Unveiling the Coloniality of Education:
A Post-Colonial Critique and Decolonizing of Education in Pakistan

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Abstract:

Contemporary educational system of Pakistan is based on Euro-American and Eurocentric civilizational identity perpetuating colonial legacy. Decolonization posits that colonial power structures persist despite independence, necessitating opposition and change. A prominent place in the decolonial discourse is occupied by education. The important part that universities play "in grounding systems of knowledge production and perpetuating coloniality" is acknowledged in this debate. Curriculum and pedagogy are especially recognized as "sites of coloniality within and outside of higher education" that have the potential to either legitimize or marginalize knowledge production systems. A critical discourse analysis of educational policies, curricula, and pedagogies in Pakistan was conducted to uncover the colonial legacy. The study revealed that Eurocentric perspectives dominate educational practices, marginalizing indigenous knowledge systems. This perpetuates inequalities in knowledge production and access. From a postcolonial perspective, the persistence of colonial legacy in education reflects the ongoing struggle for epistemic justice. Decolonizing education requires a critical examination of power structures and knowledge production systems, ultimately promoting intellectual autonomy and inclusivity. This study contributes to the growing discourse on decolonizing education in postcolonial nations, emphasizing the need for a decolonizing agenda in Pakistani higher education.

Keywords: Coloniality, education system, post-colonialism, knowledge production, pedagogy of knowledge

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan's contemporary education system retains strong Euro-American and Eurocentric influences, perpetuating colonial legacy despite decolonization. Decolonization acknowledges the

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persistence of colonial power dynamics and knowledge systems in the modern world. Education plays a crucial role in this discourse, particularly in higher education institutions that shape knowledge production and professional formation. Curriculum and pedagogy are key sites of coloniality, either legitimizing or marginalizing knowledge systems.

The legacy of colonialism has profoundly impacted Pakistan's education sector. Understanding this complex relationship requires careful examination of the historical influences shaping educational policies and practices. This article contributes to the growing discourse on decolonizing education in postcolonial nations, with a focus on Pakistan. It argues for the significance of a decolonizing agenda in Pakistani higher education, highlighting the need to interrogate and revise curriculum and pedagogy to break free from coloniality and promote inclusive knowledge production. Such an agenda challenges the systemic privileging of Eurocentric frameworks, which continue to marginalize local epistemologies and perpetuate intellectual dependency on Western paradigms.

This dependency not only limits the scope of knowledge production but also reinforces power hierarchies rooted in colonial ideologies. By exploring this critical issue, the article aims to inform efforts towards a more equitable and culturally relevant education system in Pakistan. The complex relationship between colonialism and education in Pakistan requires a careful study to understand the various influences that shaped educational policies and practices in Pakistan. For this purpose, it is important to understand the colonial approach towards the education system of colonized people.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Abidi in his article analyzes the experiences of colonialism which has extensive psycho-cultural, educational, philosophico-epistemological, and social development dimensions, which were severely limiting for the colonized populations. Colonialist education systems, designed as tools of control, were not merely instruments of knowledge dissemination but vehicles of ideological domination. By prioritizing Western ideals, these systems actively delegitimized indigenous intellectual traditions and sought to erase cultural identities, leaving a lasting imprint on the colonized psyche. Colonialist education systems often sought to indoctrinate and assimilate the local populations, undermining indigenous knowledge and cultural traditions (Abdi, 2012).

This enduring legacy compels a critical reevaluation of Pakistan's educational paradigms, emphasizing the urgency of decolonization as a means to reclaim intellectual sovereignty and foster an education system rooted in local realities and aspirations. Following a brief overview of early European colonial expansion, Lester looks at indigenous interactions and assesses the main economic, political, and educational effects of contemporary colonialism. Next, current academic perspectives on colonialism—particularly the cultural and spatial "turns" in imperial studies—come into emphasis. He wraps off by talking about how discussions of the colonial past still play a role in postcolonial politics now at many different locations. The British Empire is mostly discussed, however this is done in opposition to other colonial expansion schemes and their reciprocal constitution (Lester, 2009).

Ashcroft contend that education played a pivotal role in the colonial project, serving as a tool of colonialist subjectification that normalized British or English values as universal. This process entailed the representation of colonized individuals as inherently inferior, perpetuating a dominant

ideology that legitimized colonial rule (Ashcroft et al., 2006). Education thus became a crucial instrument of empire, facilitating domination by consent, as Gramsci (1971) termed it. Post-colonial scholars globally have corroborated this perspective, highlighting how schools privileged European knowledge while endeavoring to erase indigenous knowledge ecologies and modes of being (Allweiss, 2021). In the Arab context, Said (1994) reflected on his own educational experience, describing the "tremendous spiritual wound" inflicted by foreign educators who instilled a sense of inferiority regarding his indigenous knowledge and culture. This experience led Said to conclude that his education perpetuated a deep-seated embarrassment towards his cultural heritage, deeming it congenitally inferior (Said, 1994).

According to Tugrul Mart's article on colonial governance and education in Africa, the conquering nations imposed their own educational system on their colonies as a result of colonization. Colonizing regimes came to understand that mental as much as physical power gave them the upper hand over colonial countries. Education was used to enforce this mental discipline. Exposing Africans to a superior culture was the colonizer's educational objective. Colonizers believed that education would raise Africans' level of civilization and bring them into the contemporary world. However, conquerors' desire to spread Christianity and their need for skilled local labor for economic growth led them to utilize education as a means of establishing social control over Africans (Mart, 2011).

While tracing the impact of colonial legacy on Pakistan, Memoona Saeed, Noor Muhammad and Lal Muhammad examines the Macaulay theory of education especially drafted for subcontinent specifically. It is very unfortunate that somehow or the other we are still following the legacy of colonization. The impact of colonization can be seen and felt in the society, especially in education sector. The presence of different education system, different syllabus for different social class, education quality with respect to finance all are the outcome of colonization. Moreover, presence of elite class in the formulation of policy also proved that present system doesn't base on equity. This phenomenon is very damaging for the national integration, and this aspect we need to address so loudly as never before. Another very important aspect of this paper is the discussion on coloniality of education.

Anibal Quijano from Peru has coined the term "Coloniality of Knowledge." Coloniality of knowledge refers to the control of knowledge by Western colonial powers for their imperial, colonial, commercial, and economic interests, which can also be referred to as knowledge management. In other words, the academic control of all sources of knowledge and learning by colonial powers, and the acceptance of the theories of the colonizer, which is known as Eurocentrism in the present day (Salgado et al., 2021).

Walter D. Mignolo, an expert in epistemology and literary theory, political science, and international relations at Duke University in Carolina, says that colonialism and modernity are two sides of the same coin. Mignolo considers modernity to be an epistemological framework that is an essential part of the European colonial project (Mignolo & Escobar, 2013). Michael Baker argues that colonialism manifests itself in the logical structure of power and knowledge, which is the intentional and systematic organization of information. In other words, colonialism and its associated interests utilize knowledge in a one-sided and specific manner (Baker, 2012).

Renowned African decolonial thinker Ngugi wa Thiong'o interprets colonialism and coloniality as psychological violence, stating that violence (coloniality) occurs in the classroom after the battlefield, where local students are disconnected from the knowledge of their land, region, society, and civilization, which has been learned through centuries of experiences. This knowledge is deemed inferior and humiliated (Sibanda, 2021).

Similarly, this study highlights the effect of colonization on education along with certain recommendation to overcome on these effects. The existing literature on the topic mostly discusses about the impact of colonialism in social, economic, cultural and civilizational context, how they perceived colonized nations as inferior and the objective behind their specific educational policies was to not only to introduce the colonized nations to a superior culture but also to alter the social and cultural identities for their own purpose. Similarly, the data on the impacts of colonial policies on Pakistani education sector is not very rich, and there is a dearth of literature over coloniality of education and the ways to transform the current education system. Therefore, this article not only sheds light on the coloniality of education but also tries to find ways and means to transform the current education system and pave the way for the socio-economic development of the nation. For this purpose, this study employs a qualitative research approach to critically examine the enduring impact of colonialism on Pakistan's education system and to explore pathways for decolonization in higher education. The methodology incorporates a multi-pronged strategy to analyze the historical, cultural, and epistemological dimensions of colonial influence and its persistence in contemporary educational policies and practices.

METHODOLOGY

This research paper employs critical discourse analysis in this study, which is used to examine educational policies, curricula, and pedagogies in Pakistan to uncover the colonial legacy rooted in contemporary educational system. This qualitative approach involves a systematic examination of texts and discursive practices, focusing on how power relations and colonial influence shape knowledge production and access within higher education. By analyzing these texts from postcolonial perspective, this study aims to identify the ways in which Eurocentric perspective dominate and marginalize indigenous knowledge systems. This methodology allows for identification of underlying ideological structures and power dynamics that perpetuates inequality in education, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on epistemic justice and the need for decolonized educational framework in Pakistan.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF COLONIALISM

British economic and political dominance was established on the Indian subcontinent during colonial rule from the middle of the eighteenth to the middle of the twentieth centuries. This suppression of other European powers led to a long-term negative balance of trade with Europe and the subcontinent's loss of political sovereignty to Britain. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the English East India Company expanded its holdings throughout India, Ceylon, and Burma, beginning with Bengal in the middle of the eighteenth century. During British colonial authority, a "military fiscal" state was established, and agricultural profits were utilized to finance British wars across the globe (Bayly, 1994).

Important members of the native middle classes also started social reforms as colonial initiatives financed by colonizers, like women's and "untouchables'" education. Those authors also attempted to deepen religious divisions among India's various communities. Indigenous elites were among the many new social groups and connections brought about by colonialism on both sides (Said, 1995) close to the ruling colonizers. Colonial social life was primarily characterized by racial and class differences and disparities, with social distances being marked by things like dress rules, lifestyles, structures, or communities. However, these limits were frequently crossed because of the British colonists' strong reliance on the native population.

British Education Policy for India aimed to develop an English-educated class to serve colonial interests of company and later Britain with European sensibilities and Indian ancestry. This goal prompted the introduction of western education in India, mainly to train low-paid clerks for British offices to increase loyalty and cut down on administrative expenses (Whitehead, 2007).

Education is essential to a country's culture because it makes knowledge transfer between generations easier. The Committee of Public Instruction was established due to the English-medium education movement led by British Liberals and Evangelicals. Anglicists supported British education, while Orientalists supported indigenous education. The dispute was resolved in favor of Reformists (Anglicists) in the Minutes of Macaulay 1835, and English was adopted as the teaching language. (Moir & Zastoupil, 2013). Macaulay reaffirmed that a group of indigenous who are Indian in race but English in taste and intelligence would be produced by the western English-based educational system and would act as a bridge between the colonizers and the colonized (Evans, 2002).

After the War of Independence (1857), The British administration substituted antagonism and oppression for the policies of collaboration and reconciliation. Three major losses resulted from this: first, the gradual engraftment of western contents was stopped, which would have provided the indigenous languages with modern knowledge if it had continued; second, the colonial discourse diminished the value and scope of oriental knowledge; and third, English dominated and overshadowed the indigenous languages, halting their development (Allender, 2007). It suggested teaching English to produce a class of people who could effectively bridge the divide between the Indian people and the British rulers. His goal was to raise people of Indian descent but with English sensitivities so they could improve the quality of their native tongues and help the general public learn new things. The British Education Policy in the Indian subcontinent was formulated through commissions and committees focusing on promoting Western education in colonial India. Although English language and ideas were given priority, there was also a focus on vernacular instruction and language, albeit to a lesser degree. Following the transfer of authority from the East India Company to the British Queen, numerous initiatives were undertaken to promote Western education, ideology, and literature (Kumar, 2007). The late 19th century and early 20th century marked the period of Western education's consolidation, which Company officers and missionaries had established before the 19th century. Nevertheless, the education policy had detrimental effects on the Indian population, specifically the Muslim community.

Unfortunately, the education system in post 1947 era did not experience a significant change. And the impacts of British education system continued to play role in Pakistan's educational landscape.

ANALYZING THE POST COLONIAL EDUCATION POLICIES SINCE 1947 IN PAKISTAN

Initial guidelines for curriculum modification were originally presented at the nation's first education conference, which took place in 1947. in order to rebuild that nation's educational system. Additionally, the conference's goal was to customize the educational system to meet the nation's social, cultural, and economic demands. But its reports could not be implemented due to the early death of Jinnah and political crisis. Since 1947 all education policies have been revolving around Compulsory education, Emphasis on science, technology, and religious education, Decentralization of education administration, Promotion of equal educational opportunities for males and females, Integration of Islamic principles and practices into the curriculum.

Although the policies aimed to improve the education system, increase accessibility, and align it with national ideology. However, implementation challenges and socio-economic factors hindered progress. But A critical analysis of Pakistan's educational policies from 1959 to 2010 reveals a pattern of inconsistency, lack of implementation, and ideological polarization. Despite efforts to reform the education system, policies have been hindered by political instability, inadequate funding, and a focus on ideological orientation over quality education. The emphasis on religious education and Islamic principles has led to concerns about the marginalization of minority groups and the promotion of a narrow worldview (Rassool & Mansoor, 2007). Moreover, the policies' failure to address socio-economic disparities and regional inequalities has resulted in a persistent gap in educational access and quality between urban and rural areas, as well as between different provinces. Overall, the policies' shortcomings have contributed to a fragmented and inefficient education system, hindering Pakistan's progress towards achieving its educational goals and development aspirations.

The perpetuation of colonial-era language policies in Pakistan's education system has resulted in a dichotomous language-in-education framework. This framework reinforces the dominance of English, relegating vernacular languages to secondary status. The local elite, trained in English, has leveraged this language to consolidate power and maintain existing social hierarchies (Shamim, 2008). The designation of English and Urdu as official languages has further solidified English's position, limiting the development of vernacular languages to provincial governments. Consequently, only Urdu, Sindhi, and Pashto are employed as languages of instruction in public schools, perpetuating the colonial-era policy of English-medium education for the elite and Urdu-medium for the masses (Rassool & Mansoor, 2007). This language policy has resulted in a lack of linguistic diversity, reinforcing the neocolonial configurations that have characterized Pakistan's education system since independence.

The dichotomy between English and vernacular-medium education has persisted as a recurring theme in Pakistan's educational landscape. Despite the government's official stance to transition official work and education to Urdu post-independence, this effort was continually thwarted by the elite, who perceived it as a threat to their political and economic interests. Consequently, English-medium schools have remained a preferred choice among Pakistan's elite and middle-class parents, who view them as a catalyst for their children's upward social mobility (Channa, 2017). This preference perpetuates the notion that English is a gateway to social and economic advancement, further entrenching the dominance of English in Pakistan's education system.

Since elitism and colonial legacies have exacerbated inequality in the younger generations, Pakistan's educational system has failed among the country's youngsters. The ability of the educational system to effectively educate its students has been skewed by the pervasive demands for English proficiency. During the 2015 Oslo Summit on Education and Development, Pakistan was referred to be "among the world's worst performing countries in education." (Basir, 2002). Although there have been some recent initiatives to enhance the possibilities for youth, the fundamental problem is in the divisions between classes. Even after 73 years of independence from Britain, the nation's complicated relationship with its past still impedes the advancement of working-class households. The nation's wealthy class is distinguished by their adherence to British traditions and the English language, which led to its designation as Pakistan's official language. This has led to a culture where fluency in English is now required for many professional positions and intellectualism is equated with English ability.

The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics' 2019 Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey found that 37% of all school-age children attend private schools with English-taught instruction.(Pakistan Bureaue of Statistics, 2019). Given the high rates of poverty in the nation, this figure seems out of proportion. Nonetheless, it reflects both the growing elitism in Pakistan and the desire of working-class parents to provide their kids the linguistic skills they need to gain professional employment. Since students at government schools are instantly disqualified from skilled employment prospects because they do not speak English well, this has been one of the main reasons why the nation has failed to adequately educate its youth. Students in low-grade private schools, on the other hand, who struggle to understand a foreign language in addition to learning the curriculum, turn to rote learning because many of their teachers lack a sufficient command of the English language.

With the implementation of the Single National Curriculum, the most recent educational reform, the disparities will only get worse. (SNC). This seems like a suitable way to address the inequalities in the Pakistani educational system. The SNC is far from unique, though. Instead of improving standards generally, the privileged private schools are exempt and allowed to follow their own curriculum, which merely serves to reinforce already-existing disparities. Students attending government schools deal with a variety of issues, chief among them being inadequate infrastructure, a dearth of instructional materials, and high absenteeism rates among teachers. The United Nations recommends that Pakistan allocate at least 15–20% of its overall national budget and 4–6% of its GDP on education (Bari, 2023). However, the government only allocated 1.7% of GDP to education in 2023, demonstrating the state's lack of accountability for the country's children (Amin, 2024). Considering that Pakistan has one of the youngest populations in the world, the subject of effective education is very important. The youth have the power to revive Pakistan's faltering economy and build a thriving future if they can be effectively educated. But in the current environment, where elitism is still thriving and inequality is growing, this seems like an impossible undertaking. These inequalities are further worsened due to lack of innovative policies and continuation of pre independence policies without realizing their context background and objectives which do not comply with the realities of post-colonial era.

Coloniality of Education and Destruction of Indigenous Education System in Pakistan

The understanding and comprehension of colonial knowledge is extremely important for the people of post-colonial countries like Pakistan, where neo-colonialism is still prevalent even after the formal end of colonization. Pakistan's political, economic, judicial, military, and educational systems are a continuation of the colonial policies implemented during the British rule in India. The partition of India in August 1947 was also a continuation of this colonial system.

"The phenomenon of coloniality of knowledge perpetuates the notion that theories, ideas, and research presented by Europe and America are the only valid and superior ones. The standards and measurements set by Europe and America are used to validate every aspect of our work. Through coloniality of knowledge, people's minds and thoughts are controlled, and they are repeatedly made to feel that they are incapable of making any meaningful contributions academically and are utterly incompetent. This is reinforced to the extent that people from Africa, Asia, and Latin America feel devoid of the abilities to think, innovate, invent, and theorize, and the only benchmark and key to measurement that remains is Eurocentrism.

Coloniality establishes an educational, scientific, and intellectual system that portrays the colonizer's occupation, plunder, and exploitation as a blessing, such as presenting the establishment of railways, universities, Fort William College, or irrigation systems in India as miracles and wonders of the British colonizers. In reality, these projects had their own colonial economic objectives, but through coloniality of knowledge, they were presented as public welfare projects, and even today, a large segment of the population in India and Pakistan considers this colonial perspective to be correct (a separate column would be required to detail the specifics of the installation of railway lines for the transportation of raw materials, the irrigation system to appease local loyalist elite, and the distribution of arable lands)."

In India, to achieve the objectives of coloniality of knowledge, the British colonizers established institutions such as Fort William College, Anjuman Punjab, and other universities, and simultaneously introduced the novel. This is because the novel can be easily used to promote a specific perspective.

The communal division in India was also a colonial project, in which writers played a significant role, which was termed as "reformist literature" under the colonial project. Apparently, the "revival of specific identity" was the only solution for the political, economic, cultural, and educational backwardness of the community. Maulvi Nazir Ahmed, an employee of the British colonial administration (first as a school teacher and later as a deputy collector), attempted to disconnect from India's shared local culture and customs, and to portray Muslims as separate, superior, and distinct from others (Hindus, Sikhs, Parsis, etc.) in his novels. (The Pakistani Muslim majority still holds a similar mindset today).

The division on communal lines benefited the colonial powers. Some of the most famous literary personalities also promoted such point of views. Our textbooks mention the reformative and national achievements of organizations like the Mohammedan Association, Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental, and Oriental Defense Association, but deliberately conceal the colonial interests behind their establishment, their financial, political, and administrative patronage, and the powers that controlled them.

The effects of neo-colonialism and these policies are still so powerful today that our Pakistani literature (all genres), drama, film, and theater, etc., do not feature any characters from minority groups. The promotion of a specific singular identity under the colonial project has been maintained as a legacy. This is why our official curriculum is silent on the heroes who fought against the East India Company and later the British Raj, and sacrificed their lives, such as Hemu Kalani, Ruplo Kolhi, Adham Singh, Bhagat Singh, Subghatullah Shah Rashidi (Pir Pagara), Nura Mengal, Gul Bibi Baloch, Ram Deen Pandey, Suraj Bali, Rai Ahmed Khan Kharal, and Sartaj Fakir, etc. No novels have been written about them, no memorials have been built, no days have been celebrated, and no official events have been held in their honor, but all the characters, names, symbols, buildings, and squares of the colonial era have been preserved. Such mentality has been so prevalent that not a single university in Pakistan be named after one of the freedom fighters who fought against Britain (Like the university named after Sir Syed), Not a single highway could be named after Suraj Bali? (Like the road named after Charles Napier, who occupied Sindh). No prominent government college could be named after Bhagat Singh (Like the college named after the British Governor, Aitchison). No government building be named after Hemu Kalani (Like the building named after Commissioner Ferris, who ordered the rebels to be blown up by cannons in 1857). This is the power of coloniality of knowledge that the public remains ignorant about these matters and exhibits alienation.

As Fanon says, colonialism is not just about occupying or dominating a country. Colonialism is not just about subjugation or enslaving people, but it is about changing, destroying, and presenting the history of the subjugated people in a distorted manner (Fanon, 1965). Colonialism snatches away your memory, your language, your history, your sensitivity, and your understanding.

Political and Social Implications

The coloniality of education has far-reaching social, political, and economic implications that perpetuate dominant Western epistemologies and power dynamics. One of the primary social implications is the erasure of indigenous knowledge, cultural practices, and histories, leading to a loss of identity and cultural heritage. This is compounded by cultural alienation, where Western values and norms are imposed, causing disconnection from one's own culture and community. Furthermore, linguistic imperialism is perpetuated, marginalizing indigenous languages and reinforcing dominant languages.

The political implications of coloniality of education are equally profound. It perpetuates power dynamics, reinforcing dominant groups' control over marginalized communities (Schaefer, 2015). Divisive nationalism is fostered, creating artificial boundaries and fueling communal tensions. Neocolonialism is also perpetuated, maintaining Western dominance and influence over global politics and economies. Epistemic violence is committed, silencing marginalized voices and perspectives, and legitimizing dominant narratives.

Economically, coloniality of education perpetuates dependence on Western knowledge and expertise, hindering self-sufficiency and local innovation. Brain drain is encouraged, as talented individuals migrate to Western countries for education and employment. Economic exploitation is also facilitated, as Western corporations and governments exploit local resources and labor.

To counter these implications, decolonial alternatives are necessary. Decolonizing curricula by incorporating indigenous knowledge, histories, and perspectives is crucial. Language revitalization, promoting indigenous languages and linguistic diversity, is also essential. Community-based education, focusing on local needs and contexts, and critical pedagogy, encouraging critical thinking, resistance, and social change, are vital. Ultimately, epistemic justice, recognizing and valuing marginalized knowledge and perspectives, must be pursued to dismantle the coloniality of education and promote more inclusive, equitable, and just knowledge systems.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis of the role of education in Pakistan's colonial and post-colonial context reveals a complex web of power dynamics, linguistic and cultural hierarchies, and social inequalities. The perpetuation of English as the dominant language in education has resulted in a dichotomous system, where English-medium schools cater to the elite, while vernacular-medium schools serve the marginalized communities. This has led to a lack of linguistic diversity, cultural erasure, and the reinforcement of social hierarchies.

The colonial project's emphasis on European knowledges has had a profound impact on the education system, leading to the erasure of indigenous knowledge ecologies and modes of being. This has caused a "spiritual wound" among colonized individuals, as described by Said (1994), resulting in a deep-seated sense of inferiority and embarrassment towards their cultural heritage.

The post-colonial scholars' critique of education as a tool of colonialist subjectification highlights the need to decolonize education. This requires recognizing and challenging the power dynamics that perpetuate linguistic and cultural hierarchies, and promoting inclusive and equitable education systems that value diversity.

To achieve this, it is essential to:

1. Promote linguistic diversity by recognizing and supporting vernacular languages in education.

2. Revitalize indigenous knowledge ecologies and modes of being by incorporating local perspectives and histories into curricula.

3. Challenge the dominance of English by promoting multilingualism and linguistic equality.

4. Address social inequalities by increasing access to quality education for marginalized communities.

5. Foster critical thinking and pedagogies that empower students to challenge dominant narratives and promote social change.

By taking these steps, we can work towards a more just and empowering education system that benefits all individuals, regardless of their socio-economic background or linguistic proficiency. Ultimately, decolonizing education is essential for building a more equitable and inclusive society that values diversity and promotes social justice.

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