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Character count: 24345

POST-COLONIAL PERSPECTIVES IN HISTORY EDUCATION: IMPLEMENTATION AT A CBSE-AFFILIATED HIGH SCHOOL IN INDIA

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Received August 14, 2023; Revised October 23, 2025; Accepted October 23, 2025; Published October 24, 2025

ABSTRACT

This study explores the implementation of post-colonial perspectives in history education at a CBSE-affiliated senior secondary school in India, with a specific focus on Kendriya Vidyalaya No. 2, New Delhi. The research aims to examine how teachers interpret and apply decolonized historical narratives in classroom practices and how students engage with these narratives. Utilizing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with three history teachers, and focus group discussions involving twelve students. Thematic analysis revealed that while the CBSE curriculum includes post-colonial themes, their classroom realization is limited by exam-oriented pedagogy, insufficient teacher training, and systemic constraints. Most teachers rely heavily on lecture-based instruction and textbook summaries, with minimal integration of critical pedagogy or indigenous historiography. Students, although interested in local historical content, found lessons to be largely memorization-driven and lacking in interactive or analytical depth. The study's novelty lies in its micro-level focus on the intersection between post-colonial theory and real classroom practice, offering empirical insights rarely explored in previous research. It also contributes a dual perspective—teacher and student—that enhances the understanding of practical challenges in educational reform. The findings suggest that meaningful integration of post-colonial perspectives requires systemic changes beyond curriculum revisions, including teacher professional development, alternative assessment models, and pedagogical innovation. This research provides valuable implications for post-colonial education globally, especially in nations seeking to reclaim historical narratives and promote critical, inclusive history education.

Keywords: Post-colonial education, history teaching, CBSE, decolonization, Indian curriculum

7 INTRODUCTION

History education plays a pivotal role in shaping national identity, collective memory, and civic consciousness. In post-colonial societies like India, teaching history is not merely about conveying facts, but also about interpreting the past through lenses that challenge colonial narratives and revive indigenous voices. Traditional colonial historiography, propagated during British rule, often portrayed India as a passive recipient of modernity and civilization (Chakrabarty, 2000). These Eurocentric narratives marginalized local histories, distorted socio-cultural dynamics, and underplayed the agency of Indian people. As a result, the post-independence period has seen increasing efforts to reconstruct history curricula to reflect indigenous knowledge systems and national pride (Thapar, 2002). Such efforts are essential for nurturing a critical and inclusive understanding of the past among students.

Post-colonial theory, as applied to education, critiques the lingering ideological and structural dominance of colonial frameworks in curriculum design and pedagogy. It advocates for the "decolonization of the mind" (Aman & Singh, 2022), which involves revisiting and revising educational content to reclaim cultural autonomy. In the context of Indian secondary education, particularly within the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) system, the history curriculum has undergone various reforms to balance nationalist perspectives with pluralistic values (Patel et al., 2024). However, challenges remain regarding political influence, selective historiography, and lack of pedagogical innovation. Understanding how post-colonial principles are practically implemented in history teaching—especially at the high school level—offers critical insight into whether current practices truly reflect a decolonized educational ethos or merely repackage dominant narratives in local terms.

One major issue identified in the implementation of post-colonial perspectives in Indian history education is the selective revisionism of historical narratives. While the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has attempted to include more indigenous figures and de-emphasize colonial glorification, the changes are often politically motivated and lack academic consistency. For instance, some regimes have been accused of promoting a narrow nationalist agenda by omitting certain episodes, especially those concerning minority contributions or contentious periods like the Mughal era (Tarannum & Khan, 2023). This politicization of content undermines the pedagogical integrity of history education and limits students' critical understanding of the past. Rather than encouraging multi-perspective analysis, such curricular interventions tend to promote monolithic views of history. This contradicts the core objective of post-colonial pedagogy, which aims to diversify and democratize historical narratives (Khatoon, 2022). Therefore, curriculum reforms must be guided by scholarly consensus rather than ideological convenience.

Another recurring problem lies in the pedagogical approach used by history teachers at the secondary school level. Despite curriculum reforms, many classrooms still rely heavily on rote memorization and textbook-based instruction, leaving little room for interpretative engagement or primary source analysis (Sharma, 2025). Teachers often lack proper training in post-colonial theory and critical historiography, making it difficult to translate curriculum goals into meaningful classroom practice. Furthermore, the examination-driven culture of Indian education discourages exploratory learning, pushing students to focus on factual recall rather than critical thinking. This gap between curriculum intent and pedagogical practice dilutes the transformative potential of post-colonial education (Tarannum & Khan, 2023). Without professional development programs and resource support, teachers are unlikely to shift from traditional methods to more inclusive, inquiry-based teaching strategies. Hence, the structural limitations in pedagogy hinder the effective implementation of post-colonial history education.

Although numerous studies have examined history education in India, most focus on curriculum content, political influences, or textbook analysis at the national level, while few address how post-colonial theory is operationalized in everyday classroom

practice. Particularly lacking is empirical research on how teachers in CBSE-affiliated high schools interpret and implement post-colonial perspectives in their pedagogy. This leaves a significant gap in understanding the actual impact of curriculum reforms on student learning and historical consciousness. Previous work (Saldanha et al., 2021; Vinco et al., 2019) has highlighted structural limitations in teacher training and resource allocation, but have not sufficiently investigated how these factors influence the integration of post-colonial narratives. Furthermore, there is limited qualitative insight into student engagement with decolonized content, especially in urban vs. semi-urban contexts. Thus, a micro-level case study examining implementation at a specific CBSE high school can provide grounded perspectives often missing in national policy analyses (Jauhiainen & Guerra, 2023). Addressing this gap is essential to assess whether policy-level reforms genuinely lead to epistemological shifts in history education.

This study offers a novel contribution by exploring the practical realization of post-colonial theory in a real-world classroom setting within a CBSE-affiliated senior secondary school—an area that remains underexplored in existing literature. Unlike previous research that largely critiques content or national narratives, this study investigates how teachers mediate between curriculum mandates and classroom realities. It further examines student responses to decolonized historical themes, thus adding an important learner-centered dimension to the discourse. By integrating perspectives from both educators and students, the research captures the lived experience of history education reforms at the ground level. This dual perspective contributes to a more holistic understanding of how post-colonial approaches are internalized or resisted in pedagogical practice (Efiloğlu Kurt, 2023). Moreover, the study contextualizes findings within broader socio-political dynamics of contemporary India, offering insights relevant to both educational practitioners and policymakers. In doing so, it bridges theoretical debates on decolonization with empirical classroom realities.

The primary objective of this study is to examine how post-colonial perspectives are implemented in history education at a CBSE-affiliated high school in India. It seeks to explore the extent to which decolonized narratives are reflected in classroom teaching, instructional strategies, and student engagement. This research aims to identify the opportunities and constraints faced by history teachers in translating curriculum reforms into meaningful pedagogical practices. Additionally, the study investigates how students perceive and respond to historical content shaped by post-colonial ideology. By focusing on a single institutional context, the study provides a micro-level analysis that complements broader national discussions on history curriculum reform. It also aims to evaluate whether the integration of post-colonial content fosters critical thinking, inclusivity, and historical awareness among students. Ultimately, the research aspires to contribute to policy recommendations for improving history education in post-colonial societies like India.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore the implementation of post-colonial perspectives in history education at Kendriya Vidyalaya No. 2, New Delhi, a CBSE-affiliated senior secondary school. The case study method allows for an in-depth, contextual understanding of pedagogical practices within a real educational setting. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis of history textbooks and lesson plans. The study involved a total of 15 participants, including 3 history teachers and 12 students from grade 11 and 12 who are enrolled in history courses. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the study's objectives. The interviews aimed to capture the teachers' strategies and challenges in applying decolonized content, while student perspectives helped assess engagement and understanding. This methodological framework supports a rich exploration of how post-colonial narratives are communicated and received in classroom settings.

The main data collection instruments consisted of interview guides, observation checklists, and a document review protocol. The semi-structured interview guide included open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses about teaching approaches, curriculum interpretation, and student reactions. Classroom observations were conducted using a structured checklist to track pedagogical behaviors, use of content, and student-teacher interactions. In addition, history textbooks and sample lesson plans were reviewed to examine the integration of post-colonial themes. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing the researcher to identify recurring patterns, codes, and themes that aligned with the research objectives (Aman & Singh, 2022). Data triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents enhanced the validity and reliability of findings. NVivo software was used to assist in coding qualitative data systematically. This analytical strategy helped uncover both explicit and implicit practices related to the decolonization of history education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first major finding reveals that history teachers at Kendriya Vidyalaya No. 2, New Delhi, show a moderate level of awareness regarding post-colonial perspectives, but their classroom practices remain largely traditional. Despite curriculum content that incorporates anti-colonial struggles and indigenous narratives, most teachers continue to rely on lecture-based methods and textbook summaries. Interviews indicated that while teachers recognize the importance of decolonized content, they lack adequate training to translate this into critical pedagogy. Classroom observations also showed minimal use of primary sources or historiographical debates. This finding aligns with previous studies highlighting the gap between curriculum intent and implementation (Brohinsky, 2023). As shown in Table 1, only 1 of 3 observed teachers actively engaged students with critical questions related to colonial legacies or indigenous resistance.

The second finding centers on student perceptions and engagement. While students expressed general interest in topics such as India's independence movement and Mughal contributions, many found the subject matter "one-sided" or "memorization-heavy." Students struggled to connect historical events to contemporary issues, partly due to limited opportunities for discussion or critical inquiry in class. Focus group responses emphasized a desire for more interactive methods, including debates, multimedia sources, and local history projects. These results indicate that the current teaching approach does not fully support the development of historical thinking skills. As shown in Table 1, only 4 out of 12 student respondents rated their history classes as "engaging" or "thought-provoking," suggesting a need for pedagogical innovation.

The third key finding involves institutional and systemic challenges. Teachers identified time constraints, syllabus load, and exam-focused assessments as major barriers to adopting post-colonial pedagogies. While the CBSE curriculum theoretically allows for critical engagement, the pressure to cover large volumes of content within a limited timeframe restricts exploration of alternative narratives. Teachers also mentioned a lack of professional development opportunities focused on historiography or critical pedagogy. These constraints reinforce a rote-learning culture that undermines curriculum reform efforts. As highlighted in Table 1, all three teacher participants agreed that assessment practices favor factual recall over analytical understanding, reflecting a systemic misalignment between curricular goals and classroom realities.

Table 1: Summary of Key Findings from Teachers and Students

Theme	Observation/Response	Frequency
Teachers using critical questions	1 out of 3 observed	Low
Students finding history engaging	4 out of 12 respondents	Moderate
Teachers citing exam pressure	3 out of 3 teachers	High
Use of interactive pedagogy	Rare (lecture-dominated)	Low
Support for decolonized content	Theoretical agreement, practical gaps	Consistent

¹³ The findings of this study confirm earlier critiques regarding the superficial integration of post-colonial perspectives in Indian school curricula. Scholars have long argued that while history textbooks may reference anti-colonial struggles, they often fail to engage with the deeper epistemological critique required by post-colonial theory (Fahrurddin & Saefuddin, 2025). Decolonization in education is not just about replacing colonial heroes with indigenous ones but about questioning the frameworks of knowledge production itself (Efiloglu Kurt, 2023). However, as observed in this study, teachers rarely move beyond content delivery to critically interrogate colonial ideologies or introduce counter-narratives. This is consistent that teachers often lack both the autonomy and training to implement progressive curriculum frameworks (Neuhaus & Vogt, 2022). Furthermore, the political vulnerability of history education in India, where curriculum changes often reflect ruling party ideologies rather than scholarly consensus

(Temerbayeva et al., 2023). These structural and ideological constraints limit the realization of a truly post-colonial pedagogy in classrooms.

In addition, the gap between curriculum intentions and pedagogical execution has been documented globally in post-colonial education systems. Emphasizes the importance of critical global citizenship education, where learners are encouraged to question dominant histories and power relations, yet such pedagogies remain rare in practice (Aryal & Bharti, 2023). Fahrudin (Fahrudin et al., 2025) has similarly pointed out that without institutional support and reformed assessment structures, critical pedagogy remains aspirational. Within the Indian context, the legacy of colonial schooling systems—emphasizing rote learning, discipline, and authority—continues to shape teacher behavior and student expectations (Gultom et al., 2024). Moreover, curriculum reforms often focus more on content inclusion than on transforming teaching methods or learning outcomes (Yusuf, 2025). This literature reinforces the need for systemic interventions that go beyond textbook revisions to include teacher education, resource development, and policy realignment. In this light, the findings of the current study illustrate both the relevance and the ongoing challenges of applying post-colonial frameworks in real classroom settings.

This study provides a unique contribution by offering a micro-level, empirical investigation into the practical implementation of post-colonial perspectives in a CBSE-affiliated high school—an area largely neglected in existing literature. While prior studies critique the ideological content of textbooks, this research moves beyond curriculum analysis to examine how teachers and students experience, negotiate, and sometimes resist post-colonial narratives within the classroom (Constantin et al., 2022). Unlike most research that remains theoretical or national in scope (Aman, 2019), this case study highlights the *lived realities* of pedagogy, including institutional constraints, student agency, and teacher adaptation. In doing so, it contributes to the growing body of literature that calls for context-sensitive approaches to curriculum reform (Visuddho et al., 2023). The combination of classroom observation, student interviews, and teacher perspectives offers a holistic lens that few existing studies have employed.

Furthermore, this study addresses the intersection between post-colonial theory and classroom practice, particularly within the Indian context, where political interference in curriculum design often overshadows pedagogical innovation (Hay, 2023). The research contributes original insights into how post-colonial content is internalized by students, how teachers interpret curriculum mandates, and how assessment structures either reinforce or hinder decolonizing efforts. Most importantly, it challenges the assumption that textbook reform alone is sufficient for meaningful educational transformation—a gap noted by scholars (Ogah, 2023). By documenting both the opportunities and limitations faced by a real institution, this study proposes a grounded, practice-oriented framework for integrating post-colonial pedagogy in history education. This nuanced approach distinguishes the present study from earlier works that treat policy, curriculum, or ideology in isolation.

This study offers valuable insights with global relevance, particularly for post-colonial nations grappling with the legacy of colonial education systems. By examining how decolonized history education is implemented at the school level, the research contributes to international discussions on curriculum reform, pedagogical equity, and cultural representation. Its findings can inform educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers in countries such as South Africa, Kenya, Malaysia¹⁶ and the Philippines, where similar struggles for epistemic justice in education persist. The study underscores the importance of contextualizing historical narratives and promoting critical thinking, which are central to UNESCO's global education goals. Moreover, it supports broader movements for decolonizing knowledge and pedagogy, resonating with international scholarship on inclusive and transformative education (Constantin et al., 2022). As such, the research not only enhances academic understanding but also provides a practical framework for advancing equity-oriented history education worldwide.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that while the CBSE curriculum in India has made strides toward incorporating post-colonial perspectives, the actual classroom implementation remains limited and inconsistent. Teachers demonstrate theoretical awareness of decolonized content but lack adequate training, resources, and institutional support to fully realize critical pedagogy. Student responses reveal a disconnect between curriculum intent and learning experience, with history often taught as static, exam-driven content rather than as a space for inquiry and reflection. Structural barriers such as rigid assessments and political influence further hinder the transformative goals of post-colonial education. These findings highlight a critical need for integrated reforms that address curriculum design, teacher capacity, and classroom practice simultaneously. Ultimately, the study reinforces the idea that meaningful decolonization in education requires more than textbook revision—it demands systemic change rooted in pedagogical empowerment and cultural inclusivity.

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