
Enhancing English Language Skills of Rural Learners: Challenges, Remedies, and Future Directions**Dr. Talanki Jeevan Kumar**Associate Professor & Head, Department of English, Government College (A),
Ananthapuramu. Email: dr.tjeevan@gmail.com**Abstract**

Enhancing English language skills of the rural learners is always a challenging task despite the explosive rise of AI tools, advancement of technology, and the existence of several pedagogies, approaches, and strategies, and approaches. The objective of this paper is to discuss the multifaceted challenges such as lack of infrastructure, facilities, and fight against the deep-rooted English phobia among the learners, faced by the English teachers in the Indian rural classrooms.

Another prime objective of the paper is to do research and propose a paradigm shift from traditional teacher-centric teaching practices to a Task-Based-Language-Teaching (TBLT). Further, it suggests the teacher to reduce Teacher-Talk Time (TTT) to 20% and increase Student Talk Time (STT) from 10% to 80% in the classroom by creating a practice-oriented learning environment where the learners are exposed to the English language keeping the dictum in mind that command over a new language can be acquired through practice rather than rote memorisation.

The study also emphasises the integration of Blended Learning, Flipped Classrooms, and Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) in the teaching methodology believing the fact that rural learners use smartphones predominantly to access internet. The paper also given a clarion call to the policymakers and the Universities to shift teaching practices, to reform curricula and evaluation methods, so that the rural learners can compete and withstand themselves in an Artificial Intelligence (AI) dominated era and rapid technological growing world. It suggests a few Mobile Apps which will be immensely helpful to improve the English language skills. Finally, the paper presents a real-life application of TBLT in grammar, writing, and speaking classes, with a view to bridging the urban-rural linguistic gap by proposing practical, learner-friendly strategies that may empower rural learners to achieve success facing today's complex world.

Keywords: Rural Learners, Task-Based Language Teaching, Student Talk Time, Teacher Talk Time, Artificial Intelligence

Introduction:

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools has completely reshaped the educational and professional world. It has significantly transformed the skills acquisition of the learners and the expectations of employers. As such, the learners of the current generation must acquire necessary skills not just to withstand but to survive in the era.

Among many skills, enhancing English language skills occupies a pivotal place as the rural learners have to communicate with urban professions and work integrating technological tools which primarily work on the prompts given in the English language. Especially, in a country like India, English plays a vital role in higher education, competitive examinations, professional communication, and access to global knowledge. Therefore, it is highly essential that the rural learners must get command over the English language to withstand in the cut-throat competition. It would certainly not be sufficient if they are good at 'Globish', "a term coined by French businessman and former IBM executive to describe the simplified English used by non-native speakers for international communication, focusing on a 1,500 word vocabulary and basic grammar" (Nerriere, 2004), avoiding idioms and complex structures of native-speakers English.

Enhancing English language skills of rural students is always a challenging task as they are not exposed to English through schools, media, and social interaction. They often struggle to acquire basic English language skills despite the emergence of innovative teaching methodologies. Rao (2019) aptly remarks thus:

Difficulties like lack of resources, mother-tongue interference, poor teacher training, student motivation issues, and outdated methods (Grammar-Translation), contrasting these challenges with potential benefits (prospects) of English for rural students, emphasizing a need for technology integration, better pedagogy (like communicative approaches), and policy changes to improve English proficiency and access to opportunities.

The English teachers too face multiple difficulties such as lack of infrastructure, limited resources, large classrooms, mixed-ability learners, and strong influence of mother tongue. Another most serious problem, which needs to be addressed immediately, is the deep-rooted fear or English phobia among rural learners. This fear predominantly affects their confidence and willingness to learn and speak. Ganai (2022) rightly says,

The main barrier for the rural students is that they read English for the sake of examination but not for the sake of language. Moreover, they have some kind of fear in their minds regarding the English language. That is why most of the rural students fail to clear the examination explicitly the English subject. The teachers should teach

the students how to use the language. But unfortunately, they also focus on the examination instead of language.

Keeping the aforesaid, the paper is designed to study the major challenges faced by the rural learners and the English teachers in India and also to propose a few effective remedies that would enhance the English language skills of the rural learners.

Review of Literature:

Many researchers have studied the problems which the rural learners face while learning English language. They, in their research, found out that the rural learners suffer from linguistic, psychological, social, and economic barriers in acquiring English proficiency. Krashen (1982), in his theory of second language acquisition, emphasises that “both adults and children can subconsciously acquire language. ... This process is similar to the process that children undergo when learning their native language. Acquisition requires *meaningful* interaction in the target language, during which the acquirer is focused on meaning rather than form of language ‘rules’ and ‘grammar’ which is less effective than acquisition.” However, rural classrooms always fail to provide a supportive and communicative environment.

Then the educators came out with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method shifting focus from grammar-based teaching to communication-oriented learning. But, its implementation in rural contexts remained limited due to exam-oriented teaching and lack of teacher training. Later others introduced Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), an extension of CLT, that focuses on real-life tasks and learner participation, making it suitable for rural learners. Littlewood observes thus:

This approach helps us to conceptualize the complementary roles of form-focused and meaning-focused tasks in our methodology. It also shows the continuity between task-based language teaching and the broader communicative approach within which it is a development. Finally, the ‘task-based approach’ is really the most appropriate term at all for describing these developments in language pedagogy.

Recent studies highlight the role of technology in language learning. Blended Learning combines face-to-face teaching with digital resources, while Flipped Classrooms encourage learners to study content at home and practise in class. Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has gained importance because mobile phones are affordable and accessible even in rural areas. Despite these developments, many rural institutions continue to follow traditional methods, showing a gap between theory and practice.

1. Challenges in Enhancing English Language Skills of Rural Learners:

Teaching English in a rural setting is not just a pedagogical challenge but a social and psychological one. English teachers often find themselves fighting with different constraints like:

- a) **Lack of Infrastructure and Resources:** One of the primary challenges in rural education is inadequate infrastructure. Many rural schools and colleges lack language laboratories, digital classrooms, stable internet connectivity, and updated learning materials. Teachers often rely only on textbooks, which limits exposure to authentic English usage.
- b) **English Phobia and Lack of Confidence:** Rural learners often develop a fear of English due to poor foundation, fear of making mistakes, and ridicule from peers. As such they feel that English is a difficult and elite language. This psychological barrier prevents learners from speaking and experimenting with the language. Ameeruddin (2025) says thus:

Many Indian students, particularly from rural regions, ... perceive this seven-letter term (English) as enigmatic and legendary. Upon hearing English, they experience discomfort.

- c) **Teacher-Centred Classroom Practices:** Most rural classrooms still follow lecture-based methods where the teacher dominates the class. Excessive Teacher Talk Time (TTT) leaves little opportunity for students to practise speaking. As a result, learners remain passive listeners rather than active users of the language.
 - d) **Mother Tongue Influence:** Strong influence of the regional language affects pronunciation, sentence structure, and fluency. Since English is rarely used outside the classroom, learners do not get sufficient exposure to natural English.
 - e) **Examination-Oriented Learning:** The education system emphasises marks, memorisation, and written exams. Listening and speaking skills are often neglected. Students focus on reproducing answers rather than developing communicative competence.
 - f) **Lack of Teacher Training:** Many English teachers in rural areas do not receive regular training in modern pedagogies or technology integration. This affects their ability to adopt innovative methods like TBLT or blended learning.
- 2. Need for a Paradigm Shift in English Language Teaching:** To overcome these challenges, a fundamental shift in teaching very much needed. The teachers must play a crucial role in rural areas proposing “a techno-societal approach to enhance English

language learning focusing on appropriate learning methods, continuous societal review” (Rajguru, 2022). They should give away traditional teacher-centred model and adopt learner-centred and task-based approaches. They should believe that language learning is a skill-building process rather than content memorisation.

English can be learnt effectively only through practice, exposure, and use. Rural learners need meaningful opportunities to listen, speak, read, and write English in real-life contexts. This shift demands changes in classroom interaction, curriculum design, assessment methods, and teacher roles.

3. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) Approach, the Remedy:

The most effective way to learn a language is to use it. Task Based Language Teaching is a practical approach that shifts focus from learning *about* the language (grammar rules) to using the language to achieve a specific outcome. In TBLT, language is learnt naturally while performing tasks such as performing an action, giving directions, writing a message, or participating in a discussion. Grammar and vocabulary are taught indirectly through use rather than direct explanation.

TBLT is learner-friendly, flexible, and practical. It encourages participation, reduces fear, and builds confidence. Tasks can be designed using familiar rural contexts such as farming, village markets, festivals, local issues, and daily routines. This contextual learning makes English meaningful and relevant. As such, the educators can easily accept the truth that TBLT is the most suitable method to enhance the English language skills of the rural learners.

In TBLT, the role of an English teacher is to act as a facilitator rather than a lecturer. The teacher ought to design tasks, motivate learners, monitor activities, and provide generalised feedback instead of individual feedback. The focus shifts from error correction to communication and fluency.

a) Real-Life/Practical Examples of TBLT: To implement TBLT effectively, teachers can use the real-life/practical example so that the learners easily involve themselves in the activities.

i) Teaching Grammar: The teachers should teach grammar through tasks instead of teaching rules. For instance, while teaching “Present Continuous Tense”, a teacher can use “Mime Task”, i.e., a student can perform a mime action such as writing, driving, cooking, etc., and then the teacher can ask the rest of the students to guess the action by asking, “Are you driving?”. Then, the students may respond, “No, I am writing, I am not driving.” Likewise, the teacher can give a minimum of ten examples and then explain the rule. Such

practical/functional tasks make the learners learn grammar structures naturally and use them in the appropriate contexts. ‘Mime’ task is just an example, but the teacher can adopt any method writing daily routines to teach tenses, describing pictures to practice prepositions, conducting surveys to teach question forms, etc., to meet the expected outcome. The following Grammar-focused tasks can be used by the teachers in the classroom:

- **The “Find Someone Who” Grid:** To practice **interrogative sentences** and the **present perfect tense**, the learners can go to others and ask, “Have you ever climbed a mango tree?” or “Have you ever cooked biryani?” until they fill their grid with names.
- **The Lost Property Office:** To practice **possessive pronouns** (mine, hers, theirs), the learners may place one personal item (a pen, an eraser, a ribbon, a bangle) in a bag. They must then interview others to return the items to their rightful owners.
- **The Daily Routine:** To practice the **simple present tense**, the learners can write or speak about their daily routine in 5-6 sentences such as “I get up at 5:00 am,” “I help my parents up to 8:00 am,” etc. The learners can read them out to a partner or for the class.
- **Village Architects:** To practice **prepositions of place**, the learners can use stones or matchboxes to build a “model village” and describe the layout: “The school is *next to* the temple; the well is *between* the trees.” They can also describe objects in the classroom. For example, “The blackboard is in front of the class,” “The fan is on the ceiling,” “The teacher’s table is in the centre and straight to the door.”
- **The Recipe Exchange:** To practice **imperative verbs** (cut, boil, stir, mix), the learners can write down the steps to make their favourite local snack and teach it to a friend.
- **Comparison Shopping:** To practice **degrees of comparison** (cheaper, best, more expensive), the learners may compare the prices and quality of two different brands of bath soaps, mobiles, toothpaste, or seeds.
- **The Fortune Teller:** To practice the **future tense** (will/going to), the learners “read the palms” of their classmates and make three predictions about their future careers.

- **The “Spot the Difference” Photo:** Using two nearly identical photos of a village scene, the learners must talk to find 10 differences, practicing **there is/there are**.
 - **The Alibi Game:** To practice the **past continuous tense**, the learners may pretend a “crime” that happened at school yesterday. They must create an alibi: “I was studying in the library at 4 PM.”
 - **The Giving Tree:** To practice **conditional sentences** (If... then...), the learners can discuss: “If it does not rain this month, what will happen to the crops?”
- ii) **Teaching Writing Skills:** The teachers should provide sample pamphlets pertaining to picnic spots and ask the learners to work in pairs to prepare a similar pamphlet on any nearby tourist spot to circulate it among their villagers. The learners must include a list of attractive things in that place, a brief history, and directions/instructions to reach the spot. Here, the learners apply descriptive and persuasive writing skills which are useful for real-life communication. The following writing and critical thinking tasks may also be used in the classroom to foster originality and to improve their writing skills.
- **My Village:** The learners can write a paragraph describing location, occupation of the villagers, festivals, facilities of their village.
 - **The WhatsApp News Bulletin:** The learners may write a short, 50-word English news update about a local event (a wedding, a sports match) to be shared in a class group.
 - **The Formal Letter of Complaint:** The learners can write a letter to the local electricity board regarding frequent power cuts, focusing on formal tone and specific “ask.”
 - **The “Mobile Phone Rules” Contract:** The learners may work together to write a set of 5 rules for how students should use mobile phones judiciously at home.
 - **The Job Application:** Using a mock advertisement for a “Computer Lab Assistant,” the learners can write a short paragraph explaining why they are the best fit for the job.
 - **The Book/Movie Review:** Instead of a summary, the learners may write why they would—or would not—recommend a specific story to their best friend.

-
- **The Village Map Labelling:** The learners can draw a map of their neighbourhood and label every landmark in English, adding a one-sentence description for each.
 - **The “Thank You” Note:** The learners can write a formal thank-you note to a teacher or a local leader who helped the school.
 - **The Photo Caption Contest:** The teacher shares a funny or interesting image via mobile while the learners must write the most creative English caption.
 - **The “True or False” Autobiography:** The learners can write three “facts” about themselves (two true, one false). The class must read and guess the lie by asking questions.
 - **The Future Village Vision:** The learners can write a 100-word “Letter from the Future” (dated 2050) describing how their village has changed or progressed in the last ten years especially with the development of technological tools.
- iii) Teaching Speaking Skills:** The teachers may show a short video on weather report and then ask the learners to pay attention on the vocabulary and pronunciation. Then the learners should act as local news reporters and speak for a minute on the weather in their village and its impact on the local harvest. This enables the learners to use the language directly, build confidence, and improve their fluency. A few other tasks that would enhance speaking and fluency are:
- **The Bus Stop Debate:** A role-play where learners argue politely about who should get the last seat on a crowded bus—the student with an exam or the farmer with heavy bags.
 - **Directions for a Tourist:** One learner can act as a visitor lost directions at the village bus stand; the other must give clear verbal directions to the local hospital or post office.
 - **The Interview with an Elder:** The learners may prepare five questions and “interview” a classmate who pretends to be the oldest person in the village.
 - **The Talent Show Emcee:** The learners may take turns practicing how to introduce a performer or a guest speaker at a school function.

-
- **The Picture Narrative:** The teacher can show a mysterious photo (e.g., an empty bicycle on a lonely road). The learners work in pairs to narrate the “story” of what happened.
 - **The Advice Column:** The learners may write a “problem” (e.g., “I am scared of exams”) on a piece of paper. They swap and speak to give three pieces of advice using “You should...”
 - **The “Sell Your Village” Ad:** The learners can work in groups to create a 30-second radio advertisement to attract tourists to visit their local festival.
 - **The Telephone Game (Clarity Check):** The learners may whisper a complex instruction to see how the meaning changes, followed by a discussion on why clear speaking is important.
- b) Increase STT and Reduce TTT:** In most the Indian rural classrooms, the teachers speak 80% of time in a period. This must be reversed. The teachers must become facilitators and provide more opportunities to the learners to speak 80% of time in English by involving them in tasks. When the learners participate in the activities and try to negotiate meaning to complete the tasks, their cognitive processes activate which in turn leads to better retention.
- i) Strategies to Increase STT:** To increase Student Talk Time in the English classroom, teachers can adopt several interactive strategies such as pair work and group discussions, role plays and simulations, information gap activities, and storytelling or picture description tasks. Classroom debates and short presentations also encourage learners to express their ideas confidently in English. When teachers consciously reduce excessive explanation and avoid dominating classroom talk, learners get more opportunities to practise speaking. Such interactive practices help create a supportive and stress-free speaking environment where students feel comfortable using English without fear of making mistakes.
 - ii) Creating English Learning Environment:** A right and interesting environment exposes learners to English continuously and naturally. Even in rural classrooms with limited resources, teachers can create immersion through simple practices such as using English for classroom instructions, displaying charts, posters, and word walls, encouraging English conversations during activities, celebrating English language days and events, etc. In other words, regular exposure helps learners internalise the language and reduces dependence on the mother tongue.

4. Transitioning to Blended Learning and Mobile Learning:

The reality of rural India is that every learner may have a mobile in their hand but the desktops in the institutions are rare. So, the teaching mode must evolve to meet the learners where they are. In such contexts, Blended Learning comes as a boon. It combines traditional classroom teaching with digital tools and online resources. It allows learners to access content beyond classroom hours. The benefits of this teaching mode is flexible learning pace, access to videos, audio, and interactive content, repeated listening and practice, improved motivation and engagement, and so on. Teachers can use free platforms like YouTube, Google Classroom, and open educational resources to support learning.

Flipped Classroom Model is another interesting approach. In this, the teacher can send a short video or a text explaining a concept via WhatsApp or a learning app *before* the class. The learners watch or read and understand the content staying at home. The classroom time is then used for tasks, discussion, practice, and problem-solving, rather than lecturing. It also gives scope to the learners to focus on speaking, clarification, and task completion. This model promotes learner autonomy and effective use of classroom time.

Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is another stimulating approach. As rural learners frequently use smartphones and access internet primarily through mobile data for entertainment and social media, this habit can be redirected towards language learning. The learners can listen to podcasts and short videos, install vocabulary building apps and pronunciation tools, record and share voice messages, participating in online quizzes and discussions, and many more. MALL supports anytime, anywhere learning and increases learner engagement.

5. Reforming Evaluation for the Survival in the AI World:

The rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) poses a unique threat to traditional education. If a learner is only asked to 'provide rules on any grammar item' or 'list the techniques to hone their English language skills,' an AI can do it in seconds. If rural learners have to survive in this explosively rising AI world, they must be taught to think, not just remember.

6. Advice to Policymakers and Universities:

- a) **Shift from Rote to Application:** Examination papers should present scenarios where students must apply English to solve a problem, rather than reproducing memorized paragraphs. They should include oral tests, presentations, group tasks, and project-work instead of rote-based written exams.

-
- b) **Critical Thinking Assessments:** Evaluation must reward original thought. Instead of “Summarize the poem,” the question should be “How does the theme of this poem relate to a problem in your village?”
 - c) **Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE):** Speaking and listening skills should carry at least 40% of the total grade. If we do not test speaking, teachers will not teach speaking.
 - d) **Curriculum Contextualization:** The curriculum should include local narratives and rural contexts so that students feel their lived experiences are valid in the English language. The topics should focus on skills rather than content.
 - e) **Teacher Training:** The teachers must be equipped with skills to design inclusive lessons. Professional development should focus on strategies for scaffolding language input using assistive technologies. Teachers should also be made aware of the compensatory strategies that learners may use” (Bhayana and Sneha Latha, 2025, 26). Therefore, regular workshops and training programmes for teachers should be organised to familiarise with TBLT, technology integration, and learner-centred methods.

7. Future Directions:

Artificial Intelligence is transforming education and employment. Rural learners must be equipped with communication skills, critical thinking, and digital literacy. So, the future research must focus on empirical studies measuring the impact of TBLT and MALL in rural classrooms. Collaboration between schools, colleges, and digital platforms can enhance resource sharing. Community involvement and parental support can further strengthen language learning.

Learner too must dedicate some time to enhance English language skills installing a few mobile apps depending on what kind of English skills s/he wants to improve. They allow the learners to practice anytime, anywhere with short, manageable lessons. They boost motivation through gamification and personalised, interactive exercises, track progress, and provide varied content (audio, video, quizzes) at a lower cost than traditional classes, making language acquisition more engaging and self-paced for global audience. For instance, *English Conversation* App assists the learner’s speech recognition for pronunciation feedback, access to native speakers, making learning interactive, personalised, and effective for building fluency at their own pace. *English Grammar Book*, *English Grammar Full*, *English Sounds*, *Johnny Grammar’s* (British Council) are a few mobile apps which learners can install and enhance their language skills.

Besides the aforementioned, there are a few AI apps like *Memrise GPT* to build vocabulary and practice everyday conversation, *ELSA* to improve pronunciation and speaking fluently, *Duolingo* to learn vocabulary, grammar, reading, and writing through fun, game-based lessons especially the beginners and intermediate level learners, *HelloTalk* to practice English with real people from different countries and receive correction which is useful for real-life communication, *Xeropan* to improve reading, listening, and grammar, etc. Supernova AI is another mobile app that became popular in India in the recent past. It helps users speak English fluently using their native language (like Tamil, Hindi, Telugu, Bengali) for support, focusing on conversation, pronunciation, and vocabulary through interactive lessons, instant feedback, and gamified activities. It offers personalized paths, 24/7 AI tutoring, and real-world practice, aiming to make learning easy for various age groups and skill levels, from beginners to adults.

Remember, all these offline and AI apps are freemium models. They offer basic features for free but for full access, personalised coaching, advanced activities, and ad-free learning, the learners must go for monthly/yearly paid subscriptions. The rural learners can easily learn what they want and enhance their English language skills simply by practicing the freely available exercises. While using free version, the only inconvenience that the learners face is frequent ads.

Conclusion:

Enhancing English language skills of rural students is both a challenge and a necessity in today's globalised and technology-driven world. Despite the availability of advanced tools and methodologies, rural learners continue to face linguistic, psychological, and infrastructural barriers.

This paper has highlighted the major challenges in rural English classrooms and proposed practical remedies through Task-Based Language Teaching, increased Student Talk Time, immersive environments, and integration of blended learning, flipped classrooms, and mobile learning.

A collective effort from teachers, institutions, universities, and policymakers is required to reform teaching practices and evaluation systems. By adopting learner-centred, practice-oriented, and technology-supported approaches, the urban-rural linguistic divide can be reduced.

Empowering rural learners with English language skills will not only enhance their academic success but also enable them to participate confidently in the global and AI-driven future.

References

- Ameeruddin. "Teaching English in Indian Classrooms: Problems and Solutions." *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, vol. 7, issue 6, November-December 2025, p. 1.
- Bhayana, Garima, and Sneh Latha Sharma. "Second Language Acquisition in an Adult with Down Syndrome: A Case Study with Implications for ELT." *Journal of English Language Teaching*, vol. 67, no. 4, July 2025, pp. 21-26.
- Ganai, Younus Mohd. "The Problems faced by English Teachers and Students in Rural/Tribal Areas." *Towards Excellence*, pp. 1478-1484.
- Krashen, Stephen D. "Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition." Oxford: Pergamon Press Inc., 1982, pp.9-78.
- Littlewood, William. "The task-based approach: some questions and suggestions." *ELT Journal*, vol. 58, issue 4, October 2004, pp. 319-326.
- Nerrière, Jean-Paul. "Globish (Nerrière)." *Wikipedia*, October 27, 2025. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Globish_\(Nerri%C3%A8re\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Globish_(Nerri%C3%A8re))
- Rajguru, Santosh Pundalik. "Teaching English Language in Rural Indian Classrooms: A Techno-Societal Approach." *Techno-Societal 2022: Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Advanced Technologies for Societal Applications*, volume 1, Springer International Publishing, 2022.
- Rao, Z. "Teaching English in Indian Rural Classrooms: Problems and Prospects." *Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2019.