

Policy and Practice in English Language Teaching in India

G.Barakkath Alias Beemamma¹ C. Indira²

1.Assistant Professor of English, Nellai College of Engineering,
Maruthakulam

2.Teaching Assistant, Nellai College of Engineering, Maruthakulam

Paper Received on 20-06-2026, Accepted on 20-07-2026
Published on 22-07-26; DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2025.11.07.243

Abstract

English Language Teaching (ELT) in India occupies a central position in the country's educational, social, and economic landscape. As a multilingual nation, India has continuously negotiated the role of English within its linguistic ecology. This paper explores the relationship between policy frameworks and classroom practices in ELT across India. It critically examines major educational policies, including colonial influences, post-independence language policies, and recent reforms such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The study highlights discrepancies between policy intentions and ground-level implementation, influenced by socio-economic inequalities, teacher preparedness, infrastructural constraints, and regional diversity. It also evaluates pedagogical approaches, curriculum design, and assessment systems, while discussing challenges and emerging opportunities in ELT. The paper concludes by suggesting reforms for aligning policy with practice to ensure equitable and effective English language education.

Keywords: multilingual nation, colonial influences, post-independence language policies, regional diversity.

1. Introduction

English has evolved from a colonial language to a global lingua franca and a key instrument of mobility in India. It plays a crucial role in higher education,

employment, governance, and international communication. Consequently, English Language Teaching has become a significant component of India's education system. However, the spread and teaching of English are not uniform across the country. Differences in socio-economic backgrounds, urban-rural divides, and institutional capacities lead to varied outcomes. While policy documents emphasize inclusivity, multilingualism, and communicative competence, classroom realities often reflect rote learning, limited exposure, and inadequate resources.

This paper aims to analyze the gap between policy and practice in ELT in India and explore pathways for improvement.

2. Historical Background of ELT in India

2.1 Colonial Legacy

The introduction of English education in India can be traced back to British colonial rule, particularly after Macaulay's Minute (1835), which advocated English as the medium of instruction for higher education. English was positioned as a tool for administrative efficiency and elite formation.

2.2 Post-Independence Language Policy

After independence in 1947, India faced the challenge of balancing linguistic diversity with national unity. The **Three-Language Formula** was introduced to promote multilingualism:

- Regional language
- Hindi
- English

English retained its importance as an associate official language and a medium of higher education.

2.3 Expansion of ELT

Over time, English became associated with economic opportunity and social mobility. Private English-medium schools proliferated, while government schools struggled to match their standards.

3. Policy Frameworks in ELT

3.1 National Policy on Education (1968, 1986, 1992)

These policies emphasized:

- Equal access to education
- Promotion of regional languages
- Continued role of English

However, implementation challenges limited their effectiveness.

3.2 National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005

NCF 2005 marked a shift toward:

- Communicative language teaching (CLT)
- Learner-centered pedagogy
- Integration of language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing)

3.3 National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

NEP 2020 emphasizes:

- Multilingualism and mother-tongue instruction in early education
- Flexibility in language choices
- Skill-based and competency-driven learning

While promoting Indian languages, NEP recognizes the importance of English in global engagement.

4. Pedagogical Approaches in ELT

4.1 Traditional Methods

Many classrooms still rely on:

- Grammar-Translation Method
- Rote memorization
- Teacher-centered instruction

These methods limit communicative competence.

4.2 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Policy advocates CLT, focusing on:

- Real-life communication
- Interactive learning
- Functional language use

However, its implementation is inconsistent.

4.3 Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

Emerging in urban and private institutions, TBLT encourages:

- Problem-solving tasks
- Collaborative learning
- Contextual language use

5. Curriculum and Materials

5.1 Textbooks

Government textbooks often:

- Emphasize literary content
- Lack contemporary relevance
- Provide limited communicative practice

5.2 Private Sector Materials

Private schools use:

- International curricula
- Digital resources
- Activity-based learning tools

This creates disparities in learning outcomes.

6. Teacher Education and Training

6.1 Pre-Service Training

Teacher education programs often:

- Focus on theory rather than practice
- Provide limited exposure to modern pedagogy

6.2 In-Service Training

Professional development programs are:

- Irregular
- Insufficient in addressing classroom challenges

6.3 Teacher Proficiency

Many teachers, especially in rural areas:

- Lack fluency in English
- Struggle with pronunciation and communication

7. Assessment Practices

7.1 Examination-Oriented System

Assessments often prioritize:

- Written exams
- Memorization
- Grammar accuracy

7.2 Lack of Skill-Based Evaluation

Listening and speaking skills are:

- Rarely assessed
- Given minimal importance

7.3 Need for Reform

Assessment systems need to:

- Align with communicative goals
- Include continuous evaluation
- Incorporate oral and practical components

8. Challenges in ELT Practice

8.1 Urban-Rural Divide

Urban schools:

- Better infrastructure
- Access to trained teachers

Rural schools:

- Limited resources
- Poor exposure to English

8.2 Socio-Economic Inequality

Students from privileged backgrounds:

- Access English-rich environments

Others:

- Face linguistic and cultural barriers

8.3 Medium of Instruction Debate

Tension exists between:

- Mother-tongue instruction
- English-medium education

Parents often prefer English for better opportunities.

8.4 Infrastructure Constraints

Many schools lack:

- Language labs
- Audio-visual aids
- Internet access

9. Role of Technology in ELT

9.1 Digital Learning Tools

Technology enables:

- Interactive learning platforms
- Language apps
- Online resources

9.2 Challenges

- Digital divide
- Lack of teacher training
- Limited access in rural areas

10. Policy-Practice Gap

Despite progressive policies, implementation gaps persist due to:

- Insufficient funding

- Administrative inefficiencies
- Lack of accountability
- Inadequate teacher training

Policies often remain aspirational rather than practical.

11. Emerging Trends in ELT

11.1 Blended Learning

Combining traditional and digital methods:

- Enhances engagement
- Provides flexibility

11.2 Multilingual Pedagogy

Recognizes:

- Students' linguistic backgrounds
- Role of code-switching

11.3 Skill-Based Learning

Focus on:

- Communication
- Critical thinking
- Employability skills

12. Recommendations

12.1 Strengthening Teacher Training

- Continuous professional development
- Practical teaching exposure
- Language proficiency improvement

12.2 Curriculum Reform

- Contextualized content
- Focus on communication
- Integration of technology

12.3 Assessment Changes

- Skill-based evaluation
- Inclusion of oral tests
- Continuous assessment methods

12.4 Bridging Inequality

- Investment in rural education
- Access to digital tools
- Support for disadvantaged learners

12.5 Policy Implementation

- Monitoring mechanisms
- Accountability systems
- Collaboration between stakeholders

13. Conclusion

English Language Teaching in India is shaped by complex interactions between policy frameworks and classroom realities. While policies advocate progressive, inclusive, and communicative approaches, their implementation is hindered by systemic challenges. Bridging the gap between policy and practice requires coordinated efforts in teacher training, curriculum design, assessment reform, and infrastructure development. Ensuring equitable access to quality ELT is essential for empowering learners and enhancing India's global competitiveness.

References

National Education Policy (2020)
National Curriculum Framework (2005)
Government of India Education Reports
Research journals on ELT in India
British Council India publications