

# DECOLONISING CURRICULA FOR A KNOWLEDGE-DRIVEN SOCIETY: THE TIME IS NOW

Michael Gaotlhobogwe\*

University of Botswana, Department of Educational Foundation  
[gaotlhobogwe@mopipi.ub.bw](mailto:gaotlhobogwe@mopipi.ub.bw)

Hildah L. Mokgolodi

University of Botswana, Department of Educational Foundation  
[hildah.mokgolodi@mopipi.ub.bw](mailto:hildah.mokgolodi@mopipi.ub.bw)

*Nako in this sense takes on a meaning that transcends more than time in that it brings forth the idea that time influences everything around us. Whether it be events, history, cycles of transformations or simply a nation that believes that its time has come, the only time one really has is now—Ke Nako (Nako Timepieces, 2019)*

## Abstract

This conceptual paper was inspired by Nako Timepieces, a brand that bears Botswana's heritage on a wrist and is founded on the belief that state-of-art watchmaking innovation can be synonymous with cultural and historical significance (Nako Timepieces, 2019). The introduction of a local language and history of Botswana to the international community through a luxury watch carries an important hallmark of decolonisation. Decolonisation of curricula is a discourse that provides an indigenous understanding of education as a decolonial exercise. Decolonising curricula means redefining curricula by considering other cultures and contexts from which education is understood. Of particular importance in this paper is African indigenous knowledge and cultures from which education is defined. The current curricula is founded on colonial mind-set framed around the idea of usurping the being of indigenous people and also purge the colonies of indigenous knowledge. This is the knowledge that a decolonised curricula should promote and use to compete on the international stage as demonstrated by Nako Timepieces—by promoting a local language and Botswana's heritage. Decolonisation should start at primary school level rather than at higher levels of education as taught in the saying *lore lo ojwa lo sale metsi*, a Setswana proverb that says 'mould the plant while it is still young and supple for when it is older and hardened, it will break.'

**Keywords:** decolonisation, indigenous knowledge, Setswana proverb, *ke nako*.

## 1.0 Introduction

As economies of the world are moving from resource based to knowledge-based, Africa, and Botswana in particular is not left behind in this paradigm shift. While the thrust of this paper pronounces that the time is now for Botswana to turn around the education system to realise a knowledge-driven society, we must also remember that when economies were resource-based, the colonised mind of the African people failed to leverage on the advantage of living in a continent that was endowed with natural resources and indigenous technologies.

Instead, former political colonisers usurped the natural resources from indigenous people and also purged the colonies of indigenous technologies and referred to these technologies as heathen and backward practices (Mapara, 2009). As a result, indigenous people relied on their former colonisers for products and technologies on which these resource-based economies relied. This state of affairs did not only leave indigenous people materially poor but also mentally poor. The coffee from Kenya, diamonds from Botswana, timber from the Brazilian Amazon rainforest, cattle by-products such as hides and others were also exported from former colonies to the west for value addition and product design and development for obsolescence. They were then aggressively marketed back to third world countries at prices that continually depleted and left indigenous people powerless and even more reliant on their former colonisers.

Given this background, and inspired by Nako Timepieces (Figure 1), this conceptual paper proposes that the time to discuss decolonisation of primary education curricula for a knowledge-driven society is now, and it is the time that Botswana must take pride in who they are and look from within and beyond for knowledge that can be used in driving this society forward and thereby restore their confidence and pride in what is truly African.

Aptly named *Nako*, the inspiration from the wrist watch design by Gabriel Mothibedi was drawn from Botswana cultural and historical heritage showcasing the three dikgosi monument in the Central Business District (CBD) of Gaborone. It also used a Setswana word *nako* which simply means ‘time,’ the brand was deliberate in using language as a definer and a luxury timepiece made in Botswana by Botswana, the people of Botswana, as a platform to highlight what the country has to offer from a local and international level. *Nako* in this sense takes on a meaning that transcends more than time in that it brings forth the idea that time influences everything around us. Whether it be events, history, cycles of transformations or simply, a nation that believes that its time has come—the only time one really has, is now: *Ke Nako* (Thobega, 2019).

**Figure 1: Nako Timepiece**



The introduction of a local language and history of Botswana to the international community through a luxury watch carries an important hallmark of decolonisation as shall be demonstrated in the next section. Luxury wrist watches such as Rolex, Tissot and Saiko are a symbol of power, affluence, western, and to some extent masculinity. To a greater extent, this Nako timepiece has brought these symbols of power which are synonymous with colonialism closer to culture, history and language of the colonised to show that it is time we appreciate and acknowledge our culture, history and language as synonymous with power, affluence and pride.

## 2.0 Decolonisation

Decolonisation of different aspects of education has been a subject of discussion across the globe for over two decades. It is a paradigm (Smith, 1999; Gaotlhobogwe, Major, Kolo-Keakitse & Chilisa, 2018) on the one hand and an agenda (Gaotlhobogwe & Ruele, forthcoming) on the other. As a paradigm, decolonisation falls within critical and post-colonial theories that are liberatory or transformative responses to racial, gender and class oppression (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). As an agenda, it is used by the formally politically colonised people in an attempt to bring enlightenment and remove the colonial implant that continues to subject these formally politically colonised people to mental captivity or colonial mentality. Decolonisation, therefore, is a systematic way that attempts to liberate the colonised mind so that the formally politically colonised people are not only politically free but are also mentally emancipated (Smith, 1999).

Decolonisation, both as a paradigm and a transformational agenda has been discussed in decolonisation of evaluation (Gaotlhobogwe, Major, Kolo-Keakitse & Chilisa, 2018). Technology Education (Gaotlhobogwe & Ruele, forthcoming; Gumbo, forthcoming; Moalosi, Marope & Setlathlanyo, 2017), Geography (Knight, 2018) and the intellectual landscape (Oelofsen, 2015). All these decolonisation discussions have been made at the level well beyond the primary school. In this conceptual paper we argue that while it might have been appropriate to discuss decolonization at higher levels of the education system, *the time is now [Ke nako]* to take it down to the primary school level. In order to overcome the legacy of colonialism, it is necessary to also decolonise the intellectual landscape of the country in question, and, ultimately, decolonise the mind of the formerly colonised (Oelofsen, 2015).

The mind gets colonized at an earlier age and the colonial implant that subjects these people to mental captivity or colonial mentality gets entrenched over the years as children interact with or within a curriculum with a colonial legacy. As a result of this curriculum, we failed as Africans to compete within a resource-based economy environment despite living in a continent that is endowed with natural resources. Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson (2002) have proposed that colonialism created a reversal of fortunes in economic terms. Previously rich peoples, including Africans, became poor when colonised, while previously poor peoples, colonisers, ended up comparatively wealthier. We failed not because we are Africans, we failed because we blindly indulged in an education that was designed to fail us. The infamous excerpt from Lord Macaulay's address to the British parliament on 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1885 (purportedly culled from his speech, though not verified as authentic) carries every signal of the bad

intention of colonial education on indigenous people. This was an education that was designed to usurp the indigenous people of their natural resources and also purge the former colonies of indigenous technologies and knowledge, most of which was referred to as heathen and backward practices. This type of education of indigenous peoples is not consistent with the tenants of a knowledge driven society.

For Africans to succeed in a knowledge-driven society, they will have to reject anything that suggest that whatever is African is heathen and backward. The only thing that can make us compete and succeed in the global stage is being African, because this is what the world does not have. School curricula with a colonial legacy has relegated African languages, for example, to the periphery. How then do we, as Africans, expect to compete with the world using their languages and their worldviews? It is time that we compete with them using our languages and our worldviews because those are some of the intellectual resources available only to us. We are aware that with the advent of the virtual world these resources may also be available to our competitors, but we stand a better chance at it than when we use theirs. In decolonising the curricular to align with the tenants of a knowledge-based society it is important to note that *lore lo ojwa lo sale metsi*. This is a Setswana proverb that says ‘mould the plant while it is still young and supple for when it is older and hardened, it will break.’

Educating our children to denigrate their own native languages and to glory in speaking the coloniser’s language is equal to engraving a colonial mentality which will be impossible to uproot in the long run. This is what the ‘English Speaking Zone’ in our schools are drilling into the minds of the learners. This is killing the inner being and the pride of an African child in a subtle way. These same languages that the curriculum is denigrating are some of the intellectual knowledge resources that could drive our economies; nobody else has this resource but us. This same curriculum with a colonial legacy is denigrating life in the rural areas and glorifying life in the urban areas where there is less physical activity as compared to rural areas, where life is more stressful, where people live by eating mostly processed foods rather than fresh organic foods. In the long run lifestyle diseases become rampant and governments spends huge financial resources on medication, again enriching pharmaceutical corporations from the West.

### **3.0 How curricula could be decolonized?**

In the previous section, we attempted to indicate that during the colonial era the education curricula was designed to disempower the former colonies of any form of resource that had economic value. According to Acemoglu et al. (2002), European colonialism led to the development of extractive institutions in previously prosperous places—extractive in the sense that these institutions were intended to destroy and demean whatever the colonisers deemed backwards and barbaric, usurp whatever the colonisers deemed valuable and not good for the indigenous communities and in the long run destroy the pride of the colonised. To this end these institutions, including education, have been very successful in what they were designed to achieve.

To decolonise school curricula, Gaotlhobogwe et al. (2018) proposed evaluation frameworks suitable to contribute to the restoration, revitalisation, retribution and protection of African identities and values. These evaluation frameworks could be adopted to evaluate the primary school curricula to identify aspects that work against the decolonisation agenda. Once these aspects have been identified through empirical research, interventions could be put in place to ensure that indigenous knowledge and values which we can use to drive a knowledge-based economy are restored, revitalized and protected from further extraction and exhaustion.

One such aspect is language as indicated earlier. Language is central in a knowledge-based economy. It is argued that indigenous communities must guard their languages and use them as a resource to benefit their own people and compete with others who do not possess the same language resource. The Nako timepieces has demonstrated this by introducing not only the language but also the history of Botswana to the international community through luxury wrist watches. So, using the evaluation frameworks, the primary school curricula should be evaluated with a view to restore indigenous peoples' pride in their languages as demonstrated by Nako timepieces and restore and revitalise any aspects of the language that may have been distorted as a result of colonisation (of the mind). This distortion is evident where such practices as *bogadi/lobola/malobolo* have been westernised to be understood as 'bride price' which in turn result in the whole essence of the practice being misunderstood as paying a price for or buying a bride in marriage. This misrepresentation results and has resulted in society viewing women as objects that can be bought at a price, and has contributed significantly to gender-based abuse and violence. The essence of this distortion of language may not be directly linked to knowledge-based society but it nevertheless has far-reaching consequences. The funds and energy that are directed to campaigns against gender-based violence could have been channelled towards knowledge generating activities.

Just as much as when natural resources were amassed from the African continent when the African indigenous people were in slumber, the same is likely to happen to knowledge resources should we not take heed to safeguard the knowledge that is currently available only to us and not to those who wish to see us vanish from the face of this earth. This has been happening through the brain drain syndrome, but the *time is now* for us to protect and safeguard this valuable knowledge resource. It may not be easy during this time of the internet but it is possible through intellectual property rights laws.

We wish to invite the reader to listen to local language inspired Hip-hop, Rap and Rhythm and blues (R&B) music by the likes of Lizibo, Amantle Brown, Dramaboy, Bangu and many others. If the creative arts can do it, education can also do it, provided we take pride in who we are as indigenous people and muster the political will to do it. The example of local language inspired music demonstrates the fact that we advocate not for losing everything that is foreign but for taking pride in who we are so much so that we can infuse it with any global influences.

#### 4.0 Conclusion

Indeed time bridges the old and the new. Nako timepieces and the thrust of this paper could not have been more accurate. The time is now, *ke nako*, that we look back to the value inherent in our indigenous ways of knowing and doing things in order to confound the wise, just as it is written in the Bible that ...*God has chosen the foolish things of world to confound the wise; and has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty* (1 Corinthians, 1:27). The shift from a resource-based economy to a knowledge-based economy is imperative given the effects of climate change. The mighty economies that have relied on natural resources to build their kingdoms are looking for alternative ways of doing things, and the answers lie with the indigenous communities. We must educate our children to value what they have and protect it (decolonisation) lest it be taken from us and used against us just as it happened with natural resources. The use of a local language to name a luxury watch made in Switzerland and the inclusion of artistry depicting our historical heritage is presented in this paper as evidence that if we take pride in who we are, then we stand a better chance to influence the global landscape, which is important for a knowledge driven society. However, as argued in this conceptual paper, this mindset should be cultivated through education starting right at the primary school level.

#### References

- Acemoglu, D., Johnson, S., & Robinson, J. A. (2002). Reversal of fortune: Geography and institutions in the making of the modern world income distribution. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 117(4), 1231-1294.
- Gaotlhobogwe, M., & Ruele, V. (forthcoming). Decolonizing technology education: The case of Botswana higher education. In M. T. Gumbo (Ed.), *Decolonizing technology education: African indigenous perspectives*. New York: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers.
- Gaotlhobogwe, M., Major, T., Kolo-Keaikitse, S. & Chilisa, B. (2018). Conceptualizing evaluation in African contexts. In F. Cram, K. A., Tibbetts & J. LaFrance (Eds.), *Indigenous evaluation: New directions for evaluation* (pp. 47-62). Los Angeles, USA: Wiley Blackwell.
- Gumbo, M. T. (Ed.). (forthcoming). *Decolonization of technology education: African indigenous perspectives*. New York: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers.
- Knight, J. (2018). Decolonizing and transforming the geography undergraduate curriculum in South Africa. *South African Geographical Journal*, 100(3), 271-290.
- Mapara, J. (2009). Indigenous knowledge systems in Zimbabwe: Juxtaposing postcolonial theory. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 3(1), 140-155.

- Moalosi, R., Marope, O., & Setlhatlhanyo, K. N. (2017). Decolonising Botswana's design education curricula by infusing indigenous knowledge: Botho co-creation process. In M. T. Gumbo & V. Msila (Eds.), *African voices on indigenisation of the curriculum: Insights from practice* (pp. 66-96). Wandsbeck: Reach Publishers.
- Nako Time Pieces. (2019). *Horology and heritage: Nako timepieces: A medium corporation application*. Retrieved from <https://medium.com/@nakotimepieces/horology-and-heritage-nako-timepieces-a53c2c93d281>
- Oelofsen, R. (2015). Decolonisation of the african mind and intellectual landscape. *Phronimon*, 16(2), 130-146.
- Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. Dunedin, New Zealand: University of Otago Press.
- Solorzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 23-44.
- Thobega, K. (2019, May 10). Nako timepieces reflect bespoke craftsmanship and luxurious style. Available at <http://www.botswanaguardian.co.bw/style/item/4143-nako-timepieces-reflect-bespoke-craftsmanship-luxurious-style.html>
- The Holy Bible. (1982). *1 Corinthians 1:27*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson.