

A world map with a textured, painterly appearance, overlaid with a dark semi-transparent rectangle containing text. The map is rendered in various colors like purple, blue, green, red, and yellow, giving it an artistic, hand-painted look. The text is centered on the map.

# Decolonising the curriculum: a focus on Modern Foreign Languages

---

Tanya Linaker and Christina Richardson, King's College London

# Curriculum decolonisation

Aim – to decentre normative hierarchies and give voice to the oppressed

Colonial legacy in education

Low representation and attainment of BAME students

Tokenism critique



# Inclusive and Diverse education

Non-  
Eurocentric

Anti-racist

Critical  
race theory

Rhodes  
must fall



aim

Amplify  
voices

Diversify  
pedagogies

*“The battle isn’t won by taking the statue away and pretending those people didn’t exist. It’s won by empowering those students to look up at Rhodes and friends with a cheery and self-confident sense of unbatterability.”*

# Decolonising language teaching project at King's Language Centre

---

- [Decolonising Language Teaching - King's College London \(kcl.ac.uk\)](https://www.kcl.ac.uk/lc/decoding-language-teaching)
- EDI grant £9,571
- active research, training and reflective practice, students as co-researchers and curriculum co-creators
- staff development events on decolonizing teacher training in Modern Foreign Languages (MFL)
- deconstructing reading lists, resources, teaching methodologies
- mentoring scheme, both at King's Language Centre and in the partner school placements facilitated by King's School of Education, Communication and Society

# Case of Arabic

---

European  
representation of  
the Arab world

US-produced  
Arabic textbooks

Reinforced  
hegemonic  
power relations

Innovative  
pedagogy

Integrated  
approach to  
Arabic dialects



# Case of Russian

---

Postcolonial or  
postsocialist?

200 ethnic  
groups

Decolonisation  
of regional  
education

Focus on  
indigenous  
languages

Purification of  
Russian

# Decolonising Russian language resources

---

Intercultural  
competence

Diversity of  
Russian  
society

Students' self-  
representation

Critical  
language  
awareness

Identity  
options

# Students interviewing teachers

---

- **German teacher:** efforts in decolonisation must not end at adding new modules looking at diverse literature, decolonisation must also include exploring different teaching styles rooted in different cultures in addition to making space in the classroom for different perspectives to be shared.
- **Russian teacher:** invites guest speakers from different (minority) regions of Russia. Her students were always intrigued by the nuanced points of view given by these speakers. When addressing the issue of inclusivity and representation in resources, the anti-gay agenda has curtailed the evolution of family illustrations in textbooks. However, Russia's socio demographic history has produced very little racial tension to be dealt with.



# Students interviewing teachers

---

- **French teacher:** there is space for more representative and inclusive illustrations, teachers of beginner classes will have a relatively big impact on the way students view the culture of the language, it is important to think critically about names used in examples, images of family members, and stereotypes presented, teachers need to let go of the strict teacher-student dynamic and adopting a more collaborative structure. The next step is to look further into adopting different assessment methods and creating different feedback channels for students.

# Students interviewing teachers

---

- **Italian teacher:** most coursebooks reflect Italian conservatism as far as gender is concerned. The typical Italian family does not include some of the students I have here, who are often same sex couples and -as such- cannot identify themselves in the coursebook. So, what I usually do is integrate materials, which I personally devise to add more diversity. In terms of race there is a similar problem, Italian coursebooks tend to have just representations of white Europeans so I add more diversity when I prepare my material. Also, in terms of names I add more variety and instead of having just Italian names, I add Omar or Amira for instance.



# Students reflecting on the project

---

- **Karan:** My interest in decolonisation stems from a deep understanding of the lasting effects of colonialism on countries that were colonised, especially those in the Indian subcontinent.
- Through my interactions with Hindi and Punjabi teachers, I have gained a deeper understanding of the impact of colonialism on language and how it has led to the marginalisation and erasure of colonised languages. The project highlighted that language is not just a means of communication but also an important tool for cultural expression and identity. It is crucial to preserve and promote indigenous languages to prevent the loss of cultural heritage and to empower communities that have been historically oppressed.
- Overall, the project has been a transformative learning experience for me, deepening my understanding of the impact of colonialism on language and the importance of preserving and promoting languages for a more inclusive and equitable world

# Students reflect on the project

---

- **Hala:** My interest in decolonisation stems from a deep passion for empowering indigenous communities. The world around us is littered with remnants of colonial legacies. The effects of which have dominated the way we live, learn, and view the world.
- What I found really interesting was that each teacher's background greatly affected their outlook on the decolonization project. This made sense as decolonisation has inherent historical and geographical aspects. The variation of approaches taken by the teachers illustrated the richness of the possible outcomes on the classroom setting as a result of that diversity



# What are the outcomes?

---

- **Karan:** Through conducting interviews with Hindi and Punjabi teachers, I have honed my skills in qualitative research methods such as data collection and analysis, as well as in conducting interviews and synthesizing information.
- Furthermore, the project has given me a deeper understanding of the challenges involved in promoting indigenous languages and the importance of adopting a decolonial approach to language education.
- I am interested in exploring further the intersections between law, language, and colonialism. Specifically, I am interested in researching the role of language in the legal system and the impact of colonial legacies on legal language and interpretation.

# What are the takeaways?

---

- **Hala:** this enriching experience has developed my comparative skills. It has also made me eager to reconnect with my inquisitive side as I have relearned how to efficiently search for information and identify relevant points. In the future, I would like to research the relationship between language and identity.
- The next steps in my learning journey involve reading more about the way decolonization has been dealt with across different fields and sectors. It is also important to keep the conversation with the different actors in the educational environment alive. This initiative must not go out of 'trend' in the next few years.



# Trainee teachers as co-researchers

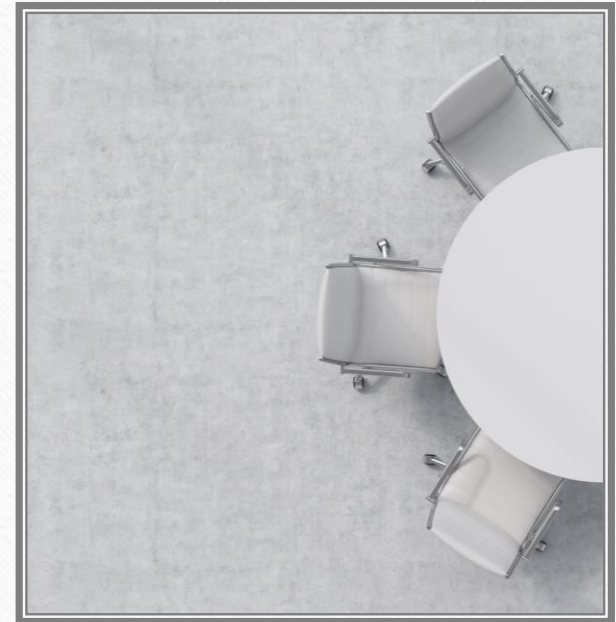
---

- 4 trainee teachers – Maya Butler, Abigail Eshun, Tanya Rajoelina and Jasmin Ahmed Ali Dualeh
- 1 Year PGCE training course to teach French and Spanish/German in Secondary schools – 2 placements – Subject Mentors
- Data collected - Interviews with School-based mentors, curriculum reviews
- Arts-based reflection
- Reflective accounts

# Training for co-researchers

---

- Attending workshops and training sessions
  - Interview training with research project co-leads,, Jane Jones, Christina Richardson with Project Lead, Tanya Linaker
  - Arts-based methods reflections
  - Qualitative Interview data analysis
  - Guidance on curriculum review – prompt sheet





# Arts-based methods

---

- “...a set of methodological tools used by qualitative researchers across the disciplines during all phases of social research, including data collection, analysis, interpretation, and representation. These emerging tools adapt the tenets of the creative arts in order to address social research questions in holistic and engaged ways in which theory and practice are intertwined.”  
(Leavy, 2009)

# Arts-based reflection

---

Brief – to choose or make an object or image that has meaning for you in connection with the decolonising the curriculum project.

Bring and show this item during the session and explain why you have chosen it.



# Arts-based reflections

---

- Objects
- A doll given to me as a child from relatives in what was then the Republic of Yugoslavia. She symbolises my bi - cultural and bilingual upbringing and the Slav roots of my family, Jane
- This is a cross stitch of a popular symbol in Ghana from the Adinkra symbols. This artwork is important to me as it is an infusion of the European and Ghanaian culture that represent who I am. The symbol is called 'Gye Nyame' which translates to 'except God or Only God' . It is a reminder that the power of the universe is greater than any human being or earthly force. It is a very popular symbol and is often used in artwork, clothing and architecture across Ghana. Abi



# Maya's object

---

- My object is a badge with a brown heart in the middle of different shades. I came across this badge in an educational institution, offered to those who signed an anti-racism pledge. I chose this object as I think it represents the nuances of contemporary decolonial work at an institutional level. While visible symbols are important, especially for young people, to easily signpost the unseen work that is being done, it can also have the opposite effect of taking the place of the work itself in the same way that the mere assertion that one is doing decolonial work comes to constitute the work. I think this object reminds us of the need to hold ourselves accountable without falling victim to virtue signalling.



# 1. Colonialism, Colonisation and Decolonisation of the curriculum

---

These themes are sometimes conflated in the data

Lack of shared conceptual understanding, a sense of conflict

But

there is an evident shared feeling of what is involved and feelings, it was suggested, are a starting point to prompt reflection and action.

One interviewee said on this point: *So the next step would be to really engage with students/ staff on their thoughts and feelings and from there we can start to make some modifications.*

*Whilst I don't believe in totally erm...shunning history and... erm you know rewriting it we do need to accept and understand that there is a need to move on and there's a need to revisit certain aspects of the curriculum that are built on those sort of...colonial interests in colonial values.*

# Initial Findings – themes emerging

---

Colonialism,  
Colonisation and  
Decolonisation of the  
curriculum

From Eurocentric to  
an international  
perspective

Personal meaning:  
uncertainty and  
temporality

The need for structure  
and a framework for  
decolonising the  
curriculum

Decolonising the  
curriculum and  
inclusive pedagogies in  
MFL

Student input/voice  
and representation

Diversity, identity and  
intersectionality

Collaborative purpose  
– an ongoing project



# Personal meaning, uncertainty and temporality

---

- There was absolute agreement that decolonising the curriculum is a concept that is still being explored- this could be seen as a strength as an ongoing process, not a tokenistic set of actions. A tension was observed in one interview and noted by the researcher thus:

*The teacher perceiving “decolonisation” as a finished ahistorical process and a waste of time because we will move onto some other “trend” in the future, but then going on to acknowledge the importance of inclusivity and the need to include South American and French-speaking countries other than France more’.*

Challenge of coming to terms with and enacting curriculum decolonisation where an individual is still trying to make sense of it, feels uncertain about it, even sees it as a passing trend YET subscribing to cultural inclusivity. Is this, we ask, part of the learning journey?

Uncertainty of meaning was very much in evidence and interviewees affirmed the essential uncertainty of the decolonisation terminology and its temporal and contextual frames, and, above all, its personalised meaning. One interviewee put it in a nutshell: *An individual’s background will play a role in how they perceive the decolonisation project.*

# The need for structure and a framework for decolonising the curriculum

---

- A lack of certainty:
  - *Where does one start? And what does it entail?*
  - *I do think there needs to be a bit more of a formalisation. I'd like to see... I'd like a teacher guidebook or a senior leadership framework on what is a decolonised curriculum? What is diversity in your school? You know, here are some suggestions and tools and some ideas. That is where the DFE needs to go next with this.*



# Collaborative purpose – an ongoing project

---

- Data wholeheartedly endorsed decolonization of the curriculum as a collaborative task with a shared purpose
- Working groups across departments
- External groups/ individuals coming in to schools to give training on the subject
- Policies implemented following INSET
- Black History Month
- Re-assessing/reviewing/adapting the scheme of work, curriculum maps, and resources in teams
- Teacher focus groups working in a cross- curricular way .
- *... having a reading group for all to collaborate in and share ideas and knowledge to create progression amongst the learner within that session and in relation to this topic, even undertake empirical research: We should have to interview people to ask them if they can tell us what it is like being a black woman in east London. I can take agency and find out from someone who has written about it and who wants to share their opinion.*

# Jasmin

---

- Overall, my interest towards the decolonization dichotomy first stemmed from the difficulties I faced finding stability between two very different cultures. Being a second-generation immigrant can be hard to navigate, especially when you are young and made to feel a certain level of uncomfortably to express and embrace other parts of your identity that sit outside the norm within a specific dominant group that isn't your family. All in all, these parts often experience apartness, disconnectedness, alienation, and separation due to community structures that often discredit aspects of your inherited culture.
- I viewed my natural hair as being disorderly, improper, and bad, and wanted to it to be straight, no matter the cost. I can specifically recall begging my older sister to straighten my hair away from my mother's watchful eye, who always pushed against Eurocentric beauty standards in my household and wanted us to fully embrace our African features.



# Takeaways from the project – final words from our co-researchers

---

- Maya
- I have felt validated in my understandings of best practices for decolonization of MFL education, and it has been fruitful and restorative for a me as a teacher, researcher, and person of color.
- Admittedly, this is mostly in part due to the fact that I have felt validated in my opinions on the concept of decolonization by those whom I have interviewed and the other people in the research group. I question how much I would have enjoyed participating in the project if I had felt the need to justify the work and my ideas, or been met with very resistant ideas.
- Nonetheless, although I have worked in the education sector for several years, as I train to be a fully qualified teacher, I have learnt a lot about the realities of the time constraints and emotional labor involved to be able to carry out best practices concerning decolonization considering the number of responsibilities and demands put on a teacher in the day to day.

# Jasmin

---

- Overall, my main take-away from the project is that there is lack of external support, as well as perhaps a lack of prioritisation in relation to the decolonising learning journey in schools. More external support is needed from grassroot organizations, examination boards and the government to support educators in providing representative content and pedagogy that is reflective of the modern foreign languages studied in class.
- I would like to promote more programmes, where students can undertake an artistic project that encourages them to explore and link their heritage culture to the MFL language studied in their classroom.



# Selected Bibliography

---

- Adams, L. (2008). Can we apply postcolonial theory to Central Eurasia? *Central Eurasian Studies Review*
- Alvares, C., & Faruqi, S. S. (2014). *Decolonising the University: The Emerging Quest for Non-Eurocentric Paradigms*. Penerbit USM.
- Arday, J. (2018a). Dismantling power and privilege through reflexivity: negotiating normative Whiteness, the Eurocentric curriculum and racial micro-aggressions within the Academy. *Whiteness and education (Print)*, 3(2), 141-161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23793406.2019.1574211>
- Arday, J. (2018b). Understanding race and educational leadership in higher education: Exploring the Black and ethnic minority (BME) experience. *Management in education*, 32(4), 192-200. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020618791002>
- Arday, J., & Mirza, H. S. (2018). *Dismantling Race in Higher Education Racism, Whiteness and Decolonising the Academy* (1st 2018. ed.). Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-60261-5>
- Arday, J., Zoe Belluigi, D., & Thomas, D. (2021). Attempting to break the chain: reimaging inclusive pedagogy and decolonising the curriculum within the academy. *Educational philosophy and theory*, 53(3), 298-313. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1773257>

# Selected Bibliography

---

- Bock, Z., & Stroud, C. (2021). *Language and decoloniality in higher education : reclaiming voices from the South* (First edition. ed.). Bloomsbury Academic. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350049109>
- Bulatova, T., & Glukhov, A. (2018). "Sostoianie mezhetnicheskikh otnoshenii v Tomske v otsenke obrazovatel'nykh migrantov," Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Filosofiiia. Sotsiologiiia. Politologiiia, no. 43.
- Burawoy, M., & Verdery, K. (1999). *Uncertain transition: ethnographies of change in the postsocialist world*. The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group.
- Chari, S., & Verdery, K. (2009). Thinking between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War. *Comparative studies in society and history*, 51(1), 6-34. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417509000024>
- Charles, E. (2019). Decolonizing the curriculum. *Insights the UKSG journal*, 32(1), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1629/uksg.475>
- Chigudu, S. (2020). Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford: a critical testimony. *Critical African studies*, 12(3), 302-312. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21681392.2020.1788401>
- Columbu, A. (2022). Decolonising Arabic Language Teaching: A Case Study. *Lingue Culture Mediazioni*, 8(2), 101-118. <https://doi.org/10.7358/lcm-2021-002-colu>



# Selected Bibliography

---

- Criser, R., & Knott, S. (2019). Decolonizing the Curriculum. *Die Unterrichtspraxis*, 52(2), 151-160. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tger.12098>
- Dale-Rivas, H. (2019). *The White Elephant in the Room: Ideas for Reducing Racial Inequalities in Higher Education*. HEPI Report 120. Higher Education Policy Institute. 99 Banbury Road, Oxford, OX26JX, UK.
- Decolonizing Queer Experience: LGBT+ Narratives from Eastern Europe and Eurasia. Ed. Emily Channel-Justice,. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2020. xiv, 205 pp. Preface. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Tables. hard bound. *Slavic review.*, 81(2), 477
- Delgado, R., Stefancic, J., & Harris, A. (2017). *Critical Race Theory (Third Edition): An Introduction*. NYU Press. <https://doi.org/10.18574/9781479851393>
- Fomunyan, K. G. (2019). *Decolonising Higher Education in the Era of Globalisation and Internationalisation*. UJ Press.
- Freire, P. (2014). *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.
- Giolfo, M. E. B., & Sinatora, F. L. (2018). Orientalism and Neo-Orientalism: Arabic Representations and the Study of Arabic. In (Vol. 120, pp. 81-99). BRILL. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004359901\\_005](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004359901_005)
- Kramsch, C. (2019). Between globalization and decolonization. Foreign languages in the cross-fire. In D. Macedo (Ed.), *Decolonizing foreign language education. The misteaching of English and other colonial languages* (pp. 50- 72). New York, NY: Routledge
- Liyanage M., 2020, HEPI number Debate Paper 23

# Selected Bibliography

---

- McCoy, D. L., & Rodricks, D. J. (2015). Critical Race Theory in Higher Education: 20 Years of Theoretical and Research Innovations: Critical Race Theory in Higher Education. *ASHE higher education report*, 41(3), 1-117. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aehe.20021>
- Nasibullov & Kopylova, (2022). Decolonising the Curriculum in Hybrid Spaces: Muslim Schooling in Russia. *Decolonising Curriculum Knowledge: International Perspectives and Interdisciplinary Approaches* In (pp. 147-159). Springer International Publishing AG. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13623-8\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13623-8_10)
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. (2020). THE DYNAMICS OF EPISTEMOLOGICAL DECOLONISATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY: TOWARDS EPISTEMIC FREEDOM. *Strategic review for southern Africa = Strategiese oorsig vir suider-Africa*, 40(1). <https://doi.org/10.35293/srsa.v40i1.268>
- Poitras Pratt, Y., Louie, D. W., Hanson, A. J., & Ottmann, J. (2018). Indigenous education and decolonization. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education
- Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, “The dynamics of epistemological decolonisation in the 21st Century: towards epistemic freedom,” *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 40, no. 1 (May 2018): 16–45)
- Salwa M., 2021b, Decolonising Arabic Language Teaching Mohamed, “An Analysis and Levelling of Reading Texts across Arabic Textbooks Based on the CEFR Proficiency Levels”. In *Trends and Developments for the Future of Language Education in Higher Education*, edited by Catherine Hua Xiang, 57-83. Hershey: Information Science Reference. Natova, Ivanka. 2019.
- Shardakova, M., & Pavlenko, A. (2004). Identity Options in Russian Textbooks. *Journal of language, identity, and education*, 3(1), 25-46. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327701jlie0301\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327701jlie0301_2)
- Zannie Bock, C. S. Z. B. C. S. (2021). *Language and Decoloniality in Higher Education: Reclaiming Voices from the South*. Bloomsbury Publishing.