

Decolonizing ELT in India: NEP 2020-Strategies for Inclusive and Contextual Education

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Abstract—This research paper explores the need to decolonize English Language Teaching (ELT) in rural India. It highlights National Education Policy 2020-aligned strategies that use a competency-based approach to include marginalized voices and perspectives. It critically examines the colonial legacy that has shaped ELT in India and highlights the importance of creating a curriculum that is inclusive and contextually relevant. It also highlights the challenges and opportunities of adopting decolonized teaching methods in India, with focus on the guidelines of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. With the help of some examples, this study offers practical strategies for teachers to transform English teaching practices. It aims to empower teachers with practical insights to create equitable and inclusive classrooms while fostering a more unbiased learning environment in India.

Keywords— Decolonizing ELT, Inclusive Education, Contextual Curriculum, Competency-based Teaching, NEP 2020, Culturally Responsive Teaching

I. INTRODUCTION

English Language Teaching (ELT) in India has long been influenced by colonial past, often neglecting the country's own languages and cultural richness. The emphasis on British English, literature, and cultural references in ELT curricula tends to boost Western viewpoints, ignoring India's diverse traditions and perspectives. This focus perpetuates existing power structures that favour the West while diminishing the value of local diversity. According to Parameswaran, English in India remains a significant marker of colonial influence (1997). Decolonizing ELT is about more than just revising the syllabus; it requires rethinking teaching practices to include diverse culture and linguistic perspectives. By adopting the National Education Policy 2020 allows educators to implement a more inclusive, competency-based approach that genuinely reflects India's rich and diverse identity. This progressive framework acknowledges the need

to move beyond colonial legacies, encouraging teaching practices that make education more relevant for all learners.

Historical Context:

English Language Teaching (ELT) in India has its roots in colonialism, dating back to 1835 when the British East India Company implemented English as the medium of instruction through the English Education Act (Wikipedia Contributors, 2022). This policy aimed to create a class of intermediaries who could serve colonial interests, positioning English as a language of power and progress (Macaulay, 1835). Lord Macaulay's controversial minute on Indian Education further solidified English as the language of education, marginalizing Indian languages and culture (Sharp, 1920). The 1835 Minute explicitly advocated for the creation of a class of anglicized Indians to act as cultural and administrative mediators (Evans, 2002). This historical decision has perpetuated the dominance of English and marginalization of local languages.

Current Challenges in ELT:

Indian English language Teaching (ELT) continues to reflect colonial influences, prioritizing Western norms, perspectives and content. Traditional approaches often emphasize British English and literature while neglecting regional languages and cultural contexts. This perpetuates a colonial legacy that favours western culture over Indian diversity and richness. However, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 advocates for a more inclusive, learner-centered approach, encouraging teachers to address these challenges and adopt decolonized practices.

Comparative Analysis:

The following table contrasts traditional ELT approaches with decolonized methods. It highlights the key differences in language standards, cultural content, literature and pedagogy.

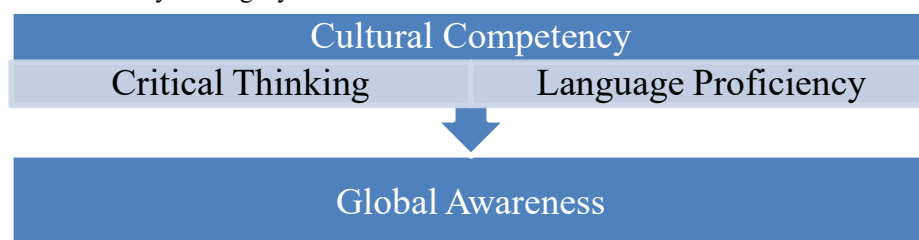
Aspect	Traditional ELT	Decolonized ELT
Language Standard	British English	Indian English
Cultural Content	Western-centric	Multicultural and inclusive
Literature	Western Authors	Indian Authors
Pedagogy	Teacher-centered	Learner-centered, inclusive

Traditional ELT often focuses on British English and Western literature, while decolonized approaches advocate for Indian English, multicultural content, and learner-centered pedagogy. In the past, teachers were seen as the main source of knowledge, with lessons often being lecture-oriented and teacher-centered. The National Education Policy, 2020 promotes a decolonized approach, focusing on learner-centered approach that encourages students' participation. This includes group discussion, project based learning and such activities that allow students to share their ideas and experiences. This policy generated approach (a decolonized ELT approach) creates a more democratic and inclusive classroom, empowering students to take an active part in their learning. However, this approach recognizes Indian English as a regional variety of English. So today most of the English text-books in India are the storehouse of local examples, idioms, and expressions relevant to India, acknowledging the country's linguistic diversity (Canagarajah, 1999). It helps students connect better with the language and as well as their own country and legacy.

Need for Decolonization ELT in India:

Decolonizing ELT is essential for promoting equity, inclusion, and academic success. Including diverse identities and experiences in the curriculum helps students feel valued and improves their learning. Research shows that students learn better when the learning materials reflect their own culture and experiences. Mukherjee (2020) notes that 35 to 50 million Indians use English proficiently, highlighting its widespread influence (p. 167).

A Competency-Based Approach can support decolonizing English Language Teaching (ELT) in India. This approach emphasizes developing skills, focusing on the needs of learners, and adapting to diverse contexts. The key competencies in this context include cultural understanding, critical thinking, language mastery, and global awareness. These competencies help students to engage with diverse perspectives, challenge dominant narratives, and gain a deeper understanding of global issues. The diagram below illustrates the Competency-Based ELT Framework:



Strategies for Decolonizing ELT in India:

1. All Inclusive Content:

One of the key strategies for decolonizing ELT in India is to select educational materials that reflect diverse cultures, languages, and perspectives. Instead of depending entirely on western literature and content, we can incorporate literature from various Indian regions, stories from marginalized communities, and media that display global voices. For example, including works by the writers like R. K. Narayan, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Arundhati Roy can offer students a broader range of voices and experiences (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

2. Flexible Frameworks:

Adapting the curriculum to incorporate local contexts and student experiences is essential for making learning more relevant and engaging. It shows that it is necessary to create a flexible curriculum framework that allows for inclusion of local stories, traditions, and cultural practices. For example, lessons should include discussions about local festivals, customs, and historical events. Smith suggests that this approach helps students connect their learning to their own lives, making education more meaningful and engaging (2008).

3. Give Students a Voice:

Allowing space for students to share their own stories and cultural backgrounds is another important aspect of decolonizing ELT. This can be done through classroom activities that encourage students to bring their personal experiences into the learning environment. For example, teachers can assign projects where students present on their own cultural heritage or family history. This makes students feel valued and helps the whole class learn from each other's experiences.

4. Learner-Centered Learning:

Learner-centered Learning is the next strategy for decolonizing ELT in India. This strategy intends to encourage students to participate in teaching learning process actively and to think critically. This approach not only enhances engagement but also develops critical thinking and collaborative skills (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Traditional teacher-centered methods often involve passive learning, where students listen and memorize information. In contrast, learner-centered methods involve activities like project-based learning, group discussions, and reflective exercises to keep students engaged and help them explore their learning more deeply. For example, students might work on a group project that involves researching and presenting on a social issue relevant to their community.

5. Culturally Relevant Teaching:

Culturally relevant teaching is possible by connecting lessons to students' lives and communities. This strategy makes lessons more meaningful and interesting. This involves using examples and case studies that are familiar and relevant to students. For example, when teaching about environmental conservation, a teacher might use examples of local efforts to preserve biodiversity or combat pollution. This makes the content more relatable and helps students see the practical applications of what they are learning. By incorporating students' cultural contexts into lessons, teachers can make learning more meaningful and impactful (Paris and Alim, 2017).

6. Competency-Based Assessment:

This strategy shows to shift the focus from rote memorization to evaluate students' skills and

competencies. Traditional assessments often emphasize the ability to recall information, which may not accurately reflect a student's understanding or skills. Competency-based assessment, on the other hand, evaluates students on their ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world contexts. For example, instead of a multiple-choice test, students might create portfolios, give presentations, or participate in peer assessments. These methods provide a more comprehensive view of student progress and capabilities (Canagarajah, 1999).

7. Formative Feedback:

Provide consistent, constructive feedback to help students develop their skills and understanding. This continuous feedback supports their ongoing improvement. This can involve written comments on assignments, one-on-one conferences, or peer reviews. Formative feedback supports continuous learning and development, helping students to build on their skills over time (Smith, 2008).

8. Teacher Training:

Providing training on cultural competence, inclusive pedagogy, and decolonization is crucial for preparing teachers to implement a decolonized ELT curriculum. This training should encourage teachers to reflect on their own biases and practices. It helps them to develop a more inclusive and equitable approach to teaching. For example, workshops and seminars on cultural competence can help teachers to understand the diverse backgrounds of their students and learn strategies for creating an inclusive classroom environment (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

9. Collaborative Learning:

Fostering a community of practice among teachers is another important strategy for professional development. By creating networks where teachers can share resources, strategies, and experiences, schools/colleges can support ongoing learning and improvement. For example, regular meetings or online forums where teachers discuss challenges and successes in decolonizing their curricula can provide valuable support and inspiration. Collaborative learning helps to build a supportive community of teachers committed to continuous improvement and innovation (Paris and Alim, 2017).

The following table clearly outlines Practical Strategies for Decolonizing ELT in India:

Strategy	Example
Inclusive Content	Incorporating works by Indian writers and marginalized voices into curriculum, such as Dalit Literature.
Learner-Centered Methods	Facilitating group projects that explore local cultural themes, encouraging students to connect their learning to their own communities.
Competency-Based Assessment	Evaluating students through creative, culturally relevant projects and presentations rather than traditional examinations.
Teacher Training	Conducting seminars and workshops on decolonizing the curriculum, focusing on cultural competence, inclusive teaching practices and self-reflection on biases.

NEP 2020: A Catalyst for Change:

Decolonizing English Language Teaching (ELT) in India involves redesigning the curriculum to better represent local languages, cultures, and everyday realities. This approach seeks to break away from the colonial emphasis on foreign texts and perspectives. The National Education Policy 2020 offers a foundation for this change by encouraging multilingual education and the inclusion of indigenous knowledge systems. Implementing NEP 2020 requires the following practical steps:

1. Integrating Indigenous Literature into the English Curriculum:

The NEP 2020 highlights the importance of promoting regional languages and incorporating India's cultural and linguistic diversity into education. Translating regional literature into English is one of the ways to make learning more relatable and engaging for students.

To decolonize ELT, rural schools and colleges can introduce English translations of local literature. For example, instead of focusing on Western authors, the curriculum could feature works by regional authors like P. L. Deshpande and Kusumagraj, whose stories resonate with the students' experiences.

This approach helps students connect with English through familiar narratives. Studying translated regional literature allows them to enhance their English language skills while staying rooted to their own culture. This not only enriches language learning but also fosters a greater appreciation for both their native and second languages.

2. Integrating Local Cultural Contexts into English Lessons:

NEP 2020 encourages the use of local contexts in teaching to make education more relevant to students' lives. This can be applied to ELT by integrating local traditions, festivals, and everyday practices into English lessons.

Rural schools and colleges can design English lessons that incorporate local cultural elements. For example, we should help our students to work on projects where they describe local festivals, such as Makar Sankranti or Ganesh Chaturthi, in English. They could also engage in storytelling or drama based on local folklore, which would be discussed and analyzed in English.

Integrating local culture into ELT would help students to perceive English not as a foreign language disconnected from their reality, but as a tool to express their own experiences and traditions. This method fosters a more meaningful and engaging learning experience, increasing both motivation and proficiency in English.

3. Promoting Multilingualism and Bilingual Education:

NEP 2020 emphasizes the importance of multilingualism in education, promoting the use of the mother tongue in the early stages of learning and encouraging bilingual approaches throughout schooling.

In rural areas where students are more comfortable with their native languages, ELT should adopt a bilingual approach. This approach allows students to understand complex concepts in their mother tongue first, before transitioning to English, making learning smoother and more effective.

This bilingual strategy would help students develop proficiency in English while maintaining and valuing their native language. It breaks away from the colonial practice of privileging English over indigenous languages, instead promoting a balanced and inclusive language education that respects students' linguistic identities.

4. Culturally Responsive Teacher Training:

NEP 2020 highlights the need for professional development that equips teachers to deliver culturally responsive and contextually relevant education.

Teacher training programmes in India should be designed to help teachers/educators integrate local culture and languages into ELT. Teachers could be trained to create lesson plans that are culturally relevant, using local examples and contexts that resonate with students' daily lives. This training should also encourage teachers to be flexible and adaptive, using students' linguistic strengths as a foundation for learning English.

Equipping teachers with the skills to deliver culturally responsive education would ensure that ELT is decolonized at the grassroots level. Teachers would be better prepared to connect with students, making English lessons more engaging and effective. This approach respects and values students' cultural backgrounds, leading to a more inclusive education system.

5. Encouraging Critical Reflection and Cultural Awareness:

NEP 2020 emphasizes critical thinking and cultural awareness as key components of education. This can be applied to ELT by encouraging students to reflect on the role of English in their lives and its relationship with their cultural identity.

Indian schools and colleges could incorporate discussions about the history of English in India, helping students understand its colonial roots and its current role in global communication. For example, students might compare traditional and modern uses of English in their communities, critically reflecting on how the language affects their cultural and social lives.

This critical approach to ELT would empower students to use English in a way that affirms their cultural identity rather than diminishes it. By understanding the broader implications of language

learning, students can engage with English not just as a subject, but as a means for personal and cultural expression.

II. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Decolonizing ELT in rural India under the framework of NEP 2020 involves designing a curriculum that reflects culture, values, and languages. This can be achieved by including regional literature, integrating local cultural contexts, promoting multilingualism, training teachers in culturally sensitive methods, and encouraging critical thinking. This approach not only improves English language proficiency but also ensures that education in rural India is decolonized, inclusive, and reflective of the country's diverse cultural heritage.

However, implementing such changes comes with challenges. Resistance can come from teachers, administrators, and policymakers. This can be addressed by spreading awareness about the benefits of decolonization and fostering collaboration among stakeholders. Another challenge is the lack of resources, as a decolonized curriculum often requires new materials and teacher-training. This can be addressed by using free educational resources with diverse perspectives and partnering with organizations to share resources. Teachers may also feel unprepared for these changes, which can be overcome through continuous professional development and creating support networks for teachers to exchange ideas and strategies.

A competency-based approach to decolonizing ELT is a crucial step for building a fair and inclusive education system in India. By centering marginalized voices and perspectives, we can foster a richer and more meaningful learning experience for all students. This process requires dedication, teamwork, and a willingness to rethink existing norms.

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