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## **STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING ENGLISH TO STUDENTS WITH DIVERSE LEARNING NEEDS IN TRIPURA**

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### **Abstract**

In Tripura, there are a number of problems for teaching English language and it is due to linguistic and socioeconomic diversity, and a variety of student learning needs. The ESL learners of the tribal and rural areas and the learners of a multi-lingual background face certain challenges to learn English due to lack of exposure, resources, lack of exposure, and a traditional examination-oriented mode of learning. This paper outlines effective teaching methodologies for teaching English to students with varied learning needs in Tripura with special emphasis on inclusive pedagogy, integration of ICT-based teaching tools, differentiation and utilisation of culture sensitive content. The paper focuses on effective teacher training, curriculum reform and supportive education policies that could be employed to enhance English proficiency in the state. Research has demonstrated that when context sensitive and learner centred methodologies are implemented, academic performance is improved, students are ready for success in higher education and the global world of work. The paper concludes that English education in Tripura needs to be made more equitable and effective through inclusive, flexible and technology assisted measures.

**Keywords:** English language teaching, diverse learners, Tripura, inclusive pedagogy, multilingual classrooms, teacher training, ICT integration, curriculum reform.

### **Introduction**

Nowadays, English is a universal language of communication, education, and employment that makes it possible to overcome the dissimilarities of various cultures and societies (Crystal, 2012). It has a special niche in India as a connecting language that unites the vast linguistic diversity of the nation and provides a channel of academic advancement, social proficiency and career opportunities (Graddol, 2010). The state of Tripura is a small region in Northeast India, which is a unique location of English Language Teaching (ELT). It is a multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic country, and native languages are socialised into Bengali, Kokborok, and various dialects of tribal languages (Chaudhuri, 2017). The fact that many students study English as a

third or even fourth language makes the process of acquiring it appear particularly challenging to trace when it is compared to the states where it is taught earlier and more frequently. Despite the fact that the significance of vocational education as a path to higher education and better job opportunities is common knowledge, students of Tripura are subjected to several challenges. The first is that the practise and use are constrained by linguistic diversity of the territory, in addition to the lack of exposure to English at home (Das and Deb, 2020). Second, access to quality schools, other resources and digital technologies is limited due to low socio-economic factors especially rural and tribal families. Third, teacher education is not proportional either; most educators continue to employ the old approach of grammar-translation, instead of using a more inclusive and communicative approach or a student-centred one (Kumar, 2018). Fourth, the absence of infrastructure in remote schools, such as a shortage of classrooms and libraries and technology, also restricts successful English instruction (NEP, 2020). In view of these challenges, there is need to implement inclusive culturally sensitive and technologically sensitive pedagogical methods that are context specific to the context of Tripura.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To examine the linguistic and socio-cultural challenges faced by students in Tripura while learning English.
2. To identify effective strategies for teaching English to students with diverse learning needs.
3. To explore the role of teachers, curriculum, and technology in inclusive English education.
4. To provide recommendations for improving English language teaching practices in Tripura.

### **Review of Literature**

Previous studies (Kumar, 2018; Singh & Das, 2020; NEP, 2020) emphasize the importance of inclusive education and differentiated pedagogy in ELT. Research in northeastern India highlights that linguistic diversity often hinders the acquisition of English, and teachers must adopt culturally sensitive methods. Chaudhuri (2017) suggests that the integration of ICT tools in rural classrooms can improve language learning outcomes. Similarly, the National Education Policy (2020) stresses multilingualism and inclusion in education.

**Table 1 : Review of Literature**

| Author(s) & Year           | Title                                                      | Key Findings / Relevance                                                                           | Reference (APA Style)                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| NCERT (2006)               | National Focus Group Position Paper on Teaching of English | Recommended learner-centered approaches and communicative teaching methods in Indian schools.      | NCERT. (2006). National Focus Group Position Paper on Teaching of English. New Delhi: NCERT.                                                                                       |
| Cummins, J. (2007)         | Rethinking monolingual instructional strategies            | Advocated for bilingual education and use of mother tongue as a bridge in multilingual classrooms. | Cummins, J. (2007). Rethinking monolingual instructional strategies in multilingual classrooms. <i>Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics</i> , 10(2), 221–240.                   |
| Graddol, D. (2010)         | English Next India                                         | Highlighted English as a driver of employability and educational mobility in India.                | Graddol, D. (2010). <i>English Next India: The future of English in India</i> . London: British Council.                                                                           |
| Mohanty, A. K. (2009)      | Multilingual Education in India                            | Emphasized the need for culturally relevant pedagogy in tribal and rural schools.                  | Mohanty, A. K. (2009). Multilingual education in India: Contexts and issues. <i>International Journal of Multilingualism</i> , 6(2), 167–178.                                      |
| Kumar, R. (2012)           | Communicative Language Teaching in Rural India             | Found that communicative language teaching (CLT) improved English proficiency in rural classrooms. | Kumar, R. (2012). Communicative language teaching in rural India. <i>Language in India</i> , 12(2), 45–57.                                                                         |
| ASER (2014)                | Annual Status of Education Report                          | Revealed poor English reading levels among rural children across India.                            | Pratham. (2014). <i>Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)</i> . New Delhi: ASER Centre.                                                                                         |
| Chaudhuri, A. (2017)       | ICT in Rural Classrooms of Northeast India                 | ICT tools enhanced engagement and language acquisition among rural learners.                       | Chaudhuri, A. (2017). ICT integration in rural classrooms of Northeast India: A case study. <i>Journal of Educational Technology</i> , 14(3), 55–63.                               |
| Das, S., & Deb, R. (2018)  | Challenges of ELT in Multilingual Classrooms               | Identified socio-economic barriers and teacher training gaps in Tripura.                           | Das, S., & Deb, R. (2018). Challenges of English language teaching in multilingual classrooms of Northeast India. <i>Journal of Language and Education Research</i> , 5(2), 45–57. |
| UNESCO (2019)              | Inclusive Education in India                               | Stressed inclusive education and equity in multilingual societies.                                 | UNESCO. (2019). <i>Inclusive education in India</i> . Paris: UNESCO.                                                                                                               |
| Government of India (2020) | National Education Policy (NEP) 2020                       | Advocated for multilingualism, digital integration, and inclusive pedagogy.                        | Ministry of Education. (2020). <i>National Education Policy 2020</i> . Government of India.                                                                                        |

## Methodology

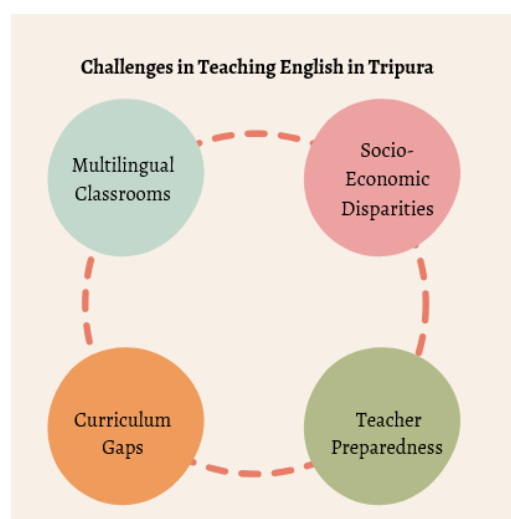
The present study adopts a qualitative research design to examine strategies for teaching English to students with diverse learning needs in Tripura. Data were primarily collected from secondary sources, including government reports, educational surveys, and scholarly literature on language education. To supplement this, semi-structured interviews with English teachers from rural and urban schools in Tripura were conducted, providing insights into classroom challenges and teaching practices. Thematic analysis was applied to identify patterns related to

linguistic barriers, socio-economic factors, and pedagogical approaches. Ethical considerations were maintained, with teacher responses kept anonymous to ensure confidentiality and reliability of findings.

## Findings and Discussion

### Challenges in Teaching English in Tripura

Teaching English in Tripura is shaped by a variety of socio-cultural, economic, and pedagogical challenges that limit effective learning outcomes. One of the foremost difficulties is the multilingual nature of classrooms, as students often speak Kokborok, Reang, Halam, Manipuri, or Bengali as their first language. For many, English becomes a third or even fourth language, which restricts their exposure and confidence in using it (Mohanty, 2009). The dominance of mother tongues at home and within communities reduces opportunities for learners to practice English beyond the classroom (Das & Deb, 2018).



There is another threat of socio-economic inequality. A sizable part of the Tripura population has rural and tribal origins wherein the access to resources like English textbooks, internet facilities, or any form of private tuitions is restricted. Although the results of the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER, 2014) indicate a steady improvement in reading English among children in rural areas, rural children are still lower-performing than urban children. Such absence of support systems makes it hard to compete academically on state and national levels among students.

Preparedness of teachers is also an issue at hand. Most educators in Tripura still use the old grammar-translation system which focuses on memorization and rote learning instead of the communication and application of the language (Kumar, 2012). Teachers end up failing in their communication and methods of inclusive pedagogy without the right training to address the needs of their various learners.

Lastly, it has gaps in the curriculum. The syllabus of the state is still mostly exam-based and focuses on grammatical perfection and written examinations rather than on interactive and learner-oriented approaches. Such a test-driven system fails to train students in communication

skills needed to achieve higher education or career advancement (NCERT, 2006). Combined, they emphasise the pressing need to adopt inclusive and context-based approaches to empower English learning in Tripura.

### **Strategies for Teaching English to Diverse Learners in Tripura**

Improving English language learning outcomes in Tripura requires a shift from conventional, exam-driven teaching methods to inclusive, learner-centered, and context-sensitive strategies. The state's socio-linguistic complexity demands innovative practices that respect cultural diversity, address socio-economic disparities, and integrate modern tools for learning. The following strategies are proposed as effective measures to meet the needs of students in diverse classrooms.

#### **a) Differentiated Instruction**

Differentiated instruction is an instructional approach that acknowledges the diversity of learners and adapts teaching methods to suit their varying abilities, learning styles, and pace. In the context of Tripura, classrooms often consist of students with very different levels of exposure to English. For some, English may be the third or even fourth language after their mother tongue and regional languages. In such cases, relying on a uniform method of teaching is often ineffective, as it cannot address the learning needs of all students simultaneously (Tomlinson, 2014).

To make instruction more inclusive, teachers can use visual aids such as charts, diagrams, and flashcards. These tools help students, particularly visual learners, to connect abstract English concepts with concrete images, thereby supporting comprehension and long-term retention. Storytelling and role play are also highly effective in multilingual classrooms, as they provide a meaningful context for learning vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structures. For instance, students may act out folk tales or everyday life situations in English, which not only makes learning engaging but also reduces the fear of speaking in a foreign language. Another important strategy is peer learning, where stronger students assist those who struggle.

#### **b) Multilingual Support**

English is generally used as a third or fourth language in Tripura after Bengali, Kokborok, Reang, Manipuri and other tribal dialects. Under such circumstances, mother tongue serves as a strong connexion to the learning of English. The research has revealed that being started in a language that is known to the learners helps them have a thorough foundation upon which they shore up their knowledge of other languages like English (Cummins, 2007). To make English lessons more accessible for the learners, teachers can use mother tongue techniques such as telling students a difficult concept, grammar points or abstract words in Bengali or Kokborok so that they can relate the new material with what they know. This method also removes the fear for some students who feel isolated in a new place. Research has shown that bilingual code-switching between English and local languages has potential to increase participation, build confidence and active participation. In addition, bilingual glossaries can help learners draw connexions between English words and those they might recognise. According to

Mohanty (2009), multilingual education model based on mother tongue improves academic performance, helps the children to sustain cultural identity and as well reduces the dropout rate which is high in cases where children are taught through a language other than mother tongue. For the diverse classrooms of Tripura, the realisation of such strategies is not measures of additional support but rather necessary steps to build an inclusive and culturally sensitive English education system.

**Table 2: Multilingual Support Strategies**

| Strategy             | Application                                       | Expected Outcome                           |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Use of Mother Tongue | Explaining difficult concepts in Bengali/Kokborok | Improves comprehension and reduces anxiety |
| Code-Switching       | Alternating between English and native languages  | Builds confidence, increases participation |
| Bilingual Glossaries | Including local translations of key vocabulary    | Enhances vocabulary learning and retention |

### c) Use of Technology

Technology has become an important aspect of education in the modern era, and is a useful tool for inclusive English language learning. In case of Tripura's rural and tribal schools infrastructural problems such as lack of access to libraries, paucity of qualified English teacher and teaching materials etc are rampant. Despite these barriers, if these technological interventions are small in scale, they have been found to contribute to improvements to the teaching and learning process (Chaudhuri, 2017). Information and Communication Technology (ICT) offers the possibilities for interactive and learner-centred approaches that are found wanting in traditional classrooms. 2 One way of doing this is with the use of digital storey books and e-learning applications, enabling the students to hear storeys and to follow along in the text. This dual exposure adds value to listening, reading comprehension and independent learning. Similarly, language learning software and mobile applications, such as Duolingo or the British Council's LearnEnglish Kids, provide structured exercises in vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. These platforms, which are low-cost or free, are particularly helpful to students who live in rural areas and who have no other supplementary learning materials (Das & Deb, 2018). Videos and animations also matter given their significance as they demonstrate abstract subjects such as grammar concepts and vocabulary through engaging visuals. For example, animated lessons on tenses or storytelling videos can help make the learning experience of English more interactive and relatable. In schools where the internet is available blended learning models of combining traditional classroom approaches with online resources can further enrich the learning environment (UNESCO, 2019). Such models facilitate flexibility for students to retrace the materials at their own pace. There is evidence from around the world and India showing that ICT-assisted language learning results in significantly increased pronunciation, vocabulary and student motivation (UNESCO, 2019). For Tripura, with the presence of socio-economic and linguistic barriers, technology is not only making classroom instruction more comprehensive, it is also creating equitable opportunities for learners to meaningfully engage with English in the classroom.

**Table 3 : Technology in English Teaching**

| ICT Tool                   | Application                                      | Expected Outcome                                |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Digital Storybooks & Apps  | Listening + reading practice at student's pace   | Improves comprehension and independent learning |
| Language Learning Software | Duolingo, British Council apps for self-practice | Builds vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation   |
| Videos & Animations        | Visual explanations of grammar and vocabulary    | Simplifies concepts, enhances retention         |
| Blended Learning           | Mix of classroom and online resources            | Increases flexibility, motivation, and access   |

#### **d) Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Students in Tripura often find it difficult to connect with English materials that are rooted in unfamiliar cultural settings, such as Western lifestyles or urban-centric examples. This disconnect can lower motivation, comprehension, and overall interest in learning the language. **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)** addresses this issue by integrating local traditions, values, and cultural practices into classroom teaching, thereby creating a more meaningful and relatable learning experience (Ladson-Billings, 1995). One effective strategy is designing activities around folk tales, songs, and local history. An example of this is folktales of traditional Kokborok or Reang, which can be translated to English, and be performed within the classroom environment to offer the students a familiar cultural context on which they can build language proficiency. Similarly, brief essay writing, poem writing, or storey writing about the topics of festivals, agriculture, or nature in Tripura helps the learner connect his or her actual life with English writing practise.

The other strategy that is significant is the community involvement. Oral histories are invited by the elders or the community leaders and thereafter told or translated into the English language so as to ensure that a learning can be passed across the generation and in the process, the cultural knowledge of the tribal and rural people is authenticated. Not only do they develop understanding of the English language, but students also develop pride in being themselves as well as alienation of both tribal and non-tribal students in the multilingual classes decreases, rendering English learning to be inclusive among the students (Gay, 2010). CRP as applied to Tripura is in such a way that it does not render English as a foreign imposition, but merely gives the students a means of expression and cultural preservation without having to lose the much-desired global communication skills.

**Table 4: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Strategies**

| Strategy                          | Application in Tripura                               | Expected Outcome                                |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Folk Tales, Songs & Local History | Translating/retelling traditional stories in English | Builds vocabulary, connects learning to culture |
| Essays on Local Themes            | Writing about festivals, traditions, or nature       | Enhances writing skills, validates experiences  |
| Community Storytelling            | Involving elders in oral history sessions            | Encourages inclusivity, preserves identity      |

### e) Inclusive Classroom Practices

Inclusive education is an educational philosophy which believes that all learners should have equal access to quality education regardless of their linguistic, cultural or socio-economic background. This is particularly significant for Tripura where classrooms are often the site for the mixing of tribal and non-tribal children. So, diversity, which is not well managed, might result in exclusion or disengagement. Therefore, a truly inclusive environment means that all children are valued and respected and are encouraged to learn. One good practice is the giving of remedial classes for those learners who are lagging academically. These sessions must not be stigmatised, but supported and valued by learners as not punitive, but supportive. Another important arm to utilise is to promote group work and peer tutoring. These cooperative strategies promote collaboration, the humidity of competition disappears, and at the same time, it is given the possibility that these stronger learners can contribute to the others, that is, build together. Also important is the introduction of tribal and non-tribal culture to the content of the classroom. By using examples, stories and pictures from both groups, teachers can ensure that all the learners can identify their culture through the curriculum. This identity recognition helps to build self-esteem and participation. In addition, in a resource-poor state like Tripura, the design and use of low cost learning materials (e.g. handmade charts, local objects, and community-based teaching aids) increased inclusivity since all learning tools can be accessed by all. Research shows that inclusive teaching practices not only improve academic performance but also foster social and emotional development and positive peer relationships (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011) and decrease dropouts. In the multilingual and socio-economically diverse setting of Tripura, inclusion is not a pedagogical practise but an imperative for an equitable education in English.

**Table 5 : Inclusive Classroom Practices**

| Strategy                   | Application in Tripura                                 | Expected Outcome                            |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Remedial Classes           | Extra support for slow learners without stigma         | Improves confidence and academic skills     |
| Group Work & Peer Tutoring | Collaborative projects and peer-led teaching           | Promotes cooperation and shared learning    |
| Cultural Representation    | Using stories/examples from tribal & non-tribal groups | Strengthens identity, fosters participation |
| Low-Cost Materials         | Locally made teaching aids and charts                  | Ensures accessibility, reduces inequality   |

### f) Teacher Training

Teachers are central to the success of any educational reform, particularly in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). In Tripura, English teachers often face challenges because of limited exposure to inclusive pedagogy and modern methodologies such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), task-based learning, and activity-based approaches (Kumar, 2012).

As a result, many classrooms remain dominated by the grammar-translation method, which does not meet the needs of diverse, multilingual learners. Therefore, sustained teacher training and professional development is critical to improving the quality and inclusivity of English education. One effective approach is the organization of workshops and refresher courses that provide teachers with hands-on experience in CLT, role play, and learner-centered lesson design. Research has indicated that such training provides the teacher with confidence and a better result for the students (Richards, 2006). Exposure to teachers to ICT integration in language instruction is also a prerequisite, as various digital materials like interactive storybooks, apps, and multimedia materials could be used to make learners more engaged (Chaudhuri, 2017), and multilingual pedagogy should be emphasised in teacher education programmes. By balancing the teaching of English language versus use of local languages such as Bengali and Kokborok the teachers will be able to bridge the transitions of the students and thus reduce the fear and increase understanding (Mohanty, 2009). This is especially relevant in Tripura which is linguistically diverse, and building teacher capacity in this area is a major concern. Finally, continuous professional development (CPD) should be institutionalized through partnerships between government agencies, NGOs, and universities. Evidence suggests that countries that prioritize long-term CPD produce more effective, reflective teachers capable of addressing diverse learner needs (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Avalos, 2011). For Tripura, teacher training must be viewed not as a one-time initiative but as an ongoing process essential for improving English proficiency and inclusion.

**Table 6 : Teacher Training Strategies**

| Training Focus                      | Application in Tripura                                       | Expected Outcome                                    |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| CLT & Task-Based Methods            | Workshops and refresher courses on learner-centered teaching | Improves communication and practical English skills |
| ICT Integration                     | Training in digital apps, multimedia, and e-resources        | Enhances engagement and accessibility               |
| Multilingual Pedagogy               | Balancing English with Bengali/Kokborok                      | Reduces anxiety, increases comprehension            |
| Continuous Professional Development | Collaborations with NGOs, universities, government           | Sustains teacher quality and innovation             |

## Suggestions

Based on the challenges and strategies identified, several measures can be suggested to improve English language teaching in Tripura.

1. Curriculum Revision: The existing English curriculum in many schools remains largely exam-oriented, with an emphasis on rote memorization of grammar rules rather than communication. A revised curriculum should prioritize functional English skills such as

speaking, listening, and practical writing. This shift would prepare students for real-life communication and higher education demands (Richards, 2006).

2. Establishment of Language Labs: Practical exposure to English through language laboratories can significantly enhance pronunciation, listening comprehension, and fluency. Language labs, even low-cost versions with audio-visual tools, help create interactive learning environments that are particularly beneficial for rural and tribal students (Kumar, 2012).

3. Government-Community-NGO Collaboration: English education should not be limited to the classroom. Partnerships between the government, NGOs, and local communities can provide access to supplementary learning materials, after-school programs, and digital resources. Such collaborations strengthen resource availability and ensure equity in learning opportunities (UNESCO, 2019).

4. Teacher Training in ICT and Inclusive Pedagogy: Regular teacher training workshops are essential for equipping educators with skills in ICT-based learning, communicative language teaching, and inclusive pedagogy. Well-trained teachers are more capable of addressing diverse learning needs and motivating students (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

5. Development of Bilingual Textbooks: Finally, creating bilingual English textbooks that integrate Bengali, Kokborok, and other tribal languages can act as scaffolding tools. This approach reduces alienation and supports smoother transitions into English, as suggested in multilingual education research (Mohanty, 2009).

## **Conclusion**

The English instruction in Tripura must be transformed into a non exam-oriented teaching method which is more inclusive and cognizant of the multilingual environment of the state. English is not the first or second language and thus the teacher has to employ differentiated strategies that take into consideration the various capabilities and backgrounds of learning. Interactive character of technology and digital tools may be utilised; nevertheless, the culturally relevant pedagogy must allow learners to relate the knowledge they gain in the classroom with their traditions and lived experience; therefore, increasing the degree of understanding and the sense of self.

In the meantime, the teacher training is essential and their professional development should be ongoing. New techniques such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), multilingual pedagogy and Information Communication Technology based learning should be offered to the teachers. Curriculum reform is also quite important, where a greater emphasis is placed on communication skills, practical application and involvement of learners. This will enhance the resources, reduce inequalities and give all learners in the rural and tribal areas equal access through the cooperation of the government, NGOs, and communities.

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