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Decolonizing Teaching and Classroom Experience in Africa: The Role of Bilchiinsi

Ali Ahmed, Najat Ahmed, and Amadu Musah Abudu

The African continent is home to the world's youngest population, with 70% of its people under the age of 30 (Mulikita, 2024). Projections from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs indicate that one in every four people in Africa will be a young person by 2030 (Wiafe, 2024). These changes in population dynamics—and particularly the increased numbers of young people—will likely lead to an increase in demand for educational opportunities including but not limited to infrastructure, equipment, and spaces to improve access. Also, likely to receive attention is the nature and quality of an educational theory, policy, and practice (curriculum, text, and pedagogy), to make them relevant to contemporary standards but also account for changing times, circumstances, and social realities (Armah, 2017; Dei, 2004). Within this context, what teachers do in their classrooms will come under the microscope.

Already, there is talk of a growing learning crisis in sub-Saharan African classrooms including Ghana (Molina et al., 2018; World Bank, 2018). Students are reportedly failing to acquire basic proficiency in literacy and numeracy even though they spend between four to seven hours in schools and classrooms every day (Bold et al., 2017; Rose & Alcott, 2015). This deficit discourse of crisis or disaster didacticism, as Schweisfurth (2023) would call it, has been placed squarely on the shoulders of teachers. As such, the learning crisis is inherently a teaching crisis (Molina et al., 2018), suggesting a heightened interest in the kind of experiences teachers create for students in their classrooms. The resultant effect is the development of purported best practices by “experts” housed within the offices of Global North-based international organizations, aid agencies, and donor partners for teachers in sub-Saharan Africa to adopt and implement in schools and classrooms (Mitchell, 2023). These so-called best practices are touted as products of extensive review and synthesis of literature in the field of education, teaching, and classroom interactions (Spink et al., 2017).

Yet, as evidence from McLean and Sen (2019) shows, “When a problem is local, locals appear best placed to address it” (p. 133). Pertinently, then, to what extent are those purported best practices informed by local perspectives and experiences? What local knowledge, experiences, and practices can be drawn upon to transform education and classroom experiences in sub-Saharan Africa? How, and in what ways, can these local knowledge practices and experiences transform teaching and other aspects of classroom life? These among other things are the concerns of this paper. In other words, this paper attempts to respond to these questions by proposing *Bilchiinsi* (moral/ethical living), as an alternative classroom pedagogy for transforming teaching and classroom interactions in Ghana and beyond. *Bilchiinsi* is a Dagban philosophy that emphasizes living and interacting with others in dignity and respect (Mohammed, 2022). It is concerned with ethical communal living where the interests, needs, and desires of the individual derive their roots from that of the society (Phasha et al., 2017; Takyi-Amoako & Assie-Lumumba, 2018; Tamale, 2020).

To be clear, proposals to transform teaching and learning in sub-Saharan Africa through the adoption and integration of Indigenous knowledge systems, philosophies, epistemologies, and local pedagogies are not new. Indeed, scholars across the globe, and those from formerly colonized contexts such as Ghana, have called for the integration of Indigenous knowledge systems and local pedagogies in school curricula and pedagogy. This, they posit, is a means of decolonizing education, curricula, and pedagogy, as well as a way of creating culturally relevant and sustaining educational experiences for learners (Adjei, 2007; Dei, 2004, 2012; Prempeh, 2022). Some have even advocated for the indigenization of the entire education system (Dei, 2007). Others have critiqued the marginalization and exclusion of Indigenous cultural knowledge, languages, and experiences from the curriculum (Adjei, 2010; Bonney, 2022, 2023), insisting that their inclusion and integration foster retention, increased engagement, and helps students to relate well with curricula content (Aboagye, 2021; Addae et al., 2024; Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016; Dei, 2012; Gyamerah, 2024; Msila & Gumbo, 2016; Mudaly, 2018; Opoku & James, 2021). Yet still, scholars have called for the reassertion of Indigenous resistance and futurity in the curriculum of schools and universities (Dei & Cacciavillani, 2024).

Importantly, research in this area has moved beyond calls for integration to actual implementation (e.g., Mudaly, 2018; Opoku & James, 2021). For instance, Mudaly (2018) drew on experiential learning and teaching approaches to help pre-service teachers engage with Indigenous knowledge systems and local pedagogies using Indigenous gardening methods. Opoku and James (2021), on the other hand, approached this process by touring cultural centres with pre-service teachers to learn the wisdom behind Indigenous knowledge and to demystify such knowledge systems. Unlike the examples, this paper is not an empirical study. However, it aligns with Bishop et al. (2014) in advocating for discursive repositioning, wherein educational planners, policymakers, and teachers address educational challenges—such as the learning crisis—by drawing upon Indigenous philosophies, worldviews, aspirations, and epistemologies, rather than remaining constrained by colonial legacies (Adzahlie-Mensah & Dunne, 2018). This perspective is particularly relevant given that, before European contact, education in Ghana—specifically teaching and learning—was shaped and guided by Indigenous philosophies, epistemologies, traditions, and practices (Pinto, 2019; Wiafe, 2023). Furthermore, given the low visibility and representation of African and African perspectives in educational research and scholarship, this paper responds to Wiafe's (2024) invitation to researchers and scholars to make visible the African presence and perspective in global education discourse.

Framed decoloniality, the paper explores Bilchiinsi's philosophy as a relational pedagogy for transforming teaching, learning, and classroom dynamics in Ghanaian schools. It begins by examining the need to decolonize education, curriculum, and instructional practices, followed by an analysis of decoloniality and related concepts. The discussion then situates Bilchiinsi within the decolonial framework, highlighting its epistemological, ontological, and axiological foundations. Finally, the paper considers the classroom as a potential space for practicing Bilchiinsi, addressing both its possibilities and limitations as a decolonizing pedagogy.

Resurgence of Decolonization Movements

Recent decades have witnessed an upsurge in calls for educational institutions, spaces, classrooms, and curricula to be decolonized (Moosavi, 2020; Morreira et al., 2020). These calls

have often demanded an end to global apartheid in knowledge production including undoing colonial vestiges in education and research (Bernal & Villalpando, 2023; Mbembe, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018a). While these conversations are not new, the recent resurgence has expanded beyond specific disciplines and has evoked diverse actions including academic publications, blog posts, and artistic performance, among others occasioning concerns that a “decolonial bandwagon” has emerged (Moosavi, 2020; Morreira et al., 2020). What then is decolonization and what does it seek to achieve?

Decolonization seeks to dismantle the enduring legacies of colonialism that have become embedded in social, political, cultural, economic, and religious structures, as well as systems of knowledge production, validation, and dissemination (Mohammed, 2022). This process necessitates a critical examination of theoretical frameworks and knowledge canons rooted in White male perspectives and their societal impacts (Morreira et al., 2020). It also involves disentangling colonial power relations and structures, including knowledge paradigms that are both products and constitutive parts of colonialism (Quijano, 2007). Such efforts aim to redress colonial and imperial harms within academia and envision liberatory futures (Mohammed, 2022). According to Mohammed (2022), this requires pedagogical, epistemological, and ontological transformations—through classroom practices, public scholarship, knowledge production, and reimagined ways of being.

Quijano (2007) argues that colonialism systematically discredited local knowledge systems, repressed indigenous beliefs, and disrupted cultural production, replacing them with the colonizers’ idealized models of knowledge and meaning. This process ensured the colonizers’ control as “a people without their ways of knowing is a people without both a history and a future of their own making” (Ndlovu, 2018, p. 95). Colonial experiences, however, varied in intensity across regions. For example, while cultural destruction in Africa was significant, it was less severe than in Latin America (Quijano, 2007). Nonetheless, African knowledge systems were delegitimized and misrecognized within the global cultural order (Ndlovu, 2018; Quijano, 2007).

Although formal colonial rule—in the form of political administration—ended long ago (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015b, 2018b), its legacy persists through coloniality—a more insidious power structure that emerged alongside colonialism (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, 2016; Quijano, 2007). Grosfoguel (2007) notes that the domination of non-European Other continued even after political independence, as colonial hierarchies became entrenched in global labor divisions and capital accumulation (Quijano, 2000). Coloniality reshaped subjectivity, culture, and knowledge production, perpetuating colonial power dynamics (Ensuncho, 2023; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Quijano, 2007). Coloniality operates as both a prescriptive and performative structure (Ndlovu, 2018). As prescriptive, it resists systemic change; as performative, it adapts and mutates, ensuring its survival through mechanisms such as economic development, globalization, and notions of progress and democracy (Ndlovu, 2018)—best teaching practices, progressive pedagogies, learner-centred teaching, modern educational practices, etc., in this case. Thus, coloniality endures as a continuous historical structure, even as colonialism itself collapses (Ndlovu, 2018).

In sub-Saharan Africa, colonial values have become deeply embedded in everyday life, influencing thought, language, knowledge systems, and cultural practices (Mohammed, 2022). This has led to the devaluation of Indigenous epistemologies and the privileging of colonial knowledge as the standard of legitimacy (Mohammed, 2022; Tamale, 2020). Colonial intellectualism deliberately marginalized oral traditions and Indigenous wisdom, relegating them to illegitimacy (Tamale, 2020). The academy, historically and presently, remains complicit in perpetuating colonial and imperial ideologies (Mohammed, 2022; Smith, 2021).

Coloniality, through its various iterations—power, knowledge, being, affect, and curriculum—has stripped the colonized of their identity and humanity, limiting their ability to envision alternative ways of being (Chilisa, 2020; Ndlovu, 2018; Mohammed, 2022), including in classrooms. This creates a form of entrapment, where colonized subjects may not even recognize their subjugation (Ndlovu, 2018). Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1986) describes this as a “cultural bomb” that alienates the colonized from their heritage, fostering self-doubt and identification with oppressive systems (p. 4). Coloniality, thus, permeates epistemology, ontology, and axiology, becoming normalized in postcolonial life (Mohammed, 2022).

Western knowledge systems dominate African and Ghanaian contexts, further legitimized through educational practices and pedagogy (Mohammed, 2022). Indeed, formal education, as we have it presently, is a product of colonialism (Wiafe, 2021). Perhaps this explains why it continues to perpetuate colonial violence, transforming students into colonial subjects and reinforcing their marginalization (Adzahlie-Mensah, 2014; Adzahlie-Mensah & Dunne, 2018; Agbenyega & Deku, 2011; Dunne & Adzahlie-Mensah, 2016). Against this backdrop, Gutto (2006) calls for a paradigm shift in knowledge systems, advocating for the decolonization of hegemonic, racist frameworks that distort African realities (Ndlovu, 2018). This involves delinking from the coloniality of power and modernity, fostering epistemic reconstitution and intercultural exchange (Mignolo, 2020; Quijano, 2007).

Decoloniality and Coloniality: A Brief Overview

Decoloniality is the process of delinking from epistemic, cultural, political, and material impositions rooted in Eurocentrism (Fúnez-Flores, 2023, 2024; Mignolo, 2020; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2023; Quijano, 2007). It involves critically interrogating Eurocentric knowledge systems and their societal impacts while remembering dismembered histories, languages, and epistemologies (Mignolo, 2020; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015a; Quijano, 2007; waThiong’o, 2009). Emerging from the struggles of the Global South, decoloniality is a liberatory praxis that challenges modernity/coloniality disguised as progress, civilization, and development (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015a; Mohammed, 2022; Morreira et al., 2020). It seeks to dismantle racial, gender, and geopolitical hierarchies by producing counter-discourses, knowledge systems, and alternative ways of being (Maldonado-Torres, 2011, 2016). Decoloniality can be said to be a reaction to coloniality.

Coloniality: The Dark Side of Modernity. Coloniality, a concept introduced by Aníbal Quijano (2000), refers to the enduring power structures that emerged alongside colonialism. Unlike colonialism, which involved direct political and psychological domination, coloniality represents a broader, more insidious system of control that shapes culture, labour, knowledge production,

and intersubjectivity (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Quijano, 2007). Coloniality operates through racial, gender, and class hierarchies, perpetuating the dominance of Euro-Western epistemologies and marginalizing non-Western knowledge systems (Grosfoguel, 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015a). It is an invisible yet pervasive power structure that defines modernity, embedding itself in everyday life, from cultural practices to notions of beauty and success (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). It has many iterations, among which include coloniality power, knowledge, being, curriculum, etc.

Coloniality of Power. The coloniality of power describes the global hierarchy established through colonialism, where Euro-Western nations occupy the "zone of being," enjoying full humanity and access to resources, while the Global South is relegated to the "zone of non-being," where humanity is questioned and existence is precarious (Fanon, 1963; Grosfoguel, 2016; Maldonado-Torres, 2007). This system perpetuates inequities through material and discursive practices, shaping social, political, and economic institutions (Kerr, 2014; Quijano, 2000). In education, the coloniality of power manifests in the uncritical adoption of Eurocentric curricula and pedagogies, often imposed by international organizations and aid agencies (World Bank, IMF, OECD, GPE, etc.), through discursive practices, consultancy, and aid conditionalities (Crossley, 2019; Gyamerah, 2024; Tabulawa, 2003).

Coloniality of Knowledge and Curriculum. The coloniality of knowledge examines how Eurocentric epistemologies dominate global knowledge production, validation, and dissemination while marginalizing Indigenous and local knowledge (Quijano, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018a; Walton, 2018). It raises critical questions about whose knowledge is recognized, who benefits, and whose voices are silenced (Dei, 2016; Sriprakash et al., 2020). The coloniality of curriculum extends this analysis, revealing how dominant curricula perpetuate imperial domination by erasing alternative modes of knowledge and existence (Fúnez-Flores, 2024; Boiles & Fúnez-Flores, 2024). In Ghana, this is evident in the uncritical borrowing of Eurocentric educational policies and practices, which reinforce the marginalization of local epistemologies (Gyamera & Burke, 2018; Tabulawa, 2013).

Coloniality of Being. The coloniality of being interrogates the ontological exclusion of colonized peoples, particularly the dehumanization of Black and Indigenous bodies (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018a). It examines how whiteness gained ontological density over blackness, reducing colonized peoples to objects and commodities (Fanon, 1963; Walton, 2018). In education, the coloniality of being is evident in the erasure of students' cultural and linguistic identities through Eurocentric curricula and pedagogies (Walton, 2018). This ontological violence is closely tied to the coloniality of knowledge, as the Cartesian dictum, "I think, therefore I am," implicitly denies the rationality and existence of colonized others (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

Toward Decoloniality. Decoloniality calls for epistemic reconstitution, detaching from Eurocentric knowledge paradigms and embracing interculturality, where diverse experiences and meanings can coexist (Mignolo, 2020; Quijano, 2007). This process involves drawing on Indigenous philosophies, epistemologies, and relational ontologies such as Sankofa, Ubuntu, and Bilchiinsi, to unsettle Eurocentric linearity and open multiple ways of knowing and being (Mukasa, 2024). By centering African and Ghanaian epistemologies, decoloniality seeks to resist

the colonality of power, knowledge, and being, fostering liberatory futures grounded in dignity and respect for all humanity.

Earlier decolonial efforts drew on the works of decolonial scholars to challenge colonial discourses and affirm the humanity and agency of colonized peoples (Morrreira et al., 2020). Mohammed (2022) suggests leveraging Indigenous knowledge systems—such as proverbs, folktales, songs, and cultural artifacts—to develop new frameworks for understanding phenomena, including classroom teaching and learning. In this context, I offer Bilchiinsi, an Indigenous philosophy of the Dagbamba (Dagomba) in Northern Ghana, as a decolonial pedagogy for transforming education and classroom interaction and relationships in Ghana and beyond. The following section explores Bilchiinsi and its potential as a decolonial pedagogy.

Bilchiinsi—Transforming Teaching and Classroom Interactions

Bilchiinsi is a Dagban philosophy centered on dignity, respect, and the recognition of humanity in all interactions (Mohammed, 2022). It is an age-long practice and way of life of the people of Dagban, who are known as Dagbamba (Dagomba). The Dagbamba (Dagomba), part of the Mole-Dagban ethnic group—one of the largest in northern Ghana—have preserved their traditions for centuries through oral transmission, led by royal praise singers and drummers. Despite its significance, Bilchiinsi remains underrepresented in Ghanaian academia, a gap Mohammed (2022) attributes to colonial legacies that marginalized northern Ghanaian knowledge systems. At its core, Bilchiinsi advocates for justice, respect, and the sanctity of human dignity, transcending social, economic, racial, ethnic, gender, cultural, religious, or disability-based differences (Mohammed, 2022).

A person who embodies Bilchiinsi is called a Bilchina (plural: Bilchininima)—a title denoting high moral standing and the pinnacle of practising humanity (Ahmed, forthcoming; Mohammed, 2022). However, this recognition is not an endpoint but a commitment to consistently uphold the dignity of others in all relations and interactions (Mohammed, 2022). Like Ubuntu and other African relational philosophies, Bilchiinsi emphasizes communal living, where individual success is intertwined with collective well-being (Phasha et al., 2017; Takyi-Amoako & Assié-Lumumba, 2018; Tamale, 2020). In classroom contexts, this translates to mutual respect between teachers and students, as well as among students and their peers, fostering an environment free from coercion, intimidation, or violence (Mohammed, 2022). Put differently, Bilchiinsi inspires group-based learning and shared academic growth among the members of the classroom community. For instance, in a Bilchiinsi-inspired classroom or a classroom filled with Bilchininima, students will gladly help explain a concept or an idea to a colleague who has difficulty in understanding such a concept, and the teacher will not only acknowledge such students but will actively encourage others to do likewise. Also, teachers structure classroom interactions and activities in ways that encourage (even reward) academically stronger students to provide learning support for academically weaker ones (e.g., help improve the reading skills of peers, provide remedial lessons, help those who for one reason or another missed a lesson or a school day).

Unlike philosophies driven by societal rules or fear of reprisal, Bilchiinsi is self-motivated, rooted in the personal desire to maintain moral integrity and honor one's lineage and ancestors

(Ahmed, forthcoming). Transgressions are seen as sins against oneself, one's family, and ancestors, often requiring atonement through rituals like 'Bagyuli maalibu' (sacrifices or libations) (Ahmed, forthcoming). As a lived, embodied philosophy, Bilchiinsi resists comprehensive explication, especially in a foreign language like English. Nonetheless, it fundamentally opposes systemic violence (e.g., colonialism, imperialism, ableism, sexism, racism, classism, and heteropatriarchy) while affirming the sanctity of human dignity (Mohammed, 2022). By valuing Indigenous knowledge systems and local pedagogies, Bilchiinsi challenges the coloniality of knowledge and curriculum. It advocates for the inclusion of these systems in the curriculum and teaching practices, fostering respect and recognition for marginalized epistemologies (Mohammed, 2022). How, and in what ways can this be achieved then?

Bilchiinsi as a Decolonial Pedagogy. The foundation of this approach lies in both teachers and students aspiring toward Bilchiinsi or becoming Bilchininima. This aspiration begins with respecting, recognizing, and accepting students as co-creators of knowledge, adhering to sociocultural conventions, and being mindful of power dynamics—such as those related to gender, ethnicity, social status, (dis)ability, and other factors—without imposing judgment on the learning community (Mohammed, 2022). Here, the creative and transformative potential of teachers and students is harnessed to empower them to act as agents of change rather than passive consumers of oppressive cultures' knowledge systems and perspectives perpetuated by coloniality in schools and classrooms (Reyes, 2019). This necessitates a radical reimagining of the classroom, where students are no longer seen as 'the Other' but as active participants and teachers remain open to relinquishing some of their authority (Bovill, 2020; Zembylas, 2006).

Praxis, in this framework, does not require grand gestures. Even small, informed behavioral changes—beginning within the individual—hold significant transformative power, thereby creating a dynamic and fluid learning community that challenges institutionalized practices of domination and marginalization (hooks, 1994; Reyes, 2019). It functions simultaneously as a process, practice, and condition to critically examine, disrupt, and transform the ways colonialism has normalized and naturalized Western-centric systems of thought, knowledge, values, emotions, actions, identities, and aspirations (Mohammed, 2022; Reyes, 2019). In this instance, the teacher cedes some of his/her powers. She/he only provides the broader curricula framework but then allows learners to decide—even create where possible—the texts or content they want to engage with, how they want to structure the classroom activities, and eventually work with the teacher to determine how success is measured. For example, when teaching reading comprehension, the teacher can allow students some flexibility to choose what text they want to use for that lesson.

Hooks (1994) described this type of engaged learning community as one that leaves educators invigorated and students empowered to think critically and independently, rather than merely emulating their teachers. Bilchiinsi demands a commitment to continuously explore deeply ingrained belief systems, their systemic origins, and the ways they unconsciously or complicity influence behavior (Reyes, 2019). By so doing, students and educators collaboratively critique knowledge, drawing on shared expertise and perspectives to make sense of their learning. This process acknowledges that knowledge is often contingent and messy (Bovill, 2020). Bovill (2020) believes in the power of this approach to not only foster but also strengthen positive

relationships between teachers and students, as well as among students themselves. In this regard, rather than succumbing to frustration or disengagement—manifested through lateness, absenteeism, or other behaviors identified as root causes of the learning crisis (Bold et al., 2017; Molina et al., 2018)—teachers recognize the potential of students as collaborators and defer to them when appropriate (Bovill, 2020; hooks, 1994).

Aligning with Indigenous philosophies such as Bilchiinsi, which emphasize mutuality, interrelationship, and interdependence (Cruz, 2024; Mohammed, 2022), educators and students are encouraged to adopt new ways of relating to one another (Bovill, 2020). This form of pedagogy visibly questions and dismantles colonial processes but also creates spaces to reimagine and rebuild a world otherwise. Thus, Bilchiinsi must strive to liberate the mind, body, and spirit from the homogenizing forces of coloniality while transforming cultural practices, power structures, and material conditions in the classroom (Reyes, 2019).

This might involve negotiating and sharing decision-making responsibilities in the classroom, embracing diverse motivations, methods, values, and outcomes, and embedding pedagogical practices that foster co-creation—both between teachers and students and among peers (Bovill, 2020). For example, students could be encouraged to support one another through peer tutoring, reflecting social norms that prioritize interdependence and collective responsibility (Cruz, 2024; Phasha et al., 2017; Takyi-Amoako & Assié-Lumumba, 2018; Mitchell, 2023; Tamale, 2020). In this framework, educational success is viewed as a shared endeavour, where individual achievement is contingent on the success of the group. Students not only respect and relate well with one another but also actively support their peers' learning (Mitchell, 2023). By centering Indigenous Dagbani epistemology in education, Bilchiinsi advances decoloniality thereby challenging Eurocentric pedagogies that dominate African classrooms. Bilchiinsi as a classroom pedagogy fosters relational learning, mutual respect, and communal knowledge co-creation.

These practices counter colonial hierarchies. Unlike the so-called “best practices” that are often imposed, Bilchiinsi emerges from local ontologies, offering a culturally sustaining alternative that rehumanizes education and classroom practices (Mohammed, 2022; Reyes, 2019). In sum, Bilchiinsi “(re)creates, cultivates, and nurtures the conditions whereby teachers and students can (re)vision the classroom space to involve practices and behaviors that are grounded in values that (re)humanize” (Reyes, 2019, p. 5), or re-member as Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2009) would put it.

Limitations and Conclusion

While Bilchiinsi offers a pathway to decolonizing teaching and classroom interactions, it is not without limitations. Indeed, Tamale (2020) once cautioned against essentializing assumptions and generalizations about Africa's social and cultural diversity—a warning equally relevant to Ghana, home to over 70 ethnic groups. Furthermore, it would be dangerously flawed to assume homogeneity in the beliefs and daily lives of people, even within the same ethnic group (Ahmed, forthcoming). Here, it is important to remember Mukasa's (2024) concerns regarding the erasure and/or marginalization of women's voices and interests in public discourse. Further, as astutely stated by Walton (2018), some Indigenous knowledge, epistemologies, and practices may perpetuate exclusion or may be weaponized against minority groups and individuals under the

guise of “societal values.” Thus, uncritically adopting these philosophies risks reinforcing the very systems they aim to dismantle (Ahmed, forthcoming).

That said, Bilchiinsi, like many of the African relational paradigms (e.g., Ubuntu), emphasizes commonality; however, this philosophy uniquely integrates ancestral accountability (bagyuli maalibu) and self-motivated ethical living that transcends rule-based compliance (Ahmed, forthcoming). Its focus on peer-led learning and teacher-student power-sharing in classrooms directly disrupts coloniality, thus offering a praxis-oriented model distinct from, for example, Ubuntu’s broader humanist philosophy (Phasha et al., 2017; Mohammed, 2022). Though the element of ancestral ties in Bilchiinsi could potentially conflict with secular curricula, it could also enrich moral pedagogy. For instance, when rituals like bagyuli maalibu are thoughtfully adapted, they could become bases for reflective practices in classrooms, fostering ethical consciousness without imposing religiosity—a decolonial negotiation of tradition and modernity (Ahmed, forthcoming; Tamale, 2020).

Recall Cruz’s (2024) concern regarding engaging with Indigenous philosophies with an outsider’s gaze. We wish to echo this anxiety here. Our understanding of Bilchiinsi is rooted in our identification as members of the Mole-Dagbanj ethnic group (first and second authors) and our proximity to the ethnic group (third author). However, we are attempting to explain it here using a language that is not ours: English. This is a big ask. To fully capture the meaning and depth of Bilchiinsi using the English language is impossible; these philosophies are meant to be lived, embodied, and experienced. Thus, something will inevitably be lost in translation (Cruz, 2024).

It is important to note that our adoption of Bilchiinsi is not an attempt to present an idealized view of the philosophy; rather, it is an attempt to present an alternative lens for reimagining teaching and learning from a Ghanaian/African-centered perspective. It is also an attempt to create opportunities for diverse knowledge forms and ways of knowing and being to learn from each other synergistically through critical dialogue (Gyamerah et al., 2023). Here, we wish to recall Tamale’s (2020) caution again and acknowledge the danger of presenting a simplistic and generalized view of non-Western frameworks as communal, organic, non-hierarchical, and non-patriarchal. This paper, therefore, represents a decolonial effort to challenge coloniality and address the lingering colonial influences in Ghana’s (and African) education system and classroom relationships. We hope we have succeeded in doing so, or at least we have tried.

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