

Pedagogy of English Language Teaching in India: A Colonial Culture

Dr. Kuldeep Singh, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Government Degree College, Nanauta, Saharanpur

Abstract

The teaching of the English language commenced to attain power over the colonised countries. Through this paper, the researcher will discuss how English language pedagogy serves as a legacy of colonial culture by tracing its path in India. Though the country has been liberated for years, the minds of the ELT practitioners are still captured. Through this paper, alternative strategies will be suggested to the involved stakeholders to dismantle the colonial legacy disseminated over English language pedagogy. The suggestions include tailor-made ELT content for the ESL classrooms in India, inclusion of diverse perspectives in the curriculum, following a multi-disciplinary approach for a better understanding of the subject matter, implementing teacher training programmes for the instructors, and promoting critical thinking among learners.

Keywords

English language, pedagogy, colonial legacy, strategies.

Introduction

The English language serves as a bridge between people of various backgrounds. Hence, it has become vital to teach and learn English. However, the pedagogy of English in the colonised countries has always been a challenge for both the teachers and learners alike, primarily due to the production of ELT methods and materials by the West and ignoring of the aspects of indigenous classrooms by the teachers. The Western practices and materials make the learners feel alienated from the language, which results in their loss of interest in the language itself. Therefore, there is a need to dismantle the colonial legacy of English language pedagogy in order to make the learners competent in the English language.

During colonisation, Indians were treated as inferior both ethically and intellectually. The West dominated the psyche of the people which is worse than the domination on the economy as the latter can be reversed but not the former. In addition to this, there was political domination too, which was followed by intimidation and hence was not legitimate for the people. Moreover, the domination on culture is concealed and therefore becomes difficult to overcome. The domination on culture is seen as a means for achieving modernity and progress. Education and governance are the ways to reinforce this domination, hence, it becomes internalised by the colonised people. Therefore, as the domination on culture is taking place over generations, it becomes difficult to overcome it (Thiong'o, 1986). The education system of the country, its religious beliefs, and traditional values have been dominated in order to dominate the country's culture. The historical development and ongoing effects of colonial legacies on English language instruction in India are examined in this research. The objective of this study is to trace the legacy of colonialism in English language pedagogy in India and provide insights into the ways in which educational, cultural and historical factors continue to influence language narratives in India. The paper also suggests various strategies to dismantle the colonial legacy associated with the English language pedagogy.

Tracing the Trajectory of Colonial Legacy in English Language Pedagogy in India

To trace the trajectory of colonial legacy within English language pedagogy in India, it becomes crucial to investigate the history of various educational committees and the advent of English education. An important turning point in the pre-independence educational history of India is the Charter Act of 1813. Among the goals of the legislation were the enhancement and rejuvenation of literature, the support of educated indigenous people and the advancement of scientific knowledge in India. In 1823, the General Committee of Public Instruction

was established to advise the company on issues pertaining to education. The committee ignored Anglican learning because it was predominately designed for the West and solely supported Oriental learning. Later, as more members were added, the homogeneity of the committee vanished. In 1834, Macaulay was named the first Law Member. Colonists introduced the new educational system through the renowned Macaulay's Minutes of 1835. Macaulay introduced the teaching of the English language in India with the motive of creating a class of people who are 'Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and intellect'. (Macaulay, 1835, p. 8) The colonists had long believed that India was a primitive and barbaric country. Therefore, it was considered the 'white man's burden' to administer the affairs of the barbaric people of the East and introduce civilisation to them.

They suggested and offered educational policies that suited their goals and interests in an effort to civilise the Indians. Paradoxically, instead of civilising them, they went to great lengths to destroy their cultural heritage. English instruction was used as a means of subjugating Indian culture and ethnicity. Since, English is the language of authority and control, it has been said that English is a superior language with a superior culture. Sanskrit, Arabic and all other native languages were considered inferior and primitive. In the document on Indian Education, Macaulay declared, 'A single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia' (Macaulay, 1835, p. 3).

Strategies to Break the Colonial Legacy in the ESL Classrooms of India

The issue of colonial legacy in English as a second language (ESL) classroom is challenging. It has influenced English education for generations, especially in formerly colonised countries. Cultural values and norms are perpetuated through a language; hence, Western content and culture are disseminated through language teaching materials designed by the West. It results in the downgrading of native culture and values.

Hence, there is a dire need to break the colonial legacy in English pedagogy in ESL classrooms. It requires conscious efforts on the part of teachers, learners and various stakeholders to foster awareness among students. The English language has global significance hence, the learners should be made aware that it serves as a means for empowerment and not for subjugating their own cultural values. This paper suggests some strategies which can help in the decolonisation of the English language in colonised countries. These strategies include tailor-made ELT content for ESL classrooms in India, inclusion of diverse perspectives in the curriculum, following a multi-disciplinary approach for a better understanding of the subject matter, implementing teacher training programmes for the instructors, and promoting critical thinking among learners. Through these strategies, a more sensitive ESL classroom can be built that focuses on the development of students without feeling alienated or losing their identity. The strategies to help break the colonial legacy in the ESL classrooms are described below.

Incorporation of Indo-Anglian Literature and Translated Texts in ESL Classrooms

Indo-Anglian oeuvre and translated regional texts depicting Indian culture should be used by the teachers for English pedagogy. These texts will provide the learners with a sense of affinity and a feel-like home environment. The writings of Indo-Anglian writers such as Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, Toru Dutt, Vikram Seth and so on reflect the Indian sensibility. The writings of Ghosh showcase India's rich linguistic and cultural diversity. The characters in his works often highlight India's pluralistic nature, hailing from different castes, classes, religions, and demographics. His works, mainly *The Shadow Lines* (1988), discuss the colonial history of India and its impact on shaping the identities of Indians. Moreover, Rushdie's magnum opus, *The Midnight's Children* (1981), reflects India independently through magical realism. It also explores the complexities in the identities of Indians in post-colonialism. Similarly, translations of Indian writers such as Premchand, Geetanjali Shree and Girish Karnad in English make the learning experience personal and dynamic. Thus,

using Indian texts in ESL classrooms helps in liberating the pedagogy of English from the clutches of colonisers.

Introduction of Teacher Training and Cultural Exchange Programmes

Teachers should be trained to introduce the learners to cultural sensitivity.

Through orientation programmes, teachers should also realise the impact of colonial legacy on English education in ESL classrooms. With the growing popularity of English around the globe, the role of teachers is to make the learners proficient in the language, and this proficiency can only be achieved if the teachers are exposed to the nuances of the language. Teaching a language in such a way that learners do not lose the affinity towards their own culture. Therefore, training programmes will help the teachers reach the desired goal.

Conclusion

The English language pedagogy should be liberated from the legacy of colonisers. The English language students should not feel daunted by the Anglo-centric narrative of the language. English should be taught by adapting the books and materials to the indigenous culture rather than being projected and taught as the language of colonisers. The paper suggested different strategies to disintegrate the legacy of colonialism disseminated over the pedagogy of the English language, such as diversifying the curriculum to make it inclusive, contextualising the curriculum according to the learner's background, incorporating Indo-Anglian literature and translated texts in the ESL classrooms, and conducting teacher training and cultural exchange programmes. The questioning attitude should also be promoted amongst the learners. By implementing these strategies, English classrooms in India can move towards a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach, breaking away from colonial legacies and fostering an environment that celebrates local identity and diversity.

References

1. Banks, J.A. (2009). Teaching strategies for ethnic studies (8th ed.). Allyn & Bacon.
2. Basnet, M. (2024). Cultural diversity and curriculum. Panauti Journal, [http:// dx.doi.org/10.3126/panauti.v21i1.66500](http://dx.doi.org/10.3126/panauti.v21i1.66500)
3. Bennett, M.J. (2007). Becoming interculturally competent. In R.M. Paige (Ed.), Cross-cultural competence for a twenty-first-century military: Culture, the flipside of COIN (pp. 173-190). Defence Language Institute, Foreign Language Centre.
4. Bhattacharya, U. (2016). Colonization and English ideologies in India: A language policy perspective. Language Policy, 16(1), 1-21.
5. Crystal, D. (2004). The language revolution. Cambridge: Polity Press.
6. Deep, K. (2009). Curriculum designing for ELT: Current trends and challenges. The Journal of English Language Teaching, XLVII(6), 3-8.
7. Duara, P. (Ed.) (2004). Decolonisation: Perspectives from now and then. Routledge. Fanon, F. (1963). The Wretched of the earth. Kwela Books.
8. Freire, P. (1970). Pedagogy of the oppressed. Bloomsbury Academic.
9. Francis, T.P. (1861). The golden treasury of the best songs and lyrical poems in the English language. Macmillan and Company.
10. Gurdur, N.S. (2009). They own it who use it: The question of whose English it is. The Journal of English Language Teaching, XLVII(3), pp. 35-39.
11. Gurin, P., Dey, E.L., Hurtado, S., & Gurin, G. (2002). Diversity and higher education: Theory and impact on educational outcomes. Harvard Educational Review, 72(3), 330-366.
12. Liyanage, I., & Canagarajah, S. (2019). Shame in English language teaching: Desirable pedagogical possibilities for Kiribati in neoliberal times. TESOL Quarterly, 53(2), 430-455.
13. Macaulay, T. (1835). Minutes on education. [http://home.iitk.ac.in/~hcverma/ article/Macaulay-minutes.pdf](http://home.iitk.ac.in/~hcverma/article/Macaulay-minutes.pdf) Oxford University Press. (n.d.). Oxford English dictionary. In oed.com dictionary. Retrieved January 13, 2024, from <https://www.oed.com/search/dictionar>

y/?scope=Entries&q=lingua+franca

14. Pennycook, A. (1998). English and the discourses of colonialism. Routledge.
- Phillipson, R. (2017). Myths and realities of 'global' English. *Language Policy*, 16, 313-331.
15. Roberts, M. (2009). *The Faber book of modern verse*. Faber and Faber.
- Rushdie, S. (1981). *Midnight's children*. Alfred A. Knopf.
16. Schmidt, R.W. (1990). The role of consciousness in second language learning. *Applied Linguistics*, 11(2), 129-158.
17. Yeats, W.B. (1979). *The Oxford book of modern verse*. Oxford University Press.