



Education as cultural hegemony: Re-reading British educational policy in colonial India through Gramsci and Foucault

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Abstract

British educational policy in colonial India has usually been discussed in terms of modernization, administrative reform or the spread of English education. Much less attention has been given to education as a means through which colonial authority shaped ways of thinking, social behaviour and political loyalty etc. That gap matters. This paper attempts to examine how British educational policy functioned as a mechanism for producing consent, discipline and colonial subjects rather than simply expanding formal schooling. It asks how schools, curricula, language policy, examinations and teacher authority became part of a wider project of colonial governance. The study adopts a qualitative historical approach based on the critical reading of colonial policy documents, official reports, existing scholarship etc. Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony and Michel Foucault's ideas of power, discipline and governmentality provide the analytical framework. Together, these perspectives make it possible to move beyond policy history and examine the everyday practices through which colonial power became normal and acceptable. This paper argues that British education was both an ideological and disciplinary institution creating an English educated intermediary class while reshaping knowledge, identity and aspirations in ways that supported imperial rule. It contributes to debates on colonial education by offering a sociological reinterpretation that connects historical educational policies with continuing discussions on decolonising knowledge, curriculum, and educational institutions in contemporary India.

Keywords: Colonial education, cultural hegemony, Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault, colonial India, sociology of education, knowledge and power

Introduction

The expansion of British rule in India was not achieved through military campaigns alone. It gradually depended on institutions that could shape everyday beliefs, habits and ways of understanding Indian society. Education became one of the most effective means for achieving this purpose. As the East India Company extended its authority across the subcontinent during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it required a trained body of Indians who could assist in administration while remaining committed to the interests of the colonial state (Cohn, 1996) ^[6]. This need influenced the direction of educational policy. The Charter Act of 1813 marked the first formal intervention of the British government in Indian education by allocating funds for educational activities although the objectives remained closely tied to imperial priorities rather than the educational needs of Indian society (Nurullah & Naik, 1951). A more decisive shift followed with Macaulay's Minute on Education (1835), which promoted English as the language of higher education and argued that Western knowledge deserved preference over indigenous systems of learning (Macaulay, 1835/1995) ^[15]. Almost two decades later, Wood's Despatch of 1854 established a structured administrative framework by recommending educational departments, universities, teacher training institutions and graded schools across British India (Wood, 1854/1965) ^[22]. These developments transformed education into an important part of colonial governance. Their influence lasted well beyond the colonial period.

Much of the existing scholarship has explained colonial education through its historical development, administrative reforms and educational policies. Detailed accounts have examined the Charter Act, the Orientalist-Anglicist debate, Macaulay's educational proposals, and later reforms introduced by the British administration (Kumar, 2005 ^[14]; Nurullah & Naik, 1951). These studies remain valuable because they reconstruct the institutional history of colonial education with considerable detail. Yet another question receives far less attention. How did education itself become a means of exercising power? Schools did more than produce clerks or spread English education. They also shaped discipline, created accepted forms of knowledge, encouraged obedience and gradually influenced how educated Indians understood themselves and the colonial state. That dimension deserves closer examination.

The literature has also concentrated on the decline of indigenous educational institutions, the spread of English language education, the wider consequences of colonial educational reforms for Indian society (Viswanathan, 1989; Kumar, 2005) ^[14, 20]. These discussions explain many important historical changes but they rarely examine education as a social process through which colonial authority became normal and widely accepted. The gap remains noticeable. Very few studies bring together Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony and Michel Foucault's ideas of power, discipline and governmentality to analyse British educational policy in colonial India. Reading these two thinkers together shifts attention away from policy alone and towards the everyday production of consent,

disciplined behaviour and colonial identities. This opens a different sociological understanding of education under imperial rule.

Against this background, the present paper reinterprets British educational policy through Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony while examining colonial schools through Foucault's understanding of disciplinary power. It further analyses education as an instrument of colonial governance and explores how colonial educational discourse continued to shape institutions, knowledge, social relations long after the end of British rule. The discussion adopts a qualitative historical-sociological approach based on the critical examination of colonial policy documents, official educational reports and established secondary scholarship. These materials are analysed through critical discourse analysis to understand how educational policies produced particular forms of knowledge, authority, discipline and consent within the broader structure of colonial governance.

Literature Review

British educational policy in colonial India has attracted sustained scholarly attention although much of this work has approached the subject from the perspective of administrative reform and policy development. Early studies by Nurullah and Naik (1951) remain foundational because they provide a detailed account of the evolution of colonial educational institutions from the Charter Act of 1813 to the end of British rule. Similarly, Bipan Chandra (1989) ^[4] places educational reforms within the broader political economy of colonialism arguing that the British introduced education primarily to meet administrative and economic needs rather than to promote universal literacy. Krishna Kumar (2005) ^[14] moves beyond institutional history by demonstrating that colonial education was shaped by a political agenda that sought to create a class of educated intermediaries capable of supporting imperial administration. Gauri Viswanathan (1989) ^[20] offers another important perspective by showing that English literary education functioned as an instrument for legitimising colonial authority through cultural influence rather than military force alone. These studies have greatly expanded our understanding of colonial education. Even so, they largely remain centred on educational policy, institutional expansion and administrative objectives instead of examining how education itself became a mechanism through which colonial power operated.

One of the most debated issues within this scholarship concerns the controversy between the Orientalists and the Anglicists which shaped the future direction of education in British India. Orientalists favoured the promotion of classical Indian languages such as Sanskrit and Persian believing that education should build upon existing intellectual traditions whereas Anglicists argued that English should become the principal medium for transmitting Western knowledge (Sharp, 1920) ^[19]. The debate reached its decisive moment with Thomas Babington Macaulay's Minute on Education (1835) which dismissed indigenous knowledge traditions and advocated English education as the foundation of colonial educational policy (Macaulay, 1835/1995) ^[15]. Closely linked to this shift was the Downward Filtration Theory, according to which education would first be provided to a small elite whose knowledge would eventually spread to the wider population. In practice, however, this approach strengthened social

inequalities by concentrating educational opportunities among privileged groups while leaving the majority outside formal schooling (Kumar, 2005 ^[14]; Nurullah & Naik, 1951). The historical debate has therefore focused largely on educational philosophy and language policy rather than on the wider relationship between education and power.

A different line of scholarship examines colonial education as part of the broader machinery of colonial rule. Bernard Cohn (1996) ^[6] argues that colonial authority depended upon the systematic production and organisation of knowledge making education one among several institutions through which the colonial state classified and governed Indian society. This insight is developed further by Nicholas Dirks (2001) ^[8] who demonstrates that colonial knowledge transformed social categories such as caste into administrative tools, giving them a fixed character that strengthened imperial control. Partha Chatterjee (1993) ^[5] shifts attention to the cultural dimensions of colonialism by showing how education became a site where ideas of nation, identity and modernity were negotiated rather than simply imposed. At the same time, David Scott (1995) ^[18] argues that colonial discourse worked by shaping the conditions through which subjects understood themselves and their political possibilities making governance effective through knowledge rather than force alone. These contributions move beyond policy history by treating knowledge as a central element of colonial authority. Still, they do not examine educational institutions themselves through a combined sociological theory of ideological consent and disciplinary power.

Within the sociology of education, several influential scholars have developed concepts that help explain how schools reproduce unequal social relations. Pierre Bourdieu (1977) ^[2] argues that education rewards the cultural capital possessed by dominant social groups, thereby presenting existing inequalities as individual achievement rather than inherited advantage. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976) ^[3] similarly contend that schools reproduce economic inequalities by preparing students for hierarchical labour relations under capitalism. Their argument draws attention to the social functions of schooling beyond formal instruction. Michael Apple (2004) ^[1] extends this discussion through the idea of the hidden curriculum showing that educational institutions transmit dominant values and patterns of authority even when these are absent from official syllabi. A different perspective emerges from Paulo Freire (1970) ^[11] who criticises education that treats learners as passive recipients of knowledge and instead advocates a critical pedagogy capable of challenging relations of domination. Together these perspectives demonstrate that schools are deeply connected to the reproduction of power, authority, and inequality. Yet they have rarely been applied systematically to the specific historical experience of colonial India.

The existing literature therefore provides valuable insights into colonial educational policy, the politics of language, the relationship between knowledge and empire and the sociology of schooling. Even so, an important theoretical gap remains. No major study systematically combines Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony with Michel Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power, governmentality and the production of knowledge to explain how colonial education functioned in India. Gramsci helps explain how schools contributed to securing consent by

shaping common sense, moral values and cultural leadership within civil society (Gramsci, 1971) ^[13]. Foucault, by contrast, explains how institutions such as schools disciplined individuals through surveillance, examination, classification, routine practices etc. that produced obedient subjects (Foucault, 1977) ^[9]. Bringing these two perspectives together allows colonial education to be understood simultaneously as an ideological project and as a disciplinary institution. This combined approach moves beyond describing educational reforms or administrative policies and instead explains how colonial schools produced loyal intermediaries, normalised imperial authority, and shaped forms of knowledge that continued to influence postcolonial institutions. It is this theoretical integration that constitutes the principal contribution of the present study.

Theoretical Framework

Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony offers a useful way to understand why colonial education cannot be viewed only as a system for transmitting knowledge. For Gramsci, the stability of political power depends not merely on coercion but on the ability of dominant groups to secure the consent of those they govern (Gramsci, 1971) ^[13]. The state, therefore, functions through both political institutions and civil society where schools, religious organisations, families and the media shape values and common sense. This distinction is important. While political society relies on laws, administration and force when necessary, civil society works by encouraging people to accept particular ideas as natural and legitimate. Education occupies a central place in this process because schools influence how individuals understand authority, morality, citizenship, social order. Rather than relying on direct compulsion, educational institutions gradually cultivate habits of thought that make existing power relations appear reasonable. In this sense, schools do not simply transfer knowledge from teachers to students. They also create consent.

Gramsci further argues that every social order depends upon intellectuals who organise and circulate ideas that support its continued existence. He distinguishes between traditional intellectuals who present themselves as independent from political interests, and organic intellectuals, who emerge from and represent the interests of particular social groups (Gramsci, 1971) ^[13]. This distinction helps explain the role of colonial education in British India. English-educated Indians increasingly occupied positions as teachers, clerks, lawyers and administrators becoming intermediaries between the colonial state and Indian society. Many of them did not merely perform administrative functions; they also participated in spreading the values, language and institutional practices associated with British rule. The process was gradual, its effects extended well beyond government offices. Through curriculum, examinations, language policy and ideas of merit, schools encouraged students to internalise assumptions about civilisation, progress, and legitimate knowledge that reflected colonial priorities rather than indigenous intellectual traditions (Kumar, 2005) ^[14]. Gramsci's framework therefore suggests that colonial education was not simply an educational reform. It was an ideological institution through which imperial authority sought cultural leadership by securing consent alongside political domination.

Michel Foucault approaches power from a different direction, yet his ideas complement Gramsci's analysis in

important ways. Rather than treating power as something possessed only by governments or ruling elites, Foucault argues that power circulates through everyday institutions and social practices where knowledge is produced, organised and applied (Foucault, 1977) ^[9]. Knowledge and power are closely connected because institutions decide what counts as truth who is qualified to speak, and which forms of behaviour are considered normal. Schools occupy a significant place within this network because they classify students, regulate time, organise space and measure performance through continuous observation. Small routines matter. Timetables divide the school day into carefully regulated periods, attendance registers monitor presence, classroom seating establishes visible hierarchies, examinations compare individuals according to officially defined standards. These practices appear ordinary, yet together they create disciplined subjects who gradually learn to regulate their own behaviour without constant external force.

Foucault develops this argument further through the concepts of discipline, surveillance, normalisation and governmentality. Discipline operates through repeated practices that shape conduct rather than through spectacular punishment alone (Foucault, 1977) ^[9]. Surveillance encourages individuals to behave as though they are continually being observed making control increasingly internal rather than external. Normalisation establishes standards against which individuals are evaluated, rewarding conformity while identifying deviation. Governmentality extends these ideas by showing how modern states govern populations through institutions that encourage self-regulation instead of relying solely on direct coercion (Foucault, 1991) ^[10]. Colonial schools reflected many of these characteristics. Teacher authority, school inspections, examinations, written records, classifications of achievement and official documentation all became routine mechanisms for organising educational life. They also helped produce subjects who accepted bureaucratic discipline as part of ordinary social experience. This perspective does not reduce education to classroom instruction alone. It instead reveals schools as institutions where power worked quietly through everyday routines making colonial governance more effective because discipline eventually became part of students' own understanding of themselves and their place within the colonial order.

Colonial Educational Policy as Cultural Hegemony

British educational policy in India was presented as a programme of intellectual improvement and administrative reform yet its broader purpose extended beyond the classroom. Colonial officials believed that durable political authority required more than military strength or legal control; it also required shaping the beliefs and attitudes of those who lived under imperial rule. This was achieved gradually through education. English schools introduced new ideas about civilisation, progress, governance and individual success that reflected British political interests rather than local intellectual traditions (Viswanathan, 1989) ^[20]. The aim was not simply to educate Indians but to cultivate a group that would accept colonial authority as rational and beneficial. Macaulay's well known argument for creating a class of persons who were "Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and

in intellect” clearly reflected this objective (Macaulay, 1835/1995) ^[15]. These educated Indians became clerks, teachers, judges and administrators who linked the colonial state with Indian society. Their role was crucial. Through Gramsci’s perspective, this process can be understood as the production of consent, where schools encouraged individuals to internalise colonial values instead of relying only on direct political coercion (Gramsci, 1971) ^[13].

Colonial education also transformed the meaning of legitimate knowledge. Before British intervention, centres such as pathshalas, gurukuls, madrasas and Sanskrit colleges offered instruction in philosophy, grammar, logic, astronomy, medicine, law, religious learning within their own intellectual traditions (Dharampal, 1983; Kumar, 2005) ^[7, 14]. Colonial educational policy did not simply introduce European knowledge alongside these systems. It gradually established Western science and English literature as the standard against which all other knowledge was judged. The change was profound. Sanskrit and Persian, which had long functioned as major languages of scholarship and administration, steadily lost their official position after the introduction of English education (Nurullah & Naik, 1951). Indigenous systems increasingly appeared outdated because colonial institutions defined usefulness according to administrative and economic needs. This hierarchy of knowledge shaped public perceptions as well. European intellectual traditions came to represent reason, science, and progress while local forms of learning were often described as backward or impractical. Such classifications strengthened colonial authority because they made imperial knowledge appear naturally superior rather than politically constructed (Cohn, 1996) ^[6].

Language became another powerful instrument through which colonial authority operated. English quickly acquired a social value that extended far beyond communication. It became associated with education, government employment, respectability and upward mobility. The language itself carried symbolic power. Knowledge of English opened access to government offices, professional occupations and higher education, while those educated in vernacular languages found their opportunities increasingly restricted (Viswanathan, 1989) ^[20]. This created a new social distinction that was not based solely on wealth or caste but also on linguistic competence. English gradually became a marker of prestige and cultural refinement. It shaped identity as much as employment. Families invested heavily in English education because it represented social advancement even when this meant distancing themselves from local intellectual traditions. Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital helps explain this process, since language functioned as a resource that converted educational credentials into social status and occupational advantage (Bourdieu, 1977) ^[2]. Colonial rule benefited from this transformation because English education encouraged aspiration within a framework defined by imperial institutions.

The spread of English education also contributed to the emergence of a new educated middle class whose social position depended largely upon colonial institutions. Graduates of government schools and universities entered occupations as clerks, lawyers, teachers, judges, doctors and civil servants, creating a professional group that occupied an intermediate position between the colonial administration and Indian society (Chandra, 1989) ^[4]. Their growth

reflected changing economic and political conditions yet education remained the principal route through which this class expanded. Access was uneven. Opportunities for higher education largely remained concentrated among urban, upper caste, and economically secure communities, reinforcing existing social inequalities instead of reducing them (Kumar, 2005) ^[14]. Even so, members of this educated class later played complex roles in Indian public life, with some supporting colonial administration while others became leading figures in the nationalist movement. The relationship was never entirely straightforward. What remained consistent, however, was the central role of colonial education in producing the professional expertise and administrative skills required by the imperial state.

Schools themselves functioned as ideological institutions where colonial authority was reproduced through everyday educational practices. Curriculum, textbooks, examinations and moral instruction all contributed to shaping how students understood history, political authority, and civilisation. British rule was frequently presented as the force that introduced order, law, science and modern education to India, while many aspects of India’s pre-colonial past were simplified or portrayed as evidence of decline and stagnation (Viswanathan, 1989; Chatterjee, 1993) ^[5, 20]. Historical narratives therefore served political purposes alongside educational ones. Moral education encouraged discipline, obedience, punctuality, and respect for authority, values that also supported bureaucratic administration. Even classroom routines reinforced these ideas through inspection, examinations, and standardised curricula that rewarded conformity and accepted forms of knowledge. The process was subtle. Schools did not merely transmit information; they shaped common sense itself. Viewed through Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony, colonial education became an ideological apparatus that normalised imperial rule by influencing how students interpreted society, authority, and their own future within the colonial order.

Colonial Schooling as Disciplinary Power

Michel Foucault’s understanding of power offers a different way of interpreting colonial education in India. Unlike approaches that locate power primarily in the state or in legal institutions, Foucault argues that power operates through everyday practices that shape behaviour, organise knowledge, and encourage individuals to regulate themselves (Foucault, 1977) ^[9]. Schools became one of the most effective places where this process unfolded. Their importance did not lie only in teaching literacy or preparing students for employment. They also established routines through which students learned punctuality, discipline, obedience and respect for authority. These practices appeared ordinary yet they carried political significance because they produced individuals whose conduct increasingly matched the expectations of the colonial administration. The classroom became more than a space for instruction. It became a space where power was quietly exercised through rules, observation, classification, and continuous evaluation.

The colonial examination system illustrates this disciplinary process particularly well. Before the expansion of British schooling, learning in many indigenous institutions relied heavily on oral instruction, personal guidance, and the teacher’s judgement rather than standardised testing

(Dharampal, 1983) ^[7]. Colonial education introduced a very different model in which written examinations became the principal means of assessing knowledge and determining educational advancement. Examination did not simply measure learning. It also ranked students, classified them according to officially recognised standards and decided who would receive certificates, scholarships or government employment (Foucault, 1977) ^[9]. Merit increasingly became something defined through examination rather than through broader intellectual ability or practical experience. This change carried lasting consequences. Students gradually adjusted their learning strategies to succeed within an examination centred system where memorisation, standard answers and conformity to prescribed curricula were rewarded. Selection and control worked together. Those who performed well gained access to professional careers while those who failed were excluded from opportunities created by the colonial bureaucracy. Through this process, examination became both an educational practice and a technology of governance.

Disciplinary power also depended upon continuous surveillance rather than occasional punishment. Foucault describes surveillance as a form of power that encourages individuals to behave as though they are always being observed, even when direct supervision is absent (Foucault, 1977) ^[9]. Colonial schools reflected this principle through numerous administrative routines. Attendance registers carefully recorded student presence, inspectors regularly evaluated schools, teachers maintained detailed reports on conduct and academic progress, and examination records followed students throughout their educational careers (Kumar, 2005) ^[14]. These practices appeared administrative, but their effects reached much further. Students became accustomed to constant monitoring, while teachers themselves remained subject to inspection by educational authorities. Performance was documented, compared, and evaluated according to predetermined standards. Very little escaped record. The purpose was not simply to identify poor performance but to cultivate disciplined habits that students would eventually internalise. Surveillance gradually shifted from external observation to self-monitoring, making discipline increasingly effective because individuals learned to regulate their own behaviour before correction became necessary.

Teachers occupied an important position within this disciplinary structure. They were not merely instructors responsible for transmitting knowledge but also representatives of the educational authority established by the colonial state. Their classroom practices were shaped by prescribed textbooks, official curricula, inspection reports, examination requirements, leaving relatively little room for independent interpretation or locally grounded knowledge (Apple, 2004; Kumar, 2005) ^[1, 14]. Authority became institutional rather than personal. Teachers were expected to maintain classroom order, ensure punctuality, prepare students for standardised examinations and faithfully implement educational policies designed by colonial administrators. Their work was itself carefully supervised through inspection systems that evaluated teaching methods, classroom discipline, attendance records, and student performance (Nurullah & Naik, 1951). This relationship created a chain of authority extending from colonial educational departments to inspectors, teachers, and finally students. The structure was highly organised. Through this

arrangement, teachers became important agents in reproducing the routines and values upon which colonial educational governance depended.

The broader consequence of these disciplinary practices was the production of governable subjects whose conduct increasingly reflected the expectations of the colonial state. Foucault's concept of governmentality explains how modern forms of governance rely less on visible coercion and more on encouraging individuals to regulate themselves according to accepted norms (Foucault, 1991) ^[10]. Colonial schools contributed directly to this process. Students learned not only reading, writing and arithmetic but also habits of punctuality, orderliness, self-control, and respect for bureaucratic authority. These lessons were rarely presented as political. That was precisely their strength. Daily routines such as lining up before entering classrooms, following timetables, seeking permission to speak, completing written assignments, maintaining attendance and preparing for examinations gradually shaped disciplined identities that appeared natural rather than imposed. Identity itself became connected to educational success, professional respectability, and acceptance within the colonial administrative order. Students increasingly judged themselves according to institutional standards, measuring their worth through certificates, examination results, and official recognition. Discipline thus moved inward. Individuals began monitoring their own behaviour because they had absorbed the values promoted by educational institutions. This transformation illustrates Foucault's central insight that modern power works most effectively when external control is replaced by self-regulation (Foucault, 1977) ^[9]. Colonial schools therefore did more than educate future clerks or civil servants. They produced subjects who accepted bureaucratic discipline, recognised official authority, and participated in the everyday reproduction of colonial governance without the constant use of force. This process helps explain why many organisational features introduced during the colonial period continued to shape educational institutions long after the end of British rule, demonstrating that disciplinary power often survives political change through the routines and assumptions embedded within institutions.

Contemporary Relevance

The questions raised by colonial education continue to shape educational debates in contemporary India. Although British rule ended in 1947 ^[17], many institutional practices established during the colonial period remain visible in schools and universities. Examination-centred learning, bureaucratic administration, English as the language of higher education, and the close connection between educational credentials and government employment still influence educational experiences across the country. The legacy is not always obvious. Yet many assumptions about what counts as valuable knowledge, successful learning, and academic excellence continue to reflect frameworks that were strengthened during the colonial period (Kumar, 2005) ^[14]. This continuity has encouraged renewed discussions about whether India's education system should simply improve existing structures or rethink the intellectual foundations upon which they were built.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 ^[12] represents one of the most significant attempts to address these concerns. It places considerable emphasis on

multidisciplinary learning, mother-tongue instruction in the early years, flexibility in curriculum and the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into teaching and research (Government of India, 2020) ^[12]. The policy also recognises the importance of India's intellectual traditions in fields such as philosophy, mathematics, medicine, environmental knowledge, and language studies. This marks a noticeable shift from earlier approaches that often treated Western knowledge as the principal reference point for educational development. Even so, implementation remains uneven, and many institutions continue to operate within administrative structures inherited from the colonial period. Policy change alone cannot transform educational culture.

The debate over language provides another example of this continuing legacy. English remains the dominant language in higher education, scientific research, professional employment, and global academic communication. At the same time, increasing attention has been given to the role of Indian languages in expanding educational access and strengthening cultural confidence. The discussion is often presented as a choice between English and regional languages but the issue is more complex. English continues to provide opportunities for international mobility and professional advancement while education in Indian languages may improve participation and reduce barriers for many students (Mohanty, 2019) ^[16]. Both concerns are real. The challenge lies in developing a multilingual educational framework that avoids reproducing linguistic hierarchies established during the colonial period while preparing students for contemporary global realities.

Digital education introduces another layer to these debates. Online learning platforms, artificial intelligence, digital classrooms, and virtual educational resources have transformed how knowledge is produced and distributed. Yet digital technologies do not automatically remove older patterns of inequality or control. Algorithms, standardised assessments, learning analytics, and online monitoring have created new forms of surveillance that resemble, in different ways, the disciplinary practices described by Foucault (Williamson, 2017) ^[21]. The technologies have changed but many governing principles remain familiar. This raises an important question for contemporary sociology of education: have colonial educational structures disappeared, or have they simply taken new institutional forms? The evidence suggests that many colonial assumptions about knowledge, authority, language, and educational success continue to influence Indian education, even as policies such as NEP 2020 ^[12] seek to redefine its future. Understanding these continuities is essential if efforts to decolonise the curriculum are to move beyond symbolic reforms and address the deeper institutional legacies that still shape educational practice.

Conclusion

British educational policy in colonial India cannot be understood simply as a programme of educational reform or administrative improvement. The evidence presented in this study suggests that schooling formed part of a much broader strategy through which colonial authority organised knowledge, shaped behaviour, and secured political stability. Education stood at the centre of this process. Through curriculum, language policy, examinations and everyday institutional practices, colonial schools influenced what counted as legitimate knowledge who could access

opportunities, and how students understood authority and their own place within society. The connection was clear: education shaped knowledge; knowledge strengthened power; power generated consent; consent influenced identity; and identity ultimately supported colonial governance. Reading colonial education through Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault makes this relationship easier to understand. Gramsci explains how schools helped produce cultural consent by presenting colonial values as natural and desirable, while Foucault reveals how discipline operated through ordinary routines such as examinations, inspections, timetables, and surveillance that encouraged individuals to regulate themselves without constant coercion. Together these perspectives show that colonial schooling did far more than produce educated individuals. It also produced colonial subjects whose knowledge, aspirations, and patterns of conduct increasingly aligned with the interests of the imperial state. This interpretation also has contemporary importance. Many institutional practices introduced during the colonial period continue to shape education in postcolonial India, even as policies such as the National Education Policy 2020^[12] seek to reform curriculum and promote Indian Knowledge Systems. The structures have changed in many ways, but they have not disappeared completely. Recognising this continuity encourages a deeper discussion about decolonising education not only by revising textbooks or expanding curricula but also by questioning the assumptions about knowledge, authority, language, merit and governance that colonial schooling left behind. Such a perspective moves the discussion beyond policy history and positions education as a central institution in understanding both colonial power and its enduring legacy.

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