

Decolonizing language education: integrating linguistic and cultural knowledge to revitalize indigenous voices and foster intercultural competence

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Abstract

In an era defined by globalization, technological convergence, and cultural homogenization, the preservation of linguistic and cultural diversity has become a critical educational and sociolinguistic concern. Language operates not merely as a communicative tool but as a dynamic repository of epistemologies, worldviews, and collective identities. As one of the most linguistically plural nations in the world, India embodies complex intersections of language, identity, and power. Therefore, this paper undertakes a critical, literature-based exploration of the interconnections among language, culture, and identity, with a particular focus on Indian Indigenous linguistic traditions and their pedagogical implications. It interrogates the historical processes of Westernization and Sanskritization that have entrenched linguistic hierarchies and contributed to the epistemic marginalization of Indigenous voices. Drawing upon contemporary frameworks in applied linguistics, intercultural education, and decolonial theory, the study argues that the integration of linguistic and cultural knowledge within formal education systems can serve as a transformative approach to learner engagement and intercultural competence. Such integration not only revitalizes endangered linguistic traditions but also challenges hegemonic knowledge structures by fostering dialogic, inclusive, and pluralistic learning spaces. The analysis highlights that language simultaneously functions as a constructor, carrier, and mirror of culture—rendering its pedagogical incorporation indispensable for cultivating critical cultural awareness and global citizenship. This paper ultimately calls for a re-envisioning of language education as a decolonial, identity-affirming, and socially responsive practice that bridges tradition and modernity. By centring Indigenous epistemologies within educational discourse, it underscores the potential of language education to serve as a site of cultural resurgence, cognitive justice, and intercultural dialogue.

Keywords: *Linguistic integration, cultural knowledge, Indigenous languages, learner engagement, intercultural competence, decolonial pedagogy, identity*

Introduction

The twenty-first century has witnessed novel cross-cultural exchanges, sweeping technological changes and significant socio-political shifts. These developments have also amplified the drivers of cultural homogenization, linguistic displacement, and epistemic erasure (Dutta, 2014). Across the world, the linguistic diversity that once flourished and was acknowledged in localized ecologies has been seen to erode and is increasingly threatened by the dominance of global languages, forming a hierarchy and resulting in the marginalization of Indigenous linguistic traditions (Crystal, 2010; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2021; Nettle & Romaine, 2000). Indigenous communities at present are struggling to preserve their languages, cultural traditions and rights within national contexts shaped by colonial dominance and hegemonic cultural frameworks. Traditional and indigenous forms of knowledge constitute “major assets for local response strategies,” particularly in an era marked by ecological uncertainties and cultural fragmentation. The resilience of

Indigenous epistemologies therefore becomes essential not only for community survival but also for sustaining cultural diversity, cognitive justice and alternative ways of knowing. In multilingual nations such as India, this process manifests in complex linguistic hierarchies shaped by historical, economic, and political narratives (Annamalai, 2005).

India is a treasure trove of language and culture, yet it has lost around 220 languages in the last 50 decades and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has declared 197 Indian languages as endangered. Even the 22 languages enlisted in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution is facing serious issues as they are not integrated at all level with school as well as higher education. Language is not just a mere tool for communication but serves as a repository of cultural memory and indigenous knowledge systems; embodying worldviews, values, cognitive structures, and modes of meaning-making (Kramsch, 1998 ; Agar, 1994). With the devaluation of a language, the epistemologies embedded within it often diminish, resulting in what de Sousa Santos terms “epistemicide” (2014, 92) - death of the knowledge that is tied to the language. Therefore, preserving linguistic diversity is not only a project to preserve culture but also a concern of epistemic justice and identity affirmation. Every language has a unique past that captures the unique characteristics of a particular culture and the nuances of a nation. It is a potent tool that manifests the human mind and the culture through social interaction in all areas of life like; beliefs, values, ethos, habits and traditions. It is a dynamic mirror that reflects the individual as well as collective identities and becomes a catalyst for the transmission of cultural heritage, collective memory and social norms. In India, Indigenous languages which primarily belong to Adivasi (indigenous) communities are bearer of distinct cosmologies, social systems, oral traditions and ecological knowledge (Mahapatra, 2018). Yet many of these languages are losing their ground due to colonial language policies, mainstream schooling, sanskritization, and the inclination towards privileging dominant languages like Hindi and English (Mohanty, 2010). These linguistic hierarchies have penetrated the educational system, creating a huge crevice between ‘home’ and ‘school’ languages, marginalized Indigenous learners and created barriers to cultural participation and academic engagement (Mohanty, 2019).

Based on this backdrop the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 cries out for a decisive shift toward decolonizing education by integrating Indian languages, art, knowledge and culture into curricular spaces. Such a shift aligns its aim with contemporary scholarship on decolonizing the education system as well as language, arguing that language is not merely a communicative tool but a repository of epistemologies, cultural memory and identity. Language constructs, carries and mirrors culture—mediating one’s perception of reality and shaping social belonging. Therefore, revitalizing Indigenous linguistic traditions within the present education system is not only a pedagogical imperative but also a socio-cultural and political urgency (King, 2001).

Across the world researches, educationists and scholars have increasingly turned towards embracing decolonial frameworks, intercultural pedagogy, and culturally sustaining language education to reform curricula and empower marginalized communities (Paris, 2012; Smith, 2012; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Decolonizing language education entails challenging the hegemonic linguistic ideologies (that accepts the superiority of one language with the other) and integrating Indigenous linguistic and cultural knowledge in ways that foster inclusivity, identity affirmation, and intercultural competence (García & Wei, 2014).

This study aims to have a literature-based comprehensive analysis of the relation among language, culture, and identity, strengthening the argument that integrating knowledge of Indigenous languages and cultural into language education can serve as a transformative pedagogical strategy. It takes on a decolonial and intercultural perspective to examine the way linguistic hierarchies existed since ages. It also critiques dominant educational approaches, and proposes a framework for culturally sustaining language teaching that supports linguistic revitalization and fosters global citizenship. Therefore, with the incorporation of Indigenous voices and knowledge into the present education system, language education can transform into a decolonial, identity-affirming and socially responsive practice, that can enable a complex cultural treasure trove like India to embrace its pluralistic heritage. It will also help in preparing learners for meaningful participation and contribution to a globalized world.

This reimagining language education reckons it as a powerful site for cognitive justice, cultural revival, and intercultural dialogue, connecting the wisdom of tradition with the demands of modernity.

The study was undertaken in response to the multicultural and multilingual realities of the Indian context, where linguistic diversity coexists with persistent hierarchies that have historically marginalized Indigenous and minority languages. The researcher recognized the urgent need to critically examine the way language education moves beyond colonial legacies to become more inclusive and culturally sustaining. The observations and experience of India's rich yet uneven linguistic landscape motivated her to pursue this research. At the same time, the growing discourse on decolonizing education shaped the choice of this topic and the literature-based decolonial and intercultural approach. This background positions the researcher well to undertake this study and contribute to ongoing conversations on linguistic justice, Indigenous knowledge systems and identity affirming pedagogies within India and beyond.

Theoretical background

Language is functional as a system in various ways; be it related to cultural, epistemological, or identity-formation. Several scholars highlighted that language shapes habitual worldviews and mediates how individuals interpret and structure reality (Sapir, 1921; Whorf, 1956; Kramsch, 1998). Contemporary linguistic anthropology where language plays a vital role in creating identity, meaning and social worlds, affirms this interdependence, viewing language as a constructor, carrier, and a mirror of culture (Duranti, 1997). Consequently, the erosion of any language therefore entails the loss of cultural memory, oral traditions, and epistemic diversity (Harrison, 2007).

The linguistic landscape of India spanning over 121 major languages having numerous dialects show this interconnection between language, identity, and knowledge. The Indigenous languages, rooted in Dravidian, Austroasiatic and Tibeto-Burman families are rich in social, spiritual and ecological knowledge yet the colonial language policies and internal hierarchies such as Sanskritization, in post-independent India privileged English and dominant regional languages. This privilege has led towards marginalization of many Indigenous languages, leading to a weakened intergenerational transmission of culture and widespread endangerment of existence (UNESCO, 2021; Ramanathan, 2005; Srinivas, 1956). These interplays serve as the producers of external and internal linguistic hegemonies.

In the educational contexts language serves as not only a medium of instruction and interaction, but also a catalyst of identity formation. Schools emphasizing on the 'other tongue' (p.145–149) rather than 'mother tongue' (p. 66-68) often results in cultural discontinuity and identity conflict among the learners (Fishman, 1991; Mohanty, 2010). Research on linguistic diversity shows a great contribution to cognitive flexibility and conceptual richness (Slobin, 2003), where mother-tongue-based classroom promoting multilingual education (MT-MLE) showcases enhancement of literacy, cognitive development, and cultural grounding (UNESCO, 2021; Cummins, 2001).

Intercultural competence frameworks (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006) that emphasize on learning skills, knowledge and attitudes for effective and meaningful interaction across cultures call for pedagogies that promote respect and acceptance for cultural difference. Unfortunately, these models tend to remain rooted in Eurocentric paradigms (Kubota, 2004) and the decolonial theories (Mignolo, 2011; Smith, 2012) contend for inclusion and recentralization of marginalized epistemologies, giving recognition to linguistic human rights (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1995), and promoting cognitive justice (de Sousa Santos, 2014). This decolonized paradigm calls for a Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) (Paris, 2012) that might offer a dynamic framework affirming indigenous languages, integrating community knowledge, and promoting multilingual identities.

The pedagogical strategies that align with decolonial theories and principles of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies (CSP) like Mother-tongue based Multilingual Education, Indigenous oral traditions integration in classroom, translanguaging practices, community-led revitalization, and more, highlights the pathways in which education can encourage linguistic and cultural diversity while enhancing learners' intercultural competence. These

theoretical insights emphasizes that decolonizing language education and Indigenous linguistic ecologies are essential for fostering cognitive diversity, cultural continuity and justified equitable educational outcomes.

Objectives of the study

1. To critically examine the relationship between language, culture and identity with reference to Indigenous linguistic traditions
2. To explore decolonial, intercultural, and culturally sustaining pedagogical frameworks within contemporary language education
3. To demonstrate how decolonized language education can foster learner engagement, cognitive justice, and intercultural competence

Methodology of the study

This study is descriptive in nature and undergoes a critical literature-based exploration with a qualitative approach. The research critically engages with the existing linguistic policies and theories to synthesize data. A critical discourse analysis was followed to identify the recurring patterns of themes and arguments in the literature.

Results and discussion

1. *Relationship between Language, Culture and Identity with reference to Indigenous linguistic traditions*

Tylor defines culture as a complex whole which include customs, laws, habits, knowledge, morals, arts, beliefs and any other attributes acquired by man as a member of society (Sibiri, 2014). Therefore, studying culture becomes an act of studying laws of human thoughts and action. To be an active member of the society with a sense of belongingness, a person needs to follow and internalize all those attributes that Tylor has stated. Peter Berger was of the opinion that culture is the product of a fundamental human predicament (1967). Unlike other animals, humans are incapable of living on their own. They are in one way or the other dependent on each other. The fabric of culture helps in providing a protective shield against the harsh impositions of nature. It also facilitates the transmission of knowledge and stability that computes human survival. It guides human to do what is right, to choose what is productive, to eat what is edible, etc. Therefore, the world humans live in is defined by culture. According to Hall (1997) culture can be perceived as “the best that has been thought and said” (p.2) in a society (Hall, 1997). It is a collective form of best ideas, classic literature, painting, music, and way of life of a community or a group.

While mentioning the “cultural turn” (p. 2) Hall argues that culture is not a set of things but practices (Hall, 1997). It comprises of exchanges between groups that similarly interprets a particular subject. He explains culture in five steps; production, consumption, representation, regulation, and identity. These steps help in producing meaning to a culture. In the first step, people vouchsafe certain meaning to an object and share that meaning among their group and regulate the right uses of the meaning to its context. Later the meaning is introduced to others by the participants after consumption, and it also renders a special identity. The representation by language is predominant to the process of producing meaningful conversations, as languages construct meanings of different objects. The representation is served through the constructional components such as words, colours, physical gestures and sounds. Through these constructional components ideas of objects are delivered, which introduces the cultural differences. For example, the National Anthem of any nation introduces the language that presents their culture and that indicates to whom they belong, and their identity in the sense that they are different from the fans of other teams. The representational function of language can also be visual. For example, the attire of a particular culture may introduce a part of the history of that culture or may give idea to construct a new beginning. It also reflects the identity of people who wear the attire and those who see the attire. The meaning of a language offers us a true sense of individual identity as well as cultural identity. Meaning produced

is exchanged in every social and personal interaction by the members of the same culture who shares the same cultural codes; concepts, ideas, and images that helps them perceive, think, feel and interpret the world similarly.

Whenever a new language is learnt it gives an individual, access to a new culture and also the opportunity to identify oneself with a culture different from one's own. Zalakoro, (2016) underlined this view point by stating that language becomes the most viable and available expression of a culture as it expedites communication among the members of a particular habitat. Therefore, second language learning becomes an acquisition of second identity. An individual can truly become a speaker of the second language when he or she is capable of taking on the 'frame of mind' of the speakers of the target language without any reservations consistent with their own mindsets (Richards and Lawrence, 2013). It is not transliteration but translation of the thoughts and essence with which the second language is spoken by the natives. One needs to think in the 'other tongue' to be a true speaker of it. The relationship between language and culture is neither simple nor complex. Though learning a new language enables one to express oneself in an alien language and learn a new culture, it also challenges one understand the intricacies of enculturation, acculturation, cultural shock, attitudes, alienation and cultural stereotypes (Adebayo, 2014). For example, a native of West Bengal trying to learn American English, needs to understand the culture of America and the cultural differences between Bengal and America. Married couple staying with their parents in the same house might arise as a cultural shock for the American people, whereas laying down too much emphasis on materialism and being hostile to life might arise as a cultural shock for the Bengalees. In the first instance the meaning of 'family' differs for both the cultures, and in the second the meaning of 'freedom of life'.

Language also renders us a cultural identity. It marks the cultural heritage of a particular community or nation. With speaking one's indigenous language, one connects himself or herself with their community and people, thereby sharing the beliefs, values, morals and reinforcing their cultural capital and cultural identity. It helps them to project themselves as unique and deserving recognition. For example, the *Santhals* speaking *Mundari language* projects proudly their cultural identity rather than projecting themselves as a part of the nation.

The analysis therefore views that language functions as an epistemic system through which social relations, cultural meanings and collective identities are produced and sustained. Conceptualization of reality by communities through encoding of culturally specific ontologies and worldviews has been emphasized by Linguistic anthropological and sociolinguistic scholarship (Sapir, 1921; Whorf, 1956; Duranti, 1997; Kramsch, 1998). The findings further hints at the decline of Indigenous languages resulting in epistemic erosion, aligning with de Sousa Santos' (2014) notion of *epistemicide*, where the loss of language triggers the ebbing of embedded knowledge systems. Moreover, linguistic marginalization also extends beyond communication loss to identity destabilization and cultural dislocation (Mohanty, 2010; UNESCO, 2021).

Table 1: Recurring themes in discourse on relationship between language, culture and identity with reference to indigenous linguistic traditions

Themes in discourse	Key arguments and focus
Culture as a social framework	Rules, norms, values, and local knowledge is embedded in every culture which is essential for social belonging and human survival
Culture as meaning-making	Every aspect of any culture produces meaning through production, consumption, representation, regulation, and identity
Language as a representative	Meaning is produced using linguistic and symbolic systems whether verbal or non-verbal
Language and identity formation	Speaking a shared or common language affirms cultural belonging and community hood thereby differentiating groups

Language and identity negotiation	With every new language learnt cultural realignment, possible cognitive and identity shifts occur
Cultural shock and meaning conflict	Differences in perceiving concepts such as family, freedom, and social norms across cultures create cultural dissonance
Indigenous language serving as cultural capital and epistemic system	Indigenous languages structure culturally specific ontologies and ways of knowing thereby sustaining community values, traditions, and distinct cultural identity
Linguistic marginalization and identity loss	Language loss create chaos, destabilizes identity and weakens cultural continuity

2. Decolonial, intercultural, and culturally sustaining pedagogical frameworks within contemporary language education

An examination of contemporary literature related to language education reveals that decolonial pedagogical frameworks have gained significant importance in language education as a response to the continuous influence of colonial epistemologies and linguistic hierarchies. Decolonial language education challenges the stereotypically perceived superiority of dominant global languages, particularly English, by exposing their historical role in knowledge domination and cultural marginalization (Mignolo, 2011; Smith, 2012; Pennycook, 2017). This framework sees language as not a mere tool for communication but as a space of power, identity negotiation, and epistemic struggle. The findings indicate that decolonial pedagogy foregrounds the legitimacy of Indigenous and marginalized languages as bearers of complex knowledge systems and advises for their integration within formal curricula. By disrupting the Eurocentric paradigm following the standards of linguistic competence and curricular canonization, decolonial approaches aim to restore epistemic equity and promote cognitive justice through the coexistence of multiple knowledge traditions (de Sousa Santos, 2014).

Intercultural pedagogical frameworks to teach language have advanced beyond mere functional models of communicative competence and brought in a more critical and reflexive acclimatization. Early research suggested intercultural models dealt in developing skills, attitudes, and knowledge for effective cross-cultural interaction (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006), but recent scholarship analyses the tendency of intercultural models to remain embedded within Eurocentric cultural assumptions (Kubota, 2004). The findings further suggest that contemporary intercultural pedagogy increasingly incorporates decolonial insights by emphasizing critical cultural awareness, reflexivity, and the examination of power play between languages and cultures. It was found that when Indigenous linguistic knowledge is integrated into intercultural curricula, learners engage better with cultural difference ethically and dialogically rather than through streamlined or hierarchical representations of culture.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) serves as a pivotal framework that integrates decolonial strategies and intercultural principles within classroom teaching learning. Unlike the initially prevalent multicultural or culturally responsive approaches, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy explicitly solicits to develop learners' existing linguistic and cultural repertoires through a sustainable lens rather than thwarting them toward dominant norms (Paris, 2012). The findings indicate that pedagogical practices such as Mother-Tongue-Based Multilingual Education, translanguaging, and the incorporation of Indigenous oral traditions and knowledge to support learner engagement, identity affirmation, and cognitive development (Cummins, 2001; UNESCO, 2021). These practices regard the 'home languages' of learners as epistemic resources, thereby reducing linguistic alienation and fostering a sense of belonging within educational premise.

This gradual growing convergence among decolonial, intercultural, and culturally sustaining pedagogical frameworks share a commitment towards promotion of linguistic plurality, building sense of identity, and co-construction of knowledge. Here, decolonial pedagogy examines historical and structural inequities, intercultural pedagogy offers relational tools for navigating cultural difference, and culturally sustaining pedagogy supplies

practical strategies for classroom implementation. In unison, these frameworks form an integrated pedagogical orientation that transforms language education into a socially responsive and inclusive practice capable of addressing both local linguistic realities and global intercultural demands. Moreover, it also posits questions to the present curriculum standardization, level of teacher preparedness, and extent of institutional resilience. The recurrent themes serve as evidences that holds these frameworks as the crux for rethinking language education as a space of cultural resurgence, epistemic justice, and global cosmopolite.

Table 2: Recurring themes in discourse on decolonial, intercultural, and culturally sustaining pedagogical frameworks within contemporary language education

Theme	Key arguments and focus
Decolonial language pedagogy and legitimization of indigenous languages	Decolonial language pedagogy challenges the superiority of dominant languages (like English, Hindi in Indian context) and epistemic and cultural hierarchies; thereby restoring epistemic equity. It highlights the Indigenous languages that carries complex epistemologies and needs to be integrated into formal curricula to promote cognitive justice
Critical intercultural pedagogy	Ethical and dialogic engagement with cultural difference requires critical awareness of power relations between languages and cultures
Culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP)	Pedagogy should aid development and not replacement of learners' home languages and cultures, resisting assimilation into dominant norms
Culturally sustaining classroom practices	Instruction in mother tongue, translanguaging, and Indigenous knowledge enhance engagement, identity affirmation, and learning outcomes
Convergence of pedagogical frameworks	These frameworks promote linguistic plurality, identity formation, and co-construction of knowledge
Institutional and curricular constraints	Standardized curricula, limited teacher preparation, weak institutional support hinder transformative language education
Transformative role of language education	Language education can function as a space for cultural resurgence, epistemic justice, and globally oriented yet locally grounded learning

3. *Decolonized language education can foster learner engagement, cognitive justice, and intercultural competence*

The findings also showcase the significant role played by the act of decolonizing language education through the validation of linguistic identities and cultural experiences of the learners within the classroom and educational setup. A recurrent pattern was observed in the literature studied, that revealed if learners experience their home languages, narratives, and cultural knowledge represented in instructional practices, their participation increases, with increased motivation, and academic confidence (Cummins, 2001; Mohanty, 2010; UNESCO, 2021). For example, an Indian learner can relate well to 'joint family', Mexican to 'avacados', Bhutanese to 'happiness', etc. Viewing the marginalized and indigenous languages from a deficit-based view point is challenged by the decolonized pedagogical approaches that resituates it as cognitive and creative resource rather than barriers to learning. This recognition helps in reducing the cultural and linguistic void often experienced by Indigenous learners in a school or classroom setting where dominant languages prevail in the garb of 'Standardized language', thus fostering a sense of belonging and active engagement in educational spaces.

The findings further reveal that decolonized language education is a substantial contributor in the realization of cognitive justice by making multiple epistemologies coexist within formal education. For example, knowledge of 'ecosystem' can be learned by studying carbon cycles, food webs, biodiversity (western means of gaining knowledge) and also through community observation (Indigenous means of gaining knowledge). A frequent adherence to Eurocentric knowledge systems by conventional language education models often witnessed, which marginalizes the Indigenous ways of knowing and reinforcing epistemic hierarchies (Mignolo, 2011; Smith, 2012; Viswanathan, 1989). For example, the Indian Story telling tradition that was the primary way of transmission of Indigenous knowledge has eroded with time (People's Linguistic Survey of India [PLSI], 2013). These oral traditions have been repeatedly emphasized on by the National Curriculum Framework, 2023 as well as National Policy of Education, 2020 in reference to the pedagogical approach towards language education. Decolonized approaches advocate for the inclusion of these traditions as well as Indigenous languages as they serve as legitimate vehicles of knowledge production, thus challenging monolithic curricular structures. Through integration of Indigenous oral traditions, ecological knowledge, and culturally embedded meaning-making practices, decolonized language education counters *epistemicide* (de Sousa Santos, 2014) and affirms the cognitive legitimacy of marginalized knowledge systems. Therefore, the findings suggest that such kind of epistemic inclusion does not just democratize knowledge system but also enhance the critical awareness learners in terms of knowledge construction and valuation.

In addition to the findings discussed above, decolonized language education also fosters intercultural competence by encouraging and accepting pluralistic worldviews and dialogic engagement across cultural boundaries. Unlike the conventional intercultural models that tends to emphasize on the significance of functional communication and cultural adaptation, decolonized approaches long with those also foreground ethical interaction, reflexivity, and critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997; Kubota, 2004). Umpteen exposure to Indigenous languages and plural epistemologies enables learners to identify cultural difference as relational (cultural background influencing individual identity and communication) rather than hierarchical, thereby inculcating skills to understand differences, respect and accept other cultures, show empathy, and ability to interpret cultural codes, within learners for a meaningful intercultural dialogue. The findings also indicate that these multilingual and multicultural classrooms inherently begin functioning as intercultural dynamic spaces where learners negotiate meaning and identity across diverse linguistic and cultural frames.

Therefore, the study suggests that within the system of decolonized language education a significant relationship between learner engagement, cognitive justice, and intercultural competence exists. In a classroom driven by decolonized language education learners are found to engage actively as their linguistic identities are affirmed and cognitive justice is advanced through epistemic plurality. Even the intercultural competence of learners also gets cultivated through sustained interaction with polyolith knowledge systems. Instead of treating these outcomes in isolation, the findings establishes that decolonized language education integrates learner engagement, cognitive justice, and intercultural competence into a cohesive pedagogical orientation where language education takes on transformative role capable of addressing and challenging the historical inequalities.

Table 3: Recurring themes in decolonized language education, learner engagement, cognitive justice, and intercultural competence

Theme	Key arguments and focus
Decolonial language education and learner engagement	Representation of culturally familiar concepts and acceptance of linguistic identities, home narratives, and cultural experiences of learners enhances participation, motivation, and academic performance.

Affirmation of linguistic and cultural identities	Decolonized approaches reduce the void created by dominant “standardized” languages with recognition of Indigenous languages and cultures that strengthens learners’ sense of identity and inclusion within educational spaces.
Cognitive justice and epistemic plurality	Knowledge can be acquired through scientific frameworks (e.g., carbon cycles) as well as Indigenous methods such as community observation. This plurality challenges Eurocentric dominance and epistemic hierarchies in conventional education systems.
Validation of indigenous knowledge system	Indigenous oral traditions, ecology and languages are considered as valid forms of knowledge that challenges epistemicide.
Policy and curricular alignment	Decolonized language education aligns with national policies on education, thereby promoting inclusive curricula and culturally responsive pedagogical practices.
Multilingual classrooms and intercultural competence	Multilingual classrooms help in developing empathy, respect, and interpretive skills among learners for meaningful intercultural dialogue.
Integrated pedagogical outcomes	Learner engagement, cognitive justice, and intercultural competence are outcomes of decolonized language education, situating language education as medium of transformation and capable of addressing historical and epistemic inequalities.

Conclusion

Decolonizing language education is imperative for preserving linguistic diversity, fostering cultural identity, intercultural competence, and advancing cognitive justice in multilingual and postcolonial contexts, where the indigenous languages has gained importance over years and has become a part of mainstream linguistic repertoire. This study endorses that language operates as an epistemic and ontological system through which knowledge, identities, and social relations are constructed, conserved, preserved and transmitted. Hence, the decline of any Indigenous language will entail not only communicative loss but also cultural discontinuity, epistemic loss and disruption of collective identities. The integration of Indigenous linguistic and cultural knowledge into language education becomes crucial here, as educators requires to challenge dominant epistemic and linguistic hierarchies, and practice inclusive classroom environments that appreciates plurality of human experiences. The convergent result of decolonial, intercultural, and culturally sustaining pedagogical frameworks unfolds as a powerful seamless approach that restructures the classroom environment and classroom communication in reference to epistemic plurality, enhanced learner engagement, and intercultural dialogue. This even promotes cognitive justice and inculcates intercultural competence, transforming language education into a socially responsive and culturally grounded ethical practice.

In the Indian context, the study not only bring forth the country’s rich linguistic heritage but also the hierarchical challenges that hinders the survival, sustenance and transmission of Indigenous languages across generations. The age-old concept of Sanskritization, the globalized linguistic hierarchies deciding the functional ability of a particular language, prevalence of ‘standardized languages’ in schools, limited constitutional recognition of indigenous languages, and insufficient administrative as well as pedagogical support from educational institutions, contribute towards marginalization Indigenous languages and knowledge systems. Therefore, addressing these challenges require sustained policy commitment, curricular reform, teacher preparedness, socio-cultural responsive teaching, and meaningful collaboration with Indigenous communities. Though the National Policies had identified and addressed the crisis, the veritable transformation of theory into practice is yet to be delivered.

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