



Teaching English in Rural Maharashtra: Challenges and Solutions

¹Quazi Zubair Akhter Shakiruddin, ²Dr. Amardeep Prakashrao Asolkar, ³Dr. John Chelladurai

¹Research Scholar, Department of Education, MGM University, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar (Aurangabad), Maharashtra, India

²Assistant Professor, Department of Education, MGM University, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar (Aurangabad), Maharashtra, India

³Research Guide, Dean, Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, MGM University, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar (Aurangabad), Maharashtra, India

Abstract

English has become an essential part of modern life in Maharashtra, serving as a key to better education, employment and social mobility. However, while urban students benefit from constant exposure to English through media, technology and interactive learning environments, rural students continue to face significant challenges in acquiring the language. This paper explores the various factors that contribute to this disparity, including limited exposure, inadequate resources, outdated teaching methods and lack of proper training for rural teachers. It highlights how traditional grammar-based instruction, poor infrastructure, and minimal digital access hinder both teachers and learners from effectively engaging with English as a functional, communicative language.

The study also presents simple and practical solutions to improve English teaching and learning in rural Maharashtra. It emphasizes the importance of regular teacher training, digital literacy, better classroom facilities and the inclusion of interactive methods such as games, role plays, and storytelling. By encouraging teachers to adopt communicative practices and by motivating students through engaging, real-life use of English, the gap between urban and rural education can be narrowed. Ultimately the paper argues that empowering rural teachers with the right tools, training, and motivation will lead to a generation of confident English speakers who can participate more fully in an increasingly globalized world.

Key Words: English Language Learning, Rural Maharashtra, Teacher Training, Digital Divide, Traditional vs. Modern Teaching Methods, Functional English, Educational Inequality, Interactive Learning, Student Motivation, Resource Limitations, Continuous Professional Development (CPD), Innovative Teaching Techniques.

I) Introduction: English Learning in Rural Maharashtra:

In recent times English has become a part of everyday life for many people in Maharashtra state. Whether it's for getting a good job, watching television, using mobile phones or browsing the internet, English is everywhere. People now see English not just as a language of the cream, but as a useful skill that can improve their lifestyle and social



standing.

However, this change is mostly seen in cities and bigger towns. In rural areas of Maharashtra, where a large part of the population lives, English learning is still very slow and limited. Students in villages often don't get the same exposure or opportunities as those in urban areas. This difference creates a gap in learning and can lead to unequal chances in jobs and income later in life.

To address this issue schools of Marathi medium and English medium have started changing the way English is taught. Instead of focusing only on grammar and writing, the innovative method encourages students to speak and listen in English and this is called "functional English." It's a positive move but it brings new challenges especially for teachers in rural schools. Many of them were trained in the traditional system and now find it difficult to teach English in this modern practical way.

II) Reasons Why Urban Students Learn English Faster than Rural:

In urban areas, children are surrounded by English in their daily lives. From the moment they wake up, they hear English words on television, in advertisements, and even in casual conversations. Many families in cities own smartphones and have access to the internet, which opens the door to a world full of English content, YouTube videos, mobile apps, online games, and social media platforms. These tools naturally expose children to spoken and written English, helping them pick up new words, phrases, and sentence structures without even realizing they are learning.

Urban students often watch English cartoons, movies, and educational programs. They listen to English songs and follow influencers who speak in English. This constant exposure makes them more comfortable with the language. They begin to understand how English sounds pronounced, how sentences are structured, and how to use the language in real-life situations. Over time this builds their confidence and fluency.

In contrast students in rural areas such as those in villages across Maharashtra do not have the same level of access. Many families may not own smartphones or have internet connections. Television channels in rural homes are often in local languages like Marathi or Hindi. English content is rare and even when available children may not understand it due to lack of guidance and practice.

Because of this limited exposure rural students miss out on the natural learning that city children experience. They don't hear English often and they don't get many chances to use it outside the classroom. As a result, their progress in learning English is slower and they may feel less confident when trying to speak or understand the language.

III) Challenges Faced by Rural English Teachers:

1) Teachers' Own Practice:

One of the biggest hurdles in improving English education in rural Maharashtra is the background of the teachers themselves. Most village schools use Marathi or other local languages as the medium of instruction. English is taught as a subject but not used in everyday classroom communication. As a result, even the teachers who are responsible for teaching English often have limited fluency in the language.



Many rural teachers are simply unaware that such training sessions exist. Information about these programs doesn't always reach smaller schools especially those in tribal or interior areas. Even when teachers do hear about them but attending becomes a struggle. Traveling to the city requires time, money and planning resources that village schools and teachers often lack.

Another problem is the shortage of staff in rural schools. Most schools operate with just a few teachers who handle multiple subjects. If one teacher leaves for training, it disrupts the entire school routine. Classes may be left unattended and students lose valuable learning time. Because of this, school principals hesitate to send teachers away even if the training could benefit them in the long run.

As a result, rural teachers miss out on opportunities to learn modern teaching techniques especially those related to functional English. They continue using outdated methods not because they don't want to improve but because the system doesn't make it easy for them to do so.

4)Low Motivation in Rural English Education:

Motivation plays a big role in learning any language especially English. But in many villages across Maharashtra, both students and teachers often struggle with low motivation which affects the quality of education.

For students, the problem begins at home. Many students come from poor families where survival and daily needs take priority over education. These children may not understand how learning English could help them in the future. Since they don't see the immediate benefit, they often skip English classes or show little interest in learning. This lack of enthusiasm makes it harder for teachers to keep them engaged.

Parents are usually not in a position to support their children's education. Many are illiterate and have never been to school themselves. They cannot help with homework or encourage their children to study. In some cases, they may even feel that learning English is unnecessary or too difficult especially when their own lives revolve around local languages like Marathi.

The school environment adds to the challenge. Buildings are often small, with cramped classrooms and broken furniture. There's hardly any space for group activities or interactive learning. Teachers want to try new methods like role play or group discussions but the physical setup doesn't allow it.

Modern tools like audio-visual aids, projectors, or language labs are missing in most rural schools. These tools can make English learning fun and effective but without them lessons become dull and repetitive. Even teachers who are trained in using such tools find themselves unable to apply what they've learned.

Teachers themselves face many difficulties. There are no rewards, promotions, or recognition for good performance. This makes teachers feel stuck in their jobs with little hope for growth or improvement.



All these factors student disinterest, lack of parental support, poor infrastructure and low teacher morale combine to create a learning environment where motivation is hard to find. Without motivation, even the best teaching methods can fail to make an impact.

IV) Language Specific Problems Faced by Students in Rural Maharashtra:

Learning to speak English is not just about knowing grammar or memorizing words, it's about using the language confidently in real life. But for many students in rural Maharashtra, this is a big challenge. Their struggles are not only academic but also emotional and social.

One of the most common issues is pronunciation. Because students grow up speaking Marathi or other local languages, their accent and speech patterns influence how they pronounce English words. For example, they might say "school" as "iskool" or "vegetable" as "vejtable." These mistakes happen naturally, but without correction and practice, they become habits.

Another major problem is shyness. Many students feel nervous or scared to speak English in front of others. They worry about making mistakes or being laughed at. Sadly, this fear is often real some classmates do tease or mock those who try to speak English. This lowers the student's confidence and makes them avoid speaking altogether.

Vocabulary is another hurdle. Students simply don't know enough English words to express themselves. They may understand what they want to say in Marathi but struggle to find the right words in English. This leads to confusion, especially when forming sentences. They mix up word order or use incorrect grammar which makes their speech unclear.

Thinking in their mother tongue is also a barrier. Before speaking in English, students mentally translate from Marathi. This takes time and causes long pauses while speaking. These pauses break their flow and make conversations feel disconnected. It also makes them feel embarrassed which further reduces their willingness to speak.

Encouragement from teachers and parents is very important but often missing. If teachers don't motivate students or give them chances to speak, and if parents don't show interest in their child's English learning, students lose hope. They begin to feel that English is too difficult or not useful for their future.

Time is another issue. In many rural schools, English is taught for only a short period each day. This gives students very little opportunity to practice speaking. Most of the time is spent reading, writing, and speaking activities are ignored.

Lastly, there are hardly any fun or physical activities like role play, drama, or language games that make learning enjoyable. These activities help students use English in a natural and playful way but they are missing in most village schools due to lack of space, materials trained teachers.

Together, these problems create a tough environment for students. They want to learn English but the system doesn't support them enough. With the right guidance, encouragement and opportunities, these challenges can be overcome.

V) Simple and Practical Solutions for Teachers in Rural Maharashtra:



Improving English education in rural areas doesn't always require expensive technology or large-scale reforms. While some changes may need long-term investment, many helpful steps can be taken right away to support teachers and make a real difference in the classroom.

1) Regular Training for Village English Teachers:

One of the most effective ways to help rural teachers is to organize regular training sessions focused on modern English teaching methods. These sessions should be held in nearby towns or even within village clusters so that teachers don't have to travel far. Training should include practical demonstrations, simple classroom activities, and ways to teach speaking and listening skills. When teachers feel supported and updated, they become more confident and creative in their teaching.

2) Computer and Internet Skills:

In today's digital world knowing how to use a computer and the internet is essential for teachers. Training programs should include basic computer literacy how to use a keyboard, browse websites, watch teaching videos, and download materials. This will help teachers access free online resources, join virtual workshops and stay connected with other educators. Even simple skills like typing and using educational apps can open new doors for teaching English.

3) Offline Learning Materials:

Since internet access is still limited in many villages, teachers can be given preloaded materials on pen drives or CDs. These can include videos, worksheets, audio lessons and sample activities. Teachers can use these resources anytime even without an internet connection. It's a simple way to bring high-quality content into classrooms that lack digital infrastructure.

4) Better Classroom Furniture:

Group activities like role play, storytelling, and speaking games require space and flexibility. In many village schools, classrooms are cramped and furniture is old or broken. Improving classroom furniture adding movable benches, chairs, and tables can help students sit in circles or small groups. This encourages interaction and makes English learning lively and engaging.

5) Appointing More English Teachers:

To ensure proper attention to English learning, every rural school should have at least two trained English teachers. This allows for better planning, shared responsibilities, and more time for students to practice speaking. When one teacher is busy or absent the other can continue the lessons without interruption. It also helps in organizing group activities and managing large classes more effectively.

6) Support for Unrecognized School Teachers:

Many teachers in unrecognized or private village schools work without proper pay or support. Yet they play a vital role in educating children in remote areas. These teachers should be included in government training programs and given financial assistance.



Recognizing their efforts and providing them with resources will improve the overall quality of English education in rural Maharashtra.

VI) Simple and Practical Solutions for Students in Rural Maharashtra:

Helping students in rural areas learn English doesn't always require expensive tools or advanced technology. With the right classroom practices and a supportive environment, students can begin to speak English with confidence and joy. The following are some simple and powerful ways to make that happen.

1) Let Students Speak More:

In many classrooms teachers do most of the talking while students quietly listen. But when it comes to learning a language, speaking is key. Teachers should reduce their own talk time and give students more chances to speak. Whether it's answering questions, sharing stories, or describing pictures, students should be encouraged to use English as much as possible. The more they speak, the more confident they become.

2) Use Events, Games, and Activities:

Learning English doesn't have to be boring. Teachers can organize small events like "English Day," storytelling sessions, or role plays where students perform short skits in English. Language games such as word puzzles, memory games, or "guess the object" can make learning fun and interactive. These activities help students use English in a natural and playful way, which improves fluency without pressure.

3) Don't Worry Too Much About Grammar:

One common mistake in English teaching is focusing too much on grammar rules. While grammar is important, it should not stop students from speaking. Teachers should allow students to express themselves freely, even if they make small mistakes. The goal is communication, not perfection. Over time, grammar will improve naturally as students gain more experience with the language.

4) Encourage Every Student to Speak:

In many classrooms only a few confident students get to speak while others stay silent. Teachers should make sure every child gets a chance to talk. They can use kind words, smiles, and gentle gestures to make shy students feel safe and supported. When students feel respected and encouraged, they are more likely to participate and try speaking English.

5) Start with Fun Warm-Up Activities:

Each English class should begin with a short, fun activity to set the mood. This could be a simple song, a quick question and answer round, or a movement-based game. Warm-up activities help students relax and get ready to learn. They also make the classroom feel lively and welcoming.

6) Use Real Objects and Teaching Materials:

Using real-life objects like fruits, clothes, toys, or household items can make English lessons more meaningful. For example, showing a mango and asking students to describe it in English helps connect language to everyday life. Flashcards, charts, and pictures also make learning more visual and memorable.

7) Use English Beyond the Classroom:



Students should be encouraged to use English not just during lessons but also in their daily routines. Teachers can ask them to greet each other in English, describe their lunch or talk about what they did after school. Even small phrases like “Good morning,” “Thank you,” or “Can I help you?” can build confidence. When English becomes part of everyday life, students learn faster and more naturally.

VII) Conclusion:

In today’s India, English is more than a school subject, it is a bridge to education, employment, and social progress. For students in rural Maharashtra, learning English can unlock many new opportunities. The move toward functional English, focusing on speaking and listening, is a positive step, but rural teachers face challenges due to outdated training and limited resources. Empowering these teachers through regular training, better facilities, and motivational support is essential. When teachers are confident and well-equipped, students can learn English more effectively, gaining the skills needed for higher education and better careers. Bridging the ruralurban gap in English education will lead to a more equal and promising future for all learners.

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