

# **Diversifying and decolonising Methodology curricula: experiences, challenges and perspectives of methodology teachers**

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*This research investigated the experiences, challenges, and perspectives of methodology teachers about the process of decolonisation of curricula inside the department of Methodology. The main findings of the research highlighted the lack of time, available support, guidance, expertise, and lack of common understanding and larger debate around the process of decolonisation between quantitative and qualitative research methods as main barriers. The key recommendation is the creation of a new visiting rotational fellowship post for a well-established academic from the Global South which would address such barriers in a mutually beneficial manner.*

## **Background**

Decolonising methodology curricula is a key part of equality within and beyond higher education. Research methods that we apply to our research and the way we apply them automatically create a position on what counts as 'good' or 'right' knowledge. The question of where this knowledge originates and whose research is of value and worth emulating than inherently is asked. Both research design and methodologies in various fields must build on differing and multi-dimensional experiences and values of various groups of individuals, in particular those who are marginalized and silenced. In some instances, when we apply research methods devised in the perception of mainstream stories, narrow and linear understanding of the world is accepted. The creation of knowledge is inherently linked to the power-relations between, within, and beyond our curriculum, departments, and school. For this reason, it is necessary to analyse what is the common understanding of the issue and what are the barriers that academics face when/if aiming to proceed with decolonization. The process of decolonization is not one of action but a long-term process that must build on cooperation between the department, the school, academics, and students.

## **Methodology and limitations**

The lack of an agreed definition of what decolonisation means poses a substantial barrier when aiming to proceed with the process in a harmonised manner. For this reason, a working definition of decolonisation was created as such understanding of the process of decolonization will help us move beyond the process of creating curricula which is diverse towards curricula and methods which are equal. As highlighted by the 2018 (:1) LSE Eden Center critique paper written by Nihan Albaryak: *"Decolonising mind and knowledge is the first step of decolonising everything else. Not thinking based on the rules of the hegemonic*

system or critiquing the existing means of colonialist thinking appears to be the fundamental phase of truly achieving equality.”

In these terms then:

- *Diversity reinforces the existing unjust system, decolonisation challenges it.*
- *Diversity authorises the advantaged, decolonisation empowers the underrepresented and undervalued.*
- *Diversity seeks to include people; decolonisation seeks to reclaim their space.*

To investigate the various experiences and perceptions of teachers within the Methodology Department, qualitative research methods, semi-structured interviews were conducted. As Gaskell & Bauer (2000) highlighted, the real purpose of qualitative research is to explore the range of opinions and different representations of issues, rather than counting the opinions. This study analysed the individual experiences of 12 teachers within the department of Methodology and the length of interviews varied between 15-40 minutes. The demography of participants varied considerably and included various characteristics such as race, gender, ethnicity, seniority, and different academic fields. To maintain the anonymity of participants, detailed demography of participants will not be included. Where quotations are provided, these are altered and not direct. The primary aim of the research scope was to include students within the department to broaden the understanding, however, there was a lack of interest in participating in this study. The reason for this could partly stem from the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic or a genuine lack of interest in this topic. Thematic analysis was used to make sense of the data. Finally, it is necessary to acknowledge that my positionality within this research and topic might influence the gathered data considering that I am coming from a white, westernised background.

## Results and discussion

Findings and the main themes of the study are presented in the *Figure 1*. The left part of the paper presents some of the quotes from the participants while discussing the issue.

- *“Very limited perspective, there should be more knowledge between researchers.”*
- *“Quantitative research methods can very easily be decolonised but are refused to.”*
- *“I don’t use the concept.”*
- *“There is the need to provide not just the hegemonic singular vies of what knowledge and true is which is rooted inside the colonial westernised history”.*
- *“Stretch of time, no commitment to the time.”*
- *“We have the obligations to not use the easiest and most common data sets because they were used historically and because this will automatically benefit*

Lack of time and support.

Lack of guidance and expertise with relation to the process of decolonisation.

Lack of common understanding and larger debate around the process of decolonisation between quantitative and qualitative research methods.

*Figure 1. Findings of the study*

*particular student bodies oppose to those who are not coming from these particular backgrounds.”*

- *“Incentives for LSE such as Race Equity Charter are bureaucratic awards, they are not about making meaningful changes of people’s lives.”*
- *“Decolonisation is a new endeavour, some of them do not have the knowledge and expertise. Don’t want to make it a bad knowledge, it needs expertise.”*

The findings of the study mainly highlight the little common knowledge that exists between quantitative and qualitative research methods regarding the process of decolonisation as the main barrier. Overall, for the majority of participants, the concept of decolonisation is of considerable interest inside their teaching and research practice and is not exclusive to those teachers of qualitative research methods. Participants coming from the quantitative background provided insightful examples and means on how to decolonise curricula and knowledge.

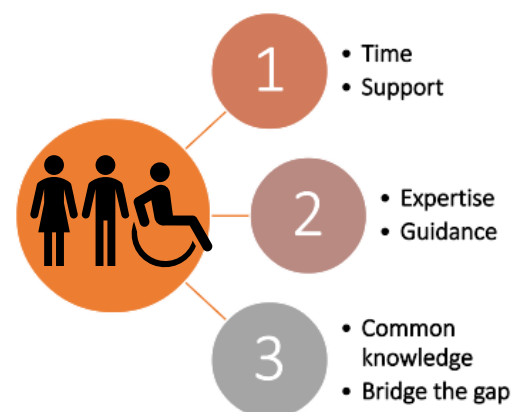
A significant number of participants aimed to include representative pieces of literature and examples in their teaching. However, as highlighted inside the rationale behind this study, decolonisation of curricula is not based on simply including a representative body of literature into the curricula but must go beyond and should create a space for reflection throughout the course.

While this study mainly aimed to explore the perceptions and experiences of teachers around the process of decolonisation. Significant findings were obtained with relation to a larger debate around the treatment of teachers of various seniority, gender, ethnicity, and race from students. Such behaviour included examples of resisting pushbacks and treatment. As discussed with the participants, such behaviour can stem from the mainstream perception of how experts and professors should look like, particularly inside LSE.

This is a significant result and feeds into the debate on recommendations. There is a need to acknowledge the fact that when teachers aim to decolonise the curricula, some of them will be inherently prone to pushbacks from students and this in consequence will affect their professional and personal life. The process of decolonisation underlies the concept of diversity and equality. The department of Methodology should aim to set up an EDI board that can provide the needed support.

## Recommendations

By putting together the rationale and findings behind the study, my main recommendation is the **creation of a new visiting fellowship post for a well-established academic from the Global South**. Such post would rotate every year to include experts from different geographical parts of the Global South and would therefore create a new culture of change. In this case, we would start the process of decolonisation by decolonising the hiring process. The main duties of this post would be both pedagogical and



administrative. The time would be divided into 15% of teaching, 30% of the departmental activities and 55% for their research.

- ✚ **Firstly**, to bridge the gap between the research methods and increase their common understanding of the process of decolonisation, the post-holder would facilitate six guest lecture speakers a year for the members of the department around such topics as decolonisation, ethics and biases from within various research methods. In this case, the debate across the department would be organically grounded in these speaker events.
- ✚ **Secondly**, such post holder would address the lack of guidance and expertise identified in findings as one of the main barriers for the process of decolonisation. The fellow would create or help create and present the lectures on decolonisation, biases and ethics within different research courses.
- ✚ **Thirdly**, such post-holder would address the lack of time and support, meaning that the fellow would collaborate with the convenors and teachers on how to decolonise the syllabi and methods and would help to review the use of literature.
- ✚ **Lastly**, I recommend setting up a yearly meeting of the department to create a 2-year strategy on the decolonisation process. Every other year, the meetings would be mainly about evaluation, raising barriers and discussing opportunities. Such meetings would be then grounded in the knowledge and debate from the guest speakers and managed by the post-holder.

To conclude, if we take into account these recommendations, we can create a new equal culture and start the process of decolonization of mind, knowledge and everything else. Furthermore, by taking into account these recommendations, the department of Methodology can become the beacon of change.

## **Bibliography**

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