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## Challenges of Teaching and Learning English in Rural Areas of Rajkot District

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### Abstract

This study focuses on the challenges faced in learning and teaching English in rural schools of Rajkot district of Gujarat. In the case of Gujarat, the rural students' incompetence in English and their fear around it is a well-known fact. The students in rural areas still struggle to learn it effectively. The main aim of this research is to understand the problems faced by both students and teachers and to find possible ways to improve the situation.

The study is based on a survey method, using questionnaires given to 52 students and 47 teachers from rural schools. The findings show that students face several difficulties such as lack of confidence, fear of speaking in English, limited vocabulary, and very little exposure to English outside the classroom. Most students use their mother tongue in daily life, which makes it harder for them to practice English.

Teachers also face challenges like large class sizes, limited teaching resources, and lack of proper training in modern teaching methods. In many classrooms, English is still taught through translation and memorization instead of practical use and communication.

The study also highlights that family background, lack of exposure to English at home, and, as a result, students develop a grudge against it. Overall, the research suggests that better teaching methods, more opportunities for practice, and a supportive environment can help improve English learning in rural areas.

Keywords: Communication, pedagogy, syllabus, textbooks, learning, comprehension, proficiency.

## INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world, English has emerged as one of the most influential languages for global communication. It is widely used in higher education, research, technology, business, and

international interaction. For many learners, proficiency in English opens doors to better employment, academic opportunities, and access to global knowledge. Reports by organizations such as UNESCO highlight that language skills, especially English, often contribute to educational advancement and social mobility in developing countries. In the Indian context, English functions not only as an academic subject but also as a link language connecting people from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Educational frameworks developed by institutions like NCERT emphasize communicative competence and functional use of English in classrooms. Policies also recognize the importance of English for participation in the global economy.

However, despite its recognized importance, the outcomes of English education remain uneven across different regions of the country. A significant portion of India's population lives in rural areas, where access to quality educational resources is often limited. According to data from the Census of India, rural communities continue to face disparities in infrastructure, technological access, and teacher availability. These disparities are reflected in language education as well. Surveys conducted by the ASER Centre consistently indicate that many rural students struggle to read and understand basic English texts even after several years of schooling. This suggests that the issue is not merely curriculum design but the conditions under which teaching and learning take place. In many rural classrooms, English is often taught through translation and memorization rather than meaningful communication. Students rarely encounter English outside the classroom, which limits their exposure and confidence in using the language. Fear of making mistakes, influence of the mother tongue, lack of pronunciation practice, and insufficient teaching materials further complicate the learning process.

Teachers too face multiple challenges, including large class sizes, limited training in language pedagogy, and pressure to complete syllabus within timelines. Considering these realities, the present study seeks to examine the challenges involved in learning and teaching English in rural educational settings. It focuses on understanding how classroom practices, socio-economic factors, and linguistic environments influence students' ability to acquire English language skills. By identifying the major obstacles faced by both teachers and learners, the study aims to contribute to improved teaching strategies and more inclusive language education practices. Beyond structural limitations, the issue of English learning in rural areas is also deeply connected with social and psychological factors. In many rural communities, English is perceived as a difficult and elite language associated with urban life and higher social status. This perception often creates a sense of distance and fear among students, making them hesitant to participate actively in English classrooms. Learners tend to avoid speaking English due to fear of ridicule, correction, or failure, which ultimately reduces opportunities for practice and confidence building.

As a result, classroom interaction is often limited, and students are encouraged to memorize textbook answers instead of developing listening and speaking skills. Empirical surveys like those conducted by the ASER Centre continue to highlight gaps between expected learning levels and actual student performance in rural schools. These findings indicate that improving English education in such contexts requires not only curriculum reform but also teacher support, community awareness, and context-sensitive pedagogical strategies. In this broader framework, the present study attempts to understand English language education in rural areas not merely as a linguistic issue but as a socio-educational challenge shaped by environment, resources, attitudes, and teaching practices. By examining these interconnected factors, the research seeks to offer insights that may support more equitable and effective English learning opportunities for rural students.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study aims to investigate the challenges involved in teaching and learning English in rural schools of the Rajkot district, Gujarat. The objectives are:

- To identify the major difficulties faced by rural students in learning English.

- To examine the challenges experienced by teachers while teaching English in rural classrooms.
- To analyse how infrastructural conditions and classroom environments influence English learning.
- To compare the teaching-learning situation of English in government and private rural schools.
- To study learners' attitudes, confidence, and participation in English language activities.
- To suggest strategies that may improve English teaching and learning outcomes in rural contexts.

In the present study, the descriptive survey method was selected. The area of the study included rural schools located in Rajkot district of Gujarat. Rajkot district comprises several rural regions where educational institutions operate under varying socio-economic and infrastructural conditions.

### **Sample of the Study**

The study comprised 99 participants, including 52 students and 47 teachers from rural schools in Rajkot district, Gujarat, India. The inclusion of both students and teachers enabled the study to examine the teaching and learning of English from complementary learner and teacher perspectives. The participants were selected from approximately 25–30 government and private schools located in rural areas of Rajkot district. Including schools from both sectors provided a broader representation of institutional contexts and educational conditions within rural settings. The student participants contributed perspectives on their experiences and challenges in learning English, while the teacher participants provided insights into instructional practices, classroom challenges, and the factors affecting English language teaching in rural schools. The inclusion of participants from multiple schools and different institutional settings therefore provided a broader empirical basis for examining the challenges associated with teaching and learning English in rural areas of Rajkot district.

### **Tools for Data Collection**

Data were collected using two structured questionnaires developed specifically for the study: a 32-item questionnaire administered to students and a 23-item questionnaire administered to teachers. The instruments were designed to obtain information on the difficulties encountered by students in learning English, challenges experienced by teachers in teaching English, classroom environments and instructional practices, students' attitudes and confidence in using English, and the availability of learning resources and opportunities for exposure to English. The questionnaires comprised both objective and opinion-based items to capture participants' experiences and perceptions regarding English language teaching and learning in rural schools. The questionnaires were administered electronically through Google Forms, which facilitated standardized distribution, response collection, and organization of the data for subsequent analysis.

### **METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS**

The collected data was analysed using the percentage method and descriptive interpretation with the assistance of an AI-based analysis method. The responses obtained from the questionnaires were first organised in tabular form.

Tables and charts were used to present the data in a clear and systematic manner. The percentage method helped in identifying patterns and determining the proportion of respondents who reported challenges or experiences.

Descriptive interpretation was then used to explain the meaning of the data and to relate the findings to the objectives of the study. This method allowed the researchers to interpret the responses and identify the major issues associated with English language teaching and learning in rural schools.

## MAJOR FINDINGS

### Teacher Profile and School Context

The findings indicate that the majority of teacher respondents were permanent teachers employed in government, grant-in-aid, or self-financed schools. Most respondents were teaching in Gujarati-medium institutions, reflecting the predominant instructional context of rural schools in Rajkot district.

### Availability of Teaching and Learning Resources

Prescribed textbooks were reported by 68.1% of respondents, indicating their widespread availability across the participating schools. Digital teaching facilities were also relatively common, with 66.0% of teachers reporting access to projectors or smart boards and 53.2% reporting access to computers or laptops. However, the availability of technological infrastructure does not necessarily indicate its regular or pedagogically purposeful integration into English language teaching. Access to supplementary English-language resources was comparatively limited. Only 23.4% of respondents reported access to libraries containing English books, while 38.3% reported access to audio CDs or recordings that could support listening activities.

### Class Size and Instructional Context

The distribution of class sizes revealed substantial variation in the instructional settings reported by teachers. While 14.9% of respondents taught classes with fewer than 20 students, 27.7% reported class sizes of 20–30 students. A considerable proportion (38.3%) taught classes with more than 40 students, including 8.5% who reported teaching classes exceeding 60 students. The prevalence of larger classes may have implications for the implementation of interactive, individualized, and communicative approaches to English language instruction.

### Skill-Specific Teaching Challenges

Teachers' perceived difficulties in teaching individual language skills were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not difficult) to 5 (extremely difficult). In addition, respondents identified specific instructional challenges using multiple-response items. The resulting difficulty ratings provide an indication of the relative challenges associated with teaching different English language skills, while the multiple-response items identify specific factors contributing to these difficulties. The detailed results are presented in Table 4.19.

Table .1: Mean Difficulty Ratings for Teaching Language Skills

| Language Skill | Mean Difficulty (1–5) | Rank               |
|----------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Speaking       | 3.15                  | 1 (Most Difficult) |
| Vocabulary     | 2.94                  | 2                  |
| Writing        | 2.89                  | 3                  |
| Listening      | 2.85                  | 4 (tied)           |
| Reading        | 2.85                  | 4 (tied)           |
| Grammar        | Bimodal*              | N/A                |

*\* Note on Grammar Item: The grammar difficulty question yielded an anomalous bimodal distribution: 63.8% (n=30) selected '1 Not difficult' and 36.2% (n=17) selected '55 Extremely difficult.' No intermediate scores were recorded. This binary polarisation suggests that the questionnaire response format for this item may have elicited extreme responses rather than nuanced gradations. The findings are reported as observed; interpretations should be made with this data quality caveat in mind.*

From the perspective of students, English created much difficulties. In major cases the lack of proper exposure and difficulties at approaching it through the skills stood as the challenge.

### Most Difficult Language Skill

Table 2 presents the single most difficult skill as identified by each student. Speaking overwhelmingly dominates (n=28, 54.9%), consistent with the mean difficulty scores and qualitative challenge data. 'All skills equally difficult' was selected by 15.7% (n=8), suggesting a cohort with pervasive and undifferentiated English difficulty. Reading (13.7%), Writing (5.9%), and Listening (3.9%) follow, with the absence of any student reporting Vocabulary or Grammar as the single most difficult item consistent with the relatively higher mean self-ratings for these dimensions.

Table 2: Most Difficult Language Skill (Single Selection, N=51)

| Most Difficult Skill  | n  | % of Students |
|-----------------------|----|---------------|
| Speaking              | 28 | 54.9          |
| All equally difficult | 8  | 15.7          |
| Reading               | 7  | 13.7          |
| Writing               | 3  | 5.9           |
| Listening             | 2  | 3.9           |
| Not specified / Other | 3  | 5.9           |
| Total                 | 51 | 100.0         |

### CONCLUSION

This paper set out to investigate the challenges in learning and teaching English in rural schools of Rajkot District, Gujarat, through a descriptive survey study drawing on primary data from 47 teachers and 51 students. The primary research question is: What are the major challenges in rural English education in Rajkot District? can now be answered with empirical specificity.

The central finding is that speaking is the dominant, most universally experienced challenge: for students, it is the hardest skill (identified by 54.9%); for teachers, student fear and hesitation is the most frequently cited obstacle (66.0%); and for the system as a whole, speaking competence is the most structurally under supported skill, crowded out by examination preparation and absent from the community environment. This oral incompetence is not a failure of individual learners or individual teachers but a systemic outcome produced by the convergence of a Gujarati medium educational environment, examination-driven pedagogy, underqualified English teachers, resource constraints, and a community context in which English holds no day-to-day functional presence.

The study's secondary findings reinforce this systemic analysis. A significant and consistent government-private school disparity exists across all measured dimensions: difficulty ratings, student proficiency baselines, infrastructure quality, and student attitudinal profiles, demonstrating that within-rural variation is as important as urban-rural variation in understanding English education inequity in Gujarat. The nonspecialist English teacher problem (78.7% of teachers without exclusive English appointment; 66.0% without additional ELT certification) constitutes a human capital deficit that no amount of equipment provision or curriculum reform can compensate for. The exam-centricity of rural classrooms structurally displaces communicative learning, and the near-total absence of English from the home and community environment makes the classroom the sole and often insufficient site of English acquisition.

Yet the study also uncovers grounds for genuine optimism. Rural learners demonstrate powerful motivational capital: 62.7% regard English as highly important for their future, 52.9% are strongly motivated to improve, and their primary aspirations to communicate broadly, access employment, and pursue higher education are precisely the domains in which English competence is most enabling. Students know what they need: more speaking practice (39.2%), more listening activities

(31.4%), and more reading practice (29.4%). Their preferences align with both their greatest challenges and with the communicative methodology that the research literature consistently endorses. The gap is not between learner aspiration and effective pedagogy in the abstract; the gap is between learner aspiration and what the current institutional system provides.

Bridging that gap requires action at multiple levels simultaneously: teacher professional development, assessment reform, curriculum reprioritisation, community engagement, and targeted infrastructure investment. The six recommendations advanced in Chapter 6 are designed to be contextually feasible, calibrated to the resource realities of rural Gujarat, and evidence-grounded in the specific challenges documented in this study.

The present research is, necessarily, a first step. The descriptive, cross-sectional survey design provides a map of the terrain but not a longitudinal account of how it evolves, nor an experimental account of what interventions are most effective. Future research directions should include: (a) longitudinal tracking of English proficiency gains following targeted interventions; (b) classroom observation studies to triangulate self-reported practices with actual instructional behaviour; (c) structured English proficiency testing alongside attitudinal questionnaires to correlate subjective experience with objective performance; and (d) qualitative in depth interviews with teachers and students to add depth and nuance to the patterns identified here.

The rural schools of Rajkot District and the students within them deserve an English education commensurate with their aspirations and their potential. This dissertation is offered as one contribution toward the evidence base needed to bring that aspiration closer to institutional reality.

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