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## Literature Education in Postcolonial Contexts: Innovative Decolonial Strategies for Curriculum Renewal and Cultural Reclamation

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### Abstract

*This paper examines creative decolonial approaches for changing curricula, pedagogy, and cultural engagement as well as the enduring impact of colonial legacies on literature education in postcolonial states. The paper highlights important decolonial interventions, such as curriculum renewal, pedagogical innovation, language inclusion, and the integration of multimodal literacies, through a critical review of current research and educational practices across African, Caribbean, and South Asian contexts. It illustrates how critical literacy, cultural self-efficacy, and learner agency may be promoted through the use of indigenous texts, vernacular languages, and culturally responsive teaching techniques. The study also highlights the importance of legislative frameworks, community involvement, and educators in maintaining significant curriculum change. This paper concludes that decolonising literary education entails a radical reorientation of knowledge production and pedagogical practice rather than just adding local texts. Decolonial literature education can enable students to critically interact with historical and modern realities, reconstruct cultural identities, and support inclusive and socially responsive educational systems by elevating minority voices and advancing epistemic justice.*

**Keywords:** Decolonial education, Literature curriculum. Indigenous knowledge, Cultural reclamation, Language inclusion, Multilingual education, curriculum transformation.

### Introduction

Literature is both a mirror and a mold of society, acting as a formative tool that molds critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and cultural consciousness as well as a reflective medium through which communities examine their identities, histories, and values (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2013). Literature gives students the chance to connect with a variety of worldviews, examine intricate social realities, and comprehend how narratives influence social

imaginaries and collective identities. However, the teaching and study of literature in many postcolonial societies is still closely linked to the long-lasting effects of colonial educational systems that favored European literary canons, languages, and methods of knowledge production; often at the expense of indigenous literary traditions and epistemologies (Parveen, 2025). Curriculum systems, instructional approaches, and knowledge hierarchies that

continue to marginalise local voices and cultural knowledge have been molded by these colonial legacies (Costa et al., 2023). Due to this historical privileging, students in postcolonial societies often come across literature curricula that reproduce epistemic hierarchies that uphold Western cultural dominance, alienate them from their cultural roots, and cause a sense of intellectual and cultural dislocation (Parveen, 2025; Kaleem, 2025). Students' ability to make connections between their educational experiences and daily cultural realities are undermined by these colonial-oriented curriculum, which frequently mute or devalue indigenous modes of expression, oral literatures, and local storytelling traditions. As a result, students may become less engaged with formal literature instruction and have low cultural self-efficacy (Makumane, Nkohl, & Khoza, 2024).

By promoting the restoration of indigenous epistemologies, narratives, and pedagogical practices that were methodically suppressed during colonial authority, decolonial approaches to education aim to critically address these systemic injustices (Smith, 2012). Decolonial tactics in literature education include reconsidering how texts are taught and interpreted, emphasising local voices, languages, and culturally grounded epistemologies, in addition to broadening the range of texts included in curricula (Beyer, 2022). Decolonised literature education can undermine long-standing hegemonic presumptions about cultural value and intellectual legitimacy, according to recent research that emphasises the significance of rethinking curricula to support epistemic justice and cultural reclamation (Parveen, 2025; Kaleem, 2025). Additionally, decolonial literature education can develop critical literacy, promote cultural pride, and enable students to identify and challenge colonial epistemic legacies. Parveen (2025) and Makumane et al. (2024) opine that these methods allow students to appreciate a variety of narrative forms and techniques of expression, reflect on power and representation, and place literary texts within larger socio-historical realities. Teachers that use decolonial pedagogy also move away from authoritarian teaching models and toward dialogic, participatory approaches that support students' intellectual agency and legitimise their cultural experiences (Nevhudoli, 2025; Costa et al., 2023).

With a focus on curriculum renewal, pedagogical change, and cultural reclamation, this study investigates creative approaches to decolonizing literary courses. It describes practical, theoretical, and policy-oriented considerations for incorporating local narratives, indigenous languages, and culturally responsive pedagogies into formal literature instruction, drawing on recent examples from South Asian, African, and Caribbean educational contexts (Parveen, 2025; Kaleem, 2025). The paper highlights the transformative potential of literature education in postcolonial societies and positions decolonial pedagogies as crucial elements of curriculum reform that support cultural relevance, critical consciousness, and social justice by emphasising recent scholarly debates and educational innovations.

### **Postcolonial Legacies in Literature Education**

Parveen (2025) noted that the Postcolonial Theory emphasises persistent colonial systems that continue to influence linguistic regulations, educational content, and knowledge production even after official political independence. Local literary traditions, vernacular languages, and indigenous means of expression were frequently neglected in favour of European literary forms, canonical authors, and Western epistemologies in colonial education systems (Makumane, Nkohl, & Khoza, 2024). Western

literature was positioned as superior and universal, while indigenous cultural knowledge was marginalised. This privileging was not only curricular but ideological (Kaleem, 2025). In reality, postcolonial literature curricula often perpetuate colonial epistemic hierarchies by emphasising Western writers like Shakespeare, Dickens, and Austen, who, despite their pedagogical value, frequently have their colonial histories contextualised or critically examined (Parveen, 2025; Costa et al., 2023). These curricula subtly convey the idea that Western literary traditions are the strongest source of cultural legitimacy. Kaleem (2025) suggests this might lead to a contradiction between the literature that students are required to study and their own cultural imaginaries, histories, and ideologies.

The psychological and cultural impacts of such curricular shift have been shown by empirical research. Research indicates that students in postcolonial settings who are primarily exposed to Eurocentric literature frequently exhibit impaired cultural self-efficacy, a diminished feeling of cultural identity, and a sort of internalised cultural marginalisation (Achebe, 1988; Thiong'o, 1993). Learners' inability to identify themselves in literary works is associated with disengagement, decreased motivation, and less confidence in academic achievement, according to recent qualitative research conducted in secondary schools in West Africa (Makumane et al., 2024). In these situations, educators also have to deal with issues that support epistemic injustices. The inability of many educators to effectively include indigenous literature into the classroom stems from their lack of expertise in local literary traditions or culturally responsive pedagogies (Parveen, 2025; Nevhudoli, 2025). Instead of encouraging revolutionary educational reform, the dearth of suitable teaching materials and high-stakes tests that favour classic Western books further encourage curriculum continuity with colonial patterns (Costa et al., 2023). Instead of encouraging critical engagement with local histories and voices, the cumulative impact is a literature education that may unintentionally perpetuate colonial cultural inequalities. As scholars have recently argued, postcolonial literature curricula that remain unexamined risk perpetuating the very power structures that decolonial education aims to dismantle (Kaleem, 2025; Parveen, 2025).

### **Decolonial Theory and Education**

Decolonial philosophy emphasises the need to consciously demolish colonial epistemologies in favor of knowledge sovereignty, cultural reclamation, and epistemic plurality (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Decolonial education actively aims to redistribute epistemic authority and affirm marginalised ways of knowing as legitimate and important, in contrast to multiculturalism, which frequently acknowledges variety without questioning underlying power structures (Parveen, 2025). Three interrelated elements are commonly used in decolonial techniques in literary curriculum in educational practice. Curriculum renewal is a decolonial technique in literary curriculum. Reimagining literature curricula to incorporate regional oral traditions, local writers, and culturally relevant works that represent students' lived realities is necessary for curriculum renewal (Kaleem, 2025; Makumane et al., 2024). This involves incorporating non-canonical literary genres like folktales, proverbs, and performance-based writing, as well as indigenous narratives and postcolonial voices, into official reading lists. By doing this, educators broaden the notion of literature to include culturally embedded forms of expression that were

previously marginalized or restricted under colonial institutions (Parveen, 2025).

Pedagogical innovation is another commonly used technique. Decolonial pedagogies emphasise student-centered, participatory approaches that promote critical thinking, discussion, and cultural analysis in place of teacher-centered education (Nevhudoli, 2025). Students can interpret literature through both local contexts and global views with the aid of collaborative learning activities, dialogic conversations, and culturally responsive teaching practices. According to recent research, these methods promote intercultural empathy, enhance interpretative depth, and raise student engagement (Costa et al., 2023; Nevhudoli, 2025). The last decolonial technique is language inclusion. A key component of decolonial education is language. Linguistic hierarchies and identity disjunction have resulted from colonial curricula's historical elevation of colonial languages (such as English and French) above vernacular or indigenous languages (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986). In order to improve understanding, encourage cultural identity affirmation, and foster cognitive involvement, decolonial initiatives support the integration of vernacular languages alongside colonial languages (Parveen, 2025). Expanding access to meaning-making processes and fostering deeper reflective practice are two benefits of using learners' native tongues in literary contexts (Makumane et al., 2024).

By using these techniques, decolonial literature education promotes an educational paradigm that acknowledges a variety of worldviews, epistemologies, and narrative traditions while challenging the idea that Western literary standards are universal (Parveen, 2025). Recent research has shown that in order to create significant, long-lasting change, curricular transformation must involve not only texts but also pedagogical relationships, educators' views, and institutional policies (Kaleem, 2025; Costa et al., 2023). Decolonial philosophy allows students to critically analyze, contrast, and contextualize literary works within larger socio-historical realities by placing Western writings in dialogue with local narratives rather than rejecting Western literature outright (Parveen, 2025). By fostering multidimensional frames of knowledge, this method enables students to read literature as a location of self-assertion, cultural negotiation, and resistance.

### Cultural Reclamation through Literature

Literature is a vital tool for cultural reclamation, historical memory maintenance and the validation of indigenous epistemologies in addition to being a storehouse of artistic expression (Abdi, 2024). Oral traditions, communal narratives and culturally ingrained forms of knowledge were frequently suppressed in postcolonial contexts due to the systematic marginalisation of local knowledge during colonial control. Local myths, folktales, proverbs, and oral histories can be incorporated into formal literary curriculum to help students feel more connected to their cultural heritage and develop cognitive agency (Makumane et al., 2024; Parveen, 2025).

Costa *et al.* (2023) suggests that exposing students to indigenous literature fosters critical literacy, enabling them to question historical injustices, social inequities, and the legacy of colonial power systems. Additionally, by enabling a synthesis of regional customs with modern experiences, culturally embedded literary education enables students to actively contribute to the reconstruction of postcolonial identities (Kaleem, 2025). Students exposed to culturally responsive literature exhibit improved critical thinking, higher cultural self-efficacy, and increased engagement in reflective conversation, according to recent research conducted in

South Asian and African educational environments (Nevhudoli, 2025; Parveen, 2025). Literature education can go beyond the passive consumption of texts to active cultural reclamation by incorporating indigenous narratives into formal education. This allows students to question epistemic hierarchies, rethink collective histories, and affirm the validity of local knowledge in international discourses (Abdi, 2024; Makumane et al., 2024).

### Methodological Considerations for Curriculum Renewal

A methodical, context-aware, and pedagogically creative approach is necessary for successful curriculum renewal in postcolonial literary teaching. For encouraging meaningful engagement with both local and global literatures, researchers have advised the following

1. Diversification and selection of literary works written by authors from regional or local contexts should be given priority. When indigenous experiences are represented, students are exposed to stories that speak to their cultural heritage and social reality (Kaleem, 2025; Parveen, 2025).
2. Integration of oral traditions such as performance poetry, storytelling, folklore, and other oral forms to help students connect with collective memory and historical knowledge. When combined with written texts, oral literature improves cultural literacy and interpretative depth (Makumane et al., 2024; Costa et al., 2023).
3. Selection of books that discuss social justice, identity development, postcolonial battles, resilience, and the transfer of knowledge across generations. Students can critically contextualize literary texts within historical and contemporary socio-political realities thanks to this theme focus (Abdi, 2024).

### Methodological Considerations for Pedagogical Innovations

The following are suggested by researchers:

1. The use of learner-centred strategies that motivate students to analyze the power dynamics, structural injustices, and colonial legacies present in literary texts (Parveen, 2025).
2. The use of collaborative learning. Students can be involved in co-creative literary creations, peer-led seminars, storytelling sessions, and group projects. Collaborative approaches improve co-creation of cultural knowledge, communication abilities, and participatory learning (Nevhudoli, 2025; Costa et al., 2023).
3. Interdisciplinary Approaches should be adopted. To contextualise texts culturally, historically, and socially, instructors can combine literature with sociology, anthropology, history, and performance studies. Students' comprehension of literary works as components of larger societal processes is enhanced by this integration (Makumane et al., 2024; Kaleem, 2025).

### Methodological Considerations for Language and Multimodality

The following are recommended for language inclusion:

1. Teachers can employ vernacular integration. Teachers can encourage students to act, write creatively, and analyse literature in their own tongues. The historical



preference for colonial languages is challenged by vernacular use, which promotes understanding, cultural identity affirmation, and cognitive engagement (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986; Parveen, 2025).

2. Teachers can employ multimodal literacies such as visual arts, digital media, theater, film, and other performance modalities. Deeper cultural comprehension and creative expression are supported by multimodal techniques, which enable students to interpret texts through a variety of sensory and cognitive pathways (Costa et al., 2023; Makumane et al., 2024).

When taken as a whole, these methodological approaches present literary education as a transformative location for critical consciousness, postcolonial cultural reclamation, and knowledge democratization, as they allow students to actively engage in decolonial intellectual practices, develop literary agency, and re-establish a connection with cultural traditions that were previously marginalized by colonial educational systems.

### **Innovative Decolonial Strategies in Practice**

Decolonial tactics in literature education go beyond just including local texts; they actively alter curriculum, instructional methodologies, and students' cultural awareness, as demonstrated by recent postcolonial educational initiatives (Abdi, 2024; Costa et al., 2023). These approaches promote learner agency, identity affirmation, and critical engagement with literature by challenging the epistemic inequalities established during colonial control by emphasising indigenous knowledge systems, oral traditions, and multimodal literacies.

National curriculum in South Africa and Nigeria includes works by influential African writers like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka, and Chinua Achebe in schools. By emphasising indigenous voices and narratives, this inclusion puts local viewpoints at the forefront of literary instruction. According to empirical research, pupils who are exposed to African literary texts exhibit greater critical thinking abilities, increased cultural self-efficacy, and a deeper engagement with historical and social realities (Makumane et al., 2024; Nevhudoli, 2025). Additionally, incorporating oral traditions with written texts enhances students' comprehension of the historical, performative, and communal aspects of African literature, connecting classroom instruction with real-world cultural experience (Abdi, 2024; Parveen, 2025). Furthermore, in the Caribbean Literature Programmes, Derek Walcott, Lorna Goodison, and Louise Bennett-Coverley are only a few examples of the regional authors and oral storytelling traditions that have been given priority in literature curricula in nations like Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica (Roberts & Charles, 2022). By introducing students to local histories, colonial legacies, and current sociocultural challenges, these programmes foster postcolonial consciousness. According to research, students from the Caribbean who are exposed to literary content with a regional focus show greater levels of engagement, critical reflection, and affirmation of their cultural identity than their classmates who are predominantly studying works that are Eurocentric (Costa et al., 2023; Kaleem, 2025).

Multimedia and digital storytelling are now effective teaching methods for decolonial literature due to advances in digital technology. By connecting ancient oral practices with modern digital modalities, platforms including podcasts, video production, blogs, and interactive storytelling software enable students to create and share culturally based narratives (Parveen, 2025;

Nevhudoli, 2025). Studies have shown that including digital storytelling fosters critical engagement with postcolonial topics like identity, migration, and resistance while also improving creativity, narrative competence, and cultural literacy (Abdi, 2024; Costa et al., 2023).

When taken as a whole, these projects highlight the transformative rather than additive nature of decolonial approaches in literature education. By centering local knowledge systems, elevating marginalized voices, and leveraging participatory pedagogies and digital technologies, literature curricula can disrupt entrenched colonial epistemologies, cultivate learner agency, and support the reconstruction of postcolonial cultural identities (Makumane et al., 2024).

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

In postcolonial contexts, decolonising literary education has important ramifications for curriculum development, teacher professional development, and educational policy frameworks (Abdi, 2024; Costa et al., 2023). Changing literary curricula is a socio-cultural intervention that tackles historical marginalisation and promotes intellectual sovereignty, not just an academic endeavour. The incorporation of indigenous literature, oral traditions, and culturally sensitive texts in secondary and postsecondary curricula must be given top priority by national ministries of education and curriculum developers (Makumane et al., 2024; Parveen, 2025). In order to ensure that students interact with books that resonate with their lived experiences and connect literary studies with more general societal development objectives, policy frameworks should require that literature curricula reflect the different epistemologies and cultural histories of the student body, and the curriculum should also incorporate themes of social justice, postcolonial resistance, and cultural identity.

Teachers play a key role in putting decolonial strategies into practice (Abdi, 2024). In order to effectively teach indigenous and postcolonial literature, professional development programmes that will equip teachers with the pedagogical abilities, intercultural competency, and analytical tools they need, should be organized periodically. To help teachers promote student participation, critical reflection, and cultural literacy, training should include critical pedagogy, participatory teaching techniques, and multimodal literacy approaches (Costa et al., 2023; Nevhudoli, 2025). Teachers' ability to effectively incorporate culturally relevant texts can be further strengthened by ongoing mentoring and collaboration with regional literary experts.

To preserve and disseminate indigenous literary knowledge, schools should actively work with local writers, oral historians, storytellers and cultural organisations (Abdi, 2024; Parveen, 2025). By giving students opportunities for experiential learning, this kind of interaction guarantees that literature instruction stays rooted in real cultural practices. Additionally, community connections strengthen the link between formal education and cultural continuity by providing opportunities for students to engage in performance-based initiatives, digital storytelling, and literary output.

Learners' cultural preservation, critical consciousness, and socio-political awareness are all enhanced by the use of decolonial literature techniques (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). In order to question historical injustices, question epistemic hierarchies, and aid in the reconstruction of postcolonial identities, students build the analytical and ethical frameworks. Over time, these programs

enhance cultural self-efficacy, democratic involvement, and national cohesion, emphasizing literature education as a tool for individual and societal change (Makumane et al., 2024).

## Conclusion

In postcolonial settings, teaching literature is both an opportunity and a challenge. Destroying deeply ingrained colonial legacies that have traditionally favoured Eurocentric literary canons, languages, and epistemologies at the expense of indigenous knowledge systems is the difficult part. However, in order to promote genuine and culturally relevant learning experiences, it is necessary to reclaim and prioritise indigenous epistemologies, cultural narratives and critical pedagogical approaches. Innovative decolonial approaches, such as curriculum renewal, pedagogical innovation and multimodal literacies, have been shown in this paper to be capable of transforming literature education. By putting these tactics into practice, literature education transforms from a collection of texts into a transformative environment where students critically engage with historical injustices, challenge established power structures, and create postcolonial identities based on their own cultural realities. This combined emphasis on cultural affirmation and critical engagement guarantees that students not only acquire analytical and interpretative abilities but also foster social agency, cultural resilience, and self-confidence.

## Recommendations

To maximise the transformative potential of postcolonial literature education, the following strategic interventions are recommended:

1. Curriculum developers and the Ministries of Education should methodically incorporate works by indigenous, regional and local authors into the African school curriculum as learners will interact with literature that accurately represent their histories, values, and life experiences. Also, curriculum should also clearly connect literary study to themes of social justice, postcolonial identity, environmental conscience, and cultural resilience.
2. Curriculum design must be flexible. Modular approaches foster diversity, engagement, and responsiveness to a range of learner requirements by enabling educators to contextualise and adapt information to local conditions.
3. Governments and educational authorities should create legislative frameworks that formalise decolonial pedagogical techniques in order to institutionalise these practices and guarantee systemic support for curriculum innovation, sustainability, and accountability.
4. Continuous professional development programmes that emphasise indigenous texts, multimodal literacy, and decolonial teaching strategies should be organised for literature teachers.
5. Educators should also participate in action research and reflective practice, assessing the effects of decolonial tactics on student learning outcomes and cultural participation.
6. Schools should actively collaborate with regional writers, oral historians, cultural centers, and performing arts organisations. Schools should also establish venues for students to engage with elders and traditional knowledge keepers.

By putting these suggestions into practice, postcolonial societies can use literature education as a transformative tool, giving

students cultural awareness, social responsibility, and the ability to actively engage in societal reconstruction in addition to analytical and interpretive skills. In the end, decolonial literary education advances the more general objectives of inclusive, equitable, and culturally sensitive education in postcolonial settings by fostering epistemic justice, cultural sovereignty, and empowered citizenship.

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