

English Language Education in Nepal: A Decolonial Perspective

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Abstract

This study aims to critically examine how colonial influences shape language education practices and how alternative epistemologies can be foregrounded. It employs a qualitative thematic literature review design, drawing on Braun and Clarke's approach to systematically code, analyze, and interpret existing scholarly literature. The findings revealed colonial legacies and cultural hegemony, and barriers to quality education. It validates that the norms of the dominant Anglo-American language, native-speaker ideologies, examination-based practices, and the use of textbooks reproduce language and educational inequities. The study calls for a reorientation of the study of the English language towards decolonisation by incorporating the use of indigenous knowledge, multilingual pedagogies, culturally responsive teaching, and critical consciousness. This can be a way to make English a tool that will support linguistic diversity. English can be re-visioned as a transformative resource that helps to enhance equity, linguistic diversity, and function as an instrument for facilitating inclusive practices.

Keywords: Colonial legacy, critical consciousness, critical pedagogy, colonial practices, English language education

Introduction

English has emerged as a dominant global language, lingua franca, and also plays the role of social mobility access, economic development, and is closely associated with international opportunities (Salomone & Salomone, 2022). The dominance of English has raised signification questions about linguistic diversity, cultural erosion, indigenous languages, and concerns of knowledge traditions. The English language is closely connected with global engagement and social advancement and is often seen as a valuable resource to deal with linguistic inequities and language justice. The global expansion of English is creating social divisions and undermining indigenous epistemologies in linguistic diversity settings (Meighan, 2023). English reimagines as a validation of knowledge systems and critically in the sense of power, identity, and value in postcolonial societies.

Nepal is a linguistically and culturally extremely diverse country. Based on the National Population and Housing Census 2021, there are 124 mother tongues representing various language families in the country, and Nepali is the mother tongue for only 44.86% of the population (National Statistics Office [NSO], 2023). The multilingualism of Nepal is indicative of its rich cultural heritage and diverse ethnic groups, but also poses challenges in language policy and educational practice. Linguistic research also reveals that over half of the Nepalese mother tongues are in a state of vulnerability or endangerment, and that this situation could lead to language loss and cultural sustainability issues (Regmi, 2024).

In this context, the use of English has grown in its importance in the education system in Nepal. The advent of the English language education goes back to the year 1854, when Durbar High School was established by the visit of Jung Bahadur Rana to Britain (Awasthi, 2010). English has since been transformed from a foreign language subject into a medium of instruction and is now the dominant medium of instruction, especially in private schools. Over the last few decades, some public schools have also adapted to the adoption of English-medium instruction (EMI) due to the desire of parents and the notion that proficiency in English boosts the educational and economic chances of their children. This has led English to be closely linked with modernity, globalization, employability, and social mobility (Pandey & Pandey, 2014). English is viewed as a pathway to global academic success, employability, and a gateway to international prospects. This tendency has been embraced from multilingual aspects and global aspirations to maintain local languages and prevent homogenization. English in Nepal has opened avenues, social inequities, and embodies tensions between exclusion and empowerment.

Nevertheless, the growth of English education also presents important issues of language equity and cultural representation. Nepal has not been officially colonized, but the use of English can lead to the reproduction of some of the colonial practices of language and culture, which are typical of the colonial educational system. International scholarship in English Language Teaching (ELT) shows that English is often used to pass on the norms of the Anglo-American language, the values of Anglo-American culture, and the ideologies of native

speakers (Phillipson, 1992; Holliday, 2006). These tendencies create a hierarchy of British/American forms of English and marginalise local varieties of English and multilingual identities. The ability to speak English in Nepal is becoming a symbolic and cultural capital, which shapes social class and has an impact on educational and occupational opportunities (Shah, 2022).

There are also tensions between multilingual realities and monolingual education practices, as evidenced in the empirical literature. UNESCO (2025) reports highlight that children who learn in their mother tongue are more likely to become literate and to better understand the written word and to perform better in the classroom, but that about 40% of learners in the world are not educated in their native language. This figure can be as high as 90% (UNESCO, 2025) in many Lower-Middle-Income (LMC) countries. UNESCO also mentions that multilingual education contributes to the process of inclusion, self-esteem, and education equity and helps to prevent dropouts and learning gaps. Despite these recommendations, the education system in Nepal in English medium education tracks English skills over multilingual pedagogies and indigenous knowledge systems, leading to a gap between students' linguistic backgrounds and classroom practices.

Few studies have reported the issues in the system of English language education in Nepal. This includes a lack of teacher competency, a lack of professional development opportunities, large-group learning, textbook-centered learning, exam-driven learning, and a lack of consideration for local cultures and languages (Kadel, 2020; Dahal & Baral, 2024). It is often easy to get in the habit of passing on material and repeating it without choosing to think about it, create it, or build it in relation to the context. These conditions often result in the repetition of facts and the transmission of knowledge without contextualized knowledge construction, critical thinking, or creativity. The practices are similar to Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy, which characterizes an education that is "banking in" knowledge to the consumer without asking them to critically reflect and transform their society.

The central issue of the study is the continued influence of hegemonic language ideologies in English language education in Nepal that continue to influence the use of English and Anglo-American norms, and the marginalization of indigenous languages, local knowledge systems, and multilingual identities. While English opens up global opportunities, this is also a dangerous prospect because of its uncritical use and its tendency to perpetuate social inequalities, cultural hierarchies, and linguistic injustices. The study advocates prioritizing English language education to foster linguistic competence, social empowerment, cultural plurality, and critical inquiry into power structures, social inequalities, and social justice. It is therefore important to take a decolonial approach to the study of the English language that critiques the status quo ideas about language, knowledge, and quality education.

This thematic review is grounded in the assumption that the incorporation of multilingualism, indigenous knowledge systems, and critical consciousness into pedagogical practices can make English language education in Nepal more equitable, inclusive, and socially responsive. Accordingly, the study seeks to (1) explore the historical, cultural, and ideological foundations

of English language education in Nepal; (2) identify major pedagogical challenges and manifestations of linguistic and cultural hegemony in English language teaching; (3) examine how critical pedagogy and decolonial perspectives can contribute to more inclusive and socially just English language learning; and (4) propose pedagogical and policy recommendations for integrating indigenous knowledge, multilingualism, and interculturality into the EFL classroom.

The study has great importance for the discussions on language policy, multilingual education, and educational equity in Nepal. It is critical in its consideration of the connection between English, power, and culture, providing insights for teachers, curriculum developers, teacher educators, and policy makers interested in designing more inclusive learning spaces. Moreover, the findings of the study are relevant to UNESCO and its vision of multilingualism and culturally responsive education by emphasizing the need for a balance between the needs for global communication and the challenges of local languages and cultures.

Literature Review

Coloniality, Linguistic Imperialism, and the Hegemony of English in Education

English is often celebrated for expanding educational opportunities and serving as a valuable global resource in shaping local language environments. Language promotes global connectivity, professional success, and competing perspectives in multilingual, cultural identities. Philipson (1992) and Holliday (2006) argue that English language teaching reinforces linguistic norms by manifesting native-speaker norms and dominant Western epistemological frameworks in educational practices. In contrast, Canagarajah (2025) emphasizes a multilingual lens to reshape, modify, and indigenize the English language as a dynamic function and reflect local experiences to move from deficit views of English.

English language education (ELE) in Nepal has evolved within a complex interplay of historical, socio-political, and cultural factors. Scholars have argued that postcolonial educational systems often reproduce social hierarchies, privileging Western norms while marginalizing local knowledge and languages (Holliday, 2006). Holliday (2006) contends that “ELT in postcolonial contexts often perpetuates the cultural subjectivities of native speaker ideologies” (p. 32), emphasizing the continued influence of colonial paradigms on classroom practices. In Nepal, English proficiency is strongly linked to social mobility and elite status, reinforcing socio-economic disparities (Phyak, 2016). Similarly, the Constitution of Nepal (2015) and the School Sector Development Plan (2016-2023) highlight mother-tongue-based education and make room for linguistic inclusion in multilingual domains. Policy documents advocate for linguistic equity because schools and colleges are gradually inclined towards EMI, which is associated with social mobility and academic achievement.

The introduction of English in Nepal during the Rana regime illustrates the deep entanglement between language, power, and social stratification (Awasthi, 2010). From its early institutionalization, English was positioned as a language of prestige, modernity, and administrative authority, thereby reinforcing clear hierarchies between English-speaking

elites and speakers of indigenous languages. In this regard, Eriksen (1992) argues that hegemonic languages tend to dominate key domains such as education, politics, and media, often marginalizing minority languages and reproducing broader social inequalities.

Freire (1970) further conceptualizes such educational structures as mechanisms of power, noting that “education either functions as an instrument...to bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom...to participate in the transformation of their world.” Within this framework, the expansion of EMI in Nepal reflects a persistent tension between global integration and local linguistic inclusion. While English offers significant opportunities for academic advancement and socioeconomic mobility in an increasingly interconnected world, its dominance within educational institutions can also reinforce linguistic and cultural hierarchies that marginalize indigenous knowledge systems. At the same time, these dynamics highlight the need to critically interrogate how language policy and educational practices may either perpetuate unequal power relations or contribute to more equitable and inclusive educational spaces in multilingual societies like Nepal.

Decolonizing English Language Education: Indigenous Knowledge, Critical Pedagogy, and Transformative Practice

The literature suggests redistribution of power within the classroom to recognize the linguistic needs, cultural resources in the form of knowledge production, not viewed as Western knowledge as superior. Teacher identity and preparedness are critical for effective, culturally responsive pedagogy (Bohara, 2025). Teacher identity is central to culturally responsive pedagogy as per a decolonial lens because teachers are not regarded as language instructors but also negotiate with classroom teaching practices, integration of curriculum, and fulfill the needs of diverse learners. Karki (2025) highlights the complexity of teacher identity in the Nepalese educational spectrum, where teachers navigate sociocultural expectations while delivering English instruction. However, teacher shortage, particularly in rural areas, continues to impact learning outcomes and the quality of instruction (Dahal & Baral, 2024). Panthi (2023) argues that critical pedagogy positions teachers as facilitators of knowledge, emphasizing reflection, empowerment, and agency, rather than mere transmitters of knowledge.

Decolonial approaches challenge West-centric norms in ELE, advocating for the inclusion of indigenous knowledge, languages, and cultural practices. Canagarajah (2025) notes that English should not be regarded as a fixed linguistic system rooted in native-speaker norms but rather as a dynamic tool shaped by multilingual and postcolonial realities. Sah (2022) describes EMI in Nepal as an “instrumental approach of self-colonization” for minority communities, privileging English over mother tongues and local knowledge. Timsina (2025) emphasizes that integrating culturally relevant and indigenous content in curricula enhances student engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes. These studies shed light on fundamental transformation, indigenous content in curricula, diverse linguistic and inclusive learning environments among Nepali English teachers to promote empowerment, reflection, and advocacy for the meaningful integration of indigenous knowledge systems in Nepali classroom settings. Thus, it promotes educational innovation, critical thinking, and develops community knowledge.

Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital, English proficiency is widely understood as a form of symbolic and economic capital that enhances access to employment opportunities, social prestige, and educational advancement. Within this framework, English operates as a valuable resource in competitive labor markets, where linguistic competence is directly converted into socioeconomic advantage. This process has been further intensified by the neoliberalisation of education, which emphasizes individual competition, market-oriented skills, and privatization. As Slaughter and Leslie (1997) note, neoliberal higher education prioritizes individualism and market logic, a trend that is evident in Nepal through the rapid expansion of EMI, particularly in private schooling sectors (Dearden, 2014). Consequently, English proficiency has become closely tied to social mobility, while simultaneously contributing to the marginalization of local languages and knowledge systems (Pandey & Pandey, 2014; Phyak, 2016).

Table 1

Major Themes in the Literature on English Language Education

Themes	Key Arguments	Nepali Context	Key Scholars
Coloniality, Linguistic Imperialism, and the Hegemony of English in Education	The English language is not merely a communication tool, contribute to epistemic inequality, and indigenous knowledge systems may receive limited recognition.	EMI contrasts with commitments to multilingual educational settings.	Phyak (2016), Phillipson (1992), Holliday (2006)
English as Linguistic Capital and the Neoliberalisation of Education	English serves as a valuable asset in economic prosperity, generates cultural prestige, and confers cultural legitimacy, conferring cultural influence and educational credentials.	Expansion of private EMI schools to compete in global markets.	Pandey and Pandey (2014), Dearden (2014)
Decolonizing English Language Education: Indigenous Knowledge, Critical Pedagogy, and Transformative Practice	Endorse culturally aware, inclusive practices, and reflect multilingual communities to accommodate various languages.	Mother-tongue-based education to incorporate indigenous knowledge.	Sah (2022), Adhikari (2021), Timsina (2025), and Canagarajah (2025)

Table 1 synthesizes major themes in the literature review on ELE in Nepal. The first theme highlights ideology, power, and local ways of creating epistemic inequality in the expansion of EMI to advocate multilingual education. Second theme exhibits that English is a relentless practice in private schools, which is associated with better career prospects and proficiency considered as employability and social recognition in the societal periphery. The last theme of the table signifies culturally responsive teaching, integration of indigenous knowledge into the curriculum is highly placed to showcase local cultures, languages, and Western-centered approaches to educational spectrums. Key scholars like Philipson, Holliday, Shah, Phyak, and Canagarajah made prominent contributions in terms of critical pedagogy, linguistic capital, and transformative practice in the construction of epistemic justice, equality, and educational policies.

Research Methods

This study adopts Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy as its guiding theoretical framework to critically examine the cultural, ideological, and pedagogical dimensions of English language education in Nepal. Grounded in the view that education is inherently political, critical pedagogy challenges traditional transmission-oriented models of teaching and positions learners as active agents capable of questioning dominant structures and transforming their social realities (Freire, 1996; Kincheloe, 2008). As Freire (1996) emphasizes, education either reproduces existing systems of conformity or becomes a practice of freedom that fosters critical consciousness and social transformation. In this sense, critical pedagogy provides a robust lens for interrogating how English language education may reproduce linguistic hierarchies while also offering possibilities for more equitable and inclusive practices. Scholars such as Giroux (2014) further extend this view by linking critical pedagogy to issues of democracy, equity, and social justice in education. In the context of Nepal, this framework is particularly relevant, as English language education often reflects Western epistemologies and reinforces linguistic and cultural hierarchies that marginalize local knowledge systems (Phyak, 2016). Accordingly, critical pedagogy is used not only as an analytical lens but also as a transformative orientation for rethinking English language education through a decolonial perspective.

Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative thematic literature review design. This approach enables a systematic and critical synthesis of existing scholarly work on EMI, linguistic capital, critical pedagogy, and decolonial education, with a focus on identifying recurring patterns, ideological assumptions, and pedagogical gaps within the Nepalese context. Literature was sourced from major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, and JSTOR, as well as institutional and policy repositories such as the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) and UNESCO documents. The search process was guided by carefully selected keywords such as "English-medium instruction," "critical pedagogy," "decolonial education," "linguistic imperialism," and "English language education in Nepal," combined using Boolean operators (AND, OR) to ensure precision and breadth in the search results.

The inclusion criteria were limited to peer-reviewed journal articles, books, theses, and policy documents published in English between 1990 and 2025. Studies were selected based on their relevance to EMI, critical pedagogy, and decolonial approaches, particularly those addressing linguistic inequality, cultural hegemony, and pedagogical practices in English language education. Preference was given to sources that directly aligned with the objectives of the study and contributed to a comprehensive understanding of English education within multilingual and postcolonial contexts.

The screening process involved several stages, including identification of records, removal of duplicates, title and abstract screening, and full-text review. Articles were further assessed for their relevance to themes such as linguistic capital, language ideology, social mobility, and decolonial pedagogical practices. Data extraction was conducted using a structured matrix that included author(s), context, research objectives, theoretical framework, methodology, key findings, and implications for English language education.

The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. The analysis began with repeated reading of selected literature to develop familiarity with the data, followed by systematic coding of meaningful segments. These codes were then grouped into preliminary themes, which were continuously reviewed and refined to ensure coherence and conceptual clarity. Through this iterative process, key themes related to linguistic capital, coloniality in education, and decolonial pedagogical possibilities were identified and synthesized to provide a critical understanding of English language education in Nepal.

Findings

The thematic analysis of literature and classroom practices revealed multiple interrelated findings regarding ELE in Nepal, examined through the lens of decolonial practices and Freirean critical pedagogy. The findings are organized under three major themes: colonial legacies and cultural hegemony, barriers to quality education, and emerging resistance and decolonial possibilities. The theme development process is highlighted in Table 2, which presents the initial codes and emergent themes aligned with the four research objectives, covering the historical and ideological foundations of English language education in Nepal, key pedagogical challenges and linguistic hegemony, the role of critical pedagogy and decolonial perspectives in promoting equity, and policy directions for integrating indigenous knowledge and multilingualism in the EFL classroom. The themes collectively reflect issues of social mobility, ideology, and linguistic equity.

Table 2**Theme Development Process**

Initial Codes	Categories	Final Themes
Teacher empowerment, educator leadership, emancipatory consciousness, student voice, interactive learning, critical reflection, indigenous culture	Critical pedagogy, transformative learning, Teacher Preparation and Critical Consciousness, Promotion of Indigenous Culture, Neoliberalism and Educational Marketization	Colonial Legacies and Cultural Hegemony
English as a status marker, Growth of EMI, EMI adoption, Marketization of education, class mobility, neoliberal ideology, Commodification of English		
Teacher scarcity, technology gaps, ICT access disparity, colonial legacies, place-based inequalities, Rural-urban divide, teacher workforce shortage	Educational Inequalities and Resource Disparities, ICT Integration Challenges, Resource Constraints, Teacher Preparation, and Critical Consciousness	Barriers to quality education
Challenging Western-dominated curricula, promoting critical consciousness and dialogic learning, Translanguaging and multilingual pedagogy, supporting identity and communication	Decolonizing Knowledge and Curriculum, Critical Pedagogy and Teacher Agency, and Multilingualism and Inclusive Learning Spaces	Emerging Resistance and Decolonial Possibilities

Colonial Legacies and Cultural Hegemony

English language education in Nepal continues to reflect colonial legacies, privileging Western cultural norms while marginalizing local knowledge and languages. Holliday (2006) observes that ELT in postcolonial contexts often perpetuates the cultural subjectivities of native speaker ideologies. Nepalese curricula, particularly in EMI, are heavily Britain-centric, with textbooks and exercises focused almost exclusively on British culture, traditions, and holidays, while indigenous practices and regional cultures are absent (Timsina, 2025). The reliance on imported curricula emphasizes Western epistemologies, which have led to an epistemic dependency. This dependency manifests in Nepal's English language education system, knowing to marginalized and reinforces the dominance over indigenous knowledge systems (Mingolo, 2011). Assessment practices are derived from Anglo-American domains, providing locally meaningful content of local realities and knowledge production. As a result, this tends to be a marginalized indigenous language, tradition, and a less reflection of their

experiences in the educational context. Educational policies from both past and present have depicted how more importance has been placed on the Nepali language and English than on other languages and cultures.

This can be seen through the policies introduced by NEC in 1992 for mother tongue instruction in schools and similar policies introduced in 2019 by NLPRC and NCEF. Linguistic rights and culture are very important in these policies. Nevertheless, in the Nepalese education system, a hierarchical language policy exists in which Western values get priority over others (Government of Nepal, 2018; Adhikari, 2021; Phyak, 2021; Poudel & Choi, 2022). Freire (1996) critiques such a system as a tool for maintaining hierarchical power, arguing that “education either functions as an instrument... to bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom... to participate in the transformation of their world” (p. 26). In Nepal, privileging Western cultural content over local knowledge reinforces cultural hegemony and limits the potential for inclusive and socially responsive education. Thus, perspective does not oppose English language education, but it advocates for epistemic justice and organizes within hierarchical structures to interact in an inclusive area of local and global knowledge construction.

Multilingual education values students’ home language as central to learning and empathizes with their realities. Decolonial and critical paves the way to promote, protect, and empower learners with socially and recognize linguistic diversity as a source of educational insights. Critical pedagogy is concerned with the indigenous knowledge co-construction process in which students are encouraged to question the established social, cultural, and political norms in society (Freire, 1996). The analysis of education in classroom practices highlights the urgency of critical pedagogy to integrate indigenous knowledge, customs, and traditions into English curricula. Distinct cultural practices, such as the Dhannach (Yalangma) of the Limbus and Chandi Nach of the Rais, are largely absent from the formal curriculum, reflecting on a broader marginalization of ethnic and regional identity (Timsina, 2025). Critical pedagogy emphasizes the validation of local knowledge and inclusive educational practices, arguing that “curricula that ignore indigenous culture contribute to the erasure of local knowledge and maintain structural inequalities” (Panthi, 2023). Incorporating culturally relevant content can enhance student engagement, foster identity validation, and challenge the dominant narratives embedded in English teaching.

Competence in the English language displays linguistic capital in order to have migration opportunities, economic rewards, and social privileges in status. It secures professional success, quality education as a prerequisite for higher education access to resources with academic achievement (Bourdieu, 1991). English in Nepal functions as both a social and economic commodity, symbolizing power, prestige, and access to global opportunities. Slaughter and Leslie (1997) argue that “neoliberalism in higher education emphasizes individualism, competition, and privatization” (p. 78), which is reflected in the widespread adoption of EMI policies in private schools. English proficiency is often equated with social status, while indigenous languages are marginalized, a phenomenon described by Sah (2020) as a form of self-colonization. Eriksen (1992) similarly notes that hegemonic languages

dominate political, educational, and media spheres, limiting minority language use and reinforcing social stratification. This commodification highlights the dual role of English as a vehicle for social mobility and a mechanism for sustaining inequality.

For many years, teacher-centered approaches have been subject to rendering teachers as the source of knowledge and authority, while students are known to be passive recipients in knowledge construction. According to Freire (1996), this learning denotes the “banking model” of education, and knowledge is deposited by whatever teachers impart without any criticality, discussion, or analytical thinking. The Nepali classroom is based on an exam-driven approach, which depends on textbooks and rote learning, which is not inclined towards creativity and learner-centered dimensions. The aspects of critical pedagogy and decolonial views have been very helpful in solving these problems in the context of methods that can be used to achieve learner-centeredness, participation, and culturally responsive teaching. Such techniques like incorporation of indigenous knowledge, mother tongue instruction, ICT, cooperative learning, and formative assessment play an important role in making the students participate in learning process as well as develop critical thinking skills.

Barriers to Quality Education

A shortage of qualified and trained teachers, particularly in rural areas, emerged as a significant barrier to quality education (Dahal & Baral, 2024). Teachers’ professional identities and attitudes directly influence learning outcomes. In this regard, Deupa (2023) emphasizes that “teachers cannot perform effectively unless they possess a positive attitude toward their profession” (p. 45). Critical pedagogy promotes the development of critical consciousness in both teachers and students, enabling co-construction of knowledge and engagement with social, political, and cultural issues (Freire, 1996). Alongside recognition of local knowledge systems, it would facilitate a participatory and constructive learning process.

Teacher education program reforms are yet another aspect that needs consideration. Besides equipping teachers with the technical knowledge required for teaching, it becomes important that there should be some provision for fostering a sense of lifelong learning among them through reflection. In the present-day scenario of the conflict between the global norms of English language and culture and the local knowledge system, it becomes imperative to equip the teachers with the knowledge and skill of inclusive pedagogy and digital literacy.

Teachers equipped with content knowledge (CK) and pedagogical skills are better positioned to facilitate reflective dialogue, critical thinking, and student agency (Kleickmann et al., 2013). In relation to teaching methodology, it becomes necessary to promote student-led learning as an effective way of transcending rote learning. Through the promotion of critical engagement, discussions, and cooperative work, it is possible to enhance class participation and encourage reflective learning. All these teaching strategies conform to the Freirean approach whereby students are viewed as agents of change who are actively involved in the construction of knowledge.

Empowering teacher agency and autonomy, including participation in curriculum reform and assessment practices, represents a crucial decolonial strategy in English language education (Poudel, 2024). The study identified severe infrastructural and material limitations in Nepalese schools, particularly in rural and remote regions. Small classrooms, lack of libraries and laboratories, and poor transportation impede access to education and compromise learning quality (Dahal & Baral, 2024). Students from economically disadvantaged households often face additional barriers, such as long travel distances to schools, further exacerbating educational inequities.

Geographical isolation and inadequate technological infrastructure limit the effective integration of ICT in teaching and learning. Without access to digital resources, teachers struggle to implement interactive and learner-centered pedagogies, reducing opportunities for student engagement and critical thinking (Dahal & Baral, 2024). Incorporating ICT in a contextually relevant and culturally responsive manner remains a critical challenge for advancing equitable English education.

The study reveals that English language education in Nepal is deeply influenced by colonial legacies, social hierarchies, and neoliberal imperatives, which together shape classroom practices and educational outcomes. Critical pedagogy provides a framework to counter these hegemonies by fostering critical consciousness, cultural inclusivity, and transformative learning (Freire, 1996; Panthi, 2023). Integrating indigenous knowledge, enhancing teacher preparation, addressing resource gaps, and incorporating ICT are essential strategies to decolonize English education and promote equity, agency, and social justice in Nepalese classrooms. On the whole, the existing curriculum framework for the teaching of English in Nepal is often influenced by the colonial legacy of the curriculum as well as its exam-oriented nature, thereby providing no room for contextualizing and reflecting on what has been learnt. The need is felt for updating the curriculum framework at regular intervals so that a new curriculum framework can be developed, incorporating a multicultural perspective and innovation in pedagogical practices based on the experiences of the local learners.

Emerging Resistance and Decolonial Possibilities

Nepali education relies on Western-oriented curricula and tries to integrate indigenous cultural practices in English language teaching. Critical pedagogy solves contextualized learning and incorporates learning through local stories, indigenous knowledge systems, and sociocultural realities (Freire, 1996). It helps indigenous people to connect their festivals, traditions, cultures, and languages to challenge the dominance of imported knowledge inheritance. Local knowledge lays the foundation of learning to contribute to equity education and epistemic justice.

Teachers should adapt their own approach and give examples of local epistemology to relate the discussion in critical inquiry. Teachers create the spaces for multiple voices, inclusive approaches, and promote culturally responsive pedagogical transformation practices in their teaching and learning. Students in Nepal navigate multiple linguistic as broaden students' communicative repertoires, challenging monolingual ideologies, and flourishing cultural

heritages. Thus, decolonial and critical pedagogy are recognized for affirming the identities of local people and negotiating global scholarship. Translanguaging, multilingual instruction, and hybrid pedagogies forge possibilities, equitable and combine global communicative competencies in a collaborative learning paradigm. Thus, decolonial possibilities entail teacher agency, identity formation, and resistance in colonial outlook.

Discussion

Based on Freire's critical pedagogy approach and the thematic analysis of the existing literature, the study examined the cultural, ideological, and pedagogical aspects of English language education with a decolonial perspective in Nepal. Colonial legacies, neoliberal ideology, and Freirean critical pedagogy demonstrate that English education does not lie in linguistic endeavor but in sociocultural power in interconnected influences and structural inequalities. The three major themes that have developed are *colonial legacies and cultural hegemony*, *barriers to quality education*, and *emerging resistance and decolonial possibilities*, which showcase EMI marginalizing indigenous languages, cultural subjectivities, a culturally grounded approach, and emphasize privatization, cultural identities, and reproduce educational inequalities in multilingual realities. The study signifies insufficient learning resources, curriculum, and ICT, further constraining opportunities that support context-sensitive technological initiatives, promoting transformative and empowering teachers in the field of language teaching and learning.

The findings touched the ground of critical pedagogy and decolonial contemplation to cater to inclusivity, intercultural approaches, equitable curriculum reform, and access to global opportunities. The allocation of resources becomes a concern for equity since most marginalized and rural schools do not have access to genuine learning materials, ICT tools, and necessary infrastructure, making the difference between urban schools, which teach English Medium of Instruction, and public schools larger than before. It is important to address issues related to the equitable allocation of resources, ensuring that learners from all walks of life receive quality education. ICT can be used to great advantage in rural areas to support multilingual and culturally relevant education.

Similarly the findings of the study contributed to the knowledge claim of English language education in Nepal and are grounded within colonial knowledge systems through neoliberal tendencies. It is not an unbiased and highlighted power structures in local and global levels. Even though Nepal has never been colonized, this study demonstrates the privilege of Anglo-American benchmarks in EMI instruction periphery. Curricula exhibit foreign curriculum, native speaker ideology, and poses of knowledge while discrediting others.

Theoretical grounds and observations fit into postcolonial and decolonial scholarship. Said (1978) points out hierarchical relations between the West and non-West, whereas Spivak (1988) raises doubts about dominant discourses and subaltern groups' voices in marginalized contexts. On the other hand, Bhabha (1994) states colonial discourse on identity construction in postcolonial societies. English education becomes the source of cultural hegemony and epistemic injustice through curriculum and English-only instruction in the

classroom, ignoring the indigenous knowledge system. The relation of coloniality and power speaks together, while Mignolo (2011) uses the concept of coloniality of knowledge and the expense of local ways of evaluating.

This study leaves the footprints of colonial legacies, teaching practices, and hope for transformation in knowledge dissemination in the educational arena. In a similar vein, Freire (1996) highlights critical consciousness, which is best evident in teacher-centered views. Thus, epistemic disobedience is a key to decolonize English language education in Nepal for betterment and upliftment (Mignolo, 2011). Findings are identical in Asian settings such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and India for the avenue for cultural and linguistic hegemony. Global decolonial discourses in ELT/TESOL manifest the dominance of Western theories to cater contextualized pedagogies, indicating decolonial possibilities in terms of multilingualism, hybrid pedagogies, and local knowledge enrichment.

Finally, it can be concluded that in the process of teaching English in Nepal, decolonization of pedagogical practices is bound to happen since it will go a long way in addressing cultural domination and inclusiveness through proper pedagogy. The practice of assessment and evaluation requires a radical change, as rote-based examinations discourage innovation while reinforcing hierarchy within a learner's mindset. Transition towards more formative assessments based on the context and critical analysis would be consistent with other objectives of the educational system.

Conclusion and Implications

The objectives of this study are to examine the cultural, ideological, and historical foundations shaping the domain of ELE in Nepal; explore the pedagogical challenges encountered within this context; investigate how critical pedagogy and decolonial perspectives can contribute to more holistic and inclusive learning approaches; and propose policy and pedagogical recommendations for integrating intercultural perspectives and indigenous knowledge into EFL classrooms. The findings indicate that the process of teaching English in Nepal is deeply rooted in colonial epistemologies and power relations, often privileging global networks while limiting spaces for local knowledge and perspectives.

This research shows that English education in Nepal is a form of epistemic dominance and the detriment of local languages. The findings posit political dominance in pedagogies, curricula, and the assessment of educational practices. Conversely, domination has its merits and demerits to epistemic counters, imperative to adopt and fosters consciousness in a decolonial mindset. Nepal is reconstructed as a decolonial terrain of struggle and negotiation in view of identity, social justice, and power. A decolonial and critical pedagogy lens to explore multilingual, low-resourced regions. Pedagogical implications are an urgent need for a multilingual pedagogy would use as a resource for learning. Critical debate, agency on the part of learners, culturally responsive pedagogy to change in teacher education, and teachers should be equipped with digital literacies and culturally sensitive teaching. Policy formation leads to reforming the curriculum in order to appreciate linguistic diversity and fuse the knowledge of indigenous peoples into the curriculum.

ELE in Nepal is facing a turning point influenced by many colonial traditions, neoliberal dynamics in the world, and struggles for equality within the country itself. On one hand, speaking English has been viewed as an asset that would provide opportunities for social mobility; however, this has contributed to the development of linguistic hierarchies. The literature review demonstrates that Nepal still favors rote learning and the ideology of native speakers and thus sees English as a language of elite classes.

On the other hand, the emerging discussions on decolonization offer spaces for transformation. Through interrogating the power of having Western values imposed and recognizing the legitimacy of local variants of the language, educational spaces can become empowering and plural. In this regard, pedagogical processes may embrace multiculturalism, critical thinking, and liberation from social subjugation.

Decolonizing English language teaching can thus be viewed as both challenging and possible, requiring a shift beyond the conventional banking model of education toward critical pedagogical approaches that foster creativity, social justice, and critical consciousness. It further includes formulating policies that give the power back to the educators, appreciate native knowledge systems, and use technology to facilitate culture-sensitive experiences. Thus, decolonizing English education represents an incredible opportunity in that it aids in combating oppressive structures, appreciating local identities, and enabling Nepalese children to participate and make changes in their global environment.

Regarding the implication, the first theme emphasizes that culturally responsive teaching and inclusive learning environments need to decolonize English curricula by integrating indigenous epistemology. On the other hand, the second theme is a barrier to quality education, and it suggests that having critical consciousness, student-driven learning is crucial for moving beyond rote memorization, teachers' preparation, technological resources, and reflective practice in teaching. On top of that, the study suggests enhancing critical pedagogical awareness, calling for equitable investment in education, enabling teachers to facilitate discussion in learning, and educational justice in Nepal to reduce cultural hegemony and promote inclusive, contextually relevant pedagogies.

Integrating decolonial principles and critical pedagogy in Nepalese education can empower students, preserve indigenous languages and cultural values, and cultivate moral, ethical, and rational development. Such approaches contribute to an inclusive, socially just, and transformative educational environment that aligns with the nation's constitutional and policy commitments to equity, diversity, and sustainable development. Thus, decolonization of English learning in Nepal is not about forgetting English but rather rethinking its role and possibilities to allow indigenous knowledge. It advocates for oppression, and equitable space in a multilingual context that can be change in liberating instrument.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited by its reliance on thematic analysis of existing literature, as it does not incorporate the diverse lived experiences and perspectives of English language teachers through empirical data collection. Moreover, while the study is framed through the lenses of critical pedagogy and decolonial perspectives, other relevant theoretical viewpoints may remain underexplored.

Most of the findings are based on secondary sources from existing literature to analyze theme development. More or less, analysis of theme development is of an interpretive nature and a subjective perception of the researcher. The risk of interpretive bias can not be ruled out in qualitative research. Rigor, transparency, coding, selecting, and synthesizing in previous literature would be a possibility of interpretive subjectivity rather than primary sources. The study has limited geographic boundaries because of limitations of its source, which may not be capable of redefining the aspects of sociolinguistic phenomena. The difference between rural and urban areas has not been captured in this study. The absence of classroom ethnography and longitudinal data also limits the capacity to explore colonial legacies, decolonization strategies, and the history of colonial legacies. Future research should also explore the integration of indigenous knowledge in classroom practices and examine the role of digital resources in promoting equity in Nepal's linguistic, social, economic, and cultural diversity.

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Conflict of Interest


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