

Decolonizing the Undergraduate English Literature Syllabus through the Integration of Global South Voices

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Abstract: The conventional syllabus for undergraduate English literature remains primarily focused on a Eurocentric canon, reinforcing a colonial hierarchy and marginalizing a multitude of other epistemologies. This paper examines the need to integrate voices from the Global South and the importance of decolonizing the curriculum in order to create a more equitable and representative space in the academy. Using decolonial theory and critical race theory as a framework, the paper explores the impact of Western-centric narratives on student participation and the continued epistemic injustice that results from this. The main approach to this study is a qualitative assessment of recent literature teaching strategies, particularly the shift from a singular “English Literature” to a more inclusive “Literatures in English” approach. The main focus of the analysis is the role of storytelling as a form of political and creative resistance, the use of multilingual academic writing as a pedagogical tool, and the incorporation of community knowledge in teaching. The primary conclusion asserts that decolonizing the syllabus is not an additive process to include more authors, but is a restructuring of how knowledge is constructed, legitimized, and disseminated. There is also the recognition that the challenges posed by the decoloniality of proficiency, along with other forms of institutional resistance, may continue to punish linguistic deviance and non-standard English. Integrating voices from the Global South is viewed as a fundamental requirement to achieving equity in higher education. The authors argue that, by eliminating the colonial legacy of the curriculum, students will develop a more nuanced understanding of global relations and cultural interconnections. This is a vital step in addressing the inequities embedded in the humanities and in preparing students for life in a globalized world.

Key Words: decolonization, global south, undergraduate syllabus, english literature, epistemic justice, pedagogy

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Introduction

The Anglo-American normativity of undergraduate English literature courses has historically been Eurocentric and based on a 'literary canon' considered universal and superior in taste and intellect that has historically been the predominant canon of White, Western authors and has pushed other narratives to the margins (Criser & Knott, 2019; Bakshi, 2021). Such a curriculum serves to reinforce the cultural domination of that canon, neocolonial assumptions, and the geographical and racial specificity of 'great literature' (Bonilla-Medina & Finardi, 2022; Ranasinha, 2019). By privileging this narrow focus, the institutions of higher education sustain the idea that Global South perspectives are peripheral to the study of the English language and its global range (Ndlangamandla & Chaka, 2022; Pesonen, 2024; Banerjee & Pan, 2024).

Given the above context, the 'decolonial turn' has emerged in response to the legacy of colonialism to contest the form and structure of knowledge that globalization has produced in higher education.

Decentering the curriculum entails more than a shift in the readings; it is ultimately a 'decolonial' reconstruction of the philosophy of education that aims to end the 'coloniality of knowledge' (English & Heilbronn, 2024). Centering the curriculum addresses the conceptual gap/s in global higher education to critique the hierarchy of whose voices are legitimized or authorized and whose are marginalized/silenced (Seats, 2022). The shift toward a decolonial curriculum pedagogy aims to replace monolithic standards in academia with recognition of pluralism and different methodologies and epistemologies (Maine & Wagner, 2021; Laing, 2021; Davids, 2024).

Research Question

The focus of this research is on what changes must be made in order to go beyond a Eurocentric canon in undergraduate English Studies. More specifically, it asks: what changes in pedagogy and what changes in the intellectual framework of English Studies are suggested by Global South voices?

The research goals are as follows:

- Assess the impact of the Eurocentric canon in the pedagogy of English literature in undergraduate studies.
- Assess the impact of Global South voices in Western-centric literary norms.
- Assess how multilingualism and storytelling can be used as means to achieve epistemic justice in pedagogy.
- Assess how community narratives and the knowledge of the community can be incorporated into the English literature curriculum.

The remaining sections of this research paper are outlined as follows. Section II outlines the literature review. This review examines Critical Race Theory and the study of English in the Global South. This review is followed by Section III, which outlines the theoretical framework and methodology, and is primarily focused on narrative reclamation and the bibliometric studies of decolonial studies. Section IV presents the findings on the integration of the curriculum and pedagogy. Section V focuses on the obstacles that are primarily institutional and linguistic in nature. Finally, Section VI addresses the decolonized English syllabus.

Literature Survey

Decolonizing English Literature necessitates a strong theoretical framework to analyze the systemic exclusion of non-Western knowledges. There is a productive convergence of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and decolonial theories which enables one to see the coloniality embedded in English Language Teaching (ELT) (Massó, 2024; Bonilla-Medina & Finardi, 2022). Such a framework demonstrates how the “coloniality of power” is a phenomenon that remains post formal decolonization by engineering educational curricula that centre Western logic and aesthetics at the expense of indigenous and Afro-descendant epistemologies (Gutiérrez & Aguirre Ortega, 2022). Because of such frameworks, educators are able to analyze, at a granular level, the dynamics of power in the selection of literature and the subsequent affirmation (or lack thereof) of different scholarly voices.

In order to make the movement towards decolonization possible, there is an urgent need to ‘move’ English Studies out of the imperial centre and into the Global South. This requires, in part, an engagement with what has been termed the ‘coloniality of language’, whereby standard English is most often employed to marginalize and erase local variations and identities (Ndlanamandla & Chaka, 2022). Scholars are now practically united in saying that English is, and should be, considered not as a unitary, homogenous, monolithic, standard language, but as a highly diverse, pluralistic instrument that serves purpose of locally

grounded, expressive, and resistive communication (Ranasinha, 2019). Equally, the incorporation of storytelling is a valuable vehicle for reclamation, for allowing (particularly, subaltern) groups to articulate counter-narratives that emanate from their own lived experiences (Davids, 2024).

This approach focuses on giving more emphasis to students' voice placed on the value in the decolonial movement, the ability to participative students, and the active unmaking of knowledge as canons (Maine & Wagner, 2021; Bakshi, 2021). Research and studies in the field of humanities and geography show that, in active decolonial programs, students are better able to comprehend a more critical perspective of global structures of power and social movements (Laing, 2021). Faculty-student cooperativeness is important to cover the curriculum in a non-dominant colonized slant, but rather a diverse, globalized, and decolonial perspective (Quintero & Clavijo, 2023; Seats, 2022).

The so-called 'coloniality of proficiency' is a major obstacle to a decolonized syllabus, where multilingual students are penalized in a standard of English that is too rigid (Ndlangamandla, 2024). In fact, decolonizing academic writing pedagogy requires embracing a more 'translingual' approach (Canagarajah, 2024). If linguistic hierarchies are not addressed, it will not be possible to include the voices of the Global South but, as the 'voice of reason' will remain the same, it will continue to represent Western standards of academia (Seats, 2022). True epistemic justice means that the Global South, where the Global South is also seen and recognized as having equal claim and ownership to the curriculum, is to be valued and appreciated as on par with the North to the benefits and to the moral and social culture and the intellectual heritage, social relations, and structural to the cultural heritage (Pesonen, 2024; Banerjee & Pan, 2024).

The synthesized literature leads to the conclusion that decolonizing the English literature syllabus is a complex and multifaceted task that is not as simple as including more authors from diverse backgrounds. It involves challenging the very linguistic and philosophical assumptions that underpin the field. It is evident from the literature that the key to achieving this is to develop a connection between the theoretical constructs of decoloniality and the actual realities of the classroom. By fostering student agency and addressing the "coloniality of proficiency," universities can move from cultural assimilation to a more authentic form of epistemic pluralism.

Methodology

A mixed methodology in this research involves action-oriented pedagogy, as well as quantitative bibliometric analysis. This methodology aims to not only chart the growing presence of scholarship from the Global South, but also to assist in providing classroom solutions that are pragmatic and transformative in nature. It integrates the macro trends a Global South literature analysis yields with the micro realities of classroom interactions to create the most comprehensive approach to decolonizing the English literature syllabus.

Bibliometric and Qualitative Insights

This study provides bibliometric insights in an attempt to understand how the traction of decolonial thought is reshaping the global higher education landscape. There is emerging research deploying sophisticated techniques, including BERTopic-guided bibliometric studies, which have illustrated shifts in the Global South's higher education landscape from colonial legacies to linguistic pluralism (Banerjee & Pan, 2024). These studies capture emerging quantitative trends, which serve as the basis and demonstrate that the demand for decolonization is not anecdotal, but rather, a statistically significant emerging discourse in meaningful decolonization within academia. Examining publication and citation patterns will enable the

tracking of the increasing prominence of “epistemic pluralism” as a means of redressing the historical injustices meted out to the Global South knowledge systems. This quantitative mapping legitimizes and justifies the inclusion of these voices as scientifically and intellectually relevant.

Narrative and Storytelling

At the core of this methodology is the use of storytelling as a liberatory pedagogical tool. In a decolonized classroom, storytelling is not simply an appreciation of the narrative; it is a form of “subversion and reclamation” (Davids, 2024). In this case, to un-center the dominant narrative is to center the personal, the oral, the marginalized, the dissident, and the subaltern, thereby turning the “voice of reason” discourse (Seats, 2022). This approach to narrative pedagogy creates an opportunity to democratize the classroom by allowing the students lived experiences to exist as valid knowledge. Storytelling pedagogically allows students to engage critically with a text and reclaim the academic identity within a space that has silenced them. It is a powerful tool that provides the space where multiple and divergent truths exist, directly overturning the “coloniality of power” (Gutiérrez & Aguirre Ortega, 2022).

Pedagogical Practicum

The methodologies detailed above are implemented through a specific pedagogical practicum within teacher education. You cannot decolonize the curriculum sustainably without decolonizing the teachers. This methodology plans to incorporate community knowledge into the teaching practicum directly (Quintero & Clavijo, 2023). It aims to shift teacher education from mere theoretical conversations about diversity to actual community involvement. Through the engagement with local diverse communities be it Afro-descendant, Indigenous, or multilingual teacher trainees learn to appreciate "community-embedded knowledge" (Quintero & Clavijo, 2023). This practice redefines the teacher’s role from a purveyor of homogeneous knowledge to a conduit of diverse, community-specific knowledge.

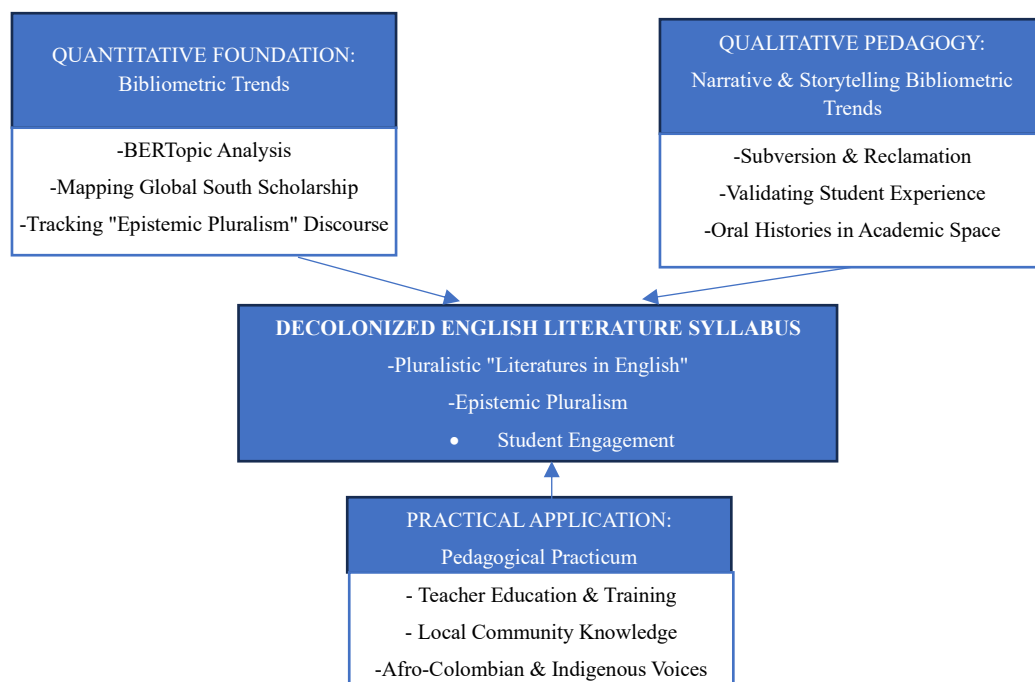


Figure 1: Methodological Framework for Decolonizing the Syllabus

The methodological framework illustrated in Figure 1 outlines a holistic model of curriculum change that incorporates three separate yet interconnected research and teaching areas. At the top of the framework,

the Quantitative Foundation: Bibliometric Trends applies data-driven methodologies, including BERTopic, to map the global upsurge of decolonial research and the movement toward epistemic pluralism (Banerjee & Pan, 2024). In tandem, the Qualitative Pedagogy: Narrative & Storytelling operates within the classroom and uses subversive storytelling to reclaim student experiences (Davids, 2024). Theories and analyses are constructed on the bottom by the Practical Application: Pedagogical Practicum, which focuses on teacher training and the incorporation of local community knowledge, particularly Afro-Colombian and Indigenous perspectives (Quintero & Clavijo, 2023; Gutiérrez & Aguirre Ortega, 2022). All three elements direct toward one goal: the development of a Decolonized English Literature Syllabus. This focal point represents a pluralistic, “Literatures in English” paradigm centered on epistemic justice and active student participation, advancing beyond the Eurocentric borders to provide a genuinely decolonized global academic framework.

Results

The integration analysis of the Global South voices into the undergraduate English Literature syllabus demonstrates noticeable changes in both teaching engagement and institutional frameworks. Below, the tables provide a summary of the key findings in relation to the transformational curriculum and the remaining obstacles to achieving epistemic justice.

Table 1 differentiates the key components of the conventional Eurocentric model from the newly emerging decolonized approach.

Table 1: Comparative Framework of Curricular Evolution

Feature	Traditional Eurocentric Syllabus	Decolonized Global South Syllabus
Primary Scope	British and American "Classics"	Literatures in English (Global)
Role of Language	Standardized English proficiency (Ndlangamandla, 2024)	Translingual and local dialects (Canagarajah, 2024)
Knowledge Source	Centralized academic canon (Criser & Knott, 2019)	Community and oral histories (Davids, 2024; Quintero & Clavijo, 2023)
Pedagogical Goal	Cultural assimilation	Epistemic pluralism and justice (Bonilla-Medina & Finardi, 2022)
Student Role	Passive recipient of "Great Works"	Active agent in canon unmaking (Maine & Wagner, 2021) (Bakshi, 2021)

The subsequent Table 2 balances the positive integration outcomes against the foremost obstacles as identified in the recent literature.

Table 2: Impact Assessment and Institutional Barriers

Category	Key Findings and Impact	Identified Challenges
Pedagogical Impact	Increased critical awareness of power dynamics and colonial legacies (Laing, 2021).	Rigid accreditation standards that favor traditional rubrics (Canagarajah, 2024).
Student Agency	Improved sense of belonging and identity reclamation for marginalized groups (Gutiérrez & Aguirre Ortega, 2022).	Conceptual "deadlocks" in defining legitimate academic knowledge (Seats, 2022).
Linguistic Inclusion	Validation of multilingual identities and diverse writing styles (Canagarajah, 2024).	Persistent penalization of non-standard English varieties (Ndlangamandla, 2024).
Research Trends	Significant rise in Global South scholarship and bibliometric visibility (Banerjee & Pan, 2024).	Limited access to Global South texts in Western-centric databases.

Discussion: Strategies for Integration

Curriculum Redesign: From "English Literature" to "Literatures in English"

Translating decoloniality from theory to practice requires a series of calculated steps that defy academic norms. One of the first steps involves renaming and re-scoping the discipline. A step towards a 'Literatures in English' paradigm means that a wide array of texts, previously considered 'post-colonial' or 'peripheral', are now visible. This change, therefore, is not simply the inclusion of authors from the Global South, but the re-positioning of texts in the syllabus, prioritizing pluralism. (Ranasinha, 2019; Bakshi, 2021). By treating Global South texts as central rather than as supplementary, programs are able to abolish the meritocratic, aesthetic bias towards Western authors, thereby flattening the coloniality of the hierarchy.

Case Studies in Pedagogical Application

Practical integration can be illustrated through targeted classroom interventions that bridge pedagogies. For example, the use of US short stories as a point of comparison within the Global South enables the exploration of migration, identity and resistance, and the articulation of such themes across borders. English teachers, too, are providing spaces for Afro-Colombian and Indigenous students to bring their heritage to the classroom, thereby situating the classroom as a site of epistemic justice. Education for teachers is now prioritizing community wisdom during the practicum, thereby preparing educators to navigate various cultural situations while valuing community-embedded knowledge as a form of scholarship (Quintero & Clavijo, 2023).

Linguistic Inclusion and Academic Writing

To address the "coloniality of proficiency," a move toward translingual teaching strategies that recognize the multilingual students' language history is needed (Canagarajah, 2024) (Ndlangamandla, 2024). With more flexibility on the English variation and recognition of the local dialects, the curriculum is reflective of the language global reality and more supportive of access. This, in fact, challenges the traditional gatekeeping of standardized English and promotes a more open, intellectual space.

Institutional and Conceptual Barriers

The obvious advantages of a decolonized syllabus do not make the institutional and conceptual barriers any less challenging. Prominent global higher education institutions tend to encounter structural problems and conceptual "deadlocks" when trying to decolonize knowledge and, in fact, trying to blindly decolonize knowledge is ruthless (Seats, 2022). Also, South students are not left out. The global South students are the ones most assiduously out of the decolonized knowledge framework (Ndlangamandla, 2024). The nature of the standardized English is one of the rigid oppressive structures that penalize the global South students. It also acts as the greatest barrier to inclusion, and contributes to the constant epistemic injustice. Lastly, in a translingual and pluralistic classroom, the traditional frameworks of assessing student knowledge, conceptualized as measuring student success, need to radically change in order to assess locally responsive and pluralistic knowledge (Canagarajah, 2024).

Conclusion

The dismantling of colonial hierarchies within English literature syllabi and the commitment to new forms of epistemic pluralism makes the case for decolonization an exorbitant intellectual and ethical position. It is through the storytelling of the Global South, as well as community knowledge and the freedom of languages, that it can move the Global North beyond colonialism and inequity to an embedded

Global Humanities education. The examples provided, ranging from locally derived narratives to validated curriculum, pave the way for the designing of classroom spaces that legitimate the authority of all participants. The future of English Studies will require more than just the implementation of curriculum diversity. It will involve the urgent need to, first, collapse the coloniality of proficiency, and, second, to cross the translingual threshold in order to assert that English is a language owned by all and everywhere rather than by the few at the imperial center. Future research should unequivocally advocate for the longitudinal study of the socio-political agency of decolonized marginalized students. Furthermore, the future of the discipline will hinge on whether institutions can summon the own courage to revise arbitrary and antiquated evaluation protocols, which currently impose severe and inequarranted penalties for Western standardized expression. A decolonized syllabus ultimately prepares students to comprehend the modern world in all of its complexity while also teaching them to engage in the construction of a more just and equitable world, while fusing epistemic justice with the standard and the future of English literature. As such, the provision of decolonized pedagogies is the right thing to do and the future of literature as English is without question the convergence of a multitude of narratives and languages. As the world becomes more globalized with post-colonial influences, the humanities must adapt to stay relevant. This constant change is necessary.

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