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Decolonizing academic identities in postcolonial higher education: A collaborative framework for Africa and the Caribbean

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Abstract: This conceptual paper critically examines the persistent influence of colonial structures on higher education in the Caribbean and Africa, particularly in shaping academic identities that remain tethered to Eurocentric knowledge systems. The paper argues that while there have been efforts to decolonize curricula, these attempts are often limited by entrenched Western frameworks that sustain the marginalization of indigenous epistemologies. The paper proposes a collaborative framework that enables Caribbean and African academics to reconstruct their professional identities by actively integrating indigenous knowledge into academic curricula, research, and pedagogical practices. Drawing on some decolonial theorists such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, the framework underscores linguistic and cultural reclamation as essential processes in redefining academic roles. Cross-regional partnerships, professional development programs, and curriculum reforms are posited as essential mechanisms to foster epistemological diversity, offering academic pathways to authentic engagement with local cultural contexts. The study advocates for institutional restructuring that challenges colonial legacies, advances inclusive leadership, and supports decolonial practices as a means of transforming higher education. This study contributes to scholarship by providing an analytical framework for decolonizing academic identities, and fostering an inclusive and contextually relevant academic environment that addresses the intellectual needs of postcolonial societies.

Keywords: *Academic identity, Decolonization, Epistemological diversity, Higher education, Indigenous knowledge.*

1. Introduction

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European colonial powers exerted widespread dominance across Asia, the Caribbean, Australasia, Africa, North America, Oceania, and the Middle East [1]. This era was marked by intellectual domination, which transformed the mindset of the colonized to conform to imperial goals. This period imposed Western educational models that eroded indigenous languages and customs while promoting a hierarchical worldview. Consequently, Western knowledge was considered superior, whereas African indigenous knowledge was considered inferior and unsuitable for educational contexts [2]. Today, the higher education systems in both the Caribbean and Africa remain heavily influenced by colonial frameworks rooted in Eurocentric perspectives [3, 4]. This enduring legacy is evident in the ongoing struggle of these regions to liberate their cultures, politics, and economies from the pervasive dominance of Euro-American ideologies. The journey toward achieving true communal self-regulation and self-determination is still underway [2, 5]. As these regions work to reclaim their cultural narratives, re-establish indigenous knowledge, there is an increasing need to decolonize higher education to create a more inclusive environment. Although much has been discussed about decolonizing knowledge and curricula [1] there has been less focus on the decolonization of academic identities, and even less on a collaborative framework that shapes academics' professional identity. This conceptual paper explores how academics in postcolonial Caribbean and

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African universities through a collaborative framework can reconstruct their professional identities through decolonizing higher education. Decolonization is a multifaceted concept broadly defined as the effort to resist and transform the intertwined impacts of colonization and racialization [6]. Its goal is to address both the historical and ongoing effects of these systems while preserving the ways of knowing, being, and relating that colonization sought to erase [6]. This paper conceptualizes decolonization as a process of resisting and dismantling the legacies and power structures established by both internal and external colonialism [7]. The focus has shifted from simply understanding what it means to decolonize higher education to identifying specific areas that need decolonization, given the critical role of higher education in shaping disciplines and institutions [3]. In the 21st century, decolonizing higher education is a pressing topic, as dismantling entrenched Western-centric practices is essential for fostering an inclusive, equitable, and responsive education system. This transformation requires incorporating indigenous knowledge and promoting pluralistic voices within curricula and pedagogy [8]. Decolonization recognizes the importance of drawing from diverse educational perspectives and approaches to reflect the richness of varied cultures and experiences. Moving beyond a colonial framework to one that embraces epistemological diversity is vital. This paper examines how such a shift impacts the roles and professional identities of academics, positioning them as agents of inclusive and transformative education. Despite scholars' efforts to counteract colonial influence, a critical question remains: to what extent has the field of higher education undergone the process of 'decolonization,' and is such a transformation even feasible?" [9]. This question often assumes that the discourse on decolonization is relevant only to those who directly experienced colonial rule, as they are believed to have a deeper understanding of its consequences. However, this perspective is limiting. While individuals with direct experience of colonialism provide invaluable insights, the conversation must adopt a broader, inclusive approach. This approach should involve individuals who have not personally experienced colonialism but are committed to dismantling its enduring effects by revisiting and reclaiming cultural beliefs and values [10]. Colonialism significantly shaped the intellectual landscape of the Caribbean and Africa, including their languages, curricula, and education systems. Without an indigenous framework to transition to self-governance, these regions adopted Eurocentric approaches deemed superior. This dependency continues to marginalize indigenous knowledge, hindering the full development of cultural and intellectual identities. Sappleton and Adams [3] argue that the root of this challenge lies in the education systems themselves and their educators, which perpetuate colonial notions such as structural domination, patriarchy, white supremacy, and Eurocentric hegemony. These ideologies are embedded in pedagogies, curricula, and traditions, creating education systems that alienate historically marginalized students from their lived realities. Consequently, these systems fail to foster an inclusive and safe learning environment for all. Despite ongoing discourse on decolonization, education systems in these regions continue to prioritize Western ideologies over indigenous knowledge and culture. This is evident in teaching methods, curriculum design, and resource availability. Many African scholars, having studied in the global North, rely on textbooks and theories disconnected from African realities. Additionally, school libraries are predominantly stocked with Western texts, offering limited resources that accurately reflect African history, customs, and traditions [10]. As a result, higher education systems have failed to create environments that support the intellectual and cultural needs of historically oppressed and marginalized students. For instance, Fomunyam and Teferra [11] highlights that South African higher education remains dominated by scholars trained during apartheid, who prioritize Eurocentric epistemologies as the gold standard. This is particularly problematic given that inclusivity is essential for accommodating the diverse needs of all learners [12]. The education systems in these regions have not met expectations, as smaller nations struggle to preserve their cultural identity and educational autonomy [8, 13, 14]. To address this, academics must redefine their identities and actively deconstruct Eurocentric influences within their institutions. This requires not only replacing library materials with indigenous texts but also integrating indigenous knowledge into classrooms, conferences, and professional development programs through collaborative efforts. Such changes are essential for fostering a truly inclusive and

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transformative educational environment. While there is growing discourse on decolonizing higher education, little attention has been given to how this process reshapes academics' professional identities, particularly in Caribbean and African contexts. This paper seeks to bridge this gap by proposing a collaborative framework for academics in postcolonial African and Caribbean universities for professional identity reconstruction in decolonization discourses.

1.1. Historical Context of (de) Colonial Knowledge Perspective of Africa and the Caribbean

Most research on the European "exploration" of Africa and the Caribbean, which began in the 14th century from the Madeira and Azores Islands to Cape Verde, Elmina in Ghana, and the Congo River before extending into the Caribbean, often portrays these regions as passive participants in European narratives of "discovery" [15-17]. This discourse suggests that African and Caribbean history began with European exploration. Such narratives persisted, in part, perhaps because these regions did not actively challenge them and were marginalized within Eurocentric histories. As a result, the history of these regions, along with the broader history of the Black race, has been consistently shaped and dominated by Eurocentric perspectives. The European conquest, which dismantled native political, educational, and economic systems, firmly entrenched colonial ideologies and created an educational framework that upheld Eurocentric values and norms [18, 19]. This system marginalized and devalued indigenous cultures and knowledge, promoting the belief in the superiority of Eurocentric perspectives. Over time, these perspectives acted as a deceptive mirror, leading colonized individuals to consciously or unconsciously accept distorted representations of reality as their own [20]. Consequently, the history of higher education in the Caribbean and Africa was shaped to serve colonial interests, marginalizing local cultures and suppressing indigenous knowledge. This paper argues that decolonizing higher education requires a critical examination of these historical legacies and a dedicated effort to restore cultural integrity and dignity. Decolonization initially emerged from a European perspective, with European intellectuals significantly shaping its development in the 1930s. Moritz Julius Bonn was the first to articulate the concept, defining decolonization as the recognition of European colonies' right to national independence [21, 22]. However, despite these principles, approximately 70% of the global population remained under European domination. Smaller colonies were often deemed incapable of self-governance, raising doubts about their sovereignty [23, 24]. This perspective reinforced a Eurocentric worldview that justified continued exploration, colonization, and occupation of these territories [21, 22]. Over time, non-European nations began opposing these Eurocentric views, crafting their own narratives and approaches to decolonization that addressed their unique colonial experiences [25]. This marked a reawakening of critical thinking and the assertion of alternative perspectives on independence and self-determination.

1.2. The Origin and Nature of Decolonization Process in Africa and the Caribbean

While the decolonization processes in the Caribbean and Africa share similarities, particularly in the rise of nationalism, the Caribbean's experience is marked by distinct characteristics. Both regions, colonized by Spain, Britain, France, and the Netherlands, comprise diverse islands and territories, each shaped by its unique historical context. The decolonization of Africa and the Caribbean was influenced by global political changes, anti-colonial movements, economic factors, and shifting geopolitical dynamics. In the Caribbean, the process began with the Haitian Revolution of 1791, which led to Haiti's independence and influenced neighboring nations like the Dominican Republic and Cuba. Decolonization efforts in the Caribbean continued into the mid-20th century, particularly between the 1960s and 1970s, as nationalist movements advanced decolonial theories [23]. These theories addressed the persistent impact of colonial structures, particularly on education systems. During the 1960s, colonial powers introduced curriculum reforms, while migration from the global South to the North and the segregation laws of the 1980s fueled debates on cultural diversity and inclusivity in colonial nations. These discussions emphasized decolonizing curricula and explored the potential impacts on various regions and indigenous populations [26]. After World War II, the United Nations and the United

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States applied significant pressure to promote human rights and self-determination. This global push empowered nationalist leaders in Africa such as Wallace-Johnson of Sierra Leone, Kwame Nkrumah of the Gold Coast, Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, and Dauti Yamba of the Central African Federation, and in the Caribbean, including Marcus Garvey, Norman Manley, Eric Williams, Frantz Fanon, Stuart Hall, Walter Rodney, and Louise Bennett [3, 27]. These leaders not only advocated for the political autonomy of African and Caribbean colonies but also emphasized the necessity of decolonizing higher education curricula, asserting that national independence is meaningless without educational independence [2]. Caribbean nationalist movements paved the way for the independence of nations such as Jamaica (1962), Trinidad & Tobago (1962), Barbados (1966), and Guyana. Similarly, African nations saw European colonial powers gradually withdraw due to economic challenges, public demand for decolonization, and geopolitical pressures. The British Prime Minister's 1960 "Winds of Change" speech [28] was a pivotal moment, initiating dialogue between colonial powers and African leaders about transitioning to self-governance. While some negotiations led to military conflicts, the impracticality of maintaining colonial rule and the global dynamics of the Cold War accelerated decolonization, resulting in numerous African nations gaining independence by the early 1960s. However, independence has not been without challenges. Many African and Caribbean nations continue to grapple with the lasting effects of colonialism, which have contributed to socioeconomic issues, political instability, cultural dislocation, and student protests [29]. This enduring struggle reflects these regions' determination to preserve their rich cultural heritages, rooted in indigenous and African influences. Contemporary discussions on decolonization have evolved, focusing on which aspects of society require decolonization and how this can be achieved. The emphasis has shifted toward diversifying strategies that address language, curriculum, and knowledge systems, as well as the need to discuss the role of academics in implementing these changes and how this impacts their professional identities. While the initial goal of decolonization was to dismantle colonial systems, today, it extends to liberating education from entrenched Western ideologies, philosophies, and theories that have marginalized the heritage and experiences of African and Caribbean peoples [4]. In contexts such as South Africa, decolonization efforts aim to "Africanize" universities, dismantle apartheid and colonial legacies, deconstruct Eurocentric epistemologies, and revive indigenous knowledge systems. These issues were central to the 2015 #FeesMustFall student protests in South Africa [29]. Furthermore, decolonization must now include rethinking and reconstructing academics' identities within this framework. This highlights a shift in academics' roles, emphasizing their contribution to the decolonization discourse in higher education by rejecting colonial knowledge systems and challenging Western Eurocentric perspectives.

2. Building a Conceptual Framework

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Decolonization challenges the epistemic, political, and cultural legacies of colonialism. In higher education, it calls for a critical reevaluation of the knowledge systems, pedagogies, and institutional structures historically shaped by Eurocentric ideologies [13]. Reshaping academic identities within this framework requires understanding how decolonization interacts with the formation of knowledge, power, and identity in postcolonial contexts. This paper draws on key theoretical perspectives on decolonization to explore and situate its conceptualization within the context of academic identity. We engage with Ngũgĩ [30] seminal work, Decolonizing the Mind, to examine the critical role of language in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Language was a primary tool of colonial domination, used not only to oppress colonized peoples but also to erase their indigenous cultures and knowledge systems [30]. Consequently, decolonization involves reclaiming indigenous languages as part of a broader effort to restore cultural identity and intellectual autonomy [30, 31]. Achieving this requires the university community, particularly academics, to develop and implement language policies promoting translanguaging [31]. This is especially significant for reshaping academic identities in higher education, where language can play a central role in identity construction. Academics in postcolonial

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contexts often work within institutions that prioritize Western languages, especially English for research publication and knowledge frameworks [32]. Reclaiming indigenous languages as legitimate mediums for instruction and scholarship is a powerful way for academics to reconstruct their indigenous language identities. It allows academics to engage deeply with their local cultures and intellectual traditions, fostering greater authenticity and autonomy in their scholarly pursuits. Smith [33] Decolonizing Methodologies highlights the critical role of indigenous knowledge systems in the decolonial project. Smith argues that the colonization of knowledge has marginalized indigenous ways of knowing, often dismissing them as inferior or unscientific [33]. She calls for the recognition and validation of indigenous knowledge as a core element of decolonization. This perspective is essential for understanding how decolonization can transform academic identity. In higher education, academic identities are often framed around Western epistemologies that prioritize certain forms of knowledge while excluding others. Integrating indigenous knowledge into curricula and research practices enables academics to develop identities grounded in local contexts while simultaneously challenging the dominance of Western academic norms. This approach fosters a more pluralistic and inclusive understanding of academic roles in a postcolonial world. Mbembe [34] On the Postcolony provides another lens to analyze the impact of colonial legacies on academic identity through his concept of postcolonial subjectivity. He examines how colonialism has instilled a deep sense of inferiority and dependence on Western knowledge systems in postcolonial societies. Mbembe [34] argues that decolonization requires rejecting colonial subjectivity, rethinking the self, and creating new, autonomous forms of identity. For academics in postcolonial settings, this involves critically examining how their professional roles have been shaped by colonial power structures. Mbembe [34] emphasizes that decolonization is not merely about changing curricula or research content but about fundamentally transforming how academics perceive themselves and their role in the global knowledge system. This shift is crucial for constructing professional identities that resist the lingering effects of colonialism. Hall [35] theory of identity as a process of becoming rather than a fixed essence adds a dynamic dimension to the understanding of academic identities in decolonization. Hall [35] argues that identities are fluid and shaped by historical, cultural, and political forces. In postcolonial contexts, academics' identities emerge through ongoing interactions with both local and global knowledge systems. This framework allows us to see academic identity as an evolving process rather than a static role confined to Western academic traditions. For academics in postcolonial African and Caribbean contexts, Hall [35] perspective is particularly valuable. It suggests that academics can continually reshape their identities through engagement with decolonial practices, embracing a multiplicity of identities that honor their diverse cultural and intellectual heritages, rather than conforming to a singular, Westernized identity.

Building on these theoretical perspectives, this paper conceptualizes decolonization as a transformative process that redefines academic identities by challenging the power dynamics entrenched in colonial knowledge systems. Ngũgĩ [30] emphasis on language, Smith [33] advocacy for indigenous knowledge, Mbembe [34] analysis of postcolonial subjectivity, and Hall [35] view of identity as fluid collectively provide a robust framework for understanding how academic identities can be reconstructed in postcolonial contexts. Decolonization extends beyond rejecting Eurocentric curricula to creating environments where indigenous and local knowledge systems thrive in the Caribbean and African higher education landscape. It necessitates reimagining the academic role from one focused on passively transmitting Western knowledge to one actively producing and disseminating local and indigenous knowledge. This shift is pivotal to reshaping academic identities in ways that honor and reflect the cultural and intellectual traditions of postcolonial societies.

3. Towards a Collaborative Framework

The theoretical insights discussed above inform the development of a collaborative framework that facilitates the reconstruction of academics' identities in postcolonial-decolonization Caribbean and African institutions. By fostering collaborations between these regions, academics can draw on shared

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experiences of colonization and resistance to build new professional identities that reflect their cultural, historical, and intellectual contexts. This framework will be discussed in the following sections.

3.1. Academic Identity: A Conceptual Redefinition

Academic identity is not a static, fixed professional status, but a dynamic, evolving construct shaped by the intersection of historical, cultural, and institutional forces. In postcolonial settings like the Caribbean and Africa, the shaping of academic identity has long been influenced by colonial legacies, which continue to affect higher education systems and the academic roles within them. The process of decolonization presents an opportunity to reconceptualize academic identity by challenging colonial narratives and integrating indigenous knowledge systems into the professional self-conception of academics. This section explores how academic identity is being reshaped through decolonial efforts, grounded in indigenous epistemologies and local contexts.

3.1.1. Academic Identity as a Socially Constructed Process

Drawing from Hall [35] theory of identity as a continuous process of becoming, academic identity can be seen as a socially constructed and constantly evolving phenomenon. Hall [35] argues that identity is shaped through historical, political, and cultural interactions, always shifting based on context. In postcolonial contexts, academic identity has been influenced by colonial educational systems, which historically prioritized Eurocentric frameworks. According to Nuttman-Shwartz [36] academics in postcolonial contexts must critically reassess their identities to reflect local realities and knowledge systems that had been marginalized under colonial rule. Academics have traditionally conformed to Western standards of knowledge production and dissemination, reinforcing Eurocentric ideals. However, decolonization challenges this norm by proposing that academic identity should reflect the epistemological diversity inherent in African and Caribbean knowledge systems [37]. This process entails more than curriculum reform; it involves a fundamental shift in how academics perceive their roles as producers of knowledge grounded in local contexts.

3.1.2. Decolonization as a Pathway to Redefining Academic Identity

Decolonization offers a critical pathway for academics to redefine their professional identities by moving away from identities that were shaped and imposed by colonial power structures. Mbembe [34] in On the Postcolony, argues that decolonization requires a rethinking of colonial subjectivity. For academics, this involves rejecting the idea that their roles are confined to transmitting Western knowledge and instead embracing their roles as agents of knowledge creation based on their cultural and intellectual traditions. Folabit, et al. [38] argue that academics' professional identities have historically been shaped by their roles in teaching, research, and outreach within colonial frameworks. Decolonization allows these academics to redefine their identities by integrating indigenous perspectives, languages, and epistemologies into their work, transforming both their professional practices and the broader educational structures in which they operate.

3.1.3. Institutional Barriers and Opportunities

While decolonization opens pathways for reimagining academic identity, it also faces significant institutional barriers. Many higher education institutions (HEIs) in postcolonial contexts remain entrenched in colonial structures, where governance, evaluation mechanisms, and curricula are still shaped by Western standards. Vorster and Quinn [29] argue that the resistance to change within South African universities, for example, is partly due to the persistence of white, Western-trained academics who uphold Eurocentric epistemologies. Despite these challenges, institutional reforms offer opportunities to redefine academic identity. Decolonial movements, such as South Africa's #FeesMustFall, have pushed for curriculum reform that centers on indigenous knowledge and languages. These efforts are slowly creating spaces where academics can reshape their identities in ways

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that reflect their cultural and intellectual contexts, moving away from a monolithic Western model of academic success.

3.1.4. The Role of Indigenous Knowledge in Shaping Identity

Central to the redefinition of academic identity is the integration of indigenous knowledge systems. [33] argues that decolonization requires a shift in the way knowledge is produced, acknowledging that indigenous knowledge is as legitimate as Western knowledge. Reclaiming indigenous perspectives in higher education challenges the dominant Eurocentric frameworks and enables academics to reconstruct their identities in line with their local cultures and histories. This process is not simply about inserting indigenous knowledge into existing frameworks but transforming the very foundations of academic identity. As Brock-Utne [10] emphasizes, true decolonization involves engaging with indigenous communities to incorporate their worldviews and epistemologies into academic work. This collaboration allows academics to move beyond the role of passive recipients of knowledge and become co-creators of new, contextually relevant knowledge.

3.1.5. Collective and Individual Transformation

Redefining academic identity through decolonization is both a collective and individual process. On an individual level, academics must critically reflect on their professional roles and engage in self-assessment to resist the reproduction of colonial knowledge systems. Collectively, departments and institutions must support structural changes that create space for multiple epistemologies and diverse academic identities. Samuel [39] contends that academics need to engage in self-reflection regarding the knowledge they prioritize in their teaching and research, acknowledging the colonial biases that may have shaped their understanding of their own roles. By engaging in this introspection, academics can reshape their professional identities to reflect better the needs of their local communities and intellectual traditions.

4. Towards a Collaborative Framework for Caribbean and African Countries in shaping Academics' identities

The collaborative framework proposed in this current study for Caribbean and African higher education institutions seeks to foster a redefinition of academic identities through shared decolonization strategies. These strategies aim to challenge the persistent dominance of Eurocentric knowledge systems, offering pathways to reclaim and integrate indigenous knowledge systems, pedagogies, and epistemologies. This framework highlights five key components for successful collaboration: epistemological diversity, rediscovery of indigenous knowledge, curriculum integration, professional development, and institutional partnerships.

4.1. Epistemological Diversity of Academics

The cornerstone of this framework is the recognition of epistemological diversity. Academic identity in both the Caribbean and Africa must acknowledge and embrace a wide range of knowledge systems, including indigenous, spiritual, and communal worldviews. Kelly [40] and Tavernaro-Haidarian [41] argue that academics must challenge the predominance of Western epistemologies and instead rely on their own local belief systems to construct knowledge that aligns with the unique cultural and intellectual needs of their regions. Caribbean and African academics can collaborate to construct knowledge that is more reflective of their indigenous experiences, traditions, and realities. This is because traditional knowledge systems, indigenous wisdom, and alternative methods of understanding these indigenous knowledge should be integrated into their academic role discourse [37]. Thus, a shift from Eurocentric perspectives, which have historically marginalized these knowledge systems, toward an academic model that values and incorporates local epistemologies into higher education.

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4.2. Rediscovering Indigenous Knowledge Systems

A critical component of this framework is the rediscovery and reintegration of indigenous knowledge systems. Both regions have rich traditions of oral history, indigenous science, and local cultural practices that were systematically devalued under colonial education paradigms. Rediscovering these systems means integrating them back into academic curricula, research, and teaching practices, creating a more inclusive and culturally responsive higher education environment. This aligns with [10] assertion that involving local communities in academic work can foster a more meaningful connection to indigenous knowledge. Academics in both regions can jointly conduct research and develop content by visiting local communities, engaging with elders, and understanding their worldviews and indigenous knowledge systems [10]. This collaborative research approach allows for the generation of knowledge that not only respects but also elevates local epistemologies.

4.3. Integration into Curricula

The framework also emphasizes the integration of indigenous knowledge systems into the curriculum. For decades, both Caribbean and African countries have followed colonial models of education, but the decolonization of curricula remains an essential task. Jules [14] notes that many postcolonial Caribbean nations have yet to fully embrace curriculum reform, despite acknowledging the value of indigenous knowledge [14, 42]. This signifies a remarkable lack of a comprehensive education reform because HEIs in these regions according to Zembylas [43] "continue to reproduce an epistemological hierarchy wherein Western knowledge is privileged over non-Western bodies and traditions of knowledge and knowledge-making" (p. 1). Thus, this collaborative framework encourages Caribbean and African institutions to co-create curricula that reflect local histories, cultures, and epistemologies. This would enable students to explore indigenous perspectives and challenge the dominance of Western paradigms in education, fostering a deeper connection to their own cultural contexts and identities.

4.4. Cultural Exchange Programs and Joint Research Initiatives

Cultural exchange programs and joint research initiatives are essential to fostering mutual understanding and collaboration between Caribbean and African academics. These initiatives would allow academics to share diverse perspectives on indigenous knowledge, research methodologies, and teaching practices, creating a space for intercultural competence and shared knowledge production. Such collaborations would provide research opportunities focused on addressing shared challenges related to decolonization and develop strategies to address these challenges. By pooling resources, Caribbean and African institutions can contribute to a collective body of knowledge that transcends geographical boundaries and promotes a pluralistic understanding of education.

4.5. Professional Development Programs

Importantly, the framework advocates for the creation of professional development programs designed specifically for academics in both regions. These programs would train faculty in decolonized pedagogies and indigenous research methodologies, equipping them with the tools necessary to engage with global academia while maintaining cultural authenticity. Faculty exchanges between Caribbean and African universities would foster the development of intercultural competencies and diversify perspectives within academic institutions. Through these programs, academics would be empowered to redefine their professional roles in alignment with local epistemologies and the broader goals of decolonization.

4.6. Institutional Changes and Partnerships

Institutional changes and partnerships are also a critical part of the framework. Decolonization requires shifts in university governance, curricula, and policies. Collaborations between Caribbean and African institutions could promote institutional reforms that prioritize indigenous knowledge and

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inclusive leadership. These partnerships would facilitate the co-creation of curricula, joint degree programs, and initiatives that reflect local contexts. By fostering strong institutional links, this framework encourages a shared commitment to decolonizing education in both regions, challenging the dominance of colonial ideologies in the academic sphere.

5. Conclusion

This conceptual paper offers a novel contribution to the field of decolonization in higher education by conceptualizing a collaborative framework that integrates Caribbean and African perspectives, thus providing a roadmap for the reshaping of academic identities through a decolonial lens. While the existing literature has extensively explored decolonization in terms of curriculum reform and knowledge production, this study emphasizes the often-overlooked role of academic identity construction as a critical aspect of the decolonization process. The proposed collaborative framework for decolonizing academic identity highlights the importance of epistemological diversity, the rediscovery of indigenous knowledge systems, and the integration of these knowledge forms into higher education curricula. This framework underscores the need for collaboration between Caribbean and African institutions to reshape not only the academic content but also the professional identities of scholars in these regions. By placing indigenous knowledge and epistemologies at the center of this transformation, this study encourages a rethinking of how academics engage with knowledge production, teaching, and research. The conceptual framework outlined in this paper has broader implications for understanding decolonization as a multifaceted process that extends beyond institutional reforms to the very individuals who inhabit these spaces. Academic identities, historically shaped by colonial legacies, can be redefined through deliberate engagement with local knowledge systems and by fostering cross-regional collaborations. The framework also calls for further institutional changes to promote inclusivity, diverse leadership, and policies that support the development of decolonized professional identities. Thus, this study contributes to the growing body of work that seeks to move beyond Eurocentric paradigms in higher education and emphasizes the role of collaborative, decolonial practices in shaping the future of academia. By reconceptualizing academic identity in tandem with decolonization efforts, this paper opens new avenues for research and practice that could be applied across postcolonial contexts. As such, future research could explore the impact of decolonizing academic identities in other postcolonial regions, expanding the framework to Southeast Asia and Latin America.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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