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Editorial

Decolonising Educational Technology

Marguerite Koole [1,*], Matt Smith [2], John Traxler [2], Taskeen Adam [3] and Shri Footring [4]

[1] College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, SK S7N 0X1, Canada
[2] Institute of Education, University of Wolverhampton, Wolverhampton WS1 3BD, UK; matt.smith@wlv.ac.uk (M.S.); john.traxler@wlv.ac.uk (J.T.)
[3] EdTech Hub, Johannesburg 2194, South Africa; taskeen@edtechhub.org
[4] Digital Learning Research Ltd., Writtle University College, Chelmsford CM1 3RR, UK; shri.footring@writtle.ac.uk
* Correspondence: m.koole@usask.ca; Tel.: +1-306-9667638

1. Introduction: Rationale and Background for the Special Issue

Educational technology (EdTech) has become commonplace in modern educational practice. It has been integrated across modalities spanning face-to-face, blended, and fully online environments. As such, it is important for researchers, scholars, practitioners, and communities to consider the role of educational technology has played in perpetuating colonial biases and reinforcing existing societal power imbalances [1,2]. This Special Issue invited authors from multiple and diverse perspectives to critically explore how to decolonise educational technology.

The words education and technology are both highly abstract concepts. Arthur defines technology as "a means to fulfill a human purpose" [3] (p. 28). He adds that a human purpose can refer to "a device, or method, or process" (p. 29). By this definition, technology can include everything from writing instruments to hardware, software, infrastructure, applications, and interfaces. 'Educational' technology, then, implies pedagogies, projects, programmes, research, structures, values, knowledges, and philosophies in which technologies are situated. Dron writes that "technologies are seldom if ever morally neutral" [4] (p. 157). An and Oliver add that as part of a relational triangle, technology is "an intervening factor in human activities and our understanding of world" [5] (p. 10). Technology both shapes and is shaped by human society. Technology is imbued with biases by those who design and develop it. It can privilege some forms of knowledge and practices while hindering others. What is important to educators and theorists is that "the social impact of technology depends on how it is designed and used" [6] (p. 83).

The motivation behind this Special Issue is based upon a desire to uncover biases and privileges in the pursuit of greater inclusivity and social justice in educational technology. While inclusivity is a noble goal, it is also an imperative. Communities around the world are interconnected in ways too numerous and complex to list. Socially, politically, economically, materially, and even spiritually, communities' activities can affect each other in both observable and subtle, less visible ways. Like the 'butterfly effect', the ripples from one community's actions can be far reaching and difficult to trace. Therefore, it is important to seek the voices of those 'others' who lack adequate representation in national and international systems.

As editors, we all work and reside in the Global North and have been strongly influenced by the Western European mindset. Through this Special Issue, we wished to open an academic platform to authors positioned within, advocating for, and/or working with diverse communities. We struggled with the word 'marginalised'; it connotes powerlessness and lack of agency. Although we occasionally use this word, our intent is to surface the underlying power, agency, and rich knowledge traditions of remote, less affluent, and/or less represented communities. By organising this Special Issue, we wished to elicit both problems and solutions within the local contexts of marginalised communities in relation

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to educational technology. Not only do we seek a better understanding, but we also seek to share and preserve knowledge traditions. A potential outcome is to better understand how local wisdom can help us as a world community in working together towards sustainable solutions to global issues such as climate change, poverty, self-determination, and systematic oppression. As de Sousa Santos and Meneses state so clearly, "there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice" [7] (p. xv). With this understanding, our Special Issue was conceptualised to help uplift "alternative ways of thinking about alternatives" [7] (p. xv). Rather than attempt to overthrow scientific practices of the Global North, we seek instead to interrogate it, challenge it, augment it, and make space for different ways of thinking and diverse ways of being; that is, we wish to expand cognitive diversity in the field of educational technology by inviting the exploration of concepts, practices, perceptions, and considerations from those communities outside the dominant, hegemonic structures. "Being also a process of ontological and epistemological restitution, decolonisation is based on the acknowledgement of silenced knowledges and on the reconstruction of humanity" [7] (p. xxii). With this in mind, we wish to step away from our epistemic privilege.

This Special Issue grew out of the Tawaw (www.tawaw.org, accessed 15 May 2024) project, which aimed to explore the development of methods (i.e., tools and techniques) for digital learning research to empower, support, and work alongside Indigenous and marginalised communities in designing and building their own digital learning spaces. The project aspired to (1) explore the extent to which the methods, the ethics practices, governance and funding models of educational research remain fundamentally pre-digital, modernist, colonialist, and European in their origin and ethos; (2) question, whether, as a consequence, these methods are culturally appropriate or are, in fact, oppressive when exploring the educational and epistemic experiences, expectations, and norms of diverse, non-European cultures and communities—that we in western universities take-for-granted; and (3) assess whether we can collaboratively adapt, devise, and/or co-construct better tools and techniques, from within the communities, and also eclectically and inclusively from across the academic disciplines, that better match communities' worldviews, lifestyles, livelihoods, and environments [8].

In an earlier paper, Traxler and Smith tentatively documented the kinds of barriers that might exist between national and global mainstreams and the communities and cultures at their margins [9]. Their paper discusses the diversity of these barriers and the tools and techniques that might overcome these barriers. Some of these barriers include, for example, objective features like distance, sparsity, services, transport, infrastructure, coverage, mains, and buildings, whilst others might include language and literacy or capacity, knowledge, training, skills, status, stigma, and esteem. It is also the case that the most remote and excluded communities are often faced with multiple barriers, rather than just one. For low-income and developing countries, some of these barriers are consequences of ill-chosen research methods that are predigital, European in origin, and may still embody the legacies of colonial and crudely modernist ideas.

The decolonisation of educational technology necessitates the challenging and dismantling of colonial structures, perspectives, and power dynamics present in the current design and implementation of educational tools. Our editorial team recognises the need to break away from hegemonic Eurocentric paradigms to embrace diverse cultural knowledge systems into educational materials, curriculum, and delivery methods. Drawing on critical pedagogy and post-colonial theories, the articles in this Special Issue question these dominant narratives.

2. Description of the Articles

In their article, Decolonizing Technologies through Emergent Translanguaging Literature from the Margin: An English as a Foreign Language Writing Teacher's Poetic Autoethnography, Shizhou Yang focuses on the utility of translanguaging in the decolonisation of the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom [10]. Yang explains that translan-

guaging recognises the creative and emergent nature of language as it is used by people who employ their "whole communicative repertoires" made up of the different languages, social norms, and cultural practices (p. 3). Through autobiographical commentary and poetic autoethnography, Yang reflects upon their own experiences and motivations as an EFL learner, and critically examines educational technology as a means for self-expression and its potential to support multivocality; however, the need for the decolonisation of educational technology remains essential, both in principle and application. Yang proposes a design approach that decolonises from both top-down and bottom-up; that is, technologies need to be engineered from an intrinsically decolonising perspective while instructors and students should be able to choose resources and pedagogical approaches that balance both "local constraints and global affordances" (p. 7). Yang also comments on and questions the dominance of the English language which perpetuates and extends colonisation. For Yang, an interesting way to think about decolonisation is through the Chinese character, 坐 (zuo), in which one person, 人 (ren), is equal to another person(s) (人丨人). Along with the concept of translanguaging, zuo seems complementary to concepts such as Marshall's two-eyed seeing [11] and Bhabha's third space [12].

In the article, Digital Education Colonised by Design: Curriculum Reimagined, Costa, Bhatia, Murphy, and Lúcia Pereira take a critical theory approach in their discussion of 'curricular imagination' as a means of disrupting and examining technological colonialism [13]. The authors define decolonisation as that which "works to diversify educational experiences, opening the webs of valued knowledge beyond Euro-centric perspectives … a form of knowledge justice" (p. 6). In this conceptual paper, they argue that current educational technologies prioritise efficiency and profit ahead of more participative, relational, and affective ways of teaching and learning. They argue that current commercial educational platforms simplify educational processes by providing automation, surveillance, and ostensibly better security and privacy. They add that these platforms also target and constrain the pedagogical freedoms of "docile" users who passively accept and adopt technologies (p. 6). The authors consider educational technology as comprising three aspects: functions, organisation of teaching and learning, and philosophical approaches. The authors suggest that reimagining the use of technology needs to focus on creating spaces of empowerment, creativity, dialogue, social interactions, and collective creativity thereby fostering "unity within diversity" (p. 7). The article refers to Freire's [14] work and draws attention to the neo-liberal imperative to develop a skilled 21st Century labour force at the expense of nurturing well-rounded, thinking, caring, and participative members of communities.

Focusing on massive open online courses (MOOCs), Morgan describes a small empirical study. The article, Improving Massive Open Online Courses to Reduce the Inequalities Created by Colonialism, is based upon social reproduction theory and transformative learning theory [15]. Morgan conducted a document analysis exploring if and how MOOCs alleviate or maintain social inequality and how they might be improved to democratise education. Four themes emerged: (1) failing to meet students' basic needs, (2) ignoring students' language and culture, (3) how to meet students' basic needs, and (4) the importance of respecting language, culture, and knowledge base. Like Yang [10], Morgan also recommends taking both bottom-up and top-down approaches in the design of educational technologies. Similarly to Costa et al. [13], Morgan advocates that MOOCs should take a more Freirean participatory approach to instruction in which teachers collaborate with learners "with the goal of releasing themselves from "oppressive structures" (p. 3).

Smith and Scott's article, Distance Education under Oppression: The Case of Palestinian Higher Education, depicts how the Palestinian people use distance technologies to maintain access to education and to sustain linguistic and cultural identity [16]. The researchers interviewed twelve teachers using a Google Docs forum. The description of the methodology highlights how the researchers coped with potential ethical and safety issues while conducting their research. The participants' responses illustrate the range of impedi-

ments to accessing physical schools and how distance education tools and pedagogies have helped to sustain progress and continued learning. Like Yang [10], the study participants see language (Hebrew) as a tool of repression, colonisation, and erasure. But participants also see language (English) as potentially liberating. The ability to speak English, for example, provides a conduit for Palestinians to share their stories with the external world. In addition, English capabilities may open avenues for economic opportunities. Within the Palestinian context, educational technology means resistance as well as linguistic and cultural survival. The authors conclude with some positive findings—that the people have a tremendous determination, and that distance education can be a source of stability and hope.

Supported Open Learning and Decoloniality: Critical Reflections on Three Case Studies by Farrow, Coughlan, Goshtasbpour, and Pitt describes a retrospective study [17]. In Table 2 [17] (p.17), the authors use a conceptual framework composed of three categories, coloniality of being, coloniality of power, and coloniality of knowledge, which the authors juxtapose with the three main characteristics of (1) supported, (2) open, and (3) learning (SOL). Farrow et al. see educational technology as a "vector" (p. 1) of colonisation. However, they argue that well-designed open educational resources (OERs) can help to remove barriers to education and lead to a greater democratisation of knowledge. The case studies they describe involve projects in South Saharan Africa, Myanmar, and Kenya. The article examines each case in relation to the three types of coloniality. In their analysis, various kinds of barriers come into view such as barriers in infrastructure, such as access to networks and devices. Political and policy barriers also surface, particularly for credentialing practices, project funding, and project ownership. Like some of the other authors in this Special Issue, concerns surrounding language and cultural norms colonising forces also emerge. The article offers some approaches for the design of open, online learning platforms. The authors conclude by commenting on the need for transparent and less hierarchical organisation between partners. They offer valuable and critical reflections on the advantages and disadvantages of OERs.

"There isn't anything there to be decolonised!": Perspectives of Distance Students on Decolonising their Computing Curriculum: this title underscores the limited awareness among students and the broader society regarding the presence of hidden biases embedded within the tools they regularly employ [18]. In this article, Topkins, Herman, and Ramage discuss the non-neutral nature of technology and how race and gender are "inscribed" into technologies (p. 3). At the same time, the authors recognise that educational technologies often neglect the inclusion of Indigenous and local perspectives. Taking a critical sociotechnical approach, the authors developed and administered surveys with quantitative and qualitative questions designed to explore the attitudes of information technology and computer science students. Having analysed 394 responses, the authors arrive at six types of challenges to student engagement with decolonising efforts, along with four types of challenges for the staff and administration of the university. They conclude that there is a range of understandings of what decolonisation is and how it is relevant to the curriculum. The authors note that the students may not understand how their learning, at the individual level, relates to the world more generally, nor do they understand how developing and designing computer programs and systems can affect, positively or negatively, marginalised communities.

Kohnke and Foung introduce the topic of data colonisation in their paper, Deconstructing the Normalisation of Data Colonialism in Educational Technology [19]. The article is important because it reminds scholars and other users of technology that there are key ethical considerations surrounding the mass retrieval and analysis of student data by and through our educational systems. Although knowledge gleaned about the needs and activities of learners can be helpful in selecting, designing, and personalising learning interventions, from an ethics perspective, accessing learner data can become detrimental when informed consent and notification is neglected. Taking a post-colonial approach, Kohnke and Foung examined 22 studies in four, high-impact educational technology journals in-

dexed in the Web of Science and Social Sciences. They found that the ways in which the identified studies evidenced data colonisation was through (1) harvesting log files, (2) correlating log-based data with questionnaires and other data such as grades, (3) accessing data without any formal approval or with only institutional permission (i.e., without student knowledge), and (4) rationalising data collection based on ideological beliefs (i.e., for the greater good). The authors argue that access to data may be likened to a form of wealth which enriches researchers and institutions, and which can be "repurposed and exploited …without giving students a chance to refuse or informing them" (p. 7). The authors provide six potential remedies, three of which include decolonising ethical clearance processes, decolonising systems design, and informing and obtaining consent from students. Rather than seeing data mining and learning analytics as normal and inherently good, they argue that greater attention to personal privacy and improved ethical practices are warranted—especially moving into the AI era.

Barnes et al. provide a highly informative article of interest to educational technology designers and developers who are working in international development and/or with refugees: Designing for Social Justice: A Decolonial Exploration of How to Develop EdTech for Refugees [20]. In the literature review, the authors share important observations about internationalisation, the techno-capitalist agenda, and how these processes can lead to "intersectional injustice and digital oppression" (p. 24). The main thrust of the research was to engage with three focus groups of refugees located in two countries—Rwanda and Pakistan. Questions were derived from the three dimensions of the human injustices framework: material, cultural-epistemic, and political and geopolitical injustices. Like other authors in this Special Issue, Barnes et al. recognise that educational technology is not neutral and that there are times when it is and is not appropriate. The authors provide a robust discussion of refugees' underlying deference to technology, to those who create technology, and to tacit messages that they, as refugees, are "helpless without it" (p. 24). The article concludes with a summary of seven "decolonial, justice-centred" (p. 25) design principles to aid in developing educational technology with and for refugees.

Kitambaa: A Convivial Future-Oriented Framework for Kinangop's Learning Hub [21], written by Kuhn, Warui, and Kimani, provides a balanced and realistic description of the African context in which they acknowledge both the challenges and the richness of education. Based within a critical realist perspective, the authors allude to unsustainable and extractive approaches to 'development', often perpetrated by multinational companies. The learning hub project they describe is at a boarding farm in a small community in Kenya, Kinangop. The hub supports people in acquiring knowledge and skills relevant to the farm whilst respecting both cultural and ancestral practices alongside Western technical and scientific knowledge. In their "multi-epistemic" approach, the authors combine practices of conviviality [22] and speculative futures [23]. In doing so, the framework they implement supports community involvement in technological development and also invites them to envision how present activity can shape the future; that is, assisting the community in "(re)inventing their futures as spaces of possibility" (p. 9).

The paper entitled Shaping the Discourse around Quality EdTech in India: Including Contextualised and Evidence-Based Solutions in the Ecosystem [24] demonstrates a heightened awareness of the need for community voice in the selection and implementation of educational technology within the Indian school system. The authors, Bhattacharya, Nandakumar, Dasgupta, and Murthy adopt a justice-oriented design comprising a content quality dimension, a pedagogical alignment dimension, and a design dimension, which they used to develop the Tulna Index to help select and implement educational technology solutions. The researchers work within the already-existing educational system as both insiders (stakeholders, index design, and training design) and outsiders (less involved in implementation). The authors identify English as a colonising force, while also serving as a lingua franca permitting communication across India, a country with 23 official languages. There is a tension between the localisation of language and culture.

Adam's [25] paper offers an explicit axiological perspective. Striving for a more holistic approach, Adam brings to attention concepts such as the desecularisation of knowledge, embodied cognition, critical reflexivity, social justice, and decolonisation. The author presents an analytical framework called 'the dimensions of human injustice' (DoHI). The framework is depicted as a Venn diagram with three circles each representing ontological and epistemological injustices, material injustices, and geopolitical injustices. Adam then examines how educational technology exacerbates these injustices. The paper offers us an opportunity to question and reexamine how educational technology amplifies and accommodates the "rationalistic, secular, and neocolonial" (p. 20) tendencies of Western educational practices. The paper helps us consider how societies can move towards more holistic and human practices.

The final paper [26], again written by the editorial team, is a drawing together of the methodological insights from all the of the above articles contained within the Special Issue. We found repeated messages warning against the use of those methods and tools known to researchers without considering the needs and contexts of the research circumstances and participants, and the unconscious promulgation of the colonial hegemonies of language and thought that are embedded in such methods and technologies. However, we also found positive messages and aspirations: research projects seem to enjoy greater success and receive better support from participants where researchers collaborate with communities in culturally appropriate and reciprocal ways.

3. Contribution to the Field

As we stated in the invitation to the Special Issue, decolonisation describes the acts of recognising, confronting, and undoing the processes, structures, and concepts by which a more powerful country, culture or community oppresses another smaller one, either currently or historically, physically, or remotely. This oppression can operate through education, through its curricula, its pedagogies, its professions, its institutions, its theories, its research methods, and its language. Oppression also operates through the digital technologies by which education and learning are separately and differently accessed, delivered, and supported.

A significant outcome of this Special Issue is the identified list of criteria that describe the decolonisation of educational technology. Without oversimplifying the complexity of the papers, three main foci emerged: (1) empowerment and self-determination, (2) diversity in 'ways of knowing', and (3) social, cultural, and linguistic justice. Based on the collection of papers in this Special Issue, we suggest that the decolonisation of educational technology is a means to achieve the following:

- uncovering power dynamics embedded within educational technologies;
- addressing structural configurations of power to foster a more equitable and socially just digital educational landscape;
- empowering marginalised communities and challenges to Western hegemonic thought;
- valuing and promoting inclusivity, linguistic diversity, cross-cultural respect, and social justice;
- challenging Western hegemony;
- involving affected communities in the processes to mitigate potential harm caused by external research and development.

We argue that effective decolonisation would involve recognising and incorporating Indigenous and/or non-Western knowledge systems into educational technology and integrating traditional, local, contextual, societal, communal, and ecological knowledge, storytelling, and other cultural practices into digital learning experiences. Drawing on the contributions from all the articles in this Special Issue, the consensus is that educational technology must adopt inclusive design principles that address diverse cultural contexts, languages, and onto-epistemological approaches.

4. Conclusions, Future Directions, and Call to Action

This Special Issue remains as an invitation for future dialogue and critical analysis of the actors and systems perpetuating and reinforcing the values, worldviews, institutions, resources, and knowledge systems entangled with (neo)colonialist structures and practices. As is made clear throughout the articles in this Special Issue and elsewhere (e.g., [27]), the global discrepancy in technology access results in a continuum where factors such as availability, infrastructure, wealth, and language can either empower or disadvantage communities in the digital landscape. The decolonisation of educational technology has the potential to empower learners from diverse backgrounds and foster a sense of inclusivity and representation in educational materials. By challenging the existing power dynamics and established colonial and neo-colonial tools and techniques in education, decolonisation can support a more equitable distribution of authority and knowledge production.

In this issue, we invited submissions that were empirical, methodological, conceptual, evaluative, artistic, and/or novel. As Yanchar et al. write, "any method for studying the world will be based on assumptions and values regarding the target phenomenon …the logical extension of this basic insight is that a method will only produce findings that are consistent with its assumptions" [28] (p. 140). To move beyond the usual Western-style assumptions, we opened the call to authors who offered unique perspectives and who might lack representation within academic journals—that is, we hoped to attract practitioners, community members, early-career researchers, and scholars from different knowledge traditions. To some extent we succeeded; in other ways, we have not yet reached the voices that remain the most remote from our Western, Global North academic world.

There are some important limitations to this Special Issue. Every step and stage of academic research is problematic in that it perpetuates and normalises current Western practices. Although mindful of how the research publishing cycle reinforces systemic colonial practices, we admittedly still relied upon existing structures and processes for adjudication. Grydehøj et al. [29] write, "for all its liberatory promise, academia is subject to the same processes of dispossession, exclusion, and inequality as wider society and is just as apt to entrench injustices as to challenge them" [28] (p. 4). Academic publishing, they argue, is important not only for sharing knowledge, but also for creating networks, opening doors, and exercising power. Grydehøj et al. [29] raise several problems, of which this Special Issue is guilty, including the low acceptance numbers of non-Western authors and the dominance of English as the medium of communication. Furthermore, as editors, we examined each paper through our Western-trained lenses and asked the writers to conform to various language, methodological, and writing norms. To an extent, we are also caught in the publishing cycle in that, as editors, we must ensure the quality of the Special Issue—lest we be judged by our own gatekeepers. So, even though we intentionally sought diverse insights and endeavoured to expand our repertoires as guest editors, this Special Issue, and others like it, must do more. Grydehøj et al. [29] concluded that "even the best of editorial intentions is incapable of undoing the coloniality of Western academic publishing" (p. 12). Moving forward, we see the need to continue the search for innovative, creative, and different voices from 'marginalised' groups who can raise and examine different and seldom-questioned assumptions complicit in the digital colonisation of education and the dissemination of knowledge.

It is our contention here, and throughout the articles contained within this Special Issue, that the decolonisation of educational technology is an essential step towards creating a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape. By acknowledging and challenging colonial legacies, educators and technologists can contribute to a more just and diverse learning environment, as well as one that is more culturally and contextually relevant to learners around the globe, in all their varied situations. This ethical shift will require collaboration, cultural sensitivity, and a commitment to dismantling the underlying, taken-for-granted structures that perpetuate inequality in education. We have been heartened throughout our editorship of this Special Issue to see examples of how, through these efforts, educational technology can become a catalyst for positive social change. We now

issue a call to advance this crucial agenda for social justice, equality, and education; more work must be carried out.

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