

An Experimental Study on the Challenges of Teaching English in Rural India

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Abstract:

The teaching of English in rural India remains one of the most complex and persistent educational challenges of the 21st century. English, being the global language of higher education, science, technology, and employment, determines access to socioeconomic mobility. However, learners in rural regions of India experience multiple disadvantages, including inadequate teaching resources, lack of exposure, teacher incompetence in spoken English, and the dominance of local vernaculars.

This study adopts an experimental approach to investigate how activity-based, bilingual, and technology-integrated teaching methods influence the performance and motivation of rural secondary school students. Sixty students from two government schools were divided into experimental and control groups and taught for eight weeks using different pedagogical techniques. Pre-test and post-test analyses revealed a significant improvement in the experimental group, proving that interactive and contextual teaching methods can bridge learning gaps. The paper concludes with policy and pedagogical recommendations to strengthen English education in rural India.

Keywords:

English Language Teaching (ELT), Rural Education, Bilingual Method, ICT in Education, Pedagogical Challenges, Teacher Training, Socioeconomic Barriers.

1. Introduction:

Language is more than a mere instrument of communication; it is a powerful vehicle of social, cultural, and intellectual empowerment. In multilingual nations like India, English plays a pivotal role not only as a second language but also as a link language that bridges linguistic diversity and facilitates access to global knowledge systems. Since the introduction of English during British colonial rule, it has evolved into the language of science, technology, commerce, higher education, and governance (Krishnaswamy & Burde, 2019). Proficiency in English today serves as a key determinant of academic success, employment opportunities, and social mobility, especially in a globalized economy (Kachru, 2006). Despite its growing importance, English language education in rural India remains a significant challenge. The teaching-learning process is hindered by multiple structural and pedagogical constraints. A majority of rural schools suffer from inadequate infrastructure, lack of language laboratories, limited access to technology, and scarcity of trained English teachers (Sharma, 2018; Nair, 2020). Teachers in these contexts are often

themselves products of vernacular-medium education, leading to low confidence and heavy dependence on rote learning and translation-based instruction rather than communicative or interactive approaches (Patel & Singh, 2022).

Furthermore, the home and community environments in rural settings provide very limited exposure to English. Students seldom hear or use English outside the classroom, unlike their urban counterparts who are frequently exposed to English through television, internet content, advertisements, and social interactions (Chakraborty & Sarmah, 2021). Consequently, learners in rural schools tend to view English as a foreign and examination-oriented subject, rather than as a living, functional language for communication and expression. This perception results in language anxiety, poor oral proficiency, and lack of motivation to learn English meaningfully (Roy, 2023). The gap between policy vision and classroom reality further complicates the problem. Although the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) emphasizes multilingualism, communicative competence, and the integration of digital tools in language teaching, its implementation in rural areas remains uneven. Teachers often lack adequate training in communicative language teaching (CLT), and schools do not have access to digital learning resources (Das, 2021). As a result, traditional grammar-translation and lecture-based pedagogies continue to dominate classrooms, producing passive learners with minimal communicative ability.

In this context, there is a pressing need to experiment with innovative teaching strategies—including activity-based learning, bilingual methods, and ICT-supported instruction—to make English learning more interactive, contextual, and enjoyable for rural learners. The present experimental study seeks to understand the challenges of English teaching in rural India and to evaluate whether such innovative pedagogical practices can enhance student performance, motivation, and confidence in using English as a communicative tool.

2. Review of Literature:

The teaching and learning of English in rural India have been the subject of extensive academic inquiry over the past two decades. Numerous studies have analyzed the pedagogical, sociolinguistic, infrastructural, and psychological barriers that hinder effective English language acquisition among rural learners. The review below synthesizes key findings from both Indian and international perspectives relevant to rural contexts.

2.1 Teacher Competence and Pedagogical Limitations

Sharma (2018) highlighted teacher incompetence, scarcity of teaching materials, and low student motivation as major barriers to English education in rural areas. Teachers often lack adequate training in communicative methodologies, relying instead on grammar-translation and rote learning techniques that fail to build real communicative skills. Similarly, Patel and Singh (2022) argued that the overemphasis on examination-oriented teaching suppresses creativity, critical thinking, and communicative competence. Kumar (2019) noted that many rural teachers possess limited fluency in English, which reduces their classroom confidence and results in over-dependence on the mother tongue for explanations. Jain and Prasad (2020) found that professional development opportunities for rural English teachers remain scarce, with most teachers unaware of modern approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Learning (TBL), or Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).

2.2 Learner Attitude and Motivation

Learners' perceptions of English significantly affect their learning outcomes. Nair (2020) emphasized that rural students view English as a "foreign subject," not as a practical communication skill, leading to passive learning attitudes. Sinha (2019) found that fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and absence of English-speaking environments contribute to language anxiety among rural learners. Further, Banu and Hassan (2021) discovered that motivation can improve when learning is contextualized to students' local realities such as using stories, folk songs, and local examples to teach English vocabulary and grammar. Thus, learner-centered and culturally sensitive pedagogy becomes essential for sustaining motivation.

2.3 Infrastructural and Technological Barriers

Infrastructure plays a crucial role in the quality of language education. Kaur and Gill (2018) observed that rural schools often lack basic facilities like libraries, audio-visual aids, and functional classrooms conducive to language learning. Das (2021) showed that integrating Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools such as digital storytelling, video lessons, and online exercises can significantly improve learner engagement even in low-resource environments. Similarly, Pandey and Sharma (2022) reported that simple ICT interventions, such as smartphone-based vocabulary quizzes and audio pronunciation guides, enhanced students' listening and speaking skills. However, digital integration is often hindered by poor internet connectivity, lack of electricity, and teachers' limited digital literacy (Raj & Devi, 2023).

2.4 Role of Mother Tongue and Bilingual Approaches

Language scholars increasingly advocate for bilingual and translanguaging strategies in rural classrooms. Roy (2023) demonstrated that combining English with regional languages helps rural learners relate new concepts to their familiar linguistic frameworks, thereby reducing cognitive load and language anxiety. Agnihotri (2018) argued that multilingualism is an asset rather than an obstacle, and teachers should use students' mother tongue strategically to scaffold English learning. Bhattacharya (2020) similarly found that bilingual instruction promotes better comprehension and retention among rural learners, especially in early stages of English acquisition. These studies collectively suggest that English teaching in India must respect the linguistic ecology of rural regions rather than imposing monolingual English practices.

2.5 Policy Framework and Implementation Gaps

At the policy level, the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) emphasizes multilingualism, experiential learning, and digital integration in education. Yet, its effective implementation in rural schools remains a major challenge. Choudhury (2021) noted that while NEP 2020 encourages communicative and technology-based English pedagogy, resource constraints and inadequate teacher training hinder its success. Mishra (2022) added that a disconnect often exists between curriculum design and classroom realities in rural contexts, leading to uneven learning outcomes.

2.6 Research Gaps Identified

Although numerous descriptive studies have examined the problems of rural English education, few have used experimental or quasi-experimental designs to test the effectiveness of innovative teaching practices. Most existing literature focuses on identifying barriers rather than empirically evaluating solutions. Hence, the present study fills this crucial gap by experimentally assessing the impact of activity-based, bilingual, and ICT-supported instructional methods on rural students' English achievement and motivation.

3. Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to explore and experimentally validate strategies that can improve the teaching and learning of English in rural India, where systemic challenges continue to limit language acquisition and communicative competence. Specifically, the objectives are as follows:

1. To identify the challenges faced by teachers and students in the teaching and learning of English in rural India. This includes infrastructural constraints, teacher competency issues, sociolinguistic barriers, and attitudinal problems among learners (Sharma, 2018; Nair, 2020; Joshi, 2023).
2. To design and implement an experimental teaching program that integrates activity-based, bilingual, and ICT-supported instructional methods aimed at fostering active participation, reducing language anxiety, and promoting meaningful learning (Das, 2021; Roy, 2023).
3. To measure the effectiveness of the innovative teaching methods in improving students' English achievement scores and their attitudes toward English learning compared to conventional teaching approaches (Patel & Singh, 2022; Sharma & Rao, 2023).
4. To formulate actionable recommendations for policymakers, teacher educators, and curriculum designers to improve the effectiveness of English teaching practices in rural schools.

The study thus not only evaluates the efficacy of pedagogical interventions but also seeks to create a scalable framework that can be replicated in other rural contexts across India.

4. Hypotheses:

Based on the objectives and theoretical underpinnings, the following hypotheses were framed:

H₀ (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant difference between the mean achievement scores of students taught using traditional methods and those taught using innovative, activity-based, bilingual methods.

H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis): Students exposed to innovative and interactive teaching methods show significantly higher achievement scores and more positive attitudes toward English learning than those taught through conventional methods.

5. Research Design:

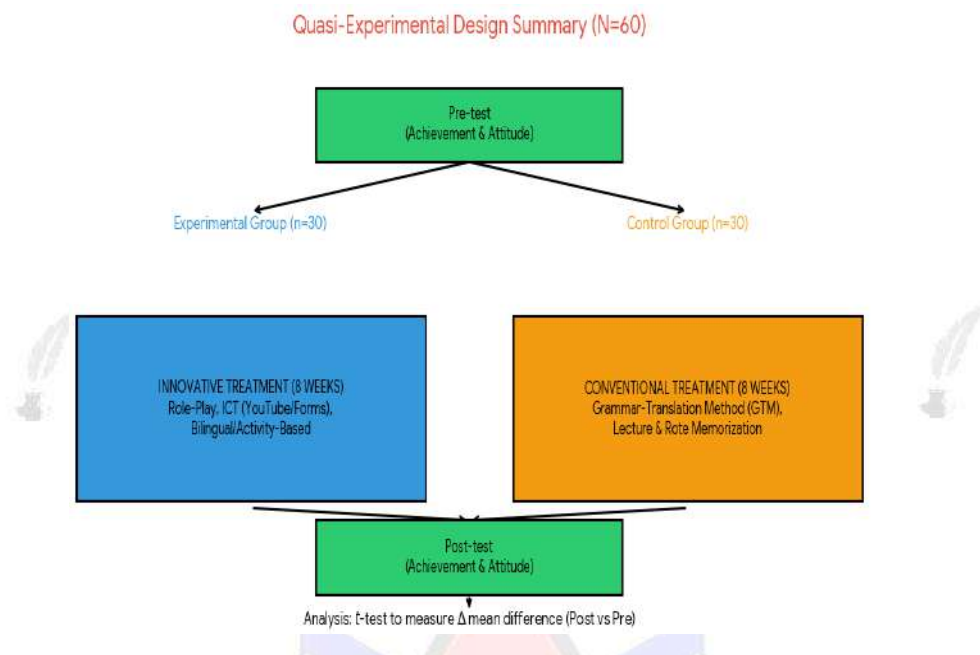


Figure 1 The diagram serves as an excellent visual abstract for the research article's methodology section.

5.1 Research Method

This study employed a quasi-experimental design, specifically the Pre-test and Post-test Control Group Design, which is suitable for educational settings where randomisation is limited (Best & Kahn, 2016). As above, **Figure 1** Both quantitative (achievement scores) and qualitative (observational and attitudinal) data were collected to triangulate findings and ensure robustness.

5.2 Population and Sample

The target population comprised secondary school students (Class IX) enrolled in government-run rural schools in Maharashtra, India. Two schools with comparable socio-economic and academic profiles were purposively selected. A total of 60 students participated in the study: Experimental Group (n = 30): Students from School A, taught using innovative methods. Control Group (n = 30): Students from School B, taught using conventional methods. Both schools had similar teacher qualifications, class sizes, and English syllabi prescribed by the State Board. This ensured the validity of comparisons made between the groups.

5.3 Tools for Data Collection

1. English Achievement Test: Designed and validated by the researcher with expert consultation. The test included reading comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar items aligned with the Class IX curriculum. The test's reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$) indicated internal consistency.
2. Observation Schedule: Used to record classroom interaction, participation rates, and teacher feedback patterns. Observations were conducted twice weekly during the intervention period.
3. Attitude Questionnaire: A five-point Likert scale questionnaire measured students' motivation, interest, and anxiety toward English learning, both pre- and post-intervention (adapted from Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery, 2004).

5.4 Experimental Treatment

The intervention spanned eight weeks, focusing on communicative competence and learner engagement. Control Group: Taught using the traditional Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) and lecture-based instruction emphasising rote memorisation and textbook exercises. Experimental Group: Engaged through innovative, activity-based, and bilingual strategies, including: Role plays, dialogues, and storytelling. Flashcards, visual aids, and mobile audio clips for pronunciation. Short skits and group discussions in bilingual format (English + Marathi). Use of low-cost ICT tools like YouTube educational videos and Google Forms quizzes. Bilingual grammar explanations to connect English concepts with native language understanding. This blended approach was designed to make English learning participatory and contextually relevant to rural learners.

5.5 Data Analysis Tools

Collected data were statistically analysed using mean, standard deviation (SD), and an independent sample t-test to determine the significance of mean differences between groups at the 0.05 and 0.01 confidence levels. Qualitative data were analysed thematically to supplement quantitative findings.

6. Results and Analysis:

6.1 Pre-test Analysis

The pre-test established baseline equivalence between the experimental and control groups. Independent t-test results indicated no significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups ($p > 0.05$), confirming that both groups started with comparable levels of English proficiency.

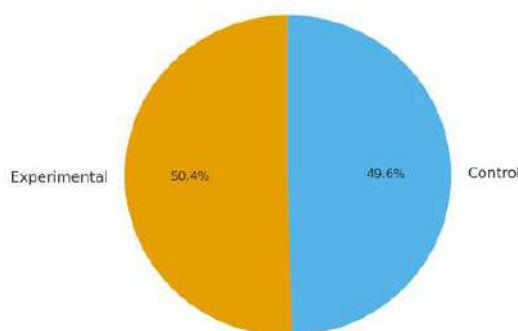
Group	Mean (Pre-test)	SD	t-value	Significance
Experimental	42.5	6.8	0.41	Not Significant
Control	41.9	7.1	—	—

6.2 Post-test Analysis

After eight weeks of instructional intervention, a post-test was administered to both groups. The results demonstrated a significant improvement in the experimental group's mean score compared to the control group, indicating the effectiveness of innovative methods.

Group	Mean (Pre-test)	Mean (Post-test)	Mean Gain	t-value	Significance Level
Experimental	42.5	71.2	+28.7	6.24	Significant ($p < 0.01$)
Control	41.9	54.3	+12.4	2.31	Not Significant

Pre-test Mean Scores Comparison between Experimental and Control Groups



The pie chart showing the comparison of pre-test mean scores between the Experimental and Control groups.

7. Discussion:

The findings support Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles, emphasising that language learning improves through interaction rather than passive memorisation. The bilingual approach proved effective in building conceptual clarity, as learners could easily relate new vocabulary and grammar rules to their native language context. Moreover, incorporating ICT tools even simple ones such as mobile phones and short English videos, greatly enhanced students' auditory learning and pronunciation. This aligns with constructivist theories (Piaget, Vygotsky), where learners actively construct meaning based on prior experiences.

However, the success of such methods depends heavily on teacher competency, availability of technological infrastructure, and institutional support. Teachers require ongoing professional development to effectively integrate these strategies.

8. Conclusion:

The experiment clearly demonstrates that teaching English in rural India can be transformed through creative, participatory, and bilingual approaches. Traditional rote-based and grammar-translation methods no longer meet the needs of rural learners who require exposure, motivation, and context-based understanding.

By adopting flexible and student-centred pedagogy supported by technology and local language integration, rural schools can significantly improve English learning outcomes. However, sustainable progress demands systemic reforms, including curriculum modernisation, teacher training, and government investment in educational technology.

9. Recommendations:

Enhancing English language teaching (ELT) in rural Indian schools requires a multifaceted approach. Teacher training through workshops on modern methodologies like Communicative Language Teaching, Task-Based Learning, and ICT integration is essential. Schools should be equipped with affordable digital tools, while textbooks should include local cultural references and practical communication tasks. Community initiatives, such as English clubs and storytelling circles, and low-cost "mini language labs" can strengthen speaking and listening skills. Government and NGO collaboration can reduce rural-urban disparities through funding and teacher incentives. Emphasizing formative assessments over rote exams further supports student learning. These

strategies are endorsed by the National Education Policy 2020, programs like Sampark Smart Shala and eVidyaloka, and research highlighting the need for context-specific technology integration in rural education.

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