Summary of the final report for the PSA Research & Innovation Fund

Confronting Eurocentrism for Equality and Diversity: Decolonising Pedagogical Strategies and Empowering International Students in Global Development Politics

Teaching and learning have become increasingly challenging in contested fields of broadly conceived global development politics. However, the coloniality of knowledge has frustrated learners (teachers and students), a structural constraint that prevents us from thinking and acting outside echo chambers to sustain diversity and plurality. The vicissitudes of politics push us to ask and answer difficult questions in global development politics.

It was generous that the PSA Research and Innovation Fund sponsored this year-long research project, which aimed to explore innovative pedagogies and empower the voices of the international student cohort in UK universities in confronting Eurocentrism in internationalised and multicultural settings.

The research involved 34 semi-structured interviews at UK universities with international students at different levels of study and teachers at various stages of careers. The students were from Belarus, Ghana, India, Japan, Kenya, Lebanon, Malaysia, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Turkey. The teachers interviewed came from Brazil, China, Greece, India, England, Jamaica, Japan, Lithuania, Portugal, South Korea, Spain and Uganda.

The findings come from in-depth (at least 50 minutes long), semi-structured individual interviews, observation of 12 lectures and seminar sessions, and a critical review of equality and diversity plans (EDPs) and decolonisation proposals. General findings are summarised in the following themes.

Decolonisation and image politics

Only a few teachers welcomed their engagement with diversifying and decolonising work to be exposed and shared. Anonymising programs and courses were necessary. All teachers agreed (with five explicitly mentioning) that diversifying and decolonising work has become increasingly popular.

However, many interviewees (teachers and students) said that instrumental motives and tokenistic tendencies behind decolonisation projects do emerge in their departments and universities. Image politics was present since universities embracing decolonisation had been attractive to UK-based BAME students. But this is not the fault of any individual per se. Instead, it has had to do with the pressure from performance-targeting commitment (e.g., the never-ending pursuit of university ranking) and student recruitment. A few interviewees (students and teachers) explicitly used the term "fake/superficial decolonisation". However, that depends very much on personal experiences and positionalities.

A matter of agency and leadership

International students were most interested in who had been at the forefront of decolonisation. Teachers tend to be less concerned. Students from African countries tend to

emphasise that they should take the lead. Students from Asia agreed but did not exclude Europeans from engaging in or even leading decolonisation. Most agreed that since global development politics and related disciplines pertain most closely to the Global South (broadly defined), their decolonisation must account for the agency of the South. Members of the South must at least have the space and capacity to be proactive, if not leading.

Many students found that they enjoyed seminars run by teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds. One student from South Korea and another from China said that their everyday struggles tend to be better understood by teachers from India, Turkey, and Eastern Europe. The student from Kenya said that some professors liked to talk in jargon, but decolonisation requires the teacher to be a 'good listener'. Some students found that, due to the inescapable power hierarchy, students cannot effectively challenge teachers' unconscious colonial tendencies. This resonates with those who warn about the dangers of 'intellectual decolonisation' (Mousavi 2020).

Intersectionality and conflicting priorities

All interviewees embraced intersectionality while practising decolonisation approaches. Teachers did not want decolonisation approaches to be too prescriptive. One teacher said decolonisation pedagogy should never become 'decolonisation ABC'. Yet, one student who was involved in a decolonising campaign at the university level said, 'Being less prescriptive can also be a lovely excuse for shirking from responsibility or not doing anything at all!'

Radical ones see decolonisation as a never-ending process but must not be about 'anything goes'. Otherwise, it would lose momentum and a sense of purpose. Moderate ones saw that having a less prescriptive approach to diversifying and decolonisation allows agents to be more aware of intersectionality. All teachers and students stressed that decolonisation must be bottom-up and student-centred in principle.

Decolonising Global Development Politics

Many interviewees called for decolonising the scholarly debates surrounding gender and race in global development politics. Radical ones argued that development politics would remain colonial and not global if we continued to neglect class politics and structural inequalities of global capitalism. Less radical from Asia advocated modernity and modernisation beyond the Western/European constructs. Interviewees have somewhat vacillated between two modes of decolonisation: (1) the reanimation of inherited (colonial) concepts and (2) the innovation of new concepts in parallel with the old (colonial) ones (Getachew & Mantena 2021). Yet, when it comes to global development politics, conceptual innovation and conceptual reanimation are two concurrent processes.