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### **Co-designing and implementing transdisciplinary academic literacy in higher education**

Oscar Eybers

Affiliation:University of Pretoria

Transdisciplinary education combines disciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches. Unlike the latter paradigms, transdisciplinary pedagogy deliberately integrates diverse academic fields with knowledge, practices and perspectives beyond institutional boundaries. Local and community knowledge play a crucial role in this context. Although there is substantial research on disciplinary and multidisciplinary paradigms, the intersection of transdisciplinarity, Afrocentricity and academic literacy remains underexplored. This article proposes an Afrocentric framework for transdisciplinary literacy within the broader paradigm of Africology, demonstrating its potential to transform educational practices.

**Keywords:** Transdisciplinarity, literacy, Afrocentricity, Africology, communities

#### **Introduction**

Humans continue to face severe crises, with Black and African-descended communities disproportionately bearing epistemic and physical violence, economic marginalisation, and cultural devaluation. For instance, Ngubane, Mndebele and Kaseeram (2023) report that roughly 1.3 billion people globally live in poverty, with a significant proportion of this population in Africa. In South Africa, considered one of the continent's economic powerhouses, approximately 18.2 million people live in extreme poverty (Ngubane et al. 2023). These crises, including poverty, unemployment and economic underdevelopment, extend beyond Africa, affecting African communities globally.

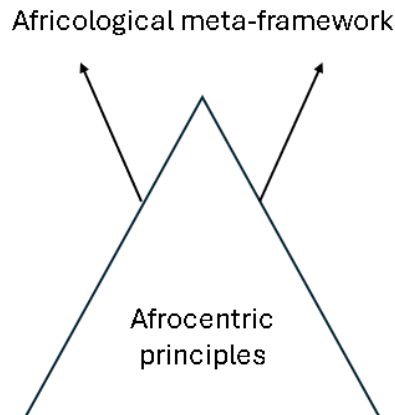
In the United States (USA), Black individuals are incarcerated at six times the rate of White individuals (Valente, 2024). This disparity demonstrates that, even in economically developed countries such as the USA, African-descended populations remain affected by cultural inequalities, discrimination and economic hardship. In Canada, socioeconomic issues facing Black Americans are similarly reflected.

In 2016, the unemployment rate of Black Canadians was almost double that of the national average, with little improvement since (Valente, 2024). Furthermore, Black Canadians aged 25-29 years were twice as likely to live in low-income conditions compared to their peers (Valente, 2024). These figures underscore the importance of global African educators, particularly those in academic literacy, in developing pedagogies to address systemic inequalities within Black communities and alleviating these living conditions.

This article argues that a transdisciplinary approach to academic literacy, aimed at preparing novice students as effective knowledge producers, experts, and professionals – can assist global African communities in addressing pressing crises. This issue includes economic underdevelopment as articulated by Rodney (1972). Rodney (1972) characterises economic underdevelopment as dependency on the economies of the Global North, a condition shaped by systemic historical inequalities and exploitation.

Previous studies have addressed transdisciplinarity in education, yet this article uniquely situates it within academic literacy, grounded in Afrocentric theory. By incorporating Afrocentric principles, the study aligns with Rodney's

(1972) critique of systemic oppression and situates transdisciplinary academic literacies within Africology, the study of African peoples' histories, cultures and lived experiences (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Africology as informed by Afrocentric principles.

### **Research problem**

A lack of a clearly defined African theory for transdisciplinary academic literacy limits developers' ability to effectively address the diverse challenges confronting global African communities within the broader context of Africology.

### **Research question**

How can developing an African theory of transdisciplinary academic literacy enhance educational strategies to more effectively address the socioeconomic and cultural challenges faced by global African communities within the context of Africology?

### **Research aim**

This research aims to develop an African theory of transdisciplinary academic literacy to strengthen educational strategies, enabling a more effective response to the socioeconomic and cultural challenges of global African communities.

### **Methodology**

To address the research problem, question and aim, this article employs a qualitative strategy. It seeks to generate meaningful knowledge and data. The researcher adopts a qualitative method to explore the meaning scholars attribute to transdisciplinary knowledge in higher education (Keikelame & Swartz, 2019). Building on Keikelame and Swartz's (2019) qualitative research framework, this study critically analyses how scholars perceive collaboration, cultural relevance, and the needs of African communities to develop an Afrocentric theory of transdisciplinary literacy within Africology.

The article triangulates three data acquisition methods: document analysis, autoethnographic reflection and model building. The purpose of document analysis is to systematically review literature in an Afrocentric framework, highlighting scholarly approaches to transdisciplinary academic literacy, offering alternatives to Global North models of knowledge validation, and emphasising meaning and subjectivity in African scholarship (Riviere, 2001). This article also uses document analysis to highlight theories and practices African educators and scholars have articulated in relation to transdisciplinary education.

This study employs the autoethnographic method as the second data acquisition tool. In line with this approach, the researcher engages in self-reflection as an academic literacy facilitator in higher education, while articulating an Afrocentric theory of transdisciplinary literacy within Africology. Falola (2022) posits that autoethnography facilitates

researchers' self-reflection as they analyse and build upon the work of other scholars. Additionally, reflexivity in an autoethnographic method enables the researcher to acknowledge his own biases while engaging the article's topics.

The third data acquisition tool is model building. Graham (1999) asserts that conceptual models help to understand the emotional, spiritual and developmental needs of individuals within a study's focus areas. In this article, model building is used to demonstrate interplays of Afrocentric principles in a transdisciplinary construct of academic literacy. The model (see Figure 2) assists scholars in aligning their teaching, learning and assessment methods within Africology's broader framework, ensuring cultural relevance for African students and communities.

### **Literature review and theoretical frameworks**

Since the emergence of humans in Africa, academic literacies have played a pivotal role in generating knowledge, preserving and developing cultural traditions, and facilitating interactions between Africans and both the physical and meta-physical environments. In this context, academic literacy refers to diverse modes of communication used for facilitating and preserving knowledge. Examples of pre-colonial indigenous literacies include proverbs, dance, dramatic enactments, music, systemic alphabetical texts, and various other vocational, physical activities (Seroto, 2011).

Reflecting Temple's (2010) construct of discourse, which emphasises the roles of languages in shaping social identities and power dynamics, this article asserts that ancient, pre-colonial academic literacies empowered communities to express their identities, assert their agency, record history, and preserve their cultural knowledge systems. In contrast to Weideman's (2021) culturally neutral view of academic literacy as a mechanical technology, this article argues that in an Afrocentric context, and within the broader framework of Africology, literacies have always functioned as cultural tools for articulating African world views, values and principles.

African literacy practices enabled transmission of cultural values and reinforced social cohesion and identity. Drawing on Brian Street's (1984) theory, these literacies can be understood as social practices embedded in power relations, highlighting the roles of communication in shaping cultural and social dynamics. Acknowledging the cultural bias in academic literacy allows us to better appreciate their relevance in transdisciplinary contexts, supporting curricula that integrate disciplinary knowledge with the traditions of off-campus communities.

Temple's (2010) depiction of discourses as repositories of cultural knowledge aligns with Seroto's (2011) assertion that during the pre-colonial period, African children developed disciplinary literacies within a communal framework, which emphasised collective learning and the needs of cultural groups. These pre-colonial discursive practices were embedded in age-grade systems, expert guilds, and in some cases, gender-specific roles (Ayitsey 2006), illustrating the diverse contexts in which knowledge was transmitted, and wherein specialised literacies were cultivated.

Age-grade systems facilitated peer-learning and mentorship, while expert guilds ensured the preservation of specialised skills and knowledge. In this context, Seroto (2011) illustrates how Africans utilised transdisciplinary literacies to preserve expert guilds, a point similarly argued by Temple's (2010) construct of discourses. Recognising these historical transdisciplinary practices, which bridged knowledge domains, enriches our understanding of African epistemologies and underscores the advantages of integrating such strategies into contemporary academic literacy.

Seroto's (2011) portrayal of pre-colonial academic literacies as communal is crucial for understanding transdisciplinary education within Afrocentric theory. An Afrocentric pedagogical framework calls for teaching, learning and assessment to be situated in disciplinary and cultural contexts that are familiar to students and which resonate with the needs of their communities (Tlali 2023). The connection between Afrocentric educational principles and transdisciplinarity is evident in the imperative to incorporate indigenous knowledge into the curriculum. Such integration is enabled through scholars' engagement with community members, the custodians of knowledge inherited from Africa's ancestors (Tlali 2023).

### **Disciplinarity and Afrocentric transdisciplinary literacies**

In "The Afrocentric Idea in Education," Asante (1991) outlines several principles that are crucial in developing transdisciplinary literacies. He asserts that education is a social process designed to integrate novice scholars into the broader cultures of local communities (Asante 1991). Additionally, grounding African students' academic growth

within their communities, ensuring that their learning is relevant and connected to their cultural identities is emphasised (Asante 1991). Afrocentric pedagogy seeks to counteract students' alienation from academic disciplines by fostering their identification with a broader historical continuum (Asante 1991). By applying these principles, Afrocentric approaches foster transdisciplinary literacies by transcending disciplinary boundaries and through integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems into the curriculum.

A deeper exploration of disciplinarity within an Afrocentric framework is essential for critically engaging transdisciplinary literacies. Acknowledging Mazama's (2018) construct of disciplinarity as reinforcing cultural norms, an Afrocentric approach seeks to challenge these by addressing the historical effects of Western colonisation. In particular, the imposition of Western literacy models, such as technical, culturally neutral constructs, as Mazama (2018) notes, was instrumental in promoting a bourgeois social order among Africans that undermined Indigenous Knowledge Systems.

To engage transdisciplinary literacies in this historical context, a deliberate effort must be made to dismantle colonial constructs of academic literacy, including technical models, that marginalise African knowledge systems, cultures and languages. These legacies were reinforced by disciplinary boundaries that separated institutional knowledge from oppressed communities.

Concerns about bourgeois culture in academic literacy departments are relevant to the development of transdisciplinary literacies. Frantz Fanon, a founder of decolonial theory, expressed apprehension about the rise of the Black bourgeoisie. In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon (2004) lamented how the newly emergent Black elite emulated the behaviour and values of colonial rulers. In educational contexts, these scholars perpetuate oppressive structures, such as ethnocentric academic literacy tests which deny multimodality, and teaching models that are disconnected from students' disciplines (McClung 1977). Fanon (2004) argued that the culture of the Black bourgeoisie hindered true societal transformation, upheld colonial structures, such as disciplinary boundaries, and obstructed the liberation and transformation of African society.

Fanon's (2004) critique of the Black bourgeoisie suggests that in higher education, transdisciplinary literacies may encounter resistance from scholars who prioritise their own advancement within oppressive systems over the genuine upliftment of poor, African communities. This focus on personal ascension among academic literacy practitioners, which centralises neutral, technical approaches, hinders efforts to engage meaningfully with community-based, indigenous knowledge, cultures, and transdisciplinary literacies. Thus, a clear link exists between Mazama's (2018) concern for colonial conceptions of language development and Fanon's critique of the Black bourgeoisie. Both highlight how colonial frameworks, whether through languages or social class, can obstruct community-centric pedagogies.

Given the on-going influence of the Black bourgeoisie and colonial approaches to academic literacy, which devalue African histories, knowledge systems, and cultures, it is crucial to embed Afrocentric and community-centric principles into academic literacy modules. As highlighted by Temple's (2010) discussion of ancient African discourses and Chilisa's (2017) focus on communal education, incorporating Afrocentric principles (see Figure 2) into academic literacies not only strengthens the link between students' knowledge and their communities, but also mitigates cultural dislocation in learning. By embedding these precepts, transdisciplinary literacies become a vehicle for preserving cultural identity and fostering meaningful connections between academic content and the lived experiences of students.

### **Connecting Africology and academic literacy**

Africology, originating from Black Studies in Northern America, encompasses the study of global African histories, cultures and experiences. This field fulfils a critical role for academic literacy developers by facilitating the examination of trans-generational and trans-continental experiences (Asante, 2020). By adopting a meta-Africology paradigm, literacy practitioners can bridge generational and continental divides. For instance, with African communities now residing across the globe, Africology enables literacy developers to implement strategies that foster interaction and collaboration across diverse age-groups and geographic regions.

While Afrocentric theory and Africology are fundamental to understanding the inclusion of histories and cultures in education, it is equally important to re-define academic literacy. Academic literacies - whether cognitive, written,

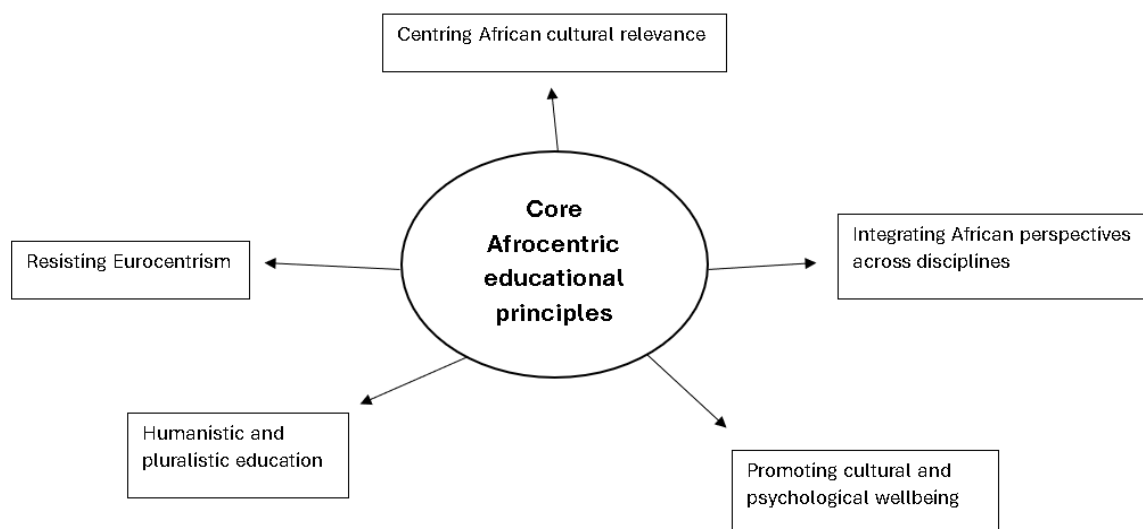
read, digital, or physically embodied – are crucial channels for transmitting knowledge (Harb & Thomure, 2024). These literacies empower African knowledge producers to preserve and safeguard the cultural heritages and wellbeing of local communities. By expanding the construct of academic literacy, we can better support the preservation of indigenous knowledge and foster meaningful engagement with local communities.

During the pre-colonial era, academic literacies were employed through various modes and for specific purposes. Africans used their own languages for thousands of years to cultivate knowledge systems, exemplified by ancient writing systems such as those of Kemet. Knowledge cultivation was originally communal, not confined to elite groups (Seroto, 2011). Academic literacies, particularly during the hunter-gatherer and pastoral phases, were deeply intertwined with the cultural, social and theological fabric of communities. In this context, Odimegwu and Omazu (2021) assert that communalism was sustained through cooperation, fraternity, mutuality and sharing. The primary objective was the survival of cultural groups. Academic literacies were instrumental in fostering unity within these communities.

In contrast, during the colonial era, as Achebe (2006) vividly portrays in *Things Fall Apart*, communal traditions became targets of violence. Global North colonial administrators and settlers viewed communalism and indigenous economies as obstacles to their goal of securing free or cheap African labour and acquiring African natural resources. Consequently, colonial powers sought to replace African languages, indigenous knowledge, and community-centric education, including transdisciplinary literacies, with European languages and economic objectives, prioritising the advancement of capitalism. In this context, Fanon (2004) argued that colonial instruction, including neutral, technical models of academic literacy (Weideman, 2021), did not only aim to erase African history in the pursuit of social and economic exploitation, but it also aimed to distort, appropriate, and disfigure African history.

### **Afrocentric principles on disciplinarity**

In *The Afrocentric Idea in Education*, Asante (1991) articulates several core principles that are relevant for preserving African knowledge systems in academic literacy development. Asante (1991) identifies five foundational principles: centring African cultural relevance, integrating African cultural perspectives across disciplines, promoting cultural and psychological wellbeing, advancing humanistic and pluralistic education, and resisting Eurocentrism. These principles are essential to shaping academic literacy, as they emphasise the necessity of creating culturally relevant and inclusive learning environments that honour and reflect the diverse experiences and perspectives of African communities.



**Figure 2:** Core principles for an Afrocentric model of transdisciplinary literacy.

An Afrocentric theory of transdisciplinary literacy development is essential for learning environments where Eurocentric or ethnocentric norms historically dominated and shaped knowledge production. This is particularly

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pertinent in formerly Afrikaans universities where historically African history, disciplinary perspectives, and knowledge systems have been marginalised in academic literacy development (Eybers, 2023). By embracing an Afrocentric framework, academic literacy developers can create more inclusive curricula that value and integrate African epistemologies, thereby enriching the educational experience and fostering a deeper understanding of the cultural origins, needs, and aspirations of African communities.

This shift necessitates a departure from neutral or universalist models of literacy to frameworks grounded in the cultures of disciplines and communities. Larson (1996) asserts that disrupting such systems is critical as they perpetuate unequal social relationships in broader society, as evidenced within the pan-African community. Consequently, a transdisciplinary theory of literacy must acknowledge Africa's rich knowledge traditions, which historically integrated transdisciplinary literacies into both educational practices and communal knowledge dissemination. By recognising the interconnectedness of literacy with African cultural contexts, educational frameworks can be restructured to honour and incorporate these rich traditions. This approach validates students' African knowledge systems and fosters a holistic understanding of academic literacy that is relevant to communities' needs.

A transformative shift in academic literacy development is also important to better reflect the distinct perspectives of both Eurocentric and African disciplinary principles. As Semmes (1981) notes, Eurocentric theories often promote an ontological separation of mind, body and soul, as well as subjectivity and objectivity. This contrasts sharply with indigenous African ontologies, which emphasise the interconnectedness of all aspects of life – physical, spiritual and intellectual (Ani, 2013). Therefore, an epistemological transformation is needed in how community-centric methods are incorporated into disciplines, to align academic literacy development with Africa's holistic ontologies (Chilisa, 2017).

Linking Afrocentricity and transdisciplinarity, Ani (2013) asserts that African epistemologies are inherently interconnected, where both physical and metaphysical entities are valid contributors to the production of disciplinary knowledge. This perspective aligns with the need for a transformative shift in academic literacy development that reflects the holistic ethos of African knowledge systems. According to Ani (2013), by incorporating these cultural systems, educators and academic literacy facilitators can design learning environments that embrace Afrocentric principles. In doing so, African students can gain a sense of belonging to disciplines in culturally relevant mediums, connecting to their own histories, cultures, and communities.

### **Facilitating transdisciplinarity with academic literacy**

Transitioning from the previous discussion, Rupnik and Avsec's (2020) model of transdisciplinary education exemplifies how integrating multiple disciplinary perspectives can address real world problems, a notion that resonates deeply with Afrocentric principles. Their findings illustrate that students and their families can act as co-knowledge producers, utilising various literacies and community environments. These technologies included computers, home workshops, as well as construction toys (Rupnik & Avsec, 2020).

By engaging with various technologies, students experience their parents' work first-hand. Moreover, hands-on experience allows students to understand how knowledge is integrated from across different fields in real-life contexts. A transdisciplinary pedagogy enhanced students' problem-solving, collaboration and innovative thinking skills (Rupnik & Avsec, 2020). This pedagogic approach underscores the importance of creating learning environments that are culturally relevant and technologically adept. Such integration promotes the idea that learning is an interconnected process that is essential for equipping students with competencies needed to develop academically, and in service of local communities.

Rupnik and Avsec's transdisciplinary model, which emphasises multiliteracies such as technological, collaborative, and problem-solving skills, aligns with an Afrocentric theory of knowledge creation. This model reflects the practices of pre-colonial African communities, which historically bridged disciplines in knowledge creation (Seroto, 2011; Ayittey, 2006). Their proposed teaching methods, as facilitated within indigenous African social organisation, promote the integration of diverse literacies and technologies across various fields. This approach fosters knowledge production that honours indigenous knowledge systems and ontologies.

The integration of diverse knowledge fields is essential for fostering a holistic educational experience for African students (Rupnik & Avsec, 2020). By grounding curricula in real-life, culturally relevant contexts, universities can develop specialised literacies and promote students' wellbeing. Additionally, incorporating community-based knowledge not only enriches the learning environment but empowers students to connect their academic pursuits with their cultural identities. Therefore, a transdisciplinary approach that merges academic epistemologies and respects indigenous knowledge systems can enhance students' overall development.

### **Linking disciplinary and transdisciplinary literacies with Africology**

Nabudere (2012), highlights that Africology serves as a meta-framework for developing curricula and epistemic spaces that address concerns related to restorative justice, thereby promoting holistic wellbeing. In this Afrikological framework, justice in African contexts goes beyond the adversarial application of laws. It encompasses inter-related legal, social, cultural, spiritual and economic principles (Nabudere 2012). Restorative justice is realised when educational practices embody transdisciplinary aims, fostering a critical understanding of knowledge that aligns with the diverse needs of African communities. This methodology enriches the learning experience by simultaneously re-embedding indigenous knowledge systems into the curriculum, while also focusing on enhancing students' and communities' wellbeing.

Nabudere's (2012), transdisciplinarity construct is important to academic literacy developers in higher education. His theory advocates for academic literacy development to be holistic, integrating the needs, aspirations, and knowledge of local communities into the educational experience. Nabudere (2012), contends that contemporary knowledge production often compels Africans into a fragmented and polarised worldview, where theory and practice, and in this context, literacies and their disciplinary applications, are often divided. This compartmentalisation risks leading African academic literacy developers to a Eurocentric approach, causing students to see themselves and disciplinary communication as disjointed, autonomous, and independent entities (Nabudere 2012). Such an approach diverges from the communal principles of Ubuntu, disconnecting students from their local communities, which Nabudere (2012), argues should play a vital role in knowledge production.

The ideological detachment of literacy practices and cultural contexts limits collaboration between disciplines and stifles interactions between academic institutions and local communities. Generic academic literacy models, partly inherited from apartheid-era language policies, isolate academic literacy instruction from its cultural, disciplinary and historical contexts (see Weideman, 2021). Nabudere (2012), warns that such neutral, technical models of education dislocate students' identities in learning. This outcome, which Chilisa (2017) associates with the colonality of knowledge, indirectly teaches students to see themselves as autonomous beings, disconnected from their communities, cultural roots, and even academic disciplines.

In contrast to autonomous ideologies of knowledge production, Rupnik and Avsec (2020) highlight that transdisciplinarity thrives on merging disciplinary knowledge with real-world, cultural contexts. However, neutral skills, one-size-fits-all approaches in South African academic literacy development undermine this potential. Therefore, Rupnik and Avsec's (2020) study is highly relevant to African educators aiming to enhance the key literacies in their courses. It emphasises the integration of knowledge of various technologies, disciplines, and epistemic traditions to nurture the development of students' higher order thinking.

The dominance of technical, neutral literacy skills models in higher education presents ongoing challenges for African academic literacy developers in providing authentic African instructional methods. This makes it difficult to implement transdisciplinary literacies. However, Nabudere's (2012) and Chilisa's (2017) theories of transdisciplinary knowledge, which emphasise co-creation between scholars and communities, highlight the importance of integrating local knowledge systems into education.

### **Findings**

This section demonstrates the interplay between Africology and transdisciplinarity by highlighting transdisciplinary literacies in action. It focuses on supporting scholars in co-designing and implementing their own transdisciplinary projects with African communities, both locally and globally. Central to this approach is Chilisa's (2017) transdisciplinary theory, which emphasises the co-creation of knowledge between scholars and local communities.

This framework aligns with Africology's goal of integrating African cultural, historical and social contexts into knowledge production.

Mahlangu and Garutsa's (2019) Grounding Programme at Fort Hare University in Southern Africa exemplifies transdisciplinary literacies in practice. In the programme, educators, students and community members engaged in dialogues around issues such as poverty and inequality, identity and environmental concerns (Mahlangu & Garutsa, 2019). These interactions facilitated academic literacies – such as argumentation, questioning, writing, and oral communication –while producing transdisciplinary knowledge that addressed communities' needs.

Before examining the practical strategies employed by Mahlangu and Garutsa (2019), it is important to first consider the educational, cultural and historical concerns that motivated their project. Numerous parallels can be drawn between the researchers' motivations and Asante's (1991) Afrocentric principles. A primary aim of the Grounding Programme was to amplify the voices of marginalised cultural communities in educational spaces (Mahlangu & Garutsa, 2019), aligning with the Afrocentric principle of integrating African knowledge across disciplines.

The researchers observed that amplifying marginalised community voices in the classroom enhanced students' engagement with knowledge (Mahlangu & Garutsa, 2019). The grounding course structure also spans multiple disciplines, suggesting that the Afrocentric goal of incorporating African perspectives throughout various fields was achieved (Mahlangu & Garutsa, 2019).

Another participant commented that listening to and considering students' voices fosters a sense of belonging among facilitators and students within the learning process (Mahlangu & Garutsa, 2019). This sense of belonging indicates that transdisciplinary literacies can play a vital role in safeguarding their psychological and cultural wellbeing in spaces traditionally dominated by Eurocentrism and Global North ideologies. By incorporating both the agency of various community and academic members, transdisciplinary approaches enabled the educators to create more inclusive environments that honour and validate African identities, as well as communities' needs.

Mokhele and Pinfold's (2020) investigation on transdisciplinarity in town and regional planning aligns with Afrocentric educational principles by addressing the gap in how built environment professionals engage with community needs. Their findings highlight that many professionals struggle to critically analyse local needs and move beyond disciplinary boundaries, even when tackling shared issues (Mokhele & Pinfold, 2020).

Mikhole and Pinfold (2020) implemented several strategies to overcome these barriers, and to foster transdisciplinarity. They directly applied Asante and Karenga's (2006) assertion that Afrocentric education requires materials that can be accessible and comprehensible across disciplines. To address barriers between future professionals and communities, they encouraged students to undertake projects, theses and dissertations supervised by staff from diverse disciplines, integrating knowledge from across fields (Mokhele & Pinfold, 2020). Additionally, they promoted community-based research, allowing students to engage directly with local communities and address real-world issues, further reinforcing the Afrocentric goal of creating culturally relevant and practically impactful work.

Mikhole and Pinfold's (2020) transdisciplinary strategy strongly aligns with Chilisa's (2019) emphasis on co-creating knowledge with communities, ensuring that literacies and communication remain relevant and transformative. By integrating community engagement into academic projects, their approach transcends traditional academic boundaries, fostering a deeper connection between scholars and local issues. This pedagogy aligns with the Afrocentric pedagogic goals outlined by Gray (2001), emphasising knowledge in action, or praxis, as a vital means of empowering African people to overcome global economic and social challenges.

## **Discussion**

### **Integration of Transdisciplinarity and Afrocentricity**

After reviewing literature on Afrocentric principles and their application in education, it is evident that there are significant overlaps with academic literacy development. The data suggests that Afrocentric principles can be utilised in three keyways: fostering cultural relevance across disciplines, facilitating the co-production of knowledge with communities, and promoting the holistic wellbeing of students. As Asante (1991) emphasizes, particular focus is



placed on safeguarding the psychological and cultural health of African students, ensuring that educational experiences are both empowering and contextually meaningful.

Seroto's (2011) description of indigenous education suggests that Afrocentric principles, as illustrated in Figure 2, offer contemporary educators a framework to understand and apply transdisciplinary literacies and discourses, much like those employed during Africa's pre-colonial era. Similarly, Temple (2010) highlights that African literature and modes of communication preserve indigenous knowledge, allowing culture to be elaborated across generations. This view is reinforced by Mahlangu and Garutsa's (2019) empirical work, which demonstrates how transdisciplinary approaches enable the co-creation of knowledge with communities. Together, these perspectives emphasise the significance of transdisciplinary methods in African knowledge systems, where literacies are deeply interconnected with cultural and historical continuity, addressing the real-life needs of communities.

The African philosophy of Ubuntu is particularly valuable for conceptualising transdisciplinary literacies as carriers of African cultures. In isiZulu, 'umuntu ngamuntu ngabantu' means 'a person is a person because of other people' (Chigangaidze, 2023). Within the Ubuntu philosophy, individual agency is validated through the recognition and support from the community. Mikhole and Pinfold's (2020) transdisciplinary strategy serves as evidence of how this philosophy can be applied in education, demonstrating how transdisciplinary literacies foster communal knowledge. Temple (2010) illustrates these discourses facilitate the sharing and preservation of cultural values across generations through collective collaboration, reflecting Ubuntu's core principle of interconnectedness.

### **Application of Afrocentric Principles in Academic Literacy**

The connection between Afrocentric principles and transdisciplinarity is crucial for how educators develop the academic literacies of novice scholars. Academic literacy extends beyond reading and writing; it underpins all knowledge processes, forming the foundation for acquiring, producing and disseminating insights across disciplines and communities.

Within an Afrocentric framework (see Figure 2), academic literacy development should be culturally relevant, encourage the co-production of knowledge with local communities, and promote students' psychological and cultural wellbeing (Asante 1991). Thondhlana et al. (2021) similarly argue that transdisciplinary research, especially in African contexts, requires mutual learning between academic and non-academic actors. This collaborative approach creates spaces where diverse worldviews coexist, emphasising transdisciplinary literacies' pivotal roles in facilitating these exchanges and ensuring that knowledge creation is contextually grounded.

Despite the benefits of mutual and reciprocal learning that transdisciplinary literacies afford between on- and off-campus stakeholders, implementing Afrocentric methods presents challenges in former segregated universities in South Africa. Eurocentric educational models, including technical and autonomous literacy constructs inherited from colonialism and apartheid, were deliberately designed to isolate African scholars from their communities, suppress indigenous knowledge, and cause cultural dislocation among African students.

Chilisa (2017) highlights the persistence of coloniality in educational structures, where indigenous knowledge is marginalised, and unequal power dynamics continue to favour Western epistemologies. Transdisciplinarity, as outlined by Thondhlana et al. (2021) can serve as a powerful tool to counter these colonial legacies by promoting inclusive, collaborative knowledge production rooted in local realities, challenging dominant disciplinary hierarchies, and reconnecting students with local communities. Transdisciplinary literacies, this article argues, are essential in re-embedding indigenous knowledge into the curriculum.

Mahlangu and Garutsa (2019) offer a compelling alternative to neutral skills academic literacy models by actively engaging local communities in the co-design of teaching, learning, and assessment practices. This transdisciplinary method ensures that academic literacy is not culturally detached but deeply rooted in communities' realities, promoting both educational relevance and cultural integration. However, as Fanon observed, there is also the issue of the Black bourgeois, who often prioritise personal advancement within academic institutions, while neglecting the input of local communities in designing and implementing academic literacy programmes.

Alternatively, by incorporating local African communities' worldviews and epistemes into education, academic literacy facilitators acknowledge the central role of culture, aligning with Lea and Street's (2006) academic literacies

model, which emphasises context as a key element in the development of academic literacy practices. This perspective recognises that academic literacy is not a neutral, technical phenomenon, but one that is deeply influenced by cultural and contextual factors, shaping how knowledge is produced, communicated, and understood in various disciplines, and diverse communities (Lea & Street, 2006).

In contrast to the ethos of the academic literacies model, when African students are placed in generic academic literacy courses, several harmful effects on their wellbeing arise. First, their instruction is disconnected from disciplinary knowledge, a core Afrocentric objective. Second, neutral skills models hinder meaningful interactions between academic literacy students, staff, and local cultural communities. In response, incorporating transdisciplinary frameworks, as Thondhlana et al. (2021) suggest, would enable the development of more culturally relevant, community-based literacy models as demonstrated by Mahlangu and Garutsa (2019) in the Grounding Programme at the University of Fort Hare.

Pre-colonial literacies in Africa also offer valuable examples of how academic literacies can be applied to foster contextuality. These literacies encompassed various modes of communication, including oral storytelling, proverbs, songs, and symbolic writing systems like Nsibidi, and the ancient scripts of Ethiopia and Egypt, all of which conveyed complex knowledge across multiple disciplines.

Each of these modes is still regularly applied in African communities and can be incorporated into disciplinary interactions. Pre-colonial literacies, as Chilisa (2017) suggests, can preserve indigenous knowledge through modes that are familiar to African cultural groups. Similarly, Thondhlana et al. (2021) emphasise that transdisciplinary approaches foster mutual learning between scholars and local communities, highlighting the crucial role of academic literacies in overcoming barriers between universities and local groups.

The findings of this article, particularly arising from the projects of Mahlangu and Garutsa (2019) and Mokhele and Pinfold (2020), demonstrate that educators are effectively integrating multiple disciplines, community knowledge and academic literacies. For example, Mokhele and Pinfold (2020) applied numerous academic literacies transdisciplinarily, including communication and collaboration skills, critical thinking, mapping skills, contextual understanding and meta-cognitive skills. By integrating these academic literacies, students engaged more effectively with both disciplinary knowledge and community-based challenges, fostering a holistic learning experience that bridged academic and real-world contexts.

### **Opportunities in Implementing Transdisciplinary Approaches**

Despite the historic challenges global African educators face in implementing authentic transdisciplinary literacies that draw on multiple academic fields, local communities' needs, and worldviews, there remain opportunities to counteract the marginalising effects of dominant ideologies, such as technical and culturally neutral constructs of academic literacy. As such, Chilisa (2017) emphasises that for transdisciplinarity to be effective, it must actively involve the co-production of knowledge between scholars and indigenous communities, ensuring that academic literacy becomes collaborative and culturally relevant.

Thondhlana et al. (2021) emphasise the importance of breaking down disciplinary boundaries to foster mutual learning and holistic knowledge creation. An analysis of the literature suggests that successfully incorporating transdisciplinary literacies into students' development requires a greater emphasis on Africology's role in re-structuring academic literacy programmes and courses. Afrocentric principles (Asante, 1991) can guide the teaching, learning and assessment of academic literacy. Therefore, as a meta-framework, Africology provides a crucial framework for integrating pan-African knowledge into transdisciplinary knowledge creation.

Akua (2020) identifies several essential standards for Afrocentric programmes, including community development, social justice, and the promotion of empowerment and agency. These Afrocentric standards are significant as they offer pathways for academic literacy developers to create culturally relevant models that value Africology. In contrast, when literacy developers adopt neutral skills models, there is a risk that the socioeconomic needs of local communities are marginalised in the structuring of courses. Hence, applying transdisciplinary frameworks that adopt standards like those articulated by Akua (2020) in academic literacy development creates spaces for collaboratively addressing the challenges faced by local communities.

By involving local community members, including elders, in designing learning experiences, literacy developers can foster education that meets the needs of African communities. Mazama (2018) asserts that disciplines should not be isolated from the cultural contexts of local communities. In preventing such isolation, academic literacy facilitators can integrate Africology into their curricula. This integration not only promotes knowledge of Africa's pre-colonial transdisciplinary literacies and their relevance to present-day education, but also enriches academic literacy by rooting it in the lived experiences and cultural traditions of African communities.

In Africology, a discipline's commitment to social justice, as argued by Nabudere (2012) is reflected in a students' ability to critically engage with issues like cultural marginalisation and dislocation. Transdisciplinary literacies play a crucial role in equipping students with the tools they need to critically engage with both knowledge and the real-world contexts in which societal problems are situated. The paradigm ensures they do not learn autonomously, but with the support of local community members. In this context, Mazama's (2018) concept of the scholar-activist becomes highly relevant. Social justice is most effectively promoted through the use of transdisciplinary literacies, where scholars nurture collaboration with communities in analysing factors that impede the attainment of holistic wellbeing.

### Conclusion

This article begins by outlining the social and economic crises affecting Black and African communities globally, manifesting in challenges such as unemployment, poverty and incarceration. It acknowledges that many cultural groups around the world face similar challenges, and these findings aim to benefit those communities. In response, the author proposes an Afrocentric theory of transdisciplinary literacy as a solution. Rooted in Afrocentric principles – such as community involvement, social justice and the integration of Africology – this theory provides a framework for addressing these socio-economic challenges by centring African knowledge systems and community-based solutions.

Transdisciplinary literacies, which foster collaboration across disciplines and between universities and communities, are central to this approach. The article urges higher education institutions to prioritise these partnerships by examining whether their policies either enhance or inhibit transdisciplinary interactions with local communities. African universities must assess how their structures support or limit the inclusion of community knowledge and Africological perspectives in academic literacy development. This consideration also applies to global universities and their interactions with local communities.

In conclusion, future research should explore the effective integration of transdisciplinary literacy through Afrocentricity into academic literacy frameworks, aiming to humanise pedagogy and foster cultural understanding globally. This research should identify strategies to overcome ideological dominance in academic disciplines and best practices for engaging local communities in the co-creation and implementation of knowledge. By doing so, we can create educational environments that are not only inclusive and empowering but also transformative for both students and communities.

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#### **Author biography**

Oscar Eybers is a lecturer and researcher in the Unit for Academic Literacy at the University of Pretoria, Tshwane, South Africa. His research interests include interplays of academic literacy with African history, culture and knowledge systems.