

English Language Education in India: Ancient Roots to Modern Innovation

***J. Jerly and P. Sathya**

Department of English, Holy Cross College (Autonomous), Nagercoil - 629 004

Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli - 627012

*Corresponding Author - Email: jerlyj2131@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Education has substantially enhanced human lives and has changed significantly through time. During ancient times, knowledge was primarily passed down by oral traditions, stories, and ancient fables from one generation to the other. These educational approaches had a strong foundation in the cultural and social customs of the era. George Washington Carver (1896), an American agricultural scientist and inventor, defined education as the key to unlock the golden door to freedom. In order to unlock the door of freedom globally, it is necessary for learners to get acquainted with the English language, which is considered a lingua franca in many countries around the world. It not only acts as a global link language but also as an inter-state common connective language among countries. In spite of its prevalence, many countries have adopted English as their second language. With the motto of promoting the quality of education and enhancing the English language teaching and learning process in Indian classrooms, the conventional educational approaches started to change over time, and in this digital era, the adaptation of modern teaching pedagogies and innovative technological tools is found more common in educational platforms. This research work analyses the rationale behind this transition from conventional teaching approaches to modern innovations in educational platforms. It also traces the evolution of the educational system and the emergence of the English language in India and evaluates how English language teaching placed its roots in Indian sands. The study highlights the recent advancements that have occurred in the field of education and the English Language Teaching and Learning process in India.

Keywords: Education, English Language Teaching (ELT), evolution, modern innovations, and advancements.

Introduction

Education is the foundation for raising people's standard of living and enriching their minds, refining them, and enlightening them. In comparison, the English language holds the status of being one of the most extensively spoken languages globally. It is the most commonly spoken foreign language, the language of the media, science, and technology, etc. In a multilingual country like India, English occupies the position of the second language irrespective of its linguistic, cultural, religious, and geographical diversity. English serves as an inter-state connective language of its own, standing as "Indian English." After British

colonisation, English became an essential tool for effective cross-cultural communication due to its widespread use in business, academics, travel, and the internet; thus, knowing it well provides learners with the opportunity to improve their lives on a global scale.

Mehtabul Azam, et al. (2013), in their article “The Returns to English-Language Skills in India,” state that India is a linguistically varied nation with thousands of different languages. Due to the British invasion, the English language played a vital role in facilitating communication between Indian merchants and British settlers. It became essential for the local population in India to acquire proficiency in English in order to thrive in their own land. The substantial influence of English on Indians, combined with its global significance, led to English becoming an official language in India after Independence. As years rolled by, the perspectives of education and language learning changed, and new educational instructions and methodologies emerged. The shifting educational demands and the growing needs of society gave rise to the modern educational system, which rules the current educational platforms. This research work delves into the evolution of the educational system in India and also presents the emergence and evolution of the English language and its teaching and learning process.

Research Statement

This study aims to clarify the changing landscape of the educational system in India and trace the evolution of English language learning in India, characterised by the transition from traditional to digital teaching methods.

Research Questions

- What are the significant changes in English Language education in India?
- What are the major shifts that occurred during the transition of the Indian educational system from conventional teaching to modern innovations?

Objectives

The objectives of the study are,

- to examine the extent of the paradigm shift from traditional to digital modes of education.
- to analyse the evolution of English language education in India.
- to investigate the role of technology in promoting the educational system and English language teaching and learning.

Scope of the Study

The educational system in India underwent various shifts and evolutions across eras. This research work provides a thorough analysis of the rationale for this transition in the

Indian educational platforms, specifically highlighting its shift from traditional to digital methods over the years. Additionally, this study explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on expediting the adoption of digital tools to enhance teaching and learning for learners in the 21st century.

Methodology

The research involves a qualitative study to gain a theoretical understanding of the transition from traditional to digital teaching and learning; basic research is conducted.

Educational Developments in India

Education is a road to success which uplifts the personal, professional, and social standards of an individual, and helps them to make a comfortable living in society. Various studies have been conducted from ancient times to the contemporary to promote education, and various methods and approaches have been introduced, developed, and implemented to enhance the knowledge and skills of the learners. As a result, numerous methods and approaches emerged to rectify the challenges in spreading education and promoting comprehension among the learners. During ancient times, people believed that education was the cornerstone to survive in their community and to rectify their basic needs. As years progressed, education for basic needs turned into education to survive in a rapidly changing world, both socially and economically.

Educational System in India during the Ancient Era

The Indian educational system is most commonly regarded as the first educational movement in the world. Sankaranarayanan Paleeri, in his book *A Brief History of Educational Developments in India* (Paleeri,1), stated that “The ancient centers of education like the Nalanda and Takshasila were identified by British historians during the middle of the 18th century”, which indicates that the educational system in India has been rooted long before the 18th century. It faced numerous changes from the Vedic period to the contemporary period. He also compares the Indian educational system with a banyan tree and states, “The educational system and its development in India resemble the structure of a banyan tree, which has a multitude of branches, roots, and twigs, providing a haven for birds, animals, and numerous creatures, even parasites! Moreover, it is like a forest that serves many lives and the whole of nature itself”(Paleeri 1–2).

Educational developments in India can be categorised into three: ancient, medieval, and modern. The ancient educational system mainly focused on providing knowledge and skills for the learners; monetary benefits were not taken into consideration. According to the ancient educational system, imparting education to others is considered a divine

responsibility. The literary texts were mainly religious, with sermons and rituals. *The Rig Veda* is considered one of the most ancient texts. Later, with these kinds of religious texts emerged texts like *The Mahabharata* - an epic, *Satapatha Brahmana* - a book on nature's physical principles, *Arthashastra* - a book on politics and economics, etc. These literary works served as a seed for the emergence of many other literary texts in India.

During the ancient era of education, Gurus were considered the prime source of knowledge; learners who wished to attain knowledge from the gurus should come under the roofs of gurus, commonly referred to as an *ashram*. Food, clothing, training, and educational materials were common for all groups of learners. Educational materials and methods were designed by the guru himself/herself. The second phase of the ancient educational system arrived when the ashram received monetary benefits from the rulers; eventually, the ashrams came under the control of the ruling party. Decisions regarding the ashram and educational materials were provided to the learners under the influence of the ruling party. Later, gurus visited the learners' homes and provided education based on their preferences, and in exchange for knowledge transfer, they were rewarded with cash or kind. In this phase, education became a commodity to exchange. The later part of this era is regarded as the Brahmanic period or Caste era. During this period, education was provided to the learners based on their caste. (Paleeri)

Educational System in India during the Medieval Era

The educational system in India during the medieval era is divided into two: the Islamic system of education and the Mughal system of education. The reign of the Delhi Sultanate in India is considered the Islamic system of education. In this system, education was given to all in free and precise ways. The education system was divided into two: primary education, which was referred to as 'Maktab', and higher education, which was referred to as 'Madrasah education'. The main motto of the Islamic system of education is to spread the Islamic religion all over India. In Maktab, learners were taught to read *the Quran* with proper pronunciation, and some basic disciplines were taught to learners. Maktab were attached to Masjids. The medium of instruction was in Arabic and Persian. They focused on enhancing the reading, writing, and arithmetic skills of the learners. Learners who fulfilled these criteria of primary education were eligible for higher education - Madrasah, where learners were provided with subject knowledge such as Maths, Science, History, etc., along with professional courses. Women's education was restricted during this period.

The second phase started when Mughal Emperor Akbar ascended the throne. During this phase, the educational system took a proper structure. Education was given to all

regardless of religion, sex, financial background, and power. Women's education was highly promoted, and primary education was given in both mosques and temples. Both Hindu and Islamic religions were given importance. They also established numerous educational institutions and initiated various educational movements. Subjects such as Science, Mathematics, Geometry, Logic, History, Literature, Astronomy, etc., were introduced. The educational system in India during the medieval era came to an end after the fall of the Mughal Empire. The medieval era played a crucial role in the development of the educational system in India.

Educational System in India in the Modern Era

The educational system in the modern era began during the first half of the eighteenth century. The British East India Company played a major role in the development of the modern educational system in India. During the early years of British rule in India, they did not pay much attention to India's politics or educational system since they mainly focused on trade; later, they found out that India was facing an unstable situation both politically and economically. The British took advantage of the situation and came to power, which brought various changes in politics, culture, religion, etc. In the midst of the 18th century, Christian missionaries took charge of the educational system in India. The syllabus was designed to train the people for serving the British in their work and welfare. Traditional education, rooted deeply in Indian culture and traditions, was replaced by the modern educational system, which mainly focused on assisting the English to assert their power all over India.

Educational development in India took several revamps during the modern era. One among them was the Hunter Commission of 1882, also known as the "Indian Education Commission"; this was considered the first education commission in India, chaired by Sir William Hunter. This commission established several resolutions that changed the system of education. Primary education was open to all regardless of status, gender, race, or religion. It paved the way for the disadvantaged sector of India to get their primary education. Secondary and collegiate education were promoted and funded by the government. Many teacher training centres were started to train the teachers to provide quality education to the masses. Several policies were adopted by the educational committee to improve the quality of the curriculum, and the syllabus was designed accordingly to improve the competency of the learners.

Computers started to evolve in educational circles around the 1990's. The evolution of computer - based learning can be categorised into seven phases: Early adoption stage, Personal computers and educational software, Internet and Multimedia Integration, Digital

Learning and Online Education, Mobile Devices and Personalised Learning, Remote Learning and Technological Integration, and Personalised Education. In the early adaptation stage, computers were used in universities and research institutions due to their cost-effectiveness. In the second phase, there was an emergence of subject software where subjects like Math, Science, and Languages were taught, and schools started to adopt basic software. Modern educational approaches were implemented in the educational platforms to overcome the shortcomings that prevailed in systematised classroom approaches. The main focus of modern educational methods is on learners of the twenty-first century, who are gifted with creativity, innovation, and critical thinking. These learners are capable of coming up with creative solutions to any challenging problems. Educators must rely on technology to educate this type of learner.

During the third phase, computers played a vital role in educational classrooms, and in the fourth phase of technological interventions, educators started to use multimedia resources such as songs, videos, pictures, etc., as educational materials inside the classroom environment to make learning more authentic, flexible, and interesting as per the educational needs of the learners. In the Remote Learning and Technological Integrated phase, the expansion of mobile technology leads to mobile education, which promotes anywhere, anytime education, in which learners can access their educational materials from any part of the world. Through Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the learning space is no longer limited to traditional classrooms, shifting educational delivery to the palms of every individual (The Earth Institute, Columbia University and Ericsson, 2016). The growth of educational apps promotes self-learning for learners. Interactive and multimedia content in computer - based education has the potential to engage learners in the learning content more effectively than traditional methods.

The COVID -19 pandemic has opened the door for rapid technological advancement in many disciplines, including education. It accelerated the shift towards technology-based learning. With widespread lockdowns and school closures, educators and students had to adapt quickly to remote learning environments. Online platforms, video conferencing tools, educational apps, and digital resources became crucial for maintaining continuity in education. This change emphasised the digital gap as well as disparities in access to technology and excellent education. Educators had to change their teaching approaches, making use of online platforms and new technologies.

The incorporation of technology into education has become an appropriate tool for providing productive knowledge input for Generation Z and Alpha learners in the current

scenario. Since they were raised in a digital world, they are technically sound by nature, and these learners are commonly referred to as tech-savvy. As these generations step into a rapidly evolving digital world, adopting technology-based learning is a strategic move to equip them with the skills and competencies necessary to thrive in the modern era.

However, the integration of technological tools alone as a medium of instruction inside the classroom environment could possess certain setbacks, such as the possibility of getting addicted, cognitive overload, content distraction, etc. In order to mitigate these challenges, the technological tools should be judiciously utilised in the classroom environment. The synergy of the strengths of conventional and technological resources and adopting them as a medium of instruction as per the needs of the learners could have the potential to offer flexible, engaging, and productive learning outcomes inside the classroom environment.

Evolution of Language Education in India

The historical development of English is typically divided into three major periods: the Old English period, which lasted from the time of the earliest written records in the 7th century to the end of the 11th century; the Middle English period, spanning from the 12th century to the 15th century; and Modern English, which began in the 16th century and continues to the present day. While tracing the origin of the English language in India, it is assumed that the English language entered India through British Colonizers during the late 16th century and early 17th century.

Joybrato Mukherjee and Tobias Bernaisch (2020), in their chapter "The development of the English language in India", have divided the diachronic development of the English language into five phases. The first stage is foundation; it speaks about the transportation of the English language to a new territory through colonisation. The second phase is exonormative civilisation; it is about the influence of English settlers, that is, Britishers, upon native settlers. The third phase is nationalisation, in which the English language has an integral part in every aspect of the native people's life. In this phase, English with proper grammatical structure was given importance. The fourth phase is about the place value of the English language in India after independence. Phase five is about the adaptability of the English language in social contexts and norms, leading to the formation of a unique English variety. Its development spans a wide range of regional and social contexts. The foundation of the English language in India was led by Father Thomas Stephens in 1579. His letter from Goa is considered the first instance of Anglo-Indian literature.

The second half of the 18th century is considered the evolutionary period of Indian

English in India. The English language gained increasing importance over time, as nearly all Indian regions were gradually overpowered by the British colonies. The British East India Company representatives further contributed to the teaching of English to Indians. The East India Company in 1813 sensed the need for modern education. Education received higher priority at that time. After Independence, due to its global importance, the English language was accepted as an official language and a medium of communication, and it gradually became the language of the academic press and education.

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) is the entity in charge of the Indian educational system. NCERT's main goal is to advance and carry out research in the area of school education. NCERT also engages and communicates with foreign organisations, participates in international educational conferences, and conducts a variety of training sessions for educators from developing nations. They recommended that English should be taught as a second language. The Government of India introduced ELT in India with the help of the British Council. John Forrester, an educator and instructor who imparted English language skills to Indian teachers, is credited with introducing the concept of the "Structural syllabus." This syllabus was the pioneering framework adopted for language instruction. The Government of India, through the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEL), started two institutions to teach English through English Teachers. The first National Congress on Senior English Teacher (NCST) discussed the effectiveness of the structural syllabus and the problems of ELT in India. Later, as a revamping of the structural syllabus designed by John Foster, a new syllabus was formed called "Structural Oral Situational Reading Syllabus."

During the 1960's Noam Chomsky introduced Transformational Grammar (TG), wherein he focused on linguistics, psychology, and education, and it challenged the foundation of the structural syllabus. Chomsky called language as, language is a rule-governed behaviour, not just a group of structures. The communicative approach emerged as a reaction against the artificial quality of "pattern practice" and also against the idea of consciously learning a language with its grammatical structure. Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) has become an essential component of ELT in the current scenario. With the advancement of technology, the use of computers, mobile devices, and the internet has transformed the way language is taught and learned.

Impact of National Education Policy (NEP) on ELT in India

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, approved by the Government of India, represents a landmark reform in the education sector, aiming to make the system more

holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary, and aligned with the needs of the 21st century (Maurya and Sharma 407). NEP 2020 emphasises the importance of multilingualism, wherein learners' mother tongue (L1) is utilised as a medium of teaching for an effective learning outcome. It reinforces the adaptation of bilingualism in an educational platform and stresses the importance of providing culturally relevant educational materials for a holistic learning outcome. It encourages the transition phase of the education system from rote learning to communicative competency and learning-centred approaches.

English language as a lingua franca has become increasingly prominent across every aspect of human life. In order to enhance current generation learners' practical skills for communication, employability, and to promote their global connections, adapting technological tools into educational platforms has become increasingly common in the digital era. "According to NEP 2020, one of the key drivers of the schooling system will be the broad use of technology in learning and teaching for the removal of language barriers, increased access, education planning and oversight" (Nithish 230). Maurya and Sharma, in their research work "Role of Technology and Digital Learning in NEP 2020," also highlight that the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 places a strong emphasis on the integration of technology into teaching, learning, and educational administration. Thus, NEP 2020 suggest that the integration of technology into educational platform could offer a productive language learning outcome in an educational platform specifically in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms, however providing equal technological access to all learners, lack of proper technological assistance in the educational platforms, inadequate training for teachers and learners on proper utilisation of technological tools, limited suitable learning environment, financial constraints, lack of network facilities, etc. were considered as affective barriers for adapting innovative technological tools in educational platforms. In order to mitigate these challenges, offering training programs for proper adaptation of technological tools into educational platforms, providing suitable educational resources, teacher readiness to adapt innovative technological tools, and institutional support were highly important. Therefore, NEP 2020 offers an innovative framework in transforming English Language Teaching (ELT) in India.

Role of the Learners

Learners are responsible for promoting their own learning progress in this technologically upgraded educational setting. The appropriate utilisation of technological tools by being aware of their ethical consideration would optimise the potential of obtaining authentic learning among the learners. The effective learning outcomes in an educational

setting can be attained through active learner participation. Even though traditional teaching approaches assist the learners to gain basic knowledge of the content in a structured way, technological integration into conventional teaching methods makes the learning more authentic and provides experiential learning platforms. It makes the learning process engaging, interactive, and productive. It promotes independent learning and also makes learners active participants in the process of knowledge transfer.

Role of the Educators

Educational practices have changed from ancient oral traditions to contemporary, technologically mediated approaches. However, the essential value of educators in promoting the transfer of knowledge and encouraging growth in learners has persisted. The foundation of education tends to be teachers, who modify their teaching strategies to meet the shifting demands of society and learners. The importance of educators in forming the brains of the next generation is undeniable as we look to the future. In contemporary educational settings, educators not only act as a mediator of knowledge transfer but also as a facilitator to make learning progress feasible for the learners. The adaptation of conventional teaching methods innovatively by integrating technological tools based on the needs of the learners would also optimise learning outcomes. The use of an eclectic approach in a classroom environment acts as an effective teaching pedagogy, which possesses the potential to offer a productive teaching process in a classroom environment.

Findings of the Study

The findings of the study are as follows:

- Conventional teaching approaches provide structured and systematic content delivery, which enables learners to have a strong foundation of the subject matter.
- Traditional teaching approaches require limited technological assistance and high - end training, which is feasible to implement anywhere and anytime.
- In conventional teaching methods, it is easy for educators to add or remove educational content or activities with respect to learners' performance in the classroom environment.
- The educational system has undergone a paradigm shift across eras. Initially, it was teacher-centred, then learner-centred, and now it is learning-centred. Due to this paradigm shift in the educational system, it is important to rely on technological tools for effective learning outcomes
- It offers digital literacy, self-directed, and multidimensional learning for the learners,

wherein learners get the opportunity to access global content and holistic learning outcomes.

- The integration of technology into educational platforms assists learners in enhancing their 21st-century skills such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking skills.
- The use of digital education in the classroom will enhance learners' interaction and reduce external distractions, especially among Gen Z and Gen Alpha learners in the current era.
- In comparison with traditional methods of teaching and learning, integration of technology into educational platforms provides learner engagement, enthusiasm, and improved performance among the learners.
- It gives learners greater independence, active participation, and pushes educators to update themselves in this technically sound world.
- The adaptation of digital education promotes flexibility, creativity, and a dedication to inclusion and equity values among learners.
- Exposure to native speakers through technological tools in language classrooms aids learners in language acquisition.
- The incorporation of digital and traditional approaches assists educators in providing innovative, interesting, and productive educational platforms for learners.
- It caters to the educational needs of the current generation of learners effortlessly and makes learning accessible, interactive, engaging, and constructive.
- It is important to offer proper training to the educators for judicious utilisation of technological tools inside the classroom environment.
- Educators' readiness in adapting technological tools also holds equal importance for effective utilisation of technological tools.
- Institutional support in providing proper technological assistance also plays an inevitable role in adapting innovative technological tools inside the educational platforms.

Conclusion

The incorporation of technology into educational platforms has sparked a paradigm shift from traditional to digital approaches in the constantly changing world of education. It is important to recognise that despite technological developments and educational shifts, it is the shared responsibility of both the educators and learners to make the learning process collaborative and effective for productive learning outcomes. This study has looked into the

many facets of this shift, examining the tremendous effects of technology on the processes of teaching and learning as well as its consequences among teachers and learners. In order to create dynamic, participatory, and inclusive learning environments, educators must negotiate an ever-changing environment, adjust to new teaching methods, and use technology in a systematic way.

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