Voices, Texts, Traditions: Using Indian Knowledge Systems to improve English literacy and Cultural relevance in Secondary schools in Andhra Pradesh – India

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Abstract

This paper examines the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into English literacy pedagogy in secondary schooling, with a specific focus on Andhra Pradesh, India. Drawing on educational theory, national policy instruments such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and empirical evidence from curriculum initiatives, the study argues that embedding IKS—through culturally grounded texts, indigenous pedagogical practices, and dialogic classroom methodologies—strengthens English literacy outcomes while enhancing cultural relevance and identity formation. The study synthesizes policy documents, pedagogical frameworks, and secondary research to propose an IKS-infused model of English literacy that promotes learner engagement, contextual comprehension, and critical literacy.

1. Introduction

English literacy remains a critical educational objective in India, particularly in secondary schooling, where English functions both as a medium of instruction and a gateway to higher education and employment. However, teaching English in Indian classrooms is often critiqued for its cultural disconnection and reliance on imported pedagogical models that marginalize learners' cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Ara, 2025). This paper proposes that **Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)** comprising millennia-old traditions of knowledge transmission rooted in Indian languages, philosophies, narratives, and epistemic practices offer a culturally relevant framework for improving English literacy in secondary schools in Andhra Pradesh.

The **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** foregrounds IKS as an integral dimension of India's educational reforms, advocating for the "accurate addition of traditional Indian knowledge including tribal and other local knowledge throughout the curriculum, across humanities, sciences, arts, crafts, and sports, wherever

relevant" (Ministry of Education, Government of India). This mandate presents an opportunity to reconceptualize literacy pedagogy, anchoring language learning in indigenous voices and texts. Given Andhra Pradesh's rich cultural and linguistic heritage, this study assesses how IKS-grounded pedagogy can align English literacy instruction with students' socio-cultural identities.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS): Concept and Educational Significance

Indian Knowledge Systems constitute a multidisciplinary repository of philosophical, linguistic, ethical, and scientific traditions that have been transmitted through textual, oral, and performative modes across centuries. Scholars articulate IKS as a repository that transcends Western epistemologies, emphasising a **holistic, contextual, and indigenous ontology of knowledge** (Mehta & Singh, 2024). This inherent holistic orientation positions IKS as compatible with culturally responsive pedagogy and critical language education.

The NEP 2020 explicitly situates IKS within India's educational reforms: *"The Indian Knowledge Systems comprise of Jnana, Vijnana, and Jeevana Darshan that have evolved out of experience, observation, experimentation, and rigorous analysis"* (Ministry of Education, Government of India). This conceptualization suggests that IKS includes both practical and philosophical dimensions of knowledge, presenting opportunities for cross-disciplinary applications in literacy, language, and cultural studies.

2.2 Critical and Dialogic Pedagogy in Language Education

Critical pedagogy, grounded in the works of Paulo Freire, advocates for **education as a practice of freedom**, wherein literacy is not mere decoding of texts but an engagement with socio-cultural realities. Dr. Arzuman Ara (2025) observes that *"the Indian Knowledge System as envisioned in NEP 2020 is also an attempt to incorporate the learners' background, culture and heritage in pedagogy"* (Ara, 2025). Integrating IKS with dialogic teaching emphasizing discussion, reflexivity, and learner voice supports the cultivation of deep comprehension, critical thinking, and cultural agency in English literacy classrooms.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Colonial Legacies and English Literacy in India

Contemporary English literacy pedagogy in India is rooted in colonial educational structures designed to produce clerical functionaries through rote-based learning. Such pedagogical orientations have had lasting implications for how English is taught, often privileging foreign texts and normative linguistic models at the expense of local linguistic repertoires and narratives. Decades after independence, scholars

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critique this sustained cultural disconnect and advocate for indigenizing the curriculum to cultivate relevance, identity, and learner engagement.

3.2 IKS in School Curricula: Policy and Practice

Recent scholarship underscores the potential of IKS to enrich schooling experiences. Integrative reviews highlight that incorporating IKS can foster *"critical thinking, sustainability, and a stronger sense of identity among students"* (Hoque, 2025). Moreover, research indicates that IKS integration into secondary curricula enhances learner motivation by situating texts within familiar cultural contexts, thereby supporting comprehension and language use.

At a systemic level, NEP 2020 mandates IKS integration across disciplines, emphasizing traditional languages, arts, crafts, and indigenous knowledge practices in school curricula (Ministry of Education, Government of India). These reforms represent a structural commitment to acknowledging India's epistemic traditions within formal schooling and underscore the need for curricular frameworks that operationalize IKS in pedagogically meaningful ways.

3.3 Andhra Pradesh Context: Literacy Challenges and Cultural Diversity

Andhra Pradesh—a linguistically vibrant state with Telugu as the dominant regional language—faces persistent challenges in English literacy, particularly in secondary schools. Though state initiatives such as the **75-day Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) programme** target reading skills at early stages, gaps persist in English literacy proficiency in higher grades (Times of India, 2025). These persistent gaps call for pedagogical innovations that leverage learners' cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

4. Methodology

This study employs a **qualitative policy and curriculum analysis**, synthesizing national policy documents, scholarly literature, and secondary data on IKS integration initiatives. We analyze the documented frameworks of NEP 2020, curricular guidelines, and relevant educational research to extract insights into how IKS-informed pedagogies can enhance secondary English literacy. The methodology foregrounds **theoretical synthesis and evidence-based interpretation** to propose a contextually grounded model relevant to Andhra Pradesh secondary schools.

5. IKS-Infused Model for English Literacy Instruction

5.1 Culturally Embedded Text Selection

A crucial aspect of IKS pedagogy is the **selection of textual materials** that resonate with students' cultural histories. Traditional narratives, folklore, and literary texts drawn from Indian epics, regional literature, and indigenous storytelling traditions offer multiple entry points for English literacy. For instance, texts such as

Panchatantra tales, Mahabharata narratives translated into English, short stories and excerpts from *classic Indian monthly magazines for children* such as Chandamama , Balamitra and indigenous poetic forms can be juxtaposed with canonical literature to facilitate comparative comprehension and cultural engagement.

Embedding stories from Indian traditions not only bridges cultural relevance but also supports learners' affective and cognitive connection to language. Research on integrating Indian literary content underscores that such anthologies can serve as *"uplifting literature from the Indian subcontinent"* that enriches linguistic and cultural competence (NEP 2019 public drafts).

5.2 Translanguaging and Multilingual Repertoires

Andhra Pradesh classrooms are linguistically diverse, with Telugu and English co-existing within daily communication. Implementing **translanguaging pedagogies** whereby learners use all linguistic resources they possess aligns with IKS principles that value indigenous languages and epistemic practices. Translanguaging supports comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and confidence in expressing meaning across languages. Practical approaches include bilingual glossaries of IKS concepts, comparative text analysis in Telugu and English, and classroom discussions that draw from students' home languages.

5.3 Dialogic and Critical Classroom Practices

Dialogic teaching centered on student talk, questioning, and reflection complements IKS's emphasis on inquiry and meaning-making. Educators can foster classroom environments where students critically engage with texts through discussions that draw on cultural context, ethical themes, and local knowledge traditions. Such practices align with **critical literacy approaches**, which view language learning as a means of interpreting and critiquing social realities.

6. Pedagogical Strategies for Andhra Pradesh Secondary Schools

6.1 Integrative Curriculum Design

A model IKS-infused curriculum should integrate **thematic modules** such as "Voices from Indian Traditions," "Narratives of Resistance and Identity," and "Cultural Texts in English." These modules can fuse classical and contemporary Indian texts, oral traditions, and student-generated narratives to construct a curriculum that determines literacy within cultural and historical realities.

6.2 Professional Development and Teacher Capacity Building

Effective implementation necessitates **professional development** that enables teachers to interpret IKS materials, facilitate dialogic inquiry, and design assessment frameworks attuned to cultural contexts. Training modules may include workshops

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on IKS concepts, collaborative lesson planning, and reflective practices that align with both linguistic objectives and cultural content.

6.3 Assessment and Evaluation

Assessment strategies must move beyond discrete literacy skills tests to include **performance-based assessments** that capture students' cultural literacy, interpretive skills, and dialogic competencies. Portfolio assessments, reflective journals, and oral presentations contextualized within IKS texts provide holistic measures of learning.

7. Case Examples and Emerging Practices

While systematic studies in Andhra Pradesh are emergent, analogous national initiatives illustrate the pedagogical potential of blending IKS and literacy. For example, in Gujarat, chapters from the *Bhagavad Gita* were added to language courses to instill ethical and narrative skills alongside language learning (Times of India, 2025). Such innovations reveal the feasibility and educational value of embedding Indian knowledge content within formal language instruction.

8. Discussion

8.1 Cultural Identity and Learner Engagement

Integrating IKS into English literacy instruction is not merely additive; it reshapes learners' linguistic engagements by validating their cultural identities within the curriculum. This recognition fosters **learner motivation, self-efficacy, and socio-cultural agency ,** all of which contribute to deeper literacy development. The dialogic engagement with texts drawn from indigenous knowledge systems allows students to see themselves as **active interpreters and contributors to knowledge**, rather than passive recipients of foreign paradigms.

8.2 Policy Alignment and Implementation Challenges

Despite clear policy visions articulated in NEP 2020, implementation challenges persist—including **resource constraints**, limited teacher training, and potential resistance to curriculum change. To address these, Andhra Pradesh must invest in curriculum materials, teacher education programs, and collaborative research partnerships that can operationalize IKS pedagogies at scale.

9. Conclusion

Voices, texts, and traditions rooted in Indian Knowledge Systems offer a transformative pathway for enhancing English literacy in Andhra Pradesh's secondary schools. By re-anchoring language pedagogy in culturally resonant narratives and epistemic practices, teachers can promote literacy that is both linguistically robust and culturally meaningful. This study contributes a conceptual framework for IKS-infused literacy pedagogy and calls for empirical research to evaluate its effectiveness in classrooms.

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