

ELT Insights: Conversations with Leading Experts: Neeru Tandon in Conversation with Dr. T.K. Kharbamon



Prof. Neeru Tandon (Chief Editor, JELT): Greetings! I am Prof. Neeru Tandon. I am delighted to welcome all our readers and ELT

scholars to this series of interviews with ELT experts from around the world. Today, we have the privilege of engaging in a conversation with a distinguished ELT expert, Dr. T.K. Kharbamon, Vice Chancellor of Nongrah University in Shillong, Meghalaya. Dr. Kharbamon, your vast experience and expertise in the field of English Language Teaching are truly commendable, and your insights are highly regarded. The purpose of this interview is to tap into your valuable knowledge and guidance, which undoubtedly will be an enlightening resource for ELT scholars and educators. We look forward to this enlightening conversation. Meet Prof. Kharbamon.

Dr. T. Kumari Kharbamon, a distinguished ELT expert with 45 years of teaching experience (both national and international), became the 4th Vice-Chancellor of Martin Luther Christian University (MLCU) in Shillong on November 1, 2021. Previously, she led the English Language Education Department while serving as Director of EFLU's Shillong campus. Dr. Kharbamon's dedication extends beyond India, as she played a key role in the Cambodia-India Centre for English Language Training (2007-2009). Her passion is further evidenced by conference presentations, publications, and scholarships from IATEFL (UK) and TESOL (USA). She actively contributes to the field through professional

associations, including being a founding member of the Meghalaya chapter of ELT Association of India.

The Interview:

Prof. Neeru Tandon: Welcome Dr. Kharbamon.

Dr. T. Kumari Kharbamon: Thank you Prof. Neeru. I would like to express my sincere appreciation for the outstanding work being done by the JELT (Journal of English Language Teaching) team. Congratulations to you and the entire editorial team for the continuous dedication and excellent work!

Q: Thank you so much for your kind words! I am delighted that you find the work being done by the JELT team valuable. Your praise means a lot to us. With your kind permission I would like to start the interview. Can you tell us about your journey in education and ELT (English Language Teaching) that led you to your current position as Vice Chancellor of Martin Luther Christian University?

A: (T. K. K.): My professional journey began teaching literature to undergraduate students, a passion I pursued for sixteen years. In 1991, I enrolled in the PGDTE program at the then-CIEFL Regional Centre, Shillong. This program completely transformed my teaching perspective, opening up a new domain of learning and teaching English. While my love for literature remains, I saw the importance of being grounded in the practical realities of English Language Teaching and Education. Joining CIEFL as a faculty member in 1995 immersed me in training teachers through various institute programs. A brief experience in the MA TESOL program at the Institute of Education, University of London,

further reinforced my understanding of the significant impact of ELE in learning and teaching. My involvement with teacher training programs by NERIE, HRDC, and NEHU, and especially my experience training international non-native speakers of English at the Cambodia-India Centre for ELT, Phnom Penh, Cambodia (a project under the Asian Initiative of the Government of India), and supervising MPhil and PhD scholars working in different aspects of ELE, enriched my understanding of ELE. Three decades at the then CIEFL, now the English and Foreign Languages University, Regional Campus Shillong, were both a professional and personal blessing, preparing me for this current responsibility.

Q: Looking ahead, what is your vision for the role of technology in ELT, particularly within a region like Meghalaya with its rich cultural heritage?

A: (T K K): Technology's role in English Language Education is undeniable. It's become an integral part of both learning and teaching, transforming our routine pedagogy. The Covid-19 pandemic, despite its challenges, forced us to learn innovative pedagogies and strategies. Platforms like LMS, Google Classroom, and Zoom, unfamiliar then, opened up entirely new teaching experiences. Today, even as a senior teacher, these platforms are almost always part of my teaching.

Q: Balancing technology with cultural preservation is important. Can you share some strategies you've implemented to enhance students' English proficiency while also promoting and protecting Meghalaya's regional languages and traditions?

A: Preserving and promoting local cultures starts with the classroom teacher. We bring our values and beliefs into the classroom, shaping student

identity, especially in diverse environments like ours. I encourage discussions and interactions where students share local fables, myths, and stories about festivals, games, sports, and important tourist sites. This fosters intercultural understanding and respect for the "Other." My current university also encourages community engagement and cross-cultural involvement between students and faculty through various semester programs.

Q: As technology continues to evolve with AI and online platforms, how do you see these advancements influencing ELT research and teaching methodologies?

A: Technology has significantly impacted classroom teaching. Remember preparing OHP slides? Now we have PowerPoints, making teaching organized and systematic while facilitating storage and retrieval. Technology improves learning outcomes and experiences by encouraging self-paced learning. However, we, as teachers, must guide students towards beneficial online resources. Technology complements pedagogy, but the classroom teacher remains pivotal. AI and online platforms cannot replace the human touch.

Q: As we look towards the future, what are some promising research areas within ELT that you believe hold the potential to improve cross-cultural communication and intercultural competence among learners?

A: Here are some promising areas:

Continuous Professional Development in the Digital Era
Intercultural Competence and Classroom Learning and Teaching
Designing Multicultural Instructional Texts
Bilingual Education
MOOCs/ AI and the Classroom Teacher

English for Employability
Teaching English and the 21st Century Skills
Teacher Roles and Beliefs
ELT and Identity Dynamics in the Classroom

Q: How is ELT research fostering a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural and sociolinguistic aspects of language learning, including issues of identity and power dynamics in the classroom?

A: ELT research does shed light on these aspects. It can reveal socio-cultural constructs that impede effective language learning or impact classroom interactions. Additionally, ELT research can highlight challenges like the digital divide or unequal access to technology in rural

communities, influencing students' learning experiences. I must mention that JELT is doing a great job. It was nice interacting with you. Good Luck.

Prof. Neeru Tandon: “Thank you, Dr. Kharbamon, for this insightful and engaging conversation. Your expertise is invaluable to the field of English Language Teaching, and we greatly appreciate your time and insights. We are excited to share this interview with the readers of the Journal of English Language Teaching and believe your guidance will immensely benefit ELT scholars and educators. We look forward to its publication in our upcoming issue. It's been a pleasure speaking with you, and we are truly grateful for your contributions.”