

When Many Tongues Speak English...

India's linguistic landscape, home to over 120 languages and dialects, poses a critical question for English language education: how can a 'foreign' language empower learners without erasing their multilingual identities? The March issue of the *Journal of English Language Teaching* interrogates this question through ten empirically grounded studies spanning pedagogical innovation, socio-cultural constraints, and technological integration. Collectively, they argue that India's linguistic plurality need not hinder English proficiency but can instead inspire pedagogies that bridge aspiration and equity through contextual sensitivity.

Central to this inquiry is the tension between globalisation's homogenising pressures and the ethical need to preserve linguistic heritage. English, once a colonial imposition, now serves dual roles: a gateway to socio-economic mobility and a potential threat to regional languages. Gogoi and Nath's study of Assam's tea-garden classrooms reveals how neglecting mother tongues like Sadri entrenches inequities, reducing English from a tool of access to a marker of exclusion. Conversely, Narji Baruah's work illustrates that strategic code-switching, rooted in learners' realities, fosters symbiotic English-regional language classrooms. These findings challenge monolingual biases in ELT, urging a redefinition of 'proficiency' that embraces translanguaging as cognitive enrichment. The studies compel educators to confront uncomfortable truths: Who benefits from linguistic hierarchies? Can pedagogy dismantle, rather than reproduce, English hegemony? The answer lies not in rejecting global lingua francas but in reimagining their integration, positioning English as a bridge within India's multilingual tapestry.

Robert Bellarmine's analysis of the Communicational Approach (CA) reframes it as a methodology merging structural rigour with communicative intent, prioritising cognitive engagement through language use. This aligns with Baruah's findings on Assam's multilingual classrooms, where regional languages scaffold comprehension without compromising English immersion. Similarly, Tandon and Sengar's validation of CLT-based self-instructional materials highlights resources that balance autonomy and interactivity. Such works reject rigid pedagogies, promoting adaptable frameworks for India's sociolinguistic diversity.

Socio-cultural factors further shape learning. Malik and Devi's study of Haryana's college students links socio-cultural backgrounds and institutional environments to English proficiency, a pattern echoed in Assam's tea-garden schools, where linguistic diversity remains underutilised. These insights expose systemic gaps in teacher training, particularly in regions with entrenched linguistic hierarchies. Nndwamato et al.'s study of Vhembe East underscores the disconnect between policy-driven support and classroom realities, advocating context-specific professional development.

Technology's role is scrutinised pragmatically. Jemuel Quinto et al.'s comparison of digital and print texts finds both formats equally effective, advocating balanced integration. Shermila et al.'s survey of Thoothukudi students reveals a preference for print alongside cautious digital adoption, while Jayachandran's analysis highlights tailored digital tools for heterogeneous learners. Pandya and Saiyad caution against over-reliance on technology, stressing structured feedback's role in nurturing critical thinking.

As India strides toward educational equity, the studies demand reflection: in a nation of countless tongues, can English pedagogy transcend its colonial legacy to foster inclusive dialogue? The answer lies not in erasing diversity but in designing classrooms where languages collaborate, not compete, to cultivate multilingual empowerment.

Prof. Neeru Tandon
Editor-in-Chief, JELT