



# Indigenous and Critical Pedagogy in Political Science

Dr. Promila Dabas<sup>1</sup>, Laxmi<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

This paper explores the integration of Indigenous and critical pedagogy within political science education, emphasizing their importance in fostering decolonized, inclusive, and transformative learning. Indigenous pedagogy values oral traditions, community-based learning, and holistic education, while critical pedagogy, as theorized by Paulo Freire, seeks to empower students to challenge oppression and power structures. The research examines how these approaches intersect in political science, providing case studies from Canada, India, UN, and Latin America.

This research paper critically examines the integration of Indigenous and critical pedagogy within the field of political science. The purpose of the study is to explore how Indigenous knowledge systems and critical educational frameworks can challenge and enrich conventional political science curricula, thereby fostering inclusive, anti-colonial, and socially transformative education.

The study employs a qualitative, case-based approach, analyzing five diverse case studies from Canada, India, Latin America, Australia–New Zealand, and the United Nations. These cases were selected to reflect regional variation, diverse Indigenous governance models, and practical efforts to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into political learning. Through these cases, the paper identifies both the opportunities and limitations of current pedagogical practices and institutional framework. The paper concludes with recommendations for educators to implement these pedagogical strategies

## Introduction

Political science, as a discipline, often focuses on power structures, governance, and policy. Traditional teaching methods in this field frequently emphasize Eurocentric theories and perspectives, marginalizing Indigenous knowledge and alternative frameworks. However, integrating Indigenous and critical pedagogies can offer a transformative approach that includes diverse voices, encourages active engagement, and challenges dominant narratives.

Indigenous pedagogy prioritizes experiential learning, storytelling, and the collective wisdom of communities. In contrast, critical pedagogy challenges the status quo by questioning power relations and promoting social justice. This paper explores how these pedagogical approaches can be integrated into political science education, offering theoretical insights, practical examples, and case studies to illustrate their impact.

## Theoretical Foundations

### 1. Indigenous Pedagogy

Indigenous pedagogy is rooted in the cultural traditions, knowledge systems, and learning methods of Indigenous communities worldwide. It values relationality, respect for nature, oral traditions, and community involvement. Key characteristics include:

**Experiential Learning:** Learning occurs through direct engagement with the environment and community.

**Holistic Education:** Knowledge is interconnected, emphasizing physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual growth.

**Storytelling as a Teaching Tool:** Oral traditions play a central role in transmitting political knowledge, history, and governance structures.

**Elders as Knowledge Keepers:** Elders hold wisdom that is vital for understanding governance, leadership, and justice.

In political science, Indigenous pedagogy provides a framework for understanding governance beyond Western institutions. It highlights Indigenous self-governance, environmental stewardship, and communal decision-making.

### 2. Critical Pedagogy

Developed by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), critical pedagogy challenges traditional power structures in education. It encourages students to become

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Maharaja Surajmal Institute (mail: promiladabas@msijanakupuri.com)

<sup>2</sup> Research Scholar, Department of Education, Maharaja Surajmal Institute

critically conscious, questioning societal inequalities and taking action for social justice. Key principles include:

**Problem-Posing Education:** Students and teachers engage in dialogue, rather than passive learning.

**Conscientization:** Awareness of social, political, and economic oppression leads to transformative action.

**Education as Liberation:** Learning empowers marginalized groups to challenge dominant ideologies.

In political science, critical pedagogy helps students analyze systems of power, colonialism, and global inequalities. When combined with Indigenous pedagogy, it fosters an inclusive curriculum that acknowledges historical injustices and promotes decolonization.

## Integrating Indigenous and Critical Pedagogy in Political Science

### 1. Decolonizing the Curriculum

Decolonization involves restructuring political science curricula to incorporate Indigenous perspectives, histories, and governance models. This can be achieved by:

Including Indigenous political thought alongside Western theories.

Using case studies on Indigenous resistance movements and self-governance.

Encouraging students to engage with Indigenous leaders, activists, and scholars.

### 2. Active and Community-Based Learning

Both Indigenous and critical pedagogies emphasize experiential and community-oriented learning. In political science, this can be implemented through:

**Fieldwork:** Visiting Indigenous communities to understand governance structures.

**Participatory Research:** Students collaborate with Indigenous groups on political issues.

**Policy Analysis:** Evaluating the impact of laws and policies on Indigenous populations.

### 3. Storytelling and Oral Traditions in Political Science

Political science often relies on written texts, but Indigenous pedagogy highlights the importance of oral traditions. Educators can:

Use Indigenous oral histories to teach political events and governance models.

Invite Indigenous speakers to share firsthand experiences.

Encourage students to document and analyze oral narratives.

### 4. Challenging Power Structures and Colonial Legacies

Critical pedagogy demands that students question the role of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism in shaping political systems. Activities may include:

Debates on the impact of colonial policies on Indigenous sovereignty.

Analysis of Indigenous resistance movements.

Research on decolonization efforts in global politics.

## Case Studies

These case studies highlight how Indigenous and critical pedagogy can be applied in political science education. They demonstrate the diversity of Indigenous governance models, the challenges faced by Indigenous communities, and the transformative power of integrating Indigenous knowledge into political education. Below is a synthesized review of each case study.

**Case Study 1: Canada** – Indigenous Governance and Political Science Education-In Canada, Indigenous political structures, such as the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, offer alternative governance models based on consensus and collective decision-making. Universities like the University of British Columbia (UBC) have incorporated Indigenous governance into political science courses, enabling students to understand Indigenous law and sovereignty.

One example is UBC's Indigenous Governance Program, which blends Indigenous knowledge with political science to prepare students for roles in policy-making, activism, and governance. This approach fosters reconciliation and acknowledges Indigenous political agency.

This case study illustrates how Canadian universities, such as the University of British Columbia (UBC), have incorporated Indigenous governance models into their political science curriculum. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy, with its consensus-based decision-making, serves as a prime example of Indigenous political structures.

**Review:** The Canadian case study highlights a positive step toward decolonizing political science education. However, despite efforts to integrate Indigenous perspectives, challenges remain, including resistance from traditional academia and limited Indigenous faculty representation. The success of such programs depends on continued institutional commitment and collaboration with Indigenous scholars. Indigenous communities such as the Haudenosaunee Confederacy have long practiced systems of governance based on consensus, clan representation, and peace-making—models that contrast with adversarial Western democratic practices. Institutions like the University of British Columbia have integrated these systems into their

curricula through partnerships with Indigenous elders and community leaders.

This model shows how Indigenous pedagogy can be institutionalized within formal education. However, challenges persist: Curriculum design often still centers around settler-colonial structures, treating Indigenous governance as supplementary rather than central. Many instructors lack training in Indigenous pedagogical practices. Indigenous students may feel tokenized if the representation isn't genuine or deep. Despite these limitations, Canada's integration efforts set a valuable example. The emphasis on Elders as co-educators and oral histories in political analysis fosters a learning environment that is both critical and culturally grounded.

### **Case Study 2: India – Tribal Governance and Political Representation**

India's tribal communities, such as the Gond and Khasi, have unique governance systems that differ from mainstream democratic institutions. Political science courses in Indian universities increasingly highlight these structures to provide a comprehensive understanding of political diversity.

North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU) in Meghalaya integrates Indigenous governance models into its curriculum, ensuring students engage with traditional political systems and contemporary Indigenous struggles. This approach aligns with critical pedagogy by challenging dominant narratives and promoting Indigenous agency.

Review: This case study underscores the importance of acknowledging the political agency of Indigenous communities in India. While some universities are incorporating Indigenous perspectives, mainstream political science education still largely focuses on Western and national governance models. India is home to over 700 recognized tribal communities, collectively referred to as Adivasis. These communities possess diverse and deeply rooted systems of governance, shaped by ecological knowledge, customary law, and collective leadership structures. Notable examples include:

**Khasi Dorbar (Meghalaya):** A matrilineal, consensus-based decision-making system involving community elders and clan heads.

**Gond Panchayats (Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh):** Councils rooted in customary practices and spiritual laws. Ho, Santhal, and Munda traditional systems in Jharkhand and Odisha, based on participatory justice, forest rights, and community welfare.

Despite this richness, mainstream political science education in India remains largely disconnected from these Indigenous governance traditions.

### ***Key Issues Identified in the Case Study:***

#### **1. Marginalization of Indigenous Political Thought**

Most university-level political science syllabi heavily emphasize Western political theory (Locke, Rousseau, Marx)

and the Indian Constitution but rarely include Indigenous thinkers, tribal customs, or localized democratic structures.

Indigenous governance is sometimes framed as “pre-modern” or “non-political,” rather than as a legitimate alternative model of democracy.

#### **2. Disjuncture between Formal Representation and Actual Power**

While there is constitutional political representation (e.g., Scheduled Tribe reservations in Lok Sabha, state legislatures, and Panchayati Raj), actual political power of tribal communities is often limited due to state intervention and bureaucratic control.

The PESA Act (1996) – which mandates self-governance in tribal areas – is poorly implemented in most states, highlighting the disconnect between policy and practice.

#### **3. Limited Visibility in Curriculum and B.Ed. Training**

Most B.Ed. programs do not train teachers to explore tribal governance systems as part of political science education.

Teacher trainees are often unaware of the plural nature of India's political realities, reinforcing a “one-nation-one-democracy” model in classroom discourse.

### ***Does the Current Curriculum Align with NCF (National Curriculum Framework)?***

#### **Analysis According to NCF (2005 & 2023 Draft Updates):**

##### **1. NCF 2005**

Emphasizes inclusion, cultural diversity, and local knowledge systems. Recommends the use of contextual and experiential learning, especially in social sciences.

Advocates for a curriculum that respects India's pluralistic and multicultural heritage. However, in practice, most state and national curricula; Continue to marginalize tribal political knowledge. Focus on statecraft, parliament, judiciary, and modern democratic institutions, leaving little space for Indigenous systems. Do not offer space for alternative models of democracy rooted in tribal experiences.

##### **2. Draft NCF 2023 (Aligned with NEP 2020)**

Places a strong emphasis on Indian knowledge systems and local contexts. Encourages experiential and multidisciplinary learning, including critical thinking about social and political realities. Supports teacher education reforms that empower teachers to become knowledge facilitators rather than content transmitters. There is minimal integration of tribal political systems into textbooks, classroom activities, or field exposure. Recommendations for Alignment covers alignment of political science education with the NCF vision.

Include Tribal Governance as a Core Topic in political science textbooks, not just as a side note. Incorporate local case studies and field visits to tribal councils as part of

teacher training. Develop modules in regional languages that reflect Indigenous political thought.

### **Case Study 3: Latin America – The Zapatista Movement and Political Science**

In Mexico, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) represents an Indigenous-led political movement that challenges neoliberal policies and state power. Political science programs in Latin America often analyze the Zapatistas as a case study of Indigenous resistance, participatory democracy, and grassroots governance.

Through critical pedagogy, students examine how the Zapatistas' autonomous communities operate outside traditional state structures, providing a real-world application of Indigenous political theories.

**Review:** The Zapatista case study provides an excellent example of how Indigenous movements actively reshape political realities. It also reinforces the relevance of critical pedagogy in teaching political science, as students can critically engage with concepts of resistance, autonomy, and grassroots democracy. However, mainstream political discourse often marginalizes such movements, highlighting the need for political science curricula to include non-Western governance models.

**Case Study 4. Australia – Yolngu and Māori Governance Models-** This case study explores Indigenous governance models in Australia and New Zealand, focusing on the Yolngu people and the Māori. Both groups maintain traditional leadership structures while engaging with modern political institutions.

**Review:** The study highlights the resilience of Indigenous governance in settler-colonial societies. While these governance models are increasingly recognized in political discourse, they still face challenges such as state-imposed legal frameworks that limit Indigenous self-determination. Incorporating these governance models into political science curricula fosters a deeper understanding of political plurality and Indigenous rights.

### **Case Study 5. United Nations – Indigenous Participation in Global Politics**

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) serves as an example of Indigenous participation in global political decision-making. Indigenous representatives from around the world advocate for their rights, influence international policies, and challenge state-centric governance models.

**Review:** This case study demonstrates how Indigenous voices are gaining recognition in international governance. However, Indigenous participation in global politics often faces barriers, such as tokenism and the dominance of state interests in international law. Including this case study in political science education encourages students to critically assess global power structures and Indigenous diplomacy.

## **Challenges and Limitations**

### **1. Institutional Resistance**

Many universities remain reluctant to decolonize curricula due to institutional biases and Eurocentric traditions. Educators advocating for Indigenous and critical pedagogy often face opposition from conservative academic structures.

### **2. Lack of Indigenous Representation**

The underrepresentation of Indigenous scholars in political science limits the integration of Indigenous perspectives. Universities must prioritize hiring Indigenous faculty and funding Indigenous-led research.

### **3. Resource Constraints**

Implementing experiential learning and community-based research requires financial and logistical support. Governments and institutions must invest in decolonized education initiatives.

## **Recommendations for Teachers at senior secondary level;**

### **1. Institutional Commitment to Decolonization;**

Universities must create long-term strategies to decolonize political science curricula. This includes: Creating dedicated departments or courses on Indigenous political systems. Offering scholarships and fellowships to Indigenous students. Hiring Indigenous faculty with authority to design and lead curriculum reform.

### **2. Collaborative Curriculum Design**

Political science courses should be co-developed with Indigenous communities, ensuring authenticity and respect. Partner with local tribal councils, Indigenous organizations, and cultural institutions to co-teach and co-evaluate course outcomes.

### **3. Promote Multilingual and Multimodal Learning**

Include Indigenous languages in course content where possible. Allow students to present assignments using oral storytelling, film, or art, reflecting Indigenous modes of communication.

### **4. Expand Field-Based Learning**

Organize student immersions or community-based participatory research with Indigenous groups. Design fieldwork that respects cultural protocols and gives back to the community.

## **5. Train Faculty on Indigenous and Critical Pedagogy**

Host regular workshops on anti-colonial education, Indigenous ethics, and critical pedagogical theory. Invite Indigenous educators to conduct guest lectures and seminars.

## **6. Rethink Assessment Practices**

Move beyond exams and essays; use reflection journals, creative projects, and collaborative case analyses. Let students co-create rubrics that value process and growth, not just outcome.

## **7. Center Indigenous Political Theorists**

Introduce students to the work of Indigenous political thinkers like Taiaiake Alfred, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Vine Deloria Jr., and others. Compare their theories to those of Locke, Rousseau, and Marx to critically interrogate what counts as “political thought.”

## **8. Support Student Activism and Community Engagement**

Encourage students to participate in or support Indigenous rights movements and policy advocacy. Create student-led groups or clubs focused on Indigenous justice, providing platforms for organizing and dialogue.

## **Conclusion**

Indigenous and critical pedagogy offer transformative approaches to teaching political science. By decolonizing curricula, incorporating experiential learning, and challenging dominant power structures, educators can create an inclusive and socially just learning environment. Case studies from Canada, India, and Latin America illustrate

how these pedagogies empower students to engage with real-world political struggles.

For political science to be truly reflective of diverse political realities, it must integrate Indigenous and critical perspectives. Through these pedagogies, students become active participants in shaping a more equitable and decolonized future.

## **References**

1. Battiste, M. (2013). *Decolonizing education: Nourishing the learning spirit*. Purich Publishing.
2. Brayboy, B. M. J. (2005). Toward a tribal critical race theory in education. *The Urban Review*, 37(5), 425–446.
3. Coulthard, G. S. (2014). *Red skin, white masks: Rejecting the colonial politics of recognition*. University of Minnesota Press.
4. Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.
5. Grande, S. (2015). *Red pedagogy: Native American social and political thought* (2nd ed.). Rowman & Littlefield.
6. *Indigenous pathways of action and freedom*. (2005). University of Toronto Press.
7. Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. Zed Books.
8. Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). Zed Books.
9. Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1), 1–40.
10. Hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.