

Digital Transformation, Multilingualism, and ELT Reform: A Critical Policy**Discourse Analysis in Karnataka**Khan, Zabiulla¹ and Kaur, Monbinder²¹Research Scholar, Department of English, Tumkur University, Tumkuru²Associate Professor, Department of English, Tumkur University, Tumakuru**Abstract**

Digital transformation has evolved into a hegemonic framework regulating policy narratives in higher education and plays a significant role in shaping innovation, competitiveness, and sustainable economic development (Selwyn, 2016; Williamson, 2017). In this regard, English Language Teaching (ELT) has increasingly been framed as a key instrument for integrating multilingual learners into the ever-growing digital knowledge economy. However, existing research remains limited in examining how digital transformation affects the narrative of linguistic hierarchies and multilingual equity within ELT policy reforms. Grounded in Bourdieu's (1991) framework of linguistic capital, also formed by the critical policy scholarship (Ball et al., 2012; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), this study explores how digital transformation and multilingualism are interconnected within ELT policy reforms, particularly in Karnataka's public universities. Adopting a qualitative Critical Policy Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2013; Wodak & Meyer, 2016), the study focuses on both the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) and Karnataka's State Education Policy (SEP) and digital education frameworks to interrogate the ideological assumptions embedded in reform narratives.

The findings of the study highlight that digital transformation has become an integral part of a policy narrative, linking it to global engagement and employability. National Education Policy (NEP,2020) highlights multilingualism, but at the same time privileges English as the primary vehicle of digital mobility, thereby producing tensions between inclusivity and market-oriented rationalities (May, 2012; García & Wei, 2014). By situating Karnataka within the wider debate on language policy and digital reform, this present paper focuses on contributing to the discipline of applied linguistics by demonstrating how digital transformation discourse redesigns ELT through

economic and technological integration. However, some questions still arise regarding equity. The study argues for a context-oriented, critically grounded approach to multilingual ELT reform.

Keywords: Digital Transportation, ELT, Multilingualism, Linguistic Capital, Critical Policy Discourse Analysis (CPDA), Language Policy Reform.

Introduction

Digital transformation has reinforced its strongest position in higher education policies. Globally, policy discourse views present digital technologies as facilitators for innovation, efficiency, and competitiveness within the knowledge economy (Selwyn, 2016; Williamson, 2017). Institutions of higher education are becoming the place of technological advancements, where digital infrastructures and platform-based learning environments are assumed to enhance learning ability among the students, provide easy access, improve employability, and help in integration with global competitions. However, some scholars are of the opinion that digital transformation is not just a natural process of technological improvement but a project embedded within broader neoliberal restructurings of education (Giroux, 2014; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Policy discourse often represents digitalisation as beneficial to all, but meanwhile often obscures structural inequalities and contextual constraints (Selwyn, 2016).

In the context of India's multilingual societies, digital transformation interacts with the persistent tension that arises out of linguistic capital and socio-economic upward mobility. English, particularly in India, is structurally rooted in a historical sense by means of colonial and postcolonial power structures, continues to function as a form of linguistic capital that mediates participation in global markets and elite educational spaces (Bourdieu, 1991; Block et al., 2012). In the present digital economic world scenario, English proficiency aligns well with new emerging technology, employability, and global connectivity. Probably no other language goes hand in hand with technology as English does. As a result, English Language Teaching (ELT) reforms are frequently framed as integral to national modernisation agendas and digital competitiveness.

Experts in sociolinguistics policy analysis argue that educational reforms often reproduce existing hierarchies under the guise of progress (Tollefson, 2013; May, 2012). Multilingualism, theoretically enjoys a top priority within the policy texts such as NEP 2020, but institutional

practices often privilege English coordinated with economic power (García & Wei, 2014). This conflict of regional languages with that of the dominant language is particularly seen in higher education contexts where the latter language, i.e., English, operates simultaneously as a pedagogical tool and a symbolic resource for upward mobility. In such settings, digital transformation discourse may amplify the commodification of English by linking language competence directly to participation in digitally mediated economic systems.

In India, both national and state higher education reforms have given much importance to digital learning ecosystems, skill development, and thereby preparing learner competent in global competitiveness. Policy narratives frequently stressed technology-enabled pedagogy, online learning platforms, and digitally enhanced employability as central to institutional progress. However, scholars of policy enactment express their discontent as the intentions of policy texts falls shorts when it comes to implementations, and they failed to translate straightforwardly into practice (Ball et al., 2012). Policies are often misinterpreted, compromised, and enacted within specific institutional contexts shaped by many factors such as material conditions, cultural variations, societal expectations and availability of resources. The gap between policy rhetoric and classroom realities has been widely documented across Global South contexts, particularly where a big gap in institutional infrastructures and the presence of multilingualism aspects further hinders the implementation of policy programs (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

Karnataka, as a state often known for its linguistic diversity and its ever-growing demand for public higher education institutions, offers an important forum for comprehending these processes. Public universities function within a pluralistic context where the regional state language, Kannada, the global language, English, and other local languages coexist in this complicated system. Accordingly, higher education academic bodies naturally come under pressure to cope with national digital transformation goals to maintain the global competitiveness standard. ELT reform thus becomes a critical aspect through which policy-driven integration of modernisation, multilingualism, and market-orientation is negotiated.

Critical discourse analysis offers a powerful, compelling, theoretically foundational framework for investigating how such aspects are taking place within policy documentation. Fairclough (2013) frames discourse as both mutually shaping and being shaped by social structures. Languages not only reflect the social reality but also actively give shape to it. Neoliberal education policy

frequently reframes language education as an instrument, highlighting the most important skill sets, job opportunities, and economic benefits (Giroux, 2014). In this scenario, English is viewed as basically an economic tool instead of as a sociolinguistic resource that co-existed within local and regional languages. This, in turn, poses some serious questions, such as how digital transformation is articulated within ELT reform narratives. How is multilingualism positioned alongside English within these narratives? What ideological assumptions underpin these constructions?

This study, therefore, attempts to address these questions through the lens of qualitative Critical Policy Discourse Analysis (CPDA) of ELT reform documents in Karnataka's public universities. Grounded in Bourdieu's (1991) theory of linguistic capital, Ball et al.'s (2012) policy enactment framework, and Fairclough's (2013) discourse model, this paper explores how digital transformation and linguistic diversity intersect within policy texts. By positioning Karnataka within this vast debate on the two distinct issues of digital education and language policy, the study seeks to contribute to critical applied linguistics scholarship in three ways. Firstly, it demonstrates how digital reform narratives give a chance to comprehend how English is used in multilingual higher education contexts. Second, it addresses the tension that is prevailing between rhetorical commitments to multilingual inclusivity and the economic privileging of English. Finally, it brings into consideration the silences that support digital transformation narratives.

Literature Review

Digital transformation in higher education is widely considered an indispensable and progressive evolution toward modernisation, operational efficiency, and global connectivity. National Policy documents often frame digital technologies as a part of solutions to issues such as access, quality, and employability (Selwyn, 2016; Williamson, 2017). Rather than serving as neutral technologies, they reproduce and reinforce are embedded within a vast context of neoliberal restructuring processes that reshape governance, accountability, and institutional priorities (Giroux, 2014; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Selwyn (2016) raises concerns about techno-solutionism in education, stressing that the processes of digitalisation are driven by policy assumptions rather than actual pedagogical requirements. In the same way, Williamson (2017) shows how data-centric governance models and online learning platforms create environments that reshape institutional control mechanisms and the identification of the learners. This progress aligns well with what Rizvi and Lingard (2010)

describe as international policy coordination in the higher educational system, in which competitiveness is seen through institutional reforms.

There is a clear shift from education as a universal public venture toward education as a market-oriented investment (Giroux, 2014). Consequently, skill-based learning that aligns with economic rationalities, including proficiency in the English language, has gained much importance over the period of time. In contrast, digital transformation discourse, on the part of innovation, often marginalises structural inequalities, including infrastructural disparities and digital divides (Selwyn, 2016). In this background, such disparities are particularly seen, raising questions about the practical viability and equity of technology-driven reforms. These tensions occupy the central stage in comprehending how ELT reform is situated within the framework of digital transformation narratives in linguistically diverse regions such as Karnataka.

The discursive positions of English as a distinctive capital asset have received a great amount of attention from language theorists within both sociolinguistics and critical applied linguistics. Bourdieu (1991) interprets language as a convertible form of symbolic capital that acquires social and economic value within particular arenas of power. English, especially, functions as a dominant linguistic resource linked to economic mobility, institutional legitimacy, and global participation (Block et al., 2012). In the era of globalisation, English has widely accepted as the most essential for access to cross-national workforce markets and with ever-growing digital economies (Pennycook, 2010). Block et al. (2012) argue that neoliberalism has amplified the commodification of language, thereby transforming English from a communicative medium into a marketable skill. English proficiency is frequently linked with employability, innovation, and global competitiveness.

However, the huge international presence of English does not take place in isolation; it interacts with existing multilingual ecologies. May (2012) challenges the deeply embedded, away from the broader social context, side cornering of minority languages, tribal, local and regional languages within policy frameworks that officially affirm multilingualism in the Indian social context, while privileging dominant languages. Similarly, García and Wei (2014) question the dominance of monolingual norms in education, highlighting the significance of multilingualism practices that identify linguistic dynamics. Despite such theoretical advances, policy narratives often reinforce

and reproduce hierarchical language orders that privilege English as the language of progress and symbol of modernisation.

Multilingualism was given much importance in NEP (New Education Policy, 2020), in India education system, several languages co-exist, and in often framed as a resource for cognitive, cultural, and the multilingualism must go hand in hand with institutional practices that sustain linguistic hierarchies (May, 2012). This tension also reflects what Blommaert (2010) describes as the sociolinguistics of globalization, wherein linguistic resources are unevenly valued depending on their alignment with global power structures.

Shohamy (2006) argues that language policy functions not only through official declarations but also through its implementation, such as assessment via tests, curricular design, and institutional practices. Even though the New Education Policy (NEP) documents encourage multilingual education, assessment systems and institutional expectations may privilege English as the primary academic language. In the present-day digital transformation of educational systems, multilingualism may be narratively associated with inclusivity, while digital infrastructures and learning platforms primarily operate in English. These critical questions, whose linguistic resources are accepted and whose are not, are side cornered. As Johnson (2013) clearly pointed out, language policy will be successful only when enacted through the regional and local regular practices shaped by the institution of higher education. Thus, examining the discursive construction of multilingualism within ELT reform requires attention to both textual representation and broader social practice.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a robust, clear conceptual idea for exploring how intended policy texts give shape to social realities. Fairclough (2013) put forth this narrative as a dialectical relationship between text, discursive practice, and social practice. Furthermore, Wodak and Meyer (2016) highlight that CDA is particularly well fitted to study power relations in institutional scenarios. By observing the frequent repetitions of lexical patterns and silences, researchers can uncover how certain perspectives are given much importance, whereas others are neglected. In the context of digital transformation and ELT reform, CDA enables interrogation of how modernisation, employability, and multilingualism are discursively framed. This approach aligns with critical applied linguistics, which examines language education within its political and economic contexts (Pennycook, 2010).

Methodology

This study equips a qualitative research design grounded in Critical Policy Discourse Analysis (CPDA). It embeds Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) alongside critical policy studies to explore how policy discourse shapes ideological formation, identities, and maintains social hierarchies (Fairclough, 2013; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Instead of viewing policy as neutral administrative records, this approach constitutes policy as discourse, a site where power operates economic rationalities, and linguistic hierarchies are articulated and normalised (Ball et al., 2012; Taylor, 2004). The epistemological framework underpinning the study is located within this critical theory, which argues that language has the ability not only to reflect but also shape social structures (Fairclough, 2013). From this angle, digital transformation and multilingualism are not just descriptive labels but a product of discursive constructions that mingle within the wider political-economic frameworks.

The dataset consists of publicly available policy and institutional documents that shape undergraduate ELT reform in Karnataka's public universities. Document analysis is a well-established qualitative method for examining institutional discourse and policy framing (Bowen, 2009). The selected texts include:

1. National higher education reform documents addressing digital transformation and language education.
2. Karnataka state higher education policy frameworks.
3. University-level undergraduate ELT syllabi and curriculum frameworks.
4. Official digital education guidelines relevant to public universities.

Documents were selected based on three criteria:

Relevance: Explicit reference to digital transformation, multilingualism, or ELT reform.

Authority: Official policy or institutional status.

Temporal proximity: Documents published within the current reform cycle.

The focus on textual data aligns with CDA's emphasis on analysing language as a site of ideological production (Fairclough, 2013). By examining policy texts at national, state, and institutional levels, the study captures multi-layered discursive constructions.

The analysis draws primarily on Fairclough's (2013) three-dimensional CDA model:

1. **Textual Analysis (Description):** The examination of lexical words, figures of speech like similes, metaphors, repetition, and syntactic structures.
2. **Discursive Practice (Assessments):** Analysis of how texts draw upon intertextual references, global policy narratives, and reform imaginaries.
3. **Social Practice (Explanation):** An interpretation of how discursive narratives are in line with the neoliberal education policies, digital administration and linguistic hierarchies

To deepen the interpretive framework, the study draws on the policy enactment theory (Ball et al., 2012), which articulates policy as a subject to be considered for execution instead of top-down implementation. Additionally, Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital guides the analyses of how English is positioned within language policy narrative, particularly in relation to employability and economic competitiveness. The study equips a systematic multi-stage process along with qualitative thematic analysis practices (Braun & Clarke, 2006), adapted for critical discourse inquiry.

Segments of text were coded inductively and deductively under broad categories such as:

- Digital modernization discourse
- Employability and skills rhetoric
- Global competitiveness framing
- Multilingual inclusion narratives
- Institutional responsibility
- Structural constraints or silences

Codes were organised into higher-order thematic patterns, exploring how these specific lexical choices, such as “innovation,” “skill-based,” and “inclusive”, constructed particular market-oriented. Themes were critically interpreted by an analytical framework of linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991), neoliberal education administration (Giroux, 2014; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), and policy enactment (Ball et al., 2012). This multi-staged coding method improves analytical transparency and rigour, addressing common critiques of qualitative subjectivity (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). To maintain methodological rigour, this present study is guided by well-established criteria for qualitative credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Rather than seeking statistical generalizability, the study aims for analytical generalisation, generating theoretical insights applicable to similar multilingual higher education contexts (Yin, 2018).

By integrating Critical Discourse Analysis with policy enactment theory and linguistic capital, this study advances a multi-theoretical qualitative approach to examining digital ELT reform. This design moves beyond descriptive document review toward a critical interrogation of how digital transformation discourse reconfigures language hierarchies and institutional priorities.

Findings

The Critical Policy Discourse Analysis (CPDA) reveals four prevailing discursive formations in ELT reform within digital transformation narratives in Karnataka's public universities. Together, these formations configure English, multilingualism, and digital modernisation within a market-driven educational framework. Across policy documents, digital transformation is framed as an inevitable and necessary progression toward modernization. Lexical patterns such as “innovation,” “global standards,” “21st-century skills,” “technology-enabled learning,” and “world-class education” recur with high frequency. Modal verbs including “must,” “will,” and “ensure” signal urgency and inevitability, constructing digital reform as both desirable and unavoidable.

This aspirational framing aligns with what Selwyn (2016) describes as the technological advancement are much needed in the field of education, wherein digital adoption is viewed as inherently progressive in nature. The absence of language facilitating resource disparities suggests what Fairclough (2013) describes as ideological normalisation, where these policy directions are neutralised and alternative possibilities sidelined. Furthermore, digital transformation is frequently framed in terms of competitiveness and job opportunities, indicating the wider neoliberal education rationalities (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Universities are discursively positioned as actors within a global market, tasked with producing technologically competent graduates. This construction shifts the focus from pedagogical depth to economic utility.

English as Economic and Digital Capital

The second dominant theme of this paper is the positioning of English within digital transformation discourse. Policy language often links English proficiency with technologically integrated, huge employment opportunities, new ideas, and global mobility. Phrases such as “communication skills for the global market,” “industry readiness,” and “skill-based English modules” frame ELT primarily in economic terms. The construction resonates strongly with Bourdieu's (1991) conceptualisation of linguistic capital. English is discursively configured not merely as a language of instruction but as a convertible asset linked to economic opportunity. The repeated coupling of

English with digital competence suggests an emergent alignment between linguistic capital and technological capital.

Block et al. (2012) assert that neoliberal educational reforms commodify language, transforming communicative competence into marketable skill sets. The findings here support this claim. English is framed as an essential part of career readiness, overshadowing broader multilingual or cultural objectives. Significantly, policy documents, whether its national policy or any state policy, rarely discuss English in relation to critical thinking, democratic engagement, or intellectual development. Instead, ELT is constructed as instrumental training aligned with labour market demands. This narrowing of purpose reflects what Giroux (2014) interprets as the transformation of higher education into the marketisation of higher education.

Multilingualism as Symbolic Inclusion

While multilingualism is given top priority in the National Education Policy (NEP,2020), as India is lang of many languages. It is predominantly framed as a cultural asset rather than a structural commitment. The phrases such as “respect for linguistic diversity,” “inclusive education,” and “promotion of regional languages” are often used alongside considering the significance of English-medium instruction and global integration. This creates a sort of tension between rhetorical inclusivity and actual practicality. García and Wei (2014) propose multilingualism as shifting and adaptive, yet policy constructions remain a complex task in which, by default, English remains the dominant academic and digital language.

May (2012) is cautious that government support for multilingualism can coexist with systemic reinforcement of dominant languages. The findings reveal that this pattern, which is multilingualism, is socially and culturally associated, while English retains its position within higher educational institutions' digital reforms. This study also reveals discursive silences regarding the role of regional languages in digital infrastructures. Online learning sites, academic bodies' language labs, and digital resources undoubtedly and implicitly function in English, reinforcing what Blommaert (2010) describes as the stratification of linguistic resources within globalised systems.

Structural Silences and the Policy–Practice Gap

A significant finding concerns what is absent from policy discourse. Acknowledgement of infrastructural issues, faculty readiness to comprehend, adopt digital tools in their teaching, rural–

urban gaps, and student access inequalities are constrained. When mentioned, such issues are framed as transitional challenges rather than structural constraints.

Ball et al. (2012) argue that policy enactment is shaped by institutional context, yet policy texts frequently present digital transformation as uniformly achievable. This reflects what Fairclough (2013) identifies as abstraction—where complex social realities are simplified through aspirational language. In Karnataka’s multilingual higher education landscape, infrastructural and socio-economic differences are likely to mediate ELT reform enactment. However, policy discourse tends to universalize institutional capacity, thereby obscuring potential inequalities in implementation.

Additionally, there is limited engagement with the pedagogical implications of digital ELT reform. The emphasis remains on infrastructure and skill acquisition rather than pedagogical philosophy. Further consolidates the instrumental depiction of language education within economically oriented administrative structures (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). The limitations of detailed implementation frameworks highlight the existing gap between rhetorical ambition and precise execution. These issues are emphatically raised by Wodak and Meyer (2016), who note that discourse analysis must attend not only to what is said but to what remains unsaid.

Taken together, the findings reveal a coherent ideological formation:

Digital transformation is constructed as an inevitable modernization.

English is positioned as economic and technological capital.

Multilingualism is symbolically endorsed but structurally secondary.

Structural inequalities are backgrounded within aspirational rhetoric.

This formation reveals broader global trends of neoliberal educational administrations (Giroux, 2014; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Under this theoretical framework, ELT reform becomes essential. Digitations must take place in the direction of the current technological advancements and linguistic hierarchy convergence. Importantly, the analysis does not suggest that digital transformation or English proficiency are inherently problematic. Instead, it showcases how the economic rationality overrules contextual sensitivity and multilingual equity.

Discussion

This study aims to investigate how digital transformation, multilingualism, and ELT reform are socially constructed through the language within policy frameworks shaping undergraduate

education in Karnataka's public universities. The findings show that digital transformation functions not only as a technological agenda but also as a wider ideological framework involved within neoliberal thinking of higher educational administrations. By integrating this from linguistic capital theory, policy implementations, and critical discourse analysis, this section situates the findings within wider global debates.

Digital Transformation as Neoliberal Educational Rationality

The future-oriented framing of digital modernisation recognised in the findings mirrors what Rizvi and Lingard (2010) explained as the globalisation of education policy. Digital transformation is framed as a regulatory mechanism for improving competitiveness, innovation, and economic productivity. This integration between education and market related thing reflects Giroux's (2014) warning of neoliberalism in higher education, where universities are increasingly governed through entrepreneurial and performance-driven paradigms

In the discursive narratives, digital reform is seen as the most essential and beneficial to all, irrespective of regions. Such framing obscures the socio-material conditions necessary for effective implementation, reinforcing Selwyn's (2016) argument that digital education policies frequently operate through techno-solutionist imaginaries. The generally accepted notion of digital transformation as a means of advancement limits space for critical interrogation of infrastructural inequality, pedagogical preparedness, and contextual diversity.

Reconfiguration of English as Digital–Economic Capital

A central contribution of this study lies in demonstrating how digital transformation discourse intensifies the commodification of English. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1991) framework, English is discursively constructed as convertible capital within digitally mediated markets. The coupling of English proficiency with technological competence suggests an emerging fusion of linguistic and digital capital.

Block et al. (2012) argue that neoliberal applied linguistics often frames English learning as an investment in human capital. The findings extend this argument by showing how digital transformation rhetoric strengthens this investment logic. This shift has notable implications for pedagogical priorities. When ELT is framed mainly as skill acquisition in line with present labour market demands, broader educational objectives, such as critical literacy, intercultural dialogue,

and democratic participation, risk of being sidelined. Such narrowing of purpose aligns with broader critiques of the marketisation of higher education (Giroux, 2014).

Multilingualism Between Symbolic Recognition and Structural Subordination

Although multilingualism has been given more importance in the policy texts, it reveals a tension between symbolic recognition and structural prioritisation of other regional languages. The rhetorical endorsement of sociolinguistic diversity coexists with the prominence of English, especially in the area of digital infrastructures. This contradiction indicates what May (2012) identifies as the politics of recognition in language policy, where local and regional languages may be acknowledged discursively without altering dominant hierarchies. García and Wei's (2014) conception of multilingualism as dynamic and fluid challenges such hierarchical ordering, yet policy discourse often retains a stratified model in which English occupies the apex.

Blommaert (2010) highlights that the effects of globalisation have brought unequal distributions of linguistic resources. English operates as the primary medium through which students access technological tools easily, academic publications, and transnational communications. English goes well with ever-growing technologies. This connection between English and digital competence, therefore, establishes its hegemonic position more strongly within multilingual systems. This study aims to contribute to multilingualism by examining how digital transformation narratives reshape language hierarchies without explicitly challenging multilingual commitments by the policy makers.

The structural absence of sustained engagement with infrastructural and institutional limitations shows what Ball et al. (2012) mentioned gap that exists between policy text and policy enactment. Policy documents construct a coherent narrative of digital modernisation; however, implementation is mediated by material resources, faculty expertise, and local socio-economic conditions. In multilingual public universities, rural–urban disparities and uneven digital access may shape ELT reform outcomes. However, policy texts often largely abstract from these contextual realities. Fairclough (2013) argues that such abstraction is featured in institutions that seek coherence and legitimacy.

This observation reflects some critics' critiques of policy borrowing, where international reform models are taken and adopted without sufficient contextual adaptation (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). This study contributes to critical applied linguistics and language policy scholarship in three ways.

First, it extends linguistic capital theory by illustrating how digital transformation intensifies the economic valuation of English within multilingual higher education systems. The fusion of linguistic and technological capital represents an evolving dimension of language commodification.

Second, it bridges digital education critique and multilingual policy analysis. Although digital transformation and language policy are often studied separately, this research indicates their intersection within ELT reform discourse.

Third, the importance of critical policy discourse analysis in examining the higher education reforms. By situating Karnataka within this neoliberal policy, this study focuses on how local reforms are embedded within transnational narratives.

Conclusion

This study has examined how digital transformation, multilingualism, and ELT reform are shaped through institutional language within policy frameworks shaping undergraduate education in Karnataka's public universities. Through a Critical Policy Discourse Analysis informed by Bourdieu's (1991) theory of linguistic capital, Ball et al.'s (2012) policy enactment framework, and Fairclough's (2013) model of discourse, the analysis demonstrates that digital transformation functions not merely as technological reform but as an ideological project embedded within neoliberal higher education governance.

The findings show that digital transformation is constructed through forward-looking narratives of modernisation, competitiveness at the global level, and employability. Within this wider narrative, English is positioned as a dominant language not only as linguistic but also technological capital, an essential resource for participation in digitally mediated markets. Multilingualism, whereas it occupies a secondary structural position, often functions symbolically rather than substantively. Structural inequalities, including infrastructural disparities and institutional capacity constraints, remain under-theorised within policy texts.

By situating Karnataka within these wider educational reforms, this study contributes to the field of applied linguistics in many ways. First, it broadened the comprehension of how digital transformation intensifies the commodification of English within multilingual higher education contexts. Secondly, it bridges digital education and language policy studies, stressing the necessity of technological reform through linguistic viewpoints. Third and finally, it shows the value of

Critical Policy Discourse Analysis (CPDA) in uncovering ideological formations which include reform narratives.

The study does acknowledge digital innovation or English proficiency as inherent concerns. Instead, it argues for a more contextually grounded and socially just method to multilingual ELT reform. Such a model acknowledges linguistic diversity as a structurally integral part rather than just a symbolically peripheral one. Digital ELT reform integrated sociolinguistics with digital resources, aiming for access to all strategies and context-specific pedagogical training. In an age where digital transformation keeps increasingly shaping more educational reform, critical engagement with its linguistic and ideological dimensions remains essential. Only through such engagement can multilingual higher education systems pursue innovation without reproducing structural inequalities.

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