

Voices from the Classroom: Teachers' Perceptions and Pedagogical Challenges in English Medium Instruction In Andhra Pradesh Government Schools

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Abstract:

The transition to English Medium Instruction (EMI) in Andhra Pradesh government schools, initiated under the state's educational reform agenda, has generated considerable debate regarding classroom feasibility and teacher readiness. The paper examines the attitude of teachers towards EMI and the instructional issues that they face during implementation based on primary survey data of 150 in-service teachers in government schools located in Vijayawada (Krishna district) and Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh. Through a mixed-method design, a combination of structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, the study establishes that although teachers generally support the aspirational value of EMI in promoting the socioeconomic mobility of students, a considerable percentage of them report poor proficiency in content-specific language vocabulary and oral communication. The key pedagogical issues that have been determined are continuous usage of Telugu among the students, absence of EMI-specific teacher training, scarcity of teaching-learning resources, and discrepancy between assessment activities and expectations of EMI. Code-switching emerged as the most prevalent coping strategy. The findings underscore the urgent need for sustained, context-sensitive professional development programmes, bilingual instructional resources, and supportive school leadership to ensure pedagogically sound EMI implementation in state government schools.

Keywords: English Medium Instruction, EMI, teacher perceptions, pedagogical challenges, Andhra Pradesh, government schools, code-switching, language policy.

1. INTRODUCTION

The adoption of English Medium Instruction (EMI) as a primary vehicle of school education has become one of the most consequential and contested policy decisions in post-liberalisation India. Andhra Pradesh has been at the forefront of this shift. Following the bifurcation of the state in 2014, the government of Andhra Pradesh prioritised English medium education in government schools, reflecting a broader neoliberal consensus that English competence is indispensable for participation in the global economy (Canagarajah, 2013; Phillipson, 1992). The English Medium Instruction policy in Andhra Pradesh was gradual and implemented in phases since Classes I onwards, and finally it was made mandatory in all government primary and upper-primary schools by 2019/2020 (Government of Andhra Pradesh, 2020).

Regardless of the policy justification, EMI implementation in low-resource government school settings is a challenge. Government school teachers in Andhra Pradesh also have their education and teacher training in Telugu medium, unlike the teachers in the English-medium schools of private educational institutions. The lack of harmony between the language of instruction required by policy and the language resources

offered to teachers is what Cummins (2000) described as an instructional mismatch, a situation that significantly compromises the quality of learning results.

Previous studies on the topic of EMI in South and Southeast Asia have repeatedly emphasized the fact that the enthusiasm of policy tends to run ahead of ground-level preparedness (Hamid et al., 2013; Hu, 2008; Dearden, 2014). Similar gaps in implementation have been reported in the studies of such states of India as Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Karnataka (Bose, 2019; Mohanty, 2019). Nevertheless, little research has been carried out on the experiences of teachers working in Andhra Pradesh government schools in particular districts like Vijayawada and Guntur, where there is demographic diversity, a heterogeneous socio-economic group of students, and a poor school infrastructure, which compounds the policy problem. It is against this gap that this study chooses to privilege the voices of the classroom, i.e., the perceptions and lived experiences of practising teachers, as the first-hand accounts of the former. The question posed in the paper is: (i) What are the perceptions of government school teachers towards EMI in Andhra Pradesh? (ii) What are the particular pedagogical problems they face in its implementation? (iii) What coping strategies do they employ? The answers to these questions have direct implications for teacher policy, pre-service and in-service training design, and materials development in the state.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The global expansion of EMI since the 1990s has been theorised through multiple lenses—linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992), language ecology (Hornberger, 2002), academic language socialisation (Duff, 2010), and content and language integrated learning (CLIL) (Dalton-Puffer, 2011). In low- and middle-income country contexts, EMI is frequently positioned as an instrument of social equity—a means to provide state-school students access to the same linguistic capital that elite private schooling confers (Erling & Seargeant, 2013).

Hamid et al. (2013) recorded in South Asia in particular that English-medium policy in Bangladesh primary schools created a high level of pedagogical dissonance with teachers who were competent in their subject areas, unable to teach English. Likewise, Hu (2008) discovered that the low level of English proficiency among rural Chinese teachers in combination with the poor institutional assistance resulted in surface-level adherence to EMI policy, instead of a real change in the medium of instruction. These results are in line with Dearden's (2014) international survey on behalf of the British Council, which found that EMI policy is often implemented without proper planning of language development in teachers.

The ecology of competitive examination and the right to education structure in India (UPSC, State PSCs, banking sector) has increased the pressure on the English-medium schooling among families who aspire to the lower-middle-class (Kumar, 2014). However, Mohanty (2019) states that this requirement is seldom aligned with the language resources of government schools, which resulted in a linguistic double bind of teachers who are supposed to implement EMI without the required preparation. Bose (2019) examined the Hindi-medium teachers who switched to teaching in English in Maharashtra, particularly, and discovered that code-switching, instead of a deficit strategy, served as a significant scaffold of translanguaging that facilitated conceptual learning.

The concept of translanguaging—drawing fluidly on bilingual repertoires for pedagogical purposes (Garcia & Wei, 2014)—has emerged as theoretically significant for understanding EMI in multilingual contexts like Andhra Pradesh, where Telugu, regional dialects, and English coexist in students' linguistic ecologies. Despite this theoretical advance, classroom-level empirical research from Andhra Pradesh remains sparse.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The research design was convergent mixed-method research (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018), which combines quantitative survey data with semi-structured interview information. This triangulated methodology made it possible to describe the breadth of teacher challenges statistically, but to describe in depth and a nuanced way the individual classroom experience.

3.2 Sample and Sampling Procedure

Government schools of Vijayawada (Krishna district) and Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh were selected through purposive cluster sampling. One hundred and fifty in-service teachers were involved in the quantitative phase, which was attracted through primary, upper-primary, and high school levels. In the qualitative section, 20 teachers with different experiences, types of schools, and genders were interviewed. The sample profile is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 150)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
District	Vijayawada (Krishna)	82	54.7
	Guntur	68	45.3
Gender	Male	78	52.0
	Female	72	48.0
Qualification	B.Ed. (Telugu Medium)	61	40.7
	B.Ed. (English Medium)	49	32.7
	M.Ed. / PG	40	26.6
Teaching Experience	< 5 Years	38	25.3
	5–10 Years	57	38.0
	> 10 Years	55	36.7
School Type	Primary (1–5)	54	36.0
	Upper Primary (6–8)	56	37.3
	High School (9–10)	40	26.7

Note. Data collected through primary survey, January–March 2024. TLM = Teaching-Learning Materials.

3.3 Instruments

A structured Likert-scale questionnaire (5-point scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) was developed covering four domains: (i) teacher English language self-assessment, (ii) perceptions of EMI policy, (iii) pedagogical challenges, and (iv) coping strategies. The instrument was piloted with 20 teachers

in a Vijayawada municipal school; Cronbach's alpha reliability was 0.83 (overall). Semi-structured interview protocols explored lived classroom narratives in greater depth.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations) computed in SPSS v.27. Thematic analysis was carried out on the qualitative interview transcripts using the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). Member checking and peer debriefing were employed to enhance trustworthiness.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Teachers' English Language Self-Assessment

A significant finding concerns the self-reported English proficiency of respondents. While a majority rated their reading comprehension as adequate, oral communication and content-specific vocabulary—the skills most directly implicated in EMI delivery—were identified as areas of concern by a substantial minority (see Table 2). Only 21.3% rated themselves as proficient in spoken English for teaching purposes, and merely 18% felt confident with subject-specific English vocabulary.

Table 2. Teachers' Self-Assessment of English Language Skills (N = 150)

English Language Skill	Proficient (%)	Moderate (%)	Needs Improvement (%)
Speaking / Oral Communication	21.3	44.7	34.0
Reading Comprehension	47.3	36.0	16.7
Writing / Grammar	38.7	41.3	20.0
Content-Specific Vocabulary	18.0	39.3	42.7
Pronunciation & Fluency	16.0	42.0	42.0
Overall Self-Rating	28.0	40.7	31.3

Note. Figures represent the percentage of respondents selecting each proficiency category. Primary data, 2024.

These results are in line with the fact that surface-level language competence is not necessarily transferred to the specialised register needed in the content area instruction (Hu, 2008). Interview information further enriched this image: a Class VII Science teacher in Guntur noted that although she could read textbook material in English, she could often be unable to answer spontaneous student questions in English except by first going back to Telugu, the difference between receptive and productive academic language competence (Cummins, 2000).

4.2 Pedagogical Challenges

In Table 3, the results are the responses of teachers with respect to particular classroom level difficulties with the implementation of EMI. The fact that nearly all participants (81.3) agree that students always switch to Telugu when communicating in the classroom is especially interesting, because it is an indication of a systemic nature of the problem that cannot be solved by a single teacher.

Table 3. Frequency Distribution of Pedagogical Challenges in EMI Implementation (N = 150)

Challenge Area	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Difficulty explaining abstract concepts in English	74.7	14.0	11.3
Students revert to Telugu in classroom interaction	81.3	10.7	8.0
Inadequate EMI-specific training / in-service support	78.0	12.0	10.0
Insufficient English-medium textbooks / TLMs	72.0	16.0	12.0
Assessment tools not aligned with EMI pedagogy	69.3	18.7	12.0
Parental pressure to use the Telugu medium	64.0	20.0	16.0
Lack of peer collaboration on EMI strategies	66.7	18.7	14.6

Note. Response categories collapsed from a 5-point Likert scale to Agree (4–5), Neutral (3), and Disagree (1–2). Primary data, 2024.

The fact that inadequate teacher training (78%) was identified as a major issue is supported by the results of the British Council global survey (Dearden 2014) and by Hamid et al. (2013), who presented the idea that EMI policy in resource-constrained situations is often more focused on administrative roll-out than pedagogical preparation. Several interviewees also indicated that in the last three years, they only attended one or two orientation workshops, which were said to be theoretical and not related to classroom requirements.

The issue of teaching-learning materials (72%) indicates a recorded gap in the Andhra Pradesh situation. Although the state government has published revised textbooks in English by the AP State Council of Educational Research and Training (AP SCERT), teachers claimed that supplementary resources, bilingual dictionaries, and manipulatives to facilitate concept-building in English were in inadequate supply (Government of Andhra Pradesh, 2020). Assessment misalignment (69.3%) was also a connected issue: teachers observed that end-of-term exams, which continue to use rote-recall formats to a large extent, did not help nurture the communicative use of the English language that EMI is supposed to foster.

4.3 Coping Strategies Employed by Teachers

Without proper institutional support, teachers have constructed a set of informal coping strategies, as described in Table 4. The most common strategy, which was used by 67.3% of all respondents regularly, was code-switching between English and Telugu.

Table 4. Coping Strategies Employed by Teachers in EMI Classrooms (N = 150)

Strategy Employed	Regularly (%)	Occasionally (%)
Code-switching (English ↔ Telugu)	67.3	22.7
Use of visual aids and realia	58.7	28.0
Bilingual glossaries/vocabulary cards	42.7	36.0
Simplified English explanations	61.3	24.0
Peer-learning groups (mixed proficiency)	38.7	30.7
Self-study of subject content in English	44.0	34.7

Note. 'Regularly' denotes use in more than half of instructional periods per week. Primary data, 2024.

The prevalence of code-switching warrants careful theoretical interpretation. The argument that advocates strategic interchange between languages is not a weakness but an advanced pedagogical tool (Garcia and Wei, 2014; Canagarajah, 2013) is that students can use their entire semiotic inventory to structure conceptual knowledge. A similar observation was made by Bose (2019) in Maharashtra. The policy dilemma, however, does not lie in the need to abolish code-switching but rather in offering teachers a conceptual framework within which the use of translanguaging can be implemented in a controlled and planned manner.

Other elements that were frequently reported were visual aids (58.7%) and simplified English explanations (61.3%). Interestingly, less commonly used techniques included peer-learning groups and bilingual vocabulary cards, which have a good evidence base in the CLIL literature (Dalton-Puffer, 2011), implying that gaps in teacher repertoire of evidence-based EMI pedagogy exist. The interview data revealed that several teachers had no knowledge of CLIL as a methodological framework and had not been trained in content-area literacy strategies.

5. DISCUSSION

The evidence from Vijayawada and Guntur presents a coherent and concerning picture of EMI as a policy mandate that has been institutionalised at the administrative level while remaining pedagogically under-supported at the classroom level. The findings reflect what Tollefson and Tsui (2004) described as the 'implementation gap'—the chasm between language policy as text and language policy as practice. Teachers in this study broadly accept the aspirational logic of EMI (access to English as social capital), yet find themselves inadequately resourced to realise it pedagogically.

Crucially, the challenges documented here are not primarily attitudinal but structural. They stem from: (i) pre-service teacher education programmes that have not been redesigned to prepare English-medium teachers; (ii) in-service training that is sporadic, brief, and theoretically removed from classroom practice; (iii) materials development pipelines that have not kept pace with policy implementation; and (iv) assessment frameworks that reward recall over communicative competence. These structural gaps cannot be resolved through teacher motivation alone and require systemic policy intervention.

The results also indicate the heterogeneity of the sample. The teachers who had over ten years of experience and those who had received training in English-medium institutions mentioned that they encountered very few difficulties with oral English delivery; thus, experience and medium of training are significant mediating variables that policy should take into consideration. A one-size-fits-all training model is therefore inadequate; differentiated professional development pathways are needed.

Parental pressure toward Telugu medium (64%) adds a community-facing dimension to the challenge. This finding resonates with Mohanty's (2019) argument that bottom-up language socialisation forces frequently resist top-down EMI mandates, particularly in communities where the perceived economic utility of English is real but the immediate communicative environment remains Telugu-dominant. An effective EMI policy must therefore include community-facing communication strategies alongside teacher capacity building.

6. CONCLUSION

The paper offers an empirical basis that can be used to critically revisit the EMI implementation in government schools in Andhra Pradesh. While teachers from Vijayawada and Guntur demonstrate a genuine willingness to engage with the EMI mandate, their experiences reveal a system under strain—one in which policy ambition outpaces preparation in teacher language proficiency, professional development, materials availability, and assessment design.

The study recommends the following evidence-based interventions. First, pre-service B.Ed. programmes in Andhra Pradesh must incorporate dedicated English-for-teaching modules, focusing on academic language, content-specific vocabulary, and oral communication, recognising that language competence for teaching differs from general communicative competence (Cummins, 2000; Dearden, 2014). Second, the state's Samagra Shiksha framework should commission systematic, school-based in-service professional development grounded in Content and Language Integrated Learning principles (Dalton-Puffer, 2011), with structured peer-observation components and mentoring from language resource teachers. Third, the AP SCERT needs to hasten the creation of bilingual auxiliary materials, e.g., bilingual glossaries, teacher reference guides, and audio-visual content-area materials to facilitate concept-building in English-medium settings. Fourth, assessment frameworks must be reformed to reward communicative competence alongside content knowledge, signalling to teachers and students that English is a living medium, not merely a medium of rote reproduction.

The voices of teachers—too rarely centred in language policy discourse—reveal not resistance to EMI but a principled demand for the support structures that would make meaningful EMI possible. Future research should conduct longitudinal studies tracking EMI outcomes at the student level and extend the geographic scope to include rural mandals, where infrastructure deficits amplify the challenges documented here.

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