



# Evidence-Based Policy Suggestions By Global Education Monitoring Report (GEMR) For Establishing Equity In Education: Through A Decolonial Lens

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## 1. ABSTRACT

Drawing on the Global Education Monitoring Report (GEMR) and employing a decolonial lens, this paper critiques the evidence-based policy suggestions of international organizations in education. It argues that despite aiming to address inequalities, the GEMR inadvertently perpetuates colonial discourses and power dynamics. Through a deconstruction of Western norms and standards, the paper highlights how hierarchies are reinforced, the West is positioned as the primary subject of modernity, and the global north is represented a-historically. The paper then proposes a reconstruction of new norms and standards by centering the subaltern subjectivities, interrogating presumed political subjects, and challenging dominant socio-psychological mindsets. Ultimately, this study advocates for a decolonized approach to evidence-based policy in education to genuinely foster equity.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Evidence-based policymaking has become an important paradigm in education, with growing emphasis on utilizing research and data to inform decision-making and improving educational outcomes (Pellegrini and Vivanet, 2020). The principal objective of evidence-based policymaking is that policies should be grounded in robust evidence to maximize effectiveness and avoid the pitfalls of relying on trends or on unsubstantiated claims (Slavin, 2008). Internationally, evidence-based policymaking in education is pushed by several organizations that play a key role in shaping education agendas by generating and disseminating evidence, monitoring progress and providing policy suggestions to member states. One such prominent organization is the Global Education Monitoring Report (GEMR) which is hosted and published by UNESCO. The GEMR has been mandated by the Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action to monitor SDG 4<sup>1</sup>. Specifically, the GEMR holds the responsibility to “report on the implementation of national and international strategies to help hold all relevant partners to account for their commitments as part of the overall SDG follow up and review” (Global Education Monitoring Report Team & Network of Education Policy Centers, 2025). However, despite the growing emphasis on evidence-based policies, persistent inequalities in education remain a critical concern. This paper critically examines the evidence-based policy suggestions and monitoring practices of the GEMR, through an anti-colonial lens. In this short intervention, drawing on the reports and the policy documents related to GEMR’s work, I argue that the proponents of the evidence-based monitoring organizations including GEMR, unknowingly promote a colonial discourse and material relations of power that continue from the colonial era. Applying Meera Sabaratnam’s decolonization framework, I posit that this colonial discourse is evident, yet, still evolving with the help

<sup>1</sup> SDG 4 is a commitment to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

of the following arguments; (1) reinforcing historical hierarchies, (2) deconstruction of the west as the primary subject of the modern world history, (3) perceiving the global north as ahistorical, (4) reconstructing the subjectivities of the subaltern positions, (5) interrogating the presumed contours of the political subject under analysis, (6) challenging the constitution of the social-psychological subject (Sabaratnam, 2011). The paper concludes by discussing the implications of GEMR's evidence-based monitoring for achieving 'equity' in education.

### 3. DECOLONIZING EDUCATION

Education has mainly been viewed as a means of reducing economic, social, and now environmental inequalities. This paper will examine how colonialism and education are interlinked. It is a known reality that colonization created inequalities between countries and even amongst groups within countries. Colonial powers imposed their own education and language on the native populace. In almost all colonies, the colonial language was used in the administration, while continuously sweeping away the customs and cultures of those who were colonized. Native people suffered because of these impositions and the repeated misuse of education. Colonization and colonial schooling created the concerns of "superiority," "inferiority," "other," and "backwardness," (Mart & Toker, 2010).

Hence, the call for decolonization is fueled by these lived experiences of inequalities that reflect historically unequal power relations and colonial legacies (Faul & Welply, 2021). As a result, education, like other sectors, must be decolonized. "Decolonization is not simply one more option or approach among others. ...Rather, it is a fundamental imperative" (Abdulla et al, 2019, p. 130). The term "decolonization" encompasses a wide range of definitions, interpretations, aims, and approaches. "Decolonization" has two fundamental referents to position its political and methodological dimensions. Firstly, it is a mode of thinking about the world that studies colonialism, empires, and racism empirically and discursively, it repositions these phenomena as important shaping factors of the contemporary world in a setting where their importance has been systematically obscured. Secondly, it claims to provide alternative ways of thinking about the world as well as an alternative political praxis.

The primary objective of decolonizing education is to achieve justice and equity. Decolonizing education thus necessitates a critical examination of historical legacies and dominant forms of knowledge, as well as how they contribute to the privileged treatment of some individuals, countries, or cultures over others (Faul & Welply, 2021). Decolonization of education helps us to understand the different paradigms in which the colonial past is still intertwined with our present.

### 4. EVALUATING GEMR AND THE GAPS IN ITS POLICY SUGGESTIONS THROUGH A DECOLONIZED LENS

SDG 4 is one of the six SDG's that emphasizes international and the national commitment to leave no one behind in education. To ensure that no one is left behind in education, policy recommendations should be inclusive and equitable. There are a variety of organizations that facilitate governance in the education sector. Institutions govern and shape the dialogue discourse in education through norms and standards, data and metrics, evidence and monitoring, finance, etc. The Global Education Monitoring Report aims to provide thorough, relevant, and authoritative evidence to help achieve SDG 4 on education (GEMR, 2019). GEMR's mission is to synthesize, analyse, and present the best available data, evidence, and research to explain progress and disparities in education, as well as to provide recommendations that inform discourse and enhance policymaking. Each edition of their publication focuses on a specific thematic area providing policy recommendations and in-depth analysis related to that theme. GEMR plays a key role in legitimizing knowledge and influencing education globally. Their research is cited by various stakeholders, including by governments and international organizations, research institutions as well as by civil society organizations contributing directly to education strategies aimed at achieving the global education goals.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach of this paper is informed by decolonization theory as articulated in various studies within education and Political Science (e.g., Sabaratnam, 2011; Friere, 1996; Faul & Welply, 2021; Abdulla et al., 2019; Lin & Martin, 2005; Menon et al., 2021; and others) as well as existing literature on evidenced-based policy in education. In this short intervention, this paper focuses more on GEMR's past reports that have examined topics such as migration, displacement and education: Building bridges, not walls (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2019), and inclusion and education: all means all (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2020). With the help of the Sabaratnam's (2011) decolonization framework, subsequent sections of this paper will delve deeper into specific examples and thematic areas from the above GEMR reports and demonstrate how, despite the fact that the GEMR provides essential information and evidence for facilitating and monitoring progress toward SDG 4 in these reports, it still fails to fulfil its objective if looked at from a decolonial perspective.

Decolonization, as previously noted above, necessitates the deconstruction of Eurocentric norms and standards, followed by the reconstruction of alternative norms and standards. To simplify the analysis, Meera Sabaratnam's framework has been divided into two categories, and is as follows: -

## 6. DECONSTRUCTION OF THE WESTERN NORMS AND STANDARDS

Deconstruction of the western norms and standards requires educators and learners to question who, where, when, how and for whom knowledge is generated. It requires us to challenge the conventional knowledge systems that do not resonate with the experiences of the previously colonized nations. It is an attempt to unmask and overcome all forms of oppression against groups who have been historically subordinated by decentering ourselves from the Eurocentric objectification of the 'other' (Chandanabhumma & Narasimhan, 2020).

### 6.1 REINFORCING HISTORICAL HIERARCHIES

This strategy requires the deconstruction of the notion that the west is an epistemically privileged or centered subject that regards the rest of the world as its objects through the process of objectification. On examining GEMR, it was found that through their policy recommendations they are reinforcing hierarchical, subject-object relationship between the Global North and the Global South. What GEMR proposes as 'quality education' is problematic because their criteria for evaluating education is very rigid (Ipsos MORI, 2018). GEMR fails to consider the local context and continues to reinforce colonial hierarchies by supporting the measures and concepts of teaching and learning from the Global North as the norm or the default standard for evaluating education (Menon, et al., 2021). Cherubini and Hodson (2008), have also noted how Eurocentric ways of high-stakes testing have paradoxical and colonizing repercussions on aboriginal students and their ways of knowing. Hence, through the policy discourse of GEMR, not only is the culture of 'high-stakes testing' and 'standardized testing' being fixed, but they are also establishing monocultural ways of thinking and knowing (Shahjahan, 2011). Therefore, instead of urging Global South to use data, concepts, knowledge and methods of evaluation from the scholars belonging from the Global South, the GEMR is advocating for Eurocentric ways of teaching and learning (Zwiener-Collins, et al., 2021).

### 6.2 DECONSTRUCTION OF THE WEST AS THE PRIMARY SUBJECT OF MODERN WORLD HISTORY

This approach involves demystifying the idea that the Global North countries are technologically and economically advanced and are the original source of enlightened, universal ethical and political thought. It entails challenging primacy and the exceptionalism that has been historically claimed by them. After applying this approach, it was found that the GEMR successfully deconstructs the perception of the west as the primary subject of the modern world by providing a multitude of information and evidence claiming that even within the developed countries there exists disparities in educational development.

For instance, the GEMR claims that even the richest countries are not moving towards the global target on reading proficiency. GEMR highlights that even higher-income countries have many hidden out-of-school children because of social exclusion. Furthermore, GEMR demonstrates that in some higher-income countries, the teacher-pupil ratio fell by 20 per cent in 2020 (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2020, p.218). This line of evidence and monitoring by GEMR clearly indicates that GEMR is pushing beyond the binary thinking of the 'winner- loser' account of the world by decentering the western countries within the global education development domain and claiming that even the Global North countries are falling behind in achieving equity.

### **6.3 PERCEIVE THE GLOBAL NORTH AS AHISTORICAL**

At the core of accomplishing all the SDG 4 objectives is a social justice vision of establishing fairness in educational developmental practices by proposing effective policies. To achieve this vision, evidence-based monitoring organizations must address the colonial legacies and the continued cycles of subjugation, exploitation and marginalization of the oppressed people by socially dominant groups. Hence, this line of thinking requires an understanding of the geo-cultural conditions and historical backgrounds of the colonized nations. This domain emphasizes the prerequisite to understanding 'multiple modernity's' occurring in the context of 'connected histories' (Bhambra, 2011). It necessitates developing consciousness of an alternative and autonomous way of living and knowing of the Global South countries. As a result, in terms of education, this approach demands evidence-based monitoring organizations to consider the historical context while assessing or explaining educational developmental disparities worldwide. Such an approach would entail the critical reflection of the colonial legacies and the numerous ways in which it presently impacts educational development in the Global South.

Surprisingly, the GEMR does not consider the historical colonial backdrop of the Global South while providing evidence-based policy recommendations. This is clearly evident in all the policy suggestions that GEMR provides for the Global South especially the Sub-Saharan African countries. For instance, GEMR claims that "even if universal primary education is achieved by 2030, the proportion of adults who have not completed primary school may remain above 10 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa until the 2050s" (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2020, p.214). Moreover, an integral aspect of decolonizing education requires engagement with the historical knowledge and the cultural insights of the communities as it is instrumental for revitalizing aboriginal wisdom and in facilitating the creation of contextualized educational policies. Therefore, GEMR is failing to acknowledge the subtle effects of colonization on modern-day social structures and ignoring the past experiences of the local communities in the Global South.

## **7. RECONSTRUCTION OF NEW NORMS AND STANDARDS**

According to Smith (2012, p.66), the notion that Western knowledge and cultures are at the heart of "universal knowledge" has persisted for millennia. She argues that colonized cultures and their forms of knowledge were historically repositioned in a way that allowed colonial powers to validate their dominance and authority by labelling their knowledge as 'oriental' or 'foreign'. In accordance with this, Mitova (2020) describes decolonizing knowledge as the need to dismantle our ways of thinking about knowledge and reconstruct it by learning new ways, rather than those imposed on individuals, institutions, or nations via the process of colonialism. Furthermore, the idea of 'conscientization' propounded by Paulo Freire (1996) resonates with the concept of decolonizing education. He contends that to be free from political and economic oppression, people must follow a cultural action of conscientization. As a result, he argues that people must be aware of impediments that prevent them from developing and properly understanding reality as well as from acquiring capacity to change their own destiny. Hence, the above arguments highlight the urgency for the educational sector to take the decolonial perspective into account and reconstruct norms and standards by contextualizing and localizing education.

## 7.1 RECONSTRUCT THE SUBJECTIVITIES OF SUBALTERN POSITION

This approach involves analysing world politics from an alternative subaltern perspective. While exposing the numerous narratives which were suppressed by modernist history, this strategy urges us to have a more ‘interpretative engagement’ with the subaltern groups by understanding what they thought and what they were doing. Spivak argues that the subaltern cannot speak and question the actions of the colonial ‘subject’ and contends that the colonialists have silenced the voices of the subaltern groups through their benevolent impulses of representing the subaltern group (Maggio, 2007). Thus, this representation does more harm than good, as it appropriates the voices of the subaltern groups and silences them. And hence, for the subaltern to be included and accounted for – there is a need to recognize their cultural differences and their ability to communicate in their native language. Therefore, this strategy entails opening a dialogue with the subaltern groups and attempting to listen to their voices. As a result, with reference to governance in education, this approach demands organizations to take native language into account while suggesting policies.

GEMR recognizes the relevance of local languages and contends that they are a necessary component for inclusive education. For instance, GEMR believes that learning in the mother tongue is fundamental. Additionally, it also advocates for the notion that native language is a right and hence an essential part of any group’s identity (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2020, p.123). Consequently, this highlights that the GEMR seems to be echoing similar voices of the subaltern groups especially that of marginalized children and teachers who struggle in the English medium classrooms in English-dominated education systems. Therefore, according to this approach, the only way we can examine the subjectivities of the subaltern group is by resisting the legitimacy of the ‘English’ language as a dominant language and as the only medium of instruction in educational institutions (Lin & Martin, 2005).

## 7.2 INTERROGATE THE PRESUMED CONTOURS OF THE POLITICAL SUBJECT UNDER ANALYSIS

Sabaratnam suggests that we should investigate alternative viewpoints on colonialism, such as different visions of power and authority, as well as colonized people's resistance movements from their point of view. This strategy, when applied to decolonizing education attempts to repair the gaps in narrow, one-dimensional, Eurocentric curricula in educational systems. It is often assumed that global events, particularly those occurring in the Global South, are of lesser intellectual significance (Subedi, 2013). For this reason, the current education systems prefers favoring certain discourses and disregarding the ‘Others’. As a result, this strategy urges educational institutions to develop a global curriculum that is inclusive, multi-dimensional and promotes unbiased knowledge.

On examining GEMR, it was found that, not only does it seek to promote narratives about those who were historically marginalized but even those within the Global South countries who have been marginalized within their own society. For instance, it perceived the inclusion of the tribal ways into the curriculum by the State of Maharashtra, India as a constructive step towards promoting equity through the creation of an inclusive curriculum (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2020, p122). However, what is ironic is that GEMR devalues lower and middle-income countries that do not prescribe curriculum which resonate to children’s social, cultural environment and labels them as insensitive to local context. This is problematic because a proportion of these countries belong to the Global South and have been colonized in the past. As a result, the knowledge incorporated in the school curriculums of such countries reflect the histories and beliefs of those who have been historically in power from the Global North. This line of monitoring by the GEMR therefore gives a setback to its policy suggestions as it portrays its monocultural thinking. GEMR chooses to solely blame these countries for the absence of the localized contexts in curricula without acknowledging that their knowledge systems have been continuously eroded, damaged and marginalized by the colonizers. Therefore, even though GEMR values decolonizing curriculum, it simultaneously fails to develop a consciousness that is required to justify the gaps in curriculum building. Blaming those who have already been marginalized only extends the divide and marginalizes them even further. Still, GEMR is doing a remarkable job of promoting a decolonized curriculum by underlining the importance of recognizing differences and encouraging curricula to incorporate debates about social justice, racism, and oppression.

### **7.3 CHALLENGE THE CONSTITUTION OF THE SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL MINDSET**

The final strategy proposed by Sabaratnam is to challenge the affective dimensions of politics. It entails understanding, challenging and thereafter displacing the socio-psychological rationale that is produced by Global North. Given the recent emphasis laid on the psychic dimension in the context of international relations, she argues that there is a need to decolonize the mind. In the context of education, this strategy calls educators and learners to adopt an agentic mindset (Smith. T, 2016). This method necessitates fluidity in thinking and encourages individuals to embrace numerous ways of knowing while also attempting to comprehend an alternative point of view. Kanu (2006) has rightly pointed out that in order to decolonize education, we need to decolonize the mind. Drawing from this approach, educators need to stop stereotyping indigenous children. Indigenous children should be free from stereotypical colonial thought that they cannot perform as well as the non-indigenous children. Moreover, decolonizing the mind can only be successful if we address racism.

GEMR has made significant progress in tackling this problem although it is far from complete. While addressing the discrimination faced by the aboriginal students in Australia and Canada, GEMR highlights that racial discrimination has resulted in an increased risk of emotional and behavioral difficulties amongst the marginalized children (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2020, p.184). However, nowhere does the GEMR talk about the need to address racism to perpetrators, i.e., conducting anti-racist courses in the Global North. Instead, it only talks about empowering those who are marginalized. As a result, even though the GEMR recognizes the harm that racist and xenophobic acts have on the psyche of children, the other core half of this strategy necessitates the shift in the mindset of the Global North learners and educators which is not addressed by the GEMR. Thus, if we need to challenge the Western socio-psychological rationale prevalent in the educational system, we should first start by acknowledging the bias, followed by exposing educators and learners of the Global North to anti-racist and indigenous teaching methodologies.

### **8. EQUITY**

The question now is whether GEMR is promoting equity through its evidence-based monitoring recommendations. After applying the decolonization framework, this paper argues that even though the GEMR claims to inform dialogue and influence policy-making on inclusive and equitable quality education; when looked at from a decolonial lens, the GEMR only values the importance of contextualizing education and curricula but there is no evidence that it takes into account the colonial past to justify the gaps in inequality. Therefore, GEMR is claiming to establish equity through its evidence and monitoring tools, but it is falling short. It is failing to disentangle itself from Western ideologies, methods and materials. GEMR is narrowly focused on the quantitative aspects of educational development rather than focusing on the qualitative aspects like teaching and learning practices in schools and classrooms. As a result, to establish equity and justice for achieving SDG 4, changing curricula to include historically excluded narratives and events, rethinking and reevaluating testing methods, contextualizing curriculum and language and redefining 'quality education' is vital.

### **9. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, decolonizing education urges us to acknowledge the lasting and intergenerational effects of colonialism. It is an attempt to critically engage with those marginalized and make conscious efforts to deconstruct and decentre from Eurocentric knowledge and ways of being. Reconstruction, on the other hand, is an ongoing process and restructuring of testing systems, curriculum and monitoring are essential for inclusive development. By glancing at the evidence-based policy suggestions through the decolonial lens it is evident that the GEMR is following a Western fashion of knowledge production and dialogue discourse and is perpetually ignoring the inequalities forged in the colonial era. Consequently, fostering such conscientization in evidence-based monitoring is critical for achieving equity in educational policy.

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