

Skill-based English Language Teaching in the Indian Context

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Abstract

In a multilingual country like India, the English language is extremely important both from the perspective of education and employment. Traditional English teaching methods have mostly focused on grammar and rote learning, which does not allow adequate development of communication and practical skills in students. Skill-based English language teaching addresses this deficiency and provides students with basic competencies such as Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing (LSRW) as well as critical thinking, confidence, and employment-oriented skills. The aim of this research is to analyze the need, challenges, and possibilities of skill-based ELT in the Indian context. The article explains, based on case studies, examples, and policy suggestions, that it is necessary to move away from a mere exam-based approach to teaching English and adopt a practical, technology-supported, and skill-centric approach. In conclusion, skill-based ELT prepares Indian students not only for academic success but also for employment and global competition.

Keyword : English Language Teaching (ELT), Indian Education Context, Language Education.

Introduction

In a diverse and multilingual country like India, the English language occupies a unique position. It is no longer just a foreign language but has become a major tool for education, employment, and global communication. English has been deeply embedded in India's administration and education since the colonial period and its influence has continued even after independence. The importance of the English language in India is deep both historically and socially. From the colonial period to the present day, it has been the main medium of higher education, administration, and employment (Jayendran, Ramanathan, & Nagpal, 2021). Even after independence, English has played a decisive role in education and job opportunities. Today, the English language has become a symbol of social mobility, opportunity, and confidence for Indian youth. Increasingly, the long-term future of English as a global language probably lies in the hands of Asia, and especially the huge populations of India and China (Barker, 2024).

However, traditional methods of teaching English have been limited mainly to grammar and translation. These methods help students pass exams but do not enable them to use English effectively in real life or the job market. This is why education experts are now stressing the need for Skill-based English Language Teaching (ELT). This method predominated language education during an era when linguistic competence was largely measured by one's ability to translate and understand literary texts (Varghese & Khare, 2020).

Importance of English in India

English is central to India's higher education system. Most courses in engineering, management, medicine, and science are taught in English. Varghese & Khare (2020) state that English proficiency is indispensable for success in higher education opportunities. Knowledge of English has become essential for getting and retaining employment. The India Skills Report (2024) shows that candidates with English proficiency have a 20% higher employability. Mehta & Awasthi (2025) say that both language and technical skills are essential to get decent work.

English has become a symbol of social identity and self-confidence. Students from rural and Hindi-medium backgrounds are often deprived of opportunities due to their lack of English (Kanoria, 2023). In the era of globalization, English is the language that connects India to the world. English has made Indian youth competitive in the IT industry, startup culture and international business (Umar, 2025).

The Need for Skills-Based ELT

Traditional ELT only enables students to pass exams but does not develop the skills needed for real life

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and employment. Dutta & Dutta (2023) point out that traditional methods are not adequate in multilingual classroom situations.

Skill-based ELT provides balanced development of LSRW skills in students:

- Listening and Speaking: Improve interview, presentation, and communication skills.
- Reading and Writing: Ability to prepare academic writing, emails, and reports.
- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving: Success in professional and personal life.

According to Chakraborty (2025), making ELT skill-based at the higher secondary level will significantly improve the employability of students. Aithal & Aithal (2024) also predict that NEP 2020 could revolutionize English education if implemented properly.

Challenges

There are many obstacles in implementing skill-based English language teaching (ELT) in India. The first and most serious problem is the lack of resources. Language labs, audio-video equipment and digital resources are not available in most rural schools. In such a situation, it is difficult to make students practice practical skills like listening and speaking. According to the ASER 2022 report, the ability to read English is extremely limited in rural India, which makes it clear that the lack of infrastructure in education is a hindrance to skill development (Arvind, 2024).

The second major challenge is the digital divide. There is a deep disparity in technological facilities such as internet, computers and smartphones between cities and rural areas. Due to this, ICT-based ELT programs are not effective in rural areas. According to Kanoria (2023), digital inequality is creating a deep gap in the field of education and it keeps rural students away from global competition.

The third problem is the lack of teacher training. Most teachers still teach using the traditional grammar-based method and are not familiar with the modern methods of skill-based ELT. Agnihotri (2022) points out that even after the implementation of NEP 2020, it remains a major challenge for teacher training institutes to make their teachers proficient in ICT and skill-based teaching.

In addition, mother tongue interference is also a major problem. India's linguistic landscape is multilingual, where students rely more on their mother tongue or local language. As a result, there is hesitation and lack of confidence in speaking English. Dutta and Dutta (2023) stated in their study that encouraging students to speak English in a multilingual classroom is one of the most difficult tasks.

Finally, the current examination system also hinders skill-based ELT. Most exams are still based on memorization and writing, which does not assess the actual communicative ability and thinking ability of students. Dhokare, Jadhav and Gaikwad (2023) believe that unless the assessment system is fundamentally reformed, skill-based education will not fully achieve its goal.

Case Studies and Examples

To understand the success of skill-based ELT in India, it is important to look at the experiments and initiatives that have taken place in various states and institutions. These case studies make it clear that when English education is implemented in a practical, communicative, and skill-based manner, the results are remarkable.

First, we can take the example of Spoken English Clubs in rural schools. These clubs, started in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, were primarily aimed at providing students with an opportunity to speak English outside the classroom. Activities such as small group conversations, role-plays and discussions helped children gain confidence and gradually began to communicate in English. A study published in the *Jamia Journal of Education* (Dutta & Dutta, 2023) shows that such clubs significantly improved student participation and learning.

Another example is Language Labs in universities. Delhi University and many private universities have set up modern language labs where students get the opportunity to practice audio-video based English. These labs are not limited to improving pronunciation but also include activities such as presentation, interview skills and group discussion. Jayendran, Ramanathan and Nagpal (2021) argue that language labs have made higher education students more prepared not only for academic success but also for employment opportunities.

The third example is of training programs in the corporate sector. Particularly IT and BPO companies have organized communication skills training sessions for their new employees. The aim of these programs is to ensure that employees can communicate confidently with international clients. The India Skills Report (2024) states that such training programs have increased the employability of fresh graduates by 25–30%. Mehta and Awasthi (2025) also believe that the combined development of language skills and technical proficiency creates opportunities for “decent work” for youth.

In addition, some states have also implemented ICT-based ELT projects at the school level. For example, digital classrooms and mobile-based English learning apps were used in some government schools in Maharashtra and Karnataka. According to a study by Aithal and Aithal (2024), the use of ICT saw rapid improvement in the language proficiency of rural students and they began to participate more actively in classroom activities.

These case studies make it clear that skill-based ELT is successful only when it is combined with practical exercises, modern technology, and participatory-based learning. This not only increases the linguistic proficiency of students, but also strengthens their confidence and employability.

New Possibilities and Solutions

To make skill-based English language teaching (ELT) effective in the Indian context, merely identifying the problems is not enough. For this, it is necessary to seriously consider practical solutions and new possibilities. Modern policies, technological interventions, and innovative teaching methods can provide guidance in this direction.

NEP 2020 presents a roadmap to make Indian education skill-centric. The policy emphasizes on linking language education with practical skills rather than limiting it to grammar and literature (MoE, 2020). It aims to ensure Foundational Literacy and Numeracy and language proficiency by Class 5. According to Swargiary (2024), success in higher education and employment is not possible without FLN and language proficiency. This policy has for the first time looked at all languages, including English, from the perspective of skill development. Therefore, if implemented correctly, the success of Skill-based ELT can be ensured.

Language labs are the most effective means of practical practice for students. Such laboratories in universities and schools provide students with an opportunity to listen, speak, and improve pronunciation. Jayendran, Ramanathan and Nagpal (2021) show that language labs significantly improved students' presentation and interview skills. Similarly, it is also necessary to establish skill development labs, where students can practice communication skills through group discussions, mock interviews, and debates. Dhokare, Jadhav and Gaikwad (2023) believe that skill-based education will remain incomplete unless experimental facilities are available in the education system.

In today's digital age, AI and ICT-based tools are giving a new direction to ELT. Tools such as Duolingo, Grammarly and ChatGPT provide personalized feedback to students. Umar (2025) states in his study that AI-based teaching increases both the learning speed and confidence of students. In addition, Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has emerged as an inexpensive and accessible option for students in rural and remote areas. Aithal and Aithal (2024) predict that ICT-based ELT will become an integral part of Indian education in the coming years.

Teachers are the foundation of any educational reform. To make skill-based ELT successful, it is necessary to train teachers in modern ELT techniques by moving beyond grammar-based methods. According to Agnihotri (2022), even after the implementation of NEP 2020, teacher training institutes need to improve ICT and skill-based methods. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs can help teachers learn to use new technologies, methods, and AI tools.

The foundation of skill-based ELT is participation and dialogue. Dutta and Dutta (2023) state that participation-based methods (such as role-play, group discussion and peer learning) in multilingual classrooms overcome students' hesitation and increase their confidence. Spoken English Clubs are an example of this, which gave rural students the opportunity to speak and improved their language proficiency.

The current examination system only measures rote learning and writing ability, while ignoring actual language skills. Mehta and Awasthi (2025) say that actual language proficiency is required for “decent work”.

Therefore, the assessment system also needs to be changed. It should include presentations, interviews, debates, and project work. Dhokare, Jadhav and Gaikwad (2023) have also clarified that unless the assessment is based on practical skills, skill-based ELT will remain incomplete.

India's IT and BPO industry introduced communication training programs for new employees, which increased employability by 25–30% (Wheebox & CII, 2024). This model can be integrated with education institutions. If universities and industry organize language training together, students can be prepared according to real-life needs. Umar (2025) believes that industry-academia collaboration will make the education system more relevant and employment-oriented.

ASER 2022 (Arvind, 2024) showed that English proficiency is extremely limited in rural India. The government will have to launch special schemes to bridge this gap. Mobile learning platforms, digital classrooms and low-cost English labs can be set up in rural areas. Kanoria (2023) argues that unless rural and urban students get equal opportunities, the benefits of skill-based ELT will be limited only to urban students.

In a multilingual country like India, the biggest question of ELT is the intervention of mother tongue. Dutta and Dutta (2023) say that ELT should be implemented in multilingual classrooms in a balanced way with mother tongue. Techniques such as code-switching and translanguaging help students learn English. Thus, ELT should be implemented in a multilingual context rather than being completely English-centric.

The future of skill-based ELT lies in the integration of technology, policy, and participatory learning. Varghese and Khare (2020) say that higher education in India will be able to compete globally only when English proficiency is given priority at both policy and practice levels. According to Umar (2025), if NEP 2020 is implemented properly, Indian students will be recognized for language proficiency not only at the national but also international level in the coming years.

“New Possibilities and Solutions” show that implementing skill-based ELT in India is difficult, but not impossible. Policy making, teacher training, use of ICT and industry-academia collaboration if implemented properly will not only enhance the language proficiency of students but also strengthen their confidence and employability.

Policy Recommendations

Policy interventions are imperative to successfully implement Skill-based ELT in India. Efforts at the school or teacher level alone are not enough, but concrete strategies are needed at all four levels – education policy, institutions, teachers, and students.

The National Education Policy (NEP 2020) has taken important steps towards making education skill-centric (MoE, 2020). But to effectively implement this policy, the government must take additional steps. First, each state government should prepare a state-specific roadmap for Skill-based ELT. Swargiary (2024) argues that the goals of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy must reach rural and deprived areas, not just resource-rich schools. Additionally, the government should ensure special funding for setting up English Labs and Digital Classrooms (Kanoria, 2023).

Schools and universities have a responsibility to make Skill-based ELT a compulsory part of their curriculum. Dhokare, Jadhav and Gaikwad (2023) believe that higher education institutions should not only teach theoretical English subjects but also include bridge courses and communication training modules based on Employability Skills. Private and government universities should jointly set up Skill Development Centres where students can participate in activities such as Mock Interviews, Group Discussions and Corporate Training.

The biggest challenge in implementing Skill-based ELT is teacher training. Agnihotri (2022) points out that most teachers still follow traditional grammar-based methods. Therefore, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programmes need to be made compulsory. In this, teachers should be trained in ICT tools, AI-based applications, and Communicative Teaching Methods. Aithal and Aithal (2024) predicts that if teachers continue to receive continuous training, the goal of NEP 2020 can be fully achieved.

Skill-based ELT will be successful only if students actively participate in it. Dutta and Dutta (2023) state that activities such as peer learning and role-play remove hesitation and increase confidence of students. Government and institutions should promote self-learning apps, spoken English clubs and digital platforms so

that students can practice learning English even outside the classroom. Wheebox & CII (2024) have also clarified that such skill development programs directly improve the employability of youth.

Only steps taken at the policy level can make skill-based ELT a permanent part of the Indian education system. If the government ensures the establishment of English Labs, institutions adopt Skill Development Centres, teachers are trained in modern methods and students use peer learning and digital tools, then this education reform will turn into reality rather than being limited to paper documents. Ultimately, skills-based ELT will prepare Indian youth for academic success as well as employment and global competition (Umar, 2025; Varghese & Khare, 2020).

Conclusion

In the Indian context, English is not just a subject but a vehicle for opportunities, confidence, and employment. However, traditional English teaching methods, which are based on grammar and rote learning, are proving inadequate in today's global age. This is why the need for skill-based English language teaching (ELT) is now more relevant than ever. Research has shown that if English education is integrated with practical competencies such as listening, speaking, reading and writing (LSRW), students can become more competent not only academically but also at the employability level (Chakraborty, 2025; Dutta & Dutta, 2023).

There is a huge gap in English proficiency between rural and urban areas of India. ASER 2022 revealed that only 20% of students in rural India can read English sentences correctly (Arvind, 2024). Similarly, the India Skills Report (2024) shows that less than 50% of graduate students have the English communication skills required for jobs. This situation confirms that there is a deep gap between education and employment, which can only be bridged by Skill-based ELT.

NEP 2020 (MoE, 2020) aims to bridge this gap by making education skill-centric. It sees language proficiency as integral to Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), which is essential for the holistic development of students. Swargiary (2024) also argues that no education system can succeed without FLN and language skills. Hence, concrete action is needed in the direction pointed out by NEP 2020.

Additionally, this research presents several case studies and examples, such as Spoken English Clubs in rural schools, Language Labs in universities, and Communication Training Programs in the corporate sector. All these initiatives have proven that when English education is integrated with practical activities, technological tools, and industry requirements, both the proficiency and confidence of students improve (Jayendran et al., 2021; Wheebox & CII, 2024).

However, there are challenges in implementing Skill-based ELT – such as lack of resources, digital divide, lack of teacher training and mother tongue interference. However, these challenges can be addressed. At the policy level, measures such as setting up English Labs and Digital Classrooms, Skill Development Centres in institutions, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programmes for teachers and Peer Learning Clubs for students can strengthen Skill-based ELT (Agnihotri, 2022; Aithal & Aithal, 2024).

Ultimately, it can be concluded that Skill-based ELT is not just a tool for education reform but it is the basis of the future of India's youth. If policy-makers, teachers, institutions and students all adopt it together, the Indian education system will not only be academically strong but will also fully prepare the youth for employment and global competition. Thus, skill-based ELT can enable India to successfully address the educational and economic challenges of the 21st century (Umar, 2025; Varghese & Khare, 2020).

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