The Eclectic Approach in English Language Teaching: Integrating Traditional Methods and ICT Tools in Indian Higher Education

Priyanka Ravi

Assistant Professor, Department of English (SFS),

SDNB Vaishnav College for Women, Chromepet,

Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.

Abstract

This chapter explores the implementation of the eclectic approach in English Language Teaching (ELT) in Indian higher education, especially in light of the transformative shifts brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. It combines findings from field research with theoretical analysis, emphasizing how the integration of traditional teaching methods with Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools can lead to improved learning outcomes. Using a mixed-methods approach with primary data from 333 college students and supported by global pedagogical literature, the study demonstrates the strengths, applications, and future potential of eclecticism in ELT. The chapter also explores the cultural and institutional readiness required to embed eclectic methods effectively across varied educational contexts.

Keywords: *Eclectic Method, English Language Teaching, ICT Tools, Higher Education, Learner-Centered Pedagogy, India*

1. Introduction

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed an unprecedented shift in education deliveryacross India. With institutions transitioning rapidly to online and blended learning formats, it became essential for educators to rethink pedagogical strategies. In this evolving landscape, the eclectic method—an adaptive, mixed-mode approach—emerged as a valuable model for English Language Teaching (ELT) in higher education. The eclectic method enables educators to integrate multiple methodologies, tailoring instruction to learner needs and contextual demands.

While eclectic approaches have long existed in theory, their practical relevance in the Indian context has gained prominence recently. This chapter combines empirical insights from a

survey of 333 students with a theoretical synthesis of eclectic and ICT-supported pedagogy, aiming to offer a structured, research-backed model suitable for global adoption.

2. Literature Review

The concept of eclecticism in ELT dates back to the early 20th century but gained academic prominence with the work of Larsen-Freeman (2000) and Mellow (2000), who proposed "Principled Eclecticism"—an approach combining methods based on learners' specific needs. Wali (2009) emphasized that such eclecticism should prioritize learners over rigid methods.

Research in the Indian context (Kumar, 2013; Rao Parupalli, 2018) advocates for combining direct methods, communicative approaches, and ICT tools to create learner-centered environments. Gao (2011) highlighted that integrating Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing (LSRW) skills through diverse tasks enhances motivation and attention.

Recent studies during the pandemic (Nerantzi, 2020) show how Peer Instruction and Flipped Learning supported by ICT foster deeper engagement. In broader domains, eclectic strategies have also proven effective for special needs education (Kaur, Kohli, and Devi, 2008), teacher training (Richards & Rodgers, 2001), and multilingual classrooms (Yun et al., 2007).

3. Theoretical Framework

This chapter is grounded in:

- **Constructivist Learning Theory** – emphasizing learner autonomy and experiential learning.

- **Multiple Intelligences (Gardner)** – addressing varied learner capabilities.

- **21st-Century Learning Skills Framework** – integrating collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and communication.

The eclectic method reflects a pluralistic educational philosophy, advocating flexibility in choosing methods that best support student outcomes. It further supports cognitive engagement, personalization, and inclusivity, crucial for bridging gaps across educational disparities.

4. Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was used, combining survey data with classroom observations. A structured questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale was administered to 333 undergraduate

English learners in and around Puducherry, India. Students evaluated the effectiveness of combined methods such as:

- Lecture + Discussion

- Peer Instruction + Flipped Learning

- Task-Based Learning + ICT Tools

- Reading + Speaking Activities

- LSRW Integration

Qualitative feedback was collected informally during class reviews and reflections. The methodology aligns with action research principles, aiming for classroom-driven, contextually grounded insights that are directly relevant to practitioners.

Eclectic Combinations Explored

Lecture + Discussion
Students appreciated the depth and clarity this pairing offered. Over 42% strongly agreed that it enhanced comprehension, while 36% responded neutrally, possibly due to variability in facilitation.

Peer Instruction + Flipped Classroom
Students watched teacher-recorded content at home and engaged in collaborative discussions in class. This method encouraged autonomy and critical thinking. Studies (Nerantzi, 2020) support this as a globally adaptable strategy.

Task-Based Learning + ICT Integration
Assignments included roleplays, mock interviews, and digital storytelling. YouTube, podcasts, and online quizzes were used to strengthen skills.

LSRW Activities
Activities integrating two or more language skills in a single session (e.g., Reading + Writing) received strong positive responses from over 50% of learners.

Discussion + Debate + Information Sharing
More than 50% of students found combining debates with structured information sharing intellectually stimulating and participatory.

These combinations reflect how thoughtfully designed instructional pairs can accommodate diverse learning preferences, increase participation, and nurture holistic language proficiency.

Findings and Analysis

Task Type	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Task-Based Activities	26.8%	25.3%	28.9%	10.6%	8.4%
Speaking & Reading	31.6%	22.6%	21.1%	13.9%	10.8%
Reading & Writing	30.7%	25.3%	19.0%	14.5%	10.5%
Recitation & Poem Interpretation	22.6%	25.3%	26.2%	13.0%	13.0%

Across all combinations, over 50% of students leaned positively toward eclectic practices. Neutral and disagreeing responses often indicated either lack of familiarity or hesitation in adjusting to new formats, underlining the need for phased implementation.

Discussion

The data suggests that the eclectic method supports differentiated learning and boosts learner engagement. Indian classrooms—with linguistic diversity, first-generation learners, and varying digital access—benefit significantly from a flexible pedagogical model. ICT tools enrich learning but must be aligned with student comfort and access levels.

This research supports a shift away from binary instructional models (e.g., GTM vs. CLT) toward blended, context-sensitive combinations that can adapt to both resource-rich and resource-constrained environments. However, challenges such as teacher training gaps, curriculum rigidity, and limited access to digital infrastructure remain significant hurdles.

Furthermore, cultural attitudes toward authority, rote learning, and performance-oriented systems must be addressed when introducing student-centered eclectic designs. This suggests the need for a systemic shift—beginning with institutional support and curriculum policy changes.

8. Conclusion

The eclectic method, especially when combined with ICT tools, proves effective in enhancing English language learning in higher education. It bridges gaps left by single-method approaches and empowers both teachers and learners to co-construct knowledge. Future studies should explore long-term learning retention, assessment strategies, and cross-disciplinary application of this model.

Additionally, scaling this approach requires consistent investment in teacher training, curriculum development, and digital infrastructure. When supported institutionally and culturally, eclectic teaching in ELT offers a promising path for inclusive, effective, and future-ready education.

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Priyanka Ravi, currently pursuing her Ph.D. in English Literature at SDNB Vaishnav College for Women, Chennai, specializes in colonial discourse analysis in contemporary South Asian fiction, drawing on post-structural and post-colonial theory. With a strong academic background including M.A., B.Ed., and UGC NET qualification, she has teaching experience across reputed institutions such as Central University of Tamil Nadu, Sri Krishna Arts & Science College, and currently serves as Assistant Professor at SDNB Vaishnav College. Her research interests include South Asian Studies, ELT, Cultural Studies, Translation Studies, and Literary Criticism. Priyanka has published and presented papers on ELT and post-colonial studies, coordinated various academic clubs and activities, and actively participates in FDPs and national-level conferences. She is also a certified typewriter and DCA holder, and a member of ELTAI, with a growing portfolio of research and academic contributions. The Eclectic Approach in English Language Teaching: Integrating Traditional Methods and ICT Tools in Indian Higher Education.