

# Embracing Ubuntu: Cultivating Inclusive Information Access in Decolonising African Information Curriculum

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## ABSTRACT

Decolonising the information curriculum through the process of indigenization is a crucial process that advocates for a paradigm shift towards the integration of various political ideologies and knowledge systems in order to correct the marginalisation and exclusion that have been sustained by colonial legacies. The Ubuntu ideology offers a foundation for promoting an inclusive, people-centered approach to curriculum development because it places an emphasis on communal values and connection. Educators can establish learning environments that support empathy, inclusivity, and cooperation while reflecting and accommodating the needs and experiences of every student by emulating the values of Ubuntu. By appreciating students' cultural origins in the information sciences, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy enhances academic engagement and equips students for a diverse global information landscape, which further supports these efforts. Collectively, these strategies seek to foster an information society that is more socially just and equitable, which is consistent with the overarching objective of guaranteeing inclusivity and fairness in education.

## KEYWORDS

Ubuntu, Inclusive Information Access, Decolonisation, Indigenization, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Marginalisation

## INTRODUCTION

In this fast-paced world of technological advancement minority groups run the risk of being left behind or forgotten in the face of history. Currently developed countries have far more significant influence in the world of scientific discourse and research and this gap is on the increase. Africa as a continent has a history of great precolonial knowledge generation, such fine examples of these include the Alexandria and Timbuktu libraries. Famous African ancient thinkers and scholars such as Imhotep played an important role in history and scientific discovery. Other significant African Scholars and thought leaders are often not well represented in the information curriculum.

One of the significant drivers to creating better inclusivity of African scholars in information curriculum is through a process of decolonisation of information curriculum. There are different views on decolonisation and the drivers behind the need for decolonisation, many place emphasis on the role of racism and domination of minority ethnic groups in academia, however our focus is rather on the under representation of local scholars in our information curriculum. According to some, decolonisation involves “a paradigm shift from a culture of exclusion and denial to the making of space for other political philosophies and knowledge systems” (Keele University, 2018).

Decolonisation can be seen as activity that specifically addresses the multiple impacts on the knowledge production that result from imperial histories and colonialism (Crilly & Everitt, 2022). Attempts to decolonise can be achieved through a multi-faceted approach involving active and practical interventions, collaboration with academic writers and students, as well as gaining influence over publishers and content producers (Crilly & Everitt, 2022).

The challenges of inclusivity are becoming more pressing in the quickly changing world of the 4IR. The problems with promoting inclusivity in information curriculum are complex and arise from historical and current disparities in the creation and representation of knowledge worldwide. Minority groups run the risk of being ignored or marginalised in the history of scientific discovery, especially those from developing nations (Miles & Singal, 2010). The problem is exacerbated by the developed world's increasing influence in international scientific discourse, which has widened the gulf between the representation of Western scholars and those from continents such as Africa, which have a rich history of producing knowledge prior to colonisation, as demonstrated by the libraries of Timbuktu and Alexandria and the works of scholars like Imhotep (Vasiliev et al, 2023). Through the promotion of a paradigm shift towards the recognition and integration of multiple knowledge systems and academics, decolonisation initiatives seek to alleviate these discrepancies (Crilly & Everitt, 2022). Nevertheless, the distance that exists between admitting colonial prejudices and taking concrete action to decolonise the curriculum prevents

inclusivity from being achieved. Ethnic minorities may feel undervalued and unacknowledged in the academic community as a result of this inaction (Kumaran, 2023). It will take coordinated efforts to overcome these obstacles.

With its focus on shared values, connection, and respect for one another, the Ubuntu idea provides a strong framework for promoting an inclusive, people-centered approach to the development of information curricula (Koen, 2021). Ubuntu, a philosophy with roots in African philosophy, emphasises the value of appreciating others' humanity and promoting a sense of community and well-being among all (Metz, 2011). Through the integration of Ubuntu ideals into the development of information curricula, educators can establish learning environments that place a premium on empathy, inclusivity, and cooperation. This strategy tackles the issues of inclusivity by making sure that curricula are reflective of and responsive to the needs and experiences of all students, including those from marginalised communities (Jansen, 2019). It also supports the objectives of decolonisation by valuing diverse perspectives and knowledge systems (Keele University, 2018). The adoption of an Ubuntu-driven curriculum promotes a more comprehensive and equitable approach to information science education by helping students recognise the interconnection of knowledge and the significance of ethical responsibility in the digital age.

It is imperative to include marginalised groups in the development of information curricula in order to promote fairness and inclusivity in education. Teachers can establish a more inclusive learning environment that represents the diversity of the student body and society at large by incorporating the perspectives, experiences, and knowledge of marginalised communities into the curriculum (Padayachee, 2022). This method exposes students to a greater variety of ideas and points of view, which not only acknowledges the experiences of marginalised groups but also enhances the learning process for all students. This process requires decolonisation initiatives, such as those that highlight the inclusion of African scholars and knowledge systems, because they subvert the predominance of Western viewpoints and advance a more inclusive and global understanding of information science. By representing marginalized groups in information curriculum development, educators can contribute to a more equitable and socially just information society (Poole, et al, 2021).

In the field of information sciences, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) is a pedagogical method that acknowledges and honours the cultural origins and experiences of students with the goal of fostering a more welcoming and stimulating learning environment. CRP creates a sense of relevance and belonging by integrating students' cultural knowledge and viewpoints into the curriculum, which can improve academic progress and motivation (Gay, 2021). Within the field of information sciences, CRP entails incorporating a range of cultural views and content into training related to information literacy, digital literacy, and other information-focused courses. In addition to fostering fairness and inclusivity, this method equips students to function in a varied and international information environment (Ikoja-Odongo & Mostert, 2006; Jaeger, Bertot, & Subramaniam, 2013). By adopting CRP, information science educators can better meet the varied requirements of their students and develop a generation of information workers who are more knowledgeable and sensitive to cultural differences.

## **PROPOSED FORMAT AND PANEL ORGANISATION**

The envisaged panel will be approximately 90 minutes long. This panel brings together academics who recognise the need for inclusive information access and a more inclusive information curriculum in universities. Current curriculum may not take into consideration the contributions from local scholars, often favouring a focus on popular western perspectives, which may isolate African academics. This lack of local focus on curriculum may not create a sense of inclusivity, and may under represent indigenous knowledge. The discussion will be divided into 6 themes.

**Introduction.** Cultivating Inclusive Information Access in Decolonising African Information Curriculum.

Moderator: Paul Laughton (5 minutes)

**Theme 1.** Challenges for inclusivity in information curriculum. Marlene Holmner (5 minutes)

**Theme 2.** Indigenization of Information curriculum. Suliman Hawamdeh (5 minutes)

**Theme 3.** Ubuntu: People centred inclusive approach to information curriculum. Daniel Alemneh (5 minutes)

**Theme 4.** Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Information Sciences. Anika Meyer (5 minutes)

**Theme 5.** Inclusive Information Access. Abebe Rorissa. (5 minutes)

**Breakout group** for each theme. (25 minutes)

**Feedback and discussion.** Group leaders. (25 minutes)

**Summary and conclusion.** Moderator: Paul Laughton (10 minutes).

## **ENGAGEMENT WITH THE AUDIENCE**

After the presentations, the moderator and panellists will divide the audience into six sub-groups (one group per theme), inviting them to share their ideas, experiences with related research, relevant theories, and methodologies

(25 minutes). Each group will nominate a person to give feedback. This feedback from the six groups will take an additional 25 minutes. Audience input will be summarized by the moderator and briefly shared with the audience in a 10 minutes summary discussion, as well as via email.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

By the end of the panel discussion the audience will have increased their knowledge and understanding of the need for inclusive information access and the need to change and incorporate indigenous knowledge into their information curriculum. This panel attempts to create awareness and discourse that will ultimately better represent our local communities and acknowledge local contributions to the information curriculum. It is envisaged that a set of outcomes for such curricula and programmes will be proposed to serve as a point of departure for further curriculum development and design.

### RELEVANCE TO THE 87TH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR INFORMATION SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The challenge of inclusive information access and inclusivity in information curriculum creation is in line with the conference topic of "Putting People First". The underrepresentation of many viewpoints, especially in developing nations like Africa, emphasises the necessity of integrating Ubuntu values into the decolonisation process. When creating information curricula, educators may make sure that all views are heard and respected by placing a high priority on empathy, cooperation, and inclusivity.

### PANEL MEMBERS AND MODERATORS

**Paul Laughton** is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Information Science at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. He completed her PhD in 2012. His research interests include data management, information management, knowledge management and competitive intelligence.

**Anika Meyer** is a Lecturer in the Department of Information Science, University of Pretoria where she is also enrolled for her doctoral studies, titled Stakeholder information sharing: a naturalistic case study of software development. Her research interests include information behaviour, knowledge management, guided inquiry, third space, creative spaces, participatory design and agile methodology.

**Daniel Alemneh** is head of the Digital Curation Unit at the University of North Texas Libraries and teaching at the College of Information. For the past 20 years, Dr. Alemneh has been actively involved in various professional activities including being a member of ASIS&T and ICKM Board of Directors. He is a Research Associate in the Department of Information Science, University of Pretoria and in 2022 he was a Fullbright Scholar in the Department.

**Hawamdeh Suliman** is a Regents Professor in the Department of Information Science, College of Information, University of North Texas. He is a leading authority in the field of knowledge management and the editor in chief of the *Journal of Information and Knowledge Management (JIKM)*. He founded and directed several academic programs including the first Master of Science in Knowledge Management in Asia in the School of Communication and Information at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore and the Master of Science in Data Science at University of North Texas. He served as a department chair and director of the interdisciplinary PhD program in Information Science from 2010-2018. Dr. Hawamdeh authored and edited several books in the areas of knowledge management, information science, data analytics, cybersecurity, and knowledge governance.

**Marlene Holmner** is an Associate Professor and the Head of Department of Information Science, University at Pretoria, South Africa. Marlene serves on the Information Technology for Development Editorial Board, and several other journal editorial boards. She is also active in ASIS&T, serving as officer in 2021-2023 and a Steering Committee member of African Center of Excellence in Information Ethics. Marlene publishes primarily in the areas of information ethics, information communication for development, and ICT in education.

**Abebe Rorissa** is Professor and Director of the School of Information Sciences, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, USA. His research concerns the organization and retrieval of information; adoption, use, and impact of information and communication technologies; and human information behaviour. He has held many leadership positions in the Association for Information Science & Technology (ASIS&T) and is the current President. He is a Research Associate at the Department of Information Science, University of Pretoria.

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