Page 851 - 866 **DOI:** *https://doij.org/10.10000/IJLMH.119722*

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES

[ISSN 2581-5369]

Volume 8 | Issue 3

2025

Colonial Shadows, Classroom Walls Race, Power, and Pedagogical Reform

MANJARI E[1]

ABSTRACT

Even decades after formal decolonisation, the architecture of education in many parts of the world remains tethered to colonial ideologies. From the dominance of Eurocentric curricula to the marginalisation of indigenous languages and knowledge systems, modern classrooms often serve as quiet enforcers of racial and epistemic hierarchies. This article examines how colonial power continues to shape educational institutions globally, tracing its legacy through curricular content, language policy, institutional governance, and pedagogical practices. By analysing key legal cases—such as Brown v. Board of Education (USA), Indra Sawhney v. Union of India, and the T.M.A. Pai Foundation case—alongside student-led decolonisation movements like Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall, the article explores the intersection of race, power, and resistance in contemporary education. It argues that decolonising pedagogy requires more than content revision; it demands dismantling the racialised structures of knowledge production and embracing pluralistic, community-rooted, and inclusive approaches to learning. The piece concludes with a roadmap for transformative pedagogical reform, where classrooms become not only sites of instruction but also spaces of justice, healing, and liberation

Keywords: *Decolonisation, Pedagogy, Colonial legacy, Curriculum reform, Race and education, Epistemic injustice, Student protests, Language policy, Institutional racism, Inclusive knowledge production*

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is often seen as the great equaliser, a pathway to opportunity, freedom, and societal advancement. However, for many racial minorities, the reality of education is far from equitable. A staggering statistic from the *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)* reveals that nearly 50% of the world's youth in disadvantaged areas lack access to quality education[2], and the racial disparities in educational outcomes are stark. In countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and India, students of colour face not only significant barriers to access but also the stifling weight of curricula, policies, and practices

[1] Author is a student at CHRIST (Deemend to be University), India.

[2] Seeger, A. (2015). Understanding UNESCO: A Complex Organization with Many Parts and Many Actors. *Journal of Folklore Research*, *52*(2–3), 269–280. https://doi.org/10.2979/jfolkrese.52.2-3.269

 [ISSN 2581-5369]

designed to uphold the racial and colonial hierarchies that still shape the global education system. This stark imbalance highlights the enduring shadow of colonialism in contemporary classrooms—a shadow that shapes knowledge, power, and identity in ways that continue to marginalise non-Western, non-white learners.

At the heart of these enduring disparities lies the concept of coloniality—a term coined by the decolonial theorist Aníbal Quijano. Coloniality refers to the deep and lasting structures of power, knowledge, and social organisation that arose during colonialism but continue to operate in the present, far beyond formal colonial rule. It is a global condition that transcends geographical boundaries, affecting education systems across the world. The colonial project was not limited to territorial conquest; it was fundamentally an exercise in the organisation and production of knowledge. Colonial powers imposed their epistemologies, languages, and pedagogies onto colonised peoples, systematically undermining indigenous ways of knowing and being. Today, these colonial structures persist in the form of a Eurocentric curriculum, language policies that favour colonial languages, and institutional racism that marginalises racial minorities. These remnants of colonial power have entrenched a racial hierarchy that continues to affect how education is experienced by students, particularly in post-colonial societies.

This article explores the relationship between race, power, and pedagogy in education, focusing on the colonial legacy. It aims to understand how racial power dynamics are reproduced in contemporary learning environments and proposes frameworks for decolonisation, requiring a deeper transformation of educational structures and acknowledging the historical construction of race and power.

Key themes that this article will address include:

1. Curriculum – How educational content is structured and whose knowledge is considered legitimate and valuable.
2. Language – The privileging of colonial languages (such as English, French, Spanish) at the expense of indigenous and local languages, and the epistemic violence this entails.
3. Institutional Policies – The racialised policies that shape educational access, discipline, and academic achievement, including affirmative action and minority rights.
4. Academic Freedom – How universities and other educational institutions resist or suppress critical decolonial thought, often in favour of maintaining the status quo.

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5. Legal Resistance – How legal cases, such as *Brown v. Board of Education* (USA)[3] and *Indra Sawhney v. Union of India*[4], have challenged the racialisation of education, and the role of law in facilitating or hindering decolonisation efforts.

In this article, we will argue that a true decolonisation of education requires not just the revision of textbooks or the inclusion of diverse perspectives, but a fundamental shift in power relations within educational systems. By examining these themes and exploring both legal frameworks and student-led movements, this article will offer a comprehensive understanding of how we might begin to undo the colonial legacy within education and build a future that is both inclusive and equitable.

II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT: COLONIALISM AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF EDUCATION

To fully grasp the racial and structural inequalities embedded in modern education systems, one must return to their colonial roots. Colonial education was never designed to liberate—it was designed to dominate. Across Asia, Africa, and the Americas, colonial regimes constructed education systems not as neutral tools of learning, but as ideological apparatuses of empire: mechanisms to control populations, erase local cultures, and reproduce social hierarchies that placed colonisers at the apex of power.

Education as a Tool of Control and Assimilation

The colonial education system in India aimed to create a class of individuals who were "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, opinions, morals and intellect," replacing Persian and Sanskrit with English, sidelining indigenous knowledge, and promoting Western science, literature, and philosophy as superior.

Colonial authorities in Kenya and the Caribbean implemented bifurcated systems, with one tier for colonisers and elites and another for the colonised masses. These systems were designed to train only for roles supporting colonial economies, such as clerks and manual labourers[5].

This model was replicated in the **Caribbean**, where the British implemented a grammar school system that promoted Shakespeare over local history and glorified the British monarchy while suppressing Afro-Caribbean cultural identities. Colonial schools in the Caribbean became instruments of mental colonisation, producing generations of students who saw their own

[3] Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954)
[4] Indra Sawhney v. Union of India AIR 1993 SC 477
[5] Peterson, P. M. (1971). Colonialism and Education: The Case of the Afro-American. *Comparative Education Review*, *15*(2), 146–157. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1186726

heritage as inferior or irrelevant.

French Assimilationist Model: Civilising Through Schooling

The French colonial education system took a more assimilationist approach, particularly in North and West Africa. Unlike the British model, which was more indirect and dualistic, the French believed in creating "Black Frenchmen"—individuals who would internalise French culture so deeply that they would come to see themselves as French, not African.

In Senegal, Algeria, and Mali, French was the sole language of instruction, with local languages banned and African cultural practices deemed primitive. Indigenous schools taught colonial history, Catholic doctrine, and French republicanism, but limited upward mobility, highlighting the hypocrisy of assimilation and racial boundaries

The French approach reveals the deeper logic of colonial education: it was never truly about inclusion, but about erasure and control. Students were taught not only to forget their histories, but to see themselves through the eyes of the coloniser—internalising inferiority, silencing resistance, and reinforcing the racial hierarchies essential to colonial rule.

Racialisation of Knowledge and Western Epistemologies

At the core of colonial education was a deliberate racialisation of knowledge. Western science, philosophy, and literature were elevated as universal and objective, while indigenous knowledge systems were dismissed as folklore, superstition, or myth. This process created an epistemological hierarchy, where only Western ways of knowing were considered valid.

Colonial textbooks depicted African, Asian, and Indigenous peoples as uncivilised, irrational, and inferior. History was rewritten to centre Europe as the origin of progress and modernity. This erasure not only distorted the self-image of colonised students but legitimised the colonial project itself—justifying conquest as a civilising mission.

In truth, the construction of colonial education was never passive or accidental. It was a deliberate strategy—one that combined pedagogy with ideology to create docile subjects, loyal intermediaries, and a sustained belief in white superiority. The impact of this design continues to echo within modern classrooms, where the canon remains predominantly Western, and the power to define knowledge still rests in the hands of the historically privileged.

III. COLONIALITY IN CONTEMPORARY CURRICULUM

Despite political decolonisation, the classroom remains one of the most persistent strongholds of the colonial legacy. This continuity is not just institutional but epistemic: what we teach, how we teach, and whose knowledge we value are all deeply shaped by the remnants of empire.

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Colonial values continue to echo in modern curricula through Eurocentric worldviews, the marginalisation of indigenous epistemologies, and a narrow understanding of global history and literature, resulting in educational environments that still centre whiteness and silence diverse ways of knowing.

Eurocentrism and the Legacy of Canonical Knowledge

Across many national education systems—especially in former colonies—curricula are Eurocentric. Shakespeare, Dickens, and Wordsworth remain fixtures in literature syllabi, while indigenous writers and local languages are often excluded or tokenised. History is frequently taught from the vantage point of colonial powers, glorifying European achievements while glossing over the violence of colonisation, slavery, and cultural erasure.

Take, for instance, global history textbooks that focus heavily on the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, and the World Wars—moments viewed primarily through a Western lens, while offering minimal or skewed coverage of African kingdoms, South Asian intellectual traditions, or Indigenous resistance movements. This perpetuates the idea that progress and modernity are Western inventions, reinforcing a racialised hierarchy of knowledge.

In science and philosophy, the curricula often attribute foundational contributions solely to European thinkers, ignoring the rich mathematical, astronomical, and philosophical traditions of non-Western civilisations such as the Mayans, Arabs, Indians, Chinese, and Indigenous Australians.

The Marginalisation of Indigenous Knowledge and Non-Western Worldviews

Modern education often overlooks indigenous knowledge systems, focusing on Western rationalism and empiricism. This dismissal limits intellectual diversity and alienates students from indigenous traditions, making them feel irrelevant or inferior, despite their ecological balance, oral storytelling, community ethics, and spirituality.

Language plays a crucial role in this marginalisation. In many post-colonial states, colonial languages such as English, French, or Spanish remain the primary medium of instruction, often at the expense of local or indigenous languages. As the philosopher Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues, this enforces a psychological colonisation—students must learn not just new information but a new identity, framed in a foreign tongue.

India: NCERT Textbook Revisions and the Politics of Erasure

A recent and controversial example of coloniality reasserting itself in curricular decisions is the NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training) textbook revisions in India.

In 2023, several references to Mughal history, caste oppression, and acts of dissent against state power were removed from history and political science textbooks.

This sanitisation of history—framed under the guise of "rationalisation"—sparked outrage among academics and civil society groups who argued that such revisions undermine pluralism and historical complexity. By downplaying the role of Muslim dynasties like the Mughals and erasing accounts of resistance, the curriculum risks aligning with nationalist narratives that marginalise minority histories and uphold a majoritarian view of the past. Ironically, this modern rewriting echoes the colonial strategy of using education as a political tool—where knowledge is curated not for liberation but for ideological reinforcement.

South Africa: Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall

South Africa offers a powerful counter-narrative through its student-led movements demanding curricular transformation. The "Rhodes Must Fall" movement, which began in 2015 at the University of Cape Town, was sparked by demands to remove a statue of Cecil Rhodes, a British imperialist whose legacy symbolised white supremacy and colonial oppression.

But the movement quickly evolved beyond statues—it became a rallying cry for decolonising the university itself. Students and academics criticised the continued dominance of Eurocentric syllabi, the underrepresentation of African scholars, and the systemic barriers that black students faced in accessing and succeeding in higher education[6].

Closely tied to this was the "Fees Must Fall" movement, which called for free, decolonised, and accessible education. These protests shed light on how coloniality persisted not only in content but in funding structures, faculty demographics, institutional governance, and pedagogical methods.

Together, these movements illustrated the need to fundamentally rethink what knowledge is valued, who produces it, and how it is transmitted, posing a direct challenge to the lingering colonial structures embedded in South African academia.

IV. LANGUAGE, IDENTITY, AND EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE

Language is not simply a medium of communication—it is a vessel of culture, identity, and worldview. It carries the soul of a people, shaping how communities understand themselves, express their values, and relate to the world. Yet, in many postcolonial societies, language has been turned into a site of struggle, where colonial languages continue to dominate, while

[6] Afolabi, O. S. (2020). Globalisation, Decoloniality and the Question of Knowledge Production in Africa: A Critical Discourse. *Journal of Higher Education in Africa / Revue de l'enseignement Supérieur En Afrique*, *18*(1), 93–110. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48618319

indigenous languages are sidelined, stigmatised, or erased[7]. This linguistic hierarchy, a legacy of empire, constitutes what scholars like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak call "epistemic violence"—a form of intellectual suppression that denies entire communities the right to know, speak, and exist on their terms.

The Privileging of Colonial Languages

Across former colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean, colonial languages such as English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish remain the dominant mediums of instruction from early schooling through to higher education. These languages are often linked to upward mobility, state exams, and access to elite institutions. As a result, parents and students are frequently pressured to abandon native tongues in favour of these 'global' languages.

This privileging is not neutral. It reflects and reproduces a colonial logic that places Western ways of knowing above indigenous epistemologies[8]. When a child is taught science, history, or literature only in English or French, they are not just learning content—they are being introduced to a worldview where their own culture and language are seen as secondary or irrelevant.

Moreover, this linguistic elitism creates a deep educational inequality. Students from rural or marginalised communities, who may speak only regional or tribal languages at home, face structural disadvantages in schools where instruction is delivered in a foreign tongue. The result is a cycle of alienation, poor comprehension, and academic underperformance, not due to a lack of ability, but due to the medium of education itself.

Language and Cultural Erasure

The marginalisation of indigenous languages leads to what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o describes as cultural estrangement—a process where individuals begin to perceive their mother tongue as inadequate, backwards, or embarrassing. Language is intimately tied to identity: when a language dies or is systematically erased from public life, entire cosmologies, oral traditions, and modes of thought disappear with it.

This is particularly evident in how certain languages are excluded from formal schooling. In many Indian states, for example, tribal languages such as Gondi, Bhili, or Santali are rarely used in classrooms, even in regions where they are widely spoken. This exclusion is a form of cultural

[7] Frank, J. (2013). Mitigating Against Epistemic Injustice in Educational Research. *Educational Researcher*, *42*(7), 363–370. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24571232

[8] Eisenlohr, P. (2006). Colonial Education, Ethnolinguistic Identifications, and the Origins of Ancestral Languages. In *Little India: Diaspora, Time, and Ethnolinguistic Belonging in Hindu Mauritius* (1st ed., pp. 168–201). University of California Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1ppkdj.10

silencing, one that often leads to language shift, where younger generations stop speaking their ancestral language altogether.

Case Law: T.M.A. Pai Foundation v. State of Karnataka (2002)

One of India's most significant judicial interventions on language and education is the T.M.A. Pai Foundation v. State of Karnataka[9] case, decided by the Supreme Court in 2002. This landmark judgment dealt with the rights of private and minority educational institutions and, among other issues, addressed the medium of instruction.

The case arose in part from a Karnataka government order mandating that primary education in the first few years must be imparted in the mother tongue or regional language. This order was challenged by minority and private institutions, especially those wishing to offer education in English.

The Supreme Court held that minority institutions have the right to determine the medium of instruction, affirming Article 30 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees minorities the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. However, the judgment also reflected the tension between preserving linguistic diversity and the increasing social demand for English education.

While the ruling protected institutional autonomy, it indirectly reinforced the dominance of English, as it legitimised the shift toward English-medium schooling, even among communities whose native languages were not English. The case highlights how legal decisions can sometimes unintentionally support linguistic hierarchies, despite being rooted in principles of freedom and minority rights.

UNESCO and the Push for Multilingual Education

In response to global concerns about language loss and cultural erosion, UNESCO has consistently advocated for mother tongue-based multilingual education. Its 2003 and 2016 declarations emphasise that early education should begin in the learner's native language, gradually transitioning to additional languages to ensure inclusive and equitable learning.

UNESCO argues that multilingual education improves comprehension, enhances cognitive development, and fosters respect for linguistic diversity. It positions language rights as central to educational justice and cultural preservation.

However, implementation remains inconsistent and symbolic in many countries. Governments often adopt UNESCO's principles in policy documents but fail to allocate the resources needed

[9] T.M.A. Pai Foundation v. State of Karnataka (2002) AIR 2003 SC 355

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to develop quality teaching materials, train teachers in indigenous languages, or build local-language curricula. In practice, many schools still prioritise English or French, especially in urban areas, reinforcing socioeconomic and racial disparities in education.

V. INSTITUTIONAL RACISM AND STRUCTURAL POWER IN EDUCATION

Colonial legacies are not only reflected in syllabi and language—they are embedded in the very structures, rules, and norms that govern educational institutions. This includes how schools regulate student behaviour, determine academic admissions, and enforce standards of discipline and dress. Together, these practices often function not as neutral administrative tools, but as mechanisms of institutional racism—systemic patterns that privilege dominant social groups while marginalising others.

Importantly, these exclusions may not always be overt. They are often structural, hidden behind the appearance of objectivity, merit, and fairness. However, their impact is profoundly racialised, reinforcing existing hierarchies and reproducing inequality under the guise of discipline, decorum, and academic excellence.

Discipline, Dress Codes, and Hidden Bias

Across multiple educational systems—particularly in countries with colonial histories—school discipline policies disproportionately target students from marginalised racial, ethnic, or caste backgrounds. For example, Black students in the United States and the UK are more likely to be suspended, expelled, or subjected to stricter disciplinary actions than their white peers for similar behaviours. In India, Dalit and Adivasi students often face subtle forms of exclusion and surveillance, leading to a sense of alienation and inferior treatment.

Dress codes also reflect cultural biases. Bans on natural Black hairstyles, turbans, hijabs, or traditional attire have sparked international controversies. These rules implicitly frame whiteness or Western norms as the standard of "professionalism" or "cleanliness," while positioning other identities as unkempt, defiant, or inappropriate.

These seemingly minor policies contribute to a climate of control and conformity that does not accommodate cultural differences. The effect is one of erasure and assimilation—pushing students to suppress parts of their identity to fit into a mould shaped by colonial and racialised ideals.

Admissions and the Illusion of Meritocracy

Admissions policies, particularly in elite educational institutions, often rely on definitions of "merit" that are themselves shaped by structural inequality. Standardised testing, legacy

admissions, and language proficiency requirements may appear neutral, but systematically advantage students from dominant social groups who have better access to quality schooling, tutoring, and cultural capital.

This bias is starkly evident in countries like India, where access to top-tier universities is closely linked to language, geography, caste, and income. Without active interventions, the system perpetuates a cycle of exclusion, where those historically left behind continue to be underrepresented in institutions of power and prestige.

Legal Case Study 1: Brown v. Board of Education (1954, USA)

This landmark U.S. Supreme Court case declared that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional, overturning the "separate but equal" doctrine established in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). The Court found that segregated schooling created a sense of inferiority among Black children, which undermined their educational and psychological development.

While Brown v. Board[10] was a major legal victory for the Civil Rights Movement, its implementation faced fierce resistance, and de facto segregation persists in many American schools today through zoning laws, funding disparities, and private education options. The case highlights both the power and limits of legal reform in dismantling structural racism—it can provide a powerful precedent, but not always the political will or resources needed for change.

Legal Case Study 2: The UK's Sewell Report (2021) and Its Controversy

In response to the global reckoning on racial justice following the murder of George Floyd, the UK government commissioned the Sewell Report to investigate racial disparities in the country, including in education. The report sparked widespread backlash for downplaying the role of institutional racism in British schools.

Among its most controversial claims was the argument that systemic racism was no longer a major factor in the UK's education system, suggesting instead that disparities stemmed from socioeconomic status, family structure, or individual effort. Critics—including academics, activists, and UN experts—argued that the report ignored lived realities, data on exclusion rates, and the Eurocentric nature of curricula.

The Sewell Report reveals a growing trend of denialism and revisionism, where governments use selective data and reports to undermine claims of racial injustice, reinforcing structural hierarchies while claiming neutrality.

[10] Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954)

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Legal Case Study 3: Indra Sawhney v. Union of India (1992, India)

In the Indian context, caste rather than race has historically been the primary axis of structural exclusion. The Indra Sawhney case, also known as the Mandal Commission case, is a pivotal moment in India's legal history concerning affirmative action in education and employment.

The Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of reservations (quotas) for Other Backwards Classes (OBCs) in public employment and education, recognising the structural disadvantages these communities face. It acknowledged that true equality cannot be achieved by treating unequal's equally—a direct challenge to the idea of meritocracy that ignores social context[11].

At the same time, the Court laid down certain restrictions—capping reservations at 50% and excluding the "creamy layer" (more affluent OBCs). The judgment is significant because it attempts to balance social justice with administrative efficiency, though debates around its implementation continue.

Indra Sawhney reminds us that legal frameworks can be used not just to correct historical wrongs but to reshape the future. Affirmative action in education is not a handout—it is a form of structural redress, acknowledging that power and privilege are inherited across generations.

VI. STUDENT PROTEST AND THE PUSH FOR DECOLONISATION

Education is a powerful space where identities are shaped, ideologies are reinforced, and power systems are legitimised or challenged. Students have historically been at the forefront of resistance, using their voices and collective strength to demand justice. In recent years, student-led movements have confronted the colonial roots of education, highlighting systemic racism, elitism, casteism, and state violence.

These movements are not isolated or reactive. They represent a global, organised, and ideological shift—a growing awareness that educational institutions are not neutral spaces, but arenas where colonial logics are still alive: in whose histories are taught, whose languages are valued, and whose bodies are welcome.

The Power of Symbolism and the Case of "Rhodes Must Fall"

The "Rhodes Must Fall" movement began in 2015 at the University of Cape Town (UCT), sparked by students demanding the removal of a statue of Cecil Rhodes, a colonial-era British imperialist. What began as a protest against a statue quickly expanded into a critique of the symbolic and systemic legacies of colonialism embedded in South African universities, such as

[11] Indra Sawhney v. Union of India, 1992 Supp (3) SCC 217

the underrepresentation of Black faculty, Eurocentric curricula, and institutional racism.

The movement soon spread to Oxford University in the UK, where students demanded the removal of Rhodes' statue at Oriel College and broader reforms in the university's approach to diversity and history. Despite elite opposition, the movement forced Oxford to reckon with its colonial legacy and created space for broader debates about curriculum decolonisation, power, and inclusion in UK higher education.

What made "Rhodes Must Fall" powerful was not just its demand to remove a statue, but its ability to expose how colonial symbols continue to shape institutional identity. It showed that decolonisation is both symbolic and material, requiring the removal of oppressive icons and the dismantling of the systems they continue to justify.

JNU Protests: Caste, Nationalism, and Academic Freedom in India

In India, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) has long been a hub of student activism. Over the past decade, it has seen multiple waves of protests against fee hikes, state surveillance, attacks on academic freedom, and caste-based exclusion. Notably, in 2016, students rose in protest following the arrest of student leaders on charges of sedition for organising an event criticising the execution of Afzal Guru. The incident triggered a national debate on freedom of expression, nationalism, and dissent.

Later protests in JNU and other institutions, such as Hyderabad Central University (after the tragic death of Dalit scholar Rohith Vemula), brought caste discrimination in higher education to the forefront. These protests linked structural exclusion to political repression, showing how caste operates not just socially but institutionally—through curricula, faculty representation, language policies, and surveillance of marginalised students.

JNU students have also frequently protested the privatisation of education and the erosion of public universities, framing the struggle for access as part of a larger decolonial and anti-capitalist project. Their resistance exposes how neoliberalism and nationalism can reinforce caste hierarchies, and why academic spaces must remain autonomous, inclusive, and critical.

Black Lives Matter on Campus: From Protest to Policy

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which gained global momentum after the murder of George Floyd in 2020, also catalysed student activism within universities across the United States, the UK, Canada, and beyond. Students of colour began speaking out against the racism they experienced on campus—not just interpersonal microaggressions, but systemic inequalities in curriculum design, staffing, funding, and policing.

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In response, students organised petitions, sit-ins, social media campaigns, and teach-ins demanding: Hiring of more Black and Indigenous faculty, Curriculum audits to evaluate racial bias and Eurocentric content, Mandatory anti-racism training for staff and students, Abolition of campus police or reform of disciplinary systems.

Universities were forced to make public statements, launch task forces, and in some cases, revise their policies. While many promises remain symbolic or partially fulfilled, BLM brought unprecedented visibility and legitimacy to the student struggle for racial justice, forcing institutions to reflect on how they perpetuate the very inequalities they claim to oppose.

The Role of Social Media, Digital Mobilisation, and Global Solidarity

Unlike earlier generations, today's student movements are digitally native and globally networked. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have become crucial tools—not just for mobilisation, but for storytelling, coalition-building, and political education. Hashtags like #RhodesMustFall, #JusticeForRohith, #BlackOnCampus, and #DalitLivesMatter have turned student-led movements into global conversations, connecting struggles across continents.

This digital activism also amplifies voices historically excluded from mainstream media—queer, disabled, Dalit, Muslim, Black, Indigenous, and working-class students. It allows for intersectional solidarity and radical imagination, creating pressure on institutions that are increasingly conscious of their public image.

At the same time, students have faced surveillance, online harassment, academic sanctions, and state violence, proving that decolonisation is not a metaphor—it is a high-stakes political demand, often met with repression.

VII. PEDAGOGICAL REFORM: TOWARD DECOLONIAL FUTURES

What would education look like if it truly centred justice, plurality, and healing from historical trauma? Decolonising pedagogy is not merely a process of swapping textbooks or removing statues. It is a radical reimagining of how we teach, learn, and know—a commitment to dismantling power hierarchies in knowledge systems and cultivating classrooms rooted in inclusivity, critical inquiry, and cultural affirmation.

What Does a Decolonised Classroom Look Like?

A decolonised classroom is not defined by appearances, but by its underlying values and practices. It is a space where multiple epistemologies (ways of knowing) coexist, where authority is shared rather than imposed, and where learners' lived experiences are recognised as

valid sources of knowledge.

In such a classroom: Curriculum includes local, indigenous, and subaltern voices, not as tokens, but as core texts and perspectives, Language is not gatekeeping but a bridge—multilingual learning is encouraged, Teachers act as facilitators, not unquestioned authorities, allowing student voices to shape discussions, Critical pedagogy is practiced—students are taught to question, critique, and co-create knowledge, not merely consume it, Assessment methods are diversified, acknowledging different cultural ways of expression and knowledge demonstration.

Inclusive Pedagogy and Critical Race Theory in Practice

Inclusive pedagogy requires educators to recognise how race, gender, caste, class, and ability shape educational experiences. It means designing learning that adapts to diverse student needs—cognitively, culturally, and emotionally. This includes deconstructing Eurocentric assumptions in materials and recognising structural barriers that different student groups face.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education, originating in the U.S., provides a framework to examine how institutionalised racism operates in education. CRT insists on centring the voices of the marginalised and critiques "neutral" or "colour-blind" policies that sustain inequality.

In countries like India, this approach parallels Dalit-Bahujan critical pedagogy, which challenges Brahminical dominance in syllabi and calls for affirmative curricular inclusion of subaltern histories, thinkers, and movements.

Community-Based Learning and Whānau-Centred Models

One powerful example of decolonial pedagogy in action comes from Māori education in Aotearoa (New Zealand). The Whānau-centred model (Whānau meaning extended family) integrates cultural identity and community support into the learning process. Schools like Kura Kaupapa Māori use the Māori language as the primary medium of instruction, root their curriculum in Māori values, and treat elders and community leaders as co-educators.

This model reframes education as collective empowerment, not just individual achievement, placing ancestral wisdom, oral traditions, and land-based knowledge at the heart of pedagogy. It also reasserts sovereignty over knowledge, resisting the imposition of colonial education structures.

Afrocentric Curriculum Models in the U.S. and South Africa

In both the U.S. and post-apartheid South Africa, Afrocentric models of education have emerged as a response to the erasure and marginalisation of Black histories and contributions.

In the U.S., Afrocentric schools like the African-Centred College Preparatory Academy in

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Missouri reorient curricula around African diasporic knowledge, Black history, and community resilience[12]. These schools counter the narrative that excellence must conform to white, Western norms.

In South Africa, following apartheid, initiatives such as the African Renaissance Schools Project and curriculum reforms post-1994 have sought to integrate indigenous languages, history, and philosophy. Despite challenges, they reflect a growing recognition that education must affirm rather than alienate Black identities and experiences.

Teacher Training, Policy Change, and Student Agency

Decolonising pedagogy requires systemic change, not isolated efforts. Teachers need: Anti-bias and anti-racism training, Exposure to global indigenous scholarship and non-Western pedagogies, and Tools to facilitate difficult conversations around race, caste, gender, and identity.

Policymakers must: Rethink curriculum design, moving beyond token diversity to genuine inclusion, support local-language instruction, especially in early education, and protect academic freedom to enable innovation and critical thinking in pedagogy.

Students play a crucial role too, not just as recipients of education, but as co-authors of change. When empowered, they can challenge dominant narratives, initiate curriculum audits, and even lead the creation of inclusive syllabi, as seen in numerous universities worldwide.

Legal Support: Academic Freedom and Curriculum Design

The Indian case of University of Delhi v. Vandana Kandari (2009) is a noteworthy reference in this context. The case revolved around the removal of A.K. Ramanujan's essay *"Three Hundred Ramayanas"* from the university syllabus after political pressure. The court upheld the university's right to modify the syllabus, but the case ignited national debates on academic freedom, censorship, and the autonomy of educational institutions.

This legal moment underscores the tensions between institutional control, state influence, and intellectual independence—key concerns in any decolonial project. It highlighted how legal systems can both constrain and protect academic freedom, and why robust legal safeguards are essential for meaningful pedagogical reform.

[12] Jarvis, S. R. (1992). Brown and the Afrocentric Curriculum. *The Yale Law Journal*, *101*(6), 1285–1304. https://doi.org/10.2307/796924

VIII. CONCLUSION: REIMAGINING EDUCATION BEYOND EMPIRE

The article explores the deep colonial roots of modern education systems and emphasises that education has never been a neutral enterprise. Historically, it has served as a tool of control, shaping identities, legitimising knowledge, and reinforcing hierarchies. Today, these colonial legacies persist in the form of racial disparities, biased curricula, and exclusionary pedagogical practices. To truly reform education, it is not enough to revise content superficially; instead, there must be a fundamental reimagining of how knowledge is produced, who teaches, and whose voices are heard.

Colonial education was designed to restructure worldviews and assert dominance. Its effects continue to haunt global classrooms—from curricula that prioritise Western figures over indigenous scholars, to teacher training that fails to challenge ingrained biases. The article argues that education is a space of both power and resistance. For colonised populations, it was both a means of survival and a source of alienation. Today, for marginalised communities—such as Dalit-Bahujan students, indigenous youth, and students of colour—education remains a double-edged sword: both a site of exclusion and a potential space for liberation.

Movements like Rhodes Must Fall and Black Lives Matter have sparked a growing global demand for anti-racist and decolonial education models. These movements highlight the need for a collaborative, cross-cultural approach that connects struggles across different regions and communities. Whether it's Adivasi children in India or First Nations students in Canada, their shared experiences of exclusion underline the importance of creating pluralistic, inclusive, and locally rooted systems of education.

True anti-racism in education requires systemic reforms such as inclusive curriculum audits, multilingual education, equitable recruitment practices, and spaces for student activism. Teacher training must also be transformed to help educators unlearn their own internalised biases. This unlearning process challenges the romanticisation of Western knowledge and calls into question who is considered an intellectual authority.

Ultimately, the piece calls for a decolonised education system that respects historical truth, centres community knowledge, and upholds academic freedom. Education must evolve from a static structure into a dynamic space of justice and transformation. As the world faces urgent crises—ranging from climate change to racial injustice—education must equip learners not just to adapt, but to lead change. By "unlearning empire," we can rebuild education as a practice of freedom, solidarity, and hope.

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 [ISSN 2581-5369]