

Decolonizing English Studies in India: Examining the Learning Environments and Resources

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Abstract

Decolonization indicates the necessity to liberate colonized nations such as India from the submissive psychology and attitude forced on them by the created colonial ideology as a result of the colonial powers' long-term dominance. Even after gaining independence, these countries continued to teach English using colonial material and methodology. In a diversified nation like India, imposing stereotypical and homogeneous practices and materials proved to be a barrier to learning English, and the student population viewed it with disdain. As a result, there is a strong desire in India to liberate ELT by adapting teaching techniques and materials to the socio-cultural setting and classroom scenario in India. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the importance of reviewing ELT techniques and materials as an effort to decolonize English studies as well as language instruction in order to improve learners' communicative competence in order to meet the demands of the communication and information technology age.

Keywords: decolonization; colonial material; liberate; language instruction; ELT

Introduction

The 20th century saw the political process of decolonization take place throughout the world. Decolonization was among the most significant political processes of the 20th century from the viewpoint of a historian since it transformed the world into a theatre for history. (Duara 2004). "The phase of decolonization, which commenced at the close of World War I, was followed by the rise of national historical awareness" among the non-European nations (Duara 2004). The goal of the decolonization progression, as it currently exists, is to free colonial nation citizens from the geopolitical, economic, social, and psychological bonds that have grown as a result of centuries of colonial domination (Nehru 1981). Popularized his theory about the adjustments required for the evolution of the country being free from all types of reliance on the overseas colonial forces in his

well-known book, 'The Discovery of India'. In order to do this, he emphasizes the significance of both political freedom and the establishment of possibilities for the development of all facets of the nation or state's economy, education, and culture.

It is clear that the term "decolonizing" refers to demythologizing and decentering the traditional colonial stereotyped methods and materials, which were general and universal in character. This is especially relevant in the case of education in general as well as English Language Teaching (ELT) in particular. It alludes to the contextualization of instructional design and material creation as well as their application in accordance with the requirements of Indian students. This concept was developed in opposition to the colonial mindset, which "examines the effect of the west as a cultural and moral development but also deems it as a possibility of modernization" (Gurdur 2009). It aims to project a trail towards the advancement of the postmodern perspective and emphasizes the reemergence of native culture.

The goal of English studies in India today goes beyond only fostering students' aesthetic sensibilities and faculties of creativity and critical thought (Crystal 2005). English is no longer a colonial language in today's globalised society; instead, it is a language that many nations and individuals use for communication and commerce. Rather than serving the colonial purpose of spreading specific colonial ideology as well as colonial values through it, it is now a language of knowledge transit across nations and people rather than an oppressive colonial language intended to subjugate people.

English teachers in the present should consider their profession in light of the historical roots of English departments, which are clearly entrenched in colonial agendas and missionary goals. Additionally, they ought to be aware of how broadly English language learning goals and objectives have been accepted. Otherwise, they are unable to alter their views toward the students, their learning materials, or their approach to teaching. Since this field of study creates teachers for the English language classrooms in India, everyone of them need to disestablish English studies. A significant barrier to the widespread adoption of English language education in India is the lack of a skilled workforce in the sector. Present-day English teachers can better comprehend the historical context for the instruction of English as a discipline, a language, and a media by studying two significant colonial papers.

Grant, known as the "founder of contemporary education in India," claimed that the ultimate goal of teaching English literature to India was to forge a cultural as well as religious invasion that would cement his nation's commercial and political dominion. Through a declaration in 1793, Wilberforce also reaffirmed the British legislature's commitment to the moral and religious development of the Indian subjects. The educational programme and schools established by missionaries were designed to spread religious propaganda and effect conversion. Another significant text that supported the use of the English language as well as literature to convert people to religion was Macaulay's Minute (1835). He continued to express optimism for his education plan shortly after his Minute was approved: "I am very convinced that if our plans for education are carried out, there will not be a single ardent atheist among the decent classes in Bengal thirty years from now." Hence this will change without any evangelizing efforts or even the slightest interference with their right to practice their religion; it will just happen as a result of information and thinking (Source: Mayhew 1928, pp. 15–16).

It was believed that learning English was the only goal of school. The colonial era is where the syndrome that "education-sans-English-is-no-education" first emerged. A portion of middle class as well as higher class individuals declared their willingness to transition from the modern education system to the new one. Sanskrit and Persian, which were for a long time the official languages employed in the legal and administrative realms, were really dropped in favour of English, notwithstanding some weak resistance from certain places. In addition, when Persian was supplanted as the dominant language of the administration in 1837, the majority of Muslims were against it. By the time Wood's Dispatch suggested that English be learned where there's a need for it, there was already a high demand for English because it had already taken over as the official language of the government.

When such a concept had not yet occurred to academics in England, English as a field of study was first presented on a temporary basis in India in 1828. English was first taught as a language in 1826 at the newly founded University College in London, while English literature as a degree at King's College in London wasn't presented until 1831. Up until the end of the nineteenth century, Oxford & Cambridge universities contested the establishment of English literature as a field of study. Instead, they persisted in favoring Latin and Greek literature. The scornful belief that English was just a colloquial language made it unworthy of any serious collegiate study.

Ironically, the Universities of Chennai, Calcutta, & Bombay were chosen in 1857 as test subjects for the British cultural hegemony, while Oxford and Cambridge did not allow English as a subject until 1894 and 1911, respectively (1953. Oct. 1952 June 1953). As per Pennycook (1998) & Spolsky (1995), the techniques for teaching and evaluating English history and literature, as well as those for constructing literary canons, were initially developed in India before being brought to England. The postcolonial Indian mindset is evident from a casual examination at the papers of the education committees and commissions established after independence. English was the primary language of instruction and a required subject in high schools until 1937. English and a mother tongue, regional language, or classical language was studied by the students. Mother tongue or a regional language was used as the language of instruction after the cutoff year, while English remained a required subject. English was both a subject of study and the teaching methodology in several schools.

From colonial period to the present, English has spread across all of India and expanded incredibly, from the wealthy elite to marginalized communities, from urban to rural areas, from universities to village schools, from the public to the private industry, and from the authorship to the technological worlds. It no longer plays the hegemonic role of the language of Westernization, having adopted a new avatar as the vernacular of modernity. It now gives the common guy who tries to use it prestige, empowers the general populace economically and socially, allows linguistically individuals and groups to substantively communicate with one another across state lines, unites the federal government, carries the daily news across the nation without regard to linguistic barriers, enables space and satellite explorations, ushers in the information age (Mayhew 1928). This literal, prose English—not literary English—is what Indian students of English in the twenty-first century demand. Teaching students works by Milton or Shakespeare from the sixteenth century is not a good idea. Even in the West, the humanist tenets, the predominance of colonial English, the universality of English Studies' literary brilliance, and colonial reading habits have long been dissected and rendered problematic. (Thiago

1981) Texts that treat students as the subject are not engaging for them to read. On the other side, they aspire to be dialogue and knowledge producers. They need to be introduced to postcolonial narratives that challenge and critique colonial discourses. International English must be taught to the Gen Next internet users rather than English that accurately propagates the colonial Standard English, such as Received Pronunciation or Standard English. International English of the twenty-first century does not acknowledge the geographical and distinct cultural bounds that characterise a national language. Students in the twenty-first century are global citizens who value diversity. As a result, they merit English that values pluralist culture.

Teaching/learning English instruction in the classroom should drastically alter from lecturing, listening, summarizing, and memorization to facilitation, learning, collaboration, and cooperation. Chalk and board conventional classrooms must be replaced with online teaching and learning in a virtual classroom. E-contents must be created in order to instill learner autonomy in students (Krishnaswamy 2006). To make learning time-bound, learning materials should be unitized. Students of today live by the motto of technology. Wherever it is feasible and desired, it must be used. The key factor contributing to the decline in English standards is the acute shortage of skilled teachers who can teach English classes on a technical level. Without any prior English proficiency, many students who enrol in BA, MA, and M. Phil. English programmes "successfully" earn their academic degrees and go on to become "English teachers." They eventually earn PhDs in English literature. They can only get better at English through teaching it to others! Such teachers, who unintentionally serve as the driving force & source of de-motivation, are 'seen through' by students (Viswanathan 1989). Since Gauri Viswanathan's *Masks of Conquest* showed how English Literature was employed by the British as a weapon of subject formation and control, "English in India" has been the focus of study as a meta-issue. With the declaration of independence in 1947, the objectives and influence of English (language & literary studies) altered, but interest in what may be accomplished through it has continued to develop and change. A Google search would turn up several articles and books that, to varying degrees of success and most frequently with a priority on the language, describe and analyze "English in India." The official language of administration and the courts, English is taught in schools all around the nation and serves as the language of communication for educated people. It is also the language of higher education.

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Contextualization of English Studies in India is Essential

English studies today encompass more than only the study of writings authored by British and American writers. Several writers from Asia and Africa contributed to the development of English literature. Due to their close ties to the native population's cultural ethos, their compositions have become quite well-known in their home nations. By utilizing native regional and also local cultural, occupational, & experiential resources for producing content for imparting the English language, English studies must be contextualized in order to decolonize. It is necessary to contextualize English studies by connecting it to the content of the children's mother tongue in order to make it more kid-friendly and pedagogically viable. Prior until now, despite the great cultural and linguistic diversity present in our nation, uniform textbooks were adopted for all students. Children now perceive English literature & language as an imposing foreign culture. Additionally, non-contextual textbooks widened the cultural divide between English and the home language. Therefore, it is possible to use local, cultural, professional, and experiential information in the classroom to decolonize English education. As they reflect Indian ethos and experience, works published by Indian English writers from various Indian regions can be used effectively as learner-friendly materials in English study. Similar to this, it is possible to use the English versions of rich folk literature that is popular in rural and tribal groups wisely to adapt the learning of English to the local context. The usage of various community resources for educational purposes is also possible.

Personalization of English Studies & Language Teaching content

Native texts that address the traditional identities and experiential origins of the pupils should replace the standard curriculum and texts utilized for all children in India, regardless of their cultural, linguistic, regional, or occupational diversity. The students' local, regional, & native ethos and experiences are unaffected by the homogeneous and elitist colonial curriculum. It slows down and occasionally completely halts learning. Students find it difficult to study English since they are unfamiliar and unfriendly with the foreign textual material. It is simple to understand, understand, and read content that is relevant to the students' local, native, cultural, experience, and personal interests.

The usage of foreign references in a book makes it difficult for readers to understand it, and in order to help students understand a text, teachers must gloss many of these allusions. This takes a teacher's focus away from instructing and giving students practice in language use and consumes the majority of his time explaining a book. Even in a nation like India, where there is a great deal of regional, ethnic, cultural, and occupational diversity, the standard curriculum is never successful or relevant for pupils in both metropolitan centers and rural areas. The curriculum used to teach English in cosmopolitan cities does not work well in semi-urban and rural settings where pupils come from quite different backgrounds and where colonial and elitist values predominate. They are forced to read materials that make learning English unpleasant and frightening.

Utilizing New and Creative Techniques and Materials

The creative and imaginative use of teaching strategies and resources to meet the requirements of the native students is essential for decolonizing English studies. Decolonizing entails rejecting the outdated, stereotypically imported techniques of teaching English that were applied uniformly notwithstanding the diversity that

predominated in Indian classrooms. Due to their universal applicability and inability to address typical local settings and challenges, stereotypical grand teaching approaches were unable to deliver positive results. It calls for giving instructors the autonomy to choose their own instructional strategies and materials, as well as to be flexible in their choices. To ensure that the chosen material does not come across as unfriendly and alien to the pupils, an instructor should be given complete autonomy to choose his or her teaching materials in accordance with the backgrounds, interests, and requirements of the students. In a similar vein, a teacher ought to be adaptable in his methods. Decolonizing ELT technique calls for a flexible approach as opposed to the rigidity of the previous colonial systems. Flexibility is the ability to modify your approach to fit the needs, expectations, and resources that you have available for your students. The strategy of a teacher shouldn't be geared on spreading a specific ideology in order to decolonize English studies. The method should be language-focused rather than content-focused, with the goal of teaching students how to use language effectively. As a result, a teacher must choose his or her method of instruction based on the language proficiency of his or her learners, the size of the class, and the setting of the school—rural or urban—as well as other factors. According to the constraints of the learning and teaching aims, task-based, situation-oriented, communication-centered, and culturally sensitive materials and methods may be used. Even educational content can be chosen and developed by talking to students about their environment, jobs, cultural preferences, and "individual and social limits and resources" (van Lier 2004). This is corroborated by (Deep 2009) assertion, which reads as follows:

There are many different cultural backgrounds represented among our (Indian) students. To tackle this challenge, we must update our course materials to include the rich cultural heritage of our native people. We require a socio-cultural perspective on teaching and learning, or perhaps I should say, It will not only aid in somewhat resolving the issue of an identity crisis, but it will also make it easier to study ESL in a friendly setting.

Along with the materials from the prescribed syllabus, teachers should make careful use of authentic materials like newspaper articles, advertisements, local radio shows, cards, local (non) government notices, etc. while taking into account the abilities and social backgrounds of their students. In an effort to increase students' engagement and enthusiasm in studying English, local and national themes will be incorporated into ESL lessons. The successful application of each of these carefully chosen resources will make English learning entertaining and alive, which is essential for its effective instruction.

Indian Writings in English: Implications for Decolonizing English Studies

The only texts used in English studies as well as language instruction in the past were authored by British authors. The curriculum included a lot of texts that were ancient, allusive, and extremely poetic. The emphasis was on teaching content rather than language acquisition. Both graduate and undergraduate students were educated about writers including Shakespeare, Lamb, Shelley, T.S. Eliot, and others. However, despite reading these accomplished authors, students utterly failed to become fluent in the application of English. The necessity to promote Indian writers who write in English and whose works embody the native Indian perspective and ethos is felt in attempt to desegregate English studies & make it learner-friendly. Along with writing several enjoyable plays, poetry, novels, and short tales, Indian English writers also made a

significant contribution to the development and expansion of the language. Their scholarly as well as linguistic contributions have given English language and writing native Indian colors. Indian English writers should therefore be introduced rather than British ones so that people who study about their own cultures, experiences, issues, pleasures, and sorrows can feel more at home and at ease in the classroom. Additionally, the teacher's valuable time will be saved from having to look up foreign historical, geographical, cultural, religious, and other allusions and explain them to pupils who typically find them repulsive owing to their links with foreign cultures. The use of Indian English literature is anticipated to not only liberate English studies including language instruction in India but also to facilitate faster, easier, and more teacher- and student-friendly English teaching and learning.

Use of Local and Regional Texts in Translation for Emancipating English Studies

It has become vital to close the cultural gap between English and the home language in order to desegregate English courses in India. Regardless of the language, cultural, and experiential differences, all students are typically taught English using the same curriculum. The pupils' home and local experiences were not connected by the common curriculum to the language instruction that took place in their classrooms. Every year, a significant amount of literature is created in India in a number of local and regional languages to reflect the vast array of rich cultural traditions prevalent throughout the nation. There is an abundance of folk literature from rural and tribal groups in books, periodicals, and newspapers. Indian Literature, a bimonthly publication of Sahitya Academi, routinely publishes English translations of plays, poems, and short stories by diverse regional authors. The use of popular local and regional books that have been translated into English will bring more of the students' culture and experiences into the English courses and foster a friendly learning environment. The creation of learner-friendly teaching materials will be aided by the use of cultural and immersive community resources. Additionally, this effort will unavoidably respect each learner's socio-cultural rights that will not only improve English learning and teaching engaging and appealing to its recipients but also raise their knowledge of their own cultures and inspire them to uphold their traditions.

Individualizing and humanising English studies including language instruction

Deconstruction and abandoning of all major myths created in the guise of nation, class, society, gender, etc. are allegedly what decolonization refers to in a broader sense. Grand tales have a tendency to be all-encompassing, which makes them anti-individual. Decolonizing English studies as well as instruction in India therefore also entails individualized and humanising language instruction. The same materials and procedures cannot be used uniformly to all learners because to the differences among them in their origins, interests, aptitudes, intelligence, and a host of other characteristics. Making learning more personal and human becomes crucial as a result. Additionally, individual student participation in the instructional process is necessary for language acquisition. Respecting the learners' autonomy therefore becomes crucial. A teacher should have the freedom to select materials and teaching strategies in accordance with the demands of the scenario since he or she is the agent that initiates, controls, and supervises a student's learning process. A teacher can customize the learning experience by implementing activity-based and child-centered methodologies and incorporating stories, songs, plays, cartoons, photos, and snippets of fascinating, legible, and pleasurable content from the internet.

Conclusion

As demonstrated by Macaulay's (1834) statement, the decolonization movement as a whole is an effort to break free of colonial rulers' expectations relating to English instruction in India. To "create a class who may be arbitrators between us and multitudes that we administer; a class of men Indian in blood as well as complexion but English in style, in opinion, in morality, and in intellect," as Macaulay put it, was the goal of English instruction in India. Through the decolonization of ELT, we hope to meet the English education demands of every segment of society, regardless of their castes, creeds, or faiths, and to create authentic Indians who are not only of Indian blood as well as colour but also of Indian spirit, morals, opinion, and intelligence. Leadership, self-directed education, interactive activities, self-evaluation, pair and working in teams, cooperative learning, and other techniques can be used while adhering to the already chosen and available teaching materials. Indian teachers are expected to be knowledgeable about pedagogy, as well as familiar with the backgrounds of their students and with local and national traditions, cultures, climates, and physical environments. Thus, by decolonizing and Indianizing ESL teaching-learning, an instructor can generate native teaching-learning situations and get better results by leveraging the existing native resources and applying them in novel and creative ways.

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