

**PARALLEL PARADIGMS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
IMMERSION AND ENGLISH MEDIUM INSTRUCTION IN INDIA'S EDUCATIONAL  
HISTORY**

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**ABSTRACT :**

English Language Immersion and English Medium Instruction emerged as two dominant paradigms in English language education, each reflecting different ideologies, pedagogical frameworks, and linguistic outcomes. By analyzing the basic premises of ELI and EMI in Indian context could enlighten the educational impacts of these two methodologies and it would also provide an overview of how these approaches influenced English proficiency, imparted the subject knowledge and the challenges faced by the Indian students in their journey of English language learning. Ultimately, this study offers insights into the implications of ELI and EMI in a multilingual context, considering how they have shaped both individual linguistic journeys and the collective socio-cultural dynamics within India's education system.

**Keywords:**English Medium Instruction; English Language Immersion; English Language Teaching; Pedagogy.

**INTRODUCTION:**

English Language Immersion (ELI) and English Medium Instruction (EMI) embody two distinct approaches within the framework of English Language Teaching in India. While both aim to enhance English proficiency, they differ fundamentally in their objectives and the procedure. English Language Immersion emphasizes a holistic, immersive approach, often focusing on creating conducive ambience where English is the primary means of communication and interaction. In contrast, English Medium Instruction incorporates English as the primary language of content instruction, often within multilingual settings, where English is used to teach subjects across the curriculum, yet the approach may not focus on full language immersion.

Understanding the historical evolution of these approaches is important in light of India's ongoing debates over language policy in education. With the rise of globalization, English has been increasingly positioned as a language of opportunity and socio-economic mobility, but this shift has also led to concerns over the impact on local languages and identities. Through a comparative study, this article is intended to explore the basic premises of ELI and EMI, aiming to shed light on their respective influences on English language acquisition, accessibility, and social equity in India.

**HISTORY AND IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH IN INDIA :**

The historical relationship between India and the English language is deeply entangled with the nation's colonial past and its complex linguistic diversity. English was introduced into India's education system during British colonial rule and gradually evolved from an elite language of administration and governance to a tool for socio-economic advancement. English played a great uniting force even during India's Independence struggle. English is India's link language. Though Gandhiji was totally against English education, he still appreciated the importance of foreign language especially, English. In his own words as expressed in *Young India*,

I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. I would have our young men and young women with literary tastes to learn as much of English and other world languages as they like and expect them to give the benefits of their learning to India and to the world. (Gandhi 170)

It has greatly contributed to the advancement of learning, by bringing in a variety of knowledge from every corner of the world. After the Independence, English language spread widely in India and it

became essential for Indians to communicate within the land. The role of English within a nation's date-to-day usage is influenced by geographical, cultural and political factors. English is a winning passport in the modern world of infinite possibilities. Though English was introduced as a library language in India, its importance was very well understood and articulated by the Radha- Krishnan commission in the following words: "English however must continue to be studied. It is a language which is rich in literature, humanistic, scientific and technical. If under sentimental we give up English, we could cut ourselves from the living stream of ever-growing knowledge." (Baruah 15)

Today English is a language of the world and it has become the source for upward social mobility. It is a window to lucrative job prospects. In the present scenario, the importance of English cannot be denied or ignored since it is the most widely spoken language across the world. It also plays a major role in all the sectors. Especially, in a country like India, a land of diversity, English links people. The presence of English and its position in the world have expanded enormously in the recent decades. In the past three decades, many money-making industries such as Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), Medical Transcription, etc., in short, the gigantic IT industry have elevated the importance of English in India. So, it is needless to say that English occupies a prominent place in our country and hence the demand for the language is ever increasing; most people have the desire to learn English and they want to learn the language as quickly and efficiently as possible

### **ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN INDIA :**

Unfortunately, in most schools and colleges in India, English language is viewed as subject knowledge to be passed than a language to be acquired. There is an imminent need to regard teaching of English language as a skill-oriented training. Both teachers and planners of English Language education should consider English as a language of comprehension rather than a literary language. It is of paramount importance to know the difference between acquisition and learning. In India, the first language (L1) is acquired and the second language (L2) is learnt.

### **THE FIRST LANGUAGE (L1) ACQUISITION:**

The process of acquiring one's first language (L1) is totally different from that of a second language (L2). Acquiring of one's first language starts at home, in fact, from the womb. L1 begins with informal listening and listening to the authentic language. The input providers of L1 are naturally many in a family environment where the baby is totally immersed in L1. In fact, the input providers are unaware that they are actually providing input for L1 acquisition for the baby. Even for the baby, it is unconsciously immersed in its mother tongue; particularly, the authentic language that is being spoken around it. The duration of its exposure to L1 is unlimited, as the baby is at the center of every activity in the family. In a way, the baby is almost forced to listen to every bit of conversation happening at home. The fact that the entire family is unconsciously involved and actively participate in the L1 acquisition of the baby cannot be denied. Stephen Krashen's 'Input Hypothesis' summarises the acquisition process of L1. He points out an inseparable relationship between exposure and language acquisition. He offers four major insights in L1 learning process:

1. It is acquisition and not learning
2. The input needs to be slightly beyond the known level of competence i.e.,  $i + 1$  (where  $i + 1$  is the stage immediately following  $i$  along some natural order)
3. The language fluency emerges automatically depending on the growth of one's linguistic competence
4. When there is enough comprehensible L1 input, the  $i + 1$  condition gets automatically fulfilled. (Krashen) [4]

Krashen further suggests that acquisition could be positively influenced through providing a conducive learning environment. He points out three such factors: motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. (Krashen) [5] Of these three, anxiety plays a major role in language learning. In babies, the anxiety level in learning a language is practically nil. Hence, it fosters language acquisition.

The natural progressive order of acquiring language skills of any language is Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. L1 acquisition exactly follows the above-mentioned order. Thus, L1 is acquired effortlessly, naturally, unconsciously, rapidly and flawless.

On the other hand, all the above-mentioned factors and advantages are practically absent in L2 learning.

### **THE SECOND LANGUAGE (L2) LEARNING :**

If L1 is acquired, then L2 is learnt. L2 learner is a non-native speaker of that language. In contrast to L1, which is learnt unconsciously through a prolonged period of exposure to L1, mainly contributed by the family and the immediate society, L2 is consciously learnt through strenuous effort and well thought out strategies in formal settings. There may be nothing or very little contribution from the family or immediate society especially, in the Indian context, towards L2 learning. In a formal L2 learning ambience, the order of learning language skills differs from that of L1 acquisition. The order of acquiring language skills in L1 is LSRW, which is a natural order that goes with the psychomotor development of humans whereas, in L2 learning, the order could be RWLS or, all the four language skills could be learnt in an integrated fashion. In most of the formal L2 learning settings, the method adopted for L2 learning is ‘drip-feed’, where the exposure to L2 is minimum and for a short duration on a regular basis; for example, an hour per day. In such settings, the objective of learning L2 is most often limited to examination-passing. Hence, the focus is on writing skill and the teaching is content-oriented. The emphasis seems to be more on accuracy in language production than fluency. Thus, acquiring of proficiency in L2 slows down, and remains a distant dream. In L2 learning, the English teacher’s role is of paramount importance, as the burden of supplying enough and quality L2 input largely depends on the teacher. In most of L2 teaching settings, for example, in India, the English teacher is the only source of L2 input. The teacher’s contribution in exposing learners to L2 rests on teacher-preparedness to teach English as a language. In addition to the above, the attitude of the L2 input provider, the teacher, is an important factor; as it determines the enthusiasm of teacher and learner in the process of teaching and learning. Besides the effort of the learner to learn L2, there is very little opportunity to use the language in authentic situations. What cannot be practiced, cannot be perfected. Hence, L2 remains a library practiced language than a language of communication. In the case of L1 acquisition, the age of learners influences the speed and quality of language learnt as pointed out by Krashen’s ‘affective filter hypothesis’, “Low personal anxiety is more conducive to second language acquisition.” (Krashen) [5] Moreover, of the L2 learners are not young children:

Anxious acquires have a high affective filter, which prevents acquisition from taking place. It is believed that the affective filter (e.g., fear or embarrassment) rises in early adolescence, and this may account for the apparent ease with which children acquire new languages compared to older acquirers of a second language. (Krashen) [5] In the Indian context in general and in rural areas in particular, the above-stated scenarios are common.

### **DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED IN ACQUIRING L2 (ENGLISH) IN RURAL INDIA:**

In addition to the above-mentioned factors, learners from rural areas of India, face certain peculiar difficulties, which learners from urban areas do not face. Compared to their counter parts in urban areas, the rural Indian learners in general, lack sufficient exposure to English. The home setting of rural Indian learners does not aid learning of English as their parents are either illiterate or very little educated. The discriminative digital divide between the urban and rural areas is yet another major factor that prevents the awareness of the importance of English as a language of communication, reaching the rural areas. Trained English teachers are rarely available in rural areas as compared to urban areas; it is common to see teachers of other subjects handle English classes. For example, in Karnataka, as reported in *The New Indian Express* on Oct 12, 2021, out of the 4,669 government schools in the state, 1,544 do not have exclusive English teachers. According to UNESCO’s ‘2021

State of the Education Report for India: No Teachers, No Class', as reported in *Times of India* by Manash Pratim Gohain on Oct 6, 2021, around 1.1 lakh schools in India are single-teacher entities. A total of 19% or 11.16 lakh teaching positions in schools lie vacant in the country, 69% of them in rural areas. The condescending attitude of the teacher towards the rural learners is yet another difficulty commonly faced by rural learners. Being in rural areas, away from the watchful eyes of the officials, some English teachers especially, do not give their best to the learners. Their effort is minimalistic and half-hearted. In spite of the above-mentioned difficulties faced by rural Indian learners, urged by the importance of English for better and brighter careers, parents, though not educated like their counter parts in urban areas, desire to educate their children in English-only medium of education.

### **CLAMOUR FOR ENGLISH EDUCATION IN INDIA:**

Given the current scenario, the parents are prepared to do anything to make their children proficient in English. The speed of expansion of English-only medium schools and CBSE schools are a clear indication of a paradigm shift in the thinking of parents and students. In the last decade, the number of regional medium schools has declined. A British Council prepared report namely, *The School Education System in India – An overview* in July 2019, Jason Anderson and Amy Lightfoot state that Not surprisingly, given the rise of English as a global lingua franca, demand for English medium instruction (EMI) has greatly increased over the last 20 years at all levels, even primary. While some states have introduced EMI across the Board (e.g Jammu and Kashmir) and others have tried to fall in even there is resistance. An increasing number of private schools served this purpose too. (27) [6] Added to that even the rural Indian parents want to send their children to English medium schools to enhance their English language proficiency to ensure a bright future for them. They strongly believe that English proficiency could lead their wards to promising careers and learning English will soon confer an advantage. The recent statistics shows that from 2003-04 to 2013-14, in Tamil Nadu, students joining Tamil-medium schools fell by 24 percent and the students enrolling in English-medium schools in Tamil Nadu is up by 41 percent.

### **UNDERSTANDING LANGUAGE IMMERSION :**

For the commoner understanding, English medium schools equip the learners with proficiency but according to ELT practitioners and experts, it is immersion language teaching that enables the learner to acquire the language. English language immersion is sinking or surrounding oneself with English language speaking ambience in which English language is commonly used for day-to-day activities. Such an ambience promotes the use of English at all times. It encourages and enables the learners to learn the language by using the language in various contexts. Such a setting provides input in L2 for listening and encourages and challenges learners to speak in L2. At first, fluency is encouraged and errors are tolerated and error-free language is presented as model. In general, language teaching methods concentrate on oral fluency; language immersion programmes try to build language proficiency in LSRSW. In language immersion programmes, L2 is the medium of instruction as well as the object of instruction. In the drip-feed method, the second language is used only for a short duration once a day; language immersion encourages students and provides opportunities to communicate in L2, all through the day. In this method, the learners are taught Maths, Science, and Social Studies, in their L2. Students are taught their subjects by teachers who use only English as their medium of communication. Experts like Krashen, Dulay, Burt, and Terrel have convincing evidences to show that second language can be acquired like mother tongue, if similar conditions are provided in the classrooms. Immersion provides such an ambience. Such an insightful model of language teaching occupied the center-stage in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Though the idea of language immersion was around for some time, immersion, as a method of L2 teaching and learning started in Canada in the 1960s. Knowing the language-divide in Canada, which has French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians, the English-speaking Canadians wanted their children to

be taught French, using immersion techniques. Immersion integrates social interaction theory and Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory. These theories stress the communication aspect of language. It encourages unconscious acquisition process than conscious learning. It encourages language acquisition in real-time contexts.

Chowan T., mentions three aspects that ensure the effectiveness of language immersion:

- (i) The intensity of contact
- (ii) The duration of teaching
- (iii) The type of teaching method

As more and more data are available from several successful studies done around the world, related to language immersion programmes, it is very evident that immersion models are one of the best methods of L2 acquisition. The reason for such a success could be attributed to the fact that it closely resembles L1 acquisition. The advantages are many:

- (i) Immersion language method does not require any particular talent from the learners rather, it suits all
- (ii) The learners will be good in academics
- (iii) It promotes cognitive development
- (iv) It ensures high level of oral and written communication. Especially, they will be good in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, word knowledge and word discrimination.
- (v) It also promotes bilingualism and literacy
- (vi) In this method, the sub skills of language continue to grow
- (vii) It can produce native speaker effect
- (viii) It illuminates the basic thinking skills
- (ix) Learners will be proficient in divergent thinking and problem solving.

In general, language immersion programmes are meant for acquiring L2 especially, in an educational environment where the classroom instructions are carried out in the second language.

#### **UNDERSTANDING ENGLISH AS A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION AT SCHOOL :**

In India, especially in Tamil Nadu, Language immersion is understood as English Medium of Instruction (EMI). English-medium education system could be defined as a system that uses English as the only medium of instruction for learners, for whom English is not their native language. They learn all their academic subjects through English.

Lord Macaulay's Minutes (1835) initiated the concept of English as a medium of instruction in India. He has started such schools for two purposes: One, to refrain people from the use of regional language and the other is to teach the western science through English. In 1844, Lord Mordaunt preferred the Indians be educated in English for employing them in Government services, which turned English as an unchallenged medium of instruction at the higher level. It also paved the way for English as a medium of instruction in schools. After the Independence, it was accepted that till the regional languages become completely ready to take over as the language of instruction in science and technology, English would be the medium of instruction. At present, the main advantage of educating children in English medium school is, they acquire speaking and writing skills in English. Generally, in all English medium schools all the communication process is in English. As all subjects are taught in English, children's familiarity with English increases and in turn, it builds confidence in children. Such a familiarity with English helps students to think in English rather than translate from one's mother tongue. Thus, thinking and speaking/writing in English enable students further in shedding their inhibitions and enhances their English proficiency.

A general understanding of "English Medium" is as follows:

1. English is not only a subject taught but also the medium of instruction (MoI).
2. The content of the subject books is in English.
3. Even the tests are conducted in English and the learners are expected to write in English.
4. The assignments as well as the homework given are in English.

5. Teacher uses English for all the basic transactions in the class and the learners are expected to follow the language rule.

### **ENGLISH MEDIUM EDUCATION AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE IMMERSION- A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS:**

In English Medium Education, English is a vehicle through which the content is taught. Here, the importance is for the content and English is a by-product. In the context of English Language Immersion, though the second language (English) is used as the primary medium for teaching the main subject content, the main focus is on the language and content is the vehicle through which the target language would be taught. Clark K. states, "Immersion is an approach to teaching a language where learners receive all or most of their instruction in the new language" (24) [7]. So, as a method and as a system, both the theories are the same. Regarding the role of teacher, both language Immersion and English Medium Education state that the classroom quality entirely depends on the language proficiency of the teachers and their creativity in bringing about the participative and experiential learning. In both the systems instructions are carried out fully in English. In the class, the medium of instruction and ordinary communications are in English. In both the systems, language achievements of learners are evaluated in terms of their English fluency. These systems empower the learners to think in L2. Both the systems aim to create a conducive environment that maximizes English language learning. In terms of language acquisition, both methods focus on fluency and not so much on accuracy of language. Both the systems enable learners to achieve well in the standardized test administered in English.

### **CONCLUSION :**

English Language Immersion, with its intensive focus on language skills, has helped students achieve high levels of proficiency, often favoring those who can access immersive environments. English Medium Instruction, on the other hand, has expanded English access across socio-economic strata, facilitating English learning while allowing students to engage with a broad curriculum. However, each approach has brought challenges, including the potential erosion of local languages and disparities in educational access and outcomes.

As India continues to navigate its multilingual identity, the lessons drawn from ELI and EMI's historical trajectories highlight the importance of balanced language policies that respect linguistic diversity while addressing the practical needs of a globalized economy. Future educational strategies could benefit from a hybrid model that combines the strengths of both ELI and EMI, promoting English proficiency without compromising the rich linguistic heritage of India's native languages.

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