

Decolonising Global Hegemonies in Nigerian Universities – A Case for Poetic inquiry

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Abstract

This paper advocates for the introduction of poetic inquiry in Nigerian universities as a powerful approach to decolonizing research and reclaiming indigenous ways of knowing. It highlights the need to challenge outdated colonial concepts of higher education that have suppressed poetry and other indigenous forms of exploration and understanding. It argues that the incorporation of poetic inquiry in Nigerian universities can create inclusive and transformative spaces that foster social justice, cultural affirmation, and knowledge decolonization. The paper draws on literature on decolonial and critical pedagogy to argue that poetic inquiry enables researchers to engage with alternative modes of expression and challenge dominant Western-centric paradigms. It underscores the social and political implications of embracing poetry as a means of reimagining narratives and reshaping power dynamics within academia and society at large. By validating and honouring indigenous knowledge systems, poetic inquiry promotes self-determination and cultural revitalization while bridging the gap between academia and the wider community. The paper offers recommendations on how Poetic Inquiry may be integrated into the curriculum of Nigerian universities.

Keywords: Decolonizing research, Hegemonies, Indigenous knowledge, Poetic inquiry

Introduction:

Global hegemony refers to the domination of one country or a group of countries over the political, economic, and military affairs of the world (Gilpin, 1981). One of the key aspects of decolonization is the critique of global hegemonies, which are the dominant power structures that dictate the norms, values, and interests of the world's most powerful countries and institutions (Grosfoguel, 2011). Studies have shown that global hegemonies are deeply implicated in the perpetuation of colonialism and neocolonialism in Africa and the diaspora (Bhabha, 2010; Mbembe, 2015; Spivak, 2010). Therefore, decolonizing global hegemonies is a crucial step towards achieving social justice, equality, and self-determination for African and diasporic communities.

*How does one dismantle
Colonial hegemonies
sired, nursed and groomed
in the counting tradition?
Would enthusiasm of inclusion
Spurned in a few,
the suspicion in many,
and the apathy in some
Tell the story of trampled voices
cowering in the scholarship of the quants?
So, let the decolonising light
Lure the tender blade of Poetic Inquiry
Through the subjugating boulders of
Colonial epistemologies
To discover its voice.*

(Alexander Essien Timothy)

Decolonization is a complex and multifaceted process that involves challenging the dominant narratives, structures, and practices that perpetuate colonialism, imperialism, and neocolonialism in different domains of society. In the African context, decolonization has been a key theme in the struggle for independence and sovereignty from European colonial powers (Fanon, 1963; Ngugi

wa Thiong'o, 1986). However, the legacies of colonialism continue to shape the economic, political, cultural, and social realities of Africa and its diaspora (Mignolo, 2012; Quijano, 2000).

Education is a crucial site of decolonization, as it shapes the ways in which individuals and societies understand themselves and their relations with others. Studies have shown that education systems in Africa and the diaspora are deeply implicated in the perpetuation of colonialism and neocolonialism (Gibson & Singh, 2019; Quijano, 2000). Therefore, decolonizing education is a necessary step towards achieving a more just and equitable society. One of the ways of decolonising education is through the Decolonising of research. This paper, therefore, proposes the inclusion of poetic inquiry in Nigerian University curriculum as one of the ways of decolonising education.

Poetic inquiry is an innovative research approach that integrates the creative and expressive power of poetry with scholarly inquiry. It offers a unique way of exploring and understanding complex phenomena, going beyond traditional methods of research and analysis. Poetic inquiry invites researchers to engage in a process of deep reflection, imagination, and artistic expression as they investigate and make sense of their research questions.

At its core, poetic inquiry recognizes the transformative potential of language and the arts in generating knowledge and understanding. It draws inspiration from the rich tradition of poetry, which has long been valued as a means of capturing and communicating the human experience in its fullest and most nuanced form. By weaving together words, metaphors, rhythms, and imagery, poetic inquiry enables researchers to access and convey meanings that may be difficult to articulate through traditional academic prose.

The evolution of poetic inquiry can be traced back to various philosophical and artistic movements that have emphasized the power of language, imagination, and creativity in the pursuit of knowledge. While there is no singular origin or linear progression of poetic inquiry, several key influences have shaped its development over time. One influential figure in the history of poetic inquiry is William Wordsworth, a prominent English Romantic poet of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Wordsworth advocated for the use of poetry as a means of connecting with and understanding the natural world (Wordsworth, 1800). His belief in the transformative potential of poetry laid the groundwork for later explorations of poetry as a form of inquiry.

In the mid-20th century, scholars and practitioners began to explore the intersections of poetry, art, and research. The field of arts-based research emerged, recognizing the capacity of creative practices to generate knowledge and insights (Barone & Eisner, 2012). Poetic inquiry became one of the approaches within this broader framework, emphasizing the use of poetry as a research tool and mode of expression.

The field of education played a significant role in the evolution of poetic inquiry. Scholars such as Maxine Greene and Elliot Eisner explored the transformative power of the arts in education, advocating for a more holistic and imaginative approach to learning (Greene, 1995; Eisner, 2002). Their work highlighted the potential of poetry and other art forms to engage learners and foster deep understanding.

In recent decades, the field of qualitative research has embraced poetic inquiry as a valid and valuable methodological approach. Researchers across various disciplines, including education, social sciences, and health, have employed poetic inquiry to explore complex and subjective phenomena, giving voice to marginalized perspectives and experiences (Cahnmann-Taylor &

Siegesmund, 2013). Thus, this study advocates for “a synergy of knowing” (Parson & Pinkerton, 2022, p.118) as a way of dismantling the hegemony of Western-oriented episteme.

*I crave not one-handedness
Neither the substitution of one tyranny with another.
Ambidextrous! Unchain my hands!
Let my mind be unfettered
So the fragrance of the right and
The aroma of the left
can both permeate
This knowledge precinct.
So, let the kite perch and the eagle too,
For he who says the other should not,
Let his wings break! (Alexander Essien Timothy)*

Statement of the Problem:

The problem addressed in this paper is the prevailing allegiance to outdated colonial concepts of higher education in Nigerian universities, which tends to check the incorporation of poetry as a way of knowing, learning, and representing, along with other indigenous ways of exploring and understanding. This allegiance to colonial frameworks limits the possibilities for decolonizing research and perpetuates a one-sided, Western-modelled approach to academic endeavours. As a result, indigenous knowledge systems and alternative modes of inquiry, such as poetic inquiry, are marginalized and overlooked within the Nigerian university context.

Recently, the National Universities Commission (NUC) launched the Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) that provides the minimum curricular contents required of universities. This is what the NUC has to say about the CCMAS:

In keeping with its mandate of making university education in Nigeria more responsive to the needs of the society, the National Universities Commission commenced the journey to restructure the BMAS in 2018, introducing in its place, the Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS), to reflect the 21st Century realities, in the existing and new disciplines and programmes in the Nigerian University System. (NUC, 2022, webpage)

Although, according to the NUC, the CCMAS is designed to reflect the 21st Century realities, curiously, the content of the course Test, measurement and research tenaciously upholds the hegemony of quantitative research. Here is the content of the course:

Types of educational measurements. Types of tests. Development of tests, test blueprint, item Analysis, reliability and validity of instruments. Domains of learning and taxonomy of cognitive Outcomes. Meaning of research. Types of research with focus on descriptive and experimental Research. The research process. Writing a research proposal. Research designs. Theoretical/conceptual framework and review of literature. Sample and sampling techniques. Types of data, data gathering, data processing, data analysis and interpretation. Probability, Critical values and error and their place in inferences. Ethical considerations (political, Economic religious and cultural) in research. Data analysis using IBM-SPSS. In data analysis. Reporting educational research.(NUC,2022, p.93)

Evidently, NUC is one of the agencies that perpetuates the dominance of Westernised epistemologies and the consequent colonisation of the intellect.

Therefore, the colonization of intellect and academia within Nigerian universities is a significant concern that hinders the exploration and recognition of diverse ways of knowing. The dominance of Western methodologies, particularly those driven by statistics and empirical approaches, marginalizes indigenous epistemologies and creative modes of inquiry. This colonization of intellect not only limits the potential for holistic and contextually relevant knowledge production but also perpetuates a power imbalance that undermines the agency and self-determination of Nigerian researchers and communities.

Therefore, this paper makes a case for the inclusion of poetic inquiry as a research model as one of the ways of countering the colonisation of research in Nigerian universities, specifically with regard to the marginalization of poetry as a form of inquiry. It seeks to highlight the need for decolonizing research and reclaiming indigenous ways of knowing. The paper aims to shed light on the possibilities and challenges of incorporating poetic inquiry within the Nigerian university setting, ultimately advocating for the integration of diverse knowledge systems and the decolonisation of research practices. For as Richardson and St. Pierre (2018) have observed this is “a time when a multitude of approaches to knowing and telling exist side-by-side,” (820). Therefore, privileging one form of research over another helps to perpetuate the hegemony of that preferred form.

A Case for Poetic Inquiry

Poetry is not alien to the Nigerian society. Poetry has a long history of being an integral part of cultural practices and rituals in many indigenous communities (Chilisa, 2019). The antiquity of poetry in Africa, Asia and Europe is further attested to by Camic et al. (2022). Therefore, through poetic inquiry, Nigerian academics can tap into this rich heritage and create spaces for

collaborative research that involves both researchers and community members. This collaborative approach challenges the traditional researcher-participant hierarchy and recognizes the expertise and contributions of local communities, promoting a more equitable and reciprocal relationship between academia and society (Bang, Warren, Rosebery, & Medin, 2012). Thus, the introduction of poetic inquiry in Nigerian universities can foster a deeper sense of community and collective knowledge production.

The practice of poetic inquiry involves engaging in a creative and iterative process that blurs the boundaries between researcher and artist. Researchers become poets, employing their poetic sensibilities to explore and articulate their research findings. Through this process, they delve into the emotional, sensory, and imaginative dimensions of their subject matter, uncovering insights that might otherwise remain hidden within conventional research methodologies.

Poetic inquiry encourages researchers to embrace subjectivity, intuition, and ambiguity, recognizing that knowledge creation is not solely an objective endeavour. It allows for personal experiences, emotions, and perspectives to intersect with academic rigor, fostering a deeper understanding and connection with the research subject. This approach also opens up possibilities for multiple interpretations and voices, honoring the complexity and diversity of human experiences.

Therefore, poetic inquiry offers a dynamic and transformative research practice that combines the artistry of poetry with rigorous inquiry. It encourages researchers to engage in a reflective and creative process, opening up new avenues for exploration and understanding. By embracing poetic inquiry, researchers can access deeper layers of meaning, challenge conventional modes of expression, and contribute to the rich tapestry of knowledge creation.

Poetic inquiry also offers a means of challenging and subverting dominant narratives that have perpetuated colonial ideologies. Through the use of metaphor, symbolism, and creative language, poetry has the potential to expose and disrupt oppressive power structures (Lorde, 1984). By integrating poetic inquiry, Nigerian universities can empower researchers and students to critically examine and challenge dominant discourses, dismantling the hegemonic forces that have shaped knowledge production in the past.

Furthermore, the integration of poetic inquiry aligns with broader decolonial movements in academia that seek to challenge and transform the Western-centric knowledge production system. It aligns with calls for epistemic justice, which advocate for the recognition and validation of diverse knowledge systems and ways of knowing (Mignolo, 2009). Poetic inquiry embraces the plurality of knowledge and encourages researchers to engage in decolonial praxis, transforming not only the content of research but also the research process itself. This transformative approach contributes to the broader decolonization efforts in academia, promoting social change and justice.

*Embrace poetic inquiry:
foster inclusive research practices,
Challenge dominant discourses,
And
Empower individuals
To engage critically
With own histories,
Own identities
Own communities.
Transform the academic landscape,
And catalyse
Decolonising of research.*

(Alexander Essien Timothy).

Today, poetic inquiry continues to evolve and expand. Scholars and practitioners explore its potential applications in diverse contexts, including community-based research, social justice activism, and personal inquiry. The field is characterized by its openness to experimentation, embracing new forms and hybrid approaches that combine poetry with other creative practices. For instance, biennially, practitioners of Poetic Inquiry gather through the International Symposium of Poetic Inquiry (ISPI). The recent gathering was in 2022 at Cape Town, South Africa. In 2024, the symposium moves to Australia. Also, the Qualitative Inquiry Conferences provide avenues for a diverse pool of qualitative researchers, including poetic inquirers to congregate and share their experiences. There are journals that provide art-based and poetic inquirers to ventilate and showcase their crafts.

The evolution of poetic inquiry reflects a growing recognition of the value of imagination, creativity, and artistic expression in the pursuit of knowledge. It is a testament to the enduring belief in the power of poetry to illuminate and engage, challenging traditional boundaries and fostering deeper insights into the complexities of human experience.

Way forward:

Integration of Poetic Inquiry into Tertiary Education Curriculum

For the Decolonising of global hegemonies not to remain a mere intellectual exercise in rhetoric, the paper makes the following recommendations towards the integration of Poetic Inquiry into the Nigerian academic space:

1. Curriculum review and course creation: Moreover, individual universities were tasked with the development of unique courses that reflect their peculiar needs, global marketability and competitiveness. Despite the highly commendable and innovative launch of the CCMAS, it has not given qualitative research, let alone poetic inquiry a mention as a viable research paradigm. However, since the NUC has encouraged individual universities to develop 30 percent of the contents of the CCMAS, integrating poetic inquiry into the curriculum of tertiary education in Nigeria can be a transformative step towards embracing a more inclusive and holistic approach to knowledge production. This may involve creating new courses or modifying existing ones to incorporate elements of poetic inquiry, while ensuring that the curriculum reflects a balance between traditional academic subjects and creative, arts-based approaches to research and knowledge creation.
2. Faculty Development and Training: Poetic inquiry has become a specialised field of study and for academics to use it with confidence and dexterity, it will be necessary to offer faculty development programmes and training sessions to familiarise educators with the principles and practices of poetic inquiry. This will include the provision of resources, workshops, and support for faculty members to develop their own expertise in poetic inquiry and incorporate it into their teaching and research activities.
3. Dedicated Courses on Poetic Inquiry: One of the ways of integrating poetic inquiry into the University curriculum is to offer specialised courses on poetic inquiry as part of the curriculum. These courses can introduce students to the theoretical foundations, methods, and ethics of poetic inquiry. They can also provide practical opportunities for students to engage in their own poetic inquiry projects and develop their creative and critical thinking skills.

4. **Interdisciplinary Approaches:** Another way to foster the integration of Poetic inquiry into the curriculum is by promoting interdisciplinary collaborations and encouraging faculty members from various disciplines to work together to integrate poetic inquiry into their courses. This can foster a more holistic understanding of knowledge production and allow students to explore the intersections between poetry, research, and their respective fields of study.
5. **Community Engagement and Partnerships:** Since poetic inquiry is viewed “as a culturally relevant methodology” (Davis, 2021, p.114), it will be expedient to encourage students and faculty members to engage with local communities and cultural organizations to develop collaborative projects that incorporate poetic inquiry. This can involve working with poets, artists, and community members to address social issues, document cultural heritage, and promote dialogue and understanding.
6. **Assessment and Evaluation:** A critical component of any curriculum is assessment and evaluation. Universities should develop assessment methods that accommodate and value the creative and subjective aspects of poetic inquiry. This may involve encouraging students to present their research findings through diverse modes of expression, such as poetry readings, performances, or multimedia presentations. Incorporate assessment criteria that emphasize critical reflection, creativity, and the ability to engage with multiple perspectives.
7. **Research and Publication Opportunities:** Research loses its value if it is not disseminated (Timothy, et al., 2023; Timothy & Uguma, 2021; Timothy & Aglazor, 2017). The development of Poetic Inquiry as a viable practice will demand that universities create platforms for students and faculty members to share their poetic inquiry research through

conferences, exhibitions, publications, and online platforms. This can help validate and promote the importance of poetic inquiry within the academic community and contribute to a wider recognition of its value in knowledge production.

8. Institutional Support: University managements should provide institutional support in the form of funding, resources, and infrastructure for the development and implementation of poetic inquiry initiatives. In addition, management should deliberately foster a supportive and inclusive environment that encourages experimentation and creativity in research and teaching practices.

Conclusion

The dominance of one form of knowledge discovery and dissemination fosters the colonialism of the intellect and perpetuates the hegemony of Western-dominated epistemologies, the relics of colonialism. Therefore, this paper proposes a mechanism that can contribute to the dismantling of intellectual and research hegemonies through the promotion of poetic inquiry in Nigerian universities. It is the position of this paper that by integrating poetic inquiry into the curriculum of tertiary education in Nigeria, universities can cultivate a more vibrant, culturally responsive, and transformative learning environment. In addition, it will promote critical thinking, cultural understanding, and self-expression while honouring indigenous knowledge systems and decolonizing research practices.

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