

## From the Editorial Desk

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In the 1960s, Michael West coined the term ‘difficult circumstances’ to describe teaching environments plagued by issues like large class sizes, lack of resources, and overworked teachers. Over the years, with education becoming a fundamental right, there has been a significant rise in school enrolments globally. With a large number of students and teachers operating in such challenging contexts, it is crucial to understand the complexities of English Language Teaching (ELT) within these situations. Thus, Fortell’s special volume on ‘ELT in Difficult Circumstances’ seeks to explore these challenges, possibilities, and future directions.

In their introductory paper, Jason Anderson and Santosh Mahapatra critically examine the terminology used to describe educational disadvantage in ELT/ TESOL. They propose a framework encompassing three levels—micro, meso, and macro—pertaining to the learner, institution, and society, respectively, to understand the interconnected nature of disadvantage in education. Additionally, Lina Mukhopadhyay and Ianthi Maria Tsimpli’s contribution offers a location-specific review of ‘challenging contexts,’ emphasizing the necessity of multilingual strategies, especially in countries like India, where many young learners face such challenges. On the other hand, drawing from Karl Marx’s labour theory and Vygotsky’s socio-cultural perspective, P. Bhaskaran Nair suggests a teaching strategy that involves integrating past experiences into current learning, using memory and reflection to enhance conversational and writing skills in a second language.

To understand the benefit from fictional oral narratives in building oral language competence, Sharon Sunny reports a study undertaken in an afterschool support programme with bilingual learners from disadvantaged backgrounds in Bengaluru, India. Tharsni M., Angel Sharon, and Shadab Khan explore the dynamics of mixed-grade education in rural Indian settings, advocating for inclusive practices such as interactive group activities and flexible grouping strategies. Furthermore, Sabin Pandey addresses the challenges of teaching and learning English in higher education institutes in rural Sikkim, proposing practical, interactive activities to enhance communication skills among rural students. Ireena Nazirudeen discusses how contextualized pedagogy helped her in teaching disadvantaged students from low-

income backgrounds and motivating them to actively engage in spoken language production. Likewise, Maryam Shaikh highlights the challenges faced by students in Urdu-medium schools and suggests using compelling, comprehensible, and culturally relevant stories as interventions to overcome these challenges.

Interestingly, Jenifer Deivanayagam considers the English-only approach as a difficult circumstance in ELT and favours adopting a bilingual method for teaching English along with the use of bilingual assessment practices and materials. On a similar note, Monalisha challenges the notion that English-medium schooling necessarily improves English for Academic Purposes (EAP) performance, suggesting that students' varying levels of exposure to English medium education should be considered in EAP course development.

Furthermore, Nirajana Bardhan suggests the adoption of an ecological perspective to enable teachers and learners to use the resources available in the local context to develop the writing skills of ESL students. Additionally, Nidhi Kunwar and Mufleha's paper challenges the popular stereotypes associated with the learning abilities of students belonging to disadvantaged groups.

This special issue also includes two literature-based papers, one by Satya Prakash Prasad, Abhishek Jha and Shafaque Zehra exploring the implications of AI-generated literature for reader response theory and literary criticism and arguing for a fundamental re-evaluation of the core assumptions in literary theory and criticism and the other by Summi Jan investigating the emancipatory role of migration by exploring its impact on freeing women from the patriarchal and cultural constraints of their home countries as depicted in Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane*.

A highlight of this volume is the interview with Dhir Jhingran. Dr. Dhir reconceptualizes the construct of difficult circumstances and emphasizes the need to train teachers to work in real classrooms, which are diverse and where there is a great risk of the exclusion of children. In addition to these scholarly contributions, Fortell includes regular features such as book reviews and language activities, enriching the current volume with diverse perspectives and practical insights.

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