

DECOLONIZING ENGLISH PEDAGOGY IN INDIA

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Abstract: Various ELT methods and materials are developed in the West and then exported to countries that teach English to speakers of other languages (ESL and EFL). Even after many years of independence, the approaches and materials for teaching English in India are still heavily influenced by the West. The Indian students of English perceive the process as a challenging one because the materials that are used to teach it contain ideas and topics that are prevalent in western culture. Through this paper, the researcher will discuss the various factors that contributed to the mental colonization of Indian English Language Teachers (ELT practitioners) over the years. In addition, this paper will provide some suggestive methods that can be incorporated to free the minds of various stakeholders involved. These include the development of bespoke ELT content that is tailored to the context of Indian classroom, the implementation of orientation and refresher programs for teachers, and the promotion of learners' autonomy.

Keywords: Decolonization, ELT methods and materials, Contextualizing, teacher training, learners' autonomy

Introduction:

With growing times, teaching English in ESL and EFL countries has become crucial. English is not only a mere language but it also serves as a conduit between people having various socio-cultural and geographical barriers. Hence, teaching and learning of English language is vital. But, in colonised countries such as India, teaching English has always been challenging. This is because of the production of different ELT methods and materials in the western countries. Experts in English as Second Language (ESL) pedagogy do not take into account other aspects of indigenous classrooms. It results in making the learners feel alienated to the references present therein, hence, making them feel daunted from the language itself. Therefore, there is a

need for mental decolonisation of various stakeholders from colonised teaching methods and materials in order to make the process of language-learning encouraging to learners.

Literature Review:

To comprehend what this article meant by decolonisation of minds of ELT practitioners. It becomes important to trace the background of the educational practices prevalent in the colonised India as well as the various educational policies and the advent of English education in India. The Charter Act of 1813 serves as a milestone in the educational history of pre-independence India. The revival and amelioration of literature, the encouragement of learned natives, and the promotion of knowledge of sciences in India were some of the objectives of the act. The General Committee of Public Instruction was shaped in 1823 to provide guidance to the company on matters related to education. Since, the committee was dominated by orientalist; it only promoted Oriental learning and hence the Anglican one was overlooked. Later, the committee lost its homogeneous oddity with the recruitment of new members. Macaulay was appointed as the first Law Member in 1834. Colonialist introduced the new education system with the famous Macaulay's Minutes of 1835. His statement can be found in the minutes, in which he explains the motivation behind the introduction of English Language Education in India, i.e. to produce a class of persons, who are "Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect." (Macaulay, T.B., 1835, p.8)

The English teaching in India was initiated with the purpose of forming a class of Indians who can be the mediators between the colonialists and the coloniser. In India as well, English education, like other colonised countries, became the means to acquire power. The population of India was divided into two groups based on the familiarity and non-familiarity with the language. It not only led to a split in the society but also shattered the cultural accord of the people. English language, being the language of power and control, was observed as a superior language having a superior culture. All other indigenous languages like Sanskrit and Arabic were considered inferior and primitive. Macaulay was full of supremacy for English

Language and simultaneously demeaned the Asian literature while uttering the following statement in the minutes, “I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.” (Macaulay, T.B., 1835, p.3)

Lord William Bentinck who was then Governor-General certified the Minute by writing that his entire consent is with the Minutes’ sentiments. Promotion of science and arts was approved as the primary objective of the British Government in India and in order to do that, they framed several policies and measures which dictated that British will determine the aims of education in India – the printing of oriental works was put to an end, the stipends of students belonging to oriental institutions were to be ceased in future, and above all, English would be the only medium of instruction. Followed by Macaulay’s Minutes, another policy called Sir Charles Wood Dispatch (1854) was labeled as ‘The Magna Carta’ of English education in India. The objective of the dispatch was not just to create intellectuals but to nurture the moral aptitude. The purpose of education was to disseminate European knowledge of Arts, Science and Philosophy. Charles Wood Dispatch led to the establishment of three universities located at Calcutta, Madras and Bombay each.

Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978) talks about the prevalent narratives of western scholars dominating the eastern literature, research and discussion in order to disseminate their powers. Said says that “anyone who teaches, writes about or researches the orient is an orientalist and what he or she does is orientalism” (Said, E., 1978). According to his definition, orientalism is a form of Western culture that is used to dominate and exert authority over the Orient. Orientalism can not only be associated with political power but also with other powers like intellectual, cultural and moral. At its core, Orientalism represents a system of the orient’s knowledge combined with the notion of power.

The people of India were made to believe that they were inferior: intellectually, ethnically and ethically. The dominance over psyche of the people was much more detrimental than any economic domination because

the latter can be easily reversed but the damage done to the minds of the people is not easy to reverse. Moreover, the economic and political suppression were accompanied by intimidation and coercion and hence possess no legitimacy for the people. But cultural domination takes subtle routes through the consent of the people involved and hence, become arduous to conquer. The cultural domination is achieved chiefly through education, religion, and other cultural customs. Ngugi discussed the cultural domination in his essay 'Decolonizing the minds' which got published in 1986. 'Decolonizing the minds' dealt with the existence of colonial ideologies in the post-colonial Africa. In the essay, Ngugi argues that cultural harmony and African Identity can only be restored in Africa by re-establishing the concord between the child and one's environment through resolving the language conflict and giving due credit to the native or regional languages by reintroducing them. He reiterated that cultural identity can never be restored if English be used as a medium of Instruction in schools. He pressed for the native literature which showcases the melancholies of Kenyan people. Ngugi tried to make the minds of the Kenyan people free from the clutches of the colonisers ideologies that were prevalent even after the independence. The minds of the people were colonised by a language and culture which is alien to them and which made them stranger to their very own culture.

With the commencing of the Mau Mau movement, the colonial administration stepped in the education system and introduced English education. Ngugi himself attended one such school in which the language of instruction was changed to English and the language of culture was subsided. In consequence of this, the concord between the world in and outside the school was disrupted. English was not merely considered a language but rather bestowed as a symbol of domination. All other languages were demeaned and the students were downcast for using their mother tongues. English became the apparatus to gauge the linguistic aptitude of the children. Superiority of English language and culture were reinforced through such practices. Thus, children were subtly conditioned to take western identity as their identity and made to overlook their indigenous identical representation.

Drawing analogy with Africa, India and other colonised countries too experienced cultural and moral inferiority and strived for regaining their lost identity. Europeans used these inferiorities as a weapon to justify their acts of colonising them. India too like Africa was long considered as primitive and savage by the colonisers. Hence, it was regarded as the 'white man's burden' to manage the affairs of the savage eastern populace and bring civilization to them. To civilize the Indians, they proposed and provided the educational policies that suit their interests and motives. Ironically, in lieu of making Indians civilized, they made all efforts to dismantle the cultural fabric of the same people they were alleged to civilize. English education is served as a tool for breaking apart the cultural ethnicity and colonizing the psyche of the Indians.

Reasons for the colonization of the minds of teachers and learners in ELT classrooms:

In the year 1998, Pennycook presented the argument that "there are deep and indissoluble links between the practises, theories, and contexts of English language teaching (ELT) and the history of colonialism" (1998: 19). It's been nearly 20 years since Pennycook and others wrote on this topic, so it's reasonable to assume that English language teaching has figured out a way to recognise its colonial origins while also moving on from them. However, since English is spoken all over the world and because colonialism was the driving force behind the development of ELT, this will likely never be a simple task to complete (Pennycook, 1998). Initially, 'The Golden Treasury of English Songs and Lyrics', a popular anthology of English poetry by Francis Turner Palgrave, published in 1861 was used as a textbook for teaching English in Indian ESL classrooms. All the poems present in it were chosen only for their lyricality and not for the meaning. This anthology dominated ELT classrooms, until 1950s. It was in the year 1936 when Palgrave's anthology was replaced by Michael Robert's 'The Faber Book of Modern Verse' (1936) and W.B. Yeats 'The Oxford Book of Modern Verse' (1936). These too were western oriented, comprising and promoting western culture and ideologies. Accordingly, literature in a serious sense i.e. its association with the life was never approached. English is not taught as a language but as a subject in which one picks up facts. Even today, tenses and parts of speech (POS) are taught in ELT classrooms without any contextualization. Teachers are not

familiar with the concept of 'consciousness raising' or 'awareness-raising'. The term 'consciousness raising' as used by Rutherford and Sharwood Smith (1985), refers to "deliberate attempt to draw the learner's attention specifically to the formal properties of the target language" (p. 274). It is a part of the process of learning a new language. First, learners recognise and differentiate it, then they produce it on their own, and finally, they become aware of or conscious of the new language. For instance, students who study the contracted form of the word "didn't" may first become aware that the form is used in English, then recognise it when they hear it and differentiate it from other sounds, and finally produce it themselves. As a result of this, learners gain an understanding of specific language features. According to Ellis (1990) and Schmidt (1990), formal education is seen as a means of consciousness-raising. Once the learner's awareness of a particular grammatical feature has been raised through formal instruction, the learner will continue to remain aware of the feature and will notice it in subsequent input. Teachers are reluctant to use new methods of teaching Grammar and Vocabulary. They prefer to use '*English Grammar and Composition*' by P.C. Wren and H. Martin. The fear of failure and various constraints such as time-orientation and planning refrain them from using innovations in a language classroom. Lack of teacher training programs is also accountable for such insecurities.

Indian learners too have peculiar problems with respect to learning a second language. Due to their unfamiliarity with the foreign textual material, a barrier is created between the students and the acquisition of the English language. The material that pertains to the students' personal, local, native, cultural, and experience interests is easily digestible, comprehensible, and legible. The usage of alien references in a book creates hindrance that make it difficult to comprehend the text, and it becomes necessary for a teacher to summarise a significant number of references with a view to aid students in comprehending a text. Because of this, a teacher's attention is taken away from instructing students and giving them opportunities to practise using language and causes him to spend the majority of his time explaining a text to students instead of teaching and providing practise to students in the use of language.

Decolonizing the minds of teachers and learners in ELT Classrooms:

ELT pedagogy has been criticised for a long time for its western slant and implicit monolingualistic ideology (for example, Phillipson, 1992; Kramsch, 2014), yet current research reveals that a colonised kind of teaching is still in use. For instance, Liyanage and Canagarajah (2019), in their study on attitudes towards English language learning in Kiribati, propose that the implicit assumption that the western pedagogies utilised are the most effective, helps to explain tensions surrounding English language learning. This was found in their research on attitudes towards English language learning in Kiribati.

Contextualization of ELT Methods and Materials:

The teaching methods should be contextualized, according to the needs of the native students. Interacting with students about their socio-cultural and economic backgrounds to find out about their learning needs can allow for the selection and creation of content that will be used in classrooms. The time-worn imported stereotyped methods of teaching English should be overruled and the heterogeneity of the Indian class rooms should be taken care of. It is necessary for a teacher to choose the method of instruction taking into consideration the level of language proficiency of the students in the class, the size of the class, and the school's location. Stereotyped teaching methods do not produce effective results due to their general applicability, hence flexibility in approach should be practiced. Moreover, a teacher's methodology should not be skewed towards the dissemination of a particular ideology. Rather than focusing on the subject matter being taught, the methodology should be geared on educating students the language in order to develop their linguistic competence. Depending on the requirements of the learning and teaching goals: task-oriented, situation-based, communication-centered, and culture-sensitive can all be utilized.

There is a need to contextualize ELT materials, which means that the content that is used to teach English needs to be generated utilising native references. Non-contextual textbooks make the learner feel alien to the language, therefore, regional and local knowledge can be utilized for teaching in the class room. The focus should be on local atmospheric environment. For example, in an essay on 'Healthy Food' in the English

textbook, the discussion should be about healthy foods easily or readily available in India rather conversing about apple pies and croissants. To make language learning more functional, cognitive based approaches should be used.

Use of Authentic Materials in the English Classrooms:

Besides the materials that are based on the prescribed curriculum, teachers should make an effort for the thoughtful use of authentic materials such as newspapers, advertisements, television programmes, podcasts, invites, public notices, and so on. This should be done while keeping in mind the abilities and social backgrounds of their students. Learners' interest in, and drive towards, English language study will grow as a result of this effort, which incorporates local and national topics into ESL instruction using a thematic approach. The successful utilisation of all of these carefully chosen materials will make learning English entertaining and engaging, both of which are very important for its successful instruction.

Use of Indo-Anglian Literature in English Classrooms:

Indo Anglian oeuvre reflecting Indian ethos and experience should be used effectively for teaching English. In the past, the English pedagogy was entirely reliant on works published by authors from the West. The curriculum included a wide variety of books that were obscure and full of allusions. The instruction of material, rather than the acquisition of linguistic skills, was the primary focus. In both the graduate and the undergraduate levels, authors such as Shakespeare, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Milton among others, were covered in class. Unfortunately, despite reading the works of these brilliant authors, the students were not successful in developing a proficient command of the English language. The introduction of Indo-Anglian writers viz. R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao whose works are representative of the native

Indian experience and ethos is thought to be necessary to make it more user-friendly for students of English. Not only did the Indian English writers produce an extensive amount of anthologies that are readable, but they also helped foster the expansion of Indian English. Therefore, it is felt that it is necessary to expose students to Indian English writers instead British English writers so that students who read about their individual civilization, ethnicity, and ethos will have a better sense of belonging in the classroom setting. This will allow students to find greater success in their academic endeavours. The valuable time of the instructor will also be saved by not having to hunt for foreign allusions and then explain these to the students, who typically see such references unpleasant owing to the fact that they are associated with aliens.

It is speculated that the utilisation of indigenous texts will not only liberate the pedagogy of English in India, but also make it simpler and accommodating to both teachers and students.

Use of Translated texts in English Classrooms:

It is now imperative that a connection be made between the English culture and the culture of the native language. Every year in India, a large amount of literary work is created in a number of vernacular languages, and this literature is meant to portray the vast range of diverse and rich cultural patterns that are prevalent in the country. English translations of the works of Premchand, Rabindranath Tagore, Kamala Das, Geetanjali Shree, and Mahasweta Devi can make English learning engaging and appropriate for the indigenous environment. The application of English translated works of well-known vernacular texts will bring the students' ethos and life experiences into their English classrooms, so producing an atmosphere that is conducive to learning and expanding the students' cultural horizons. Furthermore, this effort will make pedagogy of English dynamic and appealing for students, raise awareness for their native cultural practices and as a result, it will encourage them to preserve their cultural identity.

Conducting Orientation and Refresher programs for ELT practitioners:

There is a need for frequent orientation and refresher programs for teachers in the field of language pedagogy, particularly English Language. This will take them from being excellent instructors to becoming successful teachers. It is undeniable that English is a worldwide language, and that proficiency in the English language is a prerequisite for achieving success on a global scale. The language instructors are well aware of the fact that in the field of language pedagogy, it is prerequisite to continually learn new methods, and re-shape the old ones. The purpose of the training programs is to assist teachers to: be well-aware of the existing scenario, co-operate each other and peer review each other's classes, use ICT tools for effective teaching-learning and technology in ELT, produce need-based instructional teaching-learning materials, prepare and administer a variety of language tests, and think about things from a different perspective in order to make your teaching more effective.

Conclusion:

According to Freire (1997, as cited in Raddawi and Degenaro, 2017: 61), education should not colonise. Therefore, students of English shouldn't be encouraged to adopt an Anglo-centric perspective of the language. This means that English shouldn't be presented in the classroom as something that is uniquely owned by white native speakers from countries like the United Kingdom and the United States. However, one cannot rule out Western materials and methods entirely, but can adapt them to the indigenous culture. 'Understanding Poetry' was an American college textbook and poetry anthology by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, first published in 1938. The 'Trees' by Joyce Kilmer, 'If' by Rudyard Kipling and 'Cargoes' by John Masefield have been discussed. The editor showed that there is no correlation between the titles and the themes elaborated in the poems. They are filled with jumpy or unconnected metaphors. The rationale for displaying such texts was to awaken the students to realize the difference between a good and a bad text. In a similar way, ELT practitioners can compare Western textbooks with Indian textbooks and the western materials and methods can be adapted to meet the needs of the Indian classrooms. Contextualization of ELT Methods and Materials and use of Authentic Materials, Indo-Anglian Literature, translated texts in the

English Classrooms as well as conducting Orientation and Refresher programs for ELT practitioners are some of the ways suggested in the paper. There is also a need to create a curiosity or questioning attitude in the learners who continuously find themselves engaging and ask for information about the book or the lesson.

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