Editorial

Reclaiming Reading and Writing in the Age of AI

There is a particular irony in scripting an editorial about reading and writing at a moment when both are being quietly outsourced. A student stuck on a paragraph no longer wriggles with a sentence until it yields; she asks a chatbot to write it for her. A learner who once puzzled over an unfamiliar word now has it summarised and defined before s/he can comprehend it from context, precisely where, as every language teacher knows, learning happens. Generative AI did not create this problem; it accelerated a drift that screens and short-form content had already set in motion, advancing so quickly that the shift becomes almost invisible, and therefore harder to detect or reverse.

This issue of JELT is positioned against that drift. ELTAI's Readfest programme, now running nationally, shows what is possible when reading is treated not as a subject to be tested but as a habit cultivated through read-aloud, book clubs, community libraries, and sustained exposure to self-chosen texts. Its quiet success reminds us that the antidote to AI-assisted disengagement is not banning technology but recommitting to foundational literacy practices. Technology cannot replace sustained attention to a text, the patient construction of a sentence, and the private effort of working out what a paragraph means.

The articles here are empirical, pedagogical, and conceptual, and together sketch where reading and writing instruction in South Asian ELT classrooms stands, and where it must go.

On reading, three studies examine classroom realities. An analysis of Assam's Grade VIII SCERT textbook finds comprehension activities well represented but fluency and vocabulary neglected. A survey from Edo State, Nigeria, finds that metacognitive strategies, note-taking, summarising, and self-questioning are the strongest predictors of academic performance, while affective and social strategies are underused. A study of literature circles in a Grade 9 CBSE classroom finds student-led discussion groups producing a gradual shift toward ownership of reading, as peer discussion prompted learners to revise interpretations. Together, these argue for reading pedagogy that is more balanced, more deliberate in strategy instruction, and more willing to cede control to learners.

On writing, perspectives are equally varied. An error-analysis study from Bhadohi district, UP, examining 185 ninth graders finds high error density dominated by orthographic mistakes, with no significant variation by school type or gender. A study of BBA undergraduates finds guided engagement with English songs and films improved vocabulary and writing proficiency. An analysis of EFLU Hyderabad's MA writing module shows how employability-linked e-portfolio tasks make writing feel purposeful. A conceptual paper proposes an SEL-based multimodal framework, arguing Indian ESL writing can become a reflective, humanising practice nurturing social-emotional competencies alongside linguistic ones. Finally, an action-research study explores prompt-writing as a language task requiring learners to draft, evaluate, and refine prompts across cycles of AI response and peer discussion that builds on metacognitive awareness.

Taken together, these eight papers make a case that this issue intends to state plainly: reading and writing are not skills that AI has rendered obsolete; they are skills that AI has made more, not less, compelling to teach well. The task before English language teaching, in India and elsewhere, is therefore two-fold. First, to keep strengthening classroom practice through better-balanced textbook activities, explicit strategy instruction, learner-led discussion structures, and writing tasks that are purposeful and humanising rather than merely evaluative. Second, to keep strengthening the research base that informs that practice, through the kind of methodological rigour on display in this issue: validated instruments, inter-rater reliability checks, mixed-methods triangulation, and classroom-based action research that stays close to what actually happens when learners read and write.

Programmes such as Readfest, and the scholarship gathered here, point in the same direction: toward classrooms where reading and writing remain effortful, social, and irreducibly human acts, worth protecting precisely because they are now so easy to avoid.

Happy reading and learning time!

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