**Article** : Unfulfilled promises of diversity: a decolonial assessment of the basic level English education in Nepal

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**Authors**: Purna Chandra Bhusal & Raj K. Baral

1. **Keywords**
2. **Basic level education (BLE):** grades 1-8
3. **Decolonial**: Prioritizing local epistemologies rather than English/Western or foreign culture
4. **Epistemic shift**: prioritizing the locally available knowledge systems rather than the foreign ones
5. **Delinking**: unplugging English language knowledge from foreign knowledge systems and plugging it into local diversities
6. **Diversity:** The plurality of language, culture, traditions, ethnicity, etc.
7. **Neocolonialism:** the new form of colonialism or indirect colonialism through various means such as education, epistemological encroachment.
8. **Institutional Context**

This article has at least a double perspective: my experience of school education back in Nepal, and my reading of decolonial theories in Norway and the USA. During my school education, English was highly prioritized, and the English language was understood as equal to knowledge. Even though there are many positive changes in the education system along with political shifts, there have not been fundamental changes in educational materials and pedagogy. Therefore, my article examines the Basic Level English Education from a decolonial perspective by exposing its loopholes, thereby advocating for some necessary reforms in designing, curriculum, texts, and pedagogy. The exigence of my article dwells on the fact that the Government of Nepal has promised to protect and promote sociocultural, linguistic, and epistemological diversity at the school level and in higher education. As Nepal transitioned to a federal democratic republic and promulgated its new constitution in 2015, there have been many efforts to restructure and reform the education system corresponding to socio-political and cultural diversity. The Constitution of Nepal (2015) promises to safeguard and promote the linguistic and cultural rights of all ethnicities. Despite all these efforts, when we explore the existing literature, most research on school education in Nepal doubts that the education system in Nepal responds to the diverse socio-cultural and ethnic diversity. Therefore, as a response to this research need, this article investigates the degree of harmony between the socio-cultural, linguistic, and epistemological diversities and the BLE in Nepal from a decolonial perspective. It seeks to answer the following research question:

*To what extent does the Basic Level English Education (BLEE) in Nepal make an epistemic shift to protect and promote linguistic and cultural diversity?*

1. **Theoretical Concepts**

We have utilized the decolonial concepts of epistemic shift and delinking or localization as a theoretical framework. Decoloniality, a term coined by Anibal Quijano, means ‘to confront the ongoing colonial condition’ (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 49). A decolonial lens challenges the legacies of colonialism and strives to accentuate the marginalized or colonized culture, identities, and worldviews. This process of critiquing colonial perspectives and underscoring the local wisdom is known as ‘de-colonial epistemic shift’ (Mignolo, 2007, p. 453). In a decolonial project, such a perspectival shift paves the way for ‘an alternative philosophical option of knowledge production’ (Winkler, 2024, p. 3) in the educational systems, enhancing ‘the [educational] way for new intercultural communication’ (Quijano, 2007, p. 177). Hence, a decolonial concept of epistemic shift in the field of education provides valuable insight into how schools demonstrate ‘cultural and material dynamics of colonial power structures’ by supporting the reproduction of colonial pedagogies and epistemologies via systematic exclusion of local forms of knowledge (Makoe, 2021, p. 49). In the context of English education, decolonial approaches offer alternatives to the dominant English language pedagogy that ‘overshadows and suppresses’ local languages and knowledge systems (Kalyanpur et al., 2022, p. 159). In this article, decolonial epistemic shift provides an opportunity to examine the extent to which the BLEE in Nepal has incorporated socio-cultural and linguistic diversity of the nation. The decolonial epistemic shift advocates integrating the diversity of local knowledge systems in education. It delinks education from the colonial world and re-links them to the local culture by confronting the ‘philosophy, pedagogy, ethics, organizational practices, paradigms, methodologies and discourses’, that reinforce colonial hegemony (Smith, 2021, p. xii). In the domain of education, it opens windows for recognizing, protecting, and promoting the indigenous or local or native worldviews. Such acts of decolonial localization ‘seed and nourish pluriversal imaginaries that delink from the colonial matrix of power through a politics of insurgence, re-existence and resurgence’ (Lobo, 2020, p. 576). This delinking process of decolonization is characterized by three approaches: a broader non-Western canon of thought, pluriversal and critical dialogue as opposed to universal, and critical thinkers from the Global South (Grosfoguel, 2007). Decoloniality, therefore, is ‘an option, not a mission, to delink or extricate’ colonized identities from the dictates of the colonial matrix of power (Mignolo, 2020, p. 616). In English language education, decolonial delinking or localization aims to make transition from ‘monolingual ideologies to the embracing of multilingualism, plurilingualism, and hybridity’ (Kalyanpur et al., 2022, p. 147). This delinking concept, in this article, has been applied to investigate the degree of inclusion of local diversities in the BLEE in Nepal.

 **Research Method**

The article is based on the analysis and interpretation of four qualitative data: the National Education Policy (NEP) (2019), the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) (2019), the Basic Level English Curriculum, and the first unit of Basic Level English textbooks. The NEP (2019) and NCF (2019) are available only in Nepali language, and therefore, the authors translated them into English wherever necessary whereas the latter two are available in English language.

1. **Findings**

The article concludes that the BLEE in Nepal hardly responds to the socio-cultural and linguistic diversity. It plays a very nominal role for the protection and promotion of local, indigenous epistemologies, worldviews, languages, and rites and rituals in English language classrooms.

1. **Significance**

The study can be one of the important documents for educationists, curriculum designers, and English teachers in Nepal. At the same time, the article opens the possibility of doing further research on the pedagogical practices and classroom activities for drawing a more comprehensive and holistic picture of the BLEE in Nepal.

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