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## Decolonising English education through Indian knowledge systems a critical study

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### **Abstract:**

*In India the history of English education has been influenced by colonial policies which assigned English as a language of power, administration, modernity and social mobility. Alongside national and global opportunities that English affords, its colonial past has also created cultural alienation, linguistic privilege and reliance on Western knowledge structures. This paper critically explores the decolonising potential of Indian Knowledge Systems, through the lens of English education. Decolonisation is not about giving up English; it is about making English an authentic and culturally responsive, multilingual, inclusive and critically informed practice. The study delves into the colonial context of English education, the theoretical underpinning of decolonisation, the importance of IKS, and the significance of the National Education Policy 2020 in fostering Indian knowledge traditions. It believes that the English classrooms can be made places where learners connect with elements of Indian philosophy, literature, ethics, aesthetics, oral traditions, local histories, as well as communities' knowledge, and learn to communicate with the outside world. The paper also identifies challenges including tokenism, political misappropriation and inadequate teacher preparation and the potential for de-inclusion of marginalised knowledge traditions.*

**Keywords:** Decolonisation, English education, Indian Knowledge Systems, NEP 2020, multilingualism, colonial education

### **Introduction:**

The history of English in India is a complex history. It has created opportunities in higher education, jobs, administration, technology and global communication. Meanwhile, English had been adopted as a language of power and cultural hegemony as part of British colonialism. As it were, English was institutionalized and introduced at the same time as a language of power and dominance as part of the British colonialism. In the iconic Minute on Indian Education (1835), Macaulay

advocated for the use of English to create a cadre of Indians who would be able to help with the administration of colonial rule and who would adopt Western ideas. This policy led to the marginalisation of Indian languages, indigenous learning systems, and indigenous knowledge systems. It is not about English; it is about the colonial setting in which English has sometimes been taught. A history of English education has tended to pay too much attention to the western texts, western theories, western notions of 'correctness' and to marginalise Indian knowledge as 'traditional' or 'secondary'. This is what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) describes as cultural and linguistic alienation, as the learners are cut off from their own histories, languages, and cultural imagination.

Decolonising English education is challenging this hierarchy. It's not about taking English out of schools. Rather, it is the use of English as a stepping stone to convey Indian experience, Indian intellectual tradition and locals' realities. Moreover, the National Education Policy 2020 also places emphasis on an education system based on the Indian ethos and promotion of the inclusion of Indian knowledge systems across curricula (Ministry of Education, 2020). Hence, this paper investigates the possibility of decolonizing the English education in the context of IKS without compromising on the quality of learning and its global relevance.

### **Research Objectives:**

The main objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the colonial background of English education in India.
2. To understand the concept of decolonising English education.
3. To explore the role of Indian Knowledge Systems in English education.
4. To critically analyse the opportunities and challenges of integrating IKS into English pedagogy.
5. To suggest practical ways of making English education culturally rooted, inclusive, and globally useful.

### **Research Questions:**

This study addresses the following questions:

1. How did colonial policies shape English education in India?
2. What does decolonising English education mean in the Indian context?
3. How can Indian Knowledge Systems be integrated into English education?
4. What are the benefits and risks of using IKS in English classrooms?
5. How can English education balance global communication with local cultural identity?

### **Literature Review:**

English education in India under the colonial rule, was not only a language project, but also an ideology project. This was Macaulay's Minute in which he proposed English education to be used as a means of imparting European knowledge to Indians (Macaulay, 1835). This gave rise to a hierarchy where English was seen as a sign of progress and Indian languages were perceived as different inferior

languages. Pennycook (1998) states that English is, historically, a part of power, modernity and superiority discourses. Likewise, Phillipson (1992) defines linguistic imperialism as a phenomenon whereby English continues to exert an unequal power over other languages that are dominated.

This is a language hierarchy which has been strongly attacked by postcolonial thinkers. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) states that language is vital in terms of culture, memory and identity. Colonial languages can have a negative effect on learners' connection to one's cultural world when they are dominant in the education system. This is a major issue in the Indian context since many of the students learn English from resources which are detached from their local environment, social realities and knowledge traditions.

India's English has also been Indianized at the same time. According to Kachru (1983) Indian English has acquired its own cultural functions, style, lexis and identity. This indicates that English is not just a language of the colonies anymore, but it is also an Indian language of use. Thus, decolonising English education does not need to condemn or denigrate English, but rather make it more democratic, multilingual, and culturally relevant.

Indian Knowledge Systems are important tools in this regard. The knowledge traditions that are part of the IKS are knowledge of philosophy, grammar, literature, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, ecology, ethics, arts, architecture, governance and social life. The University Grants Commission (2023) has also suggested integrating the concept of IKS within the curricula of higher education institutions complying with NEP 2020. But critical writers suggest that decolonisation should not be simply cultural revivalism (UGC). It must comprise of the rich variety of Indian knowledge systems such as Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi, regional, folk, women's and minority knowledge systems.

#### **Methodology:**

This paper uses a qualitative and critical research method. It is based on secondary sources like the policy document, books, academic writings and theoretical literature on colonialism, postcolonial theory, English education and Indian Knowledge Systems. The study explores the issue of colonial presence in the English education and the possibility of re-imagining English by using critical analysis approach and IKS.

It is an analytical method, not an empirical one. Not collecting field data from students and teachers. Rather, it investigates concepts, policies and practices in education. Colonial legacy, language hierarchy, cultural alienation, multilingual pedagogy, Indian knowledge traditions, curriculum reform, and inclusive decolonisation are the major themes that are used to analyze.

#### **Conceptual Framework:**

The following three interrelated concepts are the conceptual underpinnings of this paper: coloniality of English education, Indian Knowledge Systems, and transformative pedagogy.

First, coloniality of English education relates to the ongoing presence of colonial values as a part of the curriculum, attitudes towards language, materials used in lessons and assessment systems. Following Independence, English is sometimes associated with the elite, urban privilege, Western knowledge.

Second, Indian Knowledge Systems provide a means to reengage teaching and learning with Indian values of knowledge, culture, ethics and ecology. They involve classical texts, oral traditions, local literature, folk knowledge, philosophical discussions, environmental knowledge, and artistic practices.

Third, transformative pedagogy is defined as approaches to teaching that develop three kinds of students: critical, confident, and culturally aware. In English teaching, it is to use English as a means of communication and exchange, but not imitation, as a means of self-expression, as a means of knowledge production.

Area	Colonial English Education	Decolonised English Education through IKS
Knowledge base	Western-centered	Indian and global knowledge together
Language practice	English-only dominance	Multilingual and translanguaging approach
Text selection	Mainly British/Western texts	Indian, regional, folk, and world texts
Learner identity	Imitation of native speaker	Confident local-global speaker
Pedagogy	Memorisation and correctness	Critical thinking and cultural connection
Assessment	Grammar-heavy testing	Communication, interpretation, creativity

This framework shows that decolonising English education is not anti-English. It is an attempt to make English education more balanced, inclusive, and rooted.

### Decolonising English Education through IKS

The first step to decolonising English education is to shift the goal of learning English. The use of English in colonial education was sometimes seen as a 'superior language', which was being used as a means of gaining power. A decolonised approach allows English to be one of a range of languages that allow students to communicate their own lived experiences. This change is crucial because there are many Indian students who know English, but feel that their mother tongue, local culture or rural background is not as good as English.

IKS can contribute in a way that will help to balance this. For instance, the translations of Upanishads, Buddhist texts, Bhakti poetry, Sufi poetry, Sangam literature, Dalit autobiographies, Adivasi oral narratives, and regional short stories may be included in English literature courses. Students can make a comparison between Rasa and Dhvani of Indian aesthetics with literary theories of Western countries. They can also learn to appreciate the use of Panchatantra, Jataka stories, folk songs and orally transmitted stories as gold mines of narrative technique and moral reflection.

Language teacher can adopt the use of local examples rather than foreign context only in language teaching. For example, grammar and writing activities are possible on Indian festivals, village markets, river, crafts, farming, climate problem, local entrepreneurship, community practices etc. The English class at a local school in Bangladesh or India could have students write a report about a local haat-bazaar, an issue of river erosion, a traditional food practice, or a microfinance programme in rural areas. This enables the students to learn English without losing touch with their society.

Multilingual Pedagogy is also needed for the decolonisation of English. Pupils' thinking needs to be respected and not penalised for thinking in their mother tongue. Multilingualism/translanguaging, or fluency in more than one language, can be a source of deeper learning. If a student shares an idea in Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Tamil or any other Indian language, he or she can share it in English as well. The method considers the learner's native language and builds up English language competencies.

#### **The challenge of finding solutions to critical issues.**

Incorporating IKS into English instruction is a potential that needs to be realized, but it also poses serious concerns. The first problem is tokenism. At times, one or two Indian texts may be added, and the curriculum is declared to be a decolonised one. There is a need for further transformation of pedagogies, evaluation systems, teacher training and knowledge hierarchies within real decolonisation. The second challenge is selective representation. IKS cannot be limited to Sanskrit/Eliot traditions. There is no single Indian knowledge. Indian knowledge is multifaceted and varied. It contains tribal ecological knowledge, the oral literature of the region, women's knowledge, craft traditions, folk medicine, agricultural knowledge and the experience of the marginalised communities. The omission of these traditions by IKS can lead to the re-production of another form of domination.

The third challenge is that of academic quality. IKS should not be romantic. Ancient knowledge must be honored, but it needs to be investigated with evidence, debate, and through time. Decolonisation does not imply replacing one unquestioned authority with another. It should stimulate students to compare, question, interpret and evaluate.

The fourth challenge is on teacher training. Not all English teachers are experts in the texts and traditions of knowledge in India, or in multilingual pedagogy. If not properly trained, integration of IKS might be superficial. Hence, teacher education programs should have Indian intellectual traditions, translation studies, comparative literature, documentation of the local knowledge and critical pedagogy

as the modules.

The fifth challenge is employability. Localizing English education is perceived by some as a threat to the students' competitiveness in the global arena by some parents and students. This is a legitimate worry. Thus, there is a need to have a balance model. Students should be taught standard academic and professional English, and standard English to confidently represent Indian knowledge, local realities and community issues in academic and professional settings.

### **Modern Relevance:**

The relevance of decolonising English education is evident in the modern context. English is retained as a language of importance in a globalised world as a language used for higher education, business, diplomacy, technology and research. Communication should not, however, be a requirement for cultural assimilation—particularly on a global scale. Pupils should speak English, but not forget their own languages, from which they draw their understanding, and their own knowledge systems and histories.

The inclusion of 'multilingualism' and 'Indian ethos' in NEP 2020 gives a policy basis to such transformation (Ministry of Education, 2020). Further, the University Grants Commission (UGC) guidelines on incorporating IKS into higher education also support curricular reform (2023) (Education Ministry of India). In the English departments, this can be achieved by courses in Indian English writing, translation, comparative poetics, oral narratives, Indian rhetoric, environmental humanities, and local knowledge documentation.

Students may do English projects on topics like: Water Conservation, Local Business Ethics, Indigenous Knowledge, Ayurveda and Public Health Debates, or Traditional Architecture of the locality, etc. These activities help to cultivate English communication, research skills, cultural understanding, and social responsibility simultaneously.

### **Discussion:**

Decolonising English education through IKS is an important and complex task. It challenges the colonial assumption of the Western-centredness of English education. It also defies the notion that Indian knowledge is a traditional one and not appropriate for modern education. English can be studied alongside Kalidasa and Wordsworth, Shakespeare and Tagore, Western rhetoric and Nyaya logic, environmental writing and indigenous ecological knowledge in a decolonised English classroom.

But this transformation should be democratic and inclusive. IKS should not be a culture-specific initiative. It should be representative of India's diversity based on various regions, castes, tribes, religions, genders, and languages. It needs to be open to the world of knowledge, too. The aim is to make intellectual balance; not isolation.

The best model is instead “English and Indian languages” or “Western knowledge and Indian knowledge.” Dialogic is the best model. Students should learn English as a world language and apply

English in their thinking of Indian realities. They should be able to read world literature and interpret their local traditions. They should feel their self-confidence without imitating native speakers but as a multilingual knowledge producer.

### Conclusion:

The burden and opportunity of English in India. It has given access to world knowledge and jobs, but it has also created linguistic hierarchy and cultural alienation. A good way to tackle this contradiction is decolonising English education through Indian Knowledge Systems. It enables English to be a medium of communication of Indian experiences, philosophies, histories and social realities.

This paper has proposed that IKS could support English education in its culturalization, multiculturalization, ethicalization and inclusiveness. This process must be critical and balanced, however. It must not be tokenistic, romantic or exclusive. The classical knowledge system, regional knowledge system, folk knowledge, tribal knowledge, Dalit, women, and community knowledge system should be part of a truly decolonised English education. It should also uphold international norms of communication and research.

Thus, decolonising English education does not mean rejecting English. It involves breaking the colonial shackles of English and promoting people's self-expression, social consciousness, cultural confidence and knowledge construction in English.

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