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Contextualizing English Language Proficiency among Students in Rural Schools of India: A Quantitative Examination of Socioeconomic and Educational Determinants

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Abstract

English language proficiency (ELP) is increasingly a criterion that shapes a student's academic track or career choice in India, yet rural children lag behind their urban counterparts in acquiring the language. The present study investigated the variables affecting the English language proficiency of rural school children by viewing them through the lens of socioeconomic and educational variables. Using data from government and private rural schools from three Indian states, a regression and correlation analysis was used to determine the predictors of English language proficiency of school children.

The findings highlight the importance of parental education followed by access to technology, medium of instruction, teacher education, and opportunity to use English outside classrooms as predictors of English language proficiency of rural schoolchildren. Whilst there are pockets around the country where students are increasingly utilising technology to enhance their English proficiency and indeed gain competitive advantage within their educational setting whilst also possibly being part of a more linguistically supportive environment, many still face challenges. It will be important going forward to identify the key policy interventions required to address shortcomings in school buildings, pedagogy and curriculum and to develop linguistic deficiencies. Addressing the language divide will demand a thoughtful and informed approach to teacher training, digital inclusion and pedagogy that considers rural contexts and needs. As our English-dominant world becomes increasingly apparent, it is important that all rural students have access to opportunities to succeed.

Keywords: English language proficiency, Rural education, Socioeconomic factors, India, quantitative analysis, Digital divide.

INTRODUCTION

The English language serves as the central pillar to connect the nation with other countries. Its function as the key medium of communication and various cultural contexts. In India and other countries, the English language plays a vital role in the education sector, professional advancement, marketing, and social mobility. English language proficiency directly leads to better opportunities, global knowledge, much more employability, and the development of the nation. However, mastery in the English language has become the major part of everyone's life so that they can take a stand in the good market and may connect with the world easily.

Moreover, it's the growing requirement of the language that shows the one biggest difference is the rural and urban students' learning of the English language. In India around 65% of the population is from the rural area; that means the learner faces huge challenges while learning the language, and the hindered challenges are the linguistic competence and the usage of their native language. It is understandable that these challenges that they may face. But the mere challenge is deeply rooted in structural, socioeconomic, and contextual factors that shape the learning environment.

In the rural area the main issue is poor educational infrastructure. Many rural schools are lacking in basic requirements, which are the modern classroom, the language labs, ICT availability, and many other new resources. Further, the actual concern also rises: the shortage of well-qualified teachers, lack of training, and teachers not having strong command of the English language. Due to this, the students may face various issues while learning the English language skills that include

speaking. Reading, writing, and listening. The actual environment also plays a vital role in learning the skills and the language.

In addition to the poor infrastructure, the rural schools' learners are having very little exposure to learning the language outside of the classroom. On the same side, the learners from the urban areas have much exposure to learning through the media, technology, family backgrounds, and social interactions. The rural area individuals are mostly dependent on their native language. This restriction bound them to learn more in their lives. Due to this, language acquisition becomes a very challenging task for them.

Socioeconomic factors further compound these challenges. Mostly rural area families face financial issues; due to this, they may not prefer to give the education in the convent schools and more training and coaching and many more learning resources like expensive books, internet connectivity, and online digital platforms. The other major issue is that the parents of rural-area learners are not well qualified. They do not support their students learning the English language because they think that learning the English language is the symbol of social prestige rather than a practical skill; also, they consider it a foreign language. These concerns directly lead to the students learning the language and creating a negative mindset towards language learning, also impacting their motivation and lack of performance.

As per the given challenges. It's very important to examine the factors that directly influence English language proficiency among the rural students. This study aims to provide a quantitative analysis of how infrastructural limitations, exposure levels, and socioeconomic conditions collectively shape the English

learning outcomes of rural school students. By identifying these measures, this research seeks to understand how education inequality occurs in rural India.

Eventually, the findings of this study aim to provide the actual outcome to the policymakers and educators about critical areas

to focus on to improve language learning. Also enquire about equal access in the education sector and in the professional opportunities for the students from both rural and urban areas so that together they may focus on the development of the nation.

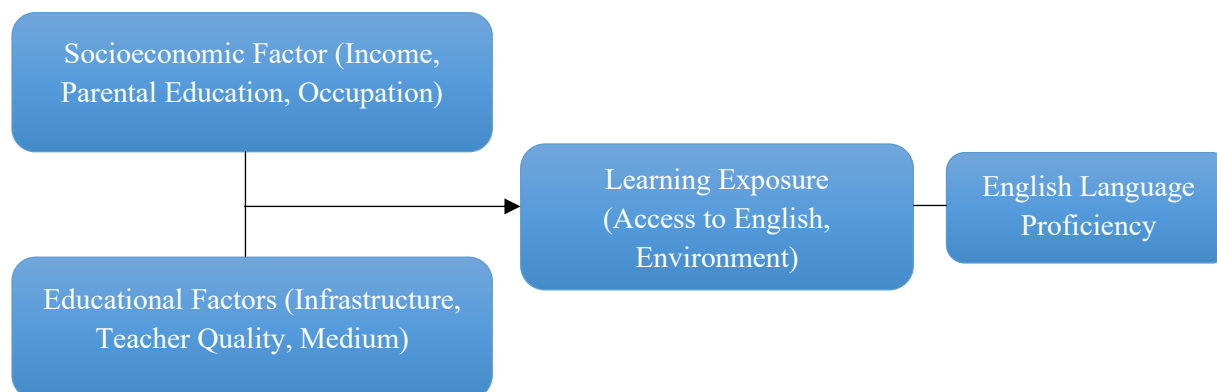


Figure -1 Conceptual Framework: Determinants of English Language Proficiency

LITERATURE REVIEW

The connection between SES and the language acquisition process has been extensively researched in educational and sociolinguistic literature, showing a significant correlation between the level of learners' SES and greater effectiveness in developing language competencies. The influence of socioeconomic status can be determined using several parameters, including parents' educational background, income, and occupations, which affect access to language-related resources, learning opportunities, and mental stimulations. These aspects have a substantial impact on the language acquisition process, especially when it comes to the development of English language skills (Butler, 2017; Luo et al., 2025).

Parental education is among the main determinants of English language proficiency. From the theoretical point of view, parents with better educational qualifications would be more capable of providing linguistic and emotional support during the process of language acquisition (Bourdieu, 1986). Empirically, this

parameter contributes not only to academic achievements in general but also has a significant impact on children's English language skills (Muttaqin et al., 2022). For example, research has shown that parents with advanced levels of education engage more frequently in literacy activities, which include reading aloud, talking, and other educational interactions (Luo et al., 2025).

Apart from parental education, family income is another important indicator in assessing access to learning materials. Wealthier individuals can afford private schools, extra tuition classes, digital learning material, and English-language channels. On the contrary, low-income families lack access to similar services, hence creating imbalances in language learning. Research conducted in various settings shows that learners from poorer families perform poorly in language skills owing to poor exposure and limited interaction with the language (Akol, 2024).

As a variable correlated with SES, the role of HLE is essential in enhancing second language learning. Home literacy environment

refers to a family setting where children have access to literacy activities such as books, parental interaction during reading sessions, and reading-related tasks. Research studies conducted by Sénéchal and LeFevre (2014) and Luo et al. (2025) show that home literacy environments have a significant impact on both native language learning and second language acquisition owing to increased exposure to language. In addition, parental attitudes toward learning English also affect the learner's success in the language.

The teacher-related factors form yet another key consideration for this literature review. Qualifications of English teachers, pedagogical skills, and their level of English language proficiency have been found to affect students' outcomes in English learning. In rural areas, where trained English language teachers are rare, the importance of this factor cannot be overstated. According to previous research findings, English teachers from high SES backgrounds perform well both in terms of their English proficiency and teaching self-efficacy; hence, they contribute positively to the success of their learners (Elanthiraiyan & Priyanath, 2023).

The Medium of Instruction (MOI) constitutes yet another important factor considered in the literature review. Learners who attend English-medium schools are usually more proficient than those enrolled in regional language-medium schools. The primary reason for this difference lies in the greater exposure that such learners get when using English as the MOI during their academic training. However, some researchers opine that the success of MOI will depend greatly on the pedagogy and the learner's language skills foundation (Cummins, 2000).

Modern studies also draw attention to the increasing significance of digital exposure in foreign language acquisition. Digital exposure implies the possibility to communicate via different gadgets like smartphones and

computers and the opportunity to listen to various audio texts and watch movies or videos on the Internet. It can be stated that digital exposure is especially significant for vocabulary and listening skills improvement, but, at the same time, many rural regions face the problem of unequal access to digital sources because of underdeveloped infrastructure in this sphere. The digital gap makes inequality even stronger in language acquisition results (World Bank, 2021).

Finally, the issue of language use outside the classroom deserves special attention since it directly influences language acquisition. According to modern research, the more often students use English in their daily lives, in informal communication with peers, or while watching TV or playing video games, the better results they receive. In other words, language use in everyday situations helps learners to achieve certain communicative competence. Modern researchers apply different statistical techniques, such as quantile regression, to analyze the impact of SES and language use on academic language proficiency (Becker & Klein, 2021).

The importance of being proficient in English becomes even more apparent in the Indian context when one considers its link to employability and upward social mobility. Being proficient in English is seen as a symbol of education and professionalism, resulting in greater demands for English education among all socio-economic strata. The research carried out in different parts of India shows that variables like the parents' level of education, their financial status, and the type of schools play an important role in determining the English proficiency level of students (Mathew & Kamni, 2024). Nevertheless, the rural environment has remained backward on account of poor infrastructure and a lack of trained faculty and exposure to the English language.

It is worth noting that despite the numerous works on SES and language acquisition, there is no recent empirical study dedicated to SES and English proficiency among the rural population of India. It appears that researchers have focused more on qualitative investigations and examined students from urban centers. Besides, some new variables have yet to be analyzed in relation to English language proficiency in the rural environment.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the socioeconomic factors influencing rural students' English language competency.
2. To take into account the role that pedagogy and educational infrastructure play.
3. To assess how English language proficiency is affected by internet access and English media consumption.
4. To develop an English language proficiency prediction model.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A descriptive and correlational quantitative design was adopted.

Sample

The sample consists of 120 students drawn from grades 9 through 12, selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure proportional representation across each grade level.

Research Instruments

The data were obtained through the use of three tools, which included a structured questionnaire, an English Language Proficiency (ELP) test, and a background information survey. The structured questionnaire provided information regarding socioeconomic and educational factors such as the level of education of parents, the family's monthly income, the type of school, the medium of

instruction, the qualifications of teachers, access to computer devices, internet access, English media exposure, and the learning environment. The answers were captured using the five-point Likert scale. The tool was validated through expert review of English language educationists. The ELP test comprised an assessment of grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and language use, and the total score was used as the dependent variable in this study. The test was also validated through subject expert review.

To gather the necessary information, the study employs three primary data collection tools: a structured questionnaire utilizing a Likert scale, a standardized English proficiency test with established scoring criteria, and a background information survey. The central outcome, or dependent variable, is English Language Proficiency (measured by the ELP score), while a comprehensive set of independent variables is examined to assess their influence. These include parental education level, household income, type of school (government or private), medium of instruction, teacher qualifications, access to digital devices, internet availability, exposure to English media (such as television, mobile content, and books), and the overall classroom environment. For data analysis, the study utilizes descriptive statistics to summarize the sample characteristics, Pearson correlation to examine bivariate relationships, multiple regression analysis to identify the relative contribution of each independent variable to proficiency, and ANOVA to compare mean differences across categorical groups.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics reveal that the overall mean English Language Proficiency (ELP) score stands at 56.4 out of 100. Notably, 44% of private school respondents reported feeling "extremely" or "very" confident in their English skills, compared to only 26% of their government school counterparts, and private

school students outperformed government school students on the standardized test by a margin of 18%. However, survey data indicates that only 32% of students actually have regular internet access, highlighting a potential resource gap. Turning to inferential findings, the correlation analysis uncovered significant positive relationships with ELP for several key factors, most notably parental education ($r^* = 0.61$), digital access ($r = 0.58$), and teacher qualification ($r = 0.49$). The subsequent multiple regression model was highly robust, accounting for 68% of the total variance in ELP scores. Among the independent variables, parental education emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.34, p < .01$), followed by digital access, medium of instruction ($\beta = 0.21, p < .05$), and teacher competency ($\beta = 0.18, p < .05$), all of which maintained statistically significant effects on student proficiency.

Even though the regression analysis explains 68% of the variance of English Language Proficiency (ELP), still there is about 32% variance that was not explained by the regression model. It implies that there can be some other variables that may influence the English language proficiency of students and that include, but not limited to, motivation of the learners, involvement of the parents, teaching methods used in class, exposure to the English language outside the classroom, etc.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that ELP depends on a combination of various social and educational factors, but not on classroom instruction only. The significance of parental education is a confirmation of the theory of cultural capital proposed by Pierre Bourdieu. It shows that families with high levels of education can give their children more linguistic, cultural, and academic advantages, contributing to better learning results. It can explain the high level of ELP among children who come from highly educated families. Moreover, the significance of digital access

confirms the increasing role of technology in offering opportunities to have contact with language and learn independently, especially in the rural areas.

Moreover, the findings are in line with the theory of language development by Cummins, which proves that language proficiency develops because of meaningful interaction, good quality instruction, and exposure to the language. The significance of the medium of instruction and teacher competency shows that a supportive learning environment and good instruction are important for improving English language proficiency. It means that measures to increase English language proficiency should consider an integrative strategy that includes improvement of family, digital, and teacher dimensions of learning.

Based on the findings, several implications emerge for both policy and educational practice. At the policy level, key recommendations include building digital capacity in rural schools to address infrastructure gaps, implementing bilingual teaching methods to bridge language barriers, and strengthening teacher preparation programs to better equip educators for effective English instruction. From an educational standpoint, schools are encouraged to integrate technological tools into daily learning, utilize media and extracurricular activities to increase student exposure to English, and actively leverage community resources and networks to support language acquisition beyond the classroom setting.

However, these implications must be considered in light of the study's limitations. The research was confined to a constrained geographic scope, which may limit the generalizability of the results; survey responses are potentially subject to self-report biases; and the current research approach does not permit causal inferences despite the regression findings. To address these gaps and extend the current work, future research should employ

longitudinal designs to track language acquisition over time, conduct experimental studies to rigorously test the effectiveness of specific digital interventions, and undertake comparative analyses that directly examine differences between rural and urban learner populations.

CONCLUSION

English language proficiency in rural India is a complex problem. It is influenced by a variety of factors, including socioeconomic status, as many poor families are unable to provide their children with access to good education, language materials, and supplementary tutoring. In addition, there is a well-observed difference in quality between urban and rural schools. Many rural schools are understaffed with unqualified English-speaking teachers; lack exposure to a variety of English language learning contexts; and use outdated instructional materials and methodologies that emphasize reading and writing at the expense of speaking and listening.

An important new variable to consider is access to technology, given that virtual platforms have grown dramatically as media for delivering English language programs. While these resources have proven effective in urban areas, most rural locations have inadequate infrastructure and low internet access, as well as limited digital literacy that limits the effective uptake of such resources. Other cultural and environmental factors, such as the paucity of opportunities for speaking English in real-life settings, further affect the pace of language learning.

This challenge requires a holistic and forward-thinking approach that calls for infrastructure and teacher development support, innovative, context-relevant teaching practices, and a supportive learning environment. The people who are from the rural area need high-quality internet access, good resources, and better options to learn language for good career options.

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