

Chapter 4

English Medium Education in India: The Neoliberal Legacy and Challenges to Multilingual Language Policy Implementation



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Abstract A parallel education industry largely unaddressed in national language education policy framings, English medium education (EME) in India thrives and is buoyed by the neoliberal constructs of the individual/institutional agency and responsibility for economic success. Most studies on Indian English language education place the inequities perpetuated by neoliberalism as a construction of the elite classes who act as gatekeepers for English, but the issue is far more complex. The chapter argues that the economically stable middle class babysits English and keeps the neoliberal rhetoric alive through investment in EME. It discusses other factors that allow a neoliberal construction of English, such as the absence of national consensus on an 'official' language or on diversity of *lingua franca(s)* to negotiate life beyond community and state, the role of teachers and the nature of ELT pedagogical practices prescribed by national curricular frameworks. In short, the chapter critiques the overt and implicit ways by which English medium education (EME) in India promotes and sustains the neoliberal regime and provides continual resistance to the implementation of a healthy multilingual education policy.

Keywords Language education policy · English medium education · Neoliberalism · Multilingualism · Multilingual education · Language hierarchy · Mother tongue · Three language formula

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Introduction

This chapter provides a critical discussion of the overt and unconscious ways in which English medium education (EME) in India promotes and sustains the neoliberal regime and provides continual resistance to the implementation of a healthy multilingual education policy. In India, English has lodged itself into an uncontested space created by fissures within both national language-in-education policy (LiEP) and the lack of robust curricular models built around the multilingual habitus. Some such gaps that English has been able to fill emerged out of the lack of national consensus on an 'official' language or a lingua franca to negotiate life beyond community and state, the unclear and problematic definitions of 'mother tongue' in LiEP documents and the complete reliance on the teacher to interpret, manage and direct successful learning of English. Given an education culture that considers economic success as directly proportional to mastery over English, schools with English as medium of instruction thrive, and an English medium education is considered a way out of poverty, exclusion and class subjugation.

Neoliberalism in Indian education is premised on the benefits of wealth creation through a free market, where education is considered “an engine for economic growth” (Block et al, 2012b, p. 7), and where the production of human capital is intricately tied to individuals’ mastery over English. A common perception in India (Dey, 2019; Karat, 1972; Malik, 2012; Roy, 1993; Shepherd, 2019) is that the inequities perpetuated by neoliberalism are a construction of the elite classes who act as gatekeepers for English. However, it is the economically stable middle class that keeps the neoliberal rhetoric alive by investing in EME for their children. As Chacko (2020) argues,

the rapid expansion of relatively low-fee English-medium private schools across the country is viewed as evidence of ‘the widespread ideology of English-medium education’s transformative potential’, not only among those who consider themselves middle class, but also among those who aspire to the middle class. (p. 6)

Several scholars investigating social disadvantage, mobility and the private English medium education industry (Chacko, 2020; Das, 2016; EPW Engage, 2021; James & Woodhead, 2014; Jayadeva, 2019; Mathew & Lukose, 2020; Mohanty, 2017, 2019 and others) discuss the wide variation in class boundaries, with new groups self-identifying as ‘middle-class’ to gain access to better English education. As Jayadeva (2019) discusses,

the proliferation of low-cost English-medium schools has contributed to very real socio-economic mobility among the expanding Indian middle classes, and those who aspire to join their ranks, while simultaneously also creating new types of inequality, based on English proficiency. (p. 154)

The lower classes thus join the middle classes in providing the clientele for the low-cost EME market. The economic elite feels no threat from these groups’

preoccupation with affordable EME as the exclusionist (usually residential) schools in which they send their children are far out of reach of the common person's pocket. The marginalized classes see hope when middle class children secure jobs in the internet-enabled corporate sector. The enactment of EME in India demonstrates that "issues such as diversity, plurality and citizenship do not necessarily counter neoliberalism" (Zacchi, 2016, p. 168). The roles that English plays in a complex social culture like India's are rooted in a history of intra-national tensions between social class and schooling, policy dispensation and political dispositions, and between a widely publicized reform agenda and putative educational access, as the studies discussed in the chapter demonstrate. The neoliberal agenda of access, equity and emancipation has been so eloquently expressed in, and through, English that its jargon has been unequivocally adopted by the educational reform and empowerment agenda as well, as a reading of national education policy documents shows. In other words, English in India is not merely a route to success; for many, it is the very definition of success.

The status of English as the marker of progress, sophistication and intellectualism is continually perpetuated in media – advertisements, television, radio, social networking spaces – and in textbooks. In media, there is a proliferation of celebrity role models, images of successful global professionals and 'Spoken English' dialogues preparing students to participate in corporate small talk in their future roles as successful professionals. This narrowing of focus is seen by some scholars as an "exclusivist, backward-looking jingoism – in which English (the language of 'development' and 'capitalism') becomes the only language worth knowing or learning ..., [reinforced by] the worldwide ascendancy of today's neoliberal, market-driven, consumerist capitalism" (Pandey, 2020, August 2). English in India has become the visible symbol of liberty from class and caste prejudice, poverty, backwardness, un-enlightenment and lack of sophistication. The image of successful English users, crafted determinedly in textbooks, billboards, media and matrimonial adverts through market-propelled images of high-income professionals, renders children from lower economic groups and social circles invisible. Ironically, this invisibilization provides the marginalized groups more impetus to look to English as the ladder that will afford them a foothold in social mobility. Such a perception of English-as-success has resulted in a thriving industry of private English medium (EM) schools not completely regulated by government mechanisms for fee structure, curricular choices (including commercially produced textbooks) and teaching practices. This is also associated with a systemic "abandonment of the social and cooperative ethic in favour of individualist and competitive business models" (Block et al., 2012b, p. 6). EME in India thus thrives, and is buoyed by, the neoliberal constructs of "individual and institutional accountability for economic success" (Kubota, 2014, p. 12). In the rest of the chapter, we will examine the historicity of the 'English equals success' narrative and argue for the need to re-examine the nation's relationship with the neoliberal agenda through the lens of Indian multilingualism.

English in Neoliberal India: The Zone of Parochial Development

Ever since the 1990s, when India opened up its economic, educational and cultural doors to compete in the global market, the neoliberal agenda began to be mainstreamed at both the macro/institutional and micro/individual levels. India, like Malaysia, “embarked on neoliberalist policies by adopting a national industrialisation strategy aiming for exports to the world market, welcoming foreign companies’ contributions to its economy” (Daghigh & Rahim, 2020, p. 3). The negotiation of participation in a global market, with its associated focus on entrepreneurial skills, also necessitated a common language through which to access “economic advancement, elevated status and prestige and trans-national mobility” (Singh et al., 2002, pp. 53–54), even though this came with a baggage of exclusionary outcomes (Young, 2011). It is no surprise that “[i]n neoliberal discourse, English is learned as a detachable, marketable and saleable resource or commodity that can convert into various forms of capital (cf. Bourdieu, 2008) in exchange for economic achievement and social mobility” (Shi & Lin, 2016, p. 170).

English in the Development of the Neoliberal Rhetoric

A critical reading of the neoliberal agenda in India’s education policies and practices (Chudgar & Creed, 2016; Harma, 2009; Heller, 2010; James & Woodhead, 2014; Jones, 2018; Mousumi & Kusakabe, 2019; Nambissan, 2012a, b; Srivastava et al., 2013; Mehrotra & Panchamukhi, 2006; Tooley & Dixon, 2006) shows that neoliberalism has entrenched itself so firmly in the Indian mindscape that the role, quality and practices of schooling are discussed and critiqued through a measurable, market-driven rhetoric. In other words, the neoliberal jargon (in English) has turned into the standardized linguistic form through which the development agenda is consumed or critiqued. Bourdieu (1991) explains the value of utterances and their relation to power, which, he says, “depends on the capacity of the various agents involved in the exchange to impose the criteria of appreciation most favourable to their own products” (p. 503). The dialectic has thus shifted from the acceptance of language as a marker of culture, breeding, in-group solidarity to the reframing of language as a commodity with economic value.

Foregrounding of the instrumental functions of language instead of its integrative functions has thus brought English to prominence in India (Mohanty, 2019). The value of utterances in the social structure is English; it is the marker of social class, educational achievement, economic success, power and privilege. There is a tacit understanding, at least among the middle and lower classes, that English is the language used to manage communication between the various global market players (producers, consumers, regulatory bodies), work processes, computerization,

the service sector and other forms of physical, symbolic or linguistic resources (Heller, 2010).

It comes as no surprise then that an English education is considered the legitimate, time-tested and respectable route to a better (and prosperous) life. Even with awareness of the imperfect conditions awaiting their children when they begin school, parents from all economic strata make education choices that are skewed heavily towards English medium schools. Pennycook (2000) views this “global dominance of English...as a product of the local hegemonies of English” (p. 117). Kandiah (2001) sees a less conscious participation of parents in this enterprise and more of an unavoidable trapping in a larger neoliberal scheme, warning of the “apparently unavoidable risk of co-option, of acquiescing in the negation of their own understandings of reality and in the accompanying denial or even subversion of their own interests” (p. 112). Other critics of the global presence of English in the postcolonial regime also write about the peculiar conceptualization and legitimization of the role of English in education. Lin and Martin (2005), for example reconstruct the notion of ‘Empire’ as “both invisible and non-monolithic”, reminding us that “we can no longer use the old binary logic” of Empire vs Us, that is, viewing empowerment through English as a kind of resistance to imperialism (p. 4). It is the belief, that an English education is the route to crossing class and caste boundaries historically regulated by society, overcoming poverty and its related social, economic and cultural stigmas, carving inroads to state and community resources, that have resulted in a thriving English medium education.

Policy Provisions and English Medium Education

As documented in the literature (Aggarwal, 2000; Annamalai, 2005; De et al., 2002; Jhingran, 2009; Mohanty, 2019; Nambissan, 2003), English medium schools in India largely come under the ambit of unaided/private education. English medium schools are privately run proprietorial enterprises that use commercial textbooks and are not required to follow government norms in teacher recruitment or remuneration; they are affiliated to the respective State Board, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) or the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE) only at secondary level when their students need school leaving certification. There are government schools in various states (such as Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Telangana, West Bengal), that now offer an English medium section, but these have not yet gained popularity, mainly because the English medium sections of these schools are served by the same teachers who teach the state/regional/local language medium sections. The teaching skills (or the lack of it) of these teachers have already received a lot of attention from scholars investigating primary education in India (see James & Woodhead, 2014; Nambissan, 2012a, b; Vaish, 2005, 2008 for instance). Apart from these, Kendriya Vidyalayas (Central Schools) and other Central government institutions like the Navodaya Vidyalayas are required to provide instruction in English in addition to Hindi as a

government mandate, but in practice, although these schools use textbooks written in the two languages, classroom instruction is mostly in Hindi.

In essence, people choose an English medium school if they want their children to receive an early and more intensive education in English. Besides autonomy in textbook selection, teacher recruitment and other factors, EME schools are also outside the purview of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and its state counterparts (the SCERTs), which are the government bodies that manage education. The NCERT is responsible for producing pedagogical guidelines for the country through the National Curricular Framework (NCF), the Position Papers for the teaching of all subjects, including languages, and other curricular regulations. However, adhering to NCERT/SCERT guidelines is not a mandatory requirement for private (English medium) schools because such schools do not come under the purview of the government school inspectorate. Nor are these schools required to use the textbooks produced by the NCERT or the SCERTs until Grade IX, at which level these schools seek affiliation to secondary certification boards. Because these schools are not part of the government education policy execution network, government research funding and focus are also not channelled towards them; the reformation and research efforts of the national education mission (*Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan* or SSA) are directed only at government schools and school teachers.

Language-in-Education Policy: Gaps and Overlaps

The lack of accountability of private schools offering English medium education and government negligence is not a matter of chance; such schools thrive because of the gaps in education governance between the national government and state governments. Education falls under the ‘Concurrent’ list in the Indian Constitution – it is legislated by both the national and state governments. Because states have legislative and financial power to regulate education, particularly school education, and seek to benefit from both grants-in-aid and private investment, the private EME ‘industry’ thrives and is not discouraged, while the national government prefers not to ‘interfere’ in state politics and policies relating to education. Kingdon and Muzammil (2003) refer to this as “a nexus between grants-in-aid, politics and private schools (p. 439). In such an unregulated private English medium education environment, focus on pedagogical efforts gets overshadowed by preoccupations with commercial returns in investment, divesting such businesses of any accountability. Even for purposes of affiliation to state or central boards, the nature of information to be provided by schools is focused on infrastructure, quantifiables and reports (including one on ‘best practices’) (eg. <https://cbse.nic.in/newsite/mandatory/OASIS%20REPORT.pdf>) rather than on quality indicators.

India’s education policies have aided and abetted the English medium education wave by the lack of clarity in its formulation and interpretation of Language in Education Policies (LiEP). After India’s independence in 1947, the Central Advisory

Board on Education (CABE) decided to retain English as an official language of state and education for 15 years until Hindi established itself comfortably as its replacement, and other Indian languages ('mother tongues') found their foothold in education. But the inability to disengage from the colonial construction of mother tongues through census determinations based on religion, caste, tribe or geography continued to make the term 'mother tongue' a problematic construct (Annamalai, 2001; Dua, 1996). National language policy sought to redress the silence on indigenous languages and revitalize them with a specific focus on their entrenchment in education by constituting a Minorities subcommittee and other national planning committees. However, the dominant hierarchy of languages (Mohanty, 2010, 2019) with English in the most dominant position, prevailed over other Indian languages including Hindi, and as a result, Indigenous, Tribal and Minority/Minoritized (ITM) languages were relegated to insignificance.

Despite the continued and overt emphasis on the promotion of mother tongues in language policy documents since 1947, the organisation of states according to language groups ensured that the distribution of funds and resources was skewed towards promotion of the privileged 'state' languages at the cost of ITM languages. English continues to flourish, in both overt and insidious ways, while India struggles to evolve language policies that can incorporate the traditionally natural fluidity of Indian multilingual repertoires in pedagogy and ensure strong maintenance norms of the living languages.

The Three Language Formula and Language Hierarchies

Apart from issues of defining mother tongues and the attempt to include these in language education frameworks, there was a drive to retain English as the language for international communication as in administration. The National Education Policy (NEP) (1968) decided that English should be one of the three compulsory languages in the three language formula (TLF), the other two being Hindi and a modern Indian language (preferably one of the languages of Southern India) in the Hindi speaking states, and Hindi and the regional language in the non-Hindi speaking states. However, South Indian states like Tamil Nadu resisted what they saw as the imposition of Hindi, and Northern states that had Hindi as the dominant language did not find any economic incentive in learning any of the South Indian languages.

In addition, the delineation of languages into vertical categories – as first, second and third languages – within the provisions of the TLF, turned the formula into a symbolic rather than a practicable solution in context (see Panda & Mohanty, 2014 for a detailed analysis of India's language-in-education policies). Implementation of the TLF was left to state agencies, which perpetuated hierarchies in curricular framing. Because states were free to decide on the medium of instruction at school (mother tongue or regional language as the 'first' language), and because each state had a number of languages spoken as mother tongues, the state language (i.e. the

language spoken by the majority in the state) became the chosen medium of instruction/language of schooling. Mohanty (2019), Mohanty & Panda (2016), Panda & Mohanty (2014) have analysed the LiEP and the TLF in India and have argued that the failure to differentiate mother tongues (MTs) from regional and dominant languages resulted in exclusion of ITM languages from education. While states struggled to accommodate various languages in the curriculum as media of instruction or additional (second/third/fourth) languages, there was no debate about English, which became a compulsory subject at school, and the main language of higher education. In the revised NPE of 1986, the inclusion of English as a compulsory subject was justified as a means of keeping up with “world knowledge... especially in science and technology” (NPE, 1986, p. 40). But the national government also warned against a “perceived hegemony of English” (NCERT, 2006, p. 4) and posed two challenges for language education: “(a) in regional medium schools, how can children’s other languages strengthen English learning? (b) in English medium schools, how can other Indian languages be valorised, reducing the perceived hegemony of English?”

English in the Development Rhetoric

Over the decades, English remained at the heart of every new LiEP, its necessity within the Indian fabric reiterated through impassioned arguments and reasoning. The National Curriculum Framework (2005) called for introduction of English at the elementary level as “a matter of political response to people’s aspiration” (NCF, 2005, p. 38). English was recognized as necessary to prepare Indians for the global knowledge explosion. [National Knowledge Commission (NKC), 2007]. English also came to be interpreted as a tool for inclusion. In that decade, the ‘hegemony’ of English was recognized, but policy was accommodative, considering English necessary for a transformative society. “[T]he time has come for us to teach our people, ordinary people, English as a language in schools. Early action in this sphere would help us build an inclusive society and transform India into a knowledge society” (NKC, 2007).

In 2019, however, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led national government questioned the hegemony of English and saw the proliferation of English-medium schools not as a response to aspirations of opportunity and success, but as a threat to an Indian sensibility. “Despite the rich, expressive and scientific nature of Indian languages, there has been an unfortunate trend in schools and society towards English as a medium of instruction and as a medium of conversation” (Draft NEP, 2019, p. 81). When the new National Education Policy came out in June 2020, the volatile issue of English and an English medium instruction through privatization was again left unaddressed, even though the hostile rhetoric against English was omitted. The word “English” occurs only five times in the 71-page document, and references to it are made obliquely through the word “bilingual” (p. 16), effectively

absolving the document of any responsibility of defining the status and role of English and EME in twenty-first century India.

Under the wide and unclear provisions for languages in education in the NEP 2020, it is likely that states will continue to struggle over language-of-choice hierarchies in deciding the “two of the three languages”, allowing English to further consolidate its position as the language of official purposes as well as the language of power. Within the blurred boundaries of framing English in language policy, administration or public perception as an Indian language, a colonial tool, or as a hegemonic strategy to alienate lower classes from equitable participation in economic nation building, attitudes to English medium instruction as a route to modernity and success have neither faded nor altered, perpetuating the neoliberal mechanism and all its attendant problems. Mohanty et al. (2009) warns: “When language becomes the basis of power, control and discrimination, socioeconomic inequality is perpetuated; the language(s) that people speak or do not speak determines their access to resources” (p. 121). Annamalai (2005) argues on similar lines, reminding us that unless the linguistic dichotomy (that English is for progress and modernity while Indian languages are for cultural preservation) is countered resolutely by education, “nation-building will remain notional” (p. 36).

Implications of Free Market Choice on English Medium Education Seekers

As a consequence of vagueness in policy, lack of legislation on private English medium schools and the continuation of the privatization agenda, the English medium school industry has made inroads into rural heartlands of India, and into the pockets of the less privileged. Contrary to the argument that English and English medium education serve only the “economic elite” which also serves as a gate-keeper for access to English and upward mobility, free market protocols have ensured that even the poorest classes are able to fulfil their educational aspirations through English to some degree. “[T]he notion that private schools are servicing the needs of a small minority of wealthy parents is misplaced ... a lower cost private sector has emerged to meet the demands of poor households” (Watkins, 2000, pp. 229–230). There is still evidence that shows that higher castes, in states like Uttar Pradesh, “have used their disposable incomes to buy privilege through private schooling for their children” (Jeffery et al., 2005, p. 47). But research also shows that private English medium schools operate in “practically in every locality of the urban centres as well as in rural areas” (Aggarwal, 2000, p. 20, in Tooley & Dixon, 2006).

Studies have also shown that “families who are choosing private schools – despite typically preferring a better government-run school system and being price conscious – tend to be comparatively more educated and wealthier than families who send their children to government schools (Härmä, 2009, 2010, 2011)” (Chudgar &

Creed, 2016, p. 546). In short, the choice of a private English medium education cuts across social and economic class, with education providers offering a range of school types, along with the choice of opting for schools affiliated to CBSE, ICSE or state education boards. While legislation is quiet on the implications of this choice on the market, “[s]chool choice is presented as providing innovation, responsiveness, accountability, efficiency and above all, improvement through competition” (Härmä, 2009, p. 153). In spite of the differential access to a ‘good’ English medium education, the perception of free choice in the matter of quality education means that “the private sector continues to grow by default more than by government design” (Mehrotra & Pancharukhi, 2006, p. 438). Fed by dreams of a better quality of life, and a way out of poverty, exclusion and caste-based discrimination, economically marginalized groups such as the Dalits (the lowest class in the caste circuit) view English as a divine redeemer, not as a part of any grand economic design concocted to widen the fault lines of society:

English is the milk of a lioness ... only those who drink it will roar. ... With the blessings of Goddess English, Dalit children will not grow to serve landlords or skin dead animals or clean drains or raise pigs and buffaloes. They will grow into adjudicators and become employers and benefactors. Then the roar of the Dalits ... will be heard by one and all. (Pandey, 2011, 15 February)

The Discourse of School Choice and English

The neoliberal discourse thus gets extended to the matter of choice of schooling, with the possibility of entry to an English medium school considered the all-important step towards economic and social emancipation. Baird (2009) reports from a study on low cost schooling that “the vast majority of low income parents I interviewed believed that if their child can speak English, he or she would be guaranteed a middle-class job” (p. 21). Reports of schooling choice from several states (Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, among others) show that private English medium schools catering especially to a low-income clientele are springing up “practically in every locality of the urban centres as well as in rural areas” (Aggarwal, 2000, p. 20).¹

The choice of a private English medium education thus depends on the hope of a promising future, usually premised on success stories of past high school graduates rather than on the quality of education. Choice also has to do with the ‘saviour effect’ – as mentioned earlier in the chapter, through the marketing of English as a wise investment with many future dividends through a wide range of cultural symbols (e.g. advertisements of luxury products, holiday packages, happy-family homes, corporate professionals, social media activity and so on); the middle class

¹For more details, see De et al., 2002; Jones, 2018; Nambissan, 2003, 2012a, b; Tooley & Dixon, 2006.

being the biggest consumers and perpetrators of this package. The middle class becomes the conduits through which EME is unequivocally promoted, and whose promotion of EME makes English an achievable goal. The relatively high disposable wealth of the middle class also makes them “educational consumers and investors, picking and choosing from the hierarchy of schools on offer, from the least attractive government school to the highest status private school, ‘upgrading’ their child’s school when resources permit, and downgrading when circumstances change” (James & Woodhouse, 2014, p. 85).

Mehrotra and Panchamukhi (2006) discuss the various fee structures of the private unaided English medium school industry, and the clientele that patronizes the schools on offer. The following tables from Mohanty (2017, p. 270) illustrate the differences in schooling costs across private and public (popularly referred to as ‘government’) schools in India (Fig. 4.1).

The hierarchy of school education choices and its implications on aspirations of achieving a “good English medium education” is captured in the figure from Mohanty (2017, p. 270) (Fig. 4.2).

For the social classes that cannot afford “good quality EM private schools” there is the perception that high fees are an additional barrier preventing access to English language skills development, and consequently, good quality general education.

The absence of a regulatory mechanism to govern the quality of education imparted in English medium schools, especially the low-cost sector, has not only allowed a proliferation of financially and educationally unaccountable schools, it has also allowed a parallel “shadow institutional framework” (Srivastava, 2008, p. 452) to thrive comfortably within the neoliberal paradigm. Srivastava defines this ‘framework’ as a “codified yet informal set of norms and procedures” operating to “manipulate and mediate the formal policy and regulatory framework for their

Type of school	Approximate cost
1. Exclusive elitist EM residential schools (e.g. Doon School)	US\$ 20,000 per annum
2. High-cost EM schools for the privileged class	US\$ 2,000–6,000 per annum
3. Low-cost EM schools for the less privileged class	US\$ 100–400 per annum
4. No-cost VM government schools for the poor	Free (with midday meal in primary grades)
4.a) MT medium for regional majority language groups	
4.b) Non-MT for ITM language groups	

Key: EM = English medium ITM = indigenous tribal majority
 MT = mother-tongue VM = vernacular medium

Fig. 4.1 Cost of schooling in India. (Mohanty, 2017)

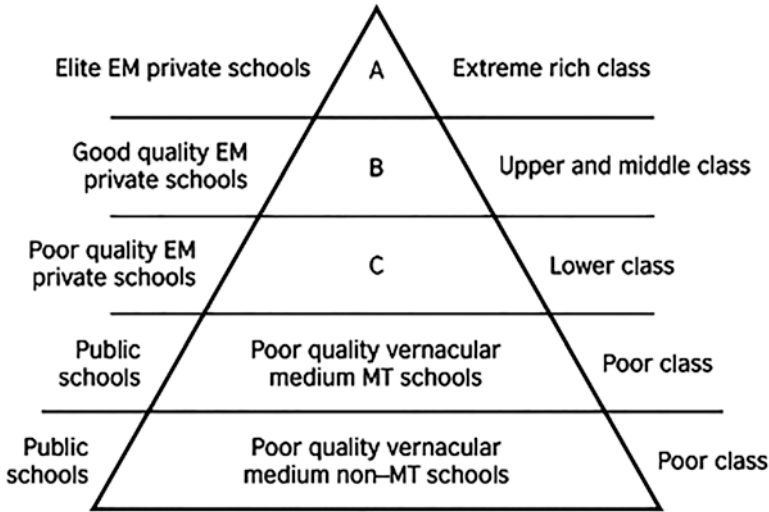


Fig. 4.2 The Relationship between schooling and social class in India

benefit” (ibid). In this framework the value of education is mapped to cost, such that a ‘good quality’ English medium school is usually understood as one that charges a high fee (with hidden costs such as textbooks from private publishers, transport fee, events donations, school trips or international assessment certificates). Public perception is fed on the view that the higher the amount charged, the better would be the quality of textbooks, teachers, facilities and opportunities. A study by Nambissan and Ball (2011) found that among the educational services in most demand by parents, private coaching and computer classes topped the list. “Computer classes were flagged as the ‘new English’ ... meaning that these services were most in demand by a parent” (Nambissan, 2012a, b, p. 88). It is common to see parents changing their children’s schools as the salaries increase, from lower cost to higher charging schools that promise high-demand educational services, in the belief that this would give their children a head start on a college education and a high paying job. Many parents also see education in an English medium school as a response to their own (lack of) education, and as opening up possibilities of social mobility, acceptance, and a way out of poverty.

The culture of sacrifice for the good of offspring, the need to have more visibility in society through more spending power –it is these broader considerations that fuel and keep the private English medium education market thriving. The colonial hang-over of obedience to authority, etiquette and discipline, coupled with parents’ belief that they are incapable of contributing to their children’s education, are all part of the image of a ‘good’ English medium education, and serves the market well. Parents from low income and disadvantaged groups are most susceptible to the imagery of success peddled by English medium schools to advertise their education packages, especially since their limited education proves a barrier to understanding of rules and regulations governing education. Some such legislations

include 25% reservation of seats that all private schools are mandated to offer² for low income aspirants, and the provisions of the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009. (See Chudgar & Creed, 2016; Mehendale, Mukhopadhyay, & Namala, 2015 for more discussion).

English Medium Educational Pedagogy and the Impact on Indian Multilingualism

The character and structure of EM schools has shown (see Copley, 2018; Gray, 2012; Gray & Block, 2012, 2014; Kubota, 2016; Phillipson, 2008, 2009; Xiong & Yuan, 2018) how they contribute to and create image (or illusion) of global success through English, perpetuating a neoliberal agenda originating out of the Anglo-American world. The promotion of English communication skills as a highly desirable commodity for economic success has meant that private English medium schools use curricula and material developed within a Western communicative paradigm even when such pedagogical choices do not resonate with the cultural experiences of the students. Imported teaching strategies built into commercial textbooks in English are part of the larger economic enterprise, and sit uncomfortably in the hands of teachers and students raised within a very different educational ecosystem. The production and supply of textbooks selling a ‘communicative’ methodology to EM schools by international ELT materials production houses legitimize teaching resources that implicitly or covertly promote neoliberal values such as individual enterprise, competition, monopoly and profit at the cost of accountability, investment in cultural capital and equity. But textbooks that “are saturated with neoliberal values ... clash with the schema of learners in non-western contexts” (Daghigh & Rahim, 2020, p. 3), as a result of which the sanctioned pedagogy is never the pedagogy of practice. The much celebrated communicative pedagogies promoted in the accompanying textbooks clash with traditional value systems that are rooted in collectivism and manifested through “values such as obedience, respect and non-confrontation towards people in authority and older people within and outside the family domain (e.g., parents, older family members, elders in the community)” (Daghigh & Rahim, 2020, p. 3). More importantly, the use of such pedagogies contradicts national language policy directives such as promotion of mother tongues, valuing the multilingual character of India, or employing one’s familiar languages to learn English, or in English.

Most of the literature on education practices in low cost private EM schools (cited in previous sections) attest to the inability of (poorly paid) teachers to

²This is among the few regulations that private (English medium) schools aspiring for affiliation to school boards are expected to follow; but because of the lack of accountability, many schools are able to evade this directive. In fact, the popular Bollywood movie *Hindi Medium* (2017) captures the nuances of the social implications of this reservation policy for parents aspiring to educate their children in an English medium school.

translate the curriculum into effective learning opportunities. This gap between what is promised and what is delivered is camouflaged under the neoliberal slogan of ‘study hard, prepare to compete if you want success’, effectively transferring responsibility of learning from the education service provider to the consumer. In some EM school contexts, teachers tolerate no language but English while in others, most English teaching happens in languages other than English (Boruah, 2017). Historically marginalized classes (such as the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes or Dalits), forced to negotiate the unfamiliar linguistic and pedagogical practices of the private schools in which they enrol their children, become a casualty in the invisible tug of war between economic benefit and identity preservation.

Some scholars tend to view the aspirational behaviour of the lower social classes not as detrimental to their linguistic identity and development, but as a desirable, or even admirable trait. Vaish (2008), for example, claims that “there is an inherent ecological balance that does not endanger the biodiversity of languages in India with the threat of language loss and shift” (p. 24). Other scholars such as Mohanty (2019), Mohanty and Panda (2016), Skutnabb-Kangas et al., (2009), however, see the neoliberal agenda in education as a serious threat to India’s linguistic character as well as its inherent multilingualism. Mohanty and Panda (2016), for example, argue that “some languages are associated with greater power and privileges compared to many others, which suffer neglect and discrimination in significant domains of use such as governance, law, education, trade, and commerce” (p. 3). They refer particularly to the “widespread attempt to bring English very early into the primary education in the Indian subcontinent” and “[t]he linguistic dichotomy perpetuated by ambiguous policy and lack of accountability of the private education sector [which] has come at significant cost to Indian multilingualism and multiculturalism” (p. 10).

The National Education Policy (2020) and Curricular Provisions for English

With the current dispensations in the new NEP about honouring students’ home languages, national education planning agencies such as the NCERT would have to redesign curricula to reflect “current conversations about the use of plurilingual forms of communication in education, whether labelled translanguaging, transliteracy, plural language practices, or polylingual languaging” (Groff, 2016, p. 156). The notion that a multilingual speaker’s languages are independent linguistic systems that develop in the order in which the individual gets ‘exposure’ to them is a tokenism that needs to be debunked. While rebuilding Indian language education from a normative multilingual position, pedagogy has to focus on children’s ‘medium of thinking’ (which could be in all the languages that a child is exposed to in its environment, and not just the home language) rather than on ‘teachers’ medium of instruction’ (Mohanty, 2020, public lecture), such that the learning of English

occurs within the general agenda of language education through “more experiential, holistic, integrated, inquiry-driven, discovery-oriented, learner-centred, discussion-based, flexible, and, of course, enjoyable” (NEP, 2020, p. 3) processes.

Curricular provisions will also need to critique English studies in higher learning institutions that have remained “a central signifier for social difference, although the difference shifted from race and gender to class, caste and ethnicity with the continuation of gender disparities” (Dutt, 2019, p. viii). In a future framing of language education, marginalization of educational opportunities for socially disadvantaged students will have to be countered not only at school sites, but also “by restructuring syllabi and effecting a pedagogic overhaul in colleges and universities, in promoting visible creativity and encouraging non-hierarchic, transdisciplinary dialogues that teach critical thinking and stimulate the imagination” (Dutt, 2019, p. ix). As the New London Group (NLG) declared in 1996, “The role of pedagogy is to develop epistemology of pluralism that provides access without people having to erase or leave behind different subjectivities” (NLG, 1996, p. 72).

In other words, to counter the erosion of educational values that are not bound within a for-profit commercial model, the English medium school industry will have to promote “a pedagogy of multiliteracies...one in which language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes” (NLG, 1996, p. 64). If we see multilingualism as the norm rather than as an exception, it becomes clear that every human being has the ability to potentially learn more than one language; monolinguals, then, are the exception: they are language users of one language because they have not been ‘exposed’ to (or have been deprived of) other languages. It is this ideological construction of the potential of human beings to acquire languages that needs to form the basis of second/foreign/other language/dialect acquisition, and English medium education will need to be envisaged within such a framework rather than as a workshop for training humans to work as communication brokers.

The Ownership of English by Postcolonial India: Myth and Reality

As the table above shows, the popular notion that in post-colonial multilingual societies, English has become a ‘native’ language and a part of the multilingual ecology, does not hold much ground. According to Phillipson (2009), the claim that the English language truly belongs to its users wherever they are and is detached from its Anglo-American roots is, “a fraudulent claim that is as untrue in York as New York or New Delhi” (p. 90). Mohanty (2019) agrees: “English as a language is quite alien to Indian life and culture, especially rural and tribal India” (p. 193)

Mohanty (2017, 2019) discusses a number of studies which expose the myth of EM superiority and show that when quality of schooling and socio-economic

differences are controlled, MT medium schools are more effective. The association between EM schooling and social privileges and the dual system of private and public schools bringing in a hierarchy related to the cost of schooling, make education a social instrument to perpetuate social inequalities and a form of *casteism* reflecting the consequences of different types of EM education. Despite its distance from the masses and their languages and its demographically minority status³, the dominance of English in India thus goes well beyond its control over material resources and the processes of globalisation and market forces (including British or American promotion of English and Anglicization) in the neoliberal regime. The dominance is reified through complex dynamics of multiple cultural layers in the diverse Indian society and gets entrenched in language users' system of beliefs and values transmitted across generations through the processes of multilingual socialisation (Mohanty, 2019, Mohanty & Skutnabb-Kangas, in press).

Conclusions: Finding a Space for English Within the Multilingual Ecology

Any policy of language education that privileges English over other languages promotes development for some and deprives many. Based on strong evidence, a number of researchers around the world have recommended relocating English into the MT-based multilingual education (MLE) framework suitable for multilingual societies like India (see Skutnabb-Kangas & Mohanty, 2009; Mohanty et al., 2009). Debunking the widely prevalent belief that EM schools are better than mother tongue or regional language medium schools, the MLE framework seeks to develop English on a strong foundation of MT and indigenous languages. Without a sustained curriculum implementation that works out of an ecological framing of language education, values and incorporates children's lived multilingual experiences and cognitive strategies for straddling various language repertoires, the English language will remain an exclusive tool in the hands of a few, rather than a marker of economic and social equity for all. The "linguistic dichotomy" that Annamalai (2005, p. 36) had warned of has to be resisted through a multiliteracy, multilingual framework that is not structured around vague rank ordering of languages as first, second or third. Positioning English officially as a second language in pedagogy has not worked in situations (such as rural or remote Indian districts) where English has no contextual presence, or works at best as a foreign language. In English-medium schools, conversely, the pedagogical orientation which mimics English as a first language has not worked either.

The English language has also to be reclaimed from class-based sites traditionally held as private and exclusive; a truly multilingual approach to literacy has to

³Less than 0.02% of the Indian population claim English as their MT and approximately 10% know English through formal education (Mohanty, 2019).

help learners negotiate the exclusionary ‘between’ spaces where English gets boxed due to undemocratized language planning. The languages in the everyday lives of students and teachers both inside and outside of the classrooms do not exist in neat, discrete categories but are used in fluid, creative, intertwined ways. It would not do, for instance, to classify learners as learning-disabled simply because their communication skills regress in an English-poor social space. When it comes to education of the masses in post-colonial societies, the question is thus not of choosing between English and MT or between English and national languages. It is not either English or any other language; it is both: English and multilingualism.

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