



Examining Dalit Experiences on English Language in Nepal: An Empowerment Perspective

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Abstract

The role of the English language in Nepal can be observed from an inclusionary and exclusionary perspective in relation to the lives of Dalit individuals. In reference to this understanding, this study explores the interplay of caste-based discrimination and the role of the English language in Nepali society. Based on in-depth interviews with 12 participants—six Dalit students, two teachers, two policy actors, and two Dalit activists—the findings of the study show that the Dalits regard the English language as a tool for enhancing social mobility and demarginalization via effective communication and better job opportunities. On the other side, they are still enduring challenges like dehumanization, discrimination, and lack of financial capabilities for access to these opportunities. As English language learning is perceived as an elite expensive skill to achieve, financially constrained and socially marginalized Dalits have to face the threat of aggravation of their worse plight because of their compromised access to English. Thus, English, on the one hand is a symbol of hope and aspiration but at the same time, it may lead to exclusion.

Keywords: Dalit, english language, empowerment, marginalization, caste-based discrimination, educational inequality

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Introduction

Nepal is a vibrant mosaic of diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic communities, enriched with unique socio-cultural and historical dimensions (Bohara, 2025), of which the Dalit community is the most vulnerable and oppressed group, often referred to as 'untouchables'. Dalits have long been subjected to socio-historical discrimination and humiliation due to the caste system (Bishwakarma, 2011; Gnana, 2018; Nepali, 2024) that severely restricted their possibilities for social, economic, academic, and professional advancement (Lamsal, 2025). Although various ethnic communities have become gradually advanced, the Dalit communities are still struggling against multi-faceted inequalities, including educational and language-related issues for their social mainstreaming, because of deep-rooted segregation in the psyche of the society (Gnana, 2018).

This article explores the experiences and understanding of Dalit individuals regarding the English language as a tool of empowerment or disempowerment. The languages of South Asia—be it Nepali, Hindi, or any other prominent or

less prominent language—reflect the underlying collective psyche of society, thus enabling the indemnification of proper names (Buswala, 2023), the markedness in the sharing of pronouns in conversations between Dalits and non-Dalits, the labeling of Dalit language varieties as non-standard in comparison to those of upper-caste people (Kaushalya, 2014), and the existence of derogatory mythos. In this background, the grip of dominant groups in society over the standard form of language—one that marginalizes minorities in domains such as education, profession, politics, etc.—creates a gap for inquiry into the role of the English language, which is considered more neutral for its origin in a culture where caste-based discrimination is absent.

The English language is a significant marker of social status (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1995) and a key to different opportunities in contemporary Nepal (Bista, 2011). In the case of the Dalits as well, English presumably appears as an emancipatory tool (Ramamoorthy & Mishra, 2024) as it opens the avenues of opportunities for them (Nepali, 2024). However, as the education in English is not

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a commonplace in Nepal and most of the Dalit students' access to the schools run in English medium, charging higher tuition fees, is compromised, English can serve as the tool of intensifying marginalization, showcasing an unmanifest paradox of Nepali society (Devkota, 2018). Though the English language is taken as an essential tool for enhancing social movement; its discriminatory access degrades the existing inequalities that may act as one of the contributing factors for the further marginalization of the Dalits (Paik, 2014).

In the Nepalese society, widespread caste-based discrimination acts as one of the key determining factors for ensuring access to societal privileges and pride (Bishwokarma, 2023). In this context, the English language may reinforce the major discriminatory practices rather than mitigate them (Pennycook, 2017; Canagarajah, 2002). For this pretext, this study attempts to unveil the role of the English language perceived and experienced by the Dalits in Nepal from a phenomenological perspective.

In the third world, English seems to be a powerful tool that may help people in their social mobility, empowerment, professional development, and economic advancement. Such understanding is evidenced by the findings of Phillipson (2009) and Pennycook (2017) who argue that language can play a positive role in the process of the upward social and educational levels for the marginalized communities through which they get jobs, and at the same time participate in the global economy.

The English language can be supportive for career development and enhancement of social status (Akther, 2022); however, systemic barriers and social complications pose challenges to its adequate access (Bishwokarma, 2023). Hence, the English language either helps in the mainstreaming of the marginalized communities or it functions as a means to preserve the status quo, as they lack the required socio-economic resources for it (Canagarajah, 2002).

The oppressed communities, such as the Dalits in Nepal, find themselves underprivileged in this respect. The absence of English-medium education for Dalits, combined with financial constraints, leads to an English-less situation in the rural areas of Nepal, where Dalit students cannot secure the benefits of English. Caste-based discrimination is prevailing in the educational system of Dalit students creating this divide even more intense (Devkota, 2018). So, the very hope of English providing the marginalized communities with economic mobility has usually resulted in the opposite. Therefore, the English language seems to have further widened the gap between the different social classes and groups characterized by their access to resources and opportunities.

The English language is mainly benefitting the well-privileged segment of society because it is easily accessible to them (Khadka, 2024). Dalits, who are frequently denied higher

educational opportunities, are less likely to develop a good command of English, which results in their being even more marginalized. One of the biggest factors preventing Dalits from moving up in society is the lack of proper inclusion in English education, as the English language is increasingly associated with better job opportunities, particularly in urban areas (Bishwokarma, 2023). Therefore, despite its acceptance as a means of empowerment, English turns out to be a distant dream for many Dalits who are compelled to endure the stigma attached to their caste.

Dalit communities, stigmatized as 'untouchables,' continue to struggle against difficulties in accessing quality education (Bishwokarma, 2023) as caste-based injustices are yet to be resolved, including in the education system in Nepalese society (Pariyar and Lovett, 2016). While policies including affirmative action, scholarship schemes, etc. have been formulated and executed by the state to promote social justice and equity, Dalits are still left as an unequal caste and class in accessing quality education. The Dalit students are treated in a biased way even in schools by teachers and other students overtly (Pariyar & Lovett, 2016). This discrimination promotes a sense of inferiority and affects Dalit students' academic performance and aspirations negatively.

Likewise, in rural areas where many Dalits dwell, the infrastructure in educational institutions is usually not enough. These areas encountering the challenges in students' access to quality English language teaching because of lack of trained teachers, learning resources, and adequate physical infrastructure cannot ensure the smooth academic progress of students. As most of the Dalits study in such schools, these adversities affect them considerably in larger context. This situation restricts Dalit students' potential to ensure their full academic achievement. Dalit students expect to learn the skills that could be supportive of their socio-economic mobility. In the context of Nepal, Dalit settlements are mostly located in isolation, away from the main residential areas, resulting in their children being compelled to attend under-resourced, low-performing schools with minimal or almost no exposure to English-language instruction, which contributes to a constant educational gap between Dalit and non-Dalit students (Bishwakarma, 2011; Pariyar, 2023). The visible educational disparity, triggered by biased state mechanisms (Bishwakarma, 2011) and systemic structural barriers (Gandhari, 2021), further widens the inequality of English language performance. Though in recent days, pro-Dalit policies have been emphasized in the educational arena of Nepal, there exists a gap between the stated policy and its implementation. Overt and insensitive manifestation of caste-based prejudice in classrooms, poor delivery of English education, a commonplace to Dalit students, etc. appear to be persistent barriers for Dalit students in their educational trajectory.

Studies point out that the English language has been perceived as an emancipatory means by Dalit individuals

that can help restructure social stratification (Bishwokarma, 2023; Vulli, 2014). Similarly, for Ilame (2020), learning the English language offers better employability to Dalits and prepares them for the global workforce. This implies that, under certain conditions, English can be used as a means for social uplifting. However, these success stories are very limited, and the broader reality for most Dalits is the experience of exclusion from English education and the benefits it entails.

On the other hand, the caste and language relationship, especially in the case of the English language and Dalit communities in Nepal, is still not thoroughly studied, and their interrelation can provide new insights. English, according to Bista (2011), is universally accepted as the primary means of social elevation; however, it also creates barriers for the already marginalized groups like Dalits (Devkota, 2018; Paik, 2014). Studies across the globe and at the local level have shown that the English language plays both the role of liberation and that of a barrier to acceptance (Devkota, 2018; Canagarajah, 1999; Pennycook, 2017). In the case of Nepal, where society is highly stratified, that is, caste, class, and gender all together very often become the main factors that limit access to quality education, English-medium instruction, and unequal English Learning Opportunities result in the reinforcement rather than the diminishment of existing inequalities (Devkota, 2018). The literature thus emphasizes the two-sided nature of English; it confers symbolic capital on the elites while impoverishing the Dalit learners with what Devkota (2018) calls "exclusionary-inclusion."

In Nepal, English is frequently considered a means of social mobility, but its unequal availability puts Dalit students at a systematic disadvantage, who—due to their marginalization—usually go to poorly funded public schools that barely have any quality English teaching. Devkota (2018) claims that the unclear policy provisions regarding English learning opportunities in the society rather consolidate the caste-discrimination as they fuel unequal distribution of English language learning opportunities. Hence, it puts a dent in the constitutional aim of social inclusion.

In the same line, Nepali (2024) concludes that Dalit students in Nepal realize English as a crucial tool for social mobility, education, and employment, but the barriers, such as socio-economic hardship, caste-based discrimination, and inadequate educational resources, hinder their English learning. If they have to get better education in English, they have to consume the resources they have. This, ultimately, wedges them into a vicious circle where every effort they make to come out of the socio-economic marginalization pushes them back deeper into it. The dilemma for Dalit students is that they are aware of the importance of the English language for getting professional opportunities, foreign employment, and lifting their subaltern status (Bishwokarma & Bishwokarma, 2022), but they still have limited or no access to schools with better English learning

opportunities (Devkota, 2018). Thus, again in the words of Devkota (2018), this "exclusionary-inclusion (p. 115)" where the Dalits are included in the system by the policies but are excluded in the practice because of their financial limitations in the market-oriented education system, intensifies their struggle in the educational landscape of modern Nepal.

In contrast, Khadka (2024) presents a more subtle view by focusing on how some Dalit individuals see English as a means of empowerment. His study points out that for certain Dalits, English is viewed not only as a tool for social mobility but also as a means of filling the gap between themselves and the privileged classes. Persistent educational disparities—shaped by biased state policies (Bishwakarma, 2011) and entrenched structural inequities (Gandhari, 2021)—severely limit Dalit students' access to quality English instruction, reinforcing cycles of marginalization. Despite the fact that perspectives and concerns of Dalits have been encompassed by the documents of national education policies, there is still a significant gap between the making of policies and their execution. Open and severe caste discrimination, along with the compromised quality of English teaching for Dalit students, are the main barriers which restrict Dalit students' access to education. It appears that there is a gap between the policy actions and the outcomes that shows the caste and the hardships related to it that Dalit students have to encounter in their education. This very situation highlights the urgent need for a change in Nepal's educational and pedagogical practices.

Some studies demonstrate that in societies where the caste system is deeply rooted, language has the power to either reinforce or mitigate caste-based discrimination. Kaushalya (2015) unveils that some dominant linguistic norms—particularly those rooted in Brahmanical ideals of "pure," "classical," and "divine" language—have historically posed barriers for Dalits from cultural authority and educational opportunity. This language-relegation, as she exposes, continues to restrict Dalits' access to resources, recognition, and power. While Dalits increasingly proclaim their voices through literature, initiatives, and movements, inadequate skills in the dominant language turn out to be a barrier to their complete participation in social, economic, and political life. For this pretext, the Dalit activists in India have set up a temple of Goddess Angreji (English Deity) to deliberately oppose exclusion created by Brahminic ideals that regard Saraswati, who is supposed to liberate an individual from the sufferings of ignorance, as the goddess of knowledge and wisdom.

Kumar (2021) shows how the Dalit students from rural backgrounds bear distinct disadvantages when it comes to learning English, mostly because the Dalit learners have to face multiple discriminations, overwhelming domination by upper caste people, and even exclusion in higher education institutions. He further claims that the English language has become a commodity, becoming increasingly easy for economically sound people, who are usually perceived

as the ones with knowledge and intellect, to learn and dominate the educational atmosphere in India. Similarly, Dalits also show their intent to take English education, but are not able to do so because of their caste background and widespread discrimination. Given this unresolved tension—where English promises inclusion yet reproduces exclusion—the lived experiences of Dalit learners remain critically underexplored in the Nepali context.

In this context, this study aims to bring forth the experiences of Dalit communities in Nepal on English language learning and its empowering or disempowering possibilities. Through the perspectives of Dalits, this study wishes to see whether and how English serves as an instrument or a barrier to social mobility under the wider socio-political context of Nepal.

Table 1: Participant Details

Participant Category	Number of Participants	Key Characteristics
Students	6	English language learning engagement; diverse age groups, gender, and educational backgrounds
Teachers	2	Involved in teaching English and direct involvement with Dalit and non-Dalit students
Policy Actors	2	Involved in education or language-related policy
Activists	2	Working in the field of Dalit advocacy related to language, education, or social justice
Total	12	Purposively selected from Kathmandu Valley

We adopted qualitative in-depth interviews to gather the data for this study. After the data collection, we transcribed and translated them from the Nepali language into the English language before coding and thematizing. Based on Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological procedure, we followed seven steps, viz., re-/reading the transcripts; extracting the major statements related to the phenomenon; formulating meanings from these statements; organizing meanings into themes; integrating results into the description; describing the fundamental structure of the phenomenon, and validating emergent themes with participants (where feasible).

Research ethics have been maintained throughout the study process by informing the participants about the study, the no-harm principle and voluntary participation. Furthermore, confidentiality and privacy were maintained by providing pseudo-names such as students (S1–S6), teachers (T1–T2), policy actors (PA1–PA2), and activists (A1–A2). All the gathered data were stored confidentially (Patton, 2002).

Findings and Discussions

In this section, we discussed the perception and understanding of the participants regarding the role of the English language in their lives. The themes in this study reflect varied perceptions and perspectives that the Dalits hold

Methods

We employed phenomenology as the research design for this study because it provides a means to understand individual perceptions and sense-making of their world, based on their lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). Using the phenomenological model (Colaizzi, 1978) to explore how Dalit individuals in Nepal perceive and negotiate their relationship with the English language within a context of caste-based marginalization.

We purposively selected 12 participants, including six students from dalit community, two teachers, two policy actors, and two activists from the Kathmandu Valley (see Table 1). Purposive sampling ensured representation across key stakeholder groups directly engaged with issues of caste, language, and education.

about the role of the English language. The perceptions of Dalits have been expressed in two contradictory positions; for some, the English language is a key to opportunity, while for others, it is a barrier to social mobility.

English as a Key to Opportunity

Dalit participants of the study view English as a key to opportunity. Better educational opportunities in the English language empower them by offering better employment prospects and work as a key actor in their upward social mobility. They were assured that the vaults of better opportunities can be unlocked by better English language proficiency. One of the participants, T2, resonated with this perspective, *"I am sure that better English language skills are necessary to achieve those opportunities which would otherwise be impossible."* PA1 added, *"I am in a position of making policies. I am sure my knowledge and proficiency in the English language have greatly contributed to it. It would literally be impossible to achieve this position otherwise".*

These expressions resonate with how the English language functions as a ladder for their upward socio-economic movement. The English language adds to one's human capital, as PA2 mentioned that, despite being the son of a cobbler, he has achieved a good social status. The people in the communities call him 'Sir' with regard. This

finding aligns with Ashrafova (2025), who opines that "English proficiency has become a powerful determinant of employability and upward mobility" (p. 278). According to Shah and Karki (2020), English is the ticket that allows entry to elite institutions and to professional networks that are considered important for one's upward mobility in society. In Nepal, English is not only seen as a key actor in one's upward mobility (Paneru & Bohara, 2025), it is also taken as a marker of modernization. One's ability to speak it is interpreted as the ability to enter the area of better opportunities and success.

In the participants' views, the English language has emerged as an emancipatory tool to elevate them from the limitations of the caste-based obligations. Students who performed well in the classroom have to face lesser discrimination. Backing this, S4 stated, "I had to face lesser discrimination in the class in comparison of other friends because I perform better. Very often other class fellows ask me for some favour". This is a strong evidence that English reshapes the identities of individuals and acts as a means to overcome their caste-based limitations and assist them to achieve personal and collective advancements. However, while English offers opportunities, the systemic barriers to learning the language remain a significant obstacle for Dalits.

Barriers to Accessing English Education

Participants of the study highlighted a number of issues related to their access to the quality of English language education. In the interviews, financial issues, management and maintenance of school infrastructure, and discrimination based on caste were mentioned repeatedly. The students were really keen on learning English; nevertheless, high tuition fees, inadequate facilities, and the absence of inspiring teachers hindered the learners' process of learning English. A college student, S5, who did her schooling in a remote village, shared her experiences:

Our teachers kept transferring in a few months and the headmaster had to go to the city to search for a new teacher. Frequently changing teachers could hardly offer any meaningful support. Very often we did not get textbooks in time. We heard that people read other books too. I did not see one while at school.

They had undergone through frequently changing teachers, poor infrastructure, and domestic responsibilities which restricted their study considerably. As she added, "I had to assist my mother at home too, so, neither we had time to read those extra books". In the same line, S3 added, "Our sir does not speak English, how can we. We just keep trying to learn from what ever we have." This exposes deep structural inequalities and inadequacies that continue to obstruct Dalits' access to quality education. Nepal's education system has frequently been condemned for the unequal allocation of resources between urban and rural areas which, at least up to a point, is unfair along caste lines.

They believe that schools which are run privately run provide good exposure to English, therefore, they regret for not getting admitted there because of the financial constraints. One participant, S2 mentioned, "Many of my friends go to 'boarding school' but I can not. My father says we are not that rich to pay the fees there." This statement points out toward deep-seated inequality in the distribution of English across students and the covert disparities between the Dalits and non-Dalits regarding their access to English education.

Stigma and Exclusion in Educational Spaces

Caste-based stigma and exclusion represented a major area of concern in the interviews. The participants came up with different situations in which their caste identity was still the first factor leading to their, in particular, the marginalization of their educational pursuit through their identity. Especially, they referred to their hardships when it came to English as the subject where they were the laughing stock and the ignored ones. In this regard, S6 said, "We are never the focus of our English language teachers in class. They mark us poor at English. How can we learn if the teacher keeps ignoring?" In line with S6, S2 added, "I rarely speak in the class. I fear people will tease me by a nick name they have given me by deforming my name just because I cannot answer the teacher's questions". He further added, "I do not speak because I do not know English. Many times, being unable to speak English well. It was considered shameful."

Study by Buswala (2023) shows that calling Dalit individuals by deforming their names is a normal act in societies where Dalit issues exist. This theme discusses the socio-cultural stigmas and issues as the major problem that the Dalit students in Nepal. Educational institutions have reported the unfair treatment towards the Dalit students. The Dalit students realized that they were the unfortunate ones to receive the obvious and the subtle forms of exclusion. Caste-based discrimination, according to Limbu (2007), is sometimes very much a part of the daily life of teachers and students, thus, pushing the Dalit students further into the periphery of the academic institutions. The hardships that the Dalit students face in their English learning are linked with their social status, thus, making it all the more impossible for them to reach their academic goals.

The participants expressed concerns about the discrimination based on caste in education which not only affected the places of learning but also had a great impact on social life. The Dalit pupils are usually isolated from the rest of the kids and are made fun of for their not-so-good English. Such treatment further strengthens the already existing oppressive caste system in Nepal and thus contributing to the isolation of the Dalit communities.

Role of English in Caste Dynamics

Though English has been seen as a tool for Dalit emancipation, some of the participants revealed that English has another face of a reinforcer of caste-based social stratification too. This language was thought to be

conveniently used by upper-caste individuals to reclaim their superiority and preserve socio-economic power. This is a tool of manifesting dominance of upper class people in the society. One participant, PA2 shared, "People from higher castes use English as a way to prove themselves to be superior to us." Similar opinions were heard from other participants who felt that their caste identity, together with their low English language proficiency, had alienated them from social spheres and also professional arenas. In this regard A2 stated, "English speaking sounds boastful and those mixing English while they speak have psychological benefit over others."

Consequently, English turns out to be a language of caste, class, authority, and privilege (Ilame, 2020). In this context, Bishwokarma (2023) goes further and explains how English brings about social stratification in Nepal, as it gives the speakers a chance to look down on the non-speakers. Dalits are still suffering from their marginalized position in society and even in the workplace due to being English-less which is yet another obstacle. The whole concept corresponds very well to the global findings regarding the reinforcing power of language in social hierarchies. Linguistic capital is often the key to maintaining and reinforcing power and privilege systems, including those based on castes (Bourdieu, 1991).

Resilience and Aspirations for Empowerment

The participants see English as a tool of empowerment and resilience. In the interview they echoed the role of English in empowering the ever-marginalized Dalits to be more resilient to overcome social and structural barriers. Resonating this role of English T1 said, "I prefer my students learn good English. I think they should realize the IMPORTANCE [he stressed this word] of English which I could not realize when I was a student." PA1 also reverberates the similar idea even more keenly, "I myself is an example of how English can empower. I worked hard on my English during my graduation, and this assisted me achieve what I am now".

Participants indicate the potential of English to demarginalize Dalits. Many of them agree that proficiency in the English language helps marginalized individuals transcend the boundaries of alienation and marginalization. PA1 said, "I could get scholarships abroad because of my well-written proposal and communication skills". He added, "I was providing IELTS classes before I went abroad for my higher studies, and people called me SIR. Meanwhile my friends of the same class were seeking coaching classes to crack English paper in annual exams". This depicts the role of the English language in enabling the Dalit individuals to transcend socio-economic barriers.

The participants shared numerous social barriers they need to overcome. In this context, the English language, as they believed, would be a powerful means for social change. In this way, the English language has been perceived as a force to accelerate socio-economic transformation for

the Dalits (Khadka, 2024; Tripathi, 2017; Bishwokarma, 2023).

Intersection of Self-Perception, Language, and Identity

The participants of this study perceived the English language not simply as a language but as a dignity and identity marker. The finding of the study revealed that the English language proficiency provided them self-esteem and a new identity in their community. In this regard, A2 asserted, "When I speak in English, I notice people listening to me with care. Speaking in English is really impactful". This highlights the internalized self-perception and the tension between the dominant language and Dalit identity.

Student participants also realized the same experience that speaking in English makes them feel elevated. In this context, S5 said, "Speaking in English makes me feel different and more powerful. I have never got such experience while speaking my mother tongue." This indicates that the English language has more value in creating self-image as "an elite and powerful" especially among the Dalit people.

This shows how Dalit individuals utilize English as a powerful linguistic capital; the ability of a language is directly correlated to a person's social and economic status (Bourdieu, 1991). The Dalits' English language proficiency improvement gives them a sense of empowerment and higher self-esteem, while their peers with lesser command over the language are affected by an inferiority complex. This is reflected in the expression of S4 "My father says he failed in SLC only because of English and now survives on manual labour. He inspires me to work hard in learning English". The situation is indicative of the impact of language on self-image and identity formation, especially in a community where language use is the primary criterion for one's social rank.

English Language and Socio-economic Mobility

Participants resonate with the positive impact of English on their social and economic mobility. In the present context, when the job opportunities are not limited to government agencies, people need better communication skills to get jobs in NGOs/INGOs and private sector enterprises. PA2 expressed, "You can see people need to correspond in English in many private sector institutions. If you have poor English, you are not fit for there, and your opportunities are limited despite having academic credentials". Better English can ensure higher hiring possibilities. "I have good English along with accounting skills, I hope I can get a job in any of the private banks," S1, a student who aspires to work in the corporate sector, shared his experiences. This evidence illustrates the instrumental value of the English language in today's local and global competitive job market.

The connection between language and economic mobility lies in how language skills, especially in English, open access to education, employment, and better income

opportunities. In the modern world, communication skills in English are the minimum requirement for getting high-paid jobs (Biryanto et al., 2018). Apart from this, the English language is used increasingly in education, science and technology, global media, trade and business, etc. This expansion of the English language in every domain of social life has made it a strong factor of socio-economic mobility and an indispensable component for human development.

Conclusion

This study discusses the dual and contradictory roles of the English language in the lives of Dalits in Nepal. On one hand, it is considered a key to better career opportunities, socio-economic status, and academic advancement; on the other hand, resource constraints, subalternized status, widespread inequalities, and policy flaws etc. have impeded them from their overall empowerment. Moreover, it was evidenced that being able to speak English functions as an emancipatory instrument that assures dignity, fosters professionalism, promotes power, and so forth. So, the Dalit students expect their empowerment, and thereby the end of the discrimination imposed against them through the English language.

At the same time, English also deepens persistent inequality in society. Dalits who mostly come from financially deprived families whose access to expensive private schools known for imparting 'good' English education always remains compromised. They go to the public schools where they are often offered questionable teaching because of resource constraints, unavailability of teachers, lack of books, and caste-based bias from teachers and classmates. Because of this, English becomes a privilege for the rich and a barrier for the poor. The same language that promised access to wide opportunities ends up strengthening the very caste divisions it was supposed to eradicate. This can only be uprooted if the state provides top-standard English teaching in every public school, equips schools with all necessary infrastructures, conducts teacher training to be equitable and inclusive, and provides targeted support to Dalit students. Only then can English become a true tool of empowerment for everyone—not just a few.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interests.

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