these students are Africans and from non-native English-speaking backgrounds. This highlights the fact that students who are struggling, underperforming or in need of help require teacher motivation, trust and understanding to build confidence and develop a genuine interest in their courses.

This commitment towards learning can help them improve their performance and achieve better outcomes (Parnes et al. 2020).

Figure 3 highlights the significance of respect and trust in building a positive relationship between a teacher and a student. Students highly value being respected by their teachers, which helps build trust, although it is not clear whether or not the colonial system expects this trust and respect to be mutual. One could argue that the current state of pedagogical relations serves as a trudging horse given the existing system's neglect of students' intellectual autonomy. Students appreciate it when teachers use their names and make eye contact while engaging with them. Hence, having some knowledge about the students facilitates better interaction and communication (according to the findings). This raises a critical question of why the African students' realities are not important to the system. Again, if effective communication and teacher efficacy are crucial in building trust, then why are the African students merely a recipient of an education that tends to alienate their thoughts? If the way teachers welcome students can impact relationships and trust building, why is the colonial education system not considering students as collaborators? And if students appreciate when teachers show interest in their viewpoints and allow them intellectual freedom why is mobilisation of students' voices and intellectual freedom not taken seriously? It's essential to recognise students' rational capabilities and thoughts (Hagenauer & Volet 2014; Lumumba 2023).

Figure 4 highlights the importance of the ethics of care in building a strong student-teacher relationship. It's important to recognise that certain factors, like big class sizes, racial divisions, and disengaged employees, can impede the development of effective pedagogical relationships with students. Some teachers may opt to be indifferent or lack empathy towards their students, prioritising what they believe is 'professionalism' over forming a significant relationship

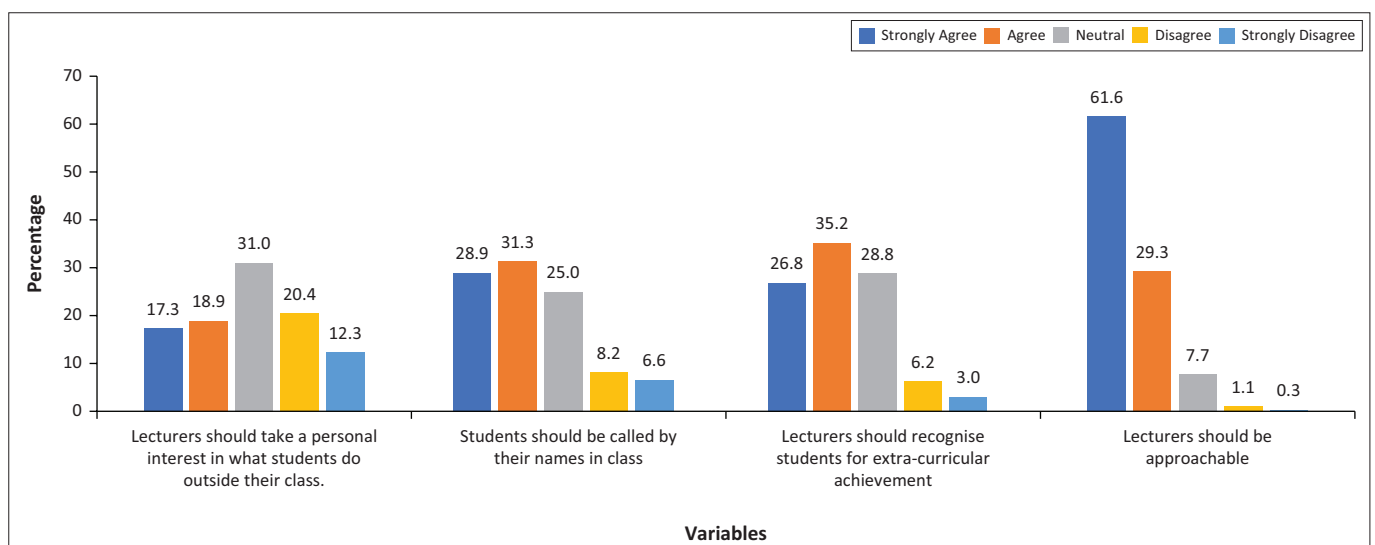


FIGURE 2: Student-teacher social relationship.

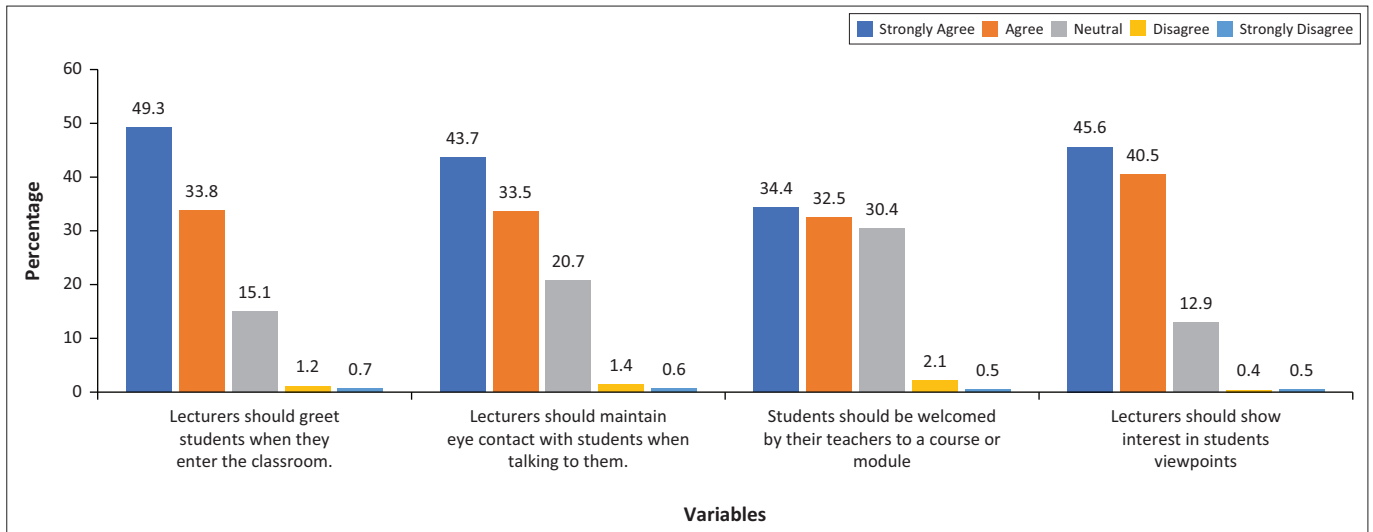


FIGURE 3: Respect and trust.

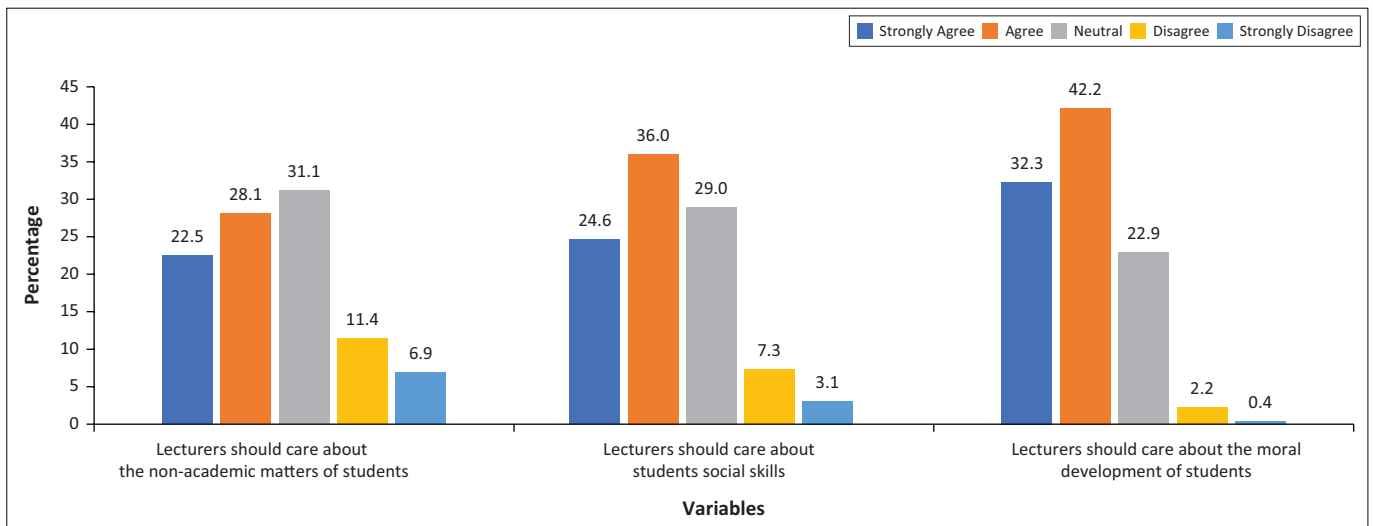


FIGURE 4: Ethics of care.

with their pupils. It is important to notice that traditional African learning systems place a high value on trust and social relationships between teachers and students (Lumumba 2023). In this context, professionalism should be adapted to suit the African context and not rely solely on individualistic ideologies and 'professionalism'. Professional ethics should not discourage teachers from sympathising, empathising, and building social relationships with their students, as trust and positive relationships are crucial for effective learning. Students desire to proclaim that education liberates power, but are unsure if it still does. The goal of education and teaching is to transform mirrors into windows of opportunity according to Sydney J. Harris (2024), and to replace the empty mind with an open one. As such, true education means teaching children to seek the truth, and not follow blindly.

A summary of the finding

The finding shows students' perception of pedagogical relations as summarised into four themes: the ethics of care, students' academic development, social relationships,

respect, and trust. Several students prefer to be neutral as if they are shying away from something sensitive. The finding reveals that students uphold high expectations regarding their teacher's role in maintaining pedagogical relations, which seemingly suggests that students seem to be unaware of the significance of their own role or contribution. This is interesting because every relationship is a two-way thing, such that both parties maintain the relationship. For Africa to develop in an African way, by Africans, HEIs need to fix the pedagogical relations to facilitate students' context-based intellectual progression, personal development, and effective teaching and learning. The students' moral and academic development are interwoven and cannot be divorced from the students' identity, welfare, and way of life.

Discussion

In the context of Africa, the teacher's job is not just teaching the existing curriculum, handing down the instructions, supervising and providing quality delivery but must include

allowing the students to participate in generating the knowledge that educates them (Malema 2019). Hence, real education must pass through you not the other way around (Lumumba 2023). From the students' perspective of decolonisation, education should not be 'garbage in garbage out' which requires the student to give what was taught (Owusu-Agyeman 2021). The question of how the colonial-imposed education system has improved the African economy, autarky and renaissance needs to be addressed (Lumumba 2023). Also, the question of whether the teacher is not being co-opted as an accomplice to this never-ending colonial hegemony through an approved pattern of curriculum delivery. One might also question whether African students do not feel they are being done favour given the high ratings of teacher approachability (especially in historically racial Institutions). It is important to conduct a qualitative study to explore this area if the structure allows for it. As mentioned in the literature, decolonisation is not just about changing the curriculum (Owusu-Ansah & Kyei-Blankson 2016). It is about reclaiming and recovering the power that has been taken away (Foluke 2023). The delegitimisation of the 'coercive' power that consistently dominates and subtly reinforces colonialism in the form of intellectual subjugation and exclusion has successfully co-opted the teacher (Lumumba 2023). Thus, the phenomenon where an African is always told how to think, write and say; and how to justify his or her ideas. The situation most Africans themselves have internalised and have degenerated into (and often manifested as) colourism, denial of freedom of thought, economic dispossession, self-hate, and downgrading of a Black person's thoughts or ideas (Maiangwa & Essombe 2022). For instance, the politics and experience of engaging in the scholarly process of publishing an article in accredited journals or so-called impact journals have become excruciatingly daunting and unaffordable for most African academics given its review processes and politics (personal communication, September 17, 2023). Hence, the review remarks and responses give you the impression that something must have stirred some shared antagonism among the reviewers regarding your argument, presentation, and logical thoughts as an academic citizen (Lumumba 2023). In other words, an African scholar is cursed with the agelessness of having to be guided, corrected accordingly or told what to think at all times (Maiangwa & Essombe 2022). The situation which Okoye (2023) states has become an intergenerational infirmity for a black scholar or person (Lumumba 2023). Experience has also shown that the same system infiltrates the realm of research supervision, academic assessment, supervision of classroom teaching and learning, and academic citizenship of an African (Foluke 2023).

Meanwhile, when the surviving infrastructure of colonialism, coercive power or racism feel threatened and want to minimise the risk of being stereotyped or judged negatively, they cling to 'professionalism', rules and other structures designed to reinforce imperialistic control (Maiangwa & Essombe 2022; Malema 2019). Sometimes the co-opted perpetrators of colonial hegemony could be heard enforcing

the 'systematic slavery' (usually on duty) with alterations like 'Sorry, I cannot help you, it is just the rule', 'I am just doing my job' and 'I am being as professional as possible'. Other times, when the victims (or Africans) complain or feel unfairly treated, they (the victims) are judged to be either racial, noisy, chaotic, and ungrateful (Maiangwa & Essombe 2022). When the victims wish to employ their own, the victim (or an African) is judged to be violent, chauvinistic, too nationalistic or xenophobic (Foluke 2023). The gatekeepers of resources, 'power' and opportunities know that there is no relationship, trust or care about what they do; for them, it is about whose interest is maximised or exploited (Malema 2019). Consequently, it does not matter where and in what circumstance (even in the classrooms), it is just 'war' all the way; it is an intellectual domination and it is about who gets the resources (Lumumba 2023). The teachers with racist tendencies know with absolute certainty that there is no friendship or no relationship trust about what they do, as such they opt for 'professionalism' at work and eschew pedagogical relations (Malema 2019). Maiangwa and Essombe (2022) assert that there is no friendship, caring, respect or trust in downgrading another person's humanity, identity and rationality or rational thought. Oftentimes, in the classrooms, African students are convinced that they are the architects of their problems (Owusu-Ansah & Kyei-Blankson 2016). As such, African students' rationality is most likely to nurture and internalise this intellectual domination and pressure that comes with assimilating this 'knowledge supremacy tendency' that has swayed or compromised African identity, academic citizenship and consciousness (Lumumba 2023). Another instance is the phenomenon of 'code-switching'. It is professional for a teacher to teach second-language speakers of English without code-switching, but not mandatory (or necessary) for the same teacher to learn the local language(s). Again, it is a common understanding that African people should suppress any inherent mannerisms, interests and accents to minimise the risk of being stereotyped or judged (Maiangwa & Essombe 2022). Foluke (2023) argues that decolonisation is a quest for justice, inclusivity and being allowed to 'be' and not just 'co-exist'. There is no relationship in using a foreign language and shunning code-switching, particularly in a situation where underperformers are mostly locals, teaching curriculum content that does not present local experiences, lifestyle and context, and there is no relationship in legitimising the colonial process and systems that recycle colonial dominance (Maiangwa & Essombe 2022).

According to the findings, the importance of a good pedagogical relationship hinges on the fundamental need of students from rural areas and low socio-economic backgrounds to be supported (see Figure 4). These categories of students can only share their experiences where the teacher has developed a good social relationship with the students, as well as shown interest in their academic development. Another qualitative study conducted in the same institution shows that African students complained of some teachers not replying to emails, showing up in the

office during student consultation sessions, creating poor communication and dominating the entire learning conversation (Okoye 2022). The relationship between the teacher and students is driven by effective communication within and outside the learning environment (Owusu-Agyeman 2021). The distance between the teacher and the learner causes a rupture in the learning process that could constrain effective teaching and learning (Okoye 2022; Parnes et al. 2020). According to this study's findings, students are motivated to participate in classroom discussions when the teacher identifies them by their names and gives them a chance to approach matters from their experiences (see Figure 2). In other words, pedagogical relation thrives on a strong combination of an open environment, tolerance, and respect (Parnes et al. 2020). Also, the *Ethics of care* creates an atmosphere of trust, commitment and disposition that enables students to freely participate in class discussions as an interactive teaching and learning environment (Crownover & Jones 2018). According to Owusu-Ansah and Kyei-Blankson (2016), the *Ethics of care* concept consists of two pedagogical structures: (1) the collaborative development and preservation of pedagogical relationships and (2) the importance of trust, acceptance and individual attentiveness on the part of the students. Similarly, Walker and Gleaves (2016) affirm that developing mutual respect is a collaborative effort that helps the teacher identify the students' learning needs and attend to them through appropriate learning intervention (Parnes et al. 2020). Oftentimes, people co-opted by the colonial agenda are usually convinced (or rather wish) that decolonisation concept does not qualify as a learning need for African students of this era who call for decolonisation of the curriculum (Vandeyar 2020). Yet, it may not be allowed to consider such conviction part of colonial resistance, dominance or politics; otherwise, would be regarded or addressed as generalisation and lacking substantiation within the spectrum of academic scrutiny. Liberation for ongoing suppression of African voices or narratives remains a reality only an African can truly identify with. On that note, the next section presents the recommendations made by this article.

Recommendations

- To ensure student satisfaction, feedback and expectations are taken seriously, African HEIs should regularly conduct student satisfaction and engagement surveys. Higher education institutions need to pursue an institutional strategy that promotes effective teaching and learning philosophy through pedagogical relationships. This requires teachers to commit to the importance of this course.
- The diversity of staff and students in African HEIs should foster a caring culture that equips teachers with skills and guidance to practise ethics of care. Courses with too many registered students should be split into smaller, more 'controllable' classes. The issue of large-sized classes (often cited as an excuse for dysfunctional pedagogical relations) and publishing in high-impact journals in

African HEIs (as an economic model and promotion) need to stop.

- The lack of structures, facilities and funding often considered impediments to African HEIs' progress should be resolved. Splitting education sections and programmes, for instance, into having morning, afternoon and evening programmes in one course or field of study can be considered. This would encourage the employability of young academic career seekers in the industry.
- It is important for students to have the freedom to think critically in their learning to effectively understand and apply knowledge in context. Higher education institutions with a history of racial inequality and diversity challenges must prioritise policies that promote ethics of care, which should be an essential part of the teaching philosophy that all staff members must adopt when interacting with students.
- Future studies on pedagogical relations should inquire on why a significant proportion of student participants in this study preferred to remain neutral or disagreed with the importance of teacher support.

Conclusion

The argument in this article seeks to address crucial topics and challenges in both adult and HE in Africa, such as decolonising the educational system in terms of language, student voice, pedagogical relations, student well-being and teacher support. The author proposes that the pedagogical relationship should be considered a useful tool in decolonising African education. The importance of a pedagogical relationship can be linked to Africa's traditional way of learning and could facilitate transformation and knowledge decolonisation that prioritise African development. It is through this approach that the African education system can be meaningfully decolonised as well as transformed and decolonisation evocatively conceptualised. An adage says that fishing of earthworms should precede fishing itself because the former is used for the latter. The first thing should come first. Africa is hurting and needs to fix its education system. Decolonisation should be seen as a healing partnership project and not a witch-hunting avenue or blaming of others. We need to start acknowledging the African way of reasoning. Africans are communitarians and can handle complex realities, as such integrating African rationality cannot degenerate into liberal norms or generalisation. Western education system selects and isolates ideas, whereas in African philosophy and context, we are population-oriented, and everything is linked to everything. Nature is respected and nothing is left unaccounted for in the equation. The article offers a solution to the demand by Africans to decolonise the education system, which is often dismissed or considered impossible and unrealistic. The article also raises the important question of how African students should be treated by their teachers and

how trust can be built between them by emphasising the need for the teacher to create a safe environment where free expression of thoughts is encouraged during knowledge sharing. The article concludes that pedagogical relations can be a powerful tool in decolonising the African education system.

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Authors' contributions

Dr F.I. Okoye is the sole author of this article.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, Dr F.I. Okoye, upon reasonable request.

Disclaimer

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