



Reimagining psychology training in Africa: A decolonial analysis of curriculum coloniality in Zimbabwe

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Abstract: Psychology training across much of Africa continues to be shaped by colonial epistemological legacies that privilege Euro-American theories, diagnostic systems, and professional models while marginalizing indigenous African knowledge systems and local cultural heritage. This study provides a critical integrative decolonial analysis of psychology education in Zimbabwe, focusing on the tension between superficial curriculum localization and continued dependence on Western epistemological frameworks. The findings reveal an enduring epistemological disconnect between theory and practice, resulting in the inadequate preparation of graduates to engage with culturally grounded expressions of psychological distress and indigenous ontologies rooted in communal personhood. The study findings suggest that decolonial psychology curricula can serve as strategic initiatives for the training of Zimbabwean professional psychologists. In doing so, the study contributes to ongoing debates on the decolonization of applied psychology and curriculum reform in Africa.

Keywords: psychology training; curriculum coloniality; decolonization; indigenous knowledge systems; psychology education; Zimbabwe

Introduction

Psychology as an academic and professional discipline in Africa remains deeply entangled with the epistemological afterlives of colonialism (Nsamenang, 2007; Ratele, 2017). During the colonial period, African ways of knowing were either dismissed as unscientific or positioned as inferior to European knowledge traditions. In this process, psychology did not merely arrive in Africa as a neutral discipline; it arrived as part of a broader colonial knowledge project that defined what counted as legitimate truth, legitimate expertise, and legitimate methods of understanding human behaviour (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019; Maldonado-Torres & Cavaoris, 2017). Against this background, this study aimed to critically examine the tensions between curriculum localisation and continued dependence on Euro-American epistemological frameworks in psychology training in Zimbabwe and to explore their implications for the decolonization of psychology education in Africa.

Decolonizing psychology. The call to decolonize the psychology curriculum in Africa has been strengthened in recent years. *Curriculum* coloniality refers to the persistence of foreign content, reading cultures, diagnostic assumptions, therapeutic models, assessment practices, and professional competencies. Indigenous knowledge systems are historically situated, culturally embedded, and community-validated ways of understanding personhood, distress, healing, morality, relationality, and wellbeing. African scholars have argued that Western-oriented psychology education frequently reproduces epistemic exclusion of African indigenous

knowledges, as explanatory systems (Chitindingu & Mkhize, 2016; Nwoye, 2015; Phiri et al., 2023).

The call is to question how deeply embedded in the education of psychology is the colonialism of knowledge and evidence for defining what constitutes legitimate science (Ratele, 2017). Decolonial curriculum initiatives have been largely rhetorical and/or token without challenging the underlying epistemological hierarchies that structure the authority of each discipline (Macedo de Lucas et al. 2026).

Within psychology education in African contexts, universities and training institutions have been slow to incorporate Indigenous knowledge systems meaningfully, and this pattern persists (Bhatia & Ram, 2024). The reason for this reluctance is due to the fact that psychology departments may continue reproducing coloniality even where there is institutional willingness to embrace Africanisation or curriculum responsiveness (Bhatia & Ram, 2024). The challenge is therefore not simply the inclusion of African examples in existing courses, but the more difficult task of questioning the epistemic foundations upon which the discipline itself has been built.

While some researchers are beginning to address the need to de-colonize psychology in Africa (Malherbe & Ratele, 2022; Phiri et al., 2023), less research has been done to study concretely how curriculum colonialism works as it relates to developing training programs for professional psychologists. However, very little research exists that provides an empirically grounded understanding

of how colonial psychological authority reproduces itself through the use of professional training programs.

The Zimbabwean context. Zimbabwe is an especially valuable example of a post-colonial space where this kind of analysis can occur. Zimbabwe was a former British Colony and followed the Anglo-Centric tradition of academic training (Chimbunde, 2024; Goronga & Deredzai, 2026; Javangwe, 2013). Anglo-Centric traditions overlook the fact that indigenous communal world views go beyond the limits of conventional Western psychological models. For instance, the indigenous concepts such as *ngozi*, *kutanda botso*, *kufungisisa* (Mtapuri & Mazengwa, 2013; Patel et al., 1995; Museka & Manyonganise, 2025), and many other culturally grounded expressions define family, spirituality, wellness, or suffering. This makes for a unique analytical tension between the professionally trained psychology that has been inherited and the real lived experiences in the context of their everyday lives.

The present study. The study examines curriculum coloniality in professional and applied psychology training, particularly counselling and clinical-oriented preparation. The study addresses three interrelated questions:

1. How does curriculum coloniality persist within formal psychology training despite gestures toward contextual relevance?
2. What professional and epistemic consequences emerge when Eurocentric psychological authority remains dominant in postcolonial African classrooms?
3. What possibilities exist for reconstructing psychology curricula in ways that are contextually grounded, socially accountable, and epistemically just?

Methods

Research design: The current study employed an integrative critical review approach based on a decolonial theoretical framework (Russell, 2005; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). Such reviews are valuable for synthesising evidence from diverse methodological traditions and sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). Unlike traditional literature reviews, integrative reviews generate new conceptual insights and theoretical understandings by combining diverse forms of evidence (Torraco, 2005). This approach was deemed suitable for investigating curriculum coloniality in psychology training as it permitted the integration of published scholarship, curriculum documents, and qualitative findings within a unified analytical framework informed by decolonial theory (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019).

Sources of data. The analysis draws on three sources of data. The first consists of published African and Global South scholarship on decolonising psychology, indigenous psychologies, curriculum transformation, and higher education reform. These sources were purposively selected because they provide the broader disciplinary, theoretical, and epistemological conversations within which the present analysis is situated. Particular attention was paid to scholarship interrogating Eurocentric knowledge dominance, epistemic exclusion, indigenous knowledge

integration, and curriculum responsiveness in psychology and related human science disciplines.

The second source of material comprised documentary curriculum evidence drawn from a professional Master of Science in Counselling Psychology programme offered at a public university in Zimbabwe. Curriculum documents reviewed included programme synopses, module outlines, prescribed reading lists, practicum expectations, and assessment orientations. Documentary review was important because curriculum coloniality is often not fully visible in rhetorical institutional claims but becomes more discernible when one examines the deeper intellectual architecture of what is formally prescribed, which authors are privileged, which therapeutic traditions are taught, and which forms of professional competence are institutionally rewarded.

The third stream of material involved analytically revisiting qualitative findings from a broader doctoral study that examined the contextual relevance of a professional Master of Science in Counselling Psychology programme in Zimbabwe. The doctoral study employed qualitative interviews with 25 lecturers, former students, and current trainees in order to explore perceptions of curriculum adequacy, professional preparedness, indigenous knowledge representation, and alignment between training content and Zimbabwean social realities.

Ethics approval. The study received prior institutional ethical clearance. All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the Limpopo research ethics committee and ethical standards of the Declaration of Helsinki, 1964. Ethical clearance for the study was granted under approval number (TREC/318/2020:PG). Ethical approval for the original doctoral study was obtained from the relevant institutional ethics committee, and all participants provided informed consent. For the present manuscript, no new interviews were conducted, and no new primary data were collected. Instead, only previously analysed findings directly relevant to curriculum epistemology, professional training, indigenous knowledge representation, and theory-practice alignment were revisited as an empirical interpretive layer within the broader integrative analysis. No identifiable participant information is reported in this paper.

Data analysis. Analysis proceeded through iterative thematic synthesis across the three evidence streams. Published literature, documentary materials, and doctoral stakeholder findings were repeatedly read comparatively and coded for recurring tensions, contradictions, and epistemological patterns. Analytical attention was given to: (a) the relationship between curriculum appearance and curriculum substance; (b) the representation or absence of indigenous psychological realities; (c) the dominance of imported diagnostic and therapeutic systems; and (d) the implications of curriculum design for professional practice competence. Through this iterative comparative process, higher-order analytical themes were developed that enabled an empirically informed decolonial critique of psychology training beyond what isolated literature synthesis or documentary review could reveal independently.

Transparency and Openness Statement

The current report was established as a result of an analytical integration of three primary types of source material: scholarly articles, documentary curriculum resources, qualitative research outcomes from a larger study regarding the relevance of psychology curricula in Zimbabwe. No original data were collected for use within this article. Relevant findings from a previously ethically cleared doctoral study used as a foundation for the stakeholders' views were revised for use in the analysis for the current report. Each reference identified in the document can be accessed by way of publicly available academic databases and digital libraries. Since the purpose of this manuscript has been limited to analyzing pre-existing qualitative findings from the doctoral study and existing documentary materials, no new data set, transcript collection, or participant documentation was developed for use in this manuscript.

Findings

[Table 1](#) presents the major decoloniality studies and related findings. Analysis of the combined findings indicated that curriculum colonialism in education for psychology occurs not merely via explicit reliance on Western theory.

Coloniality occurs through more subtle, epistemological arrangements that establish the legitimacy of particular types of psychological knowledge, represent whose realities, and produce certain kinds of professional competence. Five related themes were identified.

Theme 1: Symbolic Localisation and Substantive Epistemic Dependence

The biggest contradiction that can be seen through an integrated study of a professional psychology program in Zimbabwe is how the program is able to demonstrate a level of contextual relevance, yet still maintains its reliance upon Euro-American epistemic authority. Although the professional psychology program appears to have made an effort to make several modules appear locally relevant by providing courses based upon cross-cultural counseling, community involvement, heritage studies, and systemic interventions, the program's course descriptions suggest that they are preparing culturally responsive practitioners who will work within Zimbabwean or broader African contexts.

However, when we examined the actual curriculum documents for the programs, it became clear that there is a disconnect between what is being presented at the surface level versus the deeper structural changes required for true contextualization. For example, the majority of reading lists for the core modules were authored by Euro-Americans and about Western counseling models. Additionally, the vast majority of the theoretical explanations of human behaviour provided within the program privileged Western constructs related to rationality, selfhood, pathology and therapeutic change. Only a handful of curriculum modules incorporated conceptual frameworks written by Africans, and even those that did often served as supplements to the dominant Western framework. This finding reflects some larger criticisms of post-colonial curriculum reform efforts in Africa. Many curriculum reform initiatives produce rhetorical expressions of Africanization

with little or no impact on the colonized knowledge systems that remain deeply ingrained in academia ([Chimbunde, 2024](#); [Durrheim et al., 2011](#); [Macedo de Lucas et al., 2026](#)).

Stakeholder accounts further supported this contradiction. For instance, former students frequently expressed that although the names of certain modules may imply a high level of sensitivity toward culture in their titles, the content was based on Western therapeutic paradigms. Some respondents described their experience as "learning about" African reality vs. "learning through" African reality. What this suggests is that although the curriculum is able to acknowledge context symbolically, it does not allow local realities to re-orient the intellectual centre of the training.

From a decolonial perspective, symbolic localisation is not a minor curriculum weakness but a sophisticated form of institutional continuity. It allows universities to signal responsiveness to postcolonial demands while preserving Western epistemic authority as the benchmark of scientific seriousness. Such reform is therefore additive rather than reconstructive. African examples are inserted in local modules, yet the underlying curriculum still teaches students that authoritative psychology is Western. Similar concerns have been raised in contemporary psychology curriculum scholarship, where decolonization efforts are often shown to remain superficial because they fail to redistribute epistemic power within the discipline itself ([Phiri et al., 2023](#); [Ogenyi et al., 2025](#)).

The implication is that curriculum transformation cannot be judged by rhetorical inclusivity alone. What matters is whether local realities, indigenous knowledges, African scholarship, and contextually grounded forms of intervention become constitutive of the curriculum's intellectual core. In the present analysis, this deeper shift had not fully occurred. The curriculum therefore reflected not simply a lack of African content, but a persistent dependence on Western epistemic legitimacy as the organising standard of what counts as professional psychology.

Theme 2: Eurocentric Diagnostic and Therapeutic Authority as Professional Norm

The second theme concerns the extent to which professional competence within psychology training continues to be defined through imported diagnostic systems, therapeutic models, and psychometric technologies. Curriculum documents revealed substantial reliance on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), conventional Western psychopathology classifications, Euro-American psychotherapy traditions, and psychometric instruments developed and standardized outside African contexts. These resources were not presented merely as one set of possible professional tools among others; rather, they occupied the position of default scientific authority through which students were expected to understand assessment, diagnosis, case conceptualization, and treatment planning.

The significance of this finding extends beyond the content students are required to study. Curriculum coloniality is also reproduced through the professional technologies students are trained to trust. Diagnostic

Table 1. Summary of key studies on decolonising psychology training and curriculum in Africa and the global south

Author(s) & Year	Focus of study	Context	Key findings	Contribution to present analysis
Nsamenang (2007)	Origins and development of psychology in Afrique Noire	Sub-Saharan Africa	Demonstrates that scientific psychology in Africa developed through colonial academic transfer and remained weakly aligned with African developmental realities	Establishes colonial historical roots of imported psychology training
Nwoye (2015)	Foundations of African psychology as indigenous knowledge	Africa	Argues that African psychology must be rooted in indigenous worldviews, communal personhood, and culturally grounded explanatory systems	Provides a basis for indigenous epistemology integration
Ratele (2017)	Four African psychologies	Africa	Highlights the plurality of African psychologies and critiques the universalisation of Western psychology	Supports the argument against singular Euro-American psychological authority
Goronga and Deredzai (2026)	Contextualising psychology teaching	Zimbabwe	Psychology teaching remains largely Western-oriented and requires greater integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Ubuntu/Unhu to enhance cultural relevance	Provides recent Zimbabwean evidence supporting the Africanisation of psychology curricula through culturally relevant teaching
Javangwe (2013)	Africanising psychology in Zimbabwean universities	Zimbabwe	Notes the continued overreliance on Western theories and weak contextual grounding in Zimbabwean psychology teaching	Anchors Zimbabwe-specific curriculum critique
Chitindingu and Mkhize (2016)	Incorporating indigenous knowledge systems into the psychology curriculum	South Africa	Demonstrates students' and academics' concern over the exclusion of African knowledge from formal training	Supports the indigenous knowledge marginalisation theme
Pillay et al. (2018)	Re-imagining careers in public psychology	South Africa	Highlights the need for socially responsive and contextually relevant psychology training	Supports applied practice and professional relevance discussion
Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2019)	Decolonising research methodology	Africa/Global South	Argues that postcolonial institutions continue to reproduce coloniality through knowledge systems and validation processes	Strengthens epistemic justice framing
Bhatia and Ram (2024)	Decolonising psychology, power and identity	Global South	Shows that psychology remains implicated in power, citizenship, and colonial identity production	Supports broader theoretical critique of disciplinary psychology
Chimbunde (2024)	Deconstruction of the higher education curriculum in Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe	Argues that Zimbabwean higher education reforms often retain inherited colonial structures beneath reform rhetoric	Supports curriculum symbolism critique
Phiri et al. (2023)	Decolonising psychology curriculum	International/Global South	Shows that psychology curriculum reform often remains superficial and additive rather than structurally transformative	Directly supports the present curriculum reconstruction argument
Sefotho and Letseka (2024)	Ubuntu/Botho as cognitive justice	Africa	Positions Ubuntu as an epistemic resource capable of challenging Western knowledge monopolies in psychology	Supports communal philosophies and indigenous ontology inclusion
Macedo de Lucas et al. (2026)	Faculty perspectives on decolonising psychology curriculum	Higher education comparative	Finds that universities often rhetorically embrace decolonization while resisting substantive epistemic restructuring	Supports the symbolic localisation thesis
Ogenyi et al. (2025)	Decolonising psychology and neuroscience curriculum	Comparative higher education	Demonstrates continued Western dominance in psychology-related scientific training despite reform initiatives	Supports continued imported professional authority

manuals, psychometric batteries, and therapeutic models shape assumptions about what constitutes legitimate psychological knowledge and competent practice. Although these tools provide important technical competencies, they also reinforce understandings of psychological truth and professional authority. To the extent that these technologies have been disproportionately developed and validated outside African contexts, psychology trainees may be socialized into accepting Western standards of competence as universal benchmarks of professional practice.

Stakeholder accounts reinforced this pattern. Former students frequently expressed confidence in applying standardized psychometric assessments and DSM-based diagnostic criteria yet reported feeling less prepared to work with clients whose experiences of distress were interpreted through indigenous explanatory systems. Participants described encountering clients whose understandings of suffering were linked to ancestral obligations, spiritual causation, moral transgressions, and communal interpretations of misfortune. In such situations, many felt that their training had equipped them with technical knowledge but had provided limited guidance on how to engage with culturally grounded explanatory frameworks. The challenge was therefore not an absence of professional knowledge, but a mismatch between the knowledge acquired and the realities of practice.

Similar tensions emerged in relation to psychometric training. Although students were exposed to standardized assessment procedures, there was limited curricular emphasis on interrogating the cultural assumptions, normative foundations, linguistic translations, and contextual validity of imported instruments. Consequently, psychometric competence risked becoming procedural rather than critically reflexive. Students learned how to administer tests but were afforded fewer opportunities to critically evaluate their appropriateness within diverse cultural settings.

From a decolonial perspective, these findings suggest that Eurocentric authority is embedded not only in curriculum content but also in the mechanisms through which professional legitimacy is produced. Imported diagnostic systems, psychometric tools, and therapeutic models continue to function as the primary markers of professional competence, while indigenous knowledge systems remain marginal to formal training. Similar concerns have been raised by [Pillay et al. \(2018\)](#) and [Bhatia and Ram \(2024\)](#), who argue that psychology education in Africa often confers professional legitimacy through mastery of disciplinary instruments developed outside the continent. Curriculum coloniality therefore persists not only through what students are taught, but also through the standards by which professional expertise is recognized and validated.

The implication is that curriculum transformation requires more than the inclusion of culturally relevant examples within existing courses. It also requires critical engagement with professional technologies that shape psychological authority. Without such interrogation, students may continue to graduate with strong technical competence but limited preparation for navigating the culturally complex realities that characterize psychological practice in African contexts.

Theme 3: Epistemic Exclusion of Indigenous Ontologies of Distress, Healing, and Personhood

The systemic exclusion of indigenous African worldviews was a pervasive theme in the voices of participants. Both student voices and curriculum voices were used to identify this reality. Student-voices indicated the curricula did not allow for an adequate examination of culturally-based realities such as ancestors causing problems, avenging spirits, ritual appeasement, group-based forms of “moral injury”, and locally understandable idioms of distress such as *ngozi*, *kutanda-botso*, *kufungisisa*, et cetera. These realities have been and continue to be part of the way many communities in Zimbabwe make sense of their suffering, misfortune, relational conflict, and mental disturbances. However, there was little opportunity to study these realities formally.

This lack of inclusion is important to analyse because, while these realities may simply be viewed as cultural “beliefs” that exist outside of the client’s clinical treatment, they serve as major interpretive frameworks through which psychological suffering can be named, legitimized, and socially negotiated. Individuals experiencing misfortune and/or mental disturbance do not see themselves as separate individuals disconnected from family systems, spiritual relationships, ancestors, morality, or communal responsibilities. Instead, experiences of misfortune and mental disturbance are typically located within relational/cosmological contexts that far surpass the scope of explanation provided by typical biomedical/secularized therapeutic approaches. [Nwoye \(2015\)](#) has argued that African Psychology needs to begin with the indigenous realities through which personhood/suffering is experienced/interpreted rather than attempt to retrofit African experiences into imported psychological categories.

However, the present curriculum allowed very little room for exploring indigenous realities other than including infrequent references to multiculturalism. The primary focus of the curricular training remains centred on biomedicine/individualism/secularity and does not provide sufficient recognition of indigenous cosmologies/spiritual relationships/healing traditions. Participant voices described how, although indigenous realities were often recognized informally through classroom discussions, they were never treated as viable sites of serious theory development or professional competency. Essentially, the students were informed that these realities exist in their communities; however, the students had inadequate preparation to consider them as legitimate psychological phenomena.

This creates an important epistemological hierarchy. Western categories of distress are taught as scientifically codified and professionally actionable, while indigenous categories are tolerated as cultural background knowledge rather than institutionalised as valid systems of understanding human suffering. [wa Thiong’o \(1986\)](#) and [Sefotho and Letseka \(2024\)](#) caution that such knowledge arrangements reproduce cognitive injustice by continuously assigning scientific centrality to imported epistemologies while relegating local knowledges to peripheral recognition. The issue is therefore not only curriculum omission but epistemic subordination.

The consequences of this exclusion extend to professional identity formation. Graduates may emerge with formal qualifications and technical expertise yet remain conceptually distant from the explanatory worlds of the communities they serve. While they may be well equipped to recognize depression, anxiety, trauma, and related forms of distress through imported classificatory systems, they may be less prepared when suffering is articulated through ancestral anger, ritual transgression, communal shame, or other culturally grounded idioms. Curriculum coloniality therefore operates not only through what students learn, but also through the boundaries it establishes around what is considered psychologically intelligible.

The implication is that meaningful curriculum transformation requires more than recognizing indigenous realities as cultural context. It requires creating space for indigenous ontologies to contribute to theory development, professional practice, and the production of psychological knowledge. Without such shifts, psychology training risks producing practitioners who are academically competent yet insufficiently prepared to engage with the complex cultural realities that shape psychological life in African contexts.

Theme 4: Theory-Practice Disjuncture and the Production of Contextually Alienated Practitioners

A common theme across the views of stakeholders was that the curriculum creates a chasm between what is taught in the classroom and what is practiced. Participants agreed that their program had an expansive intellectual base, included several practical internship components, and, therefore, appeared to be well-rounded; however, most graduate participants indicated feeling unprepared for the complexities of real-world psychological problems that did not align with the theoretical assumptions used in their training. The issue identified was not merely a lack of practicum hours, but rather that much of the knowledge gained from formal education could not be easily applied to the complex social/cultural contexts of the actual Zimbabwean practice environments.

Many participants stated that they encountered clients whose psychological presentation was linked to unemployment, chronic poverty, grief, migration-related separation of families, fear associated with spirituality, inter-generational obligations, community conflict, etc. In these instances, the very individually focused models presented during training were seen as limited or lacking in the context of providing solutions to the social fabric of the client's case. Graduate participants stated that they needed to create alternative ways of addressing the client's needs through improvisation, cultural negotiation, or informal use of community understanding of mental health issues because the theory they studied and/or mastered did not adequately represent the social context of each client's case.

This disjuncture was intensified by three related factors. First, there was an overconcentration of theoretical material relative to deeply supervised contextual practice. Students learned numerous therapeutic models, psychopathology classifications, and psychometric procedures, but had fewer structured opportunities to critically

rehearse how these would operate in culturally non-linear and materially constrained environments. Second, there was insufficient grounding in indigenous case realities that would allow theory to be tested against familiar community narratives. Third, the curriculum implicitly rewarded mastery of imported theory as the marker of academic excellence, meaning that reflexive adaptation to local complexity remained under-institutionalised.

The consequence is the production of what may be called contextually alienated practitioners. These are graduates who possess formal academic competence, can reproduce disciplinary language, and understand professional procedures, yet experience uncertainty when psychological suffering presents in forms not anticipated by standard training scripts. Professional alienation here should not be read as an individual failure of confidence, but as a predictable structural outcome of epistemologically misaligned training. When curriculum authority is borrowed from elsewhere, practice uncertainty often emerges at home.

This finding is particularly important because it demonstrates that curriculum coloniality does not end in the classroom. It travels outward into the professional field by shaping not only what psychologists know, but how securely they are able to use that knowledge in relation to the communities they serve. Thus, the costs of epistemic dependence are not only theoretical; they are also practical, relational, and service-delivery oriented.

Theme 5: Decolonial Possibilities for Curriculum Reconstruction

Despite the above constraints, the integrated evidence also revealed a strong stakeholder appetite for curriculum transformation. Lecturers, former students, and current trainees did not simply critique the programme's shortcomings; many articulated concrete proposals for what a more contextually relevant and epistemically just psychology curriculum might look like. Recurrent suggestions included the inclusion of African-centred psychotherapy, indigenous psychologies, critical psychologies, locally developed psychometric tools, stronger community-grounded practicum experiences, and more deliberate engagement with African ethics, language, spirituality, and communal philosophies such as Ubuntu.

What is striking about these recommendations is that they do not call for the wholesale rejection of global psychological science. Rather, they call for a restructuring of epistemic authority within training. Participants were not suggesting that Western theories be discarded entirely, but that they cease occupying the uncontested centre of professional legitimacy. This distinction is crucial. Decolonization in this context is not anti-science; it is anti-monopoly. It seeks to disrupt the assumption that scientifically respectable psychology must necessarily be epistemologically Western.

Recent scholarship similarly argues that meaningful psychology curriculum reform requires movement away from additive inclusion, where African examples are inserted into an otherwise unchanged Western scaffold, toward reconstructive redesign in which local realities

become constitutive of the curriculum's conceptual architecture (Phiri et al., 2023; Macedo de Lucas et al., 2026). Such redesign would require not only adding new content, but rethinking who is cited, what counts as valid case knowledge, which forms of suffering are teachable, what competencies are assessed, and how students are socialised into professional legitimacy.

A de-colonized psychology education program would require at least four shifts. First, such an educational program will provide an opportunity for students to be exposed to diverse perspectives of psychological theory written from Africa and Indigenous Psychology, along with global disciplinary scholarship as foundational materials instead of merely peripheral ones. Second, these programs will challenge students to critically evaluate those tools they have been taught as universal (psychometric and diagnostic) instead of accepting them as objective instruments. Third, these programs will integrate more deliberate opportunities for students to engage in practicum experiences and case studies within their own communities or local environments, providing opportunities for students to experience the complex social and cultural aspects of human suffering firsthand. Finally, such programs will encourage professional psychologists who are not only knowledgeable about disciplinary applications but also question the political processes that support the authority of the very same disciplinary knowledge.

From a decolonial perspective, these proposals represent more than curriculum reform; they reflect a broader commitment to epistemic justice. The goal is not simply to make psychology education more culturally aware, but to create conditions under which African realities can actively shape the production of psychological knowledge. In this sense, curriculum reconstruction emerges as one of the most important pathways through which the decolonization of psychology can move from rhetorical commitment to institutional practice.

The implication is that the future relevance of psychology training in Africa will depend on its capacity to balance scientific rigour with contextual responsiveness. Curricula that embrace epistemic pluralism are more likely to produce practitioners who are both professionally competent and socially accountable within the diverse communities they serve.

Discussion and Implications

The focus of this study was on how colonial inheritance of epistemology has been influencing psychology training in Africa by way of African university training, with a focus on Zimbabwe as an example to consider these problems across the continent. The study found that the colonialism of curriculum for psychology continues beyond merely teaching Western theory to African students at universities in Africa; it continues because institutions have authorized European-based knowledge systems as legitimate grammar (and the model) of professional authority. Thus, the issue is far greater than adopted texts from Europe, reference to authors from Europe, or lack of inclusion of some topics in psychology curricula. Rather, it is a continuing assumption that the "norm" of psychology is Western and thus all other realities need to be interpreted

and labelled within this paradigm and also require to be professionally managed.

One of the most significant contributions of the present analysis is the identification of a persistent gap between curricular appearance and curricular substance. While many African universities increasingly incorporate modules with culturally responsive titles, broad statements about local relevance, or selected African examples, such gestures do not necessarily translate into epistemological transformation. The Zimbabwean case demonstrates that a curriculum may speak the language of localisation while continuing to think through colonial categories. This finding resonates with wider higher education critiques that postcolonial institutions often manage demands for decolonization through symbolic adaptation rather than structural redesign (Chimbunde, 2024; Macedo de Lucas et al., 2026). The implication is that curriculum review processes which focus only on module renaming, token multicultural references, or rhetorical commitments to Africanisation may generate the optics of reform while leaving the deeper hierarchy of knowledge untouched.

The authors conclude in the article that curriculum colonialism needs to be viewed as both a visible representation of Western knowledge in educational materials and an invisible structural reinforcement of Western knowledge based upon how it is accepted and disseminated within institutions. Authority over what constitutes acceptable psychological knowledge (who is referenced, which manuals are used for diagnostics, etc.) is exercised at many different levels of educational institutions and is reproduced in many ways. As a result, the institution reinforces the idea that the "neutral" standards for psychological education that have been developed in Europe or North America are appropriate and that there is no other way of being educated to practice psychology. Colonialism survives in education not just through the transmission of ideas, but also through the reproduction of academic practices and habits of trust.

There was another important finding regarding the professional development of psychologists. Psychology students do not receive their professional education through the simple delivery of technical material. They develop a definition of pathology, an understanding of what interventions are most effective, an appreciation for what evidence exists to support particular practices, and an ability to respond professionally when dealing with clients. However, if the educational experience of these students has an epistemological disconnect from the culture and social conditions of those they will eventually work with, then the graduate may possess all of the credentials necessary to perform his/her job effectively but still lack clarity about how to apply them.

This finding has direct implications for the practice of applied psychology in Africa. Without adequate training in working with spiritually interpreted distress, communal forms of identity, poverty-related psychosocial suffering, culturally layered grief or socially embedded trauma, practitioners may struggle to build trust, achieve therapeutic resonance and demonstrate the relevance of their interventions. In such circumstances, the social legitimacy of psychology itself becomes fragile. Communities

may perceive formal psychological services as technically sophisticated yet experientially distant, while practitioners may find themselves informally negotiating between institutional psychology and community psychology without having been adequately trained to do so. Thus, curriculum coloniality becomes a service-delivery issue as much as an academic one.

The research clearly demonstrates how indigenous knowledge systems remain marginalized from formal psychology education by being acknowledged with little integration into professional knowledge. For many years, there has been a trend towards treating African cultural knowledge as supplementary to “real” science-based psychology rather than as legitimate sites of psychological theory. However, decolonial scholarship has warned against this trend by indicating that the future relevance of psychology in postcolonial areas will depend on epistemological pluralism and not just tokenism (Sefotho & Letseka, 2024; Nwoye, 2015; Malherbe & Ratele, 2022). Therefore, indigenous forms of distress, community-based philosophies regarding the nature of self/individual, indigenous forms of healing/helping, and indigenous forms of morality can be used as epistemological resources in expanding what psychology knows about the workings of the mind, suffering, resilience, and interventions.

This repositioning is crucial because it shifts the decolonization debate away from cultural decoration toward epistemic justice. The issue is not whether African content appears somewhere in the curriculum, but whether African realities possess the power to reorganise what counts as psychological knowledge. So long as Western theories remain the unquestioned centre and indigenous knowledges remain contextual side notes, decolonization remains incomplete.

Implications for psychology curriculum reform:

Specifically, there are possible ways to reconstruct curricula for professional psychology education. Some potential first steps might include conducting a curriculum audit in order to determine whose theories, authors, textbooks, cases, and assessment tools are used in required courses. Secondly, education programs could incorporate African-authored literature as foundational texts on topics such as psychology, personhood, development, distress, healing, and community well-being. Thirdly, diagnostic training programs could teach students both DSM and ICD frameworks alongside critical cultural formulation and local idioms of distress. Fourthly, psychometric training could explicitly address issues of language, translation, sample populations, cultural validity, and the limitations of using standardized instruments developed outside of a specific culture. Fifthly, students could use Zimbabwean/African cases as illustrations when developing case studies related to topics such as *kufungisisa*, *ngozi*, bereavement, poverty-related distress, obligations to one's family, spiritually interpreting suffering, and community healing processes. Sixthly, practicum placements could be supported by providing students with supervised community-based learning opportunities in schools, hospitals, non-governmental organizations, and community mental health centers. Seventhly, curricula could establish ethical guidelines for creating spaces for dialogue with

community knowledge holders, service users, local practitioners, and where applicable, indigenous healing systems. Eighthly, assessments of student performance could evaluate students' ability to formulate case studies that are relevant to the contexts in which they were educated rather than solely applying Western theoretical models. Ninthly, multilingualism and culturally responsive communication could be recognized as aspects of professional competence.

Finally, it is recommended that all accreditation and regulatory agencies review their standards to insure that culturally responsive practice, formulating cases in context, and having an epistemic sense of self-reflexivity are considered essential skills in the education of psychologists.

These recommendations go beyond Zimbabwe. In many African countries, psychology has continued to exist in colonial infrastructures that define what constitutes valid science, excellent curricula and regulated professional practice according to the Global North (Phiri et al., 2023; Ratele, 2017). Therefore, the example provided here illustrates a larger challenge that exists across the continent of Africa: developing psychologists who have been educated globally but are not held captive by global north epistemology; who are scientifically rigorous but responsive to context; professionally competent but socially responsible.

Ultimately, rethinking education for professional psychology in Africa is not only an intellectual or philosophical exercise. Rather, it is fundamentally a practical issue of whom this discipline is intended to educate. If psychology curricula continue to rely on Eurocentric assumptions, then educators will produce professionals who are proficient in importing theory rather than understanding the complex realities of African communities. On the other hand, if psychology curricula are socially accountable, then educators will prepare professionals who move seamlessly between scientific rigor and contextual responsiveness; between critical theory and indigenous reality; and between professional competence and community trust.

Limitations and Counterarguments

Several limitations and counterarguments should be acknowledged. Decolonising psychology curricula should not be interpreted as a rejection of global psychological science. When critically adapted and contextually interrogated, Western theories, diagnostic systems, and therapeutic models may remain valuable. Furthermore, indigenous knowledge systems are not homogeneous, static, or inherently emancipatory. They may contain internal hierarchies, gendered assumptions, or practices that require ethical scrutiny. Curriculum reconstruction must avoid romanticising culture or treating African epistemologies as singular. Africa contains diverse histories, languages, spiritual systems, and social formations.

Finally, the Zimbabwean case offers an analytically rich example, but it should not be assumed to represent all African psychology training contexts. These limitations reinforce the need for epistemic pluralism rather than the simple replacement of one knowledge system with another.

Conclusion

This article contends that the de-colonialization process for psychology education in Africa is based on more than just the lack of “African” content; it also involves the continued structural power of European-based epistemologies which define what is studied (and therefore accepted) by professionals in the field of psychology, and what types of psychological experiences/realities are defined as legitimate or real. The use of Zimbabwe as an empirical example of how curriculum reform efforts in the professional development of psychologists in Zimbabwe have been limited to tokenistic changes towards culturally relevant curricula while still heavily reliant upon imported theoretical constructs, diagnostic systems, treatment modalities, and knowledge bases illustrates that the persistence of curriculum colonialism is not due to ignorance, but rather due to a fundamental failure to transform the existing structure of knowledge.

The reliance on foreign epistemological constructs impacts areas outside of academic institutions, such as the professional identity formation of psychologists, the ability of psychologists to develop culturally responsive interventions, and the ability of the field to be able to relate effectively to the diverse experiences and realities of African communities. When indigenous views of suffering, communal perspectives of self and community, and traditional paths to healing are professionally marginalized, then psychology runs the risk of developing professionals who are formally educated yet psychologically disconnected from their practice environment.

Reimagining psychology education in Africa, therefore, requires more than additive inclusion of African examples within inherited Western structures. It requires a deeper curriculum reconstruction in which African knowledges, local social realities, and community-grounded professional competencies become constitutive rather than supplementary to training. Such transformation is central not only to curriculum justice but to the future relevance, legitimacy, and applied usefulness of psychology as a discipline on the continent. The decolonization of psychology will remain incomplete until African realities are not merely acknowledged in training but allowed to shape what psychology itself becomes.

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