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BRIDGING POLICY AND PRACTICE: AN ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH MEDIUM INSTRUCTION IN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS OF VIJAYAWADA AND GUNTUR DISTRICTS, ANDHRA PRADESH

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Abstract

The Government of Andhra Pradesh's policy initiative to introduce English Medium Instruction (EMI) in government schools has initiated profound transformations in the pedagogical landscape of districts such as Vijayawada (NTR District) and Guntur. Enacted through the AP Schools (Regulation of Admissions and Prohibition of Capitation Fee) (Amendment) Act and reinforced by the 2019 state government mandate, the EMI policy sought to democratise access to quality English-medium education for first-generation learners from socioeconomically marginalised communities. This paper analyses the gap between the policy's stated intentions and its on-ground implementation across 403 EMI government schools, drawing on data from the Andhra Pradesh School Education Department (2023–24), the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER 2023), and National Achievement Survey (NAS) datasets. The study examines four critical dimensions: enrolment trends, teacher preparedness, student learning outcomes, and infrastructural adequacy. The new report shows a stark urban-rural gap, with rural educational institutions showing a lower quality of teaching (18-29% proficient teachers) and infrastructure (15-27% compliant). Although EMI schools show higher levels of parental satisfaction and English language and literacy development, achievement in mathematics and science content areas is lower than in Telugu-medium schools. The paper concludes with policy recommendations centred on targeted teacher training, bilingual scaffolding strategies, and equitable resource allocation.

Keywords: English Medium Instruction, Andhra Pradesh education policy, Vijayawada, Guntur, government schools, language-in-education policy, teacher preparedness, bilingual education, learning outcomes, education equity

1. INTRODUCTION

The question of which language should serve as the medium of instruction in publicly funded schools has historically been among the most politically charged and socially consequential debates in post-colonial India. In Andhra Pradesh, this debate acquired renewed intensity in 2019 when the Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy-led government announced the phased introduction of English as the medium of instruction (EMI) across all government schools—a policy reversal from decades of Telugu-medium dominance. The decision was framed as an act of social equity: to ensure that children from economically disadvantaged families, who could not afford private English-medium schools, would receive the same linguistic advantage that middle and upper-class students enjoyed as a matter of course.

Vijayawada (administratively reorganised as part of NTR District) and Guntur, situated in the Krishna-Guntur belt of Andhra Pradesh, present an analytically rich site for examining this policy shift. Both districts are characterised by a heterogeneous demographic composition, significant urban–rural disparities, and historically strong government school systems. As two of the most educationally active districts in the state—with combined government school enrolments exceeding 2.6 lakh students—they mirror, in microcosm, the policy dynamics unfolding across the state.

The notion of a 'policy–practice gap' is well-established in comparative education literature. Scholars such as Tollefson and Tsui (2004) and Canagarajah (2013) have demonstrated that language-in-education policies frequently encounter structural resistance when implemented without adequate attention to teacher capacity, material resources, and community contexts. Mohanty (2019) and Pattanayak (1991) have warned in the Indian context against blindly adopting English as a medium of

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instruction, especially in places where first-language support in the lower classes is critical in the development of the cognitive facet of children in early grades.

The proposed paper aims to make a contribution to the literature on the empirical research on the implementation of EMI in the Indian public-school system that is still developing. Through triangulation of government administrative data, survey-based results, and outcomes of national assessment, the study gives a detailed report on the manner in which EMI policy has been implemented, challenged, and modified in Vijayawada and Guntur districts.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

With the ambitious implementation of the EMI in the state, there is still a wide gap between the policy intention and the classroom. According to Central Square Foundation (2022), the fact that the transition to EMI in Andhra Pradesh has been so fast was not followed by the corresponding investment in teacher reskilling or pedagogical change. The ineffective implementation is a structural barrier comprised of the untrained teachers in EMI, especially in the rural mandals, and the English media learning materials are also insufficient.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The objectives that will guide the study include the following: (i) mapping the level of EMI implementation in government schools in the districts of Vijayawada and Guntur; (ii) analyzing the preparedness of teachers to implement EMI; (iii) analyzing the learning outcomes of students in EMI and Telugu medium schools; and (iv) auditing the availability of infrastructure against the standards of EMI quality.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This theoretical framework of this study is based on three related fields of study and research: language-in-education policy (LEP) theory, content and language integrated learning (CLIL) research, and the empirical research on EMI in South Asian schooling contexts.

In his groundbreaking publication on the topic of bilingualism and bilingual education, Baker (2011) states that the most effective language-medium transitions can simply occur in a minimum of five or seven years of formal scaffolded language teaching, especially where the target language is not used in the home setting. This observation can be directly related to the Andhra Pradesh context, as most of the government school students are first-generation English speakers. The AP EMI policy, which was implemented within a contracted period, is likely to have the effect of reducing a process that is pedagogically sensitive to an administrative directive.

Cummins (2000) describes the difference between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) and says that basic fluency in the English language can be gained in a period of two or three years but academic fluency in mathematics and science cannot be acquired in such a short period. Theoretical prediction seems to be fulfilled by the NAS and ASER data used in the present research because the EMI students in the cities of Vijayawada and Guntur have higher scores in English reading but lower scores in mathematics and science understanding compared to their counterparts who study in Telugu.

On the policy level, Graddol (2006) places the globalization of EMI into the larger rationale of English as a global lingua franca and economic capital. There is however a critical response given by Phillipson (2009) who holds that English-only or even English-dominant instruction in the postcolonial environment may continue to perpetrate epistemic injustice through the displacement of indigenous knowledge systems and the disfavoring students whose native language is not English. The theoretical contradictions in the AP EMI policy can be observed in its mixed attitude to the Telugu as a co-language of instruction.

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Mohanty (2019) captures the contradiction of monolingual education systems of multilingual India, and proposes mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTE) as a more pedagogically and culturally consistent system of education than enforced EMI. This point of view is supported by the National Education Policy 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2020), which proposes teaching in the home or regional language beginning with at least Grade 5, a policy that is in productive tension with the EMI policy of Andhra Pradesh.

State-specific researches are also educative. Kumar et al. (2022) studied EMI implementation in Karnataka government schools that use Kannada as a medium of instruction and discovered that teacher proficiency was the most notable predictor of student outcomes, more than the infrastructure or curriculum design. And, also, a study by the Azim Premji University (2021) on the quality of government schools in southern India discovered that sudden changes in medium-of-instruction were related to higher levels of dropout and falling parental trust in the first years. Such results put the data trends in this research into perspective.

3. SETTING UP POLICY FRAMEWORK AND CONTEXT

The EMI program in Andhra Pradesh is based on a set of legislative and governmental tools. The AP Schools (Regulation of Admissions and Prohibition of Capitation Fee) Amendment Act, together with the Government Order (GO) MS No. 1, School Education Department (2020), required all government schools to switch to English as the medium of instruction in Classes 1 to 6 and gradually extend to Classes 7 to 10 by 2024. The policy was put together within the umbrella of the Nadu-Nedu school infrastructure programme that aimed at ensuring physical facilities were also upgraded in the same breath.

The two-fold justification of the policy, equity and economic mobility, can be seen as an instrumentalist perspective on language education that has been extensively observed in the comparative literature. By ensuring the EMI, the state government aligned itself with the structural inequity to enable the students of the private schools to receive education in English medium and government-school students to be relegated to Telugu medium. This story became very popular among aspirational working-class and marginalised-caste groups in cities and peri-urban areas, creating high initial parental demand for EMI schools.

Nevertheless, the implementation architecture demonstrated some fundamental gaps. Andhra Pradesh State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), which was to redesign the curriculum and train teachers, had limited resources and a timeline. By 2023-24, the SCERT noted that out of around 14,000 government school teachers who were on EMI sections, only some 42 per cent had attended the required mandatory 30-day EMI training module, and rural mandals in Guntur and Vijayawada had much lower completion rates (Government of Andhra Pradesh, 2024).

4. METHODOLOGY

The research design that will be used in the study is a mixed-methods research design that will include both a quantitative evaluation of the secondary data and qualitative information provided through the field observations and the consultation of the stakeholders. Four major sources of secondary data were used, that is, the Unified District Information System for Education Plus, (UDISE+) 2022-23 and 2023-24 datasets released by the government of India Ministry of Education; the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023; the National Achievement Survey (NAS) 2021 data on Krishna (Vijayawada) and Guntur districts and administrative records provided by the Office of the District Education Officer (DEO), Vijayawada and G

Qualitative data were drawn from a structured review of 24 field inspection reports compiled by District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) officials during 2022–23, supplemented by published testimonies from the AP Education Department's annual review proceedings. The paper uses a comparative analytical framework to juxtapose EMI and Telugu-medium school performance across four domains: enrolment, teacher preparedness, student outcomes, and infrastructure. Statistical comparisons are presented using means and percentages; no inferential statistics are claimed, given the secondary nature of the data.

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5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Enrolment Trends in EMI Government Schools

Table 1 presents the distribution of EMI schools and enrolment across urban and rural zones of both districts as of the 2023–24 academic year.

Table 1 EMI School Distribution and Enrolment in Vijayawada and Guntur Districts (2023–24)

District / Category	Total Govt. Schools	EMI Schools (2023–24)	EMI Enrolment	% of Total Enrolment
Vijayawada (Urban)	312	148	42,360	54.2%
Vijayawada (Rural)	198	61	14,720	28.6%
Guntur (Urban)	274	121	36,810	49.3%
Guntur (Rural)	341	73	18,540	22.1%
Combined Total	1,125	403	1,12,430	41.8%

Note. Data sourced from UDISE+ 2023–24, Ministry of Education, Government of India; and the Office of the District Education Officer, Vijayawada and Guntur Districts, Andhra Pradesh.

Table 1 data shows that EMI adoption is uneven in urban and rural areas in a significant way. The highest share of EMI enrolment is reported in Vijayawada urban schools (54.2%), and this is an indication of policy adherence and demand by parents of urban constituencies. By comparison, EMI penetration is much lower in rural schools in both districts - 28.6% in Vijayawada rural and 22.1% in Guntur rural. This urban-rural disparity does not just imply disparity of parental aspiration, but structural differences in the availability of teachers and prepared infrastructure.

The total EMI enrolment of 1,12,430 students in 403 schools is about 41.8 percent of the total government school enrolment in the two districts, an indicator of the magnitude and intent of the EMI agenda in the state. Nevertheless, total enrolment figures must be viewed with caution; large enrolment may not be a sign of high-quality EMI delivery, especially when teacher readiness and material accessibility are low.

5.2 Teacher Preparedness for EMI Delivery

Table 2 presents data on teacher preparedness indicators across the four zones of the study area.

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Table 2 Teacher Preparedness Indicators in EMI Government Schools, Vijayawada and Guntur (2023–24)

Training Indicator	Vijayawada Urban (%)	Vijayawada Rural (%)	Guntur Urban (%)	Guntur Rural (%)
Received formal EMI training	61.4	34.2	57.8	29.7
Proficient in English instruction	48.9	22.1	44.6	18.3
Access to EMI teaching materials	72.3	41.6	68.9	37.2
Regular in-service refresher training	38.7	19.4	35.1	14.8
Confident in bilingual scaffolding	53.2	28.9	49.7	24.1

Note. Data compiled from SCERT Andhra Pradesh Teacher Training Records (2023–24) and DIET Field Inspection Reports, Vijayawada and Guntur Districts. Percentages represent the proportion of EMI-designated teachers in each zone meeting the respective indicator.

The most significant structural weakness of the AP EMI programme that can be revealed through Table 2 is the severe lack of properly trained and competent teachers, especially in the rural areas. In Vijayawada urban—the best-performing zone—only 61.4% of teachers had received formal EMI training, and merely 48.9% were rated as proficient in English-medium instruction. These already modest figures contract dramatically in the rural zones, where teacher proficiency falls to 22.1% (Vijayawada rural) and 18.3% (Guntur rural).

Access to EMI teaching materials presents a somewhat better picture, with urban schools reporting over 70% access. Yet regular in-service training—arguably the most critical variable in sustaining instructional quality—is accessed by fewer than 40% of urban teachers and fewer than 20% of rural teachers. The confidence in bilingual scaffolding, a pedagogical approach recognised in CLIL research as essential for transitioning learners from first-language to second-language content instruction (Coyle et al., 2010), is alarmingly low across all zones.

These findings align with the broader critique of India's teacher education system documented by the Ramachandran Report (2018), which identified the mismatch between in-service training supply and classroom demand as a systemic failure of the Indian public education apparatus.

5.3 Student Learning Outcomes

In Table 3, the author compares EMI and Telugu-medium students' learning outcomes in Classes 5 and 8 based on the NAS 2021 data on the district level that were modified to fit the current research.

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Table 3 Comparative Learning Outcomes: EMI vs. Telugu-Medium Government Schools, Classes V and VIII (2021–24)

Learning Outcome Indicator	Class V (EMI)	Class V (Telugu Medium)	Class VIII (EMI)	Class VIII (Telugu Medium)
English Reading Fluency (Mean Score/50)	31.4	18.7	38.6	22.4
Mathematics Conceptual Score (Mean/100)	58.2	62.4	61.7	64.1
Science Comprehension Score (Mean/100)	54.9	59.3	60.2	61.8
Dropout Rate (%)	4.8	6.1	3.2	5.7
Parental Satisfaction Index (1–5)	3.9	3.2	4.1	3.4

Note. Mean scores for English reading fluency and academic subject areas are derived from the National Achievement Survey (NAS) 2021, National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), and supplemented by AP state-level learning assessment data (SCERT, 2024). Dropout rates and parental satisfaction index are from UDISE+ 2023–24 and DEO Annual Reports.

The outcome data in Table 3 yield a nuanced picture that challenges both uncritical endorsement and blanket rejection of EMI. In the reading fluency test of English, the EMI students in Class V obtain the average score of 31.4, whereas Telugu-medium students obtain the average score of 18.7- a difference of 12.7 points, which is a huge benefit and proves the main lingual dream of the policy. This advantage widens in Class 8, where EMI students score 38.6 against 22.4, suggesting cumulative gains as students progress through the EMI programme.

However, the picture in mathematics and science is considerably more complex. EMI students in Class V score 58.2 in mathematics compared to 62.4 for Telugu-medium students—a gap of 4.2 points in favour of the latter. Such a tendency is observed in Class 8 (61.7 vs. 64.1) as well as in science comprehension (54.9 vs. 59.3 in Class V; 60.2 vs. 61.8 in Class 8). These results partly empirically confirm the BICS/CALP theoretical model by Cummins (2000) that surface-level English fluency may be quickly mastered with the help of EMI, but that more comprehensive academic language mastery of content classes may take significantly more time and support.

The level of parental satisfaction is significantly elevated in EMI schools (3.9 Class V and 4.1 Class 8), whereas in the Telugu-media schools, it is 3.2 and 3.4, respectively, on a five-point Likert scale. Such a discrepancy in the satisfaction and achievement results is indicative of the strong symbolic capital of the English language in Indian society, in which parents view the quality of education through the medium of instruction and not necessarily in terms of the quantifiable learning outcomes.

There are slight differences in the dropout rates between EMI schools (4.8% vs 6.1% at the Class 5 level), which is probably due to parental involvement as well as English instructional attraction in goal-oriented communities, and not necessarily better pedagogical performance.

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5.4 Infrastructure and Resource Adequacy

Table 4 presents an audit of infrastructure indicators against AP EMI quality benchmarks across the four zones.

Table 4 Infrastructure Adequacy in EMI Government Schools, Vijayawada and Guntur Districts (2023–24)

Infrastructure Parameter	Vijayawada Urban	Vijayawada Rural	Guntur Urban	Guntur Rural
Schools with functional e-classrooms (%)	68.4	31.2	62.7	27.6
Schools with EMI library resources (%)	54.6	22.4	49.8	19.1
Availability of English-medium textbooks (%)	92.1	74.3	89.6	71.8
Internet connectivity in classrooms (%)	61.3	28.7	58.4	24.3
Schools meeting AP EMI quality benchmarks (%)	47.2	18.6	43.9	15.4

Note. Data compiled from UDISE+ 2023–24, the Nadu-Nedu School Infrastructure Audit Reports (Government of Andhra Pradesh, 2024), and the Office of the District Education Officer, Vijayawada and Guntur.

The infrastructure audit in Table 4 reveals a pattern consistent with the teacher preparedness data: urban schools outperform rural schools on virtually every dimension, often by margins exceeding 30 percentage points. The availability of English-medium textbooks is the strongest-performing indicator across all zones (71.8–92.1%), reflecting the state's prioritisation of material procurement as a visible, measurable implementation output. However, more capital-intensive and pedagogically enabling resources—functional e-classrooms, EMI library resources, and internet-connected classrooms—are concentrated in urban zones.

Most importantly, the proportion of schools that satisfy the AP EMI quality standards, which is a composite index comprising of teacher certification, material accessibility, and computer infrastructure, is only 47.2% in the urban area of Vijayawada, and decreases to 15.4% in the rural area of Guntur. These figures suggest that despite the state's ambitious rollout timeline, well under half of all EMI schools meet the state's own quality standards, with the compliance deficit most severe in the geographic areas that were already disadvantaged.

6. DISCUSSION: BRIDGING THE POLICY–PRACTICE GAP

The data synthesis of the four areas of analysis demonstrates a uniform structure of the reality: There exists a gap between the EMI policy intent and classroom reality, and its students who are in rural government schools disproportionately bear the burden. The observation echoes what Tollefson and Tsui (2004) refer to as the implementational spaces, the institutional and material forms of inability or ability to actualise the language policy in action.

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The AP EMI project is part of the general trend that can be traced throughout the Indian educational governance apparatus, with policy aspiration often far exceeding capacity to execute it. This systemic challenge was recognised in the National Education Policy 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2020) when it called for a gradual, multilevel implementation alongside the corresponding mobilisation of resources. The number of Vijayawada-Guntur indicates that the EMI schedule of the AP government was accelerated in comparison to the pedagogical and infrastructural support that should have been put in place to create high-quality implementation.

Meanwhile, the evidence cannot be interpreted as an all-embracing argument against EMI. The increased English reading fluency with significant gains, the increased parental satisfaction indices, and reduced dropout rates in EMI schools are some valuable policy outputs, which can be considered as consistent with the equity rationale presented by the state government. The problem, then, is not to undo the process of EMI transition but to make it even more profound, to make sure that the symbolic desire of the English-medium education is accompanied by the pedagogical content needed to provide real learning outcomes.

The strategic, timed use of Telugu with English to facilitate conceptualization in such subjects as mathematics and science, as one of the outcomes of this analysis, is what has been referred to as bilingual scaffolding, which is proposed as the most viable intervention in the short-term. Both Cummins (2000) and Coyle et al. (2010) make strong cases in favor of the effectiveness of first-language support in EMI settings, and the lack of confidence of teachers in bilingual scaffolding (Table 2) indicates that it should feature as a priority area of the in-service training programme of SCERT.

7. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Seeking the approval of the Government of Andhra Pradesh, SCERT, and District Education Authorities in Vijayawada and Guntur, the following policy suggestions are provided based on the evidence provided:

7.1. Intensive and Sustained Teacher Training:

SCERT ought to develop and require an orderly 60-day EMI teacher induction programme with modules of CLIL methodology, bilingual scaffolding, and subject-specific English pedagogy. Training resources, such as the residential training camps, should be allocated to the rural areas where the rate of training completion is less than 35 percent to overcome the geographic accessibility constraint.

7.2 Bridging Language Support:

Bilingual instructions: A formal policy statement on bilingual instructions, in particular the authorisation of the strategic use of Telugu to clarify concepts in mathematics and science, should be included within the AP EMI framework. This would make the approach of AP consistent with the recommendation of NEP 2020 of home-language support as well as international best practices of CLIL.

7.3 Differentiated Infrastructure Investment:

The infrastructure investment of the Nadu-Nedu programme must be re-programmed on a weighted equity index that channels disproportionately higher resources to rural mandals with the largest compliance disparity to AP EMI quality standards.

7.4 EMI Monitoring and Evaluation Structure:

To facilitate specific intervention, a special state-level EMI monitoring cell manned by academic subject experts and language educators needs to be created to carry out assessment of quality of EMI in the schools annually, which is disaggregated by district, Mandal, and gender so as to be able to intervene.

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7.5 Community Engagement:

School Management Committees (SMCs) should be formally empowered to participate in EMI quality monitoring, and structured parent orientation programmes should be instituted to calibrate parental satisfaction with evidence-based learning outcome data, reducing the risk of misaligned expectations.

8. CONCLUSION

The EMI initiative in Vijayawada and Guntur districts represents one of the most significant and contested educational policy experiments in contemporary Andhra Pradesh. This paper has demonstrated that while the policy has achieved meaningful penetration—enrolling over 1.12 lakh students across 403 schools—the quality of implementation is deeply uneven, with urban schools substantially outperforming rural counterparts on every measured dimension. The data corroborate the theoretical predictions of the BICS/CALP framework: EMI is succeeding in developing English reading competency but is falling short in the more complex task of developing academic language proficiency in content subjects.

The policy–practice gap identified in this study is not, fundamentally, a failure of intent. The equity aspiration animating the AP EMI policy is legitimate and historically overdue. What is required is a more granular, evidence-based implementation strategy that acknowledges the pedagogical complexity of medium-of-instruction transitions and invests accordingly in teacher capacity, bilingual pedagogy, and differentiated infrastructure support.

The case of Vijayawada-Guntur is not only helpful to Andhra Pradesh. Because states in India are still struggling with language-in-education policy in terms of balancing between regional language pride, global economic aspiration, and constitutional obligations to educational equity, this study comes as an important reminder of why language-medium policy remains a pedagogical dilemma but no longer an administrative one.

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