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# Decolonization, Early Childhood Education, and Human Rights- Based Approach: Regenerating New Cultures, Perspectives, and Actors

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## Abstract

This paper critically argues that education is considered one of the strategic tools in slicing up the colonial legacy, mentality, and 'the neo-colonialism governance.' This comes from a reflection on a supra-domination showed by the liberal countries to the developing countries specifically relating to the practice of early childhood education (ECE) under the shadow of a colonial atmosphere. Thus, this paper is aimed to propose a decolonization and human rights as perspectives in 'regenerating' a new model of ECE in the non-Western world that presents new triangle aspects: *cultures, perspectives, and actors*.

**Keywords:** Education, ECE, Decolonization, Human Rights, Third World

## Introduction

This article argues that efforts to link educational and human rights discourses have been considered widely as one of the challenging academic and political avenues in making the decolonization process of ECE closer to more diverse and particular contexts worldwide. The main issue that relates to the project and process of strengthening ECE deals with a deconstruction process of culture and perspective of education under the shadow and hegemony of colonialism (Davis, 2014).

Besides this issue, this article intends specifically to look at the trend that the educational perspective of ECE has been continually built through the interest of globalization. In this respect, global development, including education, has also been marked as an arena monopolized by the colonial power. Moving from the mood of this thinking, thus there is a fundamental need in searching and developing a framework for accommodating children, not as a second class citizens but becoming the main subject of overall educational process including ECE (Hägglund, and Samuelsson, 2009).

In this term, the idea of human rights has been promoted as a core basis for creatively and constructively rethinking ECE. Based on an ongoing global step, children and young people have been included as a central

concern of the educational system, strategies, and policies around the world (Tikly, 2001). Thus it is believed that human rights principles are considered as one of the main entry points in pushing for a comprehensive necessary to consider children at the central position of education and ECE process.

This article focuses on the main elements that form a solid understanding of the importance of providing human rights theory as a substantive standpoint in creating decolonization of ECE relating to its policy strategy and practices. This article is based on a review on wide-ranging previous studies and publications about ECE. By looking critically at the existing research on the issue, this article attempts to provide a scientific elaboration that may bring significant impact on the policy and strategy arrangement of ECE.

Moreover, this article contains four important elements. This article opens with a short introductory section. Following the session, this article explains education as a space for imperialism action and culture. After shortly showing the intersection between education and imperialism, this paper moves further into a crucial issue relating to the decolonization process of education and ECE. This article then elaborates one of the key elements of the discussion by introducing human rights as a *vital* perspective in seriously taking attention to the decolonization of ECE. Regarding this focus, this article identifies a human rights-based approach (HRBA) as a prospective framework for the making of ECE in the light of the decolonization project.

#### Education as a New Imperialism Tool

The connection between education and new colonialism has been agreed as a critical issue in contemporary academic inquiries. Theoretically, by comparing the old colonialism and imperialism model which is associated with the European imperialism in what so-called a colonial law and a new imperialism which is referred to the United State of America's (USA) position as a symbol of what is called the 'new regime of global governance', a fresh academic assumption has emerged widely that education is dominated and practiced under the hegemony of new colonial powers (Tikly, 1999; 2004).

Some studies link colonialism with what is called the "West." In this term, development becomes a mean for the West. The "West" treated development as an instrument for understanding and then controlling what so-called the "non-West." In the line of new colonialism and imperialism actions, education has been intensely engrossed as a key strategy and area for multilateral (global) development, global economic agencies, and neo-colonial institutions (Tikly, 2004; Chimni, 2017)). Politically, new imperialism power tries to undertake and corporate populations from between what is called the 'second' and 'third world' into the global government regime (Barrow, 2005).

In this matter, education has been accepted as a central interest of imperialistic power where multilateral actors and institutions consider this issue as a key aspect of their vision and operation at a global development space (Tikly, 2004, p. 173). Moving from this global scene, we are now witnessing the transformation of the legacies of the old imperialism at the global scale which also, in fact, comes into a massive contact with new forms of the Western imperialism (Young, 2016).

Some scholars put forward central concerns of their opinion and criticism by linking education and development. According to them, both education and development have been practiced in the pattern of a 'dominant and sub-dominant relationship.' This is obviously happening when development becomes a medium for the imperialistic powers in building rationality and dominant language through the development policies and the practices of education (Chabbott, 2013; Escobar, 1984).

Moreover, a number of studies on international politics and global development that specialize in a new model of colonialism also propose major conclusions by understanding new colonialism as a space for inventing dominant actions of the ruling countries. In this term, strategy and political aspects are based on what is referred briefly to as 'power' which is broadly not only privatized but also dominated by the political power existing at the imperialistic spectrum (Harvey, 2003; Keller, 2017).

In the context of new colonial operations, a scientific breakthrough should be initiated that focuses on how we should construct education as a part of a new 'anti-colonial and imperial politics.' Those initiatives should advocate a systematic mechanism in 're-building' a resistance to new imperialistic development. This can also be seen as an urgent reference that relates to the academic creativity of the 'third world countries' for moving away from the hegemonic mechanism strengthened by the Western countries in the shadow of what is called the 'super powers' states.

### Decolonizing ECE

Decolonization has been known as one of the most prospective fields to study. One of the important phase of decolonization related to the formulation of what so-called the 'Third World'. The 'Third World' term itself is derived from the Bandung (Indonesia) Conference of Asia and Africa Countries in 1955. This event also is known as a 'non-bloc' movement position that defines a critical response to the post world war global politic clash—neither joining on a 'Soviet-Communist block' nor the USA 'North Atlantic Treaty Organization/NATO bloc.' One of the central points of decolonization struggle and challenge to new imperialism position is that significant 'cultural diversity' affects what knowledge and values gain in "Non-Western Countries." This movement enlightens and inspires the development of a new culture of ECE practices worldwide by supposing the diversity (Buckingham, 2013).

Decolonizing ECE means a decisive mechanism in cutting off colonial legacies in various landscapes. One sample of Klose's (2010) study helps us in understanding how colonial power establishes its influences into social and political spaces. He spends the main focus on the colonial violence and the historical fact of the British attempts at legitimizing their brutal violence. Through his book, he describes the anti-colonial movement when he spells out the birth of what is called the 'Third World.' In the light of Klose's argument and Eckel's (2010) opinion, it is argued that decolonization brings a significant impact on the shaping or reshaping international politics. According to them, a political emancipation is to shape international politics profoundly. Based on the above insightful academic exploration, ECE needs a strong principle of children emancipation in the entire non-violent practice of education (Hart, 2013)

Furthermore, this challenge to colonialism and imperialism has emerged from different corners such as Asia and other parts of this world. Each of these challenges is independent, but they have raised similar major questions concerning a dominant and hegemonic character of imperialism on 'cross-cultural cases' and hence its legitimacy over the plurality of values and cultures in the world. Some thinkers argue that prioritizing individual liberty as immanent element of the "Western culture" could destroy 'communitarian values' as a core value of the "non-West" world. Thus, the essential and revolutionary question is whether claims to the practice of ECE based on various settings and cultures can also be justified as a "Non-Western World" or whether they are merely exercised in the "Western model" (Charlesworth, 2002; Dallmayr, 2002).

Between 1950 and 1979, the process of decolonization transformed the UN and the shape of many discourses on global agenda, including human rights discussion. Before this stage, the Asian, African, and Arab States that coalesced into the self-conscious "The Third World" brought a powerful new set of voices to those of 1948. In the light of this criticism, ECE can be re-understood and re-constructed through the strengthening of multicultural feeling and framework in its whole curriculum. It is argued that based on a 'de-colonial' process, ECE can be potentially more inclusive in providing a wider open space for diverse and various kind of capitals, actors, institutions that serve the need of children themselves.

It is worthy to discuss three interconnected responses to colonial legacies in term of introducing decolonization of ECE. The first response focuses on the deconstruction of inequality. This issue refers to a proportional increase in the number of students from marginalized races and economically low incomes. Another aspect that is also added in this response was starting to initiate a curriculum with a "non-Western perspective." Another goal of this first response is to increase a solidarity and diversity in a relation to manifestations of a wider recognition of the capacity of ECE participants (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012).

The second response to colonial atmosphere departs from a knowledge and awareness of the creation of inequalities characterized by the epistemological hegemony in ECE. This response can be achieved by a systemic analysis of the dangers of racialization and colonization regarding the structure, curriculum, and institutional logic of ECE which supports consistently racial and economic hierarchies (Di Tomasso, 2012). One crucial side to be considered in this context is a critical resistance to the institutionalization of the exploitation of ECE students into the trap of the curriculum and the dominant perspective of their teachers.

This decolonial process is primarily directed at the deconstruction of the hegemonic illusion in which modernity is used as a space to hide the non-third domination of world context and countries. The third response to the colonial culture of ECE should be based on the awareness and knowledge of the ontological hegemony that drives education as a symbolic framework of violent practices. In this line, colonization work more thoroughly both in the structure, curriculum, culture, and ECE actors. This response must link with the most fundamental challenge that the sustainability of educational institutions in general and ECE, in particular, can only be done through the decolonial approach (Cannella & Viruru, 2003).

All the previous understanding can inspire the practice of ECE in the non-Western World. Here, we should point out the need to build an alternative knowledge in existing ECE culture based on a comprehensive approach to the decolonial process of education. It is hoped that the process can bring constructive impact on culture, perspective, and involved actors in the entire process of ECE. As one sample, this does not only involve educators and government officials in ECE practices but also mainly open a space for other related potential actors that refer to the children's community and families.

More generally, movements arise to the extent that it may be possible to decolonize institutions and culture from ECE. In this context, there is one image that is not less important about whether ECE can function as a space where decolonization projects should be incorporated through the process of decolonized education. This idea departs from the assumption that if education, as well as ECE, are specifically created and adapted to support the order of colonial knowledge and then influence our existing social system, thus the extent to which education and ECE can be changed in the order of the decolonial process. As previously explained, human rights have been examined as a key element in the entire discourse on decolonization of education and ECE (Cannella & Viruru, 2003; Abdi, 2012).

#### Human Rights, Education, and ECE

Some thinkers argue that children's rights are generally understood as a specification of human rights principles (Arce, 2012; Nussbaum, 2017). Nonetheless, there is a sharp criticism that the convention on the rights of children does not actually reflect the differences in comparison to the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR). With that, we really need a greater investment of decisive actions and serious efforts to provide guidance or framework for childhood education. This should be highlighted as a political strategy for winning decolonization of ECE when the struggle for human rights becomes one of the main markers of this important process (Bell & Adams, 2016).

At a global scope, the right to education has been recognized as a basic human rights. Article 26 of the 1948 UDHR states that *"...Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory."* For the childhood education, the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child also affirmed: *'...mankind owes to the child the best it has to give', including education...*" (UNICEF, 2003). In addition, Articles 13 and 14 of the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) also recognizes a right to free, compulsory primary education for all, an obligation to develop secondary education accessible to all.

Regarding this main problem, human rights provide fundamental insight in restoring ECE as an impact and focus of the decolonization process at an educational level. In 1993, the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action, Human Rights, affirmed that *"...States are duty-bound. . . to ensure that education is a human rights and fundamental freedoms [and that]. . . this should be integrated into the educational policies at the national as*

*well as international levels...*" (the 1993 United Nations General Assembly, Part I, para 33). It is well argued that this declaration inspires strongly the rise of new models and approaches of education as well as ECE.

Furthermore, since General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) proclaimed a resolution on the World Programme for Human Rights Education (2005-ongoing) number 59/113 on December 2004, children have been linked closely and more detail with a human rights discourse and movement. It aims to advance the implementation of human rights education programmes in all sectors. Through this programme, UN emphasizes strongly that children and young people must have equal access to human rights education (HRE). Children should be entitled to the practice of ECE (Sen, 2005).

As also elaborated by some researchers, human rights are the tool for the empowerment process in the policy, agenda, and curriculum of education (Spring, 2016; Tilbury, 1995). However, before this process can be carried out as a philosophical stance of the educational practice, another compulsory effort that must be built is to make the concept of children's rights moves away from the domination of government, educators, and parents' understanding, perspective, interest, and intention. In this regard, when human rights discourse assumes three basic aspects, including human free will, agency, and autonomy, children themselves should be placed as educational resources.

All these principles offer a fundamental idea that interlinks three main issues, including human rights, children's rights, and education. Based on this standpoint, mainstreaming children's rights in educational policies and practices is becoming a core target, on the one hand, and also should refer to the development of the children's emancipatory atmosphere, on the other hand (Moss, 2007; Arce, 2012). This can be respected as an advanced movement than just partial action and strategy in which children are still treated merely as objects of ECE policy and practice.

Moreover, in the light of *subaltern class* theory (Spivak, 1988)—that is considered as one of the important point of views in the process of decolonization—a social transformation can only occur when the voices of the sub-alternates calls get a significant accentuation in the space for the formation of public policy (Mohanty, 1989; North, 2006). In this perspective, children might be perceived as a symbol of the subaltern call. Therefore, it should also be taken into account other fundamental aspects of how children's voices are accepted as an important foundation for the decolonization of ECE policy (Gupta, 2014).

Based on this view, the whole process of ECE, which is carried out in the context of the decolonization process, refers basically to a big idea of "*opening up the silence of hegemony discourse.*" Breaking up a dominant power on education at global and national systems created by the new imperialism global development and their 'comprador' actors at national levels should be a central target of the decolonization project (Acre, 2012). Human rights provide inspiration for this process.

One of the main references of the idea of ECE from a human rights perspective is on what is called the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This international convention was ratified and accessed by General Assembly Resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989. More importantly, the convention offers a solid basis for the main idea that children's education always faces a destructive tendency, produced or is conducted through the marginalization process of children. Marginalization is one of the most obvious forms of colonialism. In this point of view, children tend to be the target of the objectification, where education to be one of the main engines of colonialism (OHCHR, 1989).

It has been widely agreed that human rights perspective, regardless over ongoing debates on that discourse, is a key issue at a global development agenda. Human rights have also been used as a standpoint of constructing resistance against new imperialism platform at international development and relation. This study intends to analyze the 'role of post-colonial' (de-colonial) perspective and struggle including human rights movement in introducing a negotiation process on a non-hegemonic accommodation related to the policies and practices of ECE (Miles & Singal, 2010).

## ECE and Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA)

As previously presented, decolonization is also related to the human rights movement. For many victims of political oppression, social tyranny, civil brutality, ethnic murder, and vulnerable groups such as children and women, the human-rights framework has ironically been narrowed down and restricted to a political consideration and power relations (Mutua, 2013). As human rights education is a core focus of this study, this section aims to discuss human rights-based approach as a new perspective in the development of ECE.

The importance of HRBA has been determined by Rene Cassin. He was one of the 18 members of the Commission on Human Rights was made up from various political, cultural and religious backgrounds. During *the drafting process of the 1948 UDHR*, he reminded the member states of United Nations that HRBA is about taking human rights from purely legal instruments into effective policies, practices, and practical realities (United Nations, History of Document, NA). Human rights principles and standards provide guidance about what should be done to achieve freedom and dignity for all.

This situation reminds us on the importance of HRBA in dealing with the gap between fundamental claims of human rights on the one hand and the implementation of the principles on the other hand (McCowan, 2010; Shonkoff, Richter, van der Gaag & Bhutta, 2012). However, HRBA does not only relates to this goal but also mainly connects to a wider purpose in building a strong mechanism to protect vulnerable individuals and groups. The purpose of this section is also to elucidate the pertinence of HRBA in connection with ECE. It should be stated that a discussion on HRBA persistently helps this study to look at the way of incorporating effectively fundamental values of human rights to protect and fulfill children's rights as human beings in the practice of ECE. The international human rights require countries to domesticise such international treaties and conventions and integrate them into the national legal and policy as well as the framework of ECE (Rehman, 2002).

The universalistic nature of human rights requires a set of legal and normative standards for the entire mankind as the people across the world are eligible to enjoy certain rights irrespective of their ethnic, cultural, religious, linguistic and other identities (Bagchi & Das, 2013, p. 1).

The UN 2005 World Summit Outcome was a 'milestone' towards the global adoption of an HRBA (Frankovits, 2006). It was the first time that the Member States in the General Assembly resolved mainstream human rights into their national policies while endorsing former Secretary-General Kofi Annan's reform agenda to integrate human rights throughout the UN system (United Nations - the General Assembly Resolution, 2005). The Summit resolution affirmed a strengthened role for all UN bodies and agencies within their respective sectors and mandate areas in order to assist the Member States to mainstream human rights in their national policies (UNFPA, 2010, p. 28).

A human rights approach to policy is a policy that is informed by the need to progressively implement and construct the system and culture of ECE that decisively maintaining a wider space for children. It might be said that that HRBA identifies the level of commitment in implementing a human rights framework in ECE policy and curriculum and this then can possibly close the gap between the theory and practice of ECE and end a dominative element of ECE (Smith, 2008).

Taking HRBA is about using international and national human rights standards to ensure that children's rights are put at the very center of ECE policies and strategies. HRBA will empower, on the one hand, children to know and claim their rights and on the other hand to increase the ability of organizations, public bodies, and businesses to fulfill their obligations in supporting ECE. And, it also creates solid accountability so children, people, families can seek remedies when children's rights are violated in the practice of ECE.

A discussion on HRBA has also been expanded into a discussion of some of its fundamental characteristics (Haule, 2006). First, a pragmatic approach can closely define the step of action in every concrete situation and experience. This approach needs a strong and progressive humanitarian act, political, and also legal responses of the state and other actors/ institutions. In the context of ECE, this approach focuses on making it easy for

children, groups, families, community, relevant actors of ECE to claim their rights and the state's obligation (Elliott, 2006).

Second, a semantic approach to human rights connects with using many terms of the human rights theory and concept. This specifically concerns the case of the nuances and resonances when some elements of the human rights concept need to be applied in the legal arrangement or state-policy of ECE. This approach greatly deals with the human rights' terminologies in legal and political discourses.

Third, a normative approach to human rights can be considered as the foundation of the two other approaches. This approach mainly requires a comprehensive understanding of the philosophical and moral foundation of human rights in ECE policies and practices. This approach gives an 'ethical root' for semantic and pragmatic approaches to ECE based on human rights principles. When human rights should be implemented into humanitarian action or policy framework on ECE, the foundation of this implementation becomes the first concern of the approach. The normative approach provides a valuable consideration in building pragmatic and semantic approaches to the protection of child's rights (Bissell, Boyden, Cook & Myers, 2006).

Many global and national organizations stand beside the process, which is regarded primarily as a political step to implement the fundamental values of the international declaration. "*The PANEL principles*" are one way of breaking down what the HRBA means in practice that includes some elements (Scottish Human Rights Commission; a) Participation—people should be involved in decisions that affect their rights; b) Accountability—there should be monitoring of how people's rights are being affected, as well as remedies when things go wrong; c) Non-Discrimination—nobody should be treated unfairly because of their age, gender, ethnicity, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation or gender identity; d) Empowerment—everyone should understand their rights, and be fully supported to take part in developing policy and practices which affect their lives; e) Legality—approaches should be grounded in the legal rights that are set out in domestic and/or international law (Landsdown, 2011).

In a discourse on ECE, an approach like 'the *PANEL Principles*' is somehow about moving beyond the minimum legal requirements and mainstreaming human rights in services, policies, and practice to make them run better for children. It can be argued that this process motivates public policy around the world to create better access for many vulnerable children groups at what is called a 'low-level economic capacity' countries to enjoy an inclusive ECE (Tikly, 2011). This demands national bodies for expanding the human rights approach into a very particular focus regarding with the policy and practice of ECE.

Furthermore, another example of the national effort to expand the human rights approach is the Scotland Human Rights Commission (SHRC) attempt to involve and to integrate it into policy framework that promotes awareness, understanding, and respect for human rights at a national level. The process covers SHRC's activities and programs in education, training, awareness raising, impact assessment development, and promotion of best practice.

The Scotland Human Rights Commission (SHRC) has sought to implement and practice fundamental principles behind HRBA through the development and adoption of what they called "*the FAIR methodological framework*" (Scotland's National Action Plan for Human Rights, NA). This operational framework includes: a) Facts—what are the important facts to understand; b) Analysis—what are the human rights or issues at stake? c) Identifying Shared Responsibilities—what changes are necessary? Who has responsibilities for helping to make the necessary changes? d) Recall—over time, have the necessary changes occurred? If not, who is to be held accountable? Using the national methodological framework throughout the HRBA has allowed human rights bodies in many levels of governmental institutions to identify the facts and then to provide a common framework for the fulfillment of human rights principles in ECE.

HRBA needs the necessary platform for those actors and institutions to work together with others to identify and to strengthen the shared responsibilities through the development of various national and global action plans for interlinking ECE and human rights and to monitor progress and recall over time in order to see if the necessary



changes have happened. From this position, then, there are several key benefits of implementing an HRBA through ECE (UNPF & HSPHP, 2010): First, promoting realization of human rights and helps government partners achieve their human rights commitments; Second, increasing and strengthening the participation of the local community; Third, improving transparency; Fourth, promoting results (and aligns with Results-Based Management); Fifth, increasing accountability; Sixth, reducing vulnerabilities by focusing on the most marginalized and excluded in society (Weerelt, NA) More likely to lead to sustained change as human rights-based programmes have greater impact on norms and values, structures, policy and practice of ECE (Care International UK & DFID, 2005-2006).

### Closing Reflection

This paper focuses on the human rights perspective in decolonizing ECE. As accepted widely, this study also argues that a discourse on human rights basically links with a wide-ranging kind of human being daily life. Definitely, human rights reflect the quality of the social relationship between people and communities. In some senses, human rights have also been used as a fundamental standard in measuring the policy efficacy that relates to education as well as ECE. In many countries, human rights determine the focus and substance of ECE culture, perspective, and actors.

What is recommended in this process is an educational organizing effort that has an anti-colonial character. This effort refers to the creation of what is called an "autonomous ecology, caring for ECE by learning from the ECE system and culture of the past that moves under the shadow of colonialism. Decolonization produces and strengthens a new perspective in arranging ECE at a "non-Western World." It can be said that education and ECE becomes a just, inclusive, peaceful, and parallel arena for children.

This study justifies that decolonization brings significant impacts to the shaping or reshaping of international politics and development that directly influences ECE in the Third World. It is also said that decolonization—based on the interest of the concept which is always connected with a debate on the trajectory of interrelated domination, inequality, and injustice—can be seen as a *new culture* for constructing the policy and practice of ECE in a 'non-Western World.'

At this point, ECE proposes a response that led to and demanded the elimination of exclusion as a legacy of colonialism. In the context of ECE, decolonial means the systematization of the deconstruction movement of colonial heritage, which is still connected to ECE politics. Decolonialism, in the context of ECE politics, necessarily relates to efforts to fight individual and institutional biases from racism into the culture and atmosphere of ECE itself. At this stage, decolonialism also refers to the process of building an ECE that is inclusive and fair for children.

In this term, children are becoming the subject as well as the main actors of ECE practices. As a consequence, many related actors such as teachers and educators, government, private sectors should adapt their role and position in this new transformation of culture and perspective. In other forms of response to colonialism, ECE also deals with the dimensions of violence, capitalism, racism, patriarchy, heteronormativity. This can be understood as a part of outmoded ECE culture. The process under decolonization emphasizes ECE institutional transformation, which is significantly demonstrated in the redistribution of resources for the empowerment children from the poor communities.

In this insightful meaning of decolonization spirit, ECE must be put in place and should be incorporated into the children's mindset themselves—not a reality as a result of the fabrication of the thoughts of their parents, educators, and government (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999). This idea is understood as an important foundation for re-planning an appropriate and effective ECE in empowering children. This is based on a kind of awareness; then, children's rights will provide an accurate inspiration for ECE. Children themselves are being the main actor of ECE. HRBA can be applied as a new perspective and approach in strengthening ECE as a platform of raising and developing the capacity and freedom of children and respecting children's dignity in school. HRBA can provide a guarantee that children can enjoy the expression of their own interest and needs in

educational practices. They can be the first and primary source of education policies and curriculum (Covell, Howe & McNeil, 2010).

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