

# REDUCING THE COLONIAL FOOTPRINT THROUGH TUTORIALS: A SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE DECOLONISATION OF EDUCATION

**S. L. Hassan**

Directorate of Learning Teaching and Student Success

University of the Western Cape

Cape Town, South Africa

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3711-9174>

## ABSTRACT

This article reports on how tutorials are employed as an instrument for the decolonisation of higher education and the promotion of inclusivity. The study was underpinned by activity theory and Bourdieu's social field theory.

Since 2015, students have embarked on nationwide protests against a colonised higher education system that they lament also makes them feel unwelcome and alienated. They have demanded that tertiary institutions be inclusive, address social justice and apply decolonisation. The study reported in this article demonstrated that the tutorial field provided a nurturing space where black tutees were made to feel comfortable on account of the tutors' symbolic capital and habitus which they could relate to.

It is argued here that pedagogical tools such as the application of tutees' mother-tongue (an example of decolonisation) and the use of group work has the potential to help integrate black tutees into academia. One needs to be cautious, however, that groups which are linguistically similar could be regarded as exclusive.

**Keywords:** decolonisation of education, tutorials, tutors, tutees, activity theory, Bourdieu, academic development, South Africa

## INTRODUCTION

The definition of the term decolonisation is multi-faceted. Decolonisation "... has multiple meanings and the desires and investments that animate it are diverse, contested, and at times, at odds with one another" (De Oliveria Andreotti et al. 2015, 22). In analysing the decolonisation of higher education, De Oliveria Andreotti et al. (2015, 31–34) offer a range of overlapping commitments: 1) "Everything is awesome": there is no recognition of decolonisation as a project of concern; 2) "Soft-reform": there is no recognition of decolonisation as a desirable project but there is increased access into the mainstream by providing additional resources to disadvantaged students to get them to excel according to existing higher education standards; 3) "Radical reform": there is recognition of

epistemological dominance: the changes made are tokenistic and inadequate. From this space, epistemological plurality and institutional restructuring are addressed yet naturalised ontological and meta-physical possibilities remain the same, and 4) “Beyond reform”: there is recognition of ontological and meta-physical enclosures. In this space, decolonisation of education is not a neat, linear process.

Seats (2020, 13) maintains that knowledge decolonisation requires an approach that can creatively capitalise on difference and epistemic complexities, and not simply on a negation of Western forms of reason. Similarly, for Prah (2017, 226), the decolonization of knowledge and education does not mean a “philistine rejection” of Western-derived knowledge. Rather, according to Prah (2017, 232), “Decolonizing education implies a search for a new system and content for new societal challenges”. Knowledge should be constructed in such a way that it addresses cultural and linguistic distinctions and should be socially relevant (Prah 2017, 226).

In addition, decolonising development involves the disruption of deeply rooted hierarchies, skewed power structures, the domination of Western knowledge, the privileging of Whiteness and the accepted othering of the majority world. Decolonising is about liberation and novel ways of valuing, and not the privileging of Eurocentric values (Fanon 1963; Tuhiwai-Smith 1999; Tuhiwai-Smith, Tuck, and Yang 2019).

Structural barriers to decolonising higher education are as a result of rootedness of Eurocentrism, epistemic violence and the hegemonic power structures that sustain them (Heleta 2016). Candid confrontations of violent pasts and continued legacies demand the recognition of decolonisation as political for it is not neutral (Langdon 2013). Bhambra, Gebrial, and Nişancıoğlu (2018) argue, however, that the concepts “decolonial” and “decolonising” are being institutionalised and packaged in depoliticised ways. It is important to be upfront about the anti-colonial, anti-racist and anti-imperial politics that underpins decolonisation. It should be recognised that it is a struggle against exploitations and oppression (Bhambra et al. 2018).

Most academics have been schooled in and teach from a Western tradition and continue to experience university spaces that are congruent with their epistemological values, beliefs and practices. They have, therefore, not seen the need to change the structure and cultural conditions at universities, such as how curricula, pedagogy and assessment are structured (Vorster and Quinn 2017, 36–37). In most disciplines, the knowledge addressed at South African universities emanates from the global North. This dominance of Western knowledge, over knowledge from Africa, has created a sense of hierarchy of knowledge and of “inferior and superior people” (Grosfoguel 2007, 214).

Ubuntu is, arguably, the most widely known African philosophy which describes what it is to be human. It has survived being overtaken by the multitude of dehumanising practices in

the service of colonial domination (Viriri and Mungwini 2010, 39). Ubuntu is perpetuated in the oral-aural performance of cultures and is in sharp contrast to a Western rationality in the thrall of “scientific method, which dictates solid boundaries between the knower and the known. Ubuntu assumes an onto-epistemological continuum of self and the other” (Seats 2020, 10). It is through the conception of Ubuntu as a normative moral theory that the decolonisation of hegemonic meanings can be expedited, thereby advancing a case for deep educational transformation. Ubuntu offers a paradigm for understanding development and decolonisation and can contribute to transformative re-curriculation efforts (Tavernaro-Haidarian 2019, 20, 21).

Specifically, the notions of development and decolonization, rooted in Ubuntu, were operationalized in a case study of re-curriculation in an educational project that was implemented in Limpopo (Tavernaro-Haidarian 2019, 19). The re-curriculation case study involves a de-centralized, participatory and Ubuntu-based approach to education which entails students learning consultatively and in smaller groups with the help of facilitators and through materials that are co-generated with students, parents and teachers (Tavernaro-Haidarian 2019, 31).

Furthermore, it has been widely argued language should be the point of departure in the decolonisation of education in Africa. Failure to address the language question, would render futile any attempt at the “decolonization of education”. In neocolonial societies, the colonially imposed language of the colonizer is maintained in the post-colonial period (Prah 2017, 228, 232). In 2015, the *Mail and Guardian* (South Africa) contained reports that student activists had protested against the use of Afrikaans as the official teaching language, arguing that it disadvantaged blacks. They emerged victorious when they eventually won the right to be taught in English at Stellenbosch University. Prah (2017, 245) observed, however, that these predominantly African language-speaking students were not attentive to the need for mother-tongue education. He asserted that the decolonization of education must begin with the re-centering of African languages within the heart of our educational endeavours otherwise the decolonization of education will remain “empty, unrealizable verbiage” (Prah 2017, 248).

In South Africa, White people developed policies (including language policies) in a manner which advanced their interests whilst being detrimental to Black people and their language. Most black students are not fluent in English and Universities are expected to provide the relevant support (Aziakpono and Bekker 2010, 39). Van der Walt and Wolhuter (2016, 1027) argue that some governments oppress certain groups and their languages. Oppressing a particular language might prevent speakers of that language from developing themselves through autonomous thought. This lack of autonomy can be circumvented by providing

instruction in the mother-tongue of students.

The student protests of 2015 and beyond started the anti-colonialism and decolonisation of education struggle (Smith and Gordon 2016, 127, 130) culminating in the “#FeesMustFall” movement. These protests have also shed light on the need for inclusiveness. Black students have lamented that they do not feel welcome in higher education institutions as they are not socially just and continue to privilege whiteness (Mahr 2016; BBC 2017; *Mail and Guardian* 2017; Lockett 2016, 426). (In South Africa, the term “black” denotes Asians, Africans and Coloureds or mixed race groups. In this study, the term black is used to refer exclusively to Africans so that it is consistent with the use of the term internationally).

In post-apartheid South Africa, it does not necessarily follow that those who can afford tertiary education will succeed academically. Studies have found that the throughput and pass rates, particularly among black students, is low (Scott, Yeld, and Hendry 2007, 28). This has given rise to a robust drive for student support, which is mostly predicated on the (often covert) assumption by some researchers, such as Boughey (2005, 237–238) and Nyamupangedengu (2017) that black students are “underprepared” for higher education due to deficits in their knowledge base and skills. Their poor academic performance is highlighted through comparison with their counterparts within other ethnic groups (Scott et al. 2007, 38; CHE 2013). The rationale for the support given to these students is mainly concerned with gaining (what Morrow (1993, 3–4) terms) “epistemological access” so as to bridge the gap between the respective worlds that students and lecturers draw on (Boughey 2005, 240). Continuing in the same vein, Boughey (2005, 240–241) argues that it is only through engagement with content that students can explore the academic constructs and thus acquire an understanding of what counts as “appropriate” in the construction of academic knowledge and academic texts.

It is, therefore, not uncommon for black students to be stereotyped as needy, fragmented, unsophisticated and possessing knowledge that is inappropriate. Often times, there is an overemphasis on their lack of economic and cultural capital on account of them being educationally disadvantaged. Lockett (2016, 424) draws attention to this in her commentary that black students are positioned as “objects of ‘disadvantage’ and subjects of ‘adaptation’ in need of development”. Even though middle class black students, might be enabled through their economic capital to fit in as members of the academe, they could still be devalued by institutional cultures that discriminate against them (Lockett 2016, 426).

Lockett (2016, 424) further argues that this deficit view of black students provides the impetus for the “descendants of colonisers” to appoint themselves as “agents of development” who develop black students for an academic environment that is more in tune with white than black habitus and capital. In addition, Booi, Vincent, and Liccardo (2017, 498) argue that white-

middle class habitus, is strongly portrayed as “excellence”. The consequence is that the support afforded to black students is not always appropriate. The support that would be appropriate would recognise and value black habitus and capital instead of regarding them as a deficiency in need of correction for the sake of “epistemological access”. Booi et al. (2017, 498) assert that the promoting white power and privilege, through valuing white-middle-class habitus amounts to “epistemic injustice”.

Arguably, the academic support for black South African students is premised largely on the habitus of the coloniser. Therefore, there is a need to decolonise the conceptualisation, design and implementation of such support. However, conversations regarding decolonisation are still limited when it comes to higher education in South Africa. Also, the marginalisation of black students who are made to feel that they do not belong at tertiary institutions, the territory of whites mostly, is not being addressed. This article illustrates how tutorials can be used as a decolonised space where students are made to feel accepted and treated in a humanistic manner.

Tutorials are small groups that enable learning to occur in a more personalised and customised manner while complementing lectures (Mischo and Haag 2002). Through performance in a safe, supportive environment created through tutorials, students can get a better grasp of relevant knowledge and skills (Sutherland 2009; Aluko and Hendrikz 2012). Tutorials in post-apartheid South Africa focus on: 1) improving performance of underprepared students; 2) providing a multi-lingual space, and 3) promoting deep, active learning. The tutorial system is playing an increasingly important role within the context of an inevitability of large class sizes. Tutorials are also being entrenched due to budgetary constraints faced by higher education institutions. In the South African context, the merging process which resulted in large numbers of students registering for undergraduate study often from socially disadvantaged communities, and the broadening of access to tertiary education, has meant that postgraduate tutors are regarded as essential for the continued functioning of undergraduate teaching (Duncan 2012, 23).

Poor academic performance is prevalent at most South African universities (Scott et al. 2007) and tutorials have been implemented to address this dilemma. At the University of Johannesburg mandatory first year tutorials have been applied at a number of faculties to potentially improve student success rates (Layton 2015, 199–200). It was shown that tutorial attendance in a first year Geography course at the aforementioned university had a positive impact on the academic performance of students (Mckay 2016, 58).

The adoption of mother tongue education in tutorials has been particularly effective. First year students at Rhodes University requested for tutorials to be conducted in isiXhosa (Aziakpono and Bekker 2010, 47). A similar request for tutorials to be conducted in the

students' mother tongue namely, Sesotho and isiZulu, was made at the University of the Free State. By the means of multilingual tutorials, lecturers and tutors could offer relevant support to students (De Buisson 2017, 159). In a study conducted by Leach (2015, 61) pertaining to the adoption of multilingual tutorials in respect of the Commercial Law for Accountants programme at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, it was found that multilingual tutorials contributed to the improvement of student of academic performance. The majority (83%) of respondents were successful in the first year Law course.

Tutorials, in general, have been found to be effective in enhancing learning as has been extensively reported (Ching and Chang-Chen 2011, 9; Comfort 2011, 207; Maynard and Almarzouqi 2006, 18–19; Retna, Chong and Cavana 2009, 251; Topping 1998, 339). Tutorials were found to improve the teaching and learning experience of tutees (Comfort 2011, 207; Topping 1998, 325), provide a platform for the promotion of deep learning in small groups (Hanley 1996, 243–247; Underhill and McDonald 2010, 99–100) and enhance students' learning skills, critical-thinking and problem-solving abilities, as well as communication skills, which resulted in a stronger motivation and responsibility for learning (Yuen Loke and Chow 2007, 239, 242).

Yuen Loke and Chow (2007, 239–241) found that, although peer-tutoring resulted in both positive and negative experiences, positive experiences predominated, with tutors and tutees benefitting from the experience. To support this claim, commentary by tutors and tutees, which involved critical thinking and reflective learning, was provided. This commentary demonstrated the enhancement of deep learning. Peer tutoring also provided the opportunity to develop “transferable” personal skills, such as communication, problem-solving, interpersonal, and time management skills; in addition to developing increased confidence, and greater independence in learners. The passivity of tutees, however, was cited as one of the pitfalls of tutoring.

The above-mentioned research on tutorials, however, do not focus on tutees' sense of belonging, social justice nor the influence of language as a variable of culture within the tutorial environment. With the exception of Colvin, Fozdar and Volet (2012, 11) whose study drew on Bourdieu's social field theory, explaining mono-cultural, mono-lingual students' accounts of intercultural interactions and experiences during tutorials at an Australian university, there are few studies with this slant. The findings illustrated that students felt that inter-cultural interactions privileged mono-cultural, mono-lingual (English-speaking) students, who would then control the intercultural agenda. Habitus was enabled when students embraced diversity and engaged well with culturally varied peers, but was constrained when students perceived ethnically homogenous groups to be impenetrable. That the participants in the Colvin et al. (2012, 14) study were predominantly mono-lingual, white English speaking students, might

have influenced their preference for English language proficiency. By contrast, in the study reported on in this article, most tutees and tutors were black and multi-lingual, for whom English was not their mother-tongue or first language, but that of the coloniser.

This study was guided by the following research questions: 1) What are the perceptions of tutees regarding the effectiveness of tutorials through the lens of activity theory? and 2) What capital and habitus do tutors bring to the tutorial field that would enhance the empowerment of tutees in a socially just manner? The study found that for tutees and tutors who were multi-lingual, the tutorials provided a space that was decolonized while addressing social justice. Therefore, based on their cultural and social capital, tutees were being privileged. This allowed them to gain academic capital that was contingent on the enhancement of their academic performance. The interaction with peers and tutors who were deemed approachable also allowed them to acquire social capital. This made them feel included and gave them a sense of belonging.

At the same time, one needs to be cautious about the manner in which homogeneous groups (based on language) can hinder inter-cultural interactions and constrain habitus as this could be a drawback of decolonisation, where one type of oppression and social injustice is traded for another. Furthermore, the decolonisation of education for the mere sake of it is not enough—it must lead to improved academic performance. Therefore, this study demonstrates the manner in which tutorials can be applied to decolonise education whilst enhancing the academic performance of tutees.

This study is informed by two theoretical frameworks, namely: 1) Activity theory (Engeström 1987), and 2) Bourdieu's social field theory (Bourdieu 1986). These theories are explained in the next section.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework that was selected to underpin the study was activity theory. In this regard, tutorials were deemed to be an activity system. In addition, Bourdieu's social field theory was chosen as it provided the relevant framework for analyzing the habitus and capital of the community involved in the activity system because the country where this study was conducted was diverse in terms of ethnicity and class,

When tutorials were viewed as an activity system, the *subject* was the tutor while the *tools* were the teaching and learning methods and materials. The *object* was the tutorial as a problem space and the *outcome* was enhancement of learning among tutees. The *community* was comprised of tutees and lecturers. The *rules* referred to policies and procedures regarding the implementation of tutorials. The *division of labour* or *roles* pertained to the responsibilities of

each member of the community, when acting on the object.

In addition, the identification of contradictions within the tutorial activity system helped to pinpoint issues for transformation. Contradictions are not simply important when it comes to the understanding the source of the problem, but also have a developmental potential, allowing for innovative solutions to disturbances within the activity system (Engeström 2008, 224). Within an activity system, contradictions are positioned at the primary and secondary level. Primary level contradictions occur within elements, while secondary level contradictions manifest between elements (Engeström 1987, 34; Roth 2004, 5–6).

Bourdieu's social field theory encompasses field, habitus and capital. According to Bourdieu: a field is a relatively autonomous domain of activity that responds to rules of functioning and institutions that are specific to it and which define the relations among the agents (Bourdieu 2013). (In this study, the field would be the tutorial space). Bourdieu and Thompson (1991, 17) maintain that habitus provides individuals with an orientation of how to act in the world and how to behave in a manner that is appropriate for the circumstances. Concerning capital, Bourdieu (1986) advises that it can come in three forms: economic capital, cultural capital and social capital.

Economic capital can be converted into money; cultural capital may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications and social capital refers to one's social networks or membership of a group. Cultural capital can exist in the embodied state such as dispositions of the mind and body, as well as the objectified state that pertain to cultural goods such as pictures and books. Social capital refers to membership in a group where members have access to collectively owned capital (Bourdieu 1986). These relationships can exist in material and/or symbolic exchanges or become socially instituted by the application of a group, and guarded by the custodians of that group. These custodians determine the entry criteria, and in doing so, modify the group or place limits on the rights to occupy powerful positions (Bourdieu 2013, 295).

## **METHODS AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

This study was conducted at a University of Technology to determine the perception of tutees regarding tutorials. The main aim of the tutorials was to improve the academic performance of the tutees, who were undergraduate students. The tutors were undergraduate students themselves in the second to fourth year of study.

The sampling technique that was adopted was purposive which meant that prospective respondents had to have participated in tutorials as tutees in order to complete and submit the questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised mainly of Likert scale items that were structured

for the collection of data that was quantitative. Unstructured items were also included in the questionnaire for the gathering of qualitative data. The items in the questionnaire aimed to: 1) Investigate whether tutees perceived the tutorials to be effective, as underpinned by activity Theory; and 2) Establish what capital and habitus tutors bring to the tutorial field that would enhance the empowerment of tutees in a socially just manner.

The questionnaire was administered online to which 896 tutees eventually responded. In order to increase the response rate, two reminders were sent. A breakdown of the number and percentage of the responses obtained per faculty is tabulated in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Number and percentages of completed questionnaires received across the faculties

Faculty	Number	Percentage (%)
Health and Wellness	77	9
Informatics and design	61	7
Applied Sciences	96	11
Education and Social Sciences	149	17
Engineering	103	11
Business	408	45

Descriptive statistics (that is, frequencies) were employed in the analysis of the structured items. The techniques that were employed to reduce and analyse the qualitative data included the generation of codes which were subsequently categorized and thematized. The analysis was informed by activity theory and Bourdieu's social field Theory.

## RESULTS

The results are discussed in terms of the theoretical frameworks employed in the study.

### Role of tutors

The multifaceted role of tutors is explicated below.

#### *Tutors' use of language*

The university where this study was conducted has a policy (rules) that requires the medium of instruction, during lectures especially, is English, even though it is the mother tongue of the minority of students. The demographic data on the mother-tongue language of respondents in this study showed that the majority were isiXhosa speaking (54%) while only 22 per cent were English speaking. Other languages spoken were Afrikaans (11%), other African languages (7%) as well as French and other languages at 1.6 per cent and 3.4 per cent respectively.

These rules, however, weren't as strictly applied during the implementation of tutorials

when many tutors had the freedom to explain concepts in the tutees' mother-tongue language, which in most cases, was isiXhosa. Tutees preferred the use of mother-tongue since it promoted understanding and learning. The need for multilingual tutors was evident in the suggestion to employ "... tutors who know many languages, to explain in [the tutees' mother tongue] if it is hard for them to understand English".

Whilst some tutees celebrated the tutors' multilingual capabilities, other tutees complained that they found it difficult to understand the language that the tutors spoke including their use of English. There was a comment that: "Sometimes it was hard to understand [the tutor] because of his pronunciation". Some tutees expressed the need for tutors to "speak English clearly" and to be "fluent in English", yet other tutees were satisfied with the tutors' use of simple English, which was easy to understand.

### ***Approachability and availability of tutors***

Most of the respondents (59% or 514/868) were satisfied that tutors were able to assist them with their academic problems. There was consensus among 72 per cent (633/883) of respondents that tutors were approachable. These findings demonstrate that the majority of tutees were comfortable working with tutors and deemed them to be helpful. In addition, many respondents (73% or 631/869) acknowledged that tutors were able to fulfil their role in managing tutorials effectively, to the extent that they were perceived to be more effective than lecturers in contributing to an understanding of the subject. Some tutors, however, were lambasted for being unprofessional. Their failure to honour appointments with tutees were reported as problematic. For example, one respondent complained: "... the tutor never shows up and we have to write tutorial tests and hand in tutorials without proper help".

### ***Facilitation skills of tutors***

Most respondents were satisfied with the tools that were employed in conducting tutorials, as tabulated (see Table 2), which demonstrates that the tutors were effective for the most part in the use of tools for addressing the object.

**Table 2:** Perceptions of tutees regarding the tools used in conducting tutorials

Variable	Frequencies			
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Total (n) per variable
The tutor communicated effectively (spoke clearly; listened to tutees).	78% n=677	14% n=124	8% n=71	872
The tutor was not able to explain concepts in an understandable way.	15% n=136	22% n=190	63% n=557	883
I was satisfied with the way in which the tutor taught	73%	15%	12%	

me.	n=636	n=134	n=100	870
The tutor used visual aids (e.g., PowerPoint presentations, flip chart, white board) effectively.	45% n=386	16% n=136	39% n=341	863
The tutor should ask us more probing questions in order to encourage us to think about the subject matter.	70% n=602	20% n=177	10% n=87	866
The tutor gave us homework tasks.	41% n=355	17% n=144	42% n=369	868
The level of the content covered during the tutorials was not of a high standard.	24% n=203	29% n=253	47% n=407	863
The tutor encouraged us to ask questions.	83% n=721	10% n=87	7% n=64	871

In cases where tutors were perceived to be underperforming, tutees offered suggestions for improvement, such as to be better prepared and to manage the class better. It was also suggested that tutors improve their presentation skills, through the use of PowerPoint presentations (for instance), by speaking clearly and audibly, and by engaging with tutees through question and answer techniques. Other recommendations offered centered on the improvement of tutorials and included: tutors allowing for more student-centered approaches that would render their presentation more engaging and interactive; tutors being receptive to questions from tutees and “listening to [tutees] so that they will know what they[tutees] want to know”; and tutors explaining well and asking interesting, ill-defined questions.

Overall, the tools employed by tutors when conducting tutorials were deemed effective and where limitations were identified, tutees provided suggestions for improvement.

### **Enhancement of academic performance**

Most tutees viewed tutorials, as a problem space for the enhancement of learning (object), in a positive light. The majority of respondents (85% or 758/890) perceived tutorials as beneficial with one tutee proclaiming: “Tutorials are helpful that’s why I think we should do it more and get more homework”. Many (63% or 559/886) agreed that tutorials had improved their understanding of the subject.

These responses point to the potential benefit of tutorials in the enhancement of academic performance. Most respondents indicated that, as a result of attending tutorials, they were able to improve their performance in tests and examinations (67% or 553/824) and were able to pass (64% or 565/881). A large number of tutees explained that attending tutorials enabled them to achieve distinctions.

These findings show that, to a large extent, the outcome of tutorials, which was to enhance academic performance, was achieved. Only a few respondents felt otherwise and reported that tutors were not helpful, as illustrated by this statement: “The tutor covered work that I did not always need help in. Therefore, I wasted time listening and participating in tutorials ...”.

## Networking and collaborative learning during tutorials

It is worth mentioning that more than two decades after the inception of a democratic government, diversity, especially as it relates to ethnic differences, has a profound bearing on higher education in South Africa. The tutorial community in this study were ethnically heterogeneous, comprised as follows: 69 per cent African; 24 per cent coloured (mixed race); 5 per cent white; 1 per cent Asian and 1 per cent classified as “other”. This heterogeneity could have influenced the sentiments related to intercultural interactions. Some respondents complained about the lack of interaction with other ethnic groups, which affected communication, while others did not feel uncomfortable with interracial communication and interaction.

Fifty-nine per cent (or 514/876) of tutee respondents concurred that tutorials afforded them an opportunity to get to know their peers better, which is indicative of the extent to which tutees were able to network and function as a community. This perception was verified in the following comment: “... having tutorials ... helps us to learn to socialize with the rest of the tutees”. They also felt that collaboration with their peers was useful: “Working as a group, getting the opportunity to ask questions on the things that I am unclear on [was beneficial]. I managed to understand things I couldn’t understand during class time.”

However, not all tutees shared the aforementioned sentiment; some admitted that they did not feel comfortable working in groups and cited a preference for alternative methods such as self-directed learning: “I feel I prefer self-study so [tutorials] weren’t helpful to me”. One-on-one consultation with the tutor was another preferred method. Thirty seven percent (or 323/870) of tutees opted for more *individual* attention from tutors during tutorials.

## Organisation, uptake and attendance of tutorials

The time allocation for the implementation of tutorials, as well as the scheduling of tutorials, was an important aspect of the rules that governed the design and execution of tutorials.

Some respondents preferred that more time be allocated to the running of tutorials, as reflected in these statements: 1) “Time at tutorials was too short”; 2) “... need to increase the time for tutorial classes”; 3) “Not given adequate time to work on tutorials” and 4) “Too much to be covered in a short period of time”. An analysis of the structured items, however, demonstrated that only a few tutees (28%) perceived the tutorial sessions as being too short (refer to table 3).

Respondents concurred that there should be greater organisation and co-ordination of tutorials, especially with respect to developing timetables for tutorials and better communication with tutees regarding tutorial schedules. Some respondents felt that there was

a “lack of communication between tutor and tutees [regarding] when sessions will be held”. There was a suggestion that appropriate venues be booked in advance because searching for venues proved to be time consuming.

Other rules that were applicable to the implementation of tutorials was a position regarding attendance and making tutorials mandatory across the various disciplines. About a third of the respondents (32%) were of the opinion that the attendance of tutorials by fellow tutees was poor (Table 3), which gives insight into the attendance pattern of tutorials. There was a perception that tutorials should be made compulsory in order to increase the pass rate. There was also a perception that attendance marks should have been allocated to ensure that tutorials would be taken more seriously by the tutees. That tutorials be conducted in every subject, even at the third- and fourth year level, was another suggestion made by the respondents.

**Table 3:** Rules employed in the implementation of tutorials

Variable	Frequencies			
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Total (n) per variable
The tutorials should be better organized.	66% n=568	16% n=141	18% n=160	869
Tutorials should be held more regularly (e.g., more tutorials per week).	76% n=672	12% n=111	12% n=103	886
The tutorial sessions are too short.	28% n=249	20% n=175	52% n=452	876
Tutorials were not scheduled in the class timetable.	41% n=346	18% n=155	41% n=360	861
The attendance of tutorials by my fellow tutees was poor.	32% n=283	29% n=258	39% n=342	883

## DISCUSSION

This study demonstrated that tutorials can be applied effectively when decolonising education, thereby creating an environment that is both inclusive and accommodating.

Individuals with a particular history, which impacts on their habitus, are already predisposed to act in certain ways. Therefore, an encounter between habitus and field could result in incongruence or incompatibility (Bourdieu and Thompson 1991, 12–13). Within the context of this study, an example would be economically and educationally disadvantaged black students attending university, which is seen as the domain of privileged white people. They might feel out of place and not know how to act or speak. Arguably, interacting with tutors with a similar background and habitus would put them at ease.

Bourdieu and Thompson (1991, 14) maintain that one form of capital can be converted into another, for instance, economic capital can be converted into academic capital. Black students might possess the economic capital to attend university, but that does not guarantee they will attain academic capital because they will remain on the periphery as long as white

capital and habitus is privileged in the academic field. This is why the #feesmustfall campaign (discussed previously) embraces the cry for the decolonisation of education.

In this study, the cultural capital of tutors who were able to speak the tutee's mother-tongue would make tutees feel comfortable and accepted in higher education. This would help remedy a situation where, in South Africa, black students feel marginalised and unwelcome in an English-speaking environment that privileges whites. (English is the language of instruction, but is also regarded as the language of the coloniser and oppressor). The cultural capital of tutors, as it applies to language, would make universities more accessible to students.

The findings of the study described in this article signalled the positive attitude towards the use of mother-tongue during tutorials (e.g., isiXhosa) because of its ability to enhance the understanding of concepts among tutees. There is documented evidence that the use of mother-tongue enhances learning and improves the performance of students (see Paxton 2009, 345; Mashiya 2010, 103). In addition to the use of mother-tongue, tutees stated a preference for the use of English as a medium of instruction and stipulated the importance of the tutor being able to speak English well. That is, a multilingual approach was preferred. In other studies (Colvin et al. 2012, 18), English was the preferred language and the capital required in the field.

The multi-lingual tutor would have benefitted from the possession of the relevant cultural capital as well as social capital although they would not have had as much academic capital as compared to lecturers. Their capital resonated with the practices and structures of the field ensuring them respect and a privileged position within its space. Indeed, the use of mother-tongue education in the tutorial field would have privileged tutors including tutees who were multi-lingual. Tutors possessed cultural capital, thereby allowing them greater control over the rules within the field. At the same time, the manner in which tutors spoke could be viewed as a form of habitus (see Bourdieu and Thompson 1991, 81–84) which allowed them to interact well and be understood by some tutees.

As a rule, tutees would have created their own linguistic groups based on the language spoken by group members. The adoption of mother-tongue education, however, would have impacted negatively on intercultural learning experiences as it would have denied tutees the opportunity to work in diverse groups. When agents are subjected to similar conditions and to similar conditioning, they will have similar dispositions and interests and will produce practices that are similar (Bourdieu 1986). When tutees perceived linguistically homogeneous groups to be impenetrable, habitus would have been constrained. The consequence being that people would keep their distance and not want to “get familiar”. Thus, agents involved in the tutorial field might not have existed as a unified group, and the promotion of homogeneity rather than heterogeneity within the community would have constituted a secondary level contradiction

between tools (language) and the community.

This contradiction would have hindered the addressing of diversity in the field and created tension between the use of mother-tongue and English as well as tension between homogeneous and heterogeneous groups in tutorials. Some tutees complained that they could not understand the language that the tutor spoke which would have excluded them from discussions. Bourdieu (1991, 167) warns that the function of division is often concealed beneath the function of communication and thus, "... the culture that unifies (the medium of communication) is also the culture which separates (the instrument of distinction) ...". Shaw, Carey, and Mair (2008, 704) advise that tutorials be properly inclusive of the diversity of students, arguing that: "The success of the tutorial is a consequence of the tutor's and student's capacity to engage with each other as collaborators within the classroom setting".

Collaboration among members of the tutorial community would have contributed immensely in fostering inclusiveness and a sense of belonging. In South Africa, the concept of "Ubuntu" when applied to higher education would affirm and humanise black students. "Ubuntu" is a phenomenon or worldview which signifies the humanity and interconnectedness among people, as well as the moral quality of a person (see Gade 2011, 103; 2012, 484). "Ubuntu" means that "... a person becomes a person through other persons" (see Lotter 1997, 46) and it is the "capacity to connect with another human being" (see Gade 2012, 489). This "... sense of community is what makes you who you are" (see Gade 2012, 493). An example of a pedagogical tool that would promote "Ubuntu" is group work, which involves collaborating within a team.

In this study, the usefulness of group work as a pedagogical tool in promoting learning was highlighted by the respondents. Other studies supported the importance of group work and in-class discussion during tutorials (Colvin et al. 2012, 15–16; Shaw et al. 2008, 711). The emphasis on participation, discussion and oral presentations suggested the possession of relevant capital (Colvin et al. 2012, 17). Shaw et al. (2008, 712) make a compelling argument for increasing interaction during tutorials, which could provide the basis for engagement with a range of concepts and ideas.

In South Africa, tutorials exhibit the potential to decolonise education through promoting the application of the tutees' mother-tongue as well as allowing tutees to interact with tutors of a similar habitus while promoting "Ubuntu", which is an important component of the cultural capital of black students. Decolonisation alone is not enough though, as tutorials must also enhance learning. In this study, it was revealed that tutorials were effective in enhancing learning amongst tutees who deemed tutorials to be instrumental in improving their examination marks and bolstering meaning making. This finding corroborates the results of evaluation

studies conducted at other universities. For example, at a university in New Zealand, it was found that tutorials improved student learning and resulted in positive learning experiences (Retna et al. 2009, 251). Tutees (in an undergraduate Applied Sports Science degree) who were subjected to peer tutoring, achieved statistically significant higher grades than their counterparts who were not peer tutored Comfort (2011, 207).

Even though tutorials in the study described in this article were effective in enhancing learning and improving summative assessment results, that is, addressing the object, they were not always scheduled into class timetables and not all departments and faculties subscribed to the notion of implementing tutorials; this created a secondary contradiction between the object and rules. Evidence from other studies suggest that when tutoring sessions are not timetabled along with other elements of a programme, student attendance was poor (Hilsdon 2014, 251).

In addition, it takes time to appropriate cultural capital. Embodied capital, which is ultimately converted into habitus, cannot be transferred instantaneously (Bourdieu 1986). Tutees attended tutorials as part of the acquisition of cultural capital which would have taken time. They, therefore, called for more tutorials and longer tutorial sessions.

In this study, as far as the tool/subject link was concerned, tutors were deemed to be approachable, good communicators, effective facilitators of learning and adept at using technology, which indicated that they were already in possession of habitus that was appropriate for the academe. The tutorial space, as the object, gave tutors the opportunity to become orientated towards academia, and to develop habitus in the profession, that is, they were learning how to think and act like academics.

The rules/division of labour link would have helped develop habitus among tutees and not only tutors. Tutees would have been prepared for their future professional roles through the regular attendance of tutorials. Because of the greater symbolic capital tutors held in comparison to tutees, the tutors would have had to be respectful and approachable rather than aloof. This disposition was important if they were to be effective facilitators of learning.

A study reported by Hilsdon (2014, 248), suggests that there are relatively symmetrical power relationships, as indicated by cooperation and collaboration, at play during peer tutoring for the interpretation of course-related concepts and language. Students felt free to ask and answer questions without being embarrassed because they felt equal to the tutor. Moust and Schmidt (1994, 480) proclaim that peer tutors are in a good position to understand the learning problems of tutees due to their recent similar learning experiences.

Drawing on evidence from their study, however, Booi et al. (2017, 507), caution that it is those tutors who are “more likely to ‘fit in’ and safeguard the reproduction of dominant cultural dispositions” that are offered opportunities for entry into the university field by powerful agents.

If the status quo is maintained within a colonised milieu, this would imply that tutors with black habitus might be less likely than those with white habitus to have access into the academe.

Shaw and colleagues (2008, 705) argue that there is a need to address the way in which higher education can marginalise and devalue the experiences of many students, while alienating them from their personal circumstances. They assert that tutorials can provide opportunities for students to interact meaningfully with tutors so that they can engage with the ideas presented during lectures and develop the conceptual and theoretical resources needed to understand more complex material. Thus, “tutorials can provide supportive learning environments where students feel able to explore problems and demonstrate growing competence” (Shaw et al. 2008, 705).

Some researchers (Colvin 2007, 178) warn that, although tutoring is becoming more widespread, it cannot be assumed that tutors will be automatically utilised and, therefore, it is imperative that tutors are aware of their perceived usefulness and credibility to others. Tutors in this study were perceived by most tutees as being helpful, whereas in other studies, (for example Colvin 2007, 176–177), some tutees were not as accepting of tutors and perceived them to be interfering with the opportunity to learn on their own, while other tutees questioned the need for tutors altogether given that they were paying to be taught by lecturers in the first place.

## **CONCLUSION**

This article argued that tutorials are academically rigorous spaces for the decolonisation of education with tutors playing a central role in enhancing the academic performance of tutors whilst promoting social justice within academia. This would better prepare black graduates to take their rightful place as citizens in a racialised society such as South Africa.

Although student protests have placed the spotlight on promoting inclusivity and the decolonisation of education, higher education is poorly prepared to adequately address this matter. There needs to be a paradigm shift from stereotyping black students as inferior and academically wanting to acknowledging and promoting black habitus as part of the decolonisation of education and social justice agenda. For example, instead of perceiving them (black students) as not being proficient in English (the medium of instruction of the coloniser), the use of their mother-tongue should be encouraged, as was done during the implementation of tutorials in this study.

The approachability of tutors, including collaborative, participatory teaching and learning methods, was central to the integration of tutees into the university. It must be recognised that *all* students should be made to feel accepted, and attempts to decolonise education should avoid

the creation of groups that are homogenous lest they exclude students on the basis of “otherness”. It is recommended that tutor training programmes focus on the decolonisation of education, thereby addressing the decolonisation of academic development, which is a novel approach that would go against the grain of the deficit, colonised model for student development.

A limitation of this study is that, while the data collection method employed allowed for a large number of tutees to participate in the research, it could not accommodate the rich narrative accounts of tutees’ take on tutorials. The conclusion that tutorials are effective, not only in the enhancement of academic performance, but also in providing an inclusive environment for students who feel misunderstood and marginalised, could not have been made had only a small group of tutees been interviewed for narrative data.

A further drawback of this investigation was that the decolonisation of education was concerned predominantly with the pedagogical skills of the tutor, while *knowledge* itself was not. Arguably, tutors are restricted by the knowledge that is covered by the lecturer and, therefore, do not possess the power or even academic capital to introduce new (decolonised) knowledge. The onus lies on lecturers to make a concerted effort to decolonise the curriculum, which at present privileges the knowledge of the coloniser. (The work of Livingston 2018, 1–17), who documents an African slant on Eurocentric fairy tales as part of decolonising the English curriculum and creating Afrocentric cultural capital, would be a case in point). This could be the focus of future studies.

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