

Models of Teaching English in India a Critical Review of Pedagogical Approaches, Policy Frameworks, and Classroom Practice in the Indian English Language Teaching Context

Chandra Mukesh Swami (Assistant Professor)

Jagannath University, Chaksu, Jaipur, Rajasthan

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ABSTRACT

Few subjects in Indian education carry as much historical baggage and present-day urgency as the teaching of English. It arrived as an instrument of colonial administration, was retained after 1947 as a language of law, higher education, and the civil services, and now doubles as a marker of social mobility for some and of exclusion for others. This paper traces how these competing pressures have produced, over roughly a century and a half, a layered rather than linear history of pedagogy: colonial grammar-translation gave way to mid-century structuralism, which was in turn challenged by the communicative movement of the 1970s–90s, and all three now sit uneasily alongside the multilingual, learner-centred orientation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Rather than treating these as a tidy sequence of methods each superseding the last, the paper argues that they persist simultaneously, layered on top of one another in actual classrooms, because none of the underlying constraints that produced them — linguistic plurality, uneven teacher preparation, examination-driven assessment, and rural-urban resourcing gaps — has gone away. The review examines nine major models (Grammar-Translation, the Direct Method, the Structural-Situational Approach, the Bilingual Method, Communicative Language Teaching, Task-Based and Content-Based Instruction, the Eclectic Approach, multilingual/mother-tongue-based pedagogy, and technology-mediated instruction) against the specific realities of Indian classrooms, and closes by arguing that the country's diversity makes a single official method neither available nor desirable. What is available, and what the evidence supports, is a form of principled eclecticism: deliberate, trained combination of techniques rather than either nostalgic grammar-translation or an unreflective import of communicative orthodoxy.

Keywords: English Language Teaching (ELT), India, models of teaching, Communicative Language Teaching, Bilingual Method, multilingualism, National Education Policy 2020, washback, language pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

To ask “how is English taught in India” is really to ask several different questions depending on who is answering and where they are standing. A government-school teacher in rural Bihar, a private-school teacher in south Delhi, and a curriculum officer at NCERT would each describe a different reality, and each would be correct. English in India is not a settled pedagogical object; it is pulled in different directions by history, policy, economics, and identity all at once. Thomas Babington Macaulay's 1835 Minute on Indian Education formalized English-medium instruction for a colonial intermediary class, and the language has not since relinquished the dual identity that decision gave it: an instrument of opportunity and, for many, a marker of an exclusion that continues along class lines. The 2011 Census recorded English as the primary, second, or third language of well over a hundred million Indians, and its currency in higher education, the judiciary, the civil services, and the globalized service economy has if anything grown since.

Given a population this large and this linguistically varied, it would be a category error to expect India to converge on one teaching method, and it never has. What the historical record shows instead is accumulation: the colonial reliance on Grammar-Translation did not disappear so much as get joined, from the 1950s, by the structuralist pedagogy associated with the Central Institute of English (later CIEFL, now the English and Foreign Languages University, EFLU); the international communicative turn of the 1970s onward then filtered into Indian textbooks and curricula from the 1980s, without displacing either of its predecessors in the actual behavior of exam-driven classrooms; and NEP 2020 has now added a strong policy preference for mother-tongue-based instruction and digital learning on top of all of this. The paper's argument is that this layering, not any one method winning out, is the defining feature of Indian ELT history, and that recognizing it changes what “improving English teaching in India” should mean in practice.

Three questions organize the review that follows. First, what are the major pedagogical models that have been used or advocated for teaching English in India, and what theoretical commitments does each rest on? Second, how do these models actually fare against the concrete conditions of Indian classrooms — linguistic diversity, class size, teacher preparation, and examination pressure — rather than against the idealized conditions in which they were originally developed? Third, given NEP 2020's recent reorientation, what does a realistic path forward look like? The paper draws on established ELT methodology, Indian policy documents, and published accounts of classroom practice, while being explicit about which claims rest on solid consensus and which remain genuinely contested or under-evidenced.

Rationale and Significance

A review of this kind is only useful if it does more than catalogue methods, so it is worth being explicit about who it is meant to help and how. Teacher educators need a map of trade-offs, not a list of options presented as equally viable; a structural drill that works in a well-staffed urban school may simply be unworkable with fifty students and no teacher training in oral technique. Policymakers need a way of checking whether a curriculum mandate is pedagogically coherent or merely aspirational — NEP 2020's language provisions, discussed in Section 6, are a case in point, since their eventual classroom effect depends on examination reform that has barely begun. Classroom teachers, meanwhile, are often already practicing an intuitive eclecticism without a vocabulary for naming or refining it, and a review that takes eclecticism seriously as a method, rather than treating it as a failure to commit to one, can give that practice a firmer footing. Finally, for researchers, the review is meant to be honest about where the evidence runs thin, particularly for government schools outside major cities, which are chronically under-studied relative to their share of India's school-going population.

Scope and Organization

Section 2 sets out the historical and policy background. Section 3 explains the review's method and sources. Section 4 works through the major pedagogical models in turn — their theoretical basis, classroom procedure, and fit with Indian conditions. Section 5 turns from cataloguing models to analyzing them against five specific structural realities of Indian classrooms. Section 6 considers NEP 2020 and the pedagogies it has begun to encourage. Section 7 is candid about the limits of a review of this kind, and Section 8 closes with recommendations.

Historical and Policy Context of English Education in India

Colonial Foundations

English teaching in India is conventionally dated to Macaulay's 1835 Minute, which pressed for English-medium instruction aimed at producing administrative intermediaries between the colonial state and the wider population. That decision did not only settle the medium of instruction in elite institutions; it also settled, almost by default,

the method. English was treated as a written and literary object, approached through translation, recitation, and grammatical parsing, on the model of how Latin and Greek were then taught in British schools.

The Grammar-Translation Method that resulted treated English as a body of rules and texts to be mastered — vocabulary lists memorized, grammar explained explicitly, usually in the learners' first language, and comprehension checked against prescribed literary extracts. It produced generations of Indians who could read and, especially, write English with considerable formal accuracy, but who often had little practice speaking it. That asymmetry between written competence and oral fluency is arguably the single most durable inheritance of this period: it is still visible in the priorities of many state-board examinations today, and it explains why “the students can write good essays but freeze in conversation” remains such a familiar complaint among Indian English teachers.

Post-Independence Developments

Independence made English's status politically fraught in a way it had not been before. Nationalist ambitions to elevate Hindi and the regional languages sat uneasily alongside the practical recognition that English was not going anywhere as a language of administration, law, and higher study. The 'three-language formula', recommended in various forms from the 1960s onward, was meant to reconcile these pressures by teaching the regional language, Hindi (or another modern Indian language, in Hindi-speaking states), and English together in school. Its implementation, however, has never been uniform: some states introduced English from the earliest primary grades, others delayed it by years, and the formula's treatment of non-scheduled and minority languages has remained a persistent point of criticism, as Vaish (2008) documents in her account of its structural gaps.

Institutionally, the founding of the Central Institute of English in Hyderabad in 1958 (later CIEFL, now EFLU) marked the first serious attempt to bring applied-linguistic method, rather than literary tradition, to bear on Indian ELT. Materials produced under its influence, shaped by British and American structural linguistics, replaced translation exercises with graded pattern practice, controlled oral drilling, and a syllabus organized around frequency and complexity rather than literary canon.

The Communicative Turn and Liberalization Era

From the 1980s, the international rise of Communicative Language Teaching began to leave its mark on Indian curriculum documents, most visibly in NCERT materials and state-board textbooks, which started incorporating functional dialogues, information-gap tasks, and integrated-skills exercises alongside the grammar drills that had dominated until then. The 1991 economic liberalization gave this shift an unmistakably instrumental edge: as employment in information technology, business process outsourcing, and other service industries began to hinge on spoken English, the gap between what curricula aspired to (communicative competence) and what most classrooms could actually deliver (written accuracy under examination pressure) became one of the defining tensions of Indian ELT — a tension this paper returns to repeatedly, because it has not been resolved so much as inherited by every subsequent policy generation, including the current one.

The National Education Policy 2020

NEP 2020 is the most consequential recent intervention in this history, and its language provisions mark a genuine reorientation rather than a continuation of earlier trends. It recommends, wherever feasible, that the medium of instruction up to at least Grade 5, and preferably Grade 8, be the child's home language, with English and other languages taught as subjects rather than necessarily as the medium through which other subjects are taught. It also endorses multilingual education, digital learning tools, and a move away from rote memorization toward competency-based, formative assessment. It is worth being precise about what the policy does not do: it does not mandate any single method for teaching English. What it does is create a policy climate that favours approaches compatible with multilingualism and continuous assessment over those built around terminal, high-stakes written

examinations — a climate whose practical consequences for classroom method are still working themselves out, and are discussed at length in Section 6.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is a narrative and analytical literature review, not a primary empirical study, and its conclusions should be read with that distinction firmly in mind. The synthesis draws on three kinds of source: established ELT methodology, both the general applied-linguistics literature (for theoretical grounding) and India-specific scholarship (for contextual application); Indian policy and curriculum documents, including NEP 2020, National Curriculum Framework materials, and NCERT's position paper on the teaching of English; and published descriptive or evaluative accounts of classroom practice in Indian schools and teacher-training institutions.

The organization is thematic rather than strictly chronological, though Section 2 uses historical sequencing because the models genuinely did emerge in a rough order even as they later came to coexist. For each model examined in Section 4, four dimensions are considered: its theoretical foundation, the classroom techniques it prescribes, its documented or plausible strengths, and its specific limitations in India — teacher preparedness, infrastructure, class size, and assessment culture chief among them.

Because direct, controlled comparisons of these models' effectiveness within India are scarce, uneven in quality, and often confined to particular states or institution types, the paper favors descriptive and comparative synthesis over quantitative meta-analysis, and tries to flag, at each point, whether a claim rests on broad scholarly agreement or on more provisional evidence. Section 7 returns to this limitation in more detail. The approach is nonetheless appropriate to the paper's purpose, which is to provide an organized, critical map that can orient further empirical inquiry and inform decisions by teachers, teacher educators, and policymakers, rather than to settle empirical questions the existing literature has not yet settled.

Major Models of Teaching English in India

Each of the nine models below is discussed along the same four dimensions: theoretical basis, classroom procedure, and strengths and limitations specific to Indian conditions.

The Grammar-Translation Method

The method treats language learning as acquisition of a rule system and vocabulary, mastered chiefly through translation between English and the learner's first language alongside explicit grammar instruction. It rests on an essentially literary and analytical conception of language that privileges reading and writing over listening and speaking. In practice, a lesson presents a grammatical rule, then works through translation exercises in both directions, vocabulary memorization, and comprehension questions on set texts, usually literary extracts, with instruction largely conducted in the learners' first language and English reserved for the texts themselves.

Its strength is real: it builds explicit grammatical knowledge and reading comprehension, and it asks comparatively little of teachers in terms of oral-communicative training, which makes it logistically sustainable in under-resourced settings — a non-trivial advantage given how many Indian classrooms are exactly that. Its weakness is equally real: it does almost nothing for oral fluency or listening comprehension, and it can make English feel like an abstract, rule-bound subject disconnected from any communicative use. What keeps it alive well past its theoretical expiry date is not inertia alone but incentive: examination systems that continue to reward translation, grammar, and textual comprehension over spoken proficiency give teachers every reason to keep teaching this way, regardless of what curriculum documents say elsewhere. This is an early instance of a pattern the paper returns to under the heading of wash back in Section 5.4 — assessment format, not curricular rhetoric, is usually what actually drives classroom method.

The Direct Method

Developed explicitly against grammar-translation, the Direct Method holds that a second language is best learned the way a first language is: through direct association between word and meaning, without recourse to translation, and with grammar acquired inductively rather than taught as rule.

Lessons proceed entirely in English, using realia, pictures, and demonstration to convey meaning, with new vocabulary introduced through everyday situational exchanges and correct pronunciation given explicit attention.

Its case for oral fluency and listening comprehension is stronger than grammar-translation's, and it builds learner confidence in spontaneous use. But it is also the most demanding method on this list in terms of what it requires of the teacher and the classroom: sustained teacher proficiency in spoken English, intensive one-on-one interaction, and small classes — three conditions rarely all present in Indian government schools, where classes of forty or fifty are common and many teachers themselves had limited opportunity to practice spoken English during their own training. Its blanket avoidance of the first language is also arguably counterproductive for learners whose home language differs sharply from English, who may need first-language scaffolding simply to follow what a concept means, not merely how to say it.

The Structural-Situational Approach

Associated closely with the work done at the erstwhile Central Institute of English, this approach draws on structural linguistics and behaviorist learning theory: language is treated as a finite set of grammatical structures to be presented, drilled, and mastered in graded sequence, embedded in situational contexts.

The characteristic lesson follows a presentation-practice-production arc: the teacher introduces a target structure within a situation (asking directions, describing a routine), models it, leads choral and individual repetition, and then has students produce it in controlled exercises, with vocabulary and structures graded by frequency across the syllabus.

Many Indian teachers, themselves trained within structuralist traditions, find this approach familiar and manageable, and it has historically shaped a great deal of state-board textbook design and continues to underpin how grammar is taught in much of the country. Its limitation is the same one that eventually motivated the international communicative turn: heavy reliance on drilling can produce learners who manipulate structures correctly on the page or in a controlled exercise but struggle to deploy the same structures flexibly in unscripted, real communication. The gap between drill accuracy and communicative competence is not a minor footnote here — it is essentially the reason CLT exists at all, discussed in 4.5 below.

The Bilingual Method

Proposed and developed principally by C. J. Dodson (1967), the Bilingual Method sits between grammar-translation and the Direct Method. It accepts, contrary to Direct Method orthodoxy, that brief and disciplined use of the learner's first language to convey meaning can accelerate rather than impede learning — provided the first language stays a clarifying aid rather than becoming the medium of instruction.

The teacher presents a new English structure, gives an immediate but brief first-language gloss purely to establish meaning, and then has students practice the structure exclusively in English through repetition and meaningful use, reverting to the first language only when new material is introduced.

For India's multilingual classrooms this is a pragmatic compromise: it respects the cognitive and affective usefulness of the first language for comprehension while still maximizing active exposure to English, and it fits naturally wherever teacher and students share a common first language — a condition the Direct Method's total-immersion ideal simply cannot assume in most Indian settings. Its risk is discipline, not principle: without careful

control, first-language use tends to expand well past its intended clarifying role and the classroom drifts back toward grammar-translation by another name. It also presumes a genuinely bilingual, judgment-exercising teacher, which is itself an assumption about teacher training that does not hold everywhere.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

CLT emerged internationally from the 1970s on the premise that the goal of language teaching is communicative competence — the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately — rather than grammatical competence alone, with accuracy treated as one component among fluency, appropriateness, and strategic competence.

Classrooms built on this premise favour information-gap activities, role-play, pair and group work, and authentic materials such as advertisements or news reports, with grammar taught in service of communicative goals rather than as an end in itself, and errors that do not impede communication tolerated more readily than under earlier methods.

CLT's appeal in India is obvious: it targets exactly the practical, spoken competence most learners actually want, and it has visibly shaped contemporary NCERT and state-board textbooks. Its obstacles in Indian classrooms are just as obvious, and worth stating plainly rather than glossing over: large classes make sustained pair and group work logistically hard to sustain; many teachers were themselves trained under grammar-centred traditions and were never given confidence or technique for facilitating communicative activities; and high-stakes written examinations actively reward grammar and writing practice over oral communicative work. The result, widely noted in the literature on Indian ELT, is a persistent gap between the communicative aspirations stated in curriculum documents and the grammar-translation habits that actually survive in examination-driven classrooms. This is not a failure of teachers so much as a rational response to the incentives they face — which is precisely why Section 5.4 argues that assessment reform, not further curricular rhetoric, is the real lever here.

Task-Based and Content-Based Approaches

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) extends the communicative paradigm by organizing instruction around completing a meaningful task — planning an event, solving a problem, producing a product — with language emerging as a means to that end rather than as the explicit object of study. Content-Based Instruction (CBI) integrates language learning with the study of subject content, such as science or social studies, on the premise that learners acquire language more readily when engaged with substantive material.

In TBLT, the lesson is organized around a task outcome, with language support offered before, during, and after the task rather than through a pre-specified grammar sequence; in CBI, English becomes the vehicle for teaching another subject, or English lessons draw heavily on cross-curricular content.

Both approaches can raise learner engagement by giving language use a genuine purpose, and elements of task-based learning have found their way into some of India's more progressive curricula and project-based assessment components. But both also ask a great deal of teachers — designing and managing tasks, or integrating language and content objectives simultaneously — and neither maps comfortably onto discrete-skill, written testing, which limits their reach outside well-resourced schools and pilot programs.

The Eclectic Approach

Eclecticism is not a method so much as a stance: the position that no single method covers the full range of learner needs, classroom conditions, and objectives, and that teachers should therefore draw selectively and deliberately on techniques from several methods depending on the learners, content, and context in front of them.

An eclectic teacher might use structured drilling to introduce a new pattern, a brief first-language gloss to clarify a difficult concept, a communicative pair activity to put the pattern into use, and a short written exercise to

consolidate accuracy — varying the mix by lesson goal and class need rather than by loyalty to any one school of thought.

Given the sheer range of conditions across India's classrooms — regional language background, urban-rural infrastructure gaps, teacher preparation, learner motivation — it is not surprising that Indian ELT scholars and teacher educators have tended to converge on eclecticism as the most defensible practical stance, since it lets teachers respond to local constraints rather than forcing a theoretically pure but practically unworkable method onto every setting. Its risk, and it is a genuine one, is that eclecticism without a clear underlying rationale collapses into an inconsistent mixture of techniques that develops no skill systematically. Effective eclectic teaching, in other words, is not the absence of a method but a more demanding one, since it depends on exactly the professional judgment and training that remain unevenly distributed across the country — which is why the paper's recommendations in Section 8 treat “train teachers to be eclectic” as a specific, actionable goal rather than a vague aspiration.

Multilingual and Mother-Tongue-Based Approaches

Drawing on a substantial body of bilingual and multilingual education research, this family of approaches holds that strong foundational literacy and conceptual development in a learner's first or home language facilitates rather than impedes subsequent learning of additional languages, including English. NEP 2020's emphasis on home-language instruction in the early grades has given this position considerable policy traction in India, though it should be said that the underlying research tradition long predates the policy.

Rather than treating the regional language and English as competing or sequential systems, these approaches encourage translanguaging — the fluid, purposeful movement between languages within a single lesson — alongside continued first-language literacy development even as English is introduced as a subject. In practice this can include bilingual picture books, deliberate code-switching as a pedagogical resource rather than a lapse to be corrected, and explicit cross-language comparison to build metalinguistic awareness.

These approaches fit the linguistic reality of most Indian classrooms unusually well, since most learners already bring a multilingual repertoire rather than a single home language, and they may reduce the alienation that early, exclusive English-medium instruction can produce for children whose home language is furthest from English. The honest caveat is twofold: large-scale implementation requires trained teachers and materials across an extraordinary number of languages and dialects, which is a resourcing challenge of real magnitude, not a minor logistical detail; and because the policy shift is recent, robust, large-scale Indian evidence specifically on English-proficiency outcomes under these approaches is still emerging rather than settled. Enthusiasm for translanguaging as a matter of linguistic and educational principle should not be mistaken for an established empirical verdict on its effect on measured English outcomes in India — those are two separate claims, and this paper treats them as such.

Technology-Mediated and Blended Approaches

Technology-mediated instruction is a delivery mode rather than a single pedagogical theory, and it can in principle carry communicative, structural, or self-directed learning content: language-learning applications, recorded audio-visual material, interactive whiteboards, and increasingly AI-assisted conversational practice tools.

Implementation ranges from fully blended classrooms combining teacher-led instruction with structured digital practice, to supplementary use of recorded listening material, to state-run digital classroom initiatives and educational broadcasting, the latter having gained particular prominence during pandemic-era school closures.

The upside is real: technology can expose learners to proficient models of pronunciation and usage, allow self-paced practice, and partially offset shortages of qualified spoken-English teachers in remote areas. The downside is equally real and, in the Indian context, arguably the more decisive consideration: the digital divide remains

substantial, with sharp disparities in device access, connectivity, and digital literacy between urban and rural areas and across income groups. Technology-mediated ELT is therefore not automatically equalizing; left to market or infrastructure forces alone, it is at least as likely to widen the gap between well-resourced and under-resourced schools as to close it, and it becomes equalizing only where equity of access is a deliberate design goal rather than an assumed by-product.

Comparative Summary of Models

Table 1 summarizes the nine models by primary focus, typical classroom emphasis, and the principal constraint each faces in Indian settings.

Model	Primary Focus	Typical Emphasis	Principal Indian Constraint
Grammar-Translation	Written accuracy, literary text	Translation, rules, vocabulary lists	Weak oral fluency outcomes
Direct Method	Oral immersion	English-only interaction, inductive grammar	Requires highly proficient teachers, small classes
Structural-Situational	Graded structures	Pattern drills, presentation-practice-production	Can neglect spontaneous communication
Bilingual Method	Efficient meaning transfer	Brief L1 gloss, English practice	Requires disciplined, judicious L1 use
Communicative (CLT)	Communicative competence	Pair/group tasks, authentic materials	Large classes; exam systems reward grammar/writing
Task-Based / Content-Based	Meaningful task or content	Outcome-driven tasks, integrated content	High teacher skill demand; assessment misalignment
Eclectic Approach	Context-responsive blend	Mixed techniques per lesson goal	Depends on teacher judgment and training
Multilingual / Mother-Tongue-Based	L1-supported literacy and learning	Translanguaging, cross-language comparison	Resourcing across many languages; nascent evidence
Technology-Mediated / Blended	Digital exposure and practice	Apps, recordings, blended delivery	Digital divide; urban-rural access gap

Table 1. Comparative summary of major English teaching models in the Indian context.

Comparative Analysis: Models against Indian Classroom Realities

The previous section examined each model in relative isolation. This section inverts the frame: rather than asking how well a given model performs in the abstract, it asks what happens when five specific, well-documented features of Indian classrooms are held constant and every model is measured against them. The point of doing

this is to make explicit a claim that is only implicit in Section 4 — that a model's “success” is not a property of the method alone but of the fit between the method and the setting it is dropped into.

Linguistic Diversity

The Census recognizes twenty-two scheduled languages, and several hundred additional languages and dialects besides, which means English is rarely a classroom's second language in any uniform sense: for one learner it may be a second language, for the next a third or fourth, and the first language shared across a single class may vary considerably even within one school district. Models that assume a single, shared first language, such as the classic Bilingual Method, work well precisely where that assumption holds and require real adaptation where it does not. Multilingual and translanguaging approaches are, in principle, better matched to this diversity — but “better matched in principle” is doing real work in that sentence, since successful implementation still depends on a teacher's skill in managing several languages simultaneously, which is not a trivial demand to place on any single classroom practitioner.

Class Size and Infrastructure

Government classrooms in many states routinely exceed recommended pupil-teacher ratios, particularly at the primary level, and rural schools especially continue to face shortages of trained English teachers, materials, and reliable electricity or connectivity. These conditions systematically favour models that can run as whole-class, teacher-led instruction with minimal materials — structural drilling, or increasingly, low-bandwidth audio interventions — and systematically disadvantage models that presuppose small-group work, individualized feedback, or stable digital infrastructure, such as fully communicative or fully technology-mediated teaching. It is worth being blunt about the implication: a model's theoretical superiority is worth very little if the classroom cannot physically support it.

Teacher Preparation

A theme that recurs across the Indian ELT literature is the gap between what curricula ask for and what teachers have been prepared to deliver. Many in-service teachers, government-school teachers especially, were themselves educated under grammar-translation or structural traditions and have had limited sustained professional development in communicative or task-based methodology since. Pre-service teacher education varies considerably in how much contemporary ELT methodology it actually exposes trainees to. This gap is not incidental — it is the mechanism that explains why curriculum documents can articulate communicative objectives that classroom practice simply does not realize, a disjunction noted repeatedly in the literature and one that no amount of textbook redesign alone can close.

Assessment and Examination Culture

If one constraint deserves to be called the single most powerful determinant of pedagogical choice in India, it is the continued dominance of high-stakes, largely written board examinations at the secondary and higher-secondary levels. The relevant concept here, from language-testing research, is wash back: the extent to which a test's power over outcomes shapes what teachers and learners actually do, independent of what either would otherwise choose to do (Alderson & Wall, 1993). Wash back in the Indian ELT context is overwhelmingly negative for communicative and task-based teaching, because oral tasks and project-based assessment do not map cleanly onto examination formats and therefore receive less classroom time than grammar exercises, comprehension passages, and writing practice that mirror what will actually be tested — regardless of the communicative aspirations stated in policy documents. This is the analytical thread that connects Sections 4.1, 4.5, and 4.6 above: each model's Indian limitation traces back, in different ways, to the same underlying cause. NEP 2020's push toward competency-based and formative assessment is best read as an attempt to weaken this

wash back effect at its source, though translating that intention into actual examination reform is a longer and still unfolding process, and the honest position is that it has not yet happened at scale.

Urban-Rural and Socioeconomic Disparity

English proficiency outcomes in India correlate strongly with socioeconomic status and urban-rural location: private English-medium schooling, disproportionately accessed by wealthier urban families, is generally associated with stronger spoken and written outcomes than government schooling in rural areas. The practical upshot is that no single pedagogical model can be evaluated independently of where it is implemented — a communicative or technology-mediated approach that works well in a well-resourced urban private school may be close to unworkable in an under-resourced rural government school serving the same national curriculum. This is the strongest empirical argument in the paper against uniform, top-down pedagogical mandates and for context-sensitive policy instead.

NEP 2020 and Emerging Directions in English Pedagogy

NEP 2020 is the most significant recent inflection point in Indian language-education policy, and its implications for English teaching deserve to be spelled out rather than merely gestured at. First, by recommending home-language instruction in early grades wherever feasible, it implicitly favours multilingual and bilingual pedagogy over early, exclusive English immersion, while still treating strong English proficiency as an important national goal to be pursued through well-sequenced, subject-based teaching from the primary years onward — the policy is not anti-English, it is anti-premature-immersion. Second, its broader push toward competency-based, experiential, and formative assessment, if carried through faithfully across state examination boards, could meaningfully weaken the wash back effect described in Section 5.4 that currently disincentivises communicative and task-based teaching. Third, its encouragement of educational technology, including digital content development across multiple Indian languages, opens genuine space for blended English instruction — provided, and this proviso matters, that digital access disparities are addressed at the same time rather than treated as a separate problem.

It is important not to collapse policy aspiration into implemented practice, and this paper is deliberately careful not to. Policy documents state goals; their translation into revised state curricula, textbooks, teacher training, and, crucially, reformed examination systems is a slow and uneven process within India's federal education structure, where states retain substantial autonomy over school education. Comprehensive, India-wide empirical evidence on how NEP 2020's language provisions have actually changed classroom practice and outcomes remains limited at the time of writing, and claims about the policy's eventual impact should be read as provisional rather than settled — a caveat this paper applies to its own discussion in this section as much as to anyone else's.

Looking ahead, several directions seem likely to shape the next phase of Indian English pedagogy: continued growth of digital and AI-assisted tools for spoken-English practice; greater institutional investment in teacher professional development for communicative and multilingual methods; gradual movement toward competency-based and oral assessment components in board examinations; and an unresolved, probably long-running debate over the right balance between English-medium instruction, which many parents want for its perceived economic value, and mother-tongue-based early education, which much of the developmental and linguistic research recommends. These two positions are not simply an academic-versus-popular disagreement; they reflect a genuine tension between individual economic incentive and collective linguistic-developmental evidence, and this paper does not think that tension is likely to resolve cleanly in either direction.

LIMITATIONS OF THE REVIEW

Several limitations should govern how the paper's conclusions are used. First, as a narrative rather than a systematic review, it offers no quantitative effect-size comparison between models; that would require carefully

controlled, large-scale Indian studies that remain relatively scarce, especially outside major cities and well-resourced institutions. Second, the Indian ELT landscape is exceptionally heterogeneous across states, school types, and socioeconomic contexts, and broad generalization inevitably flattens real variation; statements here about “typical” Indian classrooms describe common patterns, not universal conditions, and readers working in a specific state or school type should weigh the discussion accordingly. Third, because NEP 2020 is recent and its implementation is gradual and state-dependent, Section 6's discussion of its likely effects is necessarily more speculative than the discussion of established historical models, and should be revisited as implementation evidence accumulates — this paper's own claims about NEP 2020 carry a shorter shelf life than its claims about, say, the Direct Method. Finally, the review synthesizes existing scholarly and policy literature rather than collecting original classroom data, and should be read as an orientation device for further empirical research rather than a substitute for it.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

English teaching in India cannot be reduced to any single pedagogical model, and the paper's central claim is that this is not a failure of consensus to be resolved but a structural feature of the country to be designed around. Linguistic plurality, uneven infrastructure and teacher preparation, and an entrenched examination culture together mean that no method imported wholesale from elsewhere — whether the Direct Method's English-only immersion or a fully communicative, group-work-intensive version of CLT — will function uniformly across India's enormously varied classrooms. The historical trajectory from grammar-translation through structuralism and the bilingual method to communicative, task-based, multilingual, and technology-mediated approaches is not a simple progression from worse methods to better ones; it is an accumulating repertoire, each layer still doing real work somewhere in the system.

On that basis, five recommendations follow, and they are meant to be read as more concrete than the usual close-out of a review paper. First, teacher education, both pre-service and in-service, should train teachers explicitly in principled eclecticism — the deliberate selection and combination of technique based on lesson objective and learner need — rather than leaving teachers to default to inherited grammar-translation habit, or conversely, to import communicative technique wholesale without adapting it to local constraints; this is a specific curriculum-design task for teacher-training institutions, not a general aspiration. Second, assessment reform has to move in step with pedagogical reform, not behind it, since classroom practice will keep following examination format regardless of what curricular documents say; meaningful integration of oral and continuous assessment is very likely a precondition, not merely a complement, for communicative objectives to take root in practice.

Third, multilingual and mother-tongue-supportive approaches deserve sustained investment and, just as importantly, rigorous evaluation — the constitutional and educational commitment to linguistic diversity is a good reason to invest in these approaches, but it is not by itself evidence that they improve English proficiency outcomes, and the two justifications should not be conflated. Fourth, technology-mediated approaches need explicit equity design from the outset: digital tools should supplement rather than substitute for well-trained teachers, and investment in connectivity and devices needs to accompany, not follow, investment in digital content. Fifth, sustained India-specific empirical research — especially studies tracking learner outcomes across different models and contexts over time — remains a genuine priority, because the gap between what is known about ELT methodology in general and what is specifically known about its application in India's own institutional landscape is still wide.

The most promising path forward, in short, is unlikely to be any single method's triumph. It is more likely to be the steady cultivation of professionally judicious, context-responsive teaching — anchored in a clear understanding of learners' linguistic backgrounds, supported by assessment systems that no longer work against communicative goals, and informed by an evidence base that, while still incomplete, is considerably clearer about what does not work uniformly than about what will work everywhere.

Author's Declaration

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Nature of the study. This paper is a narrative literature review. It does not report primary data collection involving human participants, and therefore did not require institutional ethics review or informed consent. No new data were generated; all sources cited are publicly available published works and policy documents, listed in the References below.

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