

Shaping Tomorrow: Student Teachers' Insights into Decolonizing the Primary Curriculum and the significance of ITE and the Humanities

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Abstract

This study engages with the perspectives of 239 student teachers enrolled in teacher education programmes across diverse educational institutions in south-west Wales. The sample, diverse in age, gender, and geographical location, offers a rich array of viewpoints on decolonizing the curriculum and the roles of history, geography, and Religious Education (RE). The findings reveal a strong commitment to inclusivity, diverse perspectives, and critical engagement among the participants. While acknowledging the transformative potential of Initial Teacher Education (ITE), concerns within a minority highlighted the need for targeted interventions. This study underscores the high value placed on the contributions of history, geography, and RE, with recommendations for ongoing professional development and curricular innovation. Moving forward, a comprehensive approach is advocated, involving transparent communication, community engagement, and continuous research to ensure a transformative and inclusive educational landscape.

Keywords: decolonizing; curriculum; humanities; student-teachers' perceptions; primary school

1. Introduction

The concept of decolonizing the curriculum has become a rallying cry in contemporary education discourse (LeGrange 2021). Rooted in the broader framework of decolonization, it seeks to dismantle the legacies of colonialism that persist within educational systems, reshaping the way knowledge is produced, transmitted, and received (Race et al 2022; Moncrieffe et al 2020). This study endeavours to elucidate the concept of decolonizing the curriculum, underscores its essential nature, and delineate its transformative potential within the educational landscape. In the initial phase, we explore some of the existing literature to expound upon the definitions of decolonization, explicate the rationale behind curriculum decolonization, and assess the potential of the humanities in effectuating this process within primary school education. Subsequently, we provide an account of the research methodology and ethical considerations employed in capturing student teachers' perspectives on decolonizing the humanities curriculum in primary schools. The subsequent section delves into a discussion of the findings derived

from the student teachers' perceptions, with a particular focus on the role of the humanities in curriculum decolonization within primary education. This paper seeks to contribute to the exploration of student teachers' comprehension of decolonization, elucidate the imperative of curriculum decolonization, assess the potential contributions of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and the humanities to this transformative process, ultimately aiming to enhance our understanding of decolonizing the curriculum in primary education.

2. What do we mean by decolonization?

The notion of decolonizing the curriculum finds its roots in the mid-20th century, particularly within the framework of post-colonial nations. Scholars and activists in regions marked by historical colonization initiated a critical inquiry into the enduring repercussions of colonialism on their educational frameworks (Mintrom and O'Neill 2023). Central to this concept is the endeavour to challenge the long-standing dominance of Eurocentric and colonialist perspectives in the educational landscape over centuries. The process of decolonizing the curriculum entails a comprehensive reconsideration of educational content, structure, and delivery to confront the enduring impacts of colonialism on the education system. Newell (2021) posits that this task involves recognising the colonial legacy within the education system and necessitates a critical examination of the underlying assumptions and values. Although the inclusion of postcolonial literature represents a step towards this objective, it alone is deemed insufficient (Le Grange 2021). Achieving the decolonization of the curriculum necessitates a profound shift in our conceptualisation of education. This shift involves acknowledging the diversity of knowledge systems and striving for a more inclusive and equitable educational environment. According to Pihama and Lee-Morgan (2019), colonialism has disrupted and fragmented various aspects of Indigenous life, including natural environments, relational structures, cultural knowledge systems, languages, and ceremonial practices. Education, as both a target and tool of colonialism, played a dual role: dismantling and diminishing the validity of indigenous education while concurrently replacing and reshaping it with an 'education' aligned with colonial objectives. The formalised colonial structure of schooling operated as a conduit for broader imperialist ideological aims. Furthermore Shizha (2011) contends that the Eurocentric orientation in African education propagated myths surrounding Western knowledge, perpetuating the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge and perspectives. Colonial education not only severed colonized individuals from their indigenous learning structures but also directed them towards the educational frameworks of the colonizers. This shift was often underpinned by supremacist ideologies of the colonizers.

Decolonizing the curriculum is a multifaced and transformative process aimed at rectifying the deep-seated historical injustices and biases that have pervaded educational systems for generations. At its heart, decolonization entails four fundamental components that together foster a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. First and foremost, it involves recognising and valuing indigenous, local, and non-Western knowledge systems that have long been marginalized in favour of Western paradigms (Coates et al 2023, Munoz 2023). This recognition extends to appreciating the rich contributions of diverse cultures, worldviews, and philosophies, which have been historically under-represented (Moncrieffe 2020, Sutherland 2023). Decolonizing the curriculum also involves identifying and addressing the inherent biases, stereotypes, and misrepresentations present in textbooks, teaching materials, and pedagogical practices. This requires a critical examination of historical narratives that may glorify colonialism and perpetuate harmful stereotypes (Housee 2021). Furthermore, fostering inclusivity within the educational setting is paramount. This means creating an environment where students from all backgrounds feel represented, valued, and heard. Diversifying the curriculum by incorporating authors, scholars, and perspectives from a wide range of backgrounds is vital in achieving this inclusivity (Race et al 2022). Lastly, decolonization encourages students to engage critically with knowledge, question dominant paradigms, and develop their own perspectives. This not only promotes intellectual autonomy but also empowers students to think independently and critically about the world around them (Brett and Guyver 2023). Ultimately, decolonizing the curriculum is an ongoing process that strives to create an

educational landscape that is fair, diverse, and empowering for all learners, thereby dismantling the legacies of colonialism within educational structures (Martin et al 2020).

3. The rationale for decolonizing the curriculum

Decolonizing the curriculum is an essential endeavour with a plethora of compelling benefits that extend beyond mere historical revisionism. This transformation represents a critical response to the deeply ingrained educational inequalities that persist in our educational systems. This paper elucidates the multifaceted advantages of decolonizing the curriculum, highlighting its capacity to create a more inclusive, equitable, and culturally diverse educational landscape. First and foremost, decolonization champions the promotion of cultural diversity, fostering an environment where the myriad cultures, languages, and worldviews of students are not only acknowledged but celebrated. By recognizing the intrinsic value of each individual's unique identity and heritage, decolonization cultivates a sense of belonging and appreciation among students, promoting unity among diverse groups (Eaton 2022). This inclusivity is crucial in addressing historical biases that have marginalized the voices and contributions of various cultural and ethnic groups (Forsdick 2017).

Moreover, decolonization is an essential step toward achieving equity and social justice in education. It confronts the deeply ingrained power imbalances within educational systems, seeking to rectify past injustices and address the marginalization of under-represented groups. In doing so, it endeavours to create a more just and fairer educational environment where every student has an equal opportunity to thrive. This approach provides opportunities for under-represented groups to access quality education and participate in the learning process on equal terms, empowering marginalised students and dismantling systemic barriers (Coe et al 2020). Decolonization also significantly enhances learning outcomes. Research consistently demonstrates that students perform better when they see themselves reflected in the curriculum (Heineke et al 2022, OECD 2022). This connection between a student's identity and the content they are learning increases engagement and motivation, ultimately leading to improved academic performance. In essence, decolonizing the curriculum not only rectifies historical inequities but also provides a practical means to improve educational outcomes (Munoz 2023).

Another pivotal achievement of decolonizing the primary school curriculum is the restoration of cultural identity and self-esteem among students. By introducing indigenous and diverse perspectives into the curriculum, primary schools validate the cultural backgrounds of their students, thereby bolstering their self-worth and instilling pride in their heritage (Moncrieffe 2021). This positive reinforcement has a profound effect on students' confidence and motivation, leading to improved academic performance.

Decolonization also serves as a catalyst for cultivating critical thinking and empathy among young learners (Zembylas 2018). Encouraging students to critically engage with the knowledge presented, it prompts them to question established narratives, explore alternative viewpoints, and develop independent thinking skills (Grigg 2022). Moreover, by exposing students to diverse cultural experiences and world views, primary schools nurture empathy and open-mindedness, equipping students with essential life skills to thrive in an interconnected and globalized world (Aldrup et al 2022). In addition, decolonization strives to create an inclusive educational environment where every student feels valued and represented. This approach challenges historical biases that have marginalized the voices and contributions of various cultural and ethnic groups (Charles 2019). By diversifying the curriculum and incorporating a broad spectrum of perspectives, primary schools ensure that students from all backgrounds are acknowledged and celebrated. This inclusivity not only fosters a sense of belonging but also promotes unity among students (Arshad 2021).

In a world marked by globalization and cultural diversity, primary schools play a pivotal role in preparing students to be responsible global citizens (Akkari and Maleq 2020). Decolonizing the curriculum exposes students to a multitude of perspectives, world views, and cultural contexts, enabling them to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the world. This fosters an appreciation of global interdependence and encourages young learners to play an active role in shaping a more equitable and just global society

(Tuck and Yang 2012). In summary, the decolonization of the primary school curriculum holds the promise of not just enriching education but also nurturing more empathetic, informed, and engaged citizens of the world. This comprehensive approach to decolonization underscores the multifaceted advantages it offers, making it a paramount and imperative step in modern education.

4. Decolonizing the humanities in the primary school

Decolonizing the curriculum is a critical mission within contemporary education, striving to address historical biases, rectify the enduring legacies of colonialism, and promote inclusivity and diversity. This paper examines the distinct contributions of history, geography, and religious education in primary schools to this broader transformation. These subjects offer unique platforms to dismantle colonial narratives, empower students to critically engage with diverse perspectives, and create a more equitable and culturally diverse curriculum. Each section below explores the ways in which these subjects contribute to decolonization in the primary school context.

4.1 Decolonizing History Education

It can be argued that traditionally, history education in primary schools has often perpetuated a Eurocentric perspective, emphasizing colonial narratives of western powers. However, primary school history educators possess a unique opportunity to counteract these biases. This can be achieved through the incorporation of local and indigenous histories into the curriculum, ensuring that students learn about the rich tapestry of their own region's past. Moreover, highlighting the contributions of historical figures from various cultural backgrounds dispels the notion that history belongs solely to one group, encouraging students to examine world history from non-European perspectives (Moncrieffe 2020, Chantiluke 2018, Grever et al 2008). Primary school history education is not just about imparting historical facts; it is also about empowering students with critical thinking and historical analysis skills. Educators should teach children to question historical narratives, evaluate sources, and engage with primary and secondary materials. This approach enables students to recognize and challenge colonial biases in historical accounts. Furthermore, educators can address uncomfortable truths, such as colonial violence and oppression, allowing students to develop a more comprehensive understanding of history (Grever et al 2008, Hawkey and Prior 2011, Maylor et al 2007). Inclusivity and diverse representation are essential aspects of decolonizing history education. By incorporating a diverse range of historical figures and events, educators ensure that all students see themselves and their cultures reflected in their lessons. This representation promotes a sense of belonging and fosters unity among students from various backgrounds (Mansfield 2023). Furthermore, a holistic approach to decolonizing the curriculum involves integrating history with other subjects, such as literature, art, and geography. This interdisciplinary approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of historical events, cultures, and societies, enabling students to explore the multifaceted nature of history (Charles 2019, Hawkey and Prior 2011).

4.2 Decolonizing Geography Education

Geography education in primary schools offers an opportunity to address historical and cultural biases and engage students in a global exploration of the world. Educators play a crucial role in the process of decolonizing the curriculum and a fundamental aspect of decolonizing geography education is recognizing and incorporating diverse perspectives. Conventional geography curricula often reinforce Eurocentric viewpoints, emphasizing colonial narratives and favouring Western knowledge systems. However, primary school geography educators can counteract these biases by introducing multiple perspectives, including local and indigenous geographies. Encouraging students to examine a wide range of world regions, encompassing the geographies of Africa, Asia, the Americas, and other regions, broadens their understanding of the interconnectedness of the world (Daigle and Sundberg 2017). Primary school geography education also fosters critical thinking skills and spatial analysis. By teaching students to evaluate geographic information, analyse maps, and explore spatial relationships, educators equip them to engage with geography as a dynamic and multifaceted subject. This approach fosters an understanding of diverse perspectives and the complexities of the world (Nayeri and Rushton 2022, Daigle and

Sundberg 2017). Furthermore, geography education can play a significant role in debunking colonial stereotypes ingrained in traditional curricula. Educators can highlight diverse human-environment relationships, emphasising the myriad ways different cultures interact with their environments and the rich variety of cultural landscapes. This challenges stereotypes and fosters appreciation for the diversity of human experiences (Daigle and Sundberg 2017, Winter 2018). Inclusivity and diverse representation are essential aspects of decolonizing geography education. By incorporating a diverse range of geographic regions, cultures, and voices, educators help ensure that all students see themselves and their cultures reflected in their lessons (Laing 2021). Furthermore, to embrace a comprehensive approach to decolonizing the curriculum, geography education can be seamlessly integrated with other subjects, such as history, social studies, and environmental science. This interdisciplinary approach offers students a holistic understanding of geography, enabling them to explore the complexities and interconnections of the world comprehensively (Daigle and Sundberg 2017).

4.3 Decolonizing Religious Education

In the broader mission of decolonizing the curriculum, religious education within primary schools plays a pivotal role in promoting diversity, inclusivity, and critical thinking. One of the core elements of decolonizing religious education is recognising and incorporating diverse perspectives. Traditional religious education often focuses on dominant religions, perpetuating colonial perspectives and prioritising Western faith traditions. Primary school religious education should encompass indigenous belief systems, offering students a broader and more inclusive understanding of spirituality and cultural diversity. Encouraging students to examine a wide range of world religions empowers them to critically analyse belief systems and understand them within their historical and cultural context (Gearon et al 2020). Good religious education also nurtures critical thinking skills and interfaith dialogue. By teaching students to engage in respectful conversations about different belief systems, educators equip them with the skills to understand and appreciate diverse perspectives (Homayoonfard and Sajjadi, 2012). Addressing and challenging colonial stereotypes and misconceptions is another crucial aspect of decolonizing religious education. Educators have the opportunity to highlight the positive aspects of diverse religions and belief systems, promoting a more balanced and nuanced perspective on spirituality. Recognizing indigenous and marginalized faith traditions helps students appreciate the resilience and diversity of religious beliefs worldwide (Huth 2021). Inclusivity and diverse representation are essential elements of decolonizing religious education. By incorporating a diverse range of religious traditions, cultures, and practices, educators help ensure that all students see themselves and their belief systems reflected in their lessons (McInnis 2021). To take a comprehensive approach to decolonizing the curriculum, religious education can be integrated with other subjects. This interdisciplinary approach offers students a holistic understanding of the interplay between religion, culture, and history, encouraging them to explore the multifaceted nature of belief systems and their connection to the broader context of human civilization (Reiss 2017).

5. Methodology

The participants in this study consisted of 239 student teachers currently enrolled in teacher education programmes across various educational institutions in south-west Wales. The sample was diverse in terms of age, gender, and geographical location, representing a wide range of perspectives in the context of decolonizing the curriculum and the contributions of history, geography, and religious education. The primary data collection instrument employed in this study was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to elicit participants' views and opinions regarding the decolonization of the curriculum, with a specific focus on the roles of history, geography, and religious education. The questionnaire consisted of Likert-type scale items, where respondents indicated their level of agreement or disagreement with a series of statements. These statements encompassed a range of topics related to decolonizing the curriculum, including the diversification of content, representation of marginalized perspectives, and the incorporation of indigenous knowledge systems.

The questionnaire was developed through a comprehensive review of the literature on decolonizing the curriculum and consultation with subject matter experts in the fields of education, history, geography, and religious studies. The statements included in the questionnaire were formulated to gauge participants' perceptions and attitudes toward decolonization in the context of primary school education. Prior to the full-scale survey, a pilot study was conducted with a small group of student teachers (N = 20) to assess the clarity, comprehensibility, and relevance of the questionnaire items. Based on their feedback, minor modifications were made to ensure the questionnaire's effectiveness. The questionnaire was deployed electronically, using the Qualtrics online software package, and administered to student teachers in a controlled classroom setting. The study adhered to the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2024) ethical guidelines and obtained informed consent from all participants. An information letter and consent section were used to explain the study and to share key purposes, importance, and benefits of the study (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2018, Kumar 2014) and these aspects were built into the design of the letter of information and consent form. This was made clear to the participants in the opening screens of the questionnaire, which explicitly asked for participants' consent to complete the questionnaire, through checking three boxes confirming understanding of the purpose of the research, providing consent and confirming understanding that they can withdraw without penalty by closing the browser. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. Since questionnaires were deployed via a link to the survey software, participants were offered anonymity. All information provided remain anonymous and stored confidentially in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018) and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (2016). The collected data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

6. Findings & Discussion

The following section explores the respondents' comprehension of decolonizing the curriculum in the primary school, why it is important and the potential of ITE and the humanities to this important area. **Table 1** delves into the nuanced understanding of the term "decolonizing the curriculum" among student teachers. The findings provide some insights into how these educators perceive the importance, relevance, and potential challenges associated with decolonizing the curriculum.

Table 1: When we talk about decolonising the curriculum, we are referring to:

	% agree
integrating content that reflects a more comprehensive understanding of the world's diverse cultures and histories	100
working towards dismantling any discriminatory structures that may persist	99
encouraging a wider range of perspectives and voices, from different cultures, regions, and historical contexts	97
moving beyond a Eurocentric or Western-centric focus, acknowledging the contributions and perspectives of marginalised groups and non-Western cultures	97
the act of questioning and breaking down the Eurocentric biases that are often present in educational materials and teaching methods	96
acknowledging and appreciating the diverse cultural experiences, histories, and knowledge out there	96
addressing the under-representation of marginalised voices, including those of indigenous peoples, people of colour, and other historically oppressed groups	96
recognising how colonial legacies have influenced the development of curricula, educational systems, and perspectives	89

recognising that a more inclusive curriculum benefits all pupils by providing a richer and more accurate understanding of the world	78
questioning the biases and assumptions embedded in traditional curricula and ensuring a more inclusive and accurate representation of history, literature, and other subjects	74
a trend which does not contribute substantially to the core objectives of learning in the primary school	36
a superficial trend, and a politically motivated agenda rather than genuine effort to enhance educational inclusivity and diversity	34
the risk of destabilising the educational framework and undermining the continuity of established teaching methods	15

The student teachers' responses to the statements on decolonizing the curriculum provide valuable insights into their nuanced understanding and varied priorities within the group. One notable observation is the unanimous agreement on the importance of integrating content that reflects a more comprehensive understanding of the world's diverse cultures and histories. This consensus suggests a strong shared commitment among student teachers to promote inclusivity and incorporate global perspectives into the educational framework. Similarly, the high agreement on the necessity of working towards dismantling discriminatory structures within the educational system indicates that student teachers recognise the need for systemic changes to establish a more equitable learning environment. This emphasis on structural transformation aligns with broader efforts to address historical inequalities embedded in educational practices (Mintrom and O'Neill 2023).

The statements encouraging a wider range of perspectives, especially from different cultures, regions, and historical contexts, received a notable 97% agreement. This signifies an acknowledgement among student teachers that a diverse curriculum enriches the educational experience by fostering a deeper understanding of varied perspectives and voices. Moreover, the agreement on moving beyond a Eurocentric or Western-centric focus reflects a collective desire among student teachers to broaden the scope of the curriculum. This includes acknowledging and appreciating the contributions and perspectives of marginalised groups and non-Western cultures, emphasizing a commitment to fostering a more inclusive educational environment which mirrors the key messages from the literature review (for example, Pihama and Lee-Morgan 2019, Shizha 2011).

The responses also reveal a critical awareness among student teachers regarding existing biases in educational materials and teaching methods. The acknowledgement of the need to question and break down Eurocentric biases in the curriculum reflects a commitment to addressing inherent inequalities in educational content (Akkari and Maleq2020). Additionally, the high level of agreement on addressing the under-representation of marginalized voices, including those of indigenous peoples, people of colour, and historically oppressed groups, underscores a collective commitment to ensuring that the curriculum reflects the diversity of the student population.

While there is slightly lower agreement on recognizing how colonial legacies have influenced the development of curricula and perspectives (89%), this still suggests an awareness among student teachers of historical factors shaping educational content. However, the lower levels of agreement on statements characterising decolonizing efforts as a superficial trend or irrelevant to the core objectives of primary school education (34% and 36%, respectively) highlight a divide within the group. Some student teachers may perceive these efforts as lacking substance or not aligning with fundamental educational goals. Finally, the lowest level of agreement on the perceived risk of destabilising the educational framework (15%) suggests that a significant portion of student teachers does not share the concern that decolonizing efforts might undermine established teaching methods. This divergence in opinions adds complexity to the overall landscape of perspectives within the group. In general, the responses reflect a generally

positive and informed stance among student teachers regarding the importance of decolonizing the curriculum, with some variations in opinions regarding potential risks and perceived trends. This nuanced understanding underscores the complexity of perspectives within the group as they navigate the discourse on educational inclusivity and diversity.

Table 2 explores the respondents' views about the importance of decolonizing the curriculum. The percentages of agreement among student teachers regarding the importance of decolonizing the curriculum in primary schools reveal a nuanced perspective on their understanding and priorities. The highest level of agreement, at 92%, is attributed to the belief that decolonization provides a more inclusive educational experience for all pupils, irrespective of their cultural background. This overwhelming consensus underscores the student teachers' commitment to fostering an educational environment that accommodates and celebrates diversity, creating a sense of belonging for every student. This data also supports the findings of the literature review (for example Eaton 2022) by recognising the intrinsic value of each individual's unique identity and heritage, decolonization cultivates a sense of belonging. Closely following is the acknowledgement, with 89% agreement, that decolonizing the curriculum promotes social justice and equity within educational systems. This reflects a collective commitment to addressing historical and systemic inequalities embedded in educational content. The high level of agreement (88%) on the statement that decolonization helps to address historical and systemic inequalities further emphasises the recognition among student teachers that rectifying past injustice is a crucial aspect of their educational mission. The statement with 86% agreement emphasizes the importance of encouraging pupils to appreciate the richness and diversity of human experiences beyond a Eurocentric lens. This agreement suggests a shared understanding that broadening perspectives is vital for fostering an appreciation of diverse human experiences, aligning with the goal of promoting cultural understanding and inclusivity, reflecting some of the findings from the literature review (for example, Fordsick 2017, Housee 2021).

Table 2: Decolonising the curriculum is important because it:

	% agree
Provides a more inclusive educational experience for all pupils, regardless of their cultural background	92
Promotes social justice and equity within educational systems	89
Helps address historical and systemic inequalities	88
Encourages pupils to appreciate the richness and diversity of human experiences beyond a Eurocentric lens	86
Promotes a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of global history, cultures, and perspectives	84
Is more likely to resonate with pupils from various cultural backgrounds, making education more relevant and engaging	84
Encourages critical thinking by challenging established narratives and encouraging pupils to question assumptions fosters empathy and a deeper understanding of different cultural contexts	77
Prepares pupils to navigate an increasingly interconnected and multicultural world	62
Can enhance pupil motivation, participation, and overall academic success by acknowledging and incorporating the cultural richness that pupils bring to the learning environment	57
Providing a destabilising influence on pupils' understanding of their cultural heritage	45
Introduces unnecessary complexity and contradicts the structured framework	

that has been effective for years in delivering content to pupils	38
Distracts from essential academic content, leading to a dilution of core subject matter	39
Potentially hindering pupils' preparedness for standardised testing and future academic pursuits	28

The percentages of agreement decrease slightly but remain significant for statements such as promoting a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of global history, cultures, and perspectives (84%), and resonating with pupils from various cultural backgrounds to make education more relevant and engaging (84%). These findings underscore the student teachers' desire for a curriculum that provides a globally informed and engaging education. The agreement at 77% on the statement about encouraging critical thinking and fostering empathy by challenging established narratives indicates a recognition among student teachers that questioning assumptions can lead to a deeper understanding of different cultural contexts. However, the moderate agreement on preparing pupils to navigate an increasingly interconnected and multicultural world (62%) suggests some divergence of opinion within the group about the direct impact of decolonization on pupils' preparedness for the global landscapes. As the agreement percentages decrease, concerns and reservations become more apparent. The agreement at 57% regarding the potential to enhance pupil motivation, participation, and overall academic success through acknowledging cultural richness indicates a varied perspective within the group. Statements with lower agreement percentages (ranging from 45% to 28%) reflect concerns among some student teachers. There is a notable level of caution regarding potential destabilization of pupils' understanding of their cultural heritage, the introduction of unnecessary complexity, and potential distractions from essential academic content leading to a dilution of core subject matter. The lowest agreement, at 28%, suggests a significant level of apprehension about potential hindrances to pupils' preparedness for standardised testing and future academic pursuits.

Table 3 explores the respondents' views about Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and decolonizing the curriculum. The agreement that teacher education is a crucial point of influence in breaking the cycle of cultural reproduction of Eurocentric or colonial narratives (67%) and that teachers are key actors in the decolonization process (72%) indicates a recognition among respondents of the pivotal role teacher training plays in transforming educational paradigms. This suggests an awareness that meaningful change starts with preparing teachers to be agents of decolonization. The acknowledgement that teachers need a developed awareness of issues around race, colonial experiences, and power relations to effectively implement a decolonized curriculum (78%) aligns with the understanding that teacher training should facilitate systematic reflection on complex systems of colonisation and present-day systems of race domination (75%). The lower agreement (56%) regarding teachers' own perspectives, interests, and confidence posing challenges to the extent of decolonization suggests some acknowledgement of internal obstacles. However, the overwhelmingly high agreement (93%) that teachers' deep reflection on their own world views and positionality is complex and may require confidence and access to high-quality resources emphasises the importance of supporting teachers in this introspective journey.

Table 3: Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and decolonizing the curriculum

	% agree
ITE courses should help promote the strategic use of external resources, such as high-quality learning materials and textbooks, to support decolonised learning in classroom	94
Teachers' deep reflection on their own world views and positionalities is complex and may require confidence and access to high-quality resources	93
ITE courses should emphasise the need for confronting issues of racism directly and incorporating awareness-raising on racism and colonial structures	89

Teachers need a developed awareness of issues around race, colonial experiences, and power relations to effectively implement a decolonised curriculum	78
Teacher education serves as a mechanism to facilitate systematic reflection on complex systems of colonisation and present-day systems of race domination	75
Teachers are key actors in the decolonisation process, and well-designed teacher training can mobilise them as agents of change	72
Teacher Education is a crucial point of influence in breaking the cycle of cultural reproduction of Eurocentric or colonial narratives in education	67
Teachers' own perspectives, interests, and confidence pose challenges to the extent of decolonisation in teacher education	56
Decolonisation adds an extra burden to an already demanding programme	41
Decolonisation introduces ideological complexities that divert focus from practical teaching skills and pedagogical methods essential for effective classroom management	39
Decolonisation in initial teacher education is unnecessary	31

The strong agreement that ITE courses should emphasize the need for confronting issues of racism directly and incorporating awareness-raising on racism and colonial structures (89%) underscores a collective belief in the necessity of addressing these issues head-on. Similarly, the agreement (94%) that ITE courses should promote the strategic use of external resources, such as high-quality learning materials and textbooks, signals a commitment to providing student teachers with the tools necessary for decolonized learning environments. The figures indicating disagreement with the necessity of decolonization in ITE (31%) and concerns that decolonization introduces ideological complexities that divert focus from practical teaching skills and pedagogical methods (39%, 41%) highlight a segment of respondents who express reservations about the integration of decolonization into teacher education. These figures suggest concerns about the feasibility, practicality, and potential challenges associated with incorporating decolonization into established training programs. The diverse range of opinions indicates the need for ongoing discussions, tailored professional development, and collaborative efforts to navigate the challenges and seize the opportunities presented by the integration of decolonization principles into teacher education programs.

The teaching of history in primary schools serves as a critical avenue for decolonizing the curriculum. **Table 4** provides insights into the perspectives of respondents regarding key aspects of history education. The percentages of agreement among student teachers regarding the contribution of teaching history in primary schools to decolonizing the curriculum unveil a strong emphasis on inclusivity, diverse perspectives, and critical engagement. The unanimous agreement on ensuring the representation of diverse historical figures and events, including those related to gender, race, and socio-economic backgrounds, underscores a high priority placed on fostering a more inclusive historical education. Student teachers express a commitment to broadening the historical narrative and ensuring that individuals from varied backgrounds are represented in the curriculum. Similarly, the unanimous agreement on fostering inquiry-based learning reflects a shared recognition among student teachers of the importance of promoting students' ability to ask questions and explore historical topics independently. This alignment with a student-centred and critical thinking-oriented pedagogy suggests a commitment to cultivating students' curiosity and analytical skills within the historical context.

Table 4: The teaching of history in the primary school should contribute to decolonizing the curriculum by...

	% agree
Ensuring representation of diverse historical figures and events, including those related to gender, race, and socio-economic backgrounds	100
Fostering inquiry-based learning, allowing students to ask questions and explore historical topics independently	100
Including the history of Black British people, recognising their significant contributions and the challenges they faced throughout different periods	100
Including the history, contributions, and perspectives of indigenous peoples, recognising their unique cultures and experiences	93
Expanding the curriculum to include historical events and figures from various regions and civilizations, moving beyond a Eurocentric focus	93
Engaging pupils in critical discussions about colonialism, slavery, and imperialism	87
Explicitly discussing the lasting impacts of imperialism, both in terms of systemic inequalities and the enrichment of certain nations at the expense of others	59
Avoiding discussing controversial or uncomfortable topics in history	4
Focusing less on the local context and concentrate on broader historical narratives	2

The unanimous support for including the history of Black British people, recognizing their significant contributions and challenges faced highlights a commitment to acknowledging and honouring the diverse experiences within the Black community throughout different historical periods. This unanimous agreement underscores a collective recognition of the need to provide a comprehensive and inclusive understanding of Black British history. The high agreement on including the history, contributions, and perspectives of indigenous peoples, recognizing their unique cultures and experiences, reflects a commitment to acknowledging and valuing the rich heritage of indigenous communities. This demonstrates an understanding among student teachers that incorporating diverse perspectives enriches the historical narrative and contributes to a more inclusive educational experience and reflects the findings of the literature review (for example, Moncrieffe 2020, Chantiluke 2018).

While there is still strong agreement on expanding the curriculum to include historical events and figures from various regions and civilizations, moving beyond a Eurocentric focus, the slightly lower percentage may indicate some diversity of opinion within the group regarding the extent of such expansion. However, the overall agreement suggests a commitment to broadening the scope of historical education and embracing a more global perspective. The substantial agreement on engaging pupils in critical discussions about colonialism, slavery, and imperialism underscores a collective recognition of the importance of addressing challenging topics (Grever et al 2008, Hawkey and Prior 2011). This commitment to fostering critical discussions indicates a shared understanding among student teachers of the need to navigate complex historical subjects to provide students with a nuanced understanding of historical events.

The lower agreement on explicitly discussing the lasting impacts of imperialism, both in terms of systemic inequalities and the enrichment of certain nations at the expense of others, suggests some divergence of opinion within the group. This may reflect varying views on the depth of coverage or potential discomfort associated with addressing the far-reaching consequences of imperialism. Notably, the extremely low agreement on avoiding discussing controversial or uncomfortable topics in history rejects the idea of circumventing challenging subjects. This strong disagreement indicates a prevailing sentiment among student teachers that addressing controversial topics is essential for a comprehensive and honest historical education. Finally, the minimal agreement on focusing less on the local context and concentrating more on broader historical narratives suggests a strong disagreement with the idea of sidelining local perspectives. This indicates a priority among student teachers for maintaining a balance

between local and global perspectives in historical education, ensuring relevance to students' immediate contexts.

The teaching of geography in primary schools is instrumental in shaping students' understanding of the world. **Table 5** provides valuable insights into how respondents perceive the role of geography education in decolonizing the curriculum. This analysis explores the nuanced views on incorporating indigenous knowledge, addressing global challenges, and fostering an inclusive understanding of geography. The percentages of agreement among student teachers regarding the contribution of teaching geography in primary schools to decolonizing the curriculum provide valuable insights into their priorities and understanding. The unanimous agreement on incorporating the geographical knowledge and cultural connections of indigenous communities, recognising the diversity of their environments, signals a strong commitment among student teachers to inclusivity and respect for diverse perspectives within the curriculum. This reflects a shared recognition of the importance of acknowledging and valuing the unique contributions of indigenous communities to geographical knowledge and mirrors the findings of the literature review (for example, Daigle and Sundberg 2017). Similarly, the unanimous support for emphasizing the importance of environmental stewardship and sustainable practices indicates a collective understanding of the significance of instilling a sense of responsibility and environmental consciousness among students. This alignment underscores the shared commitment to fostering environmentally conscious citizens through geography education.

Table 5: The teaching of geography in the primary school should contribute to decolonizing the curriculum by...

	% agree
Incorporating the geographical knowledge, and cultural connections of indigenous communities, recognising the diversity of their environments	100
Emphasising the importance of environmental stewardship and sustainable Practices	100
Integrating case studies from non-Western regions, highlighting the geographical diversity and complexities of various societies beyond Eurocentric perspectives	98
Organise field trips and hands-on experiences that allow students to engage directly with geographical concepts	98
Discussing socio-economic inequalities and their geographical implications, both globally and locally	95
Provide opportunities for students to critically analyse geographical information and question prevailing narratives	95
Addressing global environmental challenges and their impacts, emphasising how historical and colonial factors contribute to present-day inequalities in resource use and conservation	76
Incorporating local indigenous knowledge about the geography of the area, recognising the significance of traditional ecological knowledge in understanding and managing landscapes	68
Exploring the historical impact of colonialism on land use, resource distribution, and environmental management, connecting past practices to present-day geographical disparities	35
Showcasing the geographical contributions of diverse cultures to navigation, exploration, and scientific understanding, moving beyond a Eurocentric portrayal of geographic knowledge.	25
Examining urbanisation patterns and urban planning, considering the colonial history's influence on the development and structure of cities in different parts of the world.	12

The high agreement on integrating case studies from non-Western regions, as well as organizing field trips and hands-on experiences, reflects a strong desire among student teachers to broaden the geographical narrative beyond Eurocentric perspectives. This demonstrates a commitment to providing a more comprehensive and diverse understanding of global geography, coupled with a recognition of the value of practical engagement for effective learning. This also mirrors the key findings from the literature review (for example Nayeri and Rushton 2022). Furthermore, the high agreement on discussing socio-economic inequalities and their geographical implications, both globally and locally, along with providing opportunities for students to critically analyse geographical information, highlights a commitment to developing students' critical thinking skills. This suggests an understanding among student teachers of the interconnectedness of social and economic factors with geography, emphasizing the importance of fostering a critical awareness of global and local disparities.

The substantial agreement on addressing global environmental challenges with a focus on historical and colonial factors indicates a shared understanding of the complex intersections between history, colonialism, and present-day geographical challenges. The slightly lower percentage may suggest some diversity of opinion within the group regarding the depth of coverage or emphasis on historical and colonial factors. The agreement on incorporating local indigenous knowledge about the geography of the area, while not unanimous, suggests an acknowledgement of the value of traditional ecological knowledge in geography education (Winter 2018). This percentage indicates a majority agreement but also reflects some diversity of opinion within the group, perhaps indicating varying levels of emphasis placed on indigenous knowledge. On the other hand, the lower agreement on exploring the historical impact of colonialism on land use, resource distribution, and environmental management, as well as showcasing the geographical contributions of diverse cultures beyond Eurocentric portrayals, suggests varying opinions within the group. This may indicate differing views on the extent to which historical and cultural factors should be emphasised in understanding geographical disparities. Finally, the minimal agreement on examining urbanization patterns with a focus on colonial history suggests a minority perspective within the group. This may reflect differing priorities or opinions on the relevance of colonial history to the study of urbanization in geography education.

Table 6 explores how respondents perceive the contribution of Religious Education (RE) to the decolonization of the curriculum. The percentages of agreement among student teachers regarding the role of RE in decolonizing the curriculum provide valuable insights into their understanding and priorities. There is a consistent and strong commitment, with 97% agreement, to integrating teachings and beliefs from a diverse range of world religions. This reflects a collective acknowledgement of the need to move beyond dominant Western perspectives, emphasizing a comprehensive understanding of religious experiences globally. Similarly, the substantial 89% agreement on acknowledging and studying the spiritual practices of indigenous communities underscores a commitment to inclusivity and recognition of diverse spiritual traditions beyond mainstream perspectives.

Table 6: The teaching of RE in the primary school should contribute to decolonizing the curriculum by...

	% agree
Fostering tolerance, respect, understanding, and cultural sensitivity	100
Incorporating the study of local religious practices and traditions, ensuring that the curriculum is relevant and reflective of the religious diversity within the immediate community	100
Integrating teachings and beliefs from a diverse range of world religions, ensuring that the curriculum reflects the plurality of religious experiences beyond dominant Western perspectives	97
Acknowledging and studying the spiritual practices and belief systems of	

indigenous communities	89
Highlighting the diversity of religious expression and resisting Eurocentric religious norms	84
Emphasising how diverse religious traditions have interacted and blended, challenging a simplistic narrative of religious purity	64
Discussing the concepts of religious freedom and human rights within the context of different cultures and religions	54
Examining post-colonial religious identities and the impact of colonisation on the ways in which communities practice and express their faith	56
Placing the highest priority on teaching Christianity as it is the main religion represented in the UK	34

The agreement on highlighting the diversity of religious expression and resisting Eurocentric religious norms at 84% reflects a shared understanding among student teachers of the importance of challenging hegemonic perspectives. This commitment to promoting a more inclusive and nuanced portrayal of religious expression aligns with the broader goals of decolonizing the RE curriculum. Furthermore, fostering tolerance, respect, understanding, and cultural sensitivity receives unanimous agreement (100%), indicating a shared priority among student teachers. This underscores a commitment to instilling positive values and attitudes within the religious education context, aligning with the broader objectives of creating an inclusive learning environment.

While not unanimous, the 64% agreement on emphasizing how diverse religious traditions have interacted and blended suggests recognition of the importance of challenging simplistic narratives. The slightly lower percentage may indicate varying opinions within the group on the depth of coverage or emphasis placed on this aspect. The agreement on examining post-colonial religious identities and the impact of colonisation on religious practices (56%) suggests an acknowledgement of the historical context's influence. The slightly lower percentage may indicate differing opinions within the group regarding the extent to which post-colonial religious identities should be explored.

The unanimous agreement on incorporating the study of local religious practices and traditions, ensuring the curriculum is relevant and reflective of the religious diversity within the immediate community, reflects a shared understanding of the importance of context and local relevance in religious education and mirrors the findings of the literature review (for example McInnis, 2021). The 54% agreement on discussing concepts of religious freedom and human rights within diverse cultural and religious contexts indicates an acknowledgement of the need for such discussions. The varying percentage suggests some diversity of opinion on the emphasis or depth of coverage related to these concepts. The lowest agreement at 34% on placing the highest priority on teaching Christianity, considering it the main religion represented in the UK, suggests a divergence of opinion within the group. This indicates that a significant portion of student teachers may prioritise a more balanced and inclusive approach that does not elevate one religion above others.

7. Conclusion

Several findings emerge from these data. First, the respondents exhibited a strong grasp of the concept of decolonizing the curriculum, as evidenced by unanimous agreement on the imperative integration of diverse content and the dismantling of discriminatory structures, showcasing a strong commitment to establishing an inclusive and equitable learning environment. This alignment with broader initiatives addressing historical educational inequalities adds considerable weight to their perspective. The unanimous agreement on embracing diverse perspectives reflects a collective acknowledgement of the inherent value in varied voices, contributing to a more enriching educational experience. Additionally, the respondents' critical awareness of biases and dedication to rectifying under-representation demonstrate a proactive approach to addressing systemic issues. The overwhelming agreement percentages for providing a more inclusive educational experience, underscore a shared commitment to fostering diversity

and creating an environment where all students, regardless of their cultural background, feel a sense of belonging. This recognition of the intrinsic value of each student's unique identity and heritage is further emphasised by the substantial agreement on promoting social justice and equity within educational systems, addressing historical and systemic inequalities in educational content. These positive responses underscore a commitment to broadening perspectives and making education more relevant and engaging for students from various cultural backgrounds. These findings suggest a nuanced understanding among student teachers of the transformative potential of decolonizing the curriculum in promoting inclusivity, equity, and a comprehensive understanding of diverse human experiences. These encouraging findings indicate that student teachers are eager to ensure future education provision actively dismantles persisting discriminatory structures and promotes a broader range of perspectives and voices from diverse cultural, regional, and historical contexts within the educational landscape.

Second, the respondents felt that ITE had a crucial role to play in decolonizing the primary curriculum. The overwhelming agreement on the importance of teacher education in breaking the cycle of cultural reproduction and recognizing teachers as key agents in the decolonization process signifies an awareness of the transformative potential of training programs. The acknowledgement of the need for teachers to possess an awareness of issues around race and colonial experiences aligns with the imperative for systematic reflection. Despite concerns about challenges posed by teachers' perspectives, the resounding agreement on the complexity of deep reflection underscores the necessity of supporting educators in this introspective journey. The strong consensus on confronting issues of racism directly in ITE courses and incorporating awareness-raising on racism and colonial structures highlights a collective commitment to addressing these challenges head-on. Additionally, the agreement on the strategic use of external resources underscores a dedication to providing student teachers with the necessary tools for effective decolonized learning environments.

Third, a noteworthy concern arises from a minority expressing reservations about the perceived superficiality of decolonizing efforts and the associated risks. This divergence in opinions underscores the complexity of attitudes within the group. While the majority exhibits a positive and informed stance regarding the importance of decolonizing the curriculum, the dissenting voices highlight potential challenges in achieving a consensus. This finding is significant as it points to the necessity for targeted interventions, discussions, and professional development to address the concerns raised by this minority. Initiatives should be undertaken to foster a more comprehensive understanding of decolonization principles, ensuring that all student teachers are aligned in their commitment to creating an inclusive and equitable learning environment. The varied perspectives within the group emphasise the need for a nuanced and tailored approach to address concerns and promote a collective effort towards integrating decolonization principles into teacher education programs effectively.

Fourth, the figures clearly demonstrate the high value given by the respondents to the contribution that history, geography, and RE can make to decolonizing the curriculum. They also highlight their strong commitment to fostering inclusivity, diverse perspectives, and critical engagement in primary education. In history, the unanimous agreement on ensuring diverse representation and fostering inquiry-based learning underscores a high priority on creating an inclusive historical education. This commitment extends to acknowledging the history of Black British people and indigenous communities, reflecting an understanding of the importance of diverse narratives. The majority agreement on critical discussions about challenging topics like colonialism and slavery indicates a collective recognition of the need to navigate complex historical subjects. In geography, unanimous support for incorporating indigenous knowledge and emphasising environmental stewardship showcases a commitment to inclusivity and environmental consciousness. The high agreement on discussing socio-economic inequalities and providing opportunities for critical analysis demonstrates an understanding of the interconnectedness of geography with social and economic factors. In RE, the unanimous commitment to integrating teachings from diverse world religions, acknowledging indigenous spiritual practices, and fostering cultural sensitivity reflects a shared commitment to inclusivity and challenging dominant Western perspectives.

The findings emphasise the importance of continued support and tailored professional development to ensure the effective integration of decolonization principles across these subjects, promoting a comprehensive and equitable primary education.

Fifth, and moving forward, it is crucial to establish a comprehensive approach to decolonizing the curriculum in primary schools. Transparent communication should address concerns and scepticism, emphasizing the educational benefits of decolonisation for all students. Ongoing professional development opportunities are essential for educators, equipping them to navigate the complexities of decolonizing the curriculum and integrate diverse perspectives effectively. Community engagement, involving local communities in the process, ensures relevance and responsiveness to local contexts, fostering a sense of ownership and collaboration. Curricular innovation should go beyond questioning biases, fundamentally transforming educational content and methods to reflect diverse perspectives. Continuous research and evaluation are encouraged to assess the impact of decolonization efforts and ensure evidence-based improvements. For Initial Teacher Education (ITE), inclusive professional development and open dialogue within educational institutions are crucial. Teacher education programmes should be enhanced to include modules on decolonization, cultural responsiveness, and strategies for inclusivity. Supporting research initiatives that investigate the impact of decolonizing initiatives on student outcomes is imperative. In teaching history, ongoing professional development, high-quality curricular resources, and inclusive pedagogies are recommended. Parent and community engagement, multidisciplinary approaches, and a focus on global perspectives are vital components. Similarly, in teaching geography, diversifying curriculum resources, providing professional development, fostering collaboration with indigenous communities, and promoting interdisciplinary approaches are key. Strengthening the emphasis on global perspectives is crucial for a holistic understanding. For Religious Education, an inclusive curriculum design that integrates teachings from diverse religions, incorporation of indigenous perspectives, community engagement, and professional development are essential. Interdisciplinary approaches should be promoted, providing a holistic understanding of religious beliefs. This multifaceted approach should ensure a transformative and inclusive educational landscape, fostering understanding, collaboration, and positive societal change.

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