



Unions leading the way to decolonise education

Gabriela Bonilla
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Education International (EI)

Education International represents organisations of teachers and other education employees across the globe. It is the world's largest federation of unions and associations, representing over 33 million education employees in 375 organisations in 180 countries and territories.

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Glossary

Culture Cultural anthropology defines culture as the accumulation of knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, customs, and habits that individuals acquire while living and interacting within society. It is a dynamic entity capable of transformation and adaptation, encompassing learned behaviours, language, and shared symbols that facilitate group living.

Cultural pertinence/ relevance Cultural pertinence or relevance entails providing information and approaches that are applicable within the immediate cultural context. It denotes having significance and meaning within the cultural milieu in which a policy or initiative develops.

Culture war A culture war, a concept attributed to Marxist Antonio Gramsci, denotes the struggle for dominance between conflicting sets of cultural values. This battle unfolds within influential societal institutions such as mass media and education.

Decolonisation Decolonisation refers to the ongoing process of dismantling systems, institutions, attitudes, beliefs, mentalities, norms, and processes stemming from colonial domination. It is not confined to a temporal framework but encompasses political and cultural efforts to reorganise symbolic, social, and economic dynamics.

Decolonial thinking Decolonial thinking involves an awareness of structures and dynamics perpetuating racial inequality and geopolitical power imbalances. It seeks to deconstruct these systems and propose alternative frameworks.

Epistemic violence Epistemic violence pertains to the disregard for non-Western knowledge, methodologies, and perspectives within the construction and recognition of knowledge.

Ethnicity or ethnic group Ethnicity or ethnic group refers to a group of people who identify with each other based on shared cultural experiences, including language, beliefs, nationality, cuisine, religion, upbringing, etc. It is not synonymous with "exotic" or "foreign."

Hate speech Hate speech encompasses any form of communication that employs pejorative or discriminatory language targeting individuals or groups based on identity factors such as religion, ethnicity, race, etc. It encompasses biased, bigoted, or intolerant expressions that denigrate individuals or groups based on various identity factors.

Global North/ Ideological west The terms "Global North" or "West" denote not only geographical locations but also encompass worldviews and subjectivities supporting the production and reproduction of specific knowledge, power structures, and thought systems intertwined with colonialism.

Global South Similar to the terms "Global North" or "West," the Global South represents a geopolitical, historical, and developmental concept addressing countries and regions affected by colonial legacies and contemporary power dynamics, including neo-imperial expansions.

Minority "Minority" does not merely denote numerical representation but also signifies a history of underrepresentation and marginalisation within the political system, resulting in limited access to power, resources, and decision-making processes.

Mother tongue The mother tongue is the first language learned by an individual in childhood, serving as the primary means of connecting with information and contextual understanding. It may differ from the language spoken at school or in adulthood, playing a crucial role in inclusion and quality learning.

Multicultural A multicultural society comprises multiple ethnic and racial groups without the dominance of one group over another. Public policies within such societies aim to recognise, make visible, and benefit all ethnic and racial groups equally.

People of colour The term "people of colour" refers to individuals or groups identifying as non-white, encompassing a broad spectrum of ethnic backgrounds. It may be supplemented with more specific mentions of ethnicity, such as "BAME/BME people" (Black, Asian, and minority ethnic).

Political polarisation Political polarisation involves the division of a country's political parties and/or population into opposing camps, hindering the ability to effectively address national issues and eroding trust in institutions, including electoral bodies.

Race Race lacks biological significance and is a sociological construct used to highlight inequalities based on physical features, including skin colour. It encompasses various racial identities, such as Black, White, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, etc.

White/ Whiteness Whiteness refers to a social construct denoting historical and intergenerational privilege and power, rather than merely skin pigmentation.



Executive Summary

This research on the decolonisation of education aims to promote further reflection among Education International (EI) member organisations on the role of unions, teachers, and policy in the decolonisation of education. The research maps the actions of education unions who are engaged in decolonising education, documenting how some education unions have conceptualised and mobilised around these issues. It also seeks to understand the main concepts related to decolonising education and explores the nuances manifested in undertaking decolonising projects and implementing a practical view of the decolonisation of education. The research involves interviews with leaders from twelve EI members and a review of books, journal articles, and other sources.


The literature reviewed aligns with the participants' perspectives on the implications of a decolonial education policy, emphasising that a decolonial education policy should result from participatory design and decision-making processes guided by principles of cultural plurality. Additionally, it should foster a culture of research in which higher education institutions advocate for epistemological justice and promote diverse topics, curriculum, and teaching methodologies. Decolonising education requires a relevant curriculum that empowers students and teachers to transform their contexts, adequate teacher training, and policies ensuring inclusion and decent working conditions for marginalised groups.

The context in which unions operate is characterised by neoliberal models, racial inequality, limited government dialogue, worsening working conditions, curriculum disputes, privatisation challenges, and cultural polarisation. Despite this, unions aim to foster decolonial thinking, emancipatory pedagogy, and anti-racist education policies. Colonial

thinking is seen as imposing uniform models and a singular view of education, which unions oppose. They focus on addressing inequalities based on race or ethnicity, considering these issues as integral to the working-class agenda. Incorporating language and demands reflecting ethnic, geographical, and racial identities benefits both education workers and students. Most unions refer to their work on decolonisation using terms like "*inclusion*," "*participation*," "*representation*," "*anti-racism*," "*critical thinking*," and "*multilingualism*."

Unions describe colonial thinking and colonial power not only as a means of control and resource exploitation based on racism but also as the imposition of uniform models. In education, colonial thinking would impose a singular view of the goals of education, a singular way of teaching and managing the classroom, a singular language to construct valid knowledge, or only one skin colour for those participating in decision-making. On the contrary, the decolonisation of education involves developing a workforce with decolonial thinking, pedagogy that promotes emancipatory thinking, and education policies that combat racism and colonial practices. Overall, teacher unions worldwide are advocating for decolonisation, equity, and inclusivity in education, addressing systemic racism, linguistic diversity, and colonial legacies to create more just and equitable learning environments.

The mandate of teacher unions is to defend workers' rights and the right to public, free, and relevant education for people of all ages. This research proposes several actions that EI members can adapt and implement as part of their own action plan to organise, represent, and mobilise to decolonise education.



“ ...dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is not a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed ”

Paulo Freire, 1970.



Introduction

The struggle for the decolonisation of education coincides with the daily struggle of education unions. On one hand, unions have historically fought to dismantle all forms of inequality and discrimination, to make visible the power structures that generate inequality. The struggle for decolonising education also coincides with a union's fight to defend its members with an advocacy agenda that reflects the needs of a diverse, working class. Simultaneously, public education can function as a tool for nurturing equality and addressing the inequities and prejudices that are inherent within societies.

However, public policies, including education policy, are subject to constant construction and debate. Education policy plays a central role in shaping and perpetuating different societal models. The education system is dynamic, reflecting the societal tensions and evolving needs of its time. As such, education systems have been and can continue to be used to enforce a colonial order, often resulting in unequal, unjust societies along racial, ethnic, or gendered lines. With the active and intentional involvement of teachers, education support personnel and their unions, education policy can promote democratic principles, inclusion, and relevant curriculum conducive to social transformation. These actions, common to the union agenda, can actually be considered calls for a decolonial education system. This intentional shift will significantly contribute to the broader goal of social transformation, acknowledging the need to dismantle colonial legacies and promote diverse, equitable, and inclusive educational environments.

Education unions advocate for education policy that fosters critical thinking, self-awareness, and empowerment among students. Such policy acknowledges the capacity of individuals to transform their reality and promotes diversity rather than standardisation. The decolonisation of

education is a complex and multifaceted endeavour, involving the recognition, acknowledgment, and dismantling of colonial legacies embedded within educational systems. Teacher unions play a crucial role in advocating for educational reforms and shaping policies that address issues of colonialism, racism, and inequality within the education sector – and in society at large. Regarding the decolonisation of education, teacher unions are dedicated to advocating for public education that is culturally relevant and accessible to all students, regardless of their country's history under imperial or colonial rule. Unions also strive to ensure dignified working conditions for education workers in both imperial and colonial contexts.

This study aims to compile practical knowledge developed by unions to inspire educators, students, policymakers, and communities in their shared goal of decolonising education for social transformation. It also reviews the concepts and literature that have problematised the issue of colonial expression in education and the decolonisation of pedagogy and educational policy itself. This research aims to contribute to the efforts of unions and social sectors striving for an education policy free from colonial influences, and for education systems that dismantle the colonial legacy and address its persistent inequalities.

Research objectives

This research aims to delve into the perspectives and experiences of teacher unions regarding the decolonisation of education, providing valuable insights into their approaches, challenges, and recommendations for future efforts from a working-class perspective. More specifically, the research aims to:

1. Explore the social and cultural context in which teacher unions engage in decolonial thinking and advocacy.
2. Examine how teacher unions incorporate and apply decolonial concepts in education.
3. Identify and analyse the key areas of focus, strategies, perceived effectiveness, and institutional policies of teacher unions in their efforts for decolonisation within educational systems.
4. Identify the main positive effects, setbacks and nuances experienced by teacher unions in their decolonisation efforts.
5. Elaborate on future efforts aimed at decolonising education within their respective contexts.

1. Why is decolonisation on the trade union agenda?

Unions aim to organise, represent, mobilise, and put forward demands and policy proposals. To achieve these objectives, unions must comprehend the concerns of their members, understand their needs, and identify what will mobilise them. Applying Medina's analysis of epistemic injustice and

colour-blindness to unions, it's crucial to view unions as integral actors alongside other liberatory movements combating imposed silence, racial oppression, and gender inequality. When countries implement policies or projects that disproportionately and negatively affect women, Black people, people of colour, or Indigenous Peoples, unions must recognise that their members from these groups are impacted differently.

Identity and issues of race and gender must be addressed in conjunction with the broader agenda of claims defended by the unions. Unions must educate their members, ensuring that the struggle for the working class and the defense of the right to education does not pit one racial group against another. Solidarity should be fostered among all members in the pursuit of common goals.

Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education (SDG4), as part of the United Nations Agenda 2030, serves as a guiding framework for global efforts to ensure inclusive and quality education for all. Within the context of decolonisation, Goal 4 encompasses the challenge of achieving cultural diversity and inclusion, as a tool to increase access to education. The endeavours towards decolonisation are particularly aligned with the vision of SDG 4, focusing on enhancing access to education for marginalised groups such as women, students from rural areas, Indigenous Peoples, and those affected by conflict.



Methodology

The study combined a desk review of existing literature on decolonisation and qualitative data obtained through semi-structured interviews with union representatives to gather their in-depth insights, experiences, and practices related to the decolonisation of education.

The literature review delves into the influence of colonialism, race and power dynamics on education policymaking, identity issues within the working class, and the decolonial nature of educational systems. It also examines representation and cultural relevance in curricula and educational materials. Secondary data sources included books, journal articles, and other research materials, using the digital library JSTOR to ensure representation from diverse geographic and cultural perspectives.

The research also employed a qualitative approach, drawing on grounded theory methodology to analyse data collected from teacher unions and to create analysis variables based on their experiences. Participation in the research was based on a convenience sample. All EI member organisations were invited via circular, with unions self-selecting to participate. Interviews were scheduled between October 2023 and February 2024, during which online interviews were conducted with various organisations representing different regions.

The research provides a panorama of the work being done by member organisations of EI, along with future perspectives for continuing the decolonisation of education. The results of the interviews do not represent all education unions and cannot be extrapolated as universally applicable cases.

This study is not exempt of limitations. One of them was achieving a greater representation of the regions. There are organisations with very important experiences and discussions that, on this occasion, did not participate, and whose experiences could not be reflected in this analysis. Another challenge was to identify trends and patterns while showing the heterogeneous union activity in terms of reflection, activism, and influence on educational policy. For some unions, this marks their initial reflection on the issue, while for others, it presents an opportunity to deepen their insights.

Exploring Academic Insights on Decolonising Education

The decolonisation of education is part of a broader movement encompassing public policy, culture, economy, and social movements. The following concepts and theoretical reflections contribute to understanding how the cultural values and social structures of colonialism expresses itself in public policies and in working conditions, having an impact in the education sector.

1. Colonisation and Colonialism

Colonisation usually entails invasion and occupation by one nation over another, driven by extractivism, exploitation, and racism. Through this occupation, the colonisers not only assert this authority to extract resources, but to impose political, economic and social control over the people on that land. This occupation uses violence to assert its control and dehumanisation. In all colonisation systems, the dominating group that imposes its control over another, uses the notion of race and/or ethnic origin falsely to justify imposing this violence and control. The group imposing control considers that it has moral, ideological and cultural superiority. In the end, such control transforms the cultural and social practices in the colonised territory.

One consequence of colonisation is colonialism, a system of thought that legitimises colonial domination. Today, in what is presumed to be a postcolonial era, colonial thinking endures, shaping political, economic, and cultural systems. The legacy of colonial dynamics persists in contemporary geopolitics, perpetuating structures of power and inequality. These processes of imposition, control, and resource exploitation disrupt the cultural, economic, and political dynamics of invaded and colonised groups. It perpetuates exploitation and domination

through practices and discourses aimed at delegitimising the knowledge of some ethnic and cultural groups and reinforcing racial hierarchies. Quebec's Association of International Cooperation organisations (AQOCI) developed a common lexicon (Lexique de la solidarité internationale de l'AQOCI) and it defines colonialism as a system which justifies

"the exploitation and domination of colonised peoples on the basis of supposed moral, cultural, racial and economic superiority. Unlike the practice of colonisation, which is almost a thing of the past, colonialism is still relevant today, particularly when imposing a restrictive external agenda aimed at destroying cultural values or social structures, and reproducing "racial" hierarchies through practices and discourses, or to delegitimise the knowledge of a community." (AQOCI, 2021, p. 15)

The practices endorsed by these hierarchies establish enduring structures and systems of power, order, and ideology, which normalise and seemingly justify inequality, exploitation, and the atrocities of imperial expansion and the colonial mindset. These power structures persist long after the territorial occupation ends. Even in 2024, many countries, which were previously colonies and are now independent republics, continue to grapple with the enduring consequences of the dependencies and exploitations established during their colonial past. This document views colonisation not as a temporal concept, but as an enduring political and cultural framework that organises social and economic life.



2. Race and colonial thinking

The discussion on colonisation cannot progress without addressing the social construct of race. Race, defined by physical traits to assign social value, becomes a tool for asserting power or facing marginalisation under colonialism. During the modern period (1400-1800), imperialist expansion and colonisation shaped perceptions of the colonised world. This led to the emergence of "*white normativity*," where European culture was regarded as the standard for humanity, asserting its moral, aesthetic, cultural, and intellectual superiority.

This normative principle distorted facts about colonised peoples, justifying imperialism by dehumanising local peoples as '*savage*' or '*primitive*'. Such notions justified horrors, exploitation, and slavery during the colonial era, persisting even after its end and becoming integrated into Western liberal democracies' public, political, cultural, and economic life. Many of these democracies continue to claim to be "*colour-blind*", believing that their society has moved beyond racism and that the colour of someone's skin does not impact their life experience. However, the "colour-blind" approach, which denies discussions on racism and the lived experiences of people of colour, allows people and societies to ignore manifestations of discrimination and hinders their ability to address race-based inequality.

In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Paulo Freire explains that the oppressed internalise the image of the oppressor and adopt their guidelines, often before realising their oppressed status or striving for liberation. This identification with the oppressor intensifies when individuals or societies are deprived of language, religion, political expression, economic autonomy, and cultural practices. Consequently, dehumanisation ensues as a result of an unjust order that fosters violence in the oppressors, thereby dehumanising the oppressed. For the oppressors, "*human beings*" only encompass themselves, while others are reduced to mere "*things*." Oppressed people integrate the identity of oppression. Sáenz (2024) refers to this as "*white normativity*", Freire describes it as the oppressor being the model of humanity, and Pérez Criado (2019) labels it as "*white man as default human*."

Building on Medina's (2013) debate about the hidden mechanisms of racism, philosopher Laurencia Sáenz (2024) emphasises the importance of unmasking such mechanisms arguing that when the impact of race on knowledge creation and relations is denied or obscured, racism is allowed to persist, making it difficult to challenge something that remains concealed (Saenz, 2024). The fact that racial disparities remain hidden or normalised is a significant concern.

3. The Working Class and the Issue of Race

Carneiro (2020) contends that power shapes subjectivity and race intersects with class, highlighting the unequal distribution of power among racial groups. The working class is impacted by various intersecting identities affecting workers' rights and living conditions differently, including race, gender identity, origin, sexual orientation, age, and religion. Many Black workers and people of colour globally lack sufficient job tenure for retirement benefits, leading to disparities compared to the white middle class. The working class includes people of all races, emphasising that the decolonial pursuit is not an ethnic-group conflict within the working class. Despite experiencing oppression, white individuals may still benefit from racial privilege and perpetuate racist behaviours. Salter and Adams (2019) and Mills (2007) discuss white individuals' capacity to comprehend racist structures and their complicity in oppression. Salter and Adams (2019) highlight that privileged groups tend to perceive less racism in society. Failure to acknowledge complicity in oppression, regardless of class, hinders social justice efforts.

Medina (2013) explores the concept of colour-blindness as insensitivity to racial matters, inhibiting empathy and recognition of the social significance of race. Saenz (2024) notes that white people may dismiss racially oppressed people's grievances, attributing them to oversensitivity or manipulation. To address this limitation and "*closed-mindedness*", Medina (2013) recommends cultivating epistemic virtues such as epistemic humility, curiosity/diligence, and open-

mindedness. White working-class individuals seeking to enhance their understanding of racist structures can benefit from "*epistemic friction in interactions with significantly different epistemic others*" achieved through acknowledgment and engagement with the experiences of non-white individuals. Instead of believing that "*colour-blindness*" is the solution to racism, it is important to explore and address how race continues to shape the lives of those who experience racial discrimination. Refusing to acknowledge colour in a racist society denies the impact of racist prejudices on people's interactions.

4. Manifestations of Colonial Thought in Education

The education system, intentionally or unintentionally, reinforces colonial norms and values of colonial systems and has contributed to reproducing their dynamics of inequality. Colonial thinking pervades education, from curriculum design to teacher training, promoting white or dominant culture norms. Education can be the tool that prevents the oppressed from thinking and wishing the "*new man or woman themselves become oppressors*" (Freire, 1970, p. 47).

Choi (1993) astutely observes how postcolonial educational policies often replicate the structures of colonial and imperial systems, originally designed to enforce obedience to colonial rulers. Authors such as Paraskeva Joao (2016) and Choi (1993) concur that even in a post-colonial era, education systems may marginalise non-Western perspectives and impose singular views, teaching methods, and decision-makers, perpetuating the "*white normativity*". Clavé-Mercier and Wuth (2024) critique universities as epistemic institutions for historically devaluing the cultures and knowledge of colonised and Indigenous Peoples. Carneiro (2020) echoes this sentiment, particularly regarding Black people and the African Diaspora, noting that literature and knowledge pertinent to these communities were not disseminated by universities but were instead produced and accessed through activism.

Sheryl MacMath and Wenona Hall (2018)

emphasise the enduring wounds of colonialism, as seen in Canada's residential school system, which aimed to erase Indigenous spirituality and culture. They stress the importance of Indigenous education within Indigenous communities to acknowledge colonial history and prevent further harm. MacMath and Hall (2018) argue that education must aid in reconciliation, citing Alfred (2005) and advocating for restitution to truly heal. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) in Canada outlined parameters for reconciliation, urging the abandonment of superiority and assimilation in favour of a new relationship based on sharing, recognition, respect, and responsibility toward Indigenous peoples. Later definitions of reconciliation extend to healing connections with both people and the environment.

5. Decolonisation

Definition

Decolonisation encompasses a multifaceted process that extends far beyond a singular interpretation.

At its core, the decolonisation of education recognizes and rejects the political, social and economic domination over other nations or peoples. This domination is rooted in an imposition of supposed modernity by the oppressing nations or powers; and is enforced through violence, plunder and destruction.

Decolonisation is an ongoing struggle, in which oppressed individuals and nations have the capacity to dismantle "*systems, institutions, attitudes, beliefs, mentalities, norms, and processes*" originating from colonialism, which underpin contemporary systems of domination, including systemic racism and patriarchy (Clavé-Mercier and Wuth, 2024).

Decolonial thinking involves recognising structures and dynamics that perpetuate racial inequality and geopolitical power imbalances. Beyond awareness, decolonial thinking looks to deconstruct these dynamics and propose alternative



paradigms. Decolonisation in public policy requires integrating diverse knowledge and perspectives, including those from Black, Indigenous, peasant, urban popular, women, LGBTI+, and other communities. There is a global trend to expand the scope of cultural and ethnic representation in the data used as a base for planning and funding policies.

For Indigenous Peoples, decolonisation encompasses the reappropriation of their lands and the assertion of their right to self-determination. Similarly, many other oppressed and occupied nations seek restoration, truth, and reparations as integral components of the decolonisation process. Across the globe, numerous groups and peoples have endured oppression and colonisation, underscoring the need for them to establish appropriate decolonisation frameworks and resistance strategies to address inequality between those in power and colonised populations.

Decolonising knowledge

The concept of decolonising knowledge extends beyond political and economic control; it encompasses a hierarchical system of beliefs and understanding that marginalises the knowledge and practices of oppressed nations and peoples. This epistemic hierarchy perpetuates the notion that certain societies possess superior knowledge, justifying exploitation and oppression while hindering the recognition of oppressed peoples as rights-bearing subjects, and ignoring the cultural, religious, spiritual, or sexual practices and beliefs of the countries and peoples it oppresses. Salter and Adams (2019) describe this phenomenon as epistemic violence, wherein institutions impose dominant understandings and practices from powerful centres onto marginalised peripheries, thereby perpetuating systems of exploitation and domination. They highlight how reporting on group differences often establishes white norms as the standard, marginalising those perceived as racial Others.

Silvia Cusicanqui (2018) emphasises the need for universities and research institutions to engage with marginalised

epistemic perspectives, which requires restructuring administrative processes, curriculum design, and education and research funding. Furthermore, Cusicanqui discusses the decolonisation of work dynamics and knowledge production, addressing how research funding is a crucial aspect of academic inquiry. She argues that transforming the relationship between markets, universities, and knowledge production can foster a more inclusive economy and cultivate a collective identity among knowledge producers. The Global South promotes an "*ecology of knowledge*" as a restorative concept and practice, emphasising the interconnectedness between knowledge and its social context, as described by Atsushi Akera (2007). Tlostanova and Mignolo (2009) have highlighted that decolonisation introduces a body of knowledge that promotes epistemic justice by embracing the diversity of knowledge, including traditional and ancestral wisdom.

The decolonisation of education

Although educational systems can perpetuate colonial thought, they also hold the potential to dismantle oppressive structures and behaviours, paving the way for liberation. To achieve decolonisation, education policies must avoid reproducing a single culture as the standard for all, embrace diversity, involve various stakeholders, and incorporate culturally relevant methodologies, content and evaluation systems. Choi (2006) and Maldonado-Torres (2011) highlight the lasting influence of colonial power dynamics on education systems and highlights the anxiety and fear generated by discussions surrounding colonialism, decolonisation, and related concepts, noting that reactions to these discussions often seek to delegitimise the role of the colonised as critical voices.

Decolonial policies advocate for research and universities to advance epistemological justice, promoting diverse research topics and methodologies. Decolonising education requires a relevant curriculum which empowers students and teachers to transform their contexts. This demands adequate teacher training and inclusive



policies to support marginalised groups, including decent working conditions for Black, Indigenous and ethnic minorities workers. Authors like BlackDeer (2023), Tamburro (2013), and Hampton and DeMartini (2017) focus on decolonising academic institutions and professional training. In their view, adequate professional development to that end requires critical literacy skills, particularly in teacher education, to equip educators with the knowledge and pedagogical tools for the dismantling of oppression.

Decolonisation, as Freire asserts, is not about seeking revenge but restoring humanity for both the oppressed and the oppressors. The oppressed hold the key to creating a new, liberated society, as they uniquely understand the oppressive nature of the status quo and the need for liberation (Freire, 1970).

Decolonising education requires attention across various critical domains, including curriculum development, teacher training, research agendas, mother tongue education, and education policy design.

Problematising the curriculum: content, mediation and representation

Problematising the curriculum involves disputing its content, pedagogy, and representation for several crucial reasons. One significant step in decolonising education is to reconsider the sources and methodologies chosen for the curriculum, opting instead for those that are most relevant to diverse societies.

The narratives and content within curricula may prioritise the representation of certain social groups, consequently "*othering*" social groups not represented. Meanwhile, Hampton and DeMartini (2017) underscore the significance of storytelling for meaning-making and understanding people, societies, and the world. A narrow, globalised curriculum lacks the depth needed to address crucial subjects. Boisselle (2016) shares similar sentiments regarding educational content with local and territorial relevance. The pressure faced by public administration and education systems in the Global

South to conform to globalisation-friendly standards often results in the prioritisation of Western knowledge as superior. Boisselle (2016) advocates for localisation as a postcolonial remedy, enabling the inclusion of Indigenous science and innovation agendas in curricula.

The issue of representation in the curricula is another crucial matter. As emphasised by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in her speech on "*The Danger of a Single Story*", the power of a narrative extends beyond storytelling—it shapes individuals' definitive identities. Adichie urges for a nuanced portrayal rather than a singular perspective. She states that students require tools for crafting their own narratives, without romanticising or denying race and historical realities like slavery and legal segregation. Addressing hegemonic narratives in identity construction is crucial. The University of Cape Town established the Curriculum Change Working Group (CCWG) to tackle this issue, developing a Curriculum Change Framework in 2017. Informed by scholars like Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) and Lwazi Lushaba (2017), the framework examines the construction of the global political terrain, highlighting its asymmetrical power dynamics. This analysis underscores the need for a decolonised curriculum to empower marginalised communities in reclaiming their narratives and identities.

Teacher training and pedagogy

State institutions, including education, play a role in disseminating and perpetuating dominant ideologies that normalise and reproduce racial hierarchy. Therefore, teacher training should equip educators with the tools to help students comprehend their lives within their specific contexts, especially in regions where people are fighting for land rights. Standardising curricula often does not align with efforts to decolonise education. Charles (2019) examines the perspectives of researchers such as Lowenstein (2009), Milner (2011), and Shank (2016), who highlight the risks of teaching with underdeveloped or misguided information and concepts about race.



To mitigate this risk, teachers, regardless of their ethnicity, need training in issues related to race. Ladson-Billings (2009), as quoted by Charles, emphasises the importance of a culturally responsive pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

The approach advocated by MacMath and Hall (2018) aligns closely with the principles proposed by Freire in 1970, emphasising working with and within communities rather than simply teaching about them. In "*The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*," Freire (1970) articulated that such pedagogy "*must be forged with, not for, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity. This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation. And in the struggle this pedagogy will be made and remade*" (p. 48).

The importance of mother tongue instruction in the education system

The early learning experience heavily relies on developing symbolic and oral language, forming the foundation for interaction with the world. Methods for acquiring a second language in educational institutions with a different language than one's mother tongue exist, but learning in the mother tongue fosters abstract thinking and enables the construction of solutions and new ideas from familiar concepts, crucial for knowledge acquisition.

Yet, both traditional and remote learning have largely neglected teaching in mother tongues, with UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring report noting that "*40% of the world's population lacks education in a language they speak or understand*" (UNESCO, 2022). This neglect erases cultural and intellectual heritage, depriving both students and teachers of linguistic diversity in materials and training tools. This deficit exacerbates learning loss, dropout rates, and exclusion, particularly for Indigenous, Black, or

migrant children. Decolonising education involves advocating for multilingualism at all levels and modalities, including teacher training, teacher recruitment, and pedagogical knowledge production.

Epistemic Disobedience: the decolonisation of higher education and research

The literature underscores a consensus that universities and the research institutions were established in alignment with white normativity, failing to accommodate the needs of Black, Indigenous, and non-official language-speaking populations. In response to this exclusion, universities began creating research areas in Ethnic Studies and Women Studies in the early 1960s, driven by internal demands within academia. This move forced universities to confront the necessity of epistemic decolonisation and the creation of new categories for redefining humanity (Maldonado-Torres, 2011). However, grappling with issues of identity has not been—and continues not to be—easy for universities. In "*Black Academic Voices: The South African Experience*" (2019), Grace Khunou, Edith Phaswana, Katijah Khoza-Shangase, and Hugo Canham detail their personal experiences as Black academics in South African universities, revealing how academia remains a white-normative institution, with research culture and university structures not designed for non-white individuals.

To address the issue of race and its impact on knowledge production, authors such as Mills (2007), Bailey (2007), and Sáenz (2024) advocate for a cognitive reform towards decolonial thinking. They argue that a race-sensitive approach in cognitive science should replace race-ignorant perspectives with race-cognisant knowledge. Khunou, Phaswana, Khoza-Shangase, and Canham (2019) assert that Black individuals and people of colour must actively participate in academia and research, engaging in "*epistemic disobedience*" to resist the institutional marginalisation perpetuated by white academia. In this context, decolonial education equips students with the tools to understand their history, as well as the histories of their peers and educators.



It instils in them the notion that they have the power to enact change in their realities, empowering them to dismantle structures of discrimination in their schools, communities, countries, and even geopolitics.





Perspectives from Education Unions

The next pages present a brief review of the experiences of the unions affiliated with EI across regions, followed by an analysis of the main decolonial efforts of the unions and their influence on educational policy and their own members to promote decolonial education. The participants of this study showcase a variety of practices and approaches to the decolonisation of education. From the unions' perspectives, decolonisation extends beyond the realm of education and encompasses broader societal and governmental structures. Unions conceptualise decolonisation as achieving a workforce with decolonial thinking, a pedagogy promoting emancipatory thinking, and education policies combating racism and colonial practices. Participating unions advocate for a reconfiguration of the State and public policy to acknowledge ethnic diversity within each country, ensuring mechanisms for participation, representation, and the design of culturally relevant public policies.

When discussing their decolonisation agenda, participants highlight actions related to broader anti-racist policies, as well as specific initiatives for teacher training to implement culturally relevant pedagogies. Unions draw parallels between the exploitation of working-class individuals and the principles of colonial thought, which dehumanise certain groups and deny them their rights. This correlation underscores why unions view the theoretical framework of class relations as pertinent for conducting their analysis and reflections on decolonisation. Moreover, some unions incorporate a gendered lens to further elucidate the exploitation of one social class over another, which is deeply rooted in colonial heritage.

1. The political context in which unions advocate to decolonise

Most unions view decolonisation as a necessary step towards achieving quality and relevant public education, guaranteeing students and teachers agency in transforming their own realities through knowledge, reflection and solidarity. Unions are engaging in their struggle to decolonise education under neoliberal and conservative governments which are defunding public education and worsening working and living conditions for the working class. Another common ground described by unions is the racist root of political and economic structures in their countries, which demands strategies to highlight and overthrow racism and exclusion based on race.

Despite geographical, historical, and cultural differences, participating unions experienced very similar political contexts marked by neoliberal policies, and governments who fail to engage in social dialogue. More information on the specific union contexts can be found in the Appendix.

The following points synthesize the current context experienced by participants:

- Neoliberal models erasing State responsibility and defunding public policy, impacting cultural approaches and relevant teacher training;
- Invisible and normalised inequality based on race and ethnicity, with racist structures underlying country policies;
- Governments failing to engage in social dialogue with unions;
- Worsening conditions for the working class, disproportionately affecting workers of colour and ethnic minorities;

- Curriculum used as a tool by certain religious groups to impose a single religion;
- Cuts in public funding primarily impacting diversity, human rights, and multilingualism policies;
- Privatisation and commercialisation of education and teacher training delaying relevant training curricula;
- Historical government interventions combined with imperial legacies and new environmental colonialism driven by corporations seeking to exploit natural resources;
- Culture wars that polarise society and enable the utilization of race and hate speech as electoral tools.

At this juncture, it is crucial to address the utilisation of race and narratives promoting racial superiority as an electoral tactic, as highlighted by at least 3 unions. These narratives significantly impact the working class, necessitating concerted training efforts by unions to discourage adherence to hate speech among grassroots members. In addition, a critical approach to disinformation is essential. Teachers and students are not immune to the allure of fake news. Recognizing this vulnerability, teachers and students possess a strategic tool: the spaces for training and reflection within their classrooms and unions. These spaces can be pivotal in shaping pedagogical decision-making, allowing educators and students to discern between genuine information and manipulative disinformation. By fostering critical thinking and encouraging open dialogue, teacher unions can empower their members to challenge harmful narratives and promote a more informed, equitable educational environment.

2. *What does decolonisation mean to unions?*

Unions describe colonial thinking and colonial power not only as a model of control and resource exploitation based on racism but also as the imposition of standardised models of practice inside the classroom. The unions who participated in this research prioritise achieving a workforce with a

decolonial approach, fostering a pedagogy that promotes emancipatory thought, and advocating for an education policy that actively opposes and deconstructs racism and colonial practices. This commitment to decolonisation also entails recognising that unions must address identity and racial issues as integral parts of the workers' agenda, engaging in critical discourse against new forms of environmental colonialism, and cultivating new collaborative relationships between unions. They consider that incorporating language and demands that reflect ethnic, geographical, and racial identities in class disputes is crucial for unions, benefiting both teachers and students.

Regarding the explicit use of the term "*decolonisation*," out of the 11 participating unions, only one confirms its adoption. Instead, unions soften and employ terms such as "*inclusion, participation, and representation*" in education curricula or the education workforce, alongside concepts like anti-racism, critical thinking, multilingualism, and pluriculturalism. Unions hold diverse interpretations of decolonisation, with some emphasising power relations. Still, unions recognise the role of education policy in perpetuating colonial-era inequalities, emphasising its potential to dismantle racial and economic disparities.

Therefore, participating unions integrate reflection with participatory action to decolonise education, operating at various levels from classroom mediation to policy advocacy, to union autonomy and its independence from political parties.

The following definitions provided by union participants offer valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of decolonising education.

Eğitim-Sen, Türkiye: Decolonising education means a multilingual and a secular education. The imposition of a single language and of a single religion limits the ability to respect students' and teachers' backgrounds.

CTERA, Argentina: Decolonising education means recognising and exercising the power of teachers in transforming society. Decolonial thinking in Latin America cannot split from a history of extractivism that has



left entire communities and even countries excluded from all benefits.

PPTA, Aotearoa New Zealand:

Decolonising education means relevant curricula and emancipatory pedagogy. Schools which do not implement a more culturally relevant pedagogy usually drive Indigenous children to fail. But in fact, it is the education system, and this discriminatory design is the one failing, not the children.

NEA, United States of America:

Decolonising education means combating the privatisation of education. Some political factions are fuelling a fabricated culture war, weaponising minority rights to sow division. Those pushing this agenda within education policy are primarily focused on privatising education for profit.

FENECO, Democratic Republic of the

Congo: Decolonising education means ensuring union autonomy. Currently, Congo has over 100 education unions, many controlled by political factions seeking to benefit from the absence of pedagogical initiatives from unions. True decolonisation necessitates independent unions empowered to shape education policy.

PROIFES, Brazil: Decolonising education means participation and representation of diverse ethnic groups in the production of knowledge, research, and teaching. We need a discussion of ethnic and racial representation in curricula at all levels, as well as in the teaching workforce. Black populations also have to get more involved in the union struggle and the wage struggle.

NASUWT, United Kingdom: Decolonising education means an anti-racist union and the inclusion of identity as a matter of the working class. When we talk of the working class, we should not forget the colours and ethnicities of the working class. There is an intensification in the political narrative against the working class, as well as the rhetoric against asylum seekers, including LGBTQ+ people. This rhetoric creates cracks and gaps in the social fabric and favours polarisation. This means we must work more in training to help our members deconstruct such beliefs and prejudices.

NZEI, Aotearoa New Zealand: Unions advocating for decolonial education need a strong public education policy supported by public funds and good working conditions

for teachers. At the same time, unions need more inclusive decision-making processes, moving beyond traditional voting mechanisms. Proportional representation and alternative approaches to voting aim to ensure meaningful participation, particularly for minority groups like Māori. By valuing diverse perspectives and challenging colonial norms, the union strives to create a more equitable educational landscape, where all learners, including Māori, feel seen and heard.

CNTE, Brazil: Decolonising education entails providing critical training within unions. The process of resistance takes various forms, particularly in confronting modern forms of colonisation, such as the exploitation of nature by multinational companies. Without a decolonial education, individuals risk internalising narratives imposed upon them by others, including the normalisation of exploitation and slavery in their lives.

SNE/FDT, Morocco: Decolonising education in Morocco involves very clear actions. On one hand, we must ensure inclusion policies for girls from rural areas, who are mostly Amazigh. On the other, we need to raise awareness so that the country's elites are educated in Arabic and Amazigh, ensuring they remain connected to their national identity and speak the language of Moroccan people.

SNTE, México: Decolonising education is part of the defence of public, quality and culturally relevant education. It is a struggle that is pedagogical, is strong and is durable. One of our main goals is to ensure that there are Indigenous teachers who speak Indigenous languages hired in schools within Indigenous communities.

Overall, these perspectives exemplify unions' active engagement with the decolonisation discourse and their role as advocates for education as a tool for emancipation and social transformation. Their commitment to pedagogical strength and durability underscores their dedication to promoting inclusive and culturally relevant education systems.

3. How are unions advocating for decolonisation?

When initially questioned about their efforts in decolonising education, unions depict decolonisation as a pivotal step towards the quality and relevance of public education they strive for. Ensuring this quality education is a responsibility of the State, and curricula must empower teachers and students to perceive themselves as agents capable of transforming their reality. Participating unions integrate reflections on decolonisation into their broader scope of work, recognising that endeavours ranging from improving working conditions to enhancing teaching conditions can contribute to decolonial and emancipatory thinking, provided there is ongoing training and professional development for teachers. Based on the responses provided, Table 1 synthesizes the efforts made by unions to decolonise education.

Other efforts reported by unions are participating in national conferences or commissions on multilingualism, anti-racism, and Indigenous education; sensitising and raising awareness among education authorities and advocating for policies of reparation, inclusion, and recognition of diversity. Additionally, unions guarantee inclusion policies for students from all ethnic groups and defend working conditions to prevent inequalities between teachers from different ethnic backgrounds, while implementing strategies at the local level.

4. Union achievements

The advances perceived by unions reflect their success in influencing public policy, institutions, and representation. These victories, highlighted in Table 2, include curricular transformations, language-inclusive policies, institutional support, inclusive hiring practices, and community representation. The organisations undertake various actions, including sensitisation campaigns to raise awareness among union members, students, families, and education authorities. They organise systematic training for members, incorporate these issues into their discussion agendas with authorities, and present

Table 1. Union Activities to Decolonise Education

Union activities	# of Unions
Working on larger issues of race-based structural discrimination in education and other public policies and public administration	9
Advocating for anti-racist, multicultural, and multilingual education with appropriate curricula, budget, and teacher training	9
Developing research and proposing pedagogical approaches from the union perspective	9
Providing members with information and training to link quality education with practices that prevent race-based discrimination	6
Addressing the needs of migrant students and their integration into education systems	6
Emphasising initial and in-service teacher training in decolonial thinking and anti-racist pedagogies	5
Promoting collective solidarity and partnerships instead of traditional north-south cooperation	5
Implementing a decolonial methodology in curricula and classroom pedagogy	5
Collaborating with families and communities to enhance education outcomes	4
Advocating for union autonomy and participation in policymaking to achieve a decolonial education policy	4
Supporting the use of participation quotas and other mechanisms to guarantee representation of marginalised groups in the education workforce	4

proposals and data to decision-makers. Unions have been able to influence public policy because they sustain systematic efforts, mobilise members around these matters, and present clear proposals for education policy improvement.

These achievements contribute to the broader goal of decolonising education by promoting diversity, inclusion, and recognition of cultural heritage. As one can identify, what is considered a victory or an achievement in terms of public policy furthers unions aims to improve teachers working conditions and improve pedagogical practice.

5. How does advocating for decolonisation strengthen education unions?

According to the participating unions, advocating for decolonisation strengthens their pedagogical approach by advocating for more relevant curricula. It also enhances their purpose and allows them to embody their principles by acknowledging and addressing their own racist and colonial practices as a political actor. Strategic alliances with social movements, Indigenous groups, and anti-racist organisations underscore unions commitment to social justice. Incorporating these issues into collective bargaining and social dialogue enhances the unions' relevance to the vast diversity of their membership, students, families, and local communities. Research confirms the positive impact of unions proposals for culturally responsive and decolonised curricula on student performance (PPTA, 2023). Collaboration to decolonise education between unions and universities further enrich training and curriculum development initiatives.

Table 2. Union victories # of unions (n.11)

Union victories	# of Unions
Development of new curricula, new books and education materials giving visibility to history and cultural diversity	8
Education policy mandating the hiring of teachers who speak Indigenous languages	5
Public institutions dedicating budget and staff to Indigenous education	3
Public policy recognising the right to education in mother language instruction	3
Education Authority with a department or program focused on ensuring the relevance of education for Indigenous and ethnic communities	3
Reforms to teacher recruitment processes to hire Indigenous and Black teachers	3
Indigenous Peoples can establish their own autonomous education authorities in their communities	2

Obstacles and setbacks

In addressing the structural challenges inherent in decolonising education, unions confront a multifaceted landscape marked by neoliberalism, racial inequality, limited government engagement, poor working conditions, curriculum disputes, budget cuts and privatisation pressures, cultural norms, and cultural divides. Facing persecution and harassment, unions often address racial issues separately from broader education and labour issues. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive strategies to confront societal attitudes, resist privatisation, and nurture inclusive educational environments. For unions, challenges manifest both externally and internally, requiring nuanced approaches to navigate setbacks and divisions among members.

The external challenges

The external challenges were described as the following according to participating unions:

- Discrimination and hate experienced by workers and students, despite the unions ongoing efforts to combat racism and promote decolonisation in society.
- When conservative governments come into power, they typically reduce funding for specific programs that benefit Indigenous people, Black individuals, and people of colour.
- The growing influence of religious elements in school curricula, along with the pressure exerted by religious groups on education authorities and the persecution of teachers by these groups.
- Racism and discrimination are present in processes for hiring teachers.

- An increasing number of teachers are graduating from private universities and/or online training programs, which typically do not provide training in decolonial thinking.
- Unions face criticism and attacks because political actors and mass media often overlook the pedagogic value behind the policies they defend.

The internal challenges

The internal challenges were described as the following according to participating unions:

- The difficulty in integrating anti-racism as part of the broader class struggle.
- Union members often struggle to recognise migrants and asylum seekers as part of the working class, leading them to inadvertently endorse hate speech propagated by partisan political sectors.
- The union structure perpetuates discrimination by lacking representation of marginalised groups at decision-making levels.

These obstacles are not unique to efforts to decolonise education but are recurrent in various areas of union struggles. They reflect broader power structures, economic dynamics, and disputes over societal models.



Key Takeaways

The pursuit of anti-racist and culturally inclusive education remains central to trade union practice, advocating for democratic education management, culturally relevant curricula, and equitable teacher training. Education unions interested in mobilising or enhancing their efforts to decolonise can consider these main lessons learned by unions who are actively engaging in initiatives and efforts to decolonise education.

Lessons about the close relationship between decolonising education and the right to public education

1. The fight for the decolonisation of education aligns with the longstanding efforts of education union to dismantle systemic barriers and ensure equal access to quality education for all, shedding light on power structures that perpetuate societal injustices.
2. Advocating for the decolonisation of education goes hand in hand with defending the right to public and free education, highlighting the union's dedication to safeguarding the interests of the working class and marginalised communities.
3. Unions recognise the role of education policy in perpetuating or dismantling racial and economic inequalities inherited from colonialism, emphasising its pivotal role in shaping societal dynamics.
4. Unions interpret decolonisation differently. Some emphasise the need to renew the curricula and teacher training to enable a change in power relations, while others focus on actions aligned with decolonising education goals, without

explicitly labelling them as such.

Lessons regarding race and working class

5. It is essential for unions to prioritise issues of race and identity in their bargaining agendas and training programs.
6. Anti-racism requires discussions on ethnic and racial representation in curricula in all levels, as well as participation and representation in the education workforce.
7. Unions are against the normalisation of racial disparities and can help societies recognise how race-based inequalities operate.
8. The discussion on decolonisation cannot progress without addressing the social construct of race. Fighting against racism is central to initiatives and actions undertaken by education unions as part of decolonising education.
9. Inequalities based on race or ethnicity are prominent concerns among unions, coming hand in hand with other identity elements such as gender, age, or religious belief in discussions on decolonising education.

Lessons in training, mobilising and representation

10. Most unions have formulated public education policies aligned with decolonising education, with varying degrees of progress evident in initiatives such as multilingual education, culturally

relevant curricula, diverse teacher training, and anti-racism clauses in collective bargaining agreements.

11. Union members will experience unequal impacts of discrimination. Addressing these inequalities poses challenges, particularly in prioritising decolonisation within union agendas amidst broader socio-economic issues.
12. The collective bargaining of unions should include demands for the participation of Indigenous workers and workers of colour, as well as safeguarding funding for inclusion and multilingualism policies.
13. Educating members about solidarity across racial groups in the struggle for education rights is essential for unions, ensuring unity in addressing class disputes without undermining the interests of any racial group.
14. An appropriate union policy on decolonisation should send a strong message that when teachers and students fight for the right to curricula relevant to their culture, they should know they are not alone, but that teacher unions stand with them.

Lessons for policy design

15. Efforts are focused on understanding the hidden curriculum and integrating content on decoloniality across various subjects, not solely confined to history classes.
16. Education unions advocate for an education policy that fosters critical thinking, self-awareness, and empowerment among students. Such a policy acknowledges the capacity of individuals to transform their reality and promotes diversity.
17. The struggle for humanisation in education encompasses combating colonial thinking ingrained within the system. This includes curriculum design, teacher training, budget allocation, and organisational structures, all of which may perpetuate or challenge colonial norms.

18. To progress towards decolonisation, education policy must be developed with the participation of diverse actors and incorporate methodologies, content, and evaluation systems relevant to multiple cultures, distancing itself from standardisation.

Lessons in education administration

19. Decolonising education means participation and representation of marginalised groups in the production of knowledge, research, and teaching.
20. Colonial thinking operates in the education system. From handling the decision-making level accordingly to one culture's management views, to including only some specific content in the curriculum, to training teachers and enabling only specific pedagogic mediation strategies, this responds to the colonial thinking that follows white or dominant culture normativity.
21. There are positive experiences of hiring processes that safeguard or guarantee quotas for different ethnic groups.
22. There are also positive experiences regarding the participation of different populations in educational management and administration decisions.
23. Alongside affirmative policies for participation in teaching positions and administrative roles, all practices of structural racism must be dismantled to make the educational space a safe and supportive environment for all workers.



Conclusion

Decolonial thinking has a profound impact on education, influencing not just what is taught and how it is taught, but also the broader social norms and values. When teacher unions actively engage in initiatives to decolonise education, they play a crucial role in amplifying the voices and perspectives of educators. This helps create inclusive and fair learning environments that honour the diverse experiences and cultures of all students and education workers and education communities.

The experiences from participants in this study demonstrate a strategic approach being taken by unions which aims to address pedagogical, educational, and teacher training issues, as well as safeguard the working conditions of Black, Indigenous, and ethnic minority workers, promoting environments free of racism and discrimination.

Unions do not separate the work to decolonise education from their actions to defend accessible, inclusive, quality, and relevant public education, nor do they separate it from efforts to defend labour rights and decent working conditions for teachers and education support personnel. They recognise the enduring impact of colonial legacies on teachers and students, prioritising decolonisation as a means to empower them in reshaping educational realities. Central to their approach is ensuring that collective bargaining incorporates pedagogy for emancipation, antiracism, Indigenous education, and multilingualism. Moreover, unions advocate for enhancing teacher training and career paths, prioritising the participation of diverse teachers and culturally relevant curriculum. Thus, unions approach these issues not only as educational imperatives but also as crucial elements in improving working conditions.

Finally, to take a global approach in the next steps, unions are seeking cross-regional collaboration and engagement with international organisations to advance decolonisation efforts and foster a regular exchange platform or working group to facilitate sharing views and experiences. Teachers are the best suited actors to recommend pedagogical strategies that reduce and remove stigma, inequality, and epistemic injustice. Unions are the most capable and legitimate actors to propose the transformation of educational policies because their bases build knowledge every day within the classroom. Education International has a unique opportunity to continue working with its affiliated organisations in building a strong voice from the education sector, with a working-class perspective, to lead actions, negotiations, and campaigns for the decolonisation of public education.

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Appendix

Contextual information on participating unions

Asia Pacific

NZEI, Aotearoa New Zealand: New Zealand's educational landscape has witnessed significant reforms aimed at decentralisation. Historical legacies of colonial suppression of Māori language and culture continue to impact educational outcomes. NZEI conceptualizes decolonisation as dismantling colonial structures of thinking and practice within education. This involves empowering Indigenous communities, promoting Māori knowledge and values, and fostering inclusive learning environments. NZEI's efforts focus on promoting mixed-ability teaching, addressing education practices that harm the right to education such as streaming and ability grouping. They conduct surveys to assess the prevalence and impact of such practices, advocating for inclusive approaches. NZEI's achievements include supporting Māori leadership within the union, advocating for pay equity, and promoting culturally responsive teaching practices. Challenges include ingrained biases and resistance to change. To address colonisation's implications, NZEI plans to focus on precise terminology, legislative frameworks, and inclusive decision-making processes. One of the central tasks is to combat budget cuts because these cuts always harm ethnically minority students in a differentiated manner. The union faces obstacles in addressing systemic issues and ensuring meaningful Māori participation. However, there is a growing recognition of the need for inclusivity and diversity within the education community.

PPTA, Aotearoa New Zealand: New Zealand boasts a diverse population with

ethnic roots from Māori, European, Pacific, and Asian backgrounds. The country is experiencing increasing ethnic diversity, particularly with growing Māori, Asian, and Pacific communities. Historically, marginalised groups, including Māori and Pacific peoples, have faced disproportionate challenges in education, exacerbated by the harmful practice of classroom streaming. The education system in New Zealand, while not deliberately racist, perpetuates inequalities, especially for Māori and Pasifika students. Classroom streaming, based on perceived abilities, leads to unequal access to content and opportunities for advancement. Māori and Pacific students often encounter cultural dissonance between their home and school environments, further widening the achievement gap. Efforts to decolonise education focus on integrating Māori perspectives and values into pedagogical practices. The use of the Māori language and concepts like Whakapapa (genealogy) help foster cultural relevance and trust within the classroom. PPTA plays a pivotal role in advocating for policy changes and providing training to educators towards a culturally responsive education. Initiatives to end classroom streaming have shown promising results, with improved academic achievement and increased student confidence and aspiration, particularly among Māori and Pasifika students.

Europe

NASUWT, The United Kingdom: The United Kingdom (UK) has a history marked by colonialism, imperialism, and racism, which significantly influences and shapes relations, leading to ongoing racial discrimination. Teachers across the UK encounter various forms of discrimination, compounded by existing inequalities

based on gender and sexual orientation. The working class in the UK has faced deteriorating living conditions due to reforms that have reduced the role of the State, disproportionately affecting people of colour and Black communities. Additionally, race has been exploited as an electoral tool, further exacerbating social divisions. The union advocates for an institutional approach to anti-racist education, emphasising the importance of union leadership championing this strategy. Efforts are focused on understanding the hidden curriculum and integrating content on decoloniality across various subjects, not solely confined to history classes. A resolution passed by the National Conference underscores the commitment to decolonise the curriculum through collaboration, resource publication, advocacy, and teacher training. The union addresses issues of gender and race alongside class demands, recognizing the interconnectedness of various forms of discrimination. These initiatives contribute to a supportive environment where teachers feel empowered to confront and address challenging topics. Efforts include collaborating with campaigners, publishing materials, lobbying for inclusive curricular entitlements, and engaging with teacher training providers. The union's commitment to teacher development during free time underscores the dedication of members and the importance of training content. Political rhetoric targeting the working class and asylum seekers, as well as budget cuts affecting teacher training programs, pose significant challenges. Some members internalize divisive narratives, aligning themselves with political groups promoting hate-based agendas. Resistance within the education community stems from entrenched beliefs and prejudices, highlighting the need for comprehensive training to address these issues effectively.

EGITIMSEN, Türkiye: Türkiye comprises 26 cultural groups, each with its own language, yet discussions on multiculturalism and multilingualism are suppressed. The official education language is Turkish, and restrictions prevent teaching in languages other than Turkish, hindering students' ability to learn in their mother tongue. EGITIMSEN faces opposition in its quest for multilingualism and quality education,

with government authorities rejecting union bylaws supporting mother tongue education. The union also contests the rise of religious elements in the national curriculum, stressing the importance of diverse perspectives in education. The union focuses on enhancing education quality by advocating for instruction in students' mother tongues, organizing conferences and campaigns, including events like the Day of Mother Tongue. The increase in religious elements poses challenges to cultural respect and coexistence, potentially reviving colonial practices in the education system. Despite setbacks, including member imprisonment and bans, EGITIMSEN Türkiye's advocacy for mother tongue education is a significant achievement amid political persecution. The union remains committed to engaging with authorities to integrate multilingualism as a basic step for decolonising education policy.

Latin America

CTERA, Argentina: Latin America has long been shaped by political and economic models imposed by external powers, notably the United States, leading to extractive practices and the marginalisation of Indigenous and vulnerable communities. In Argentina, the education system reflects colonial legacies, necessitating efforts to promote Latin American identity, sovereignty, and anti-imperialism. The Teachers' Confederation of the Argentine Republic (CTERA) prioritizes emancipation, sovereignty, and anti-imperialism over "*decolonisation*." Through collective bargaining and collaboration with Education International, CTERA emphasises teacher training rooted in Latin American perspectives and critical analyses of power relations, addressing Argentina's history of dictatorship and foreign intervention. Securing state funding for training programs has been a significant achievement for CTERA, reaching thousands of teachers annually and fostering critical perspectives on natural resources, territory, and sovereignty within education. CTERA aims to integrate Latin American perspectives into classroom practices, empowering educators to engage students critically with historical and geopolitical issues through courses like the history of dictatorship and memory or



the one on the Malvinas Islands. Despite participation in training, some teachers support conservative governments that oppose their interests, prompting research initiatives to assess the effectiveness of training in influencing pedagogical practices and political engagement. By embedding Latin American and emancipatory visions in education policy, unions advance a national educational project aimed at liberating communities from colonial legacies and external influences.

CNTE, Brazil: CNTE operates within the context of Brazil's rich ethnic and cultural diversity, encompassing populations such as Black, Indigenous, migrants, mixed-race individuals, and Quilombolas. These groups have historically faced discrimination, with Indigenous Peoples comprising over 360 ethnic groups, each with its language and socio-economic dynamics. Quilombolas are descendants of fugitive slaves seeking liberation, and Indigenous communities continue to fight for recognition of their lands amidst urbanization and land grabbing. CNTE prioritizes the concept of public education free from racism and prejudices over explicit decolonisation terminology. Its mission focuses on advocating for policies promoting diversity and inclusion within the educational system. The union emphasises representation at all levels, citing the slogan "*Nothing for us without us*" from the disability rights movement. CNTE's efforts include a specialized curriculum fostering decolonial and Latin American thinking, promoting local culture and anti-imperialist thought. It resists modern forms of colonisation, such as natural exploitation by multinational corporations, through union training initiatives. Collaboration with industrial sector unions aims to counter new forms of colonisation, offering training on "*horizontal productive relationships*." Indigenous communities assert their strength in rejecting standardized curricula proposals. Challenges persist in institutionalizing cultural plurality across all Brazilian states, as evidenced by curriculum reform debates that neglect Indigenous contexts in some states. CNTE will continue advocating for representation from decision-making to the classroom and emphasizing the perspective of the working class.

PROIFES, Brazil: The struggle to decolonise education intersects with a history of

slavery, racial inequality, and socio-economic disparities. PROIFES, a leading union for higher education professionals, advocates for a more inclusive and equitable education system despite challenges. Despite the abolition of slavery in 1888, Black Brazilians continue to face economic inequality and limited access to education and opportunities. Government policies aimed at racial miscegenation have failed to address structural racism, resulting in ongoing disparities in wealth, education, and representation. PROIFES aims to challenge the myth of racial harmony and address systemic racism in education by integrating ethnic and racial perspectives into curricula, promoting representation among educators, and empowering marginalised communities to produce and teach their own knowledge. However, the decolonisation discourse remains largely invisible within higher education, highlighting the need for greater advocacy and awareness.

The implementation of the "*Quotas Act*" in 2012 aimed to diversify university admissions and support underprivileged students, yet racial diversity in Brazilian universities remains limited. Racism persists in the hiring process for teachers, undermining efforts to promote inclusivity within academia. PROIFES faces internal and external resistance to addressing racial inequality, with tensions within the union movement over prioritizing anti-racist policies. The union calls for greater representation of Black women in leadership roles and advocates for curricular reforms acknowledging the contributions of Black individuals to knowledge production. By mobilising grassroots support and engaging in strategic advocacy, the union hopes to dismantle systemic racism and build a more equitable future for Brazil's education system.

Arab Country Cross Regional Structure

SNE/FDT, Morocco: The decolonisation process in Morocco post-independence in 1956 impacted education, leading to efforts for national unity through "*Moroccanization*" and "*Arabization*" of the education system. Official recognition of the

Amazigh language alongside Arabic in 2011 reflected a shift towards cultural inclusion. A unified curriculum mandates across public institutions, integrating the Amazigh language since 2013, though challenges persist in developing Arabic or Amazigh curricula for certain subjects. The private sector follows foreign curricula, potentially disconnecting from Moroccan identity. Public teacher training centres prepare all education trainees as Amazigh language teachers, promoting cultural relevance. While SNE/FDT reports no discrimination in accessing teacher training programs, inequalities persist in teacher hiring, with regional academies offering inferior contracts compared to the Ministry of Education. SNE/FDT's 2020 strike eliminated fixed-term contracts, improving conditions. Rural girls face barriers to secondary education, including transportation and safety concerns. SNE/FDT advocates for transportation services to ensure girls' inclusion. Governance by an Islamic government from 2011 to 2021 led to social regression and worsened education inequalities. SNE/FDT continues to fight against these setbacks, prioritizing policies for girls' education, focusing on inclusion, and advocating for culturally relevant education.

Africa

FENECO /UNTC), Democratic Republic of Congo: FENECO, the education union in the DRC, faces challenges in a landscape marked by limited public investment, a politicized union movement, and partisan influence in education policy. Despite attempts to update the curriculum since 2015, private schools often lead in implementing changes. FENECO views decolonial education as reflecting local interests and rejecting non-pedagogical agendas. They advocate for trade union autonomy to prioritize pedagogical decisions over political ones and empower teachers through study circles. While many education unions are politically controlled, FENECO stands out for its commitment to autonomy, resisting external influence. FENECO advocates for a democratic approach to education, pushing for a curriculum that

mirrors Congo's multicultural society and emphasizing the importance of union autonomy in safeguarding this vision. Decolonising education in Congo relies on union freedom and autonomy, ensuring educational decisions prioritize pedagogy over politics and incorporate vernacular languages to align with the country's diverse cultural identity. FENECO will continue promoting study circles in the public sector to empower teachers and advocate for meaningful educational reforms.

North America and the Caribbean

NEA, United States of America: The National Education Association (NEA) acknowledges the entrenched racial and socio-economic structures shaping US policies and institutions, particularly in public education. Recognizing the urgent need to dismantle embedded racism within education policy and curriculum, NEA advocates for a more equitable and inclusive learning environment. The US education system, rooted in white settler colonialism, perpetuates racial segregation through a Eurocentric curriculum. Disparities in teacher certification requirements and wages exacerbate educational inequalities. NEA's approach to decolonising education is multifaceted, advocating for public education reform while increasing diversity in the teaching workforce and curriculum. Member training programs combat racism, patriarchy, and white supremacy, with NEA allocating resources to advancing racial justice since 2016. Despite facing resistance from political groups promoting global education reform, NEA strives to promote inclusivity and erase discrimination in the education system. Through these efforts, NEA aims to create a more equitable and empowering learning environment for all students while engaging its members.

SNTE, Mexico: Mexico exhibits a diverse linguistic landscape, boasting 68 languages and 664 language variants. Despite constitutional guarantees, education in one's mother tongue remains largely unfulfilled. Racism persists, prompting SNTE to prioritize eradicating discriminatory practices. While a national Indigenous education system exists, challenges like



language barriers and unequal internet access hinder its effectiveness. SNTE, though not explicitly using the term "*decolonise*," focuses on defending the right to public education, especially in Indigenous languages. Efforts include advocating for Indigenous language proficiency among teachers in Indigenous territories, despite challenges like deploying untrained teachers and potential politicization risks. SNTE faces resistance from sectors overlooking pedagogical concerns, requiring careful policy navigation. Moving forward, SNTE will persist in combating racism and addressing Mexico's complex demographics, focusing on defending salaries, working conditions, and professional identity while promoting culturally relevant education, particularly in Indigenous mother tongue instruction.

CSQ, Quebec, Canada: CSQ aligns with AQOCI's description of decolonisation, emphasizing active resistance against colonial powers and a shift in power dynamics towards the independence of colonised peoples. The union advocates for terminology changes and collaborative efforts to promote decolonial practices in education. However, conservatism in the Canadian government influences funding agendas towards business-oriented approaches, posing challenges to decolonial initiatives. CSQ collaborates with FECODE in Colombia and FENECO in Congo on decolonial projects, such as the "*Schools Instruments for Peace*" project in Colombia and study circles in Congo. These projects involve significant participation from teachers and members, strengthening local unions and enhancing negotiating power with the government. Despite challenges, CSQ's decolonial policy strategy has gained traction among members, leading to increased awareness of its importance. However, alignment of funding agendas with government views poses ongoing challenges. CSQ intends to continue collaborating with partner organisations, focusing on capacity building, training, and grassroots engagement to broaden understanding and involvement in decolonisation efforts among teachers.





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Unions leading the way to decolonise education

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