

**SYNOPSIS OF THE THESIS**

**EXPLORING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND  
LEARNING AMONG LINGUISTIC MINORITY  
LEARNERS: A CASE STUDY**

*A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
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## **1. Introduction**

India is a land of diversity. It is inhabited by people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. That is why India is considered a multilingual and multicultural country. People in India can communicate in more than one language or dialect. As per Census, 2011 documents, there are around 121 languages in India, spoken as first languages or mother tongues. The Eight Schedule of the Constitution of India recognizes 22 languages as the official languages of the states in India. Of the 22 scheduled languages, Hindi occupies a significant position with almost 528 million speakers, which is 44 % of India's total population (Chandras, 2020). However, the importance of learning English in today's world is beyond explanation because it is used as a 'lingua franca' across the globe. Learning English broadens the scope for communication. But in a multilingual country like India, English language teaching does not mean promoting English culture. Rather the main objective behind English language teaching, as it is quite similar in the case of any other languages, is to promote multilingualism along with encouraging critical thinking skills. The purpose of the entire English language programme is to encourage effortless speaking ability, patient listening and understanding ability, comprehensible and sensitive reading ability, confident and precise writing ability and learning to respect other languages (Agnihotri, 2010). So, while teaching English in diverse regions of India, the paramount importance should be given on multilingualism. Teaching English through English often curbs the effectiveness of learning among learners who are from tribal communities or linguistic minority backgrounds. Addressing the linguistic diversities in a multilingual classroom is considered a very effective and prospective approach to teaching English. Instead of resisting a learner to use his/her mother tongue, encouraging them to use it for learning English proves to be an effective method.

## **2. Need of the Study**

The present study was designed to explore insights into the strategies employed by the teachers while teaching English to linguistic minority learners in the government-run primary schools. Besides, the study also delves deep into the challenges faced by both the teachers and the students from linguistic minority groups during English language teaching and learning. By interviewing the ESL/EFL teachers and head teachers of the select govt. primary schools along with observing English language classes, I attempted to explore the strategies for teaching English and to identify challenges faced by both teachers and linguistic minority learners. Besides, by conducting focus group discussions with linguistic minority learners and interviewing their parents, I tried to know their perceptions towards English. The need of the study lies in the expectation that it may set an example for diverse scholars to conduct research on diverse aspects concerning issues related to English language learning and multilingualism of the linguistic minority learners as well as learners from various tribal communities and disadvantaged classes. .

## **3. Review of Literature**

The study of related literature in any research plays a crucial role since it helps the researcher to choose the correct direction towards a specified goal while searching for the research gap. The basic purpose behind conducting the review of related literature is to find out the research gap in the field. It further helps the researcher to work on the research gap in order to fill a part of it at least. Besides, this process also helps to have an in-depth study into the research works that have been conducted in the areas related to that of the researcher.

### **3.1 Socio-cultural Theory**

The root of the Socio-cultural Theory can initially be traced in Lev S. Vygotsky's concepts. According to Vygotsky's theory (1978), social interactions lead to cognitive development, including language development. Individual interactions are the most important of them. Socio-cultural theory considers speaking and thinking as closely intertwined, in contrast to psychological theories that consider them as connected but independent processes (Lightbown and Spada, 2006). Vygotsky thinks that the development of the brain's higher-order functions is influenced by peers, parents, caregivers, and society as a whole. Vygotsky argues that since human development focuses on social interaction, cultural differences may exist. The importance of social interaction in psychological development is emphasized by socio-cultural theory. It implies that human learning is mostly a social process and that our interactions with people who are "more skilled" around us shape our cognitive abilities (Cherry, 2025). According to Vygotsky, there are two related mechanisms that work behind the emergence of psychological processes from social activity. The first mechanism is imitation and the second one is the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Imitation helps learners to form repertoires of resources for performing in future but at the same time it cannot be taken as the exact replicas of the primary model. In case of ZPD, teachers or capable peers guide learners to perform various activities that they cannot do independently. Through this, learners can form ideas about their knowledge and ability, allowing them to perform any task independently (Lantolf, 2013).

### **3.2 Pedagogical Approaches to Teaching EFL/ESL**

Teaching methods that incorporate two or more languages with the goal of fostering multilingual repertoire development as well as metalinguistic and language awareness are referred to as 'pedagogical translanguaging.' Pedagogical translanguaging views

students as emerging multilinguals who, depending on the social situation, can utilize both English and other languages. Their linguistic assets are respected and students are viewed as multilingual speakers rather than as poor English users (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020). A systematic literature review conducted by Huang and Chalmers (2023) shows that pedagogical translanguaging is frequently used to teach mainly the domains of reading and writing. The study concludes with the note that pedagogical translanguaging may be helpful for teaching in specific circumstances, but lack of high methodological quality of the literature on average makes it quite hard to draw concrete causal inferences. Aryan and Pavlova (2019) in their study mention some primary issues concerning the foreign language textbook, which include the features and importance, functions, proper use, role played in the social development of learners and areas that need modifications. An English language textbook provides the course syllabus, functions as a model of the real educational system, instills confidence and a sense of accomplishment in pupils, and implements the fundamental principles of language education. Mahanand and Duria (2023) mention in their study that the use of mother tongue, in case of tribal learners, plays a significant role when it is concerned with English language learning. They also state that in many contexts the mother tongues of the tribal learners are often ignored. The researchers conducted their study on the select tribal students of the Koraput region of Odisha on the perceptions towards the use of their mother tongue in English classrooms as well as on the effectiveness of the mother tongue in the target language learning. The study, conducted using a qualitative approach, presents its findings reflecting on the negative attitude towards the use of the mother tongue on account of the prevalent social stigma. The study also shows that teachers' motivation to use mother tongue for learning English plays an effective role.

### **3.3 Challenges**

Jeyaraj (2017) mentions that the challenges in Indian context are related to methods of teaching, learning style, professional development, motivation of the learners, diverse socio-economic and linguistic backgrounds of the learners, medium of instructions used in schools, training of the teachers, and amount of exposure to English. Another study conducted by Nath (2016) on the challenges faced in teaching English to secondary schools in North Tripura district focuses on several challenges in teaching and learning of English. Since most of the students in this region are multilingual, their native languages affect English language learning by impacting their pronunciation and syntax. Majority of the students express fear for English as a second language. Some other challenges incorporate poor teaching, inappropriate English text books and lack of skills among teachers. Moreover, the curriculum, traditional grammar and avoiding communication in English by teachers in the classroom are also contributing factors to the challenges.

### **3.4 Perceptions**

Kim (2002) in a study conducted on the teachers' diverse perceptions of teaching English through English on account of various factors like school, teaching experiences and the amount of English used in the classroom. The findings of the study, drawn from the responses of 53 in-service teachers, are obtained through administering questionnaire which contains both close and open-ended questions. The findings suggest using various useful strategies for teaching English through English. Wallace and Leong (2020) in their study investigated several factors that contributed to exploring the motivation of primary EFL learners behind learning English. The study was conducted on 23 grade six students who studied at a primary school in China using an open-ended questionnaire. The

findings of the study revealed positive attitude towards EFL teachers. The participants reported that they prefer learning through games and activities.

#### **4. Research Gap**

Most of the research studies conducted, as mentioned above, are either from different regions of West Bengal or from other states in India or from countries abroad. Some studies focused simply on the problems related to L2 (English) learning, some studies focused on the challenges related to L2 (English) teaching and some studies focused on both in several contexts along with issues related to multilingualism. Several discussions take place regarding constructivist teaching-learning situations in which there is a paradigm shift from teacher centricism to student centricism in classroom contexts. But there are not ample studies conducted on the teaching strategies, challenges and perceptions related to the linguistic minority learners. The reviews of literature further identify that no study has been conducted on the linguistic minority learners of the Sundarbans in West Bengal, India so far. So, the present study attempts to focus on several integrated emerging pedagogic approaches along with challenges in the English language classroom that consists of learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds through in-depth analysis of language teaching and learning issues among linguistic minorities. The study further attempts to explore the perceptions of linguistic minority learners and their parents towards English. Thus the present study attempts to fill the gap identified from the reviews of literature on the select areas.

#### **5. Research Objectives**

The main objectives of the study, after a thorough review of literature, are as follows:

1. To explore strategies employed by teachers for teaching English to linguistic minority learners at government primary schools in the Sundarbans of India.

2. To identify the challenges faced by teachers in English language teaching and the challenges faced by linguistic minority learners in English language learning at government primary schools in the Sundarbans of India.
3. To study the perceptions of linguistic minority learners and their parents towards English.

## **6. Research Questions**

The study will try to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the major strategies employed by teachers for teaching English to linguistic minority learners at government primary schools in the Sundarbans of India?
2. What are the major challenges faced by teachers in English language teaching and by linguistic minority learners in English language learning at government primary schools in the Sundarbans of India?
3. What are the perceptions of linguistic minority learners and their parents towards English?

## **7. Methodology**

### **7.1 Research Approach**

While planning for a proper research strategy to be adopted for conducting the present research, the primary goal was to choose a suitable research approach that would best answer the research questions with in-depth exploration. Besides, the focus was also on determining appropriate methods and design that would help to delve deep to explore

real-life issues related to classroom strategies used by teachers for English language teaching as well as complexities related to teaching and learning English language among the linguistic minority learners in the Sundarbans of West Bengal. On considering the issues mentioned, qualitative approach was the best one to be adopted for the present study.

## **7.2 Research Design: Case Study Design**

Since the present study is exploratory in nature, a case study design has been considered the most suitable design. Creswell (2014) defines case studies as a design which the researcher chooses when there is requirement of in-depth analysis of a case that may include a program, process, activity, or one or many individuals. Since the present research deals with a specific study related to multiple cases conducted in nine schools, I have adopted the multiple-case designs. In the single study multiples cases are incorporated.

## **7.3 Data Collection**

The data required for conducting the present study were, therefore, gathered from the following sources:

- Interviews of Head Teachers
- Interviews of Assistant Teachers who taught English (i.e., EFL/ESL Teachers)
- Interviews of linguistic minority learners' parents
- Observations of Assistant Teachers' (i.e., EFL/ESL Teachers') English language classes
- Focus group discussions of linguistic minority learners
- Contextual documents collected from the sites of research

**Table 1***An Outline of the Sites of Investigation*

<b>Sl No.</b>	<b>Name of the Schools (Anonymized)</b>	<b>Date of Visit</b>	<b>Location</b>
1.	School A	26.07.2023	<b>Block:</b> Hingalganj, <b>District:</b> North 24 Parganas
2.	School B	02.08.2023	<b>Block:</b> Sandeshkhali-II, <b>District:</b> North 24 Parganas
3.	School C	07.08.2023	<b>Block:</b> Hingalganj, <b>District:</b> North 24 Parganas
4.	School D	08.08.2023	<b>Block:</b> Sandeshkhali-II, <b>District:</b> North 24 Parganas
5.	School E	14.09.2023	<b>Block:</b> Sandeshkhali-II, <b>District:</b> North 24 Parganas
6.	School F	10.10.2023	<b>Block:</b> Sandeshkhali-II, <b>District:</b> North 24 Parganas
7.	School G	22.08.2024	<b>Block:</b> Basanti, <b>District:</b> South 24 Parganas
8.	School H	12.09.2024	<b>Block:</b> Patharpratima, <b>District:</b> South 24 Parganas
9.	School I	24.09.2024	<b>Block:</b> Gosaba, <b>District:</b> South 24 Parganas

#### **7.4 Instruments for Data Collection**

In the present study, I followed a semi-structured interview technique for collecting data. While conducting interviews with participants, the stages should properly be maintained for successful accomplishment of the process. I used focus group discussion technique for collecting data from the linguistic minority learners for knowing their perceptions towards English language. For collecting data in the present study, classroom observation was another major method because it enabled me to explore diverse areas related to the teaching and learning process of English, which further helped me to triangulate the data sources in this study. I collected various contextual documents from the research site. These documents play an important role and work as complementary source of information to the present study. I collected various documents like official records of student enrolment, pictures of TLM, signs on the walls of the school premises, sample pages from the learners' English notebooks, images of the pages from the learners' English textbooks in which they have noted down something etc.

## **7.5 Sample and Sampling Technique**

The study being qualitative in approach, I have adopted a sub-type of non-probability sampling technique, known as purposive sampling technique. A purposive sample, a non-representative subset of a larger population, is chosen by the researcher for serving a specific purpose. As part of the sample, the researcher, in this type of sampling, chooses units (e.g., people, cases etc.) considering a specific purpose to be served for the study (Li et al., 2018). The number of samples to be selected in qualitative studies varies. In typical qualitative research, usually a few individuals or a few cases are studied because if the number of samples is increased, the scope for providing an in-depth exploration or picture is decreased. So, depending upon the nature of study, the number of samples in qualitative studies may be a single individual or a single site. Sometimes it may range from 1 or 2 to 30 or 40 (Creswell, 2015). I chose a limited number of samples so that I would be able to delve deep into the phenomenon and explore it through interviews, observations, focus group discussions and contextual documents from the research sites. In the present study, as mentioned before, I chose 9 schools, 8 head teachers and 8 assistant teachers who taught English to linguistic minority learners at primary schools. Besides, 17 parents were also a part of the entire sample. In addition to them, 39 linguistic minority learners who formed 9 focus groups were included in the sample for the present study.

**Table 2***An Outline of the Samples*

Schools	Head Teachers/TICs	Assistant Teachers [EFL/ESL Teachers]	Parents	Focus Groups [Number of Participants]
School A	Nil	1	3	FGD 1 [4]
School B	1	1	3	FGD 2 [6]
School C	1	1	2	FGD 3 [5]
School D	1	1	2	FGD 4 [4]
School E	1	Nil	2	FGD 5 [4]
School F	1	1	4	FGD 6 [4]
School G	1	1	Nil	FGD 7 [4]
School H	1	1	Nil	FGD 8 [4]
School I	1	1	1	FGD 9 [4]
Number of Schools = 9	Number of Head teachers/TICs = 8	Number of Assistant Teachers [EFL/ESL teachers] = 8	Number of Parents = 17	Total FGDs = 9 Number of Learners = 39

**7.6 Criteria for Inclusion of the Participants**

The criteria for selecting the participants for the current study were fixed on the basis of several points. First, the head teachers and the assistant teachers (i.e. EFL/ESL teachers) had to be from those primary schools where young learners were mostly from linguistic minority communities. Second, only those teachers who were accustomed to teaching English to young learners regularly were included. Third, only those young learners who were studying in Grades III, IV and V and were from linguistic minority communities were included. Fourth, those parents who belonged to linguistic minority communities and had the experience of speaking and understanding the minority languages more or less were considered for inclusion.

## **7.7 Sites of Investigation**

A total number of nine schools have been visited by me for conducting the present study adopting the multiple case study design and each of the schools may be considered as a single case for analysis, leading to a holistic analysis of all the cases.

## **7.8 Pilot Study**

The pilot study was conducted for the present research on 22.06.2023, which was approximately one month before the final data collection process started. I selected a primary school in the Hingaljanj block of North 24 Parganas, the Sundarbans, West Bengal. In that school, learners were mostly from the ST communities, having their own tribal languages other than Bengali. The participants for the pilot study were very carefully selected in order to collect data from the natural setting, which would contribute to the phenomena being studied for the main research. They were also from socio-economically disadvantaged background. Parents of most of the children were migrant labourers. The school contained only four teachers including the Head of the institution who was a Teacher-in-Charge. So, in order to know the perceptions of teachers, students and parents towards English language and also to know the teachers' views on challenges of teaching English to linguistic minority learners along with strategies employed by them for teaching, the pilot study was conducted on the members of the relevant population. However, the members who participated in the pilot study were excluded from the main study. The interview schedules and the observation protocol that I prepared considering the research questions of the present study were employed for in-depth explorations of the phenomena under study.

## **7.9 Triangulation in the Present Study**

In the present study, I have employed triangulation method in order to strengthen trustworthiness of the data. Since the objectives of the present study include various strategies and challenges related to teaching and learning English as a second/foreign language and also perceptions of parents and young learners of primary schools towards English, I have mainly focused on data triangulation which strengthened the evidences and intensified trustworthiness of the data. So, the data triangulation process was accomplished by collecting data from six different sources which include head teachers' interview, assistant teachers' interview, parents' interview, focus group discussion with learners, classroom observation data, and contextual documents collected from the sites of investigation.

## **8. Data Analysis, Findings and Discussion**

Data analysis involves data collected from several sources in any research. However, for the present study data analysis consisted of the following sources of data:

- Interview data from 8 Head Teachers
- Interview data from 8 Assistant Teachers who taught English (i.e., EFL/ESL Teachers)
- Interview data from 17 parents
- Observation based data from 8 Assistant Teachers' (i.e., EFL/ESL Teachers') English language classes
- Focus Group Discussion data from 9 groups of learners
- Contextual documents collected from the sites of research

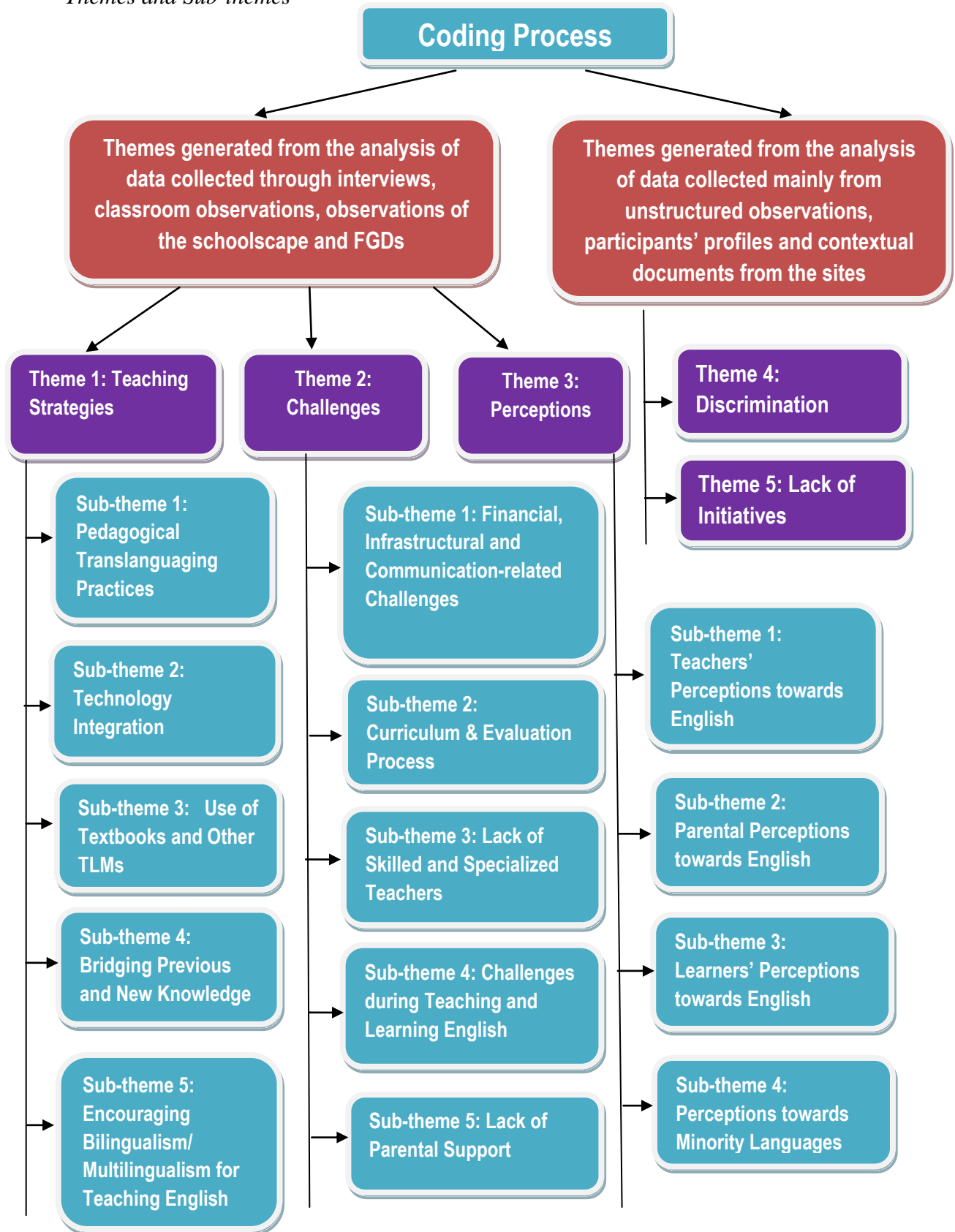
For analyzing data, I have adopted thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Thematic analysis is a process that helps to generate themes from codes and categories

within a dataset like transcripts of interview, observation and other documents. On the basis of thematic analysis as popularized by Braun and Clarke (2006), multiples codes were generated out of which various themes emerged. The themes which are directly related to the research questions were considered primary evidence in relation to the present study. Rest of the evidence was used as supporting materials for the present study. However, from multiple codes and categories, five major themes were generated under which a number of sub-themes were placed, where it was befitting. The five major themes generated are – **teaching strategies, challenges, perceptions, discrimination and lack of initiatives.**

**Figure 1**

*Themes and Sub-themes*



## **8.1 Teaching Strategies**

From the analysis of the collected data for answering the first research question that deals with the strategies employed by teachers while teaching English to linguistic minority learners in govt. primary schools, located in the Sundarbans of India, it was found that considering the linguistic minority backgrounds of the learners, the teachers employed several teaching strategies for teaching English. One of the suitable strategies employed by the teachers, as data analysis has revealed is pedagogical translanguaging through which learners can learn English using their own linguistic repertoire. It proves to be a very effective teaching strategy in a multilingual setting. However, the analysis of the data reveals that the EFL/ESL teachers encouraged this pedagogical practice in the government-run primary schools, located mostly in the remote and disadvantaged areas of the Sundarbans. The other strategies that the teachers employed in the classroom for teaching English incorporated use of technology, textbooks and various teaching-learning materials. However, some of the teachers questioned the high standard of the textbooks for English, prescribed by the Department of School Education and West Bengal Board of Primary Education for the government-run primary schools in West Bengal. Again, some other strategies employed by teachers, as the analysis of the data revealed, included connecting previous knowledge with new knowledge and promoting bilingualism/ multilingualism while teaching English to linguistic minority learners.

## **8.2 Challenges**

The second theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was the challenges encountered by the teachers while teaching English to the linguistic minority learners as well as the challenges faced by the learners while learning English. Analysis of the data reveals various challenges which were related not only to the teaching and learning of

English but also to some other major issues. However, the major challenges that emerged as sub-themes under the main theme were related to i) poverty, infrastructure and communication, ii) curriculum and evaluation process, iii) lack of skilled and specialized teachers for teaching English and iv) parental support.

### **8.3 Perceptions**

The third theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was perceptions of the linguistic minority learners and their parents. The parents (though most of them were illiterate) expressed their concern for their children's need of learning English in the present society. The focus group data also revealed the young linguistic minority learners' interest towards learning English and also their knowledge about the importance of learning English. In this connection, the perceptions of the teachers, parents and linguistic minority learners towards minority languages should also be mentioned. The findings revealed that though the teachers preferred preservation of the minority languages, they were not able to speak the languages. Some of the teachers stated that they could understand the languages a little bit. The experience was somewhat same in case of the parents and the children as well because of the growing communication with the Bengali language speakers. Their native languages (or the tribal languages) were not found in their original forms and a shift was found towards the use of Sadri language.

## **9. Implications**

### **9.1 Pedagogical Implications**

Teachers and educators should consider integrating translanguaging pedagogy practically with adequate expertise in the EFL/ESL classroom, especially when there are

multilingual learners. Instead of using the traditional pedagogical practices, this approach broadens the scope of learning a second or foreign language effectively.

## **9.2 Policy Implications**

As NEP-2020 emphasizes mother tongue-based multilingual education at the initial stage of schooling, this should be more practically implemented, especially when the linguistic minority learners, tribal learners and multilingual learners are concerned. Policy makers may consider promoting multilingual education with practical initiatives.

## **9.3 Methodological Implications**

Methodologically, the study emphasizes the importance of qualitative research approach that delves deep into any phenomenon in order to explore. However, a mixed method design can also be used to explore such phenomenon combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

## **10. Recommendations**

1. There should be considerable focus on the specialization of the teachers at the primary schools run by the state govt. since it is at this level that the foundation of education can be strengthened.
2. Teachers should focus on adopting innovative strategies for teaching English in order to make the teaching-learning process interesting.
3. The EFL/ESL teachers should employ real-life and practical examples in the classroom so that the learners seek interest in the teaching methods. Besides, the instructional materials should be chosen so that they meet the requirements of the learners.

4. Teachers should give sufficient reinforcements for motivating the learners both intrinsically and extrinsically.
5. Teachers should feel the urge for educating the learners along with teaching them English for their betterment and also for ensuring their future establishment.
6. The evaluation system which was deferred should be brought back again so that the performance of the learners can be judged properly and they should be guided on the basis of individual requirements.
7. Focus on mother-tongue based education should be promoted in a planned way so that the learners learn English and other subjects in a simpler way. In this context, the mother tongue of the linguistic minority learners should also be given sufficient emphasis, which would, in turn, save the tribal languages from being endangered.
8. So, there should be adequate training for professional development of the teachers. This would contribute to the skill development of the teachers, which would further contribute to the application of innovative strategies in the EFL/ESL classroom.
9. There should be sufficient provisions for the use of the minority languages. Teachers should encourage learners from linguistic minority communities to use their own languages while teaching English.
10. For making the EFL/ESL classroom interactive as well as interesting, arrangement for smart classroom should be done. This would create a practical and real-life environment for learning.
11. Adequate infrastructural facilities should be provided for the learners. There should be arrangement for separate classrooms. Physical facilities like chairs, tables, fans, lights, black/whiteboards and playground should be provided as per requirements.

12. Special emphasis should be given on TLMs. Government should provide various teaching aids to schools so that teaching-learning becomes effective and enjoyable.

### **11. Limitations**

- The purposive sampling technique may also be considered as one of the major limitations of the study. The study being qualitative in nature, purposive sampling was the best technique for getting sample. But the smaller size of the sample limits the scope for generalizing findings to a broader population.
- Getting access to the institutions was another limitation of the study. Most of the time it became very difficult to gain access to the schools, located in very remote places of the study area.
- During the observation process, the researcher's presence in the classroom might have affected the teaching-learning process because the teachers became more concerned about their teaching strategies, interaction with the learners, use of TLMs and motivating the learners. Besides, the attention of the learners also got distracted.

### **12. Areas for Future Research**

Since the study was conducted adopting the qualitative approach, a small number of samples has been incorporated. So, it was not possible to incorporate all the linguistic minority learners. So, for conducting future research, linguistic minority learners from diverse regions can be chosen. Further studies can be conducted with large-scale data for a longer period of time in order to explore diverse issues related to the linguistic minority learners. Besides, further research can be done on the policies related to English language teaching in a multilingual context.

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