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Decolonising the Curriculum: Perspectives of Indonesian Academics with Overseas Qualifications

Ririn Syahriani
Engslih Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Kendari, Indonesia
Email: ririn@umkendari.ac.id

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ABSTRACT: This study explores how Indonesian academics with overseas educational backgrounds interpret and enact curriculum decolonisation in higher education. Although decolonisation has gained increasing attention globally, it is often reduced to symbolic inclusion rather than substantive epistemic transformation. Using a qualitative design, data were collected through an online open-ended questionnaire involving ten Indonesian lecturers who completed postgraduate studies abroad. Thematic analysis generated four interconnected themes: recognising the colonial legacy embedded in university curricula, pursuing epistemic justice through the inclusion of local knowledge systems, negotiating transnational positionalities shaped by both global and local academic experiences, and engaging in the ongoing process of decolonising the self. The findings suggest that participants viewed curriculum decolonisation not as the rejection of Western knowledge but as a critical effort to create more equitable and contextually relevant knowledge practices. However, their efforts were frequently constrained by institutional pressures associated with internationalisation, publication metrics, and global ranking systems that continue to privilege Eurocentric epistemologies. The study concludes that meaningful curriculum decolonisation in Indonesia requires both individual reflexivity and broader structural transformation to support epistemic plurality within higher education.

Keywords: curriculum decolonisation, epistemic balance, international experience, overseas-trained academics.

ABSTRAK: *Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana akademisi Indonesia yang memiliki latar belakang pendidikan luar negeri memaknai dan mengimplementasikan dekolonisasi kurikulum dalam pendidikan tinggi. Meskipun dekolonisasi semakin memperoleh perhatian di tingkat global, konsep ini kerap direduksi menjadi sekadar upaya inklusi simbolik tanpa disertai transformasi epistemik yang substantif. Dengan menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner daring terbuka yang melibatkan sepuluh dosen Indonesia yang telah menempuh pendidikan pascasarjana di luar negeri. Analisis tematik menghasilkan empat tema yang saling berkaitan, yaitu: pengakuan terhadap warisan kolonial yang masih tertanam dalam kurikulum perguruan tinggi; upaya mewujudkan keadilan epistemik melalui pengintegrasian sistem pengetahuan lokal; negosiasi posisi transnasional yang dibentuk oleh pengalaman akademik global dan lokal; serta keterlibatan dalam proses berkelanjutan untuk mendekolonisasi diri. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa para partisipan memandang dekolonisasi kurikulum bukan sebagai penolakan terhadap pengetahuan Barat, melainkan sebagai upaya kritis untuk menciptakan praktik pengetahuan yang lebih adil dan relevan dengan konteks lokal. Namun demikian, berbagai upaya tersebut sering kali dibatasi oleh tekanan institusional yang berkaitan dengan internasionalisasi, tuntutan publikasi ilmiah, dan sistem pemeringkatan global yang masih cenderung mengutamakan epistemologi Euro-sentris. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa dekolonisasi kurikulum yang bermakna di Indonesia memerlukan tidak hanya refleksivitas individual, tetapi juga transformasi struktural yang lebih luas guna mendukung pluralitas epistemik dalam pendidikan tinggi.*

***Kata kunci**: dekolonisasi kurikulum, keseimbangan epistemologis, pengalaman internasional, akademisi lulusan luar negeri.*

INTRODUCTION

Calls to "decolonise the curriculum" have travelled far beyond their origins in particular national debates to become a global imperative in higher education. Tight's (2024) systematic review shows that scholarship on decolonisation now spans more than 80 countries. Yet the term often risks dilution: in many universities, it is conflated with generic diversity work or reduced to adding non-Western authors (Ahmed, 2012; Brennan et al., 2022). Such reductions obscure the deeper epistemic task of dismantling hierarchies of knowledge and confronting colonial legacies that continue to shape academic canons.

Scholars stress that decolonisation cannot be equated with diversification. Diversity policies operate at the level of representation, whereas decolonisation is about epistemic transformation, redefining what counts as legitimate knowledge and who is authorised to teach it (Ntloedibe, 2025). In South Africa, student movements such as #RhodesMustFall forced universities to confront Eurocentric curricula, yet as Motala et al., (2021) note, exclusion persists when pedagogy, assessment, and language reproduce colonial hierarchies. Olsson (2023) similarly observes that curricular transformation remains fragile, showing that decolonisation requires more than symbolic gestures.

While scholars broadly agree that decolonisation requires more than symbolic inclusion, there remains considerable debate over how universities should engage with Western knowledge traditions in the process of curricular transformation. The literature also reflects tensions over how to approach Western epistemologies. Some argue for indigenous-centred curricula that reject them altogether (Heleta & Chasi, 2023; wa Thiong'o, 1986), while others advocate a more integrative approach. Ntloedibe (2025), for instance, suggests that Western knowledge, stripped of its dehumanising and oppressive elements, can still contribute valuable insights when critically integrated with African and global systems of thought. The aim, in this view, is to foster an "epistemic equilibrium" where diverse knowledge systems can engage in dialogue. This resonates with Hughson's (2024) idea of an "ecology of knowledges," where multiple epistemologies co-exist without hierarchy. The question of whether to reject or reframe Western canons remains a live debate in the literature, reflecting broader struggles over how to balance critique of coloniality with the need for global intellectual exchange.

Beyond debates about the place of Western knowledge, scholars have also questioned whether commitments to decolonisation translate into meaningful institutional changeAt the institutional level. Ahmed (2012b), warned that diversity policies often produce "non-performativity", naming inclusion without enacting it. Similarly, Brennan et al., (2022) document how equity work in Canadian and German universities often stalls between symbolic commitment and structural inertia. These findings caution against assuming that policy adoption equals epistemic change.

Corresponding author: Ririn Syahriani (ririn@umkendari.ac.id)

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These tensions are not experienced solely at the institutional level but are also negotiated by individual academics whose educational trajectories span different epistemic and cultural contexts. These institutional tensions become even more pronounced in contexts shaped by internationalisation and academic mobility. Mobility and internationalisation add further complexity. Clare & Keenan (2025) argue that study abroad can reproduce hierarchies unless scaffolded by reflexive pedagogy, as students tend to seek cultural comfort and consume difference uncritically. Their warning is pertinent in contexts where internationalisation, closely tied to prestige and rankings, can undermine decolonial aims by privileging Northern epistemologies.

While these concerns have been documented across diverse international contexts, they take on particular significance in postcolonial societies where questions of knowledge, identity, and nation-building remain closely intertwined. For Indonesia, these debates are acutely material. Higher education developed within Dutch colonial frameworks designed to serve the colonial state (Suwignyo, 2024a). After independence, intellectuals sought to indigenise universities through the Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi, with Suwignyo's (2024) history showing how the 1950s introduction of community service was framed as a decolonial project. Yet, over time, modernisation and internationalisation discourses re-inscribed Western models. More recently, Lismay (2024) finds that English Language Teaching syllabi in Islamic higher education still bear colonial vestiges, from the privileging of “native speaker” models to the reliance on Western textbooks. Her analysis calls for a syllabus that reflects Indonesian students’ cultural and linguistic identities while equipping them for global engagement. Meanwhile, public intellectuals such as Hilmar Farid, the Director-General of Culture at the Ministry of Education and Culture has warned that cultural decolonisation remains Indonesia’s most unfinished project, marked by a colonial mentality that values Western validation above local confidence.

At the same time, Indonesian universities are deeply invested in global prestige, through Scopus publications and world rankings. Tight (2024b) notes that internationalisation and decolonisation are not neutral or parallel agendas; they are often entangled in neo-colonial logics of knowledge hierarchies. For Indonesian universities, this raises a dilemma: how to achieve global competitiveness without reproducing epistemic dependency.

Understanding how overseas-trained academics navigate these tensions is therefore crucial for examining how decolonisation is interpreted and enacted in everyday academic practice. This dilemma becomes particularly acute for Indonesian lecturers trained overseas. Their positionality is paradoxical. On the one hand, they return with advanced expertise, methodological training, and networks that enhance their authority and capacity to innovate. On the other hand, without critical reflection, they risk reproducing the epistemic paradigms they acquired abroad, embedding Western canons more deeply into Indonesian curricula. Clare & Keenan (2025) cautions on mobility apply equally here: overseas training can be a site of either re-colonisation or reflexive transformation.

Corresponding author: Ririn Syahriani (ririn@umkendari.ac.id)

Yet there are also grounds for optimism. Motala et al., (2021) argue, decolonisation requires reflexive pedagogies that enable students to situate themselves in knowledge production. Lecturers who have navigated both Northern and Southern academic cultures may be uniquely placed to scaffold such reflexivity for their students. Similarly, Gaio et al., (2024) emphasise pluriversal approaches that integrate local cultural contexts with global flows. Overseas-trained lecturers, navigating both Northern and Southern academic cultures, may thus act as mediators, if they critically reflect on their positionality.

Despite growing Indonesian scholarship on historical and institutional dimensions (e.g., Lismay, (2024); Suwignyo, (2024b)), little is known about how educators themselves conceptualise and practise decolonisation, particularly those whose biographies span North and South. This study addresses this gap by examining how Indonesian lecturers with overseas qualifications interpret, enact, and negotiate curricular decolonisation.

This study is underpinned by decoloniality. Following Quijano's (2000) notion of the coloniality of power/knowledge, I treat curriculum and evaluative standards as historically shaped hierarchies that persist beyond empire. To analyse how these are reproduced or resisted in pedagogical choices, I use Mignolo & Walsh's (2018) concept of the colonial matrix of power as a sensitising lens. This framework directs attention to lecturers' justifications for what they include, exclude, and legitimise in their teaching, while making visible the structural constraints under which those choices are made. Importantly, it is not used as a rigid codebook but as an orientation guiding reflexive thematic analysis while allowing themes to emerge inductively.

This study is guided by three interrelated questions. First, how do Indonesian lecturers with overseas training conceptualise "decolonising the curriculum," and which intellectual traditions inform their understandings? Second, what pedagogical and curricular strategies do these lecturers employ to integrate local knowledges and challenge Eurocentric canons, and how do students respond? Finally, how do these academics navigate the tensions between global academic standards, such as accreditation demands, publication metrics, and canonical literatures, and local epistemic priorities within Indonesian higher education?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative design to foreground participants' meanings and rationales in their own words. A qualitative approach is appropriate when the aim is to develop a "complex picture" of a phenomenon by attending to multiple perspectives and contextual factors, rather than forcing linear cause–effect models (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Mertens, 2020; Punch & Oancea, 2014). Consistent with qualitative logics, analysis proceeded through iterative movement between data and interpretation, building patterns and themes inductively while also testing them against the corpus, what Creswell describes as working "back and forth" between themes and the database.

Corresponding author: Ririn Syahriani (ririn@umkendari.ac.id)

Given the geographical dispersion of the target group (Indonesian lecturers who completed postgraduate study overseas) data were generated via an online open-ended questionnaire. Open-ended instruments align with qualitative inquiry because they elicit responses without predetermined categories and allow participants to compose reflective accounts at their own pace and location (Chanda, 2022; Mertler, 2022). The questionnaire invited extended written responses to prompts concerning (i) how participants conceptualise "decolonising the curriculum," (ii) how such understandings translate into course design and pedagogy, and (iii) how they negotiate tensions between global academic standards and local epistemic commitments. The questionnaire consisted of six open-ended questions designed to encourage participants to reflect on their understandings, experiences, and practices related to curriculum decolonisation. The questions were intentionally broad to allow participants to elaborate on issues they considered significant while maintaining alignment with the study's objectives. Examples of the questions included: "How do you understand the idea of decolonising the curriculum in Indonesian higher education?", "In what ways, if any, has your overseas educational experience influenced your teaching or curriculum design?", and "Have you experienced tensions between global academic expectations and local knowledge traditions? If so, how have you navigated them?" Additional prompts invited participants to provide concrete examples from their teaching practices, curriculum development activities, or professional experiences. The instrument was distributed individually by email; participation was voluntary and no incentives were offered.

Sampling was purposive: the study intentionally sought overseas-trained Indonesian lecturers as an information-rich group whose perspectives directly speak to the research focus. n addition to overseas educational experience, efforts were made to include participants from different disciplinary backgrounds, academic ranks, countries of study, and lengths of professional experience following their return to Indonesia. This variation was intended to capture a broader range of perspectives on curriculum decolonisation and to avoid over-representing a single academic or institutional context. Potential participants were identified through the researcher's professional networks and were invited individually via email to participate in the study. Ten lecturers consented to participate. They represent varied gender identifications, academic ranks (from novice to senior lecturer), and disciplinary homes (e.g., applied linguistics, English education, education policy, early childhood education, curriculum and instructional technology, literature, business, nutrition/health, and agricultural economics/agribusiness). In terms of educational trajectories, eight hold Master's degrees and two hold doctorates; five completed postgraduate study in the UK, three in Australia, one in the Netherlands, and one across France and India. Most had returned to Indonesia four to six years ago, with several exceeding six years. To preserve confidentiality, the article reports participants using pseudonymous initials (P1–P10) and omits institutional names.

All responses were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis in an abductive mode (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Inductive coding

Corresponding author: Ririn Syahriani (ririn@umkendari.ac.id)

grounded in participants' language was iteratively linked to sensitising concepts from decolonial-curriculum scholarship (e.g., epistemic justice, pluriversality, critique of the Western canon). This theoretical sensitisation oriented attention without operating as an a priori codebook; theme boundaries were refined through repeated readings, memo-writing, and the constant checking of claims against the raw text. This abductive stance (seeking the most plausible explanation while oscillating between data and ideas) was documented through an analytic trail of coding decisions and memo entries (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Ethical principles guided every stage of the project. Prior to accessing the questionnaire, participants received an information sheet detailing the study's purpose, the nature of participation, their right to decline any question and to withdraw at any time without penalty, and the measures taken to protect privacy, elements identified in the ethics literature as central to informed consent and respect for autonomy in educational research. Consent was obtained electronically before participation commenced. The study also followed good-practice guidance on confidentiality and anonymity in data dissemination: no person or institution is named, direct identifiers were removed at the point of data handling, and only aggregated or pseudonymous descriptors are presented here. In line with ethics guidance, the information provided to participants included what data would be collected, how it would be managed, who would have access, where it would be stored, and how long it would be retained. Digital data are stored on a password-protected, encrypted drive accessible only to the researcher.

Beyond formal procedures, ethical practice involves day-to-day judgements to minimise harm and exercise integrity throughout the research process. The ethics literature stresses that researchers should remain alert to potential risks in routine decisions, not only to formal rules (Howe & Moses, 1999). Following this guidance, the questionnaire prompts were phrased to avoid distress, and dissemination safeguards were planned to prevent reputational harm or inadvertent identification.

Researcher positionality required explicit acknowledgement. Because several participants are professional acquaintances, two risks were considered: subtle pressure to participate and interpretive bias. To mitigate the former, invitations emphasised that participation was entirely voluntary, non-participation would carry no consequences, and only one reminder would be sent. This aligns with ethics guidance on respecting autonomy and ensuring consent is voluntary and informed. To mitigate interpretive bias, analysis proceeded with reflexive memoing about prior relationships and expectations, careful attention to disconfirming evidence in the corpus, and retention of verbatim excerpts so that interpretive claims remain traceable to participants' words, consistent with Creswell's emphasis on reflexivity and participants' meanings in qualitative inquiry.

Finally, using an online open-ended instrument entails trade-offs. While it cannot probe emergent lines of inquiry as a live interview might, it offers participants time and space to craft responses without scheduling or bandwidth

Corresponding author: Ririn Syahriani (ririn@umkendari.ac.id)

constraints and yields “open-ended” qualitative data suitable for thematic analysis (Creswell & Miller, 2000)(Quijano, 2000). Given the geographical spread of participants and the study’s aim to elicit reflective accounts in participants’ own terms, this mode balanced feasibility with the epistemic goal of hearing lecturers’ situated reasoning about curricular decolonisation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The interviews with Indonesian academics who obtained overseas qualifications revealed a rich tapestry of reflections on the colonial legacies in their curricula and their own roles in challenging these legacies. Participants described deeply personal journeys of grappling with Western-dominated knowledge systems and striving to create space for Indonesian perspectives. Several key themes emerged from their narratives, each illuminating different facets of what it means to decolonise the curriculum in Indonesia. Below, we present these themes: Recognizing the Colonial Legacy, Epistemic Justice, Transnational Positionality, and Decolonising the Self , supported by direct voices of the participants.

Recognizing the Colonial Legacy in Curriculum

Many participants began by confronting the enduring presence of the Western canon in Indonesian higher education. They recounted moments of awakening when they realized how the curriculum they taught was still largely shaped by colonial-era knowledge hierarchies.

> “Our curriculum still wears the clothes of its colonizers" (Participant 2, 3, 5).

> "....even now, we teach far more about Europe than about Indonesia in my discipline” (Participant 1).

This stark acknowledgment of imbalance was echoed by others who felt that the dominance of Euro-American authors and theories had become almost naturalized in their fields. Participants reflected on how their own education had implicitly positioned Western knowledge as universal, inadvertently sidelining local contexts and voices.

Several academics described feelings of dissonance and discomfort when teaching content that felt alien to Indonesian realities. One lecturer confessed that upon returning from her doctoral studies abroad:

> “I realized I had learned to see the world with Western eyes, and I struggled to reconcile that with my Indonesian soul” (Participant 2).

This poignant metaphor of a split vision captures a common sentiment: that their overseas training, while enriching, also made them acutely aware of a colonial shadow in the curriculum at home. The recognition of this legacy often

Corresponding author: Ririn Syahriani (ririn@umkendari.ac.id)

served as a catalyst, a first step in the journey toward change. Participants' personal experiences of "feeling like a stranger in my own classroom" (Participant 5) laid bare the need to unmask and challenge the Eurocentric foundations of what they were teaching.

Epistemic Justice: Reclaiming Local Knowledge

Emerging from this awareness is a strong theme of epistemic justice, or the urge to restore fairness and balance in whose knowledge counts. Participants spoke passionately about the need to value indigenous and local knowledges within the curriculum, not as token additions but as central pillars of learning. This is as can be seen from quotation as follow.

> "The voices of our own scholars and communities are often absent from our syllabi,....That silence is a form of injustice I can no longer accept" (Participant 3).

Such reflections highlight that decolonising the curriculum, for these academics, is fundamentally about righting a wrong, ensuring that Indonesian perspectives, histories, and ways of knowing are no longer marginalized or treated as second-class knowledge.

In practice, this meant participants actively sought to integrate local content and context into their teaching. They shared examples of replacing or supplementing Western texts with Indonesian literature, case studies, and examples that resonate with students' lived experiences. The impact of these efforts was palpable.

> "My students got really excited when I shared readings from local thinkers and case studies," (Partcipant 1).

> "It was as if they finally saw themselves reflected in what they were learning" (Participant 8).

This moment of recognition in the classroom underscores the transformative power of epistemic justice: students felt validated and inspired, and teachers felt they were:

> "returning dignity to our students, letting them know that their heritage and history are worthy of academic study" (Participant 4).

Participants also noted that pursuing epistemic justice is not about discarding all Western knowledge, but about contextualising and pluralising it. One senior academic put it eloquently:

Corresponding author: Ririn Syahriani (ririn@umkendari.ac.id)

> "To decolonise the curriculum is to allow multiple truths to breathe. Western theory must sit alongside Nusantara perspectives as equals, each illuminating the other's gaps" (Participant 5).

In such narratives, the curriculum becomes a meeting ground for different knowledge systems, a pluriversal space rather than a one-way imposition. By advocating for curricula that draw upon local wisdom, indigenous languages, and regional issues, these academics see themselves as correcting epistemic imbalances and enriching intellectual discourse for everyone.

Transnational Positionality: Navigating Two Worlds

Another prominent theme is the participants' transnational positionality, their identity and perspective as scholars shaped by both Indonesian and overseas experiences. Having studied or taught abroad, these academics often occupy a liminal space "with one foot in Jakarta and one foot in London," as one participant described it, "always balancing between worlds" (Participant 6). This in-between status gave them a unique vantage point from which to critique and improve the curriculum. They could see, from the outside, the parochial or colonial assumptions in Indonesian academe, while also understanding the limitations of Western models when applied to a Southeast Asian context.

For many, this positionality is a double-edged sword, a source of insight but also of personal conflict.

> "Sometimes I feel like a stranger at home because I carry foreign theories in my mind, but that very feeling pushes me to indigenize what I teach" (Participant 7).

Here, the sense of estrangement becomes productive, motivating the academic to adapt and ground their teaching materials in local reality. Their overseas training had given them new tools and theories, but it also made them sensitive to what those frameworks overlooked or misconstrued about Indonesian society. In essence, their transnational identity enabled them to act as bridges between knowledge cultures– translating, critiquing, and blending ideas from the global North with those from the global South.

The theme of transnational positionality also came with a sense of responsibility and agency. Participants often felt a duty to use their privilege of global exposure to benefit their home institutions and students.

> "Having experienced education in the West, I feel responsible to challenge the very Eurocentric ideas I was taught," (Participant 5).

This statement reflects a broader resolve among the participants: rather than simply importing Western curricula, they leverage their insider-outsider status to question and reconstruct curricular content. Their international experience thus becomes a tool for interrogating universals and advocating for

Corresponding author: Ririn Syahriani (ririn@umkendari.ac.id)

context-sensitive teaching. In doing so, they are not just navigators of two worlds but weavers of a new tapestry of knowledge – one that is transnational in essence, interlacing global insights with local realities.

Decolonising the Self: Personal Journeys of Change

Finally, woven through all these themes is a deeply personal and reflective journey, a sense that decolonising the curriculum begins with decolonising oneself as an academic. Participants narrated how their personal experiences, both positive and painful, became catalysts for transformation in their teaching philosophy. Many spoke of an inner awakening, often triggered during their time abroad or upon returning home, that made them question their own assumptions and biases.

> "Decolonising the curriculum is deeply personal for me. It's about healing the split in my own identity and helping the next generation avoid that split" (Participant 9).

This remark highlights how the work of curriculum change is intertwined with self-reflection and self-growth. As they became more aware of colonial influences on their own education, they also became more intentional in reshaping their pedagogical practices.

The personal nature of this journey lent a passionate, almost poetic quality to many participants' testimonies. They often used metaphors of voice and story, suggesting that by reclaiming their personal narrative, they could challenge the grand narrative of coloniality.

> "Each of us has a story that challenges the colonial story we inherited. By sharing my story in the classroom (of how I unlearned colonial mindsets) I invite my students to question everything and to dream of a knowledge system that includes them" (Participant 10).

Such reflections show how the participants' own life stories and vulnerabilities become pedagogical tools in the decolonial process. In bringing their whole selves – their memories of village life, their feelings of culture shock, their moments of epiphany – into the learning space, they model a form of education that is humanized and liberating.

Throughout these narratives, it is evident that the personal experiences of the academics profoundly enrich the discourse of decolonising the curriculum in Indonesia. Their stories of navigating different epistemologies, their critical self-examinations, and their emotional investment in change all serve to ground the abstract concept of "decolonisation" in lived reality. This gives the movement a heartbeat and a human face. The participants are not only curriculum reformers but also storytellers and bridge-builders, using their transnational insights and local roots to imagine a more inclusive, just, and empowering educational future. In sum, their voices illustrate that decolonising the curriculum is not a distant

Corresponding author: Ririn Syahriani (ririn@umkendari.ac.id)

policy goal, it is a personal and collective journey toward reclaiming identity, agency, and academic freedom in the postcolonial Indonesian context.

Discussion

Reframing the Problem through Coloniality of Power

The perspectives of Indonesian academics with overseas qualifications need to be situated within Quijano's (2000) framework of coloniality of power, which explains how epistemic hierarchies outlive formal colonialism. In higher education, coloniality manifests in the privileging of Eurocentric theories, languages, and methods, which are naturalized as universal while local knowledge is relegated to the periphery (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018b; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020) Participants' awareness that curricula remain "dominated by the West" echoes findings from other postcolonial contexts, where scholars emphasize that epistemic colonialism is the most resilient form of domination, persisting through academic canons and university rankings (Mbembe, 2016).

Framing decolonisation through coloniality of power also highlights that the problem is not simply one of "inclusion" but of structural hegemony. While diversity initiatives often focus on representation, decolonisation is about restructuring epistemic legitimacy (Ntloedibe, 2025). This distinction is crucial: the dominance of Western epistemologies in Indonesian curricula cannot be solved by adding a few local readings, just as in South Africa the #RhodesMustFall movement argued that token inclusion does not dismantle epistemic hierarchies (Heleta & Chasi, 2023). Instead, decolonisation requires exposing how coloniality shapes the very criteria of what counts as rigorous, relevant, and world-class scholarship (Tight, 2022, 2024b).

At the same time, Indonesian academics' calls to integrate local knowledge resonate with broader Global South debates. For example, Suwignyo (2024a) demonstrates that early Indonesian higher education policies, particularly the introduction of community service (Tri Dharma), already embodied a decolonial aspiration to link universities with society rather than reproducing the colonial model of elite training. Yet, as recent analyses show, these aspirations have been eroded by neoliberal globalisation, which reasserts Eurocentric benchmarks of excellence (Sakhiyya, 2023). The participants' critiques thus reveal continuity with a longer intellectual struggle in Indonesia and elsewhere: the effort to replace dependency on imported frameworks with epistemic autonomy rooted in local contexts.

In this light, Quijano's coloniality of power provides both diagnosis and agenda. It diagnoses the entanglement of Indonesian higher education in global circuits of academic capitalism, which perpetuate epistemic dependence (Connel, 2022). It also offers an agenda for rethinking curriculum not as a neutral vehicle but as a site where power is inscribed and contested (Morreira et al., 2020). By foregrounding this framework, the discussion reframes decolonisation not as a temporary reform but as a historical project, a multi-generational struggle to dismantle entrenched hierarchies and establish a genuinely pluriversal knowledge order (Santos, 2014).

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Epistemic Dissonance and Border Thinking

A recurrent thread in the participants' reflections is what can be termed epistemic dissonance, the unease of being trained in Western epistemologies while seeking to recentre Indonesian or indigenous knowledge in their teaching and research. This tension is not unique to Indonesia: scholars elsewhere have documented similar "cognitive estrangement" when Global South academics return from overseas training, realising that the frameworks valorised abroad often obscure local realities (Alatas, 2003; Connell, 2022). Within Quijano's (2000) schema, this dissonance is symptomatic of the coloniality of knowledge, wherein Eurocentric epistemologies are naturalised as universal and other traditions are marginalised.

Rather than treating this as a personal dilemma, it is more fruitful to theorise epistemic dissonance as a generative space. Mignolo & Walsh's (2018a) describes this condition as border thinking: the subaltern's epistemic response to Eurocentrism, which enables critique from the "exteriority" of the colonial matrix. Participants' accounts of revising syllabi to include Indonesian case studies alongside canonical Western theories exemplify such border work. By juxtaposing Foucault with Javanese philosophies, or Marx with local labour histories, they create what Bhabha (1994) famously concept called a "third space" of hybridity. In this liminal zone, new epistemic configurations can emerge that neither replicate Eurocentrism nor lapse into nativism.

The recognition of dissonance also aligns with Santos's (2014) call for an ecology of knowledges. Instead of rejecting Western theory outright, participants advocated recontextualisation, using global theories critically, in dialogue with local concepts. This approach is increasingly recognised as central to decolonisation in higher education: Heleta & Chasi (2023) notes that South African curricula cannot be decolonised by exclusion but by critically engaging Eurocentric knowledge from the perspective of African epistemologies. Similarly, Fischer (2022) demonstrates how Dutch legal curricula began to shift when colonial histories were interrogated alongside mainstream jurisprudence. In the Indonesian case, participants' willingness to "not throw out Foucault or Marx, but reread them through Nusantara" reflects an analogous practice of epistemic disobedience (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018a).

Importantly, epistemic dissonance was not viewed as paralysis but as impetus for pedagogical innovation. Several participants spoke of designing assignments that required students to apply both global and local theories to the same problem, encouraging epistemic comparison. This practice mirrors what Sakhiyya (2023) describes as a "cultural interface" in Indonesian higher education, where Western and indigenous knowledges meet and mutually inform one another. It also resonates with the insights of Morreira et al., (2020), who argue that decolonisation is most effective when students are positioned to interrogate epistemic hierarchies themselves, rather than simply consuming a revised canon.

By naming their discomfort, participants enact what Ahmed (2012) calls a "critical affect", a willingness to dwell in the unease of institutional structures that

Corresponding author: Ririn Syahriani (ririn@umkendari.ac.id)

silence alternative voices. In this sense, epistemic dissonance itself becomes a decolonial act: an awareness that interrupts the smooth reproduction of Eurocentric norms and creates the conditions for curricular transformation. Far from being a deadlock, the tension experienced by these academics is an engine of decolonial creativity, one that destabilises the presumed universality of Western epistemologies and affirms the possibility of epistemic plurality.

Positionality and Complicity of Overseas-Trained Academics

The positionality of Indonesian academics with overseas qualifications emerged as a critical factor in shaping their engagement with decolonisation. On one hand, their Western training affords them institutional prestige and symbolic capital in Indonesian universities, what Bourdieu (1986) would describe as cultural capital that enhances their authority. On the other hand, this very prestige is entangled with the coloniality of knowledge, since "world-class" legitimacy is still measured against Euro-American standards (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020; Quijano, 2000). This dual positioning means that overseas-trained academics are simultaneously empowered to advocate for curriculum change and implicated in reproducing the very hierarchies they critique.

Several participants described the irony of being taken more seriously when they advocate for local knowledge precisely because of their Western alma maters. This paradox resonates with what Alatas (2003) terms academic dependency, where Global South intellectual authority is validated through the North. It also mirrors findings from Ntloedibe (2025) in African universities, where postcolonial academics are often trapped between the demand to localise curricula and the expectation to conform to Eurocentric scholarship. The participants' reflexivity about this position aligns with notion of decolonial reflexivity: a conscious interrogation of one's complicity within epistemic hierarchies.

Complicity was a recurring theme. Some academics candidly acknowledged that their early teaching and research practices reproduced Eurocentric norms, designing syllabi heavy with Western readings or privileging English-language sources. Such admissions resonate with Fischer's (2022) findings in Dutch legal education, where colonial legacies are sustained not only through content but also through pedagogy and language. By naming this complicity, participants enact what Andreotti's (2016) call "critical self-location", an ethical stance that refuses to absolve the self from colonial entanglements.

At the same time, positionality provided opportunities for resistance. Overseas-trained academics described how exposure to postcolonial and critical theory abroad equipped them with conceptual tools to challenge Eurocentrism at home. For instance, one participant noted that experiencing marginalisation as an "Other" in Western academia sharpened her awareness of epistemic injustice in Indonesia, echoing Ahmed's (2012a) argument that institutional discomfort can catalyse critical engagement. This suggests that positionality is not static but dynamic: it can reinforce colonial hierarchies or subvert them, depending on how academics exercise reflexivity.

Corresponding author: Ririn Syahriani (ririn@umkendari.ac.id)

Yet, structural incentives complicate this dynamic. Publishing in high-impact international journals, often dominated by Western epistemologies, remains a career necessity. This reproduces what Schöpf (2020) identifies as the outward-orientation of Southern knowledge production, where scholars align with Northern paradigms to gain recognition. Participants expressed ambivalence: while critical of these pressures, they admitted to prioritising topics with "Scopus potential" over locally urgent issues, a compromise that illustrates their entanglement in global academic capitalism (Connel, 2022). As Sakhiyya (2023) observes in the Indonesian case, attempts to blend local and global often leave Western frameworks as the implicit default, underlining the difficulty of escaping academic dependency.

Thus, positionality in this context must be understood as ambivalent, a space of both privilege and vulnerability, complicity and critique. Overseas-trained academics are "border intellectuals" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018a): they inhabit the margins of the Western canon while leveraging its legitimacy to destabilise it. Their challenge is to ensure that this legitimacy is used to amplify rather than overshadow local epistemologies. When participants described inviting community elders into classrooms or foregrounding young Indonesian scholars in reading lists, they were engaging in what Santos (2014) calls epistemologies of the South, redistributing epistemic authority away from the Eurocentric centre. In this way, positionality becomes not merely a marker of identity but a site of ethical and political struggle, an arena where complicity is acknowledged, reflexivity is enacted, and possibilities for decolonial transformation are negotiated.

Structural Constraints of the Global Knowledge Economy

Even as Indonesian academics with overseas qualifications articulate strong commitments to decolonisation, their efforts are embedded within the structural constraints of the global knowledge economy. Quijano (2000) notion of coloniality of power is crucial here: it is not only about ideas but also about the economic and institutional arrangements that determine whose knowledge is legitimised. Universities in the Global South operate within a global system where "quality" is benchmarked through rankings, accreditation, and citation indices, most of which privilege Euro-American epistemologies and English-language outputs (Connel, 2022; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020).

Participants frequently noted the pressure to publish in high-impact international journals and to design curricula that meet "world-class" standards. While framed as neutral indicators of excellence, these metrics are steeped in coloniality. As Schöpf (2020) argues, the global division of academic labour positions the North as the "core" that sets the epistemic agenda, while the South is relegated to a periphery whose outputs gain recognition only when validated by the core. This creates an outward orientation in which Southern scholars cater to Northern audiences and frameworks, often at the cost of local relevance. Similar dynamics have been documented in South Africa, where decolonial initiatives clash with pressures to internationalise in Eurocentric terms (Morreira et al.,

Corresponding author: Ririn Syahriani (ririn@umkendari.ac.id)

2020), and in Indonesia, where internationalisation policies often reinforce rather than dismantle epistemic dependency (Sakhiyya, 2023).

The language question exacerbates these constraints. English remains the lingua franca of global academia, shaping access to publication, citation, and prestige (Turner, 2023). For Indonesian scholars, this produces a double bind: while teaching and researching in Bahasa Indonesia affirms epistemic justice and accessibility, publishing in English remains essential for career advancement. As Turner (2023) shows in the South African case, even digitalisation projects risk reproducing colonial hierarchies when English dominates the infrastructure of knowledge dissemination. Our participants expressed similar concerns, noting that Bahasa-based publications are often deemed "parochial" in evaluation systems, despite their cultural and pedagogical relevance. This echoes Sakhiyya's (2023) finding that attempts to integrate local knowledge often fail to gain traction institutionally because accreditation criteria continue to prioritise Western sources and outlets.

Another structural barrier lies in the neoliberalisation of higher education. As Tight (2024b) reviews, decolonisation agendas are frequently subsumed within neoliberal imperatives of efficiency, marketisation, and competitiveness. This neoliberal logic is evident in Indonesian universities' pursuit of international rankings, where success is measured by global partnerships, international curricula, and publication counts in Scopus or Web of Science. While ostensibly progressive, these mechanisms reinforce Eurocentric epistemic hierarchies by equating global recognition with Western validation (Fischer, 2022; Heleta & Chasi, 2023). Participants captured this paradox vividly: "We are told to decolonise, but also to Scopus," one remarked, highlighting the contradictory institutional mandates.

Importantly, these structural constraints are not merely external impositions but are internalised within academic cultures. As Alatas (2003) observed in his theory of academic dependency, Southern scholars often adopt Northern epistemic frames not only for recognition but also out of habit, perceiving them as inherently superior. Participants described colleagues questioning the "rigour" of Indonesian authors compared to Euro-American ones, reflecting what Quijano (2000) called the colonisation of the imagination. This internalisation sustains coloniality by normalising Eurocentrism as the natural horizon of thought.

Nonetheless, acknowledging these structural constraints is itself part of a critical decolonial praxis. By naming the contradictions of being both required to internationalise and committed to decolonise, participants mirror what Moghli & Kadiwal (2021) call the double consciousness of decolonisation: the awareness that epistemic justice cannot be achieved without simultaneously confronting institutional complicity. In this sense, structural constraints are not excuses for inaction but conditions that must be strategically navigated. As Santos (2014) insists, epistemic emancipation requires both critique of global hierarchies and concrete institutional reforms that valorise diverse knowledge traditions.

Corresponding author: Ririn Syahriani (ririn@umkendari.ac.id)

Pragmatic Strategies and Risks of Co-optation

Despite structural barriers, Indonesian academics with overseas training employ pragmatic strategies to advance decolonisation. Many described using their international prestige as leverage to introduce local content, echoing Santos' (2014) idea of epistemologies of the South, where legitimacy from the global core can be strategically redirected to uplift peripheral knowledges. Examples include revising syllabi to integrate Nusantara philosophies or inviting community elders into classrooms, practices similar to those reported in South African (Heleta & Chasi, 2023) and Indian contexts (Andreotti, 2016). These efforts embody what Mignolo & Walsh (2018a) terms epistemic disobedience, subtly delinking from Eurocentric scripts while avoiding direct institutional confrontation.

Yet, participants also warned of the risks of co-optation. As Tuck & Yang (2012) famously argue, decolonisation is not a metaphor: when institutions tokenize local content to satisfy diversity agendas, the effect is recolonisation under new labels. Participants observed this in Indonesian universities where "decolonial washing" occurs—syllabi include one Indonesian text but remain structurally Eurocentric. Similar risks are noted (Tight, 2024b), who cautions that decolonisation discourses can be absorbed into neoliberal agendas of branding and rankings, diluting their radical potential.

Thus, while pragmatic strategies demonstrate agency, they remain precarious. Their success depends on maintaining critical reflexivity and resisting institutional pressures to domesticate decolonisation into symbolic gestures (Moghli & Kadiwal, 2021). The challenge is to ensure that tactical adaptations do not compromise the transformative intent of epistemic justice.

Toward Epistemic Justice and Pluriversality

The perspectives of Indonesian academics with overseas qualifications ultimately point toward the broader goal of epistemic justiceensuring that diverse knowledge systems are valued on equal terms (Santos, 2014). Decolonisation, in this sense, is not simply about revising syllabi but about redistributing epistemic authority so that Indonesian, indigenous, and Global South knowledges are no longer relegated to the margins. Participants' awareness of coloniality and their pragmatic innovations reflect what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020) calls the struggle against the "cognitive empire": a system that privileges Eurocentric epistemes while rendering others invisible.

The horizon of this struggle is pluriversality, a world where many epistemologies coexist without one claiming universality (Santos, 2014). Participants' efforts to juxtapose global and local frameworks, encourage bilingual knowledge production, and collaborate across South–South networks embody this orientation. As Sakhiyya (2023) shows in the Indonesian case, the encounter between indigenous and Western knowledges can create fertile "cultural interfaces" that enrich both. Yet, as Tuck & Yang (2012) caution, achieving pluriversality requires constant vigilance against co-optation and symbolic gestures that dilute decolonial intent.

Corresponding author: Ririn Syahriani (ririn@umkendari.ac.id)

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For Indonesian higher education, the path forward involves both individual reflexivity and structural reform. Overseas-trained academics can act as catalysts, but institutional frameworks, promotion criteria, accreditation systems, and rankings, must also shift to recognise the legitimacy of local scholarship. Without this structural alignment, decolonisation risks remaining rhetorical. As Tight (2022) and Moghli & Kadiwal (2021) argue, decolonisation must be embedded in the governance of universities, not confined to isolated teaching experiments.

In sum, the experiences of these academics underscore that decolonising the curriculum is not a finite project but an ongoing praxis. By engaging critically with their positionality, navigating global academic hierarchies, and envisioning pluriversal futures, they are contributing to what Connel (2022) calls "southern theory in action", a conscious rebalancing of the global knowledge economy. Their struggles and strategies affirm that epistemic justice is attainablebut only through sustained, collective efforts that combine local grounding with global solidarity.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that Indonesian academics with overseas qualifications navigate curriculum decolonisation from a complex position of both critique and complicity. By foregrounding Quijano's coloniality of power, the findings reveal how Western epistemologies continue to dominate as the implicit standard of legitimacy, producing what participants described as epistemic dissonance. Yet this dissonance is generative: it pushes academics toward border thinking, where global and local frameworks can be held in productive tension. Their positionality, as scholars trained in the global North but working in the South, equips them with both institutional capital and critical reflexivity, enabling them to leverage global prestige while also amplifying indigenous epistemologies.

At the same time, the analysis underscores that individual agency operates within powerful structural constraints. The global knowledge economy, with its ranking systems, publication imperatives, and English-language dominance, often reinscribes Eurocentrism and risks co-opting decolonial discourse into symbolic gestures. Nevertheless, the academics' pragmatic strategies, revising syllabi, fostering bilingual scholarship, and engaging local communities, signal meaningful steps toward epistemic justice. The challenge ahead is ensuring that such efforts are not isolated but embedded into institutional reforms that recognise pluriversality as a legitimate horizon of higher education. Decolonising the curriculum, therefore, is not an event but an ongoing praxis that demands sustained reflexivity, structural change, and global solidarity.

These findings carry important implications for Indonesian higher education policy and practice. If curriculum decolonisation is to move beyond symbolic commitments, universities need to create institutional conditions that recognise and value diverse forms of knowledge production, including local and indigenous scholarship. This may involve revisiting curriculum frameworks, promotion and evaluation criteria, publication expectations, and internationalisation strategies that continue to privilege Eurocentric standards of academic legitimacy. For academic practitioners, the findings highlight the

Corresponding author: Ririn Syahriani (ririn@umkendari.ac.id)

importance of reflexive pedagogies that critically engage both global and local knowledge traditions rather than positioning them as oppositional. Future research could extend this work by examining how students, university leaders, and policymakers understand and negotiate curriculum decolonisation, thereby providing a more comprehensive picture of the opportunities and challenges facing decolonial transformation in Indonesian higher education.

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