

# Milestones and Visions: ELTAI's 2022-2023 Annual Report and Beyond

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Let me start with looking backward to look forward: In the past more than 50 years, except during the COVID-19 years, we have had face-to-face annual conferences, and last December 2022, the 16th International and 52nd Annual Conference was held on the theme of "Indian ELT: Imitative or Generative?" at CKT College, Mumbai. The chosen theme was to underscore ELTAI's conscious attempt to evolve a home-grown ELT rather LT (languages teaching), not limiting to English language teaching, but extending to our mother tongues as well.

Our learners, although able to employ their mother tongues for casual day-to-day purposes, struggle to engage them for deeper reflective, creative, and critical purposes. This is evidenced by the fact that several state boards have confessed there were more failures in mother tongues than in English. So, a new initiative has been undertaken to focus more on mother tongues, and we, as English language teachers, are at a vantage point to enable learners to become more efficient users of their mother tongues.

Though we continue to bring out all the four of our journals, *Journal of English Language Teaching*, the printed one, has been indexed in the UGC-Care list, the qualities of its articles having been valued on par with the international standard. We are indebted to its Editor-in-Chief, Dr Neeru Tandan, VSSD College, Kanpur, and the editorial team for their committed work, and it is no surprise that they are now setting their eyes upon the SCOPUS for its inclusion.

We have been, without any break, holding our monthly webinars, the last one being the 114th,

drawing resource persons and attendees from across the globe. We like to place on record our appreciation for the untiring efforts of Dr Sankarakumar, PSG Engineering College, Coimbatore, and Mr Kavin Kingston, a research scholar, for organizing them regularly.

ELTAI continues to grow numerically, and we now have 77 chapters spread across the country. In the last couple of months three new chapters were launched in Nagpur and Aurangabad in Maharashtra and the first ever chapter of Odisha in Bhubaneswar. We wholeheartedly thank everyone who has contributed in some way or other, and in particular, Dr Jaipal of Nagpur, Dr Ashwin Rajanikar of Aurangabad, and Dr Manish Kumar of Bhubaneswar, for establishing their chapters.

## Looking Forward

I will touch upon just four trends that are of greater significance to us in the days to come.

## Reading

We are living at a time when the millennial and alpha generations have developed a disregard for reading, especially book reading, which has set forth an intangible cognitive decline. The visual generation is largely operating at a shallow cognitive level and wallowing in instant gratification, nothing interests them if they aren't instantaneous.

The advent of ChatGPT, Bard, and Bing, overpowering EdTech companies, aggressive NEET and JEE coaching centres, and the academia narrowly limiting to the prescribed

textbooks are conjuring up a grim teaching-learning ecosystem – these are certain to create a universe of emptiness and bleakness for the current generation. Artificial intelligence replacing natural intelligence will ultimately lead to the obliteration of humans and culminate in dystopian universe. To halt it, the association has determined to launch its reading movement, along the suggested lines of the Chipko movement, from this auspicious state which garnered the global recognition.

### **Tech in education**

Recently an interesting headline appeared, ‘The ugly face of beauty pageants’, which forces us to peep into the darker side of technology. The apparent truth is no educationist so far has invented any technology for the promotion of education but technologists invented and forced them on us to become billionaires. As educationists, shall we uncover the truth that a handful of brainy ones are making us brainless?

Mired in their world of ads, we find, “Be your own teacher with the power of AI” and utilize ChatGPT as a conversation partner, for translations, for developing exercises inclusive of descriptive and multiple-choice questions – an evident indicator of not merely the replacement of teachers but humans themselves which replaces the truism, ‘no man is an island’, with ‘man is an island’.

A smart phone of 5,000 rupees is capable of dislodging shortly the brick-and-mortar institutions worth millions of rupees, with the consequent potential to put an end to the typical teaching situation of teacher-learner interface in classrooms. Worse still is that students today tend to disrespect and humiliate teachers making fun of them under the assumption that they are better

equipped. So, in a twisted environment, we must make ourselves relevant by evolving revolutionary pedagogical practices, lest the breed of teaching community be the thing of the past.

### **Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)**

Instead of reducing any language to four skills and teaching them discretely, let us treat it holistically, in its organic form by integrating content and language for a meaningful transaction. When the captivating and relatable contents are delivered, learners can comprehend the content and effectively acquire the language that embodies it.

The prescribed textbooks deliberately but slyly disintegrate the language and content – as the contents are alien. The Western specialists convince us to deal with the linguistic components such as pronunciation and grammar pedagogically. We have now realized that alien contents alienate learners thereby alienating learning the language as well, leading to learning both language and content posing hurdles.

A plausible way forward is introducing indigenous contemporary contents – but not drawing from the ancient times however indigenous they are – that could provide the teaching-learning ecosystem an enjoyable experience. Wordsworth’s be it *The Tintern Abbey, London, 1802*, or *Composed Upon Westminster Bridge* is alien to us, hardly making any sense linguistically and semantically, so the time spent in class is more of watering the desert. The desire to learn English is realizable only when we engage with the known contents and contexts.

The westerners’ artificial binary of ELT Vs ELT, that is, English language teaching and English literature teaching, ought to be wiped out as we

in our country teach language essentially through literature from the primary level onwards.

### **Simultaneous acquisition of languages**

As known, those of us who teach English in our country are bilinguals, if not multilingual, which compels us to perceive teaching languages from new perspectives. The monolinguals attempted to wipe out the linguistic potential we were endowed with thereby causing the cognitive genocide. Unfortunately, in our country, especially at the primary level, English is mostly taught through mother tongues, but that is not what we mean by simultaneous acquisition of languages.

While we welcome the thrust on mother tongue education, the status of it being taught seems deplorable – a concerned teacher expressed it, “Even the students at the high school level are adding/spelling out letters to read a word; their reading literacy is in an abysmal state.” We, being familiar with ELT, are at a vantage point; we must dynamically engage with evolving coherent theories and practices for the multiple levels of mother tongues’ teaching-learning.

Let us not entangle ourselves with the controversy of one language versus the other; learning more than one language hardly damages the brain’s neural network, research has proven bilingual brains function better than the monolingual. Learning math never militates against learning history or chemistry, neither the imbibing of music militates against playing football. But the cognitive skills vary among learners as established by

Howard Gardner differentiating verbal-linguistic intelligence from other forms of intelligences.

Simultaneous acquisition of languages is although a new domain, India has taught global languages much before the West had come to terms with multiple languages, so when we succeed in shaping innovative approaches, India will be a hub of teaching-learning languages.

The sad truth about teachers is akin to the story of ‘the elephant and the stake’, conditioned to act circularly; their immense power remains unrealized; and the 13 million teachers’ booming voice inside the class is made voiceless outside. The paradox is culturally offered elevated status is now trampled upon in practice. When the teachers’ voice resonates, the entire nation will be educated.

At a time when the mass media and social media are doling out an avalanche of news, fake news, misinformation, and disinformation, and as the globe is tottering more towards illiteracy and aliteracy, a vibrant societal role of teachers is becoming all the more significant. Hope, the powers wake up to reality.

Let me end with an anonymous quote: a simple one but pregnant with meaning, “*A teacher takes a hand, opens a mind, and touches a heart.*” *This is us, let us make a difference.*

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