

The Origin and Growth of ELTAI

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INTRODUCTION

Our Association had a humble beginning and has grown into a one of the largest professional associations of teachers in the world just like a tiny seed becoming in course of time a big Banyan tree—started with just six members, all belonging to just one city, Chennai, grown into fairly a big organization with 3864 members and 40 chapters in different parts of our country. You may wonder how it had happened. Well, it is quite an interesting saga.

Journal first, Association later!

It is interesting to note that our Journal was started first and our Association much later. Why and how did it happen? As early as 1974, The Journal of English Language Teaching (JELT) —the first of its kind in our country— was published, thanks to one of the well-known educationists of that time, the late Padmashree S. Natarajan. He really wanted to start a professional association of teachers of English but he knew that teachers would not join it paying some subscription without some incentive. So he decided to tell teachers they would get a free copy of the Journal if they joined the English Language Teachers' Association once it was started.

The Journal of English Language Teaching

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was thus first started and it provided an opportunity for the teachers to get themselves acquainted with recent research findings in the teaching of English and also share their experiences with others. He priced it just a rupee per copy and almost single-handedly promoted its sale. He visited schools and colleges and requested them to subscribe for it. Out of pure regard for him only some subscribed but he didn't give up. He wrote letters to the heads of a few well-known educational institutions in the State requesting them to subscribe for the journal. He did not have a typewriter nor anyone to assist him and he was in fact poor health with failing eyesight but with missionary zeal he wrote letters with his own hand and did thus the canvassing. Then there was also paucity of articles for publication. He requested his close friends—one or two—to write almost for every issue. The point is the journal saw the light of the day only due to the persistent efforts of this old man. At the beginning only a hundred copies were printed and in fact some remained unsold. But he didn't give up and soon the circulation went up. But unfortunately it never went beyond 400 copies or so.

ELTAI is born!

Eleven years later—in 1985—Mr. Natarajan

started the English Language Teachers' Association of India (ELTAI). A small group of teachers including the writer—just six of us met at his residence. We had a discussion on the importance of professional development of teachers as a key factor in enhancing the standards of education in our country. At that time there were only trade unions of teachers concerned with working for the improvement of their service conditions. At our meeting he mooted the idea of starting an Association of teachers concerned with organizing teacher development programmes—seminars and workshops—for them. We all agreed and assured him of our help in his great venture. He said enrolment of members of the new association would be easier if we said all members of the Association would get a free copy of Journal. Thus our Association came into being and we were able to enrol about 256 members only.

Promoting ELTAI.—New strategies

After passing away of our Founder in 1974, a new team of office-bearers took charge of the Association and decided to carry forward the good work initiated by him adopting certain new strategies.

For enrolling members it was decided to conduct a number of workshops, seminars and refresher courses for teachers of English. Schools and colleges were contacted and they were told no fees would be charged from their teachers attending these staff development programmes.

At the programmes we organized teachers were told about the benefits of joining ELTAI

—a free copy of our bimonthly, The Journal of English Language Teaching (Impact factor-4.756), opportunities provided for the improvement of their teaching competence, interacting with ELT professionals and also for getting their papers published in our Journal. This strategy is working well and we have teachers coming forward to join ELTAI.

Another strategy adopted was to provide cash awards for teachers undertaking action research and also for using ICT tools in teaching English. The allotment of some subsidised memberships offered by IATEFL to our members has also helped to enrol new members, besides familiarizing them with the great work done by IATEFL.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

There are two Special Interest Groups—English Literature SIG and Computer Technology SIG—both quite active. The former has been running an E journal—Journal of Teaching and Research in English Literature for the past five years and the other SIG has been publishing its own E Journal—Journal of Computer Technology for ELT. These two open access journals may easily be accessed on the web by clicking on the direct links given to them on the Home page of our website www.eltai.in

IATEFL and Hornby Trust Projects

ELTAI was the first recipient of the IATEFL Project grant along with another country in Europe. We received a handsome grant of GBP3000 for our innovative project on

Training the Trainers in Virtual Learning. A group of 17 teachers were selected from over the country and were trained in using Web tools in ELT and they were then required to train teachers in their area. Image 2)

Another project undertaken by our Association with support from the Hornby Trust, UK, was on training teachers in using smart phones for the teaching and learning of English. The project now in progress relates to our 'Shakespeare lives - 2016' celebrations undertaken in collaboration with the British Council in six different cities in India. Competitions for students in soliloquy, quiz and enacting a scene from one of Shakespeare's plays are being held. Seminars are being organized for teachers for discussing the relevance of the playwright's works for all ages and cultures.

Annual conferences

We hold our annual conferences regularly and they are international too. They are attended by not less than 600 teachers every year.

ELTAI. An Associate of IATEFL

As an Associate of IATEFL, we are able to provide a fixed number of subsidized memberships of the world organization to our members. Almost every year a member is sent to attend the IATEFL conference with some financial assistance from us. A few have won IATEFL scholarships too to attend the international event. There

have been a few contributions too from our members during the recent years for publication in 'Voices'. We have had a few speakers too at our annual conferences—Peter Grundy when he was the President, Jeremy Halmer, Eric Babar and George Pickering.

Online Discussion Forums

Opportunities for our members to interact with one another and also to give them updates about our association are provided by our Google group discussion Forum, Members of the Computer Technology for ELT SIG too have got a separate online forum.

Collaboration with the British Council

The British Council has been collaborating with us in a range of our activities for a number of years now, It provides a plenary speaker for our annual conferences. Along with the IATEFL and Hornby Trust it has provided support to us carrying out successfully our projects on Virtual learning and Mobile learning. It has also sponsored an ELTAI member to attend the IATEFL annual conference in some years.

Looking ahead

Our target for the current year is to enrol at least another 500 members. We hope to start a separate website for providing the e version of our Journal. At present members may access it only on our present website.