

International Writing Research Workshop at CCCC Conference 2026

Decolonizing English Instruction: A Critique of BBA English Syllabi at Pokhara University, Nepal

In this study, I critically examine the syllabi for ENG 110 and ENG 201 in the Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) program at Pokhara University, Nepal. While the syllabi imagine enhancing basic language and communicative skills, their pedagogical structure and assessment criteria focus on teacher-centered practices, preserving the colonial logic of what Walter Mignolo (2007) calls the practice of “silencing or relegating other epistemologies (p 162).” Thus, the disparity between the objectives and the approaches reinforces a “banking model” of education (Freire, 1970), consequently limiting the students' critical engagement with the texts.

Research Questions

1. How do ENG 110 and 201 syllabi at Pokhara University perpetuate colonial and teacher-centered pedagogical models?
2. How can decolonial approaches inform a localized, participatory, and inclusive pedagogy?
3. How can the syllabi be redesigned from a decolonial perspective?

As a theoretical framework, this study is grounded in decolonial and critical pedagogical traditions that interrogate the ways knowledge, language, and power operate within curriculum design. It draws primarily on the work of three theorists—Walter Mignolo (2007, 2011), Paulo Freire (1970), and Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014)—whose ideas inform my examination of English instruction in the BBA program at Pokhara University.

I employed qualitative content analysis to examine two syllabi, the university's undergraduate curriculum (2024), and the ideological and pedagogical assumptions embedded in

the prescribed textbooks, adopting an onto-epistemological approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Flick, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The analysis is organized into four thematic categories: student autonomy, critical thinking, collaboration, and contextual relevance.

The preliminary findings indicate that despite the curriculum's idealized aim of student engagement, the syllabi position students as inactive recipients, rely heavily on Western-authored textbooks, and marginalize local linguistic and cultural knowledge. Additionally, the assessment mechanisms privilege accuracy and completion over creative and process-oriented learning. Regarding the research objectives, I will first highlight weaknesses in the syllabi and propose ways to make them more localized, participatory, and inclusive.

Then, I will propose a decolonial redesign of the curriculum and syllabi that relocates students to the center of epistemic agents. To that end, I will develop assignments like multilingual storytelling, community case studies, and critical media reflection to promote lived experiences, local knowledge, and collaborative inquiry. Highlighting how the coloniality of knowledge in curricula and syllabi may erase local epistemology by privileging teachers' voices over students', this study contributes to the conference conversation by posing the rhetorical question, "Whose conversations count?"

Summary Proposal

Introduction & Rationale

Despite efforts to modernize English instruction, language education in South Asia still bears the imprints of colonial epistemologies. The content and form of many university syllabi remain fixated on Eurocentric norms, monolingualism, and teacher authority—what Ngũĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) critiques as the internalization of colonial knowledge hierarchies. This proposal examines two foundational English courses (ENG 110 and ENG 201) at Pokhara University,

Nepal, where I previously taught, to interrogate how these legacies manifest and how decolonial pedagogy might offer a transformative alternative.

Research Questions

1. How do ENG 110 and 201 syllabi at Pokhara University reflect or resist colonial and teacher-centered pedagogical models?
2. In what ways do these syllabi enable or constrain student agency, collaboration, and critical literacy?
3. How can decolonial and postmethod approaches inform a localized, participatory English pedagogy?

Methodology

This qualitative study conducts a critical content analysis of two syllabi and my field notes from teaching (2019–2021). Drawing on Kumaravadivelu's (2006) postmethod pedagogy, I assess the syllabi across five dimensions of student-centered learning:

- Learner Autonomy
- Peer Collaboration
- Critical Thinking
- Contextual Relevance
- Reflexivity

I also conduct a comparative textual analysis with emerging Global South curriculum models and use grounded theory to trace implicit pedagogical ideologies.

Theoretical Framework

- Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014): Calls for “epistemologies of the South,” emphasizing knowledge produced outside Eurocentric frameworks.

- Walter Mignolo (2007, 2011): Argues that decolonial pedagogy must challenge the universality of Western epistemes.
- Paulo Freire (1970): Advocates problem-posing education that centers dialogue and mutual learning.

Proposed Redesign

A decolonial revision would:

- Incorporate multilingual storytelling that values students' hybrid linguistic identities.
- Include community-engaged case studies linking classroom work with local realities.
- Foster peer dialogue and reflection through journals, podcasts, and reading circles.
- Integrate Nepali oral traditions, local media, and folktales as central texts.

These changes aim to build what bell hooks (1994) calls an “engaged pedagogy,” rooted in students’ lived experiences and resistant to hegemonic discourse.

Contribution to the Field

This proposal addresses the CCCC 2026 theme—“*Whose Conversations Count?*”—by critiquing the exclusion of Global South perspectives in writing instruction and offering a concrete model of curricular transformation. It contributes to transnational composition studies, postcolonial language education, and decolonial curriculum design by demonstrating how theory and praxis can intersect to center student voice and epistemic justice.

Institutional Description:

Pokhara University is a public university in Nepal that follows a centralized curriculum, with syllabi designed and approved at the institutional level and implemented consistently across its affiliated colleges. Within the Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) program, English courses such as ENG 110 and ENG 201 are essential, skill-based courses designed to support students' academic and professional communication. However, curricular decisions are influenced by exam-focused assessment methods, standardized learning outcomes, and a strong emphasis on linguistic accuracy and practical skills, reflecting broader national and postcolonial educational goals related to employability and global competitiveness.

These institutional factors significantly influence English teaching methods. Although the objectives mention developing communicative skills and critical thinking, the curricula emphasize teacher-centered approaches, strict content coverage, and final assessments. This structure limits instructors' ability to incorporate local knowledge systems, student-centered teaching, or critical discussions of language and power. As a result, English instruction at Pokhara University often perpetuates colonial epistemic hierarchies, echoing Mignolo's (2007) description of the silencing of alternative epistemologies and reinforcing Freire's (1970) "banking model" of education. My research addresses these institutional limitations by examining how curriculum design shapes the possibilities for decolonial English pedagogy in a Nepali public university setting.

Theoretical Framework

My study is grounded in decolonial and critical pedagogical traditions that question how knowledge, language, and power operate in curriculum design. I draw primarily on three theorists whose work informs my examination of English instruction in the BBA program at Pokhara University.

First, I will refer to Mignolo's explanation of why the curriculum is colonial. Mignolo's theory of decoloniality helps me view the curriculum as a site where colonial power continues to shape knowledge production. His concept of the coloniality of knowledge guides my analysis of how English syllabi reproduce Western epistemic authority, even when they are presented as neutral or skills-based instruction.

This study then draws on Paulo Freire's notion to explain how coloniality operates pedagogically. At the pedagogical level, Freire's critique of the banking model of education is key. Freire offers a perspective for analyzing the teacher-centered focus in syllabus goals, classroom activities, and assessment systems. His concept of problem-posing education guides my assessment of whether the curriculum allows space for dialogue, critical reflection, and student agency. In the banking model, he considers that "Students are the depositories, and the teacher is the depository. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat" (p. 58).

Finally, Boaventura de Sousa Santos provides a broader epistemological framework through his idea of epistemologies of the South. His idea of epistemicide indicates that "The destruction of knowledge... involves the destruction of the social practices and the disqualification of the social agents that operate according to such knowledges." (Santos, 2014, p. 153). Therefore, his work prompts us to consider which knowledge is validated in university curricula and which is overlooked. This perspective is essential to my critique of how English syllabi prioritize Eurocentric norms while overlooking local and contextual knowledge.

Therefore, these perspectives guide both my methodological choices and my critical reading of the syllabi, allowing me to examine English education as a space of epistemic struggle and decolonial potential.

Glossary

Pokhara University (PU)

Pokhara University (PU) is a nonprofit, autonomous public university in Nepal, established in 1997. It operates with both government funding and revenue from its affiliated colleges, emphasizing practical, high-quality education in Science & Technology, Management, Health Sciences, and Humanities. The university also promotes private sector involvement in higher education.

Affiliated Colleges

Semi-autonomous colleges academically governed by Pokhara University that deliver standardized courses and assessments approved by the university.

BBA (Bachelor of Business Administration)

An undergraduate professional degree program in Nepal where English is taught as a compulsory subject to support academic and workplace communication.

ENG 110 / ENG 201

Core English courses in the BBA program at Pokhara University are officially intended to develop students' language and communication skills.

Coloniality of Knowledge

The continued dominance of Western ways of knowing in education, even after formal colonial rule ended (Mignolo).

Decolonial Pedagogy

An approach to teaching that challenges inherited colonial assumptions by valuing local knowledge, multiple perspectives, and student voice.

Epistemologies of the South

A term describing knowledge produced in historically marginalized regions and communities, often excluded from mainstream academic curricula (Santos).

Banking Model of Education

A teacher-centered approach in which students are treated as passive recipients of information rather than active participants in learning (Freire).

Teacher-Centered Instruction

A mode of teaching where authority and knowledge remain primarily with the instructor, often reinforced by lecture-based methods and exams.

References

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