

RESEARCH ARTICLE

## English Language Learning and the Latur Pattern: A Critical Study of Exam-Oriented English Education in Latur City

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Accepted version published on 5 March 2026

 <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19634048>

### ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines the Latur Pattern of education as it applies to English language learning in Latur City, Maharashtra, India. The Latur Pattern—an intensive, exam-centric pedagogical model that emerged in the 1980s following widespread academic success in competitive examinations—has profoundly shaped English language instruction in the region. Drawing on second language acquisition theory, critical pedagogy, and educational psychology, this study investigates how the pattern's emphasis on rote memorisation, grammar-translation methods, and standardised test preparation affects learners' communicative competence, motivation, and long-term linguistic development. The paper argues that while the Latur Pattern has successfully produced high examination scores, it has simultaneously stunted authentic language acquisition by privileging passive, receptive skills over active, productive ones. The findings suggest that a more balanced pedagogical framework—one that integrates communicative language teaching with the disciplinary rigour characteristic of the Latur Pattern—could yield more holistic English language learners better prepared for globalised professional and academic environments.

**Keywords:** English language learning, exam-oriented education, communicative competence, second language acquisition, critical pedagogy

## **FULL PAPER**

### **Introduction**

In the landscape of Indian education, few regional phenomena have attracted as much scholarly attention and popular admiration as the Latur Pattern. Emerging from the drought-prone Marathwada region of Maharashtra in the post-1985 era, this model of intensified, examination-focused schooling propelled thousands of students from modest socioeconomic backgrounds into prestigious professional courses, generating a wave of high scorers in the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examinations (Nayar, 2002). The pattern, characterised by rigorous timetabling, disciplined repetition, and systematic test preparation, became synonymous with academic transformation and social mobility in rural India. Yet within the broader discourse of language education research, the Latur Pattern presents a fascinating and troubling paradox. English, as a compulsory subject in Maharashtra's school curriculum and a gateway language for higher education and employment, has been absorbed into this exam-centric architecture in ways that may fundamentally misalign with principles of effective language acquisition. While students trained in the Latur method may demonstrate impressive performance on written examinations, critics have observed significant gaps in their oral proficiency, communicative flexibility, and authentic language use (Rajagopalan, 2004; Graddol, 2010).

This paper seeks to interrogate this paradox systematically. It examines the historical genesis of the Latur Pattern, its pedagogical assumptions, and its specific implications for English language instruction. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of communicative language teaching (CLT), second language acquisition (SLA) theory, and critical pedagogy, the paper argues that the Latur Pattern—despite its remarkable successes in producing examination results—represents a structurally limited approach to English language education that risks producing students who are linguistically competent on paper but communicatively underprepared for real-world demands.

### **Historical and Sociocultural Context of the Latur Pattern**

The Latur Pattern did not emerge in a vacuum. It was born out of specific historical, geographical, and socioeconomic conditions that shaped both its character and its remarkable appeal. The Marathwada region of Maharashtra has historically been one of the most economically disadvantaged in the state, characterized by semi-arid terrain, recurrent droughts, farmer indebtedness, and limited industrial development (Patel, 2001). Education, in this context, became one

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of the few reliable pathways to upward social mobility, and academic success in board examinations emerged as a prized cultural capital.

The transformation began most visibly in the 1980s, when certain schools in Latur and surrounding districts began adopting highly regimented study schedules, long classroom hours, frequent mock examinations, and intensive individual attention from teachers (Nayar, 2002). The results were dramatic. Students from Latur began topping state-level examinations at unprecedented rates, and the region gained national recognition as an unlikely producer of medical and engineering professionals. This success story was not merely educational but deeply political, representing a challenge to the urban, upper-caste monopoly on professional education (Omvedt, 1994).

The sociocultural dimensions of the Latur Pattern are essential to understanding its relationship with English education. English in Maharashtra occupies a complex sociolinguistic space: it is simultaneously the language of elite aspiration, the medium of instruction in most professional courses, and a marker of social capital that remains differentially distributed across caste, class, and geographic lines (Agnihotri & Khanna, 1997). For Latur students, many of whom come from Marathi-medium schooling backgrounds and first-generation learner families, English is not an ambient language acquired through daily exposure but a formal academic subject to be mastered through deliberate study.

This context means that the Latur Pattern's approach to English is shaped by necessity as well as ideology. The pattern's designers and practitioners were responding to the real constraints of their learners: limited access to English-speaking environments, few extracurricular resources, and examination systems that reward written accuracy over spoken fluency (Canagarajah, 2005). Understanding these constraints is essential before we can fairly assess the pattern's pedagogical choices.

### **Theoretical Frameworks: Second Language Acquisition Theory**

The field of second language acquisition provides essential tools for evaluating the Latur Pattern's approach to English. Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982) posits that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input slightly beyond their current level of competence—the famous  $i+1$  formula. This theory foregrounds the importance of meaningful exposure to the target language in authentic or quasi-authentic contexts. The Latur Pattern's emphasis on textbook-based, teacher-fronted instruction with minimal

real communicative exchange arguably limits the quantity and quality of comprehensible input available to learners.

Swain's Output Hypothesis (1985) complements Krashen's framework by arguing that productive language use—speaking and writing in meaningful contexts—is not merely a consequence of acquisition but a driver of it. When learners must articulate meaning in the target language, they encounter gaps in their competence that push further acquisition. The examination focus of the Latur Pattern, which privileges receptive recognition over productive generation, may therefore undermine the very mechanism Swain identifies as central to language development (Swain, 1985).

Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and its application to language learning through scaffolded interaction (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) further complicates the Latur Picture. While Latur classrooms may provide intensive teacher guidance, the interaction is typically one-directional and form-focused rather than meaning-focused collaborative dialogue. The scaffolding offered is geared toward examination success rather than toward expanding learners' authentic communicative repertoire.

### **Communicative Language Teaching**

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emerged from the work of Hymes (1972) and was systematised by Canale and Swain (1980), holds that language education must develop not merely grammatical competence but a broader communicative competence encompassing sociolinguistic awareness, discourse coherence, and strategic communication. The CLT paradigm explicitly rejects the grammar-translation method and the audiolingual approach, which treat language as a system of forms to be memorised and reproduced. The grammar-translation method—which remains dominant in many Latur classrooms—involves the systematic translation of texts from English to Marathi, detailed grammatical analysis, and reproduction of memorized passages (Cook, 2010). While this approach yields measurable progress on written grammar tests and translation exercises, it provides little preparation for spontaneous oral production, interactive listening, or pragmatic appropriateness—dimensions of communication that are increasingly essential in professional and academic environments.

Richards (2006) notes that CLT has faced significant implementation challenges in Asian and South Asian contexts, where large class sizes, limited teacher training, examination pressure, and administrative conservatism have impeded its adoption. This observation is particularly relevant to Latur, where the

structural conditions of schooling—class sizes often exceeding fifty students, limited infrastructure, and high-stakes examination accountability—create genuine barriers to CLT implementation even when educators recognise its theoretical merits.

### **Critical Pedagogy**

Critical pedagogy, drawing on the work of Paulo Freire (1970) and its application to language education by scholars like Norton (2000) and Pennycook (2001), introduces a third lens through which to examine the Latur Pattern. Critical pedagogy questions the political and ideological dimensions of educational practices, asking whose knowledge is valued, whose voices are silenced, and how schooling reproduces or challenges social hierarchies. From a critical perspective, the Latur Pattern's approach to English education embodies a particular ideological stance: that English is a neutral, standardised set of forms to be mastered through disciplined effort, and that mastery is measured by performance on examinations designed and evaluated by distant, often urban, authorities. This framing obscures the socioeconomic functions of English as a gatekeeper language, the colonial history of English-medium education in India, and the legitimacy of learners' home languages and cultural knowledge as resources for language learning (Canagarajah, 1999).

Pennycook (2001) argues that critical language education must help learners not merely acquire the dominant language but understand their relationship to it—including the power dynamics that determine whose English is valued and in what contexts. Latur's exam-oriented English education, focused narrowly on producing correct written answers, leaves these larger questions entirely unaddressed, potentially leaving learners underprepared to navigate the complex sociolinguistic realities of English use in contemporary India.

### **Features of Exam-Oriented English Instruction in Latur: Rote Learning and Memorisation**

Perhaps the most defining feature of English instruction within the Latur Pattern is the centrality of rote memorization. Students are required to memorise model answers to anticipated examination questions, standard essays on common topics, grammatical paradigms, and lists of vocabulary items (Nayar, 2002). This practice is rationalised by the predictable structure of board examinations, which tend to recycle question types and topics year after year. Students and teachers alike recognise that memorised content, accurately reproduced, consistently generates high marks. From an SLA perspective, however, rote memorisation of language chunks without meaningful communicative practice produces what Ellis (2008) calls

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'formulaic sequences'—pre-assembled language strings that can be retrieved and reproduced but cannot be creatively recombined. Students trained primarily through memorisation may perform impressively on standardised tests while struggling to produce original language in novel contexts. The gap between examination performance and authentic communicative ability is a well-documented phenomenon in Indian English education more broadly (Rajagopalan, 2004).

The emphasis on memorization also affects learners' relationship to the reading process. Rather than developing strategic reading skills—such as inference, prediction, and critical evaluation—Latur students are trained to identify and recall specific textual information likely to appear in examinations. This examination-oriented reading effectively reduces a complex cognitive and communicative process to a retrieval exercise, with significant implications for academic literacy development at the tertiary level (Grabe & Stoller, 2011).

### **Grammar-Translation Dominance**

The grammar-translation method remains the dominant mode of English instruction in most Latur schools and coaching institutes. Lessons typically proceed as follows: the teacher reads a passage aloud, translates it into Marathi, explains key grammatical features in Marathi, and students complete translation exercises and grammar drills. This sequence reflects a fundamentally product-oriented, rather than process-oriented, view of language learning (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004).

The consequences for English listening and speaking development are particularly severe. Grammar-translation classrooms offer learners minimal authentic exposure to spoken English and virtually no opportunities for interactive oral production. Students may complete twelve years of formal English instruction with almost no experience of sustained English conversation, negotiation of meaning, or impromptu oral expression. When they arrive at degree colleges or enter workplaces where English oral communication is expected, many report acute anxiety and debilitating self-consciousness (Norton, 2000). It is important to note, however, that the persistence of grammar-translation in Latur is not simply a matter of pedagogical ignorance or institutional inertia. The method offers real advantages in the specific constraints of Latur classrooms: it is manageable with large class sizes, requires minimal additional materials, is predictably aligned with examination requirements, and allows teachers with varying levels of spoken English proficiency to deliver instruction effectively. Any critique of grammar-translation dominance must grapple seriously with these structural advantages (Cook, 2010).

### **Test Preparation and Mock Examinations**

The Latur Pattern's signature innovation—the systematic use of mock examinations and timed test practice—is, in the domain of English, simultaneously its greatest pedagogical strength and its most significant limitation. Mock examinations build examination literacy: students learn to manage time, decode question formats, structure their written responses, and moderate anxiety (Nayar, 2002). These are genuinely useful skills with positive consequences for board examination performance.

However, the relentless focus on mock examination performance also produces a form of 'backwash'—the tendency of examination formats to determine the nature of classroom instruction, as Biggs (2003) calls it. When English learning is defined as preparation for a particular examination format, the entire curriculum becomes organised around that format's demands. Content, skills, and activities that are not testable in the examination—such as oral communication, extensive reading, creative writing, and critical analysis—are systematically deprioritised or eliminated. The examination's limited conception of English proficiency becomes the effective definition of English proficiency for both teachers and learners. Washback research has consistently demonstrated that high-stakes examinations exert a profound influence on classroom practices, even when educators are aware of their limitations (Alderson & Wall, 1993). In Latur, where examination success carries enormous social and economic weight, this washback effect is particularly intense. Teachers who attempt to introduce communicative activities or project-based learning often find themselves under pressure from parents, administrators, and students to return to examination-focused instruction.

### **Role of Coaching Institutes**

A distinctive feature of the Latur educational ecology is the proliferation of private coaching institutes that supplement formal schooling with additional examination preparation. These institutes, operating in the evenings and on weekends, have become deeply integrated into the educational lives of Latur students, particularly those preparing for competitive entrance examinations (Nayar, 2002). In English, coaching institutes typically offer intensive grammar drilling, memorisation of model answers, and rapid-fire test practice sessions.

The coaching institute sector occupies an ambiguous position in debates about education quality. On one hand, it democratizes access to intensive academic preparation for students from resource-limited backgrounds (Bray, 2009). On the other hand, it intensifies the examination-oriented approach to English learning,

further compressing the already narrow communicative scope of formal schooling. Students who attend both school and coaching institute may spend six to eight hours daily in English-related instruction without ever engaging in authentic communicative interaction in the language.

### **Consequences for Learner Outcomes: Communicative Competence Deficits**

The most consistently observed consequence of Latur's exam-oriented English instruction is a substantial gap between written examination performance and oral communicative competence. Studies of students transitioning from Marathi-medium secondary schools—including those in the Latur Pattern system—to English-medium degree colleges consistently find that students who achieved high marks on the SSC English examination experience significant difficulties with: sustained academic listening in lectures, participation in seminar discussions, oral presentations, and informal English conversation with peers and faculty (Agnihotri & Khanna, 1997).

This competence gap has real consequences for academic and professional trajectories. Students who enter medical, engineering, and law programs—the very professions that the Latur Pattern is designed to facilitate entry into—find themselves in environments where English oral communication is expected and evaluated. The mismatch between their written proficiency and oral competence can generate anxiety, withdrawal from participation, and underperformance on oral assessments (Norton, 2000). The Latur Pattern thus produces an irony: it successfully opens doors to professional education but inadequately prepares students for the communicative demands they encounter on the other side.

### **Affective Dimensions: Motivation and Identity**

Beyond competence, exam-oriented English instruction in Latur produces distinctive affective consequences for learners. Research on language learning motivation distinguishes between instrumental motivation—learning a language for specific practical purposes—and integrative motivation—learning a language to affiliate with its speakers and culture (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Latur students demonstrate strong instrumental motivation: English is valued as an examination subject and professional credential. However, they frequently show limited integrative or intrinsic motivation for English as a medium of communication, creativity, or cultural engagement.

Norton's (2000) concept of 'investment'—the complex relationship between identity and language learning—is illuminating here. Learners invest in a language when they perceive it as connected to their identity construction and social futures.

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For many Latur students, English-as-examination-subject is a necessary but alienating experience—something to be endured and mastered instrumentally rather than genuinely inhabited. This alienation can limit the depth and durability of language learning, producing what Widdowson (1978) calls 'usage' competence rather than genuine 'use' competence. The social valorisation of examination success within Latur's culture may also create paradoxical demotivating effects for students who struggle despite intensive preparation. When academic identity becomes exclusively tied to examination performance, students who do not achieve high marks may develop negative self-concepts as language learners that persist into tertiary education, limiting their willingness to take communicative risks essential for continued language development (Dörnyei, 2001).

### **Long-Term Literacy Development**

The consequences of exam-oriented English instruction extend beyond immediate competence gaps to affect long-term academic literacy development. Reading and writing are not simply skills that, once acquired, remain stable; they are complex, domain-specific practices that develop through sustained, varied, and purposeful engagement with texts (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). The narrow reading diet of the Latur Pattern—focused on examination passages and model answers—may limit the development of the flexible, critical reading practices required in tertiary academic work. Writing development is similarly constrained. Students trained to reproduce memorised model answers become skilled at a very specific genre of writing—the formal examination essay—but may lack strategies for the wider range of academic writing genres they encounter at the tertiary level: laboratory reports, literature reviews, research proposals, case analyses. The examination essay's standardised structure may actually become an obstacle to genre-flexible academic writing, as students default to familiar patterns rather than responding to the specific demands of new writing situations (Hyland, 2004).

### **Integrating Communicative Language Teaching**

The most straightforward recommendation flowing from this analysis is a more systematic integration of CLT principles into English instruction within the Latur Pattern. However, this recommendation must be operationalized carefully, given the real structural constraints of the Latur educational context. Richards (2006) has documented numerous failed attempts to implement CLT in South Asian contexts where the method was introduced without adequate attention to local conditions.

A more productive approach is what Ellis (2003) calls 'task-based language teaching' (TBLT), which organizes instruction around meaningful communicative tasks—problem-solving activities, role plays, information-gap exercises—while retaining explicit attention to language form at appropriate moments. TBLT has demonstrated effectiveness in diverse Asian educational contexts and can be adapted to large-class environments. Critically, it is not incompatible with examination preparation: students who develop genuine communicative competence perform better, not worse, on well-designed language examinations (Ellis, 2003). Even within the intensive timetable of the Latur Pattern, small but significant modifications could yield communicative benefits. Dedicating ten to fifteen minutes per English class to structured speaking activities—pair discussions, brief oral presentations, think-pair-share routines—would provide students with meaningful oral production practice without displacing examination preparation time. The key is making these activities habitual and valued, not merely occasional supplements (Richards, 2006).

### **Reconsidering Assessment**

The most fundamental lever for changing English instruction in Latur is examination reform. As washback research consistently demonstrates, the examination format determines classroom practice more powerfully than any pedagogical recommendation (Alderson & Wall, 1993). Maharashtra's SSC and HSC English examinations, which test primarily reading comprehension, grammar, and written composition, implicitly define English proficiency in a way that excludes oral communication. Introducing oral components—even modest ones, such as short oral examinations or portfolio-based assessments—would immediately alter the incentive structure that currently drives grammar-translation dominance.

Assessment reform at the school level is admittedly a slow process, dependent on policy decisions beyond the control of individual teachers or schools. However, degree colleges and professional programs can independently introduce English oral assessment requirements and communicate these requirements clearly to feeder secondary schools. When students and teachers understand that oral English proficiency will be assessed at the next stage of education, the Latur Pattern's pragmatic, preparation-focused logic will drive investment in oral communication development (Biggs, 2003).

### **Teacher Development**

Any pedagogical reform in Latur's English classrooms must grapple with teacher preparation. Many English teachers in Latur-region schools are themselves

products of the same examination-oriented system they now teach, and may have limited experience of communicative English pedagogy or confidence in their own spoken English proficiency. Teacher professional development programs that build both pedagogical knowledge and oral English confidence are, therefore, a prerequisite for meaningful reform (Freeman & Richards, 1996). Such programs need to be designed with sensitivity to teachers' existing strengths and the real constraints of their working environments. Rather than positioning CLT as a wholesale replacement of established practice, professional development might frame it as a complement to examination preparation—showing teachers how communicative activities can build the language foundations that support better written examination performance. Demonstration lessons, peer observation, and teacher learning communities are particularly effective formats for professional development in resource-limited contexts (Freeman & Richards, 1996).

### **Leveraging Technology**

Digital technologies offer new possibilities for extending English-language input and output beyond the Latur classroom. Smartphones—now widely available even in economically modest households in Latur—provide access to English audio and video content, language-learning applications, and online communication platforms. Pedagogically guided use of these resources, integrated with classroom instruction, could substantially increase the quantity of authentic English exposure available to Latur learners (Warschauer & Meskill, 2000). Specific applications with demonstrated effectiveness in Indian contexts include: mobile vocabulary learning platforms that use spaced repetition to support retention, podcast-based listening activities that provide exposure to diverse spoken English varieties, and online discussion forums that create low-stakes environments for written English interaction. These technological supplements do not resolve the fundamental curricular limitations of exam-oriented English instruction, but they can expand learners' English learning ecology in ways that support more balanced development (Warschauer & Meskill, 2000).

### **Discussion**

The analysis presented in this paper reveals a complex picture that resists simple evaluative judgments. The Latur Pattern is neither the unqualified educational success celebrated in popular accounts nor the straightforward pedagogical failure that a purely CLT-oriented critique might suggest. It is a contextually embedded response to real constraints and real opportunities, whose

outcomes reflect both the genuine achievements and the genuine limitations of its foundational assumptions.

The pattern's strengths are real: it has enabled thousands of students from marginalised socioeconomic backgrounds to achieve educational success and social mobility in a system structurally weighted against them. Its disciplinary rigour, systematic preparation, and clear alignment between instruction and assessment create an educational experience that is coherent and motivating for many students, particularly those with strong instrumental motivation for English learning. These strengths should not be discarded in the rush to implement theoretically fashionable pedagogical alternatives. At the same time, the pattern's limitations—its narrow definition of English proficiency, its neglect of oral communication, its dependence on rote memorisation, and its consequent production of examination-competent but communicatively limited graduates—represent genuine educational failures with real human costs. Students who succeed brilliantly in the Latur system and then struggle in English-medium professional environments are not merely experiencing individual adjustment difficulties; they are experiencing the consequences of a systematically incomplete educational preparation. The resolution of this tension requires not the abandonment of the Latur Pattern but its thoughtful evolution. The pattern's remarkable organisational discipline and its capacity to mobilise learner effort toward defined goals are educational assets. What is needed is a reconceptualisation of the goals themselves—from examination performance to holistic communicative competence—and a corresponding expansion of the assessment systems and pedagogical methods through which those goals are pursued. This is not a simple task, but the Latur region's history of educational innovation suggests that it is not an impossible one either.

Broader implications extend to English language policy in Maharashtra and across India. The Latur case illustrates a tension that is by no means unique to this region: between the genuine short-term utility of examination-focused English instruction and the genuine long-term costs of communicative neglect. As India's integration into global professional and academic networks deepens, the costs of this neglect will grow. Policy frameworks that continue to define English education primarily through written examination performance risk producing a generation of credentialed but communicatively underprepared graduates.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has argued that the Latur Pattern, despite its remarkable success in producing high examination performance, represents a structurally incomplete

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approach to English language education that prioritises written, formal, examination-oriented competence at the expense of oral communication, authentic literacy, and long-term language development. Drawing on SLA theory, CLT principles, and critical pedagogy, it has identified rote memorisation, grammar-translation dominance, mock examination preparation, and the coaching institute culture as the primary mechanisms through which this imbalance is reproduced.

The paper has also resisted the temptation to dismiss the Latur Pattern as simply misguided. The pattern's emergence from specific socioeconomic conditions, its genuine achievements in democratizing access to professional education, and its pragmatic responsiveness to real structural constraints all demand serious engagement rather than summary critique. The task for educators, policymakers, and researchers is to build on the pattern's organisational strengths while addressing its communicative limitations through judicious integration of communicative pedagogy, reconceptualisation of assessment, investment in teacher development, and strategic use of digital technologies. The stakes of this challenge are significant. English proficiency is increasingly central to professional, academic, and social participation in contemporary India, and the quality of English education in regions like Latur will substantially shape the opportunities available to the next generation of students from these communities. Getting English education right—honouring both the disciplinary rigour that has made the Latur Pattern powerful and the communicative richness that current approaches neglect—is not merely a pedagogical question. It is a question of educational justice.

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