**The New Compass: Guiding English Studies through Emergent Humanities**

**Abstract**

As English Studies in India navigates the pressures of employability, digital transformation, and ecological urgency, there is an increasing need to reimagine its disciplinary scope through the lens of emergent humanities—including environmental, digital, medical, and energy humanities. This study investigates the extent to which Indian universities are incorporating these new directions into their English curricula and explores faculty attitudes, institutional constraints, and student responses to such integration. Using a mixed qualitative methodology involving curriculum review, semi-structured faculty interviews, and policy analysis, the research reveals a significant disconnect between national policy aspirations, as seen in NEP 2020, and actual curricular practice. While faculty show enthusiasm for interdisciplinary innovation and students express a strong desire for relevance and future-oriented learning, structural rigidity, outdated syllabi, and a lack of institutional support continue to hinder reform. The study argues for a new curricular compass that aligns English Studies with global challenges and civic engagement, urging policymakers, academic councils, and departments to embrace transdisciplinary designs that prepare graduates not only for employment but for ethically grounded, socially responsive futures.

**Keywords**: curriculum transformation, interdisciplinary pedagogy, faculty agency, experiential learning, policy-practice gap, cultural relevance, transdisciplinary research, student engagement, sustainable knowledge production

**1 Introduction**

English Studies as a discipline in India has long charted its course by the compass of the colonial canon and Eurocentric literary paradigms. Rooted in Victorian moral values, literary historiography, and genre-based structures, the field has traditionally emphasized textual interpretation over contextual intervention. However, the 21st century presents unprecedented social, ecological, and technological challenges that demand a recalibration of this compass. Climate change, pandemics, digital disruption, migration, and systemic inequality are no longer marginal issues—they are the defining realities of our time. Against this backdrop, the question arises: How can English Studies remain relevant, critical, and transformative? This study contends that the answer lies in integrating the emergent humanities into the very heart of the curriculum and research agenda of English departments.

100+ emergent humanities—encompassing environmental humanities, medical humanities, digital humanities, energy humanities, and disability studies—are not simply adjunct disciplines or passing intellectual fashions. They represent a shift in epistemology and pedagogy and urge scholars and students alike to engage with literature as a medium *not only of aesthetic pleasure but of ethical and civic responsibility* (Braidotti, 2013; Alaimo, 2016). These fields situate human experience in relation to broader ecological systems, technological interfaces, and bodily vulnerabilities. They challenge traditional binaries of subject and object, mind and body, text and context, and invite transdisciplinary dialogues that are participatory and problem-driven rather than purely analytical or interpretive (Roser & Wernli, 2012).

In India, despite the progressive rhetoric of the National Education Policy 2020, the integration of these emergent frameworks into English Studies remains slow and uneven. Curricula often retain the structure of colonial syllabi and privilege British and American literary canons over socially embedded texts. Elective offerings in areas such as eco-literature, illness narratives, or digital storytelling are limited, underdeveloped, and offered without adequate institutional or pedagogical support (Prasad, 2021; Chattopadhyay, 2020). The emphasis on employability and skill-based learning proposed by NEP 2020 remains narrowly interpreted in most university contexts, with minimal translation into curricular innovation.

However, the potential for transformation is vast. The emergent humanities offer English Studies a way to respond to contemporary crises while maintaining its core commitment to critical enquiry, narrative understanding, and ethical reflection. For example, Environmental Humanities enables students to analyse representations of nature, disaster, and planetary justice through literature, while also engaging with real-world climate concerns (Alaimo, 2016). Medical Humanities, particularly relevant in a post-pandemic world, allows for a nuanced understanding of health, suffering, care, and medical discourse and fosters empathy and ethical awareness (Chattopadhyay, 2020). Digital Humanities introduces students to multimodal storytelling, data-driven analysis, and collaborative research practices, bridging the gap between literary tradition and digital futures (Gold & Klein, 2016).

This study is therefore anchored in the belief that English Studies in India must reorient its pedagogical compass to include these emergent directions. Drawing on qualitative analysis of curricula, policy texts, and faculty interviews, the study explores how far emergent humanities have been integrated, what institutional and attitudinal barriers persist, and how curriculum design can be reframed to produce graduates who are not only textually literate but socially and environmentally responsive.

In choosing the metaphor of “The New Compass,” this article emphasizes that the purpose of English Studies today is not only to interpret literary maps of the past but to chart ethical and interdisciplinary routes for the future. It is a call to reimagine English not merely as a discipline of reading, but as a site of intervention—where storytelling meets sustainability, culture meets crisis, and imagination meets the imperatives of our shared world.

**1.1 Review of the Literature**

The transformation of English Studies in the 21st century must be understood within the broader intellectual movements that have redefined the purpose and practice of the humanities. Scholars and educators across the globe have been calling for a disciplinary reorientation that addresses the pressing concerns of our time—climate change, public health crises, digital disruption, and systemic inequality. The emergent humanities have gained prominence as frameworks that blend literary and cultural analysis with urgent ethical, political, and ecological questions. This review examines key literature that frames the rationale, methodologies, and pedagogical implications of these emergent fields, particularly in relation to English literary studies.

One of the most vibrant areas within emergent humanities is the environmental humanities. It offers a paradigm shift from human-centred literary analysis to a more ecological understanding of narrative, identity, and survival. Stacy Alaimo (2016), in her seminal work *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times*, explores how literature and culture reflect—and are complicit in—the environmental crises of the Anthropocene. Her concept of “trans-corporeality” blurs the boundaries between human bodies and their environmental surroundings, suggesting a porous, interconnected ontology that literature can powerfully illustrate. Alaimo’s work is foundational in encouraging literary scholars to attend to the entanglements of the ecological, the ethical, and the aesthetic. At the same time, Amitav Ghosh (2016) critiques the literary world’s failure to confront the climate crisis, urging a reimagining of narrative forms to address ecological catastrophe.

Similarly, Rosi Braidotti’s *The Posthuman* (2013) offers a theoretical framework for understanding how posthumanism destabilizes the centrality of the human subject in the humanities. Braidotti challenges the Enlightenment-based liberal humanist subject and invites scholars to imagine alternative, more sustainable modes of subjectivity and community. Her insistence on “zoe-centric egalitarianism” resonates with the environmental and ethical commitments of the new humanities. Together, these works call for a curriculum that incorporates literature dealing with environmental justice, animal studies, planetary health, and multispecies storytelling—thus broadening the thematic and epistemological base of English studies.

The rise of the digital humanities marks another significant development in the restructuring of literary studies. In *Debates in the Digital Humanities* (2016), edited by Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein, contributors grapple with how computational tools and digital platforms can be mobilized not just to study literature but to produce knowledge collaboratively, ethically, and publicly. The volume addresses key tensions: between quantification and interpretation, between open-access scholarship and institutional gatekeeping, and between digital innovation and disciplinary conservatism.

Gold and Klein argue that Digital Humanities is not simply about digitizing texts, but about rethinking what it means to read, write, and interpret in the digital age. For English Studies, this shift implies a move toward multimodal literacy, digital storytelling, data visualization, and collaborative authorship—skills increasingly relevant for both academia and the knowledge economy. However, they also caution that this field must remain politically conscious and inclusive, especially in postcolonial contexts where access to digital infrastructures and literacies is uneven. Meanwhile, Roopika Risam (2018) explores how digital humanities can be decolonized to support postcolonial scholarship, pedagogy, and justice in the digital age.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the relevance of medical humanities has become even more pronounced. This subfield interrogates the intersections between literature, ethics, illness, caregiving, and health policy. Supriya Chattopadhyay (2020), writing in the *Indian Journal of Medical Ethics*, emphasizes the potential of medical humanities to humanize healthcare in India by integrating narrative competence, empathy, and ethical reflection into medical and literary education. She advocates for the inclusion of illness narratives, doctor-patient communication modules, and reflective writing in undergraduate and postgraduate curricula—not just in medical colleges but also in English departments.

Medical humanities compel English Studies to move beyond representations of suffering to engage with the political economy of healthcare, the language of pain, and the narrative structures of illness. These pedagogical interventions can deepen students’ ethical sensibilities and prepare them for careers in counselling, public health communication, health journalism, and trauma-informed education.

A more recent but increasingly important field is energy humanities, which interrogates how energy systems—especially fossil fuels—shape cultural narratives, identities, and power structures. Scholars like G. J. V. Prasad (2021) have emphasized the role of Indian English literature in reflecting ecological concerns and energy politics. In Indian Literature, Prasad analyses how contemporary fiction engages with themes such as displacement, land degradation, and environmental injustice, urging a re-reading of literary texts in the context of the Anthropocene. He contends that ecological critique must not be confined to ecocriticism in isolation but should be woven into the broader thematic structures of the curriculum. Energy humanities emphasize the need for interdisciplinary analysis that connects literature to environmental history, resource politics, and climate activism. For English departments, this means offering students tools to critically engage with both literary form and the infrastructures—economic, material, and ecological—that sustain or threaten life.

The conceptual foundation for emergent humanities lies in the principle of transdisciplinarity—a mode of knowledge production that transcends disciplinary boundaries to address real-world problems collaboratively. Roser and Wernli (2012), in their guide *Promoting Transdisciplinary Research: A Practical Guide*, argue that traditional disciplines are ill-equipped to deal with complex, “wicked” problems such as climate change or public health crises. Transdisciplinary approaches involve stakeholders outside academia, promote co-creation of knowledge, and favour problem-solving over theory-building.

In the context of English Studies, this suggests a shift from teaching literature as an end in itself to using literature as a method of inquiry into larger socio-ecological systems. It opens up English Studies to collaborations with environmental scientists, digital technologists, medical practitioners, and policy makers, thereby enriching both the disciplinary content and its social function.

**1.2 Synthesis and Research Gap**

The reviewed literature establishes that the emergent humanities are both a response to and a critique of the limitations of traditional disciplinary structures. They advocate for curricula and research that are *interdisciplinary, ethically grounded, socially responsive, and future-facing*. However, while international scholarship is rich in theory and praxis, there is a noticeable gap in the Indian context regarding the institutionalization of these fields within English departments. With a few exceptions, most Indian universities have yet to embrace these developments in any systematic way. This study seeks to address that gap by exploring the current status, institutional challenges, and future possibilities for integrating emergent humanities into English studies in India.

**2 Method**

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design grounded in the principles of critical enquiry and thematic content analysis. The interpretive paradigm is particularly suited to research in humanities education as it emphasizes context, meaning, and the lived experiences of academic stakeholders. The goal is not to generalize but to explore how English departments in India are currently engaging with (or resisting) emergent humanities and what pedagogical, institutional, and epistemological shifts are necessary to foster interdisciplinary curriculum reform. The choice of qualitative methods is informed by the research problem: the need to understand how curricular structures, faculty attitudes, and policy frameworks intersect in shaping the evolution of English Studies. In this sense, the study is exploratory, reflective, and diagnostic in nature.

**2.1 Research Questions**

In light of the evolving landscape of English studies and the increasing relevance of emergent humanities, this study seeks to explore how these new interdisciplinary fields are being understood, adopted, or resisted within Indian higher education. Guided by a critical enquiry into curriculum design, institutional practices, and faculty preparedness, the research questions below aim to uncover both the current status and the transformative potential of integrating emergent humanities into English departments. These questions also reflect the study’s broader concern with making English studies more responsive to contemporary global challenges and more meaningful to students’ academic and professional futures.

1. To what extent have emergent humanities been integrated into English studies curricula in Indian universities?
2. What is the level of faculty awareness and preparedness to teach or research in these new subfields?
3. What institutional and pedagogical challenges hinder the incorporation of emergent humanities?
4. What strategies can be adopted to mainstream these areas within English studies?

**2.2 Data Sources and Sampling**

Three types of data sources were used to triangulate insights:

**2.2.1 Curriculum Documents** (Syllabi and Course Structures)

Ten universities were selected using purposive sampling to reflect a range of institutional types: central, state, private, and autonomous institutions across different regions in India.

Both undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) syllabi in English were collected and analysed.

The selection included institutions known for innovation and those with traditional frameworks, offering a comparative lens.

**2.2.2 Policy Frameworks**

Key national policy documents such as the National Education Policy 2020, UGC’s FYUGP Guidelines, and selected reports by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and NAAC were reviewed. These documents helped to contextualize institutional reforms and regulatory expectations around interdisciplinarity and employability.

**2.2.3 Semi-Structured Interviews with Faculty**

Twelve faculty members from English departments at the selected institutions were interviewed. Participants included both junior and senior faculty with varying degrees of engagement in curriculum design. Interviews were conducted either in person or online, lasting between 30 and 60 minutes.

**2.3 Data Collection Techniques**

**2.3.1 Document Analysis**

Syllabi and course outlines were analysed for the presence of themes, modules, or electives that reflect emergent humanities (e.g., environmental literature, digital storytelling, illness narratives, energy literature, posthumanism). Course descriptions, learning outcomes, and assessment methods were also reviewed.

**2.3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews**

An interview guide was developed around themes such as awareness and understanding of emergent humanities,institutional support or resistance to curricular innovation, pedagogical training and autonomy, perceived student interest, perceived relevance of emergent humanities for employability and research. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

**2.3.3 Analytical Approach**

The collected data were analysed using thematic content analysis, a method suitable for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process included the following steps:

1. Familiarization with the data through reading and re-reading transcripts and documents.
2. Initial coding of data segments that responded to the research questions (e.g., “curricular gaps,” “faculty resistance,” “student curiosity,” “policy alignment”).
3. Theme development by grouping codes into broader thematic categories.
4. Theme refinement by reviewing themes for internal coherence and distinctiveness.
5. Interpretation in light of theoretical frameworks related to interdisciplinarity, posthumanism, and educational reform.
6. The coding was both deductive (guided by predefined themes from literature and research questions) and inductive (emerging themes from data, such as “lack of digital infrastructure” or “institutional inertia”).

**2.4 Ethical Considerations**

1. Identities of participants and institutions are anonymized in the reporting.
2. No student data were directly collected, ensuring that the study remained within ethical boundaries approved for low-risk educational research.

**2.5 Trustworthiness and Validity**

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study:

1. Triangulation was employed through multiple data sources (documents, interviews, policies).
2. Member checking was done with three interviewees who reviewed the summary of their contributions.
3. A reflexive journal was maintained to document researcher biases, positionality, and interpretive decisions.

**2.6 Limitations of the Methodology**

While the qualitative design allows for depth and nuance, the methodology has limitations:

1. The sample size is not statistically representative of all Indian universities.
2. Student voices and employer perspectives are not directly captured.
3. Classroom-level data such as teaching practices or student feedback were beyond the scope.

These limitations are acknowledged as part of the study’s delimitations and form the basis for future research.

**2.7 Delimitations of the Study**

Every research project must define its boundaries to maintain focus, feasibility, and clarity of purpose. This study is primarily concerned with exploring the integration—or lack thereof—of emergent humanities into English studies curricula and research practices within the Indian higher education system. To that end, several deliberate delimitations have been applied.

First, the study focuses exclusively on departments of English language and literature at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. While emergent humanities such as environmental humanities or medical humanities may also be explored in disciplines like history, philosophy, media studies, or cultural studies, this research confines itself to English departments in order to examine how a traditionally text-based discipline is responding to new intellectual and pedagogical imperatives.

Second, the study selects a representative sample of ten Indian universities—including central, state, private, and autonomous institutions—for curriculum review. These institutions were chosen to reflect diverse geographical and administrative contexts. However, this sample does not aim to be exhaustive or statistically generalizable across all of India’s universities. Rather, it seeks to offer qualitative insights into emerging patterns and institutional dispositions.

Third, the primary data sources include university syllabi, relevant policy documents, such as NEP 2020 and Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) frameworks, and semi-structured interviews with faculty members. The study does not include classroom observations, student focus groups, or alumni tracking. As a result, while some student perspectives are reflected through faculty observations and anecdotal references, direct student voices are not central to the data set.

Four, while the study discusses emergent humanities in a global intellectual context, it maintains an India-specific focus in its empirical investigation. International models of curriculum innovation are mentioned selectively for comparison or inspiration, but the core analysis centres on Indian institutions and stakeholders.

Last, the study is interpretive and exploratory in nature. It does not employ quantitative methods, nor does it attempt to measure learning outcomes or employment statistics. Instead, it aims to map current trends, institutional barriers, and faculty orientations regarding interdisciplinary integration in English studies.

These delimitations, while necessary for focus and depth, also point toward opportunities for further research—particularly involving student perspectives, interdisciplinary collaborations across departments, and empirical assessments of the impact of emergent humanities on learning and employability.

**2.8 Scope of the Study**

This study is situated within the broader context of academic reform, curricular innovation, and interdisciplinary engagement in English Studies in India. Its scope is defined by both its intellectual ambition and its practical focus on how emergent humanities—such as environmental humanities, digital humanities, medical humanities, and energy humanities—can be meaningfully integrated into the curriculum and research practices of English departments. The study seeks not only to assess current levels of integration but also to offer a vision for how English Studies can be transformed to meet contemporary cultural, social, and ecological challenges.

At its core, the study aims to critically examine the potential of emergent humanities to revitalize the disciplinary relevance, pedagogical approach, and social responsiveness of English Studies. It addresses questions of curricular design, faculty orientation, institutional capacity, and alignment with global trends and national policy frameworks such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP). By doing so, it engages with both the academic content and the institutional ecosystem that shapes the delivery and reception of English education in India.

The scope of the study is qualitative and interpretive by focusing on select institutions across central, state, private, and autonomous university systems. It includes the analysis of syllabi, interviews with faculty, and relevant educational policy documents and allows the research to draw inferences about existing practices, emerging innovations, and systemic gaps. The study also explores how faculty conceptualize interdisciplinarity, how they perceive the value of the emergent humanities, and what forms of institutional support or resistance they encounter.

Further, the scope extends to conceptualizing English Studies as a site of transdisciplinary knowledge-making, where literary texts are not merely objects of study but entry points into discussions of climate change, public health, digital media, energy politics, and ethics. This expands the scope of English from the realm of language and literature to that of civic engagement, sustainability, and social innovation.

Importantly, while the study draws inspiration from global conversations and practices, it remains rooted in the Indian academic and sociocultural context and aims to contribute meaningfully to national debates on curriculum reform, graduate employability, and the public role of the humanities.

**3 Results**

The findings of this study emerge from a triangulation of data: a review of English syllabi from ten Indian universities, an analysis of national higher education policy documents, and semi-structured interviews with twelve faculty members across diverse institutions. The results are organized thematically around five key areas relevant to the research questions: (1) curriculum content and structure; (2) faculty awareness and engagement; (3) student response and perceived demand; (4) institutional support and constraints; and (5) alignment with national education policy.

**3.1 Curriculum Content and Structure**

The analysis of curricula reveals that most English departments have yet to meaningfully integrate emergent humanities into their undergraduate or postgraduate syllabi. Among the ten universities examined:

1. Only three institutions offer specific elective papers that reflect themes from environmental, medical, or digital humanities.
2. Courses like “Literature and Environment,” “Literature and Media,” or “Narratives of Illness and Healing” were included in the syllabi of two central universities and one autonomous private institution.
3. In seven universities, the curriculum remains predominantly canon-driven and Eurocentric, with modules focused on classical British, American, and Indian English literature, and minimal engagement with interdisciplinary or contemporary societal concerns.
4. A few departments have included brief references to “eco-criticism” or “digital narratives” in broader theory or genre papers, but these were rarely given thematic prominence or supported by revised reading lists or assessment methods.

This suggests that the integration of emergent humanities remains limited, fragmented, and non-institutionalized within most Indian English departments.

**3.2 Faculty Awareness and Engagement**

Interviews with faculty reveal a wide gap between personal interest and institutional practice. Most respondents express intellectual curiosity and pedagogical enthusiasm for themes associated with emergent humanities, even if they lacked formal exposure or training.

1. Nine out of twelve faculty members are familiar with environmental or digital humanities though only four have taught courses or supervised research in these areas.
2. Faculty working in newer or autonomous universities are more likely to have initiated experimental or elective modules, citing institutional flexibility and student demand as motivators.
3. Many report lack of curricular autonomy, outdated university-prescribed syllabi, or resistance from senior faculty as barriers to curricular innovation.
4. Those who have introduced these themes often did so informally—by integrating contemporary texts, digital resources, or case studies into existing literature courses without formal curricular endorsement.

These insights highlight that faculty interest exists, but systemic support and collaborative frameworks are lacking.

**3.3 Student Engagement and Demand**

Faculty consistently report strong student interest in contemporary, socially relevant, and interdisciplinary topics, even if such themes were not officially part of the curriculum.

1. Topics that resonate with students include climate justice, digital storytelling, mental health narratives, and gendered experiences of illness.
2. Students are especially responsive to assignments or projects that connect literature to real-world issues and it suggests a desire for relevance, creativity, and career-linked content.
3. However, in the absence of structured courses, students often lack theoretical grounding or interdisciplinary vocabulary to fully engage with these topics.
4. A few faculty note that students who pursue internships, writing fellowships, or digital content creation find emergent humanities themes directly applicable to their career paths, especially in fields like content writing, health communication, and sustainability outreach.

Thus, student receptivity is high, but curricular and institutional structures have yet to channel this energy into sustained learning outcomes.

**3.4 Institutional Support and Structural Barriers**

The data reveal significant structural and procedural constraints that inhibit curricular reform:

1. Several departments follow rigid university syllabi set by boards of studies, with limited scope for updating content or introducing interdisciplinary modules.
2. Faculty report bureaucratic inertia, lack of funding, and minimal administrative support for developing interdisciplinary syllabi or organizing training.
3. Institutions that have implemented interdisciplinary courses often do so through add-on certificate programmes or informal electives, rather than through core curriculum restructuring.
4. There is little to no institutional dialogue between English departments and those offering environmental science, media studies, or health studies, despite clear overlaps in thematic content.

This suggests that while national policies advocate for interdisciplinarity, many institutions struggle with implementation due to structural silos, lack of incentives, and absence of leadership in curricular innovation.

**3.5 Policy Alignment**

A review of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the UGC’s Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) guidelines reveals a strong emphasis on interdisciplinary learning, research-based pedagogy, and employability.

1. NEP 2020 encourages departments to design multidisciplinary courses, offer flexible electives, and promote skill-based learning—all of which align with the goals of the emergent humanities.
2. However, faculty interviews indicate that these policy shifts have not yet translated meaningfully into syllabus revisions or new course offerings.
3. There is a disconnect between policy rhetoric and departmental realities, with few mechanisms to support cross-departmental collaboration, assessment reform, or faculty development.

The findings suggest that policy frameworks create enabling conditions, but require ground-level leadership, academic vision, and institutional initiative to enact the curricular transformation they envision.

**4 Analysis**

The findings of the study reveal a complex and uneven landscape in which emergent humanities are only tentatively finding a place within English Studies in India. This section analyses these findings in light of critical theories of interdisciplinarity, curriculum reform, and the evolving role of the humanities in addressing contemporary crises. The analysis is organized around four interrelated dimensions: (1) conceptual awareness vs. institutional inertia, (2) student agency and future-readiness, (3) the structural paradox of policy and practice, and (4) the redefinition of disciplinary boundaries.

**4.1 Conceptual Awareness vs. Institutional Inertia**

One of the central tensions emerging from the study is the disjuncture between faculty awareness of emergent humanities and the institutional reluctance to adapt curricula accordingly. This reflects what educational theorists like Paulo Freire (1970) call the problem of “banking education,” where institutions deposit fixed content into students rather than respond dynamically to lived realities. While faculty members demonstrate intellectual curiosity and engagement with environmental, digital, and medical humanities, they often lack the agency and resources to translate this interest into curriculum change.

This disjuncture can be further understood through Bourdieu’s (1988) concept of the academic field as a structured space of power and tradition. Many faculty members report facing hierarchical resistance and bureaucratic rigidity when proposing interdisciplinary syllabi, revealing how deeply institutional logics can prevent academic innovation. The emergence of the new humanities thus challenges not only epistemic boundaries but also power structures within departments and universities.

**4.2 Student Agency and Future-Readiness**

The findings suggest that students exhibit strong enthusiasm for interdisciplinary, socially relevant content, but the curriculum often fails to reflect or harness this interest. This aligns with Raymond Williams’ (1980) argument that education must be responsive to the “structures of feeling” of a generation—those lived, affective, and social experiences that shape consciousness before they are codified into institutional forms. The desire among students to engage with climate narratives, digital cultures, and healthcare storytelling is evidence of such a generational shift.

From a pedagogical perspective, this gap between student interest and curricular delivery reflects a missed opportunity to cultivate transferrable 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, digital fluency, ethical reasoning, and civic engagement. As Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory suggests, students learn most deeply when they are able to connect theoretical knowledge to lived and applied contexts. Emergent humanities provide precisely that opportunity—yet their marginal presence in the curriculum means that students graduate with a deficit in both relevance and employability.

**4.3 Structural Paradox of Policy and Practice**

At the policy level, India’s National Education Policy 2020 champions interdisciplinarity, research orientation, and flexibility. However, the study shows that these policy ideals are often frustrated by ground-level implementation challenges, including a lack of collaboration between departments, outdated syllabi, and limited training for faculty. This confirms Roser and Wernli’s (2012) claim that while transdisciplinarity is often praised in theory, it remains “infrastructurally unsupported” within most academic institutions.

The NEP’s aspiration to produce “future-ready graduates” is at odds with the structural conservatism of traditional curricula. The result is a policy-practice paradox, where reformist language abounds but curricular inertia persists. For emergent humanities to be successfully integrated, institutions will need to address not only what is taught, but how curriculum design, faculty development, and evaluation systems are governed.

**4.4 Redefining Disciplinary Boundaries Toward a New Compass**

The analysis also affirms that English Studies in India is at a crossroads—caught between its traditional literary canon and a world that demands ethical, ecological, and digital literacy. Drawing on Julie Thompson Klein’s (1990) insights on interdisciplinarity, we can argue that the emergence of new humanities represents more than a thematic expansion—it is a reconceptualization of disciplinary identity. Instead of treating English as a self-contained domain of literary analysis, the emergent humanities position it as a gateway to understanding the world—from climate catastrophe and pandemics to algorithmic injustice and energy colonialism. This expansion does not dilute disciplinary rigor; rather, it revitalizes it by embedding literature within systems of urgency and care, as emphasized by scholars like Edward Said (1993) in Representations of the Intellectual.

Thus, the integration of emergent humanities should not be seen as a peripheral addition to the English curriculum but as a necessary reorientation—a new compass for navigating the intersecting crises of the 21st century.

**5 Discussion**

The integration of emergent humanities into English Studies is no longer an elective luxury but a curricular necessity. As the findings of this study reveal, Indian English departments remain anchored in traditional literary paradigms while the world around them—marked by ecological crises, pandemics, digital transformations, and energy geopolitics—demands more porous, transdisciplinary forms of engagement. This discussion synthesizes empirical findings with theoretical insights to chart a path forward for curriculum reform, faculty development, and institutional transformation.

**5.1 Reclaiming Curricular Relevance through Emergent Humanities**

The limited but growing inclusion of environmental, medical, and digital humanities in a few university syllabi reflects a slow shift from canonical fixity to thematic responsiveness. This trend aligns with what Julie Thompson Klein (1990) describes as the evolution of disciplines through border crossing, where once rigid domains are restructured to respond to new knowledge configurations. However, most English syllabi in India still lag behind this global trend, clinging to a Eurocentric canon with little attention to the lived realities of students. Williams (1980) warns of the disjuncture between academic traditions and societal needs and calls for cultural forms that emerge from, and speak to, everyday experience. Emergent humanities offer this relevance. Whether through the study of ecocritical literature in the context of climate change or narratives of illness in an era of global pandemics, these fields help to position literature not just as a site of aesthetic reflection but as a medium of civic consciousness and ethical inquiry.

**5.2 Faculty as Intellectual Agents and Institutional Change-makers**

While institutional structures remain slow to change, faculty responses suggest a latent potential for transformation. Many faculty express awareness of and interest in teaching themes from emergent humanities but cited a lack of support, autonomy, and training. This disconnect reflects Bourdieu’s (1988) concept of the academic field as a space of struggle, where innovation often contends with habitus and hierarchical gatekeeping. Yet, as Freire (1970) reminds us, education is always a political act and teachers must be co-creators of knowledge, not passive transmitters of tradition. Faculty members who introduce emergent themes informally—such as integrating illness narratives into modern fiction or using podcasts in digital storytelling—demonstrate what Edward Said (1993) would term the “amateur intellectual”: the educator who resists orthodoxy and embraces risk for the sake of public relevance. What is needed now is institutional recognition of such faculty efforts through support for curriculum innovation, interdisciplinary collaboration, and faculty development workshops on emergent humanities. Without this, even the most progressive academic voices risk being isolated or rendered ineffective.

**5.3 Student Voices and Experiential Learning**

A striking finding of the study is the student enthusiasm for interdisciplinary, socially anchored topics. Students respond well to courses and modules that link literature to environmental, health, and digital concerns—areas they encounter in their personal, civic, and professional lives. This echoes Kolb’s (1984) theory of experiential learning, which posits that learners retain knowledge more deeply when it is connected to concrete experience and critical reflection. Moreover, the study supports Williams’ (1980) notion of “structures of feeling,” in which new generations develop ways of knowing and feeling that precede formal curricular change. Students today are deeply shaped by crises like COVID-19, climate anxiety, and digital disorientation. When curricula fail to address these experiences, they risk becoming irrelevant, or worse, alienating. By embedding emergent humanities in core and elective modules, institutions can bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world engagement and foster a generation of graduates who are not only employable but ethically and ecologically literate.

**5.4 From Policy Rhetoric to Pedagogical Practice**

At the policy level, India’s National Education Policy (2020) advocates for interdisciplinarity, flexibility, and skill integration, calling for curricula that foster critical thinking, communication, and societal engagement. Yet, as Roser and Wernli (2012) argue, transdisciplinarity is often embraced in rhetoric but poorly supported in infrastructure and practice. This gap was evident in faculty testimonies: while national frameworks support reform, university systems are often caught in bureaucratic inertia, resistant syllabi committees, and outdated assessment practices. Without mechanisms for interdepartmental collaboration, funding for curricular experiments, or professional training in interdisciplinary pedagogy, the NEP’s vision remains aspirational. Closing this policy-practice gap will require systemic coordination between government bodies, universities, faculty associations, and accreditation agencies. English departments can lead this transformation by piloting new models of curriculum that place literature in conversation with ecology, technology, health, and energy—all of which are central to 21st-century life and work.

**5.5 Reimagining Disciplinary Identity**

The metaphor of the “new compass” signals the need for English Studies to recalibrate its disciplinary identity—not by abandoning the literary, but by expanding its horizons. As Klein (1990) observes, interdisciplinary learning is not dilution but integration with purpose. The emergent humanities challenge the isolation of English departments and invite a repositioning of literature as a form of critical world-making. English can remain a home for close reading, narrative understanding, and cultural critique—but these skills must now be harnessed to navigate pandemics, environmental degradation, algorithmic bias, and global inequity. As Said (1993) wrote, the intellectual must act on behalf of values that transcend professional boundaries—literature must prepare students not just to read texts, but to read and respond to the world.

**6 Suggestions**

Below is a set of well-developed, actionable suggestions directed at policy makers such as the Board of Studies, the Academic Council, and the State Higher Education Councils (SHECs) in the context of integrating Emergent Humanities into English Studies. These suggestions are framed in a scholarly and constructive tone, rooted in the findings and discussion of the study “The New Compass: Guiding English Studies through Emergent Humanities.”

1. Boards of Studies should introduce core and elective courses in emergent humanities, such as environmental, digital, medical, and energy humanities to align English Studies with contemporary global and national priorities.
2. Academic Councils should implement flexible, credit-based, and modular curriculum structures to facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration and student choice.
3. State Higher Education Councils (SHECs) should organize regular faculty development programmes to equip English faculty with skills to teach and research in emergent humanities.
4. Institutions should enable interdepartmental teaching and shared course ownership to foster interdisciplinary approaches within and beyond English Studies.
5. Research Councils should provide grants and seed funding for faculty and student projects in emergent humanities to stimulate academic innovation and local engagement.
6. Boards of Studies should require English departments to undergo syllabus review and submit innovation reports every five years to ensure curricular relevance and renewal.
7. Curriculum developers should explicitly align English courses with the NEP 2020 and UN Sustainable Development Goals to enhance global relevance and civic learning.
8. Departments should allow students to complete transdisciplinary capstone projects as part of their final-year coursework to promote applied, real-world learning.
9. Universities should establish linkages with NGOs, media houses, hospitals, and sustainability organizations to offer internships and field-based learning opportunities in emergent humanities.
10. Boards of Studies should redesign evaluation systems to assess interdisciplinary competencies such as critical reflection, civic reasoning, and systems thinking.

**7 Scope for Further Study**

The present study offers an initial exploration into the relevance and integration of emergent humanities within English Studies in India, particularly in the context of curricular innovation and graduate preparedness. While it identifies critical gaps in institutional practice and pedagogical design, the field remains wide open for deeper, more diverse investigations. Future research can expand both the theoretical frameworks and empirical data that support the curricular reimagination of English Studies through interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary lenses.

1. Further research can conduct comparative analyses across central, state, private, and autonomous institutions to examine how geography, governance, and funding influence the adoption of emergent humanities in English curricula.
2. Studies that track student outcomes over time—such as employability, civic engagement, and critical thinking—can assess the long-term impact of exposure to emergent humanities in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.
3. In-depth qualitative studies can explore faculty attitudes, resistance, training needs, and professional development trajectories in relation to interdisciplinary teaching and curriculum reform.
4. Researchers can investigate how policies such as NEP 2020 are operationalized in English departments, identifying systemic gaps between curricular recommendations and institutional execution.
5. Pilot programmes that introduce interdisciplinary modules—such as courses in medical humanities or climate literature—can be studied through action research methodologies to generate scalable models.
6. There is scope to explore how student perspectives, aspirations, and life experiences can inform participatory models of curriculum co-design, particularly in emergent humanities.
7. Research can document and evaluate collaborative efforts between English departments and those of environmental science, digital media, sociology, or public health to co-create courses and research projects.
8. With the growing role of technology in education, studies can examine how digital tools, such as digital storytelling, podcasts, and VR narratives can enhance learning and engagement in emergent humanities topics.
9. Future work can explore how emergent humanities themes—especially illness, climate, and energy narratives—are expressed across Indian languages and how this multilingual knowledge can enrich English Studies.
10. Comparative studies across countries in the Global South can examine how postcolonial and indigenous knowledges intersect with emergent humanities and offer decolonial frameworks for curriculum transformation.

**8 Conclusions**

This study reaffirms that English Studies in India stands at a pivotal moment—one that demands both intellectual courage and structural transformation. The emergent humanities offer not a rejection of literary tradition but its necessary renewal in the face of 21st-century challenges such as climate crisis, public health emergencies, and digital reconfiguration. By integrating environmental, medical, digital, and energy humanities into the curriculum, English departments can expand their relevance, restore civic purpose, and prepare students for socially meaningful, interdisciplinary careers. However, this vision will remain unfulfilled without committed policy implementation, faculty empowerment, and institutional innovation. As the findings suggest, the new compass for English Studies must point toward relevance, resilience, and responsibility—anchored in the world as it is, and responsive to the world as it is becoming.

Consent: Informed consent was obtained from all faculty participants.

**Disclaimer**

Author hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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**Appendix**

**Title**

Faculty Interview Schedule: Integration of Emergent Humanities into English Studies

**Purpose**

This interview guide is designed to gather faculty perspectives on the current state, relevance, challenges, and future possibilities of integrating emergent humanities (environmental, digital, medical, and energy humanities) into English Studies curricula and research at Indian universities.

**Confidentiality Notice**

All responses will remain confidential. Faculty names and institutional affiliations will be anonymized in reporting. Participation is voluntary, and the interviewee may decline to answer any question or withdraw at any time.

**Section I: Background Information**

1. Can you briefly describe your teaching and research interests in English Studies?
2. How long have you been teaching in the department, and what courses do you typically handle?

**Section II: Awareness and Understanding of Emergent Humanities**

1. Are you familiar with the term “emergent humanities”? If yes, how would you define or understand it?
2. Have you come across or worked with areas like environmental humanities, digital humanities, medical humanities, or energy humanities in your academic work?
3. In your view, how relevant are these fields to English Studies today?

**Section III: Curriculum and Institutional Practice**

1. Does your department offer any papers or modules related to emergent humanities (e.g., eco-literature, literature and health, digital storytelling)?
2. If yes, are these courses core, elective, or interdisciplinary offerings shared with other departments?
3. To what extent do you think the existing curriculum encourages interdisciplinary engagement or thematic innovation?
4. Have you been involved in curriculum development or revision in the last five years? If so, what space was there for proposing such innovations?

**Section IV: Pedagogical Challenges and Opportunities**

1. What are some challenges you face (or anticipate) in teaching emergent humanities topics? (e.g., lack of materials, institutional approval, student preparedness, assessment methods)
2. Do you think faculty in your department would benefit from training or workshops in these areas?
3. Have students expressed interest in such themes, especially those related to digital culture, environment, or health narratives?

**Section V: Attitudes Toward Interdisciplinary Reform**

1. Do you see value in moving English Studies toward a more interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary model? Why or why not?
2. How open is your department or institution to experimenting with non-traditional content and approaches?
3. Do you think such shifts will make English graduates more employment-ready or socially relevant? In what ways?

**Section VI: Institutional and Policy Framework**

1. How familiar are you with the National Education Policy 2020 and its emphasis on interdisciplinary learning?
2. Do you feel supported by your institution in aligning teaching with national curriculum frameworks or global trends?
3. What changes (in policy, administration, or funding) would make it easier for English departments to incorporate emergent humanities?

**Section VII: Final Reflections**

1. What are your personal hopes or visions for the future of English Studies in India?
2. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding curriculum reform, student needs, or your experience as a faculty member in this evolving academic landscape?