

# EDUCATION PLUS

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**“A**re you taking the UGC-NET?” I asked a young man who had completed his Master’s in English Language Teaching (ELT) a year ago.

“I’m not sure I can crack it,” he said hesitantly. “The subject I’ve specialised in – English Language Teaching (ELT) – isn’t even on the list of prescribed subjects. So, I’m forced to choose something related, like English Literature. It’s not just me; many of my classmates who specialised in ELT have chosen not to take the exam at all...”

The UGC National Eligibility Test (NET) determines candidates’ eligibility for Junior Research Fellowships (JRF) and Assistant Professorships by assessing their knowledge in a specific subject. According to the National Testing Agency, the June 2025 session will include 85 subjects, yet ELT remains excluded.

When the UGC-NET was introduced in 1989, ELT was not well-established in India and was, therefore, not included. However, according to S. Mohanraj, retired professor from EFLU, Professor Tharu of the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL), Hyderabad, had recognised the importance of the field and advocated for its inclusion even at that time.

Candidates for the exam are expected to select a subject based on their postgraduate specialisation. Since ELT is not on

the list, many ELT graduates are compelled to opt for English Literature, which focuses heavily on literary content and literary theory, making it a

poor match for ELT specialists.

**Evolving academic landscape**  
Traditionally,

English

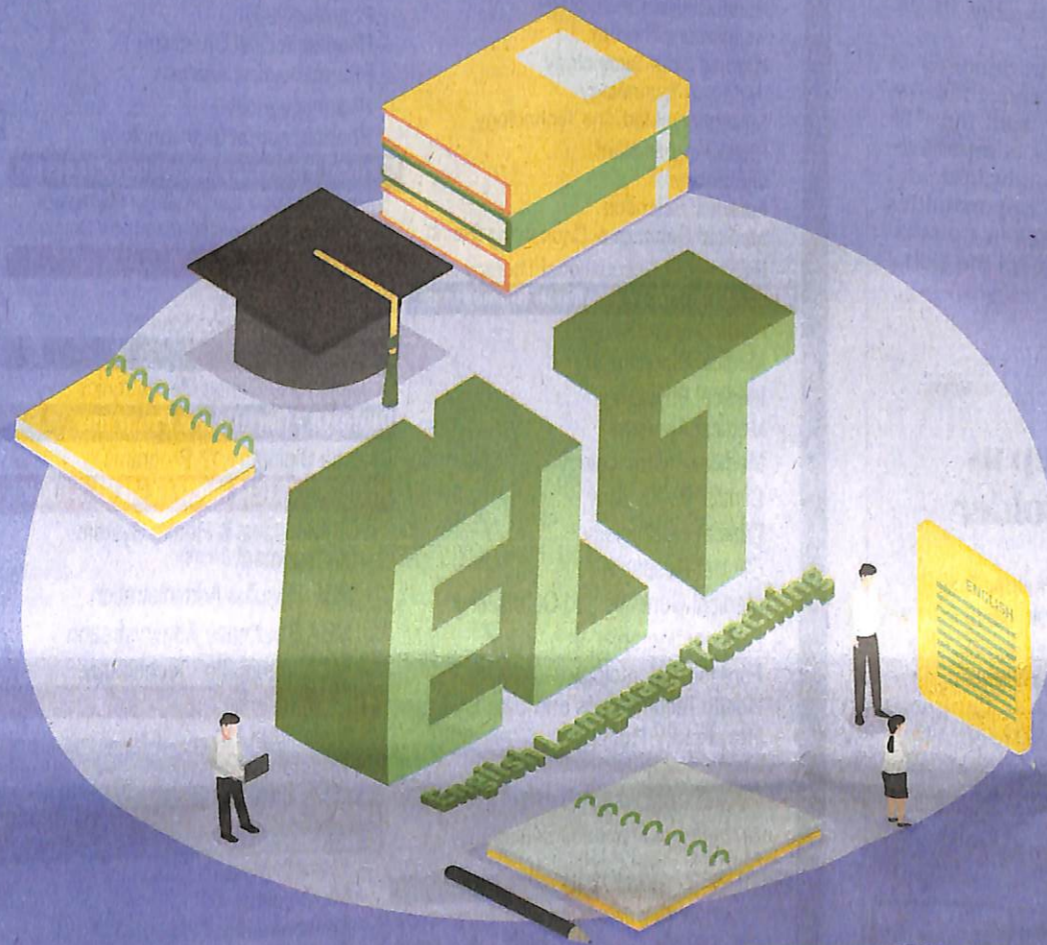
teachers at the tertiary level held qualifications in English Literature. Consequently, instruction in General English and other language-based courses of

ten lacked grounding in second language acquisition and pedagogy.

However, some educators pursued additional qualifications in ELT and

## Beyond English literature

In India, where English is a second language, ELT plays a vital role in the education system and deserves to be recognised as an independent discipline



gained expertise in language teaching methods.

Over time, the academic landscape evolved and Master’s programmes that once focused solely on literature began to incorporate language components.

Eventually, dedicated Master’s programmes in ELT were introduced that trained students in second language acquisition, teaching methodologies, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), technology-assisted learning, and applied linguistics, making graduates more suited to teach English language skills than literature graduates.

ELT has now gained significant traction in India and universities increasingly offer programmes at postgraduate and doctoral levels, and student enrolment is steadily rising. Yet, ELT remains absent from the UGC-NET subject list, 35 years after the exam’s inception.

There are several compelling reasons to recognise English Language Teaching (ELT) as a distinct academic discipline and to include it in the UGC-NET list of prescribed subjects to recruit ELT specialists to teach English in colleges.

### Fundamental differences

In India, where English is a second language, ELT plays a vital role in the education system, as English is integrated into the curriculum at all levels and is essential for the professional development of individuals who need to communicate effectively in the language.

Teaching English literature and teaching the English language are fundamentally different in their purpose, content, and methodology. The primary goal of the former is to enable students to appreciate, analyse, and interpret literary texts, whereas the aim of language teaching is to help learners achieve proficiency in English.

Accordingly, literature teachers focus on exploring texts from critical perspectives, while language teachers concentrate on developing learners’ linguistic and communicative competence.

Further, literature instruction typically follows a text-centric approach, emphasising literary theory and critical thinking. In contrast, language teaching adopts a learner-centric approach, with a focus on pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and practical communication skills. Another major difference lies in classroom practice: literature classes are often lecture-based, while language classes are typically task-based and interactive.

Universities abroad select candidates with specialisation in ELT to teach language courses such as General English, English for Communication, Business English, English for International Tests, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and so on.

Teachers with a background in ELT possess the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes for effective English teaching.

Their expertise in second language acquisition theories allows them to understand how learners acquire language and to adapt their teaching using diverse methods such as the communicative approach, task-based learning, and technology-enhanced instruction. As a result, they are well-equipped to prepare students not only for academic achievement but also for success in professional and international contexts.

Given the global status of English and its significance in India, it is imperative that language teaching be led by professionals with formal training in ELT. This can only be possible if ELT is recognised as a distinct subject in UGC-NET.

Institutions such as the English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU) and professional bodies like the English Language Teachers’ Association of India (ELTAI) should actively campaign for the inclusion of ELT in the UGC-NET subject list. Xavier Pradeep Singh, National President of ELTAI, has stated that the association has already launched a signature campaign and is planning to submit a petition to the UGC.

It is time for ELT to be acknowledged not as a subset of literature, but as a vital, independent discipline deserving of its rightful place in India’s academic and professional landscape.

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