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Towards a decolonial philosophy of religious education in Zambia

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Abstract

Religious Education (RE) in Zambia's national curriculum has been historically shaped by missionary and colonial paradigms, resulting in the privileging of Eurocentric epistemologies and the marginalization of indigenous spiritual traditions (Phiri, 2020). Despite post-independence reforms aiming to diversify curricular content, dominant frameworks continue to emphasize Christian doctrinal instruction, thus limiting critical reflexivity and epistemic justice (Banda, 2018; Simuchimba, 2005). This article proposes a decolonial philosophical framework to reconceptualize RE in Zambian schools by centering indigenous cosmologies and embracing pluriversality. Employing qualitative curriculum document analysis of national syllabi and textbooks, alongside semi-structured interviews with educators, curriculum developers, and community elders in Lusaka, Copperbelt, and Eastern Provinces, we investigate colonial traces in syllabus objectives, teaching materials, and pedagogical practices. Findings reveal persistent discursive silences around local spiritualities and an absence of dialogical pedagogies that honor learners' lived experiences (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2021). Grounded in decolonial theory - particularly Quijano's (2000) concept of coloniality of power and Mignolo's (2011) epistemic disobedience - the study articulates three core principles for a decolonial RE curriculum: epistemic pluriversality, relational knowing, and dialogical pedagogy. These principles inform recommended curriculum revisions, including place-based learning modules, incorporation of indigenous narratives, and targeted teacher professional development in decolonial methodologies. By bridging philosophical decolonial insights with actionable curriculum design, this framework advances RE scholarship in Sub-Saharan Africa and offers policy guidelines such as participatory syllabus review processes involving indigenous stakeholders. Reimagining RE through this philosophical lens contributes to broader debates on curriculum decolonization in the Global South. Ultimately, the proposed decolonial philosophy of RE aims to foster inclusive, culturally responsive learning environments that advance epistemic justice and cultural sustainability in Zambian schools.

Keywords: Religious education, decolonial philosophy, epistemic pluriversality, dialogical pedagogy, indigenous spiritualities

1. Introductions

1.1 Background and Context

Religious Education (RE) has occupied a central place in Zambia's national curriculum since the early colonial period, when missionary societies established faith-based schools to inculcate Christian doctrine alongside basic literacy and numeracy (Phiri, 2020) ^[9]. Following independence in 1964, successive curriculum reforms sought to broaden the scope of RE, incorporating multiple world religions and moral education objectives (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2021) ^[7]. Yet, the legacy of missionary influence remains evident in the privileging of Christian theological frameworks and the relative marginalization of indigenous spiritualities, which in pre-colonial Zambian societies functioned as holistic systems of knowledge, communal ethics, and cosmology (Phiri, 2020; Banda, 2018) ^[2, 9]. Despite policy assertions of religious pluralism, official syllabi and approved textbooks continue to foreground Eurocentric epistemologies, positioning Christianity as normative and treating other traditions - African Traditional Religion (ATR), Islam, Hinduism - as supplemental (MoE, 2021) ^[7]. Pedagogical guidance emphasizes doctrinal instruction and rote learning over critical engagement, limiting learners' ability to interrogate the historical and power dimensions embedded in RE content (Banda, 2018) ^[2]. These continuities reflect what Quijano (2000) ^[10] terms the "coloniality of power," wherein inherited knowledge hierarchies

persist beyond formal decolonization processes, sustaining epistemic injustice in educational practice.

1.2 Problem Statement

Although post-independence curriculum revisions nominally endorse pluralism and critical inquiry, there is scant evidence that decolonial paradigms inform RE policy or classroom implementation (MoE, 2021) ^[7]. The persistence of Eurocentric content and pedagogies generates discursive silences around indigenous cosmologies and fails to cultivate epistemic justice for learners whose spiritual and cultural identities lie outside dominant Christian frameworks (Banda, 2018) ^[2]. Moreover, teachers report a lack of professional development in decolonial methodologies, which further inhibits the transformation of RE into a site for critical reflexivity and cultural resurgence (Phiri, 2020) ^[9].

1.3 Purpose, Scope, and Research Questions

This study responds to the need for a systematic philosophical critique of RE by proposing a decolonial framework that re-centers indigenous knowledge systems and dialogical pedagogies in Zambian schools. Specifically, the article aims to:

1. Trace the colonial and missionary origins of current RE curricula and identify enduring Eurocentric assumptions.
2. Articulate core philosophical principles - epistemic pluriversality, relational knowing, and dialogical pedagogy - grounded in decolonial theory (Mignolo, 2011; Quijano, 2000) ^[8, 10].
3. Recommend curriculum revisions and professional development strategies to enact a decolonial philosophy of RE in policy and practice.

1.4 Significance of the Study

By bridging decolonial thought with curriculum theory, this research advances the conceptualization of RE as a transformative discipline capable of redressing epistemic injustice and fostering cultural sustainability in the Global South. The proposed framework contributes to emerging scholarship on curriculum decolonization by offering concrete design principles and policy guidelines tailored to the Zambian context. Practically, it equips educators and policymakers with a philosophically robust rationale for participatory syllabus review processes that integrate indigenous stakeholders, thereby promoting inclusive, contextually grounded learning environments (Mignolo, 2011) ^[8]. Ultimately, this study lays the groundwork for future empirical and comparative investigations into decolonial RE practices across Sub-Saharan Africa.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Evolution of Religious Education in Zambia

Religious instruction in pre-colonial Zambian societies was embedded within communal rites, oral traditions, and indigenous spiritual systems that integrated cosmology, ethics, and social cohesion into everyday learning (Phiri, 2020) ^[9]. These knowledge systems were transmitted through elders, clan rituals, and community gatherings, emphasizing relationality and the sacredness of land, ancestors, and natural phenomena.

The advent of European missionary societies in the late nineteenth century introduced formalized schooling models

whose curricula prioritized Christian catechism, European moral codes, and Western epistemologies (Phiri, 2020; Banda, 2018; Hambulo, 2016) ^[2, 6, 9]. Missionary-run schools supplanted indigenous pedagogies with rote memorization of biblical texts, hymnody, and doctrinal quizzes, constructing Religious Education (RE) as confessional instruction rather than a critical inquiry into belief systems. After independence in 1964, the Zambian government enacted successive curriculum revisions to reflect national identity and religious pluralism (MoE, 2021) ^[7]. Official syllabi expanded to include Islam, Hinduism, and African Traditional Religion (ATR) alongside Christianity, while introducing moral education objectives intended to foster unity and citizenship. However, the structural templates and assessment methods remained largely unchanged, perpetuating missionary-derived content design and didactic pedagogies (MoE, 2021) ^[7].

2.2 Philosophical Foundations of Religious Education

Global scholarship on RE distinguishes between confessional, non-confessional, and critical paradigms, each reflecting divergent aims and methodologies (Banda, 2018) ^[2]. The confessional paradigm seeks faith-formation and doctrinal adherence, often tied to denominational goals, whereas non-confessional approaches aim for objective study of religion as a cultural phenomenon. Critical models prioritize reflexivity, social justice, and power analysis, positioning learners as active interrogators of belief systems. In the Zambian context, policy documents nominally endorse critical engagement and pluralism but default to non-critical content delivery due to entrenched doctrinal legacies and limited teacher preparation in philosophical pedagogy (Banda, 2018; MoE, 2021) ^[2, 7]. Philosophical inquiry into the nature and purpose of RE remains underdeveloped, with curriculum frameworks lacking explicit theoretical rationales beyond moral instruction and civic cohesion.

2.3 Decolonial Theory in Education

Decolonial theory foregrounds the ongoing structures of colonial power that persist in knowledge production and pedagogy, termed the “coloniality of power” (Quijano, 2000) ^[10]. This framework critiques Eurocentric hegemony in curricula and advocates epistemic disobedience - rupturing dominant canons to make space for subjugated knowledges (Mignolo, 2011) ^[8].

Key concepts in decolonial education include epistemic pluriversality, which asserts the validity of multiple knowledge systems; cognitive justice, which calls for equitable recognition of marginalized epistemologies; and relational pedagogy, which situates learning within learners’ cultural and spiritual worlds (De Sousa Santos, 2014; Mignolo, 2011) ^[3, 8]. These principles challenge monolithic, universalist educational models and invite a reorientation toward situated, dialogical curricula.

2.4 Gaps and Opportunities

Despite growing interest in decolonial curriculum initiatives across Sub-Saharan Africa, RE scholarship in Zambia has yet to integrate these theoretical advances into policy or practice (MoE, 2021) ^[7]. Existing studies document curricular content and teacher perspectives but rarely engage with decolonial philosophy as a guiding framework (Banda, 2018; Phiri, 2020) ^[2, 9]. This lacuna presents an opportunity

to develop a systematic critique of Eurocentric assumptions in RE and to propose concrete design principles that re-center indigenous spiritualities, dialogical pedagogy, and epistemic justice in Zambian schooling contexts.

3. Theoretical Framework: Towards a Decolonial Philosophy

3.1 Defining “Decolonial Philosophy” in Education

Decolonial philosophy in education emerges from critiques of the ongoing coloniality of power, knowledge, and being that persist in pedagogical practices and curricular content long after political independence (Quijano, 2000) ^[10]. It posits that education must move beyond formal inclusion of non-Western content to address structural hierarchies that privilege Eurocentric epistemologies and marginalize indigenous ways of knowing (Mignolo, 2011) ^[8]. At its core, decolonial philosophy foregrounds three interrelated tenets:

- Epistemic justice, which mandates equitable recognition and valorization of subjugated knowledges without forcing them into Western conceptual frameworks (De Sousa Santos, 2014) ^[3].
- Relational knowing, which situates learning within embodied, intersubjective relationships among learners, community knowers, and the natural world (Tuck & Yang, 2012) ^[12].
- Embodied curricula, which integrates praxis and lived experience, asserting that cognition and spirituality are inseparable and must be honored in pedagogical design (Battiste, 2013) ^[1].

By defining decolonial philosophy in these terms, this framework moves beyond a mere additive approach (e.g., “including ATR alongside Christian instruction”) toward a transformative paradigm that interrogates the philosophical underpinnings of Religious Education (RE) itself. It demands a reorientation of curricular aims, reframing RE as a site for critical reflexivity, collective sense-making, and communal healing from colonial epistemicides.

3.2 Principles for a Decolonial RE Curriculum

Building on these tenets, three guiding principles inform the design of a decolonial RE curriculum in Zambian schools:

Centering Indigenous Spiritualities

- Curriculum content must begin with local cosmologies and ritual practices as foundational knowledge systems rather than peripheral case studies (Phiri, 2020) ^[9].
- This principle rejects hierarchical classification of religions and instead offers comparative, relational modules that honor ATR, Islamic, Christian, and other traditions as pluriversal interlocutors (Mignolo, 2011) ^[8].

Fostering Critical Reflexivity

- Learners engage in reflective inquiry about how colonial histories and power relations shape religious knowledge and identity (Quijano, 2000) ^[10].
- Pedagogical activities - including archival document analysis, storytelling circles, and site-visits to sacred locales - encourage students to uncover and question embedded epistemic biases (De Sousa Santos, 2014) ^[3].

Dialogical Pedagogy

- Classrooms operate as spaces of reciprocal knowledge exchange rather than top-down transmission (Freire, 1970) ^[5].
- Teachers and learners co-construct meaning through generative dialogue, integrating community elders, faith leaders, and cultural practitioners as co-educators (Battiste, 2013; Tuck & Yang, 2012) ^[1, 12].

These principles collectively shift RE from a passive reception of authorized doctrines to an active, participatory process that cultivates epistemic empowerment and cultural revitalization.

3.3 Philosophical Methods

To enact this decolonial philosophy, two interlocking philosophical methods guide empirical inquiry and curriculum design:

1. Curriculum Genealogy

- Inspired by Foucauldian genealogy and decolonial theorists, this method traces the historical emergence, normalization, and contestation of religious curricular statements (Foucault, 1977; Mignolo, 2011) ^[4, 8].
- Analysts examine archived syllabi, missionary reports, and policy drafts to reveal how colonial power relations shaped learning objectives, assessment criteria, and textbook narratives (Phiri, 2020) ^[9].
- Genealogical analysis foregrounds moments of rupture and resistance - such as early post-independence curriculum reviews - to identify potential sites for decolonial intervention.

2. Dialogical Inquiry

- Grounded in Freire’s (1970) ^[5] pedagogy of the oppressed and expanded through decolonial scholarship, dialogical inquiry engages stakeholders in co-constructing curricular knowledge (Freire, 1970; de Sousa Santos, 2014) ^[3, 5].
- Data collection methods include collaborative workshops with teachers and community knowledge keepers, participatory observation of ritual practices, and learner-led curriculum prototyping sessions.
- This method not only yields rich qualitative insights but also models decolonial praxis by redistributing epistemic authority to historically marginalized voices.

Together, curriculum genealogy and dialogical inquiry operationalize the theoretical principles of epistemic pluriversality, relational knowing, and embodied curricula. They provide both analytic lenses for deconstructing colonial remnants and generative processes for building a decolonial RE curriculum that resonates with Zambian learners’ cultural and spiritual realities.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative philosophical inquiry that integrates curriculum genealogy and dialogical inquiry to surface and transform colonial legacies in RE curricula. Curriculum genealogy traces the historical formation of syllabus objectives, textbook narratives, and policy statements, revealing power relations embedded in

curricular artefacts (Foucault, 1977; Mignolo, 2011) ^[4, 8]. Dialogical inquiry engages educators, curriculum developers, and community knowledge keepers in co-constructing meaning, modeling Freire's (1970) ^[5] praxis of education as mutual reflection and action. By combining these methods, the research simultaneously deconstructs Eurocentric assumptions and generates generative spaces for a decolonial RE philosophy (De Sousa Santos, 2014) ^[3].

4.2 Data Collection and Analysis

4.2.1 Document Analysis

A purposive sample of national curriculum documents was collected, including:

- The 2021 National Religious Education Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2021) ^[7].
- Three widely used Grade 8-12 RE textbooks approved by the MoE.
- Policy reports and syllabus review drafts from 2010-2022.

Each document was examined using a coding schema derived from decolonial tenets: epistemic pluriversality, relational knowing, and dialogical pedagogy (Phiri, 2020) ^[9]. Analytic memos documented instances of Eurocentric framing, omissions of indigenous spiritualities, and opportunities for curricular rupture (Quijano, 2000) ^[10].

4.2.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 participants across Lusaka, Copperbelt, and Eastern Provinces:

- 15 RE teachers from government and mission schools.
- 5 curriculum developers from the MoE and teacher training colleges.
- 4 school chaplains and community elders representing local ATR lineages.

An interview guide probed participants' perceptions of RE aims, pedagogical practices, and prospects for decolonial reform. Interviews lasted 60-90 minutes, were audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim.

4.2.3 Data Analysis

Transcripts and document codes were imported into NVivo 12 for thematic analysis. Coding followed an iterative process:

1. Open coding to identify recurring concepts and tensions in RE content and practice.
2. Axial coding to link concepts to decolonial principles (Mignolo, 2011) ^[8].
3. Selective coding to synthesize core themes - colonial residues, pedagogical constraints, and emergent decolonial strategies.

Philosophical critique complemented thematic analysis by interrogating normative assumptions behind recurring themes and situating findings within broader decolonial discourse (Battiste, 2013; De Sousa Santos, 2014) ^[1, 3].

4.3 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Zambia Research Ethics Committee. Participants received information sheets detailing study aims, methods, and data use. Written consent was secured, with assurances of

anonymity and the right to withdraw at any time. Researcher positionality was continually reflexed through field journals, acknowledging the investigator's own colonial-informed education and commitment to epistemic justice (Tuck & Yang, 2012) ^[12]. Cultural sensitivity protocols honored participants' spiritual beliefs, ensuring that discussions of indigenous rituals and cosmologies were conducted with respect and reciprocity.

5. Critical Analysis of Current Curriculum

5.1 Colonial Traces in Curriculum Documents

The 2021 National Religious Education Curriculum Framework retains terminology that privileges Christian catechism over indigenous worldviews, repeatedly referring to "scriptural knowledge" without specifying which scriptures, effectively centering the Bible as the normative text (MoE, 2021) ^[7]. Textbook analysis reveals that 82% of content pages discuss Christian doctrine - often through literal interpretation exercises - while African Traditional Religion (ATR) is confined to a single, end-of-chapter overview labeled "other faiths" (Phiri, 2020; Banda, 2018) ^[2, 9].

Syllabus objectives emphasize memorization of theological definitions and key biblical narratives, with assessment rubrics requiring students to "recall and explain" rather than critique or compare belief systems (MoE, 2021) ^[7]. In end-of-unit examinations, 67% of item prompts pertain directly to biblical passages, whereas ATR and Islam-related questions account for fewer than 10% of tasks, often framed descriptively rather than analytically (MoE, 2021) ^[7]. Such allocation of assessment weight illustrates Quijano's (2000) ^[10] "coloniality of power," whereby curriculum artifacts maintain epistemic hierarchies long after independence.

The absence of dialogical or reflexive tasks underscores a persistent Eurocentric pedagogy. Even modules labeled "Religious Pluralism" default to didactic lectures, with no guidance for comparative or community-based learning activities (MoE, 2021) ^[7]. This one-dimensional approach reproduces the "epistemicide" that De Sousa Santos (2014) ^[3] identifies, erasing the complex, relational knowledge systems inherent in local spiritual traditions.

5.2 Educator Perspectives

Interviews with 15 RE teachers across three provinces reveal widespread concern about curricular constraints. Twelve teachers reported feeling unprepared to teach ATR content, citing a lack of detailed resource materials and training in decolonial pedagogies (Banda, 2018) ^[2]. As one Lusaka teacher noted, "When we cover ATR, we rush through it in a single lesson because the textbook gives us only a paragraph" (Interview with Teacher 7, August 2023). Curriculum developers acknowledge that pluralism is more rhetorical than substantive. Two developers admitted that policy revisions have focused on adding faith categories without revisiting pedagogical methods or power dynamics: "We listed religions side by side, but we never questioned why Christianity dominated our learning objectives" (Interview with Curriculum Officer, September 2023).

Community elders and school chaplains described a sense of disconnection between learners and their ancestral heritage. An Eastern Province chaplain explained that students often lack vocabulary to discuss local rituals in class, reinforcing the notion that indigenous practices belong outside of formal education (Interview with Chaplain 2, September

2023). These testimonies align with Freire's (1970) ^[5] critique of top-down pedagogy: learners are recipients of imposed knowledge rather than co-creators of meaning.

5.3 Learner Experiences

While classroom observation was limited, student focus groups in Lusaka and Copperbelt indicate that RE lessons rarely resonate with their lived realities. Several participants reported that lessons on ATR felt "theoretical" and disconnected from community practices they observe during ceremonies (Learner focus group, July 2023). Others expressed frustration that discussions did not address how colonial histories continue to shape contemporary religious identities: "We learn about church history but not about how our ancestors practiced faith before missionaries came" (Learner focus group, July 2023).

These reflections highlight the need for dialogical pedagogy and place-based learning that situates curriculum content within students' cultural landscapes (Mignolo, 2011) ^[8]. Without such integration, RE remains a site of epistemic exclusion rather than a forum for epistemic justice and cultural revitalization (De Sousa Santos, 2014) ^[3].

6. Articulating a Decolonial RE Philosophy

6.1 Core Philosophical Propositions

A decolonial RE philosophy rests on three interlocking propositions that reconfigure curriculum aims and pedagogical practice.

First, epistemic pluriversality asserts that multiple knowledge systems indigenous, Islamic, Christian, and other faith traditions hold equal validity and must inform curricular content (De Sousa Santos, 2014; Mignolo, 2011) ^[3, 8]. Rather than positioning ATR as an add-on, pluriversality foregrounds local cosmologies as foundational, inviting comparative modules in which learners explore commonalities and differences across traditions without defaulting to Western binaries.

Second, relational knowing emphasizes interconnectedness among learners, community knowledge holders, and the natural world (Battiste, 2013) ^[1]. This proposition shifts emphasis from abstract doctrinal mastery to embodied, intersubjective learning experiences: storytelling circles with elders, joint reflections on sacred sites, and collective rituals that situate religious concepts within lived context (Tuck & Yang, 2012) ^[12].

Third, dialogical praxis reconceives teaching and learning as co-creative encounters rather than top-down transactions (Freire, 1970) ^[5]. In this view, educators and students engage in praxis - reflection coupled with action - examining how colonial histories shape religious knowledge while collaboratively constructing new, locally rooted narratives (Mignolo, 2011) ^[8].

Together, these propositions move RE beyond confessional or non-confessional paradigms toward a transformative discipline that cultivates critical reflexivity, cultural resurgence, and epistemic justice (Quijano, 2000) ^[10].

6.2 Curriculum Design Implications

Translating philosophical propositions into curriculum design requires reimagining objectives, content, pedagogy, and assessment.

Objectives: Frame learning goals around critical engagement and cultural revitalization. For example,

learners articulate how colonial missionization altered indigenous rituals and co-design community-based projects to reintegrate these practices (Phiri, 2020) ^[9].

Content: Curate modules that begin with local oral histories, proverbs, and ritual performances as primary texts. Subsequent comparative lessons introduce Christian and Islamic narratives alongside ATR, encouraging thematic exploration - such as conceptions of creation or communal ethics - rather than isolated doctrinal study (De Sousa Santos, 2014) ^[3].

Pedagogy: Employ place-based learning and dialogical formats. Classes might convene at sacred groves or community shrines, where learners document and reflect on ritual practices, then return to the classroom to theorize connections between spiritual experience and curricular concepts (Battiste, 2013; Freire, 1970) ^[1, 5].

Assessment: Replace rote recall exams with reflective portfolios, community-engaged projects, and oral presentations co-evaluated by teachers and local elders. Such assessments validate relational knowing and reward critical interrogation of power dynamics in religious histories (Mignolo, 2011) ^[8].

6.3 Teacher Professional Development

Sustainable enactment of a decolonial RE philosophy depends on comprehensive teacher development that fosters both conceptual understanding and pedagogical skill.

Foundational Workshops: Intensive seminars introduce decolonial theory coloniality of power, epistemic disobedience, and Pluriversality grounded in Zambian case studies (Quijano, 2000; De Sousa Santos, 2014) ^[3, 10]. Facilitators model dialogical methods by co-learning with local spiritual leaders and encouraging teachers to reflect on their own colonial-informed assumptions (Tuck & Yang, 2012) ^[12].

Collaborative Curriculum Labs: Regular practitioner forums bring together RE teachers, curriculum developers, and community elders to co-draft lesson plans and resource materials. These labs function as living epistemic communities where participants iteratively prototype place-based activities and refine assessment rubrics that honor embodied curricula (Battiste, 2013) ^[1].

Ongoing Reflective Communities: Establish teacher learning circles - face-to-face or virtual - where educators share successes, challenges, and adaptations. These communities of practice sustain momentum, foster peer mentorship, and ensure continuous alignment with decolonial principles (Phiri, 2020) ^[9].

Resource Development and Dissemination: Develop a decentralized repository of decolonial RE materials, including audio-visual recordings of local rituals, annotated lesson guides, and reflective journals. Open access to these resources democratizes curriculum revision and empowers teachers across provinces to localize content effectively (MoE, 2021) ^[7].

By integrating philosophical propositions into concrete design and systematic professional support, this section lays

the groundwork for policy and practice reforms that follow, ensuring RE in Zambian schools becomes a dynamic site for epistemic justice, cultural sustainability, and transformative learning.

7. Policy and Practice Implications

7.1 Recommendations for Curriculum Policy

Revising national policy is critical to embed decolonial principles into the official RE curriculum framework. Four strategic actions are proposed:

1. Establish Participatory Curriculum Review Committees

- Mandate provincial RE review councils comprising Ministry officials, curriculum specialists, indigenous elders, faith leaders, and teacher representatives.
- Require councils to conduct biennial audits of syllabus objectives, ensuring alignment with epistemic pluriversality and relational knowing (Phiri, 2020) ^[9].
- Institutionalize public consultations - town-hall forums and digital surveys - to gather community input on proposed revisions (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2021) ^[7].

2. Revise Syllabus Guidelines to Centre Decolonial Tenets

- Update curriculum standards to define learning outcomes in terms of critical reflexivity, cultural resurgence, and dialogical praxis rather than solely doctrinal recall (Quijano, 2000) ^[10].
- Include explicit directives for integrating local oral histories, ritual practices, and indigenous epistemologies as core content pillars (de Sousa Santos, 2014) ^[3].
- Provide exemplar modules and assessment rubrics that model reflective portfolios, community-engaged projects, and co-evaluation by teachers and local knowledge keepers (Mignolo, 2011) ^[8].

3. Reform Textbook Approval Processes

- Require all new RE textbooks to undergo a decolonial content review by an independent panel of scholars, educators, and cultural custodians (Battiste, 2013) ^[1].
- Introduce criteria that assess balance among religious traditions, representation of indigenous worldviews, and inclusion of dialogical learning activities (MoE, 2021) ^[7].

4. Integrate Decoloniality into National Teacher Standards

- Embed mastery of decolonial theory and decolonial pedagogical methods within the Zambia Teacher Standards for professional accreditation (Tuck & Yang, 2012) ^[12].
- Link teacher appraisal and career progression to demonstrated application of relational and dialogical approaches in the classroom (Freire, 1970) ^[5].

7.2 School-Level Implementation Strategies

Policy reforms must be operationalized through targeted school-level initiatives that translate decolonial philosophy into practice. Two complementary strategies are recommended:

1. Pilot Programme Roll-Out in Diverse Provinces

- Select a cohort of 10-15 schools across urban, peri-urban, and rural districts in Lusaka, Copperbelt, and Eastern Provinces to implement revised RE modules.
- Facilitate partnerships between these pilot schools and local cultural institutions - shrines, community museums, and heritage centers - to support place-based learning excursions (Battiste, 2013) ^[1].
- Monitor implementation through mixed-methods evaluation: student reflective portfolios, teacher journals, and focus-group interviews to assess shifts in epistemic engagement and cultural resonance (Mignolo, 2011) ^[8].

2. Continuous Professional Learning Communities (CPLC)

- Establish school-based CPLCs that meet monthly for collaborative lesson planning, peer observation, and joint reflection on decolonial pedagogies (Phiri, 2020) ^[9].
- Invite community elders and faith leaders as CPLC co-facilitators, fostering reciprocal learning and ensuring cultural protocols are respected (De Sousa Santos, 2014) ^[3].
- Develop simple monitoring indicators - such as percentage of curriculum hours devoted to indigenous content, number of student-led dialogical sessions, and qualitative feedback on cultural relevance - to track progress toward epistemic justice goals (MoE, 2021) ^[7].

By aligning national policy with school-level praxis, these recommendations create a feedback loop: policy supports practice, practice informs iterative policy refinements, and both reinforce a sustainable decolonial RE philosophy that promotes epistemic justice, cultural sustainability, and transformative learning in Zambian schools.

8. Conclusion, Study Limitations and Future Directions

8.1 Summary of Major Findings

This study has demonstrated that Zambia's current RE curriculum perpetuates colonial epistemic hierarchies by privileging Christian doctrinal knowledge and marginalizing indigenous spiritualities (MoE, 2021; Quijano, 2000) ^[10, 7]. Document analysis revealed disproportionate coverage of biblical content and rote-learning objectives, while interviews with teachers, developers, and elders exposed gaps in resources and training for decolonial pedagogy (Banda, 2018; Phiri, 2020) ^[2, 9]. Grounded in decolonial theory, we articulated three core philosophical propositions - epistemic pluriversality, relational knowing, and dialogical praxis - and translated these into concrete curriculum design principles, professional development strategies, and policy recommendations to foster epistemic justice and cultural resurgence (de Sousa Santos, 2014; Mignolo, 2011) ^[3, 8].

8.2 Study Limitations

While the blended use of curriculum genealogy and dialogical inquiry enriched our critique and co-creative process, the purposive sampling of documents and participants limits generalizability beyond the three provinces studied (Freire, 1970; Foucault, 1977) ^[4, 5]. Classroom observations were constrained by access and time, reducing the depth of learner-experience data.

Additionally, the framework's implementation feasibility depends on sustained political will and resource allocation, factors that extend beyond the scope of this research (Battiste, 2013) ^[1].

8.3 Future Research Directions

To build on these foundations, comparative studies across Southern African contexts could examine how different colonial legacies shape RE policy and practice, illuminating regional patterns of epistemic exclusion and innovation (Tuck & Yang, 2012) ^[12]. Longitudinal impact assessments of pilot programmes will be critical to evaluate changes in student epistemic empowerment, intercultural competence, and community engagement over time. Further research might also explore digital innovations - such as multimedia repositories of indigenous rituals - to scale decolonial materials nationwide (Mignolo, 2011) ^[8].

By embedding decolonial philosophy into RE, this article contributes a rigorous, actionable framework for transforming religious curricula in Zambia and beyond. The envisioned collaborative processes among policymakers, educators, and communities offer a roadmap for epistemic justice that can inform broader curriculum decolonization efforts in the Global South.

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