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Promoting critical thought through university curriculum decolonising: insights from a semi-systematic literature review

Since the 2015/2016 #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student protests in South Africa, higher education decolonisation has become a global movement and rapidly growing field of study. In this, university curriculum decolonising (UCD) assumes centrality, as one (and only one) strategic moment in intersectional (class, gender, race) struggles for social and epistemic justice, inclusiveness and liberation, for decolonising academia, knowledge and society at large. Framed by critical sociology of education, this presentation reports findings from my semi-systematic review of global UCD literature, conducted in 2023/2024 as part of a larger FCT-funded research project. The Electronic Library Online (SciELO), Scopus and Web of Science databases were searched using an English/Portuguese search string. This systematic search yielded 463 unique journal articles and book chapters published up to 2022 inclusive and was complemented by purposive search. While universities worldwide engage with UCD, no evidence of visible engagement with UCD in Portugal's university sector emerged. This does not necessarily mean non-engagement. However, this finding is surprising considering Portugal's coloniser history and ongoing neo-colonial engagement via, for example, the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) as a pool for international student recruitment. Key findings generated through thematic analysis will be reported in three categories: (i) theoretico-conceptual framings of UCD ('decolonisation'; 'decoloniality'; 'coloniality of power'); (ii) the politics of UCD ('add-on', 'institutional-transformist' and 'systemic' approaches); and (iii) methodical challenges in decolonial university curriculum analysis (quantitative proxy indicators vs qualitative thematic analysis). On this basis, this presentation speaks to the need for engaging with UCD in Portugal, with the explicit aims of conscientising and provoking critical thought and decolonial action within Portuguese higher education, and beyond.

Palavras-chave: Curriculum, Decolonisation, Higher Education

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