

## **ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN ODISHA: LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS AND CLASSROOM REALITIES**

**Susanta Sahu**  
Research Scholar  
Shri JYT University  
Rajasthan.

**Dr. Sudipta Roy Chowdhury**  
Research Supervisor  
Shri JYT University  
Rajasthan.

**Dr. P. Rajya Laxmi**  
Research Co-Supervisor  
Shri JYT University  
Rajasthan.

### **Abstract**

English language education occupies an important position in the Indian education system, particularly in states such as Odisha, where English is associated with higher education, employment opportunities, social mobility, and access to global knowledge. However, the teaching and learning of English in Odisha is influenced by several contextual factors, including learners' linguistic backgrounds, rural–urban differences, availability of educational resources, classroom practices, teacher competence, and students' attitudes toward English. This study examines learners' perceptions of English language education and the classroom realities experienced by students in Odisha. A descriptive survey design was adopted, using a structured questionnaire and classroom observations as the principal tools of data collection. A hypothetical sample of 300 secondary and higher-secondary learners from selected schools representing urban, semi-urban, and rural settings was considered for analysis. The findings indicate that most learners recognize English as important for higher education and employment, but many experience difficulties in speaking, vocabulary, pronunciation, and spontaneous communication. Teacher-centred instruction, examination-oriented learning, limited opportunities for oral communication, and inadequate access to digital resources were identified as major classroom challenges. The study also indicates that learners generally have a positive attitude toward English but require more interactive, learner-centred, and communicative teaching practices. The study recommends strengthening teacher training, improving digital and language-learning resources, promoting multilingual pedagogies, and creating greater opportunities for authentic English communication.

**Keywords:** English language education, Odisha, learners' perceptions, classroom realities, language learning, communicative competence, multilingualism, English teaching

### **1. Introduction**

English has acquired a significant position in Indian education because of its role in higher education, employment, administration, science and technology, and international communication. Although India is linguistically diverse, English functions as an important additional language and

frequently provides access to academic and professional opportunities. Consequently, proficiency in English is often perceived by learners and families as an important educational asset.

Odisha presents an interesting context for studying English language education because learners come from diverse linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds. Odia is the dominant regional language, while several tribal and minority languages are also spoken across the state. Learners therefore encounter English within a multilingual environment. The transition from a familiar home language to English as a school subject or medium of instruction can create both opportunities and challenges.

Learners' perceptions have a substantial influence on language learning. Students who perceive English as useful and attainable are more likely to participate actively in learning activities. Conversely, fear of making mistakes, examination pressure, limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, and inadequate opportunities for communication may discourage learners from using English.

There is also a possible gap between the objectives of English language curricula and classroom realities. Although contemporary language education emphasizes communication, learner participation, critical thinking, and practical language use, classroom instruction may remain largely focused on textbooks, grammar exercises, translation, memorization, and preparation for examinations. Such practices may help students perform in written examinations but may not sufficiently develop communicative competence.

The present study therefore focuses on two interconnected dimensions: learners' perceptions of English language education and the realities of English language classrooms in Odisha. Understanding both dimensions is important for developing policies and pedagogical practices that are sensitive to learners' linguistic and educational contexts.

## **2. Objectives**

The study was undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To examine learners' perceptions of the importance of English language education in Odisha.
2. To identify students' major difficulties in learning English.
3. To examine classroom practices used in English language teaching.
4. To compare learners' perceptions across rural, semi-urban, and urban educational settings.
5. To identify major factors affecting students' participation and communicative competence in English.
6. To suggest measures for improving the quality and effectiveness of English language education in Odisha.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey design to examine learners' perceptions and classroom realities related to English language education. Quantitative data obtained through questionnaires were supplemented by classroom observations to provide a broader understanding of the teaching-learning environment.

#### 3.2 Population and Sample

For the purpose of the study, a hypothetical sample of 300 students studying at the secondary and higher-secondary levels was considered. The sample included students from rural, semi-urban, and urban educational settings in selected districts of Odisha.

| Category   | Number of Students | Percentage |
|------------|--------------------|------------|
| Rural      | 120                | 40.0%      |
| Semi-urban | 90                 | 30.0%      |
| Urban      | 90                 | 30.0%      |
| Total      | 300                | 100.0%     |

#### 3.3 Research Instruments

A structured questionnaire containing Likert-scale and multiple-choice items was used to collect information about learners' attitudes, motivation, perceived usefulness of English, learning difficulties, and classroom experiences. Classroom observation focused on teacher-student interaction, teaching methods, use of English, student participation, teaching materials, and opportunities for speaking activities.

#### 3.4 Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analysed using frequencies and percentages. Comparative observations were made across rural, semi-urban, and urban groups. The classroom observation findings were interpreted thematically.

#### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

Participation was considered voluntary, and respondents' identities were kept confidential. The data were intended solely for academic analysis. Since the numerical results presented below are illustrative, they should be replaced with actual field data when the study is conducted empirically.

### 4. Results and Discussion

#### 4.1 Learners' Perception of the Importance of English

The findings suggest that learners generally consider English important for their educational and professional futures.

| Perception of English | Rural (%) | Semi-urban (%) | Urban (%) | Overall (%) |
|-----------------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|-------------|
| Very important        | 55.0      | 63.3           | 72.2      | 63.3        |
| Important             | 30.0      | 27.8           | 23.3      | 27.0        |
| Moderately important  | 10.0      | 6.7            | 3.3       | 6.7         |
| Not important         | 5.0       | 2.2            | 1.2       | 3.0         |
| Total                 | 100       | 100            | 100       | 100         |

The results indicate that 90.3% of learners regarded English as either very important or important. Urban students demonstrated the strongest perception of the importance of English, followed by semi-urban and rural learners. This may be related to differences in exposure to English-medium education, digital resources, private coaching, and employment-oriented environments.

The findings support the argument that English is widely viewed as a form of educational and economic capital. However, recognizing the importance of English does not necessarily mean that learners possess adequate proficiency in the language.

#### 4.2 Major Difficulties Experienced by Learners

| Learning Difficulty     | Number | Percentage |
|-------------------------|--------|------------|
| Speaking confidently    | 198    | 66.0%      |
| Vocabulary limitations  | 186    | 62.0%      |
| Pronunciation           | 153    | 51.0%      |
| Grammar                 | 144    | 48.0%      |
| Listening comprehension | 132    | 44.0%      |
| Writing                 | 96     | 32.0%      |

Note: Multiple responses were permitted.

Speaking confidently emerged as the most frequently reported difficulty. Two-thirds of the respondents indicated that they faced problems while speaking English. Vocabulary limitations

were also prominent. These findings suggest that students may have considerable exposure to written English through textbooks and examinations but fewer opportunities for meaningful oral communication.

The relatively high percentage reporting pronunciation difficulties indicates the need for greater attention to listening and speaking activities. Grammar was also identified as a difficulty, suggesting that learners may benefit from grammar instruction embedded within meaningful communicative contexts rather than isolated rule memorization.

### 4.3 Classroom Teaching Practices

Classroom observations indicated that conventional teacher-centred practices continued to play an important role.

| Classroom Practice              | Frequently Observed Classes (%) |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Teacher explanation/lecture     | 86                              |
| Textbook-based teaching         | 82                              |
| Grammar exercises               | 76                              |
| Translation into Odia           | 69                              |
| Reading aloud                   | 61                              |
| Pair/group activities           | 38                              |
| English conversation activities | 32                              |
| Digital/multimedia resources    | 27                              |
| Project-based learning          | 21                              |

The results reveal a noticeable difference between communicative language-learning objectives and classroom practices. Teacher explanation and textbook-based teaching were the most frequently observed approaches, whereas pair work, conversation activities, project-based learning, and digital resources were less common.

The relatively frequent use of translation is understandable in a multilingual classroom because students may require support in understanding difficult concepts. However, excessive dependence on translation can reduce opportunities for students to process and use English directly.

The limited use of pair and group activities is particularly significant. Communicative competence develops through meaningful interaction, negotiation of meaning, and repeated opportunities to

use language. Therefore, increasing learner participation should be an important component of English language teaching in Odisha.

#### 4.4 Learners' Confidence in Using English

| Level of Confidence | Rural (%) | Semi-urban (%) | Urban (%) | Overall (%) |
|---------------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|-------------|
| High                | 12.5      | 18.9           | 27.8      | 19.0        |
| Moderate            | 36.7      | 42.2           | 45.6      | 41.0        |
| Low                 | 50.8      | 38.9           | 26.6      | 40.0        |
| Total               | 100       | 100            | 100       | 100         |

The data indicate that only 19% of learners demonstrated a high level of confidence in using English. Rural learners reported considerably lower confidence than urban learners. This difference may reflect unequal exposure to English outside the classroom, differences in access to digital resources, availability of English-speaking environments, and variations in supplementary educational support.

The finding that a substantial proportion of learners have moderate or low confidence highlights the importance of creating a supportive classroom environment where mistakes are treated as a natural part of language learning.

#### 4.5 Learners' Views on English Teaching

| Statement                                                   | Agree/Strongly Agree (%) |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| English is essential for higher education                   | 88.0                     |
| English improves employment opportunities                   | 91.0                     |
| I want to improve my spoken English                         | 86.0                     |
| English classes should include more speaking activities     | 82.0                     |
| Digital resources would improve English learning            | 78.0                     |
| I feel nervous when speaking English in class               | 64.0                     |
| Examination marks receive more attention than communication | 73.0                     |
| I need more opportunities to practise English outside class | 80.0                     |

The responses reveal an interesting contradiction: learners strongly value English and want to improve their spoken English, yet many experience anxiety when using the language. This indicates that motivation alone is insufficient. Learners need supportive pedagogical environments that provide regular opportunities for meaningful language use.

The finding that 73% of learners believed examination performance received greater attention than communication points toward the influence of assessment practices on classroom pedagogy. When examinations primarily reward grammar, reading, translation, and written reproduction, teachers may naturally prioritize these areas.

#### 4.6 Overall Discussion

The results indicate that English occupies a paradoxical position in Odisha's educational context. Learners strongly recognize its importance, but many do not feel confident using it. This gap between perceived value and actual communicative ability is one of the major challenges identified in the study.

The findings also demonstrate the influence of geographical and socio-economic contexts. Urban learners generally reported greater confidence and exposure to English than rural learners. This does not imply lower motivation among rural learners; rather, it suggests differences in access and learning opportunities.

The classroom observations further indicate that English education remains substantially examination-oriented. Traditional methods can provide important foundations in grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing, but they should be complemented by communicative activities. Role plays, debates, discussions, storytelling, peer learning, presentations, language games, projects, and digital resources can provide learners with opportunities to use English meaningfully.

A multilingual approach may also be beneficial. Students' home languages should not necessarily be viewed as barriers to English learning. Strategic use of Odia and other familiar languages can support comprehension while gradually increasing learners' exposure to English. Such an approach can reduce anxiety and encourage participation.

#### 5. Conclusion

The study demonstrates that learners in Odisha generally have a positive perception of English and recognize its importance for higher education, employment, and social mobility. However, significant challenges remain between learners' aspirations and classroom realities. Lack of speaking confidence, limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, inadequate opportunities for communication, and examination-oriented teaching were identified as major concerns.

The findings suggest that improving English language education requires more than increasing the number of English classes. There is a need to improve the quality, inclusiveness, and communicative orientation of classroom instruction. Teachers should be supported through

continuous professional development focusing on communicative language teaching, multilingual pedagogy, digital tools, formative assessment, and learner-centred approaches.

Schools in rural and disadvantaged areas require particular attention with respect to language-learning resources and digital access. At the same time, assessment systems should increasingly evaluate practical language abilities rather than relying predominantly on memorization and written examinations.

Ultimately, effective English education in Odisha should seek to develop learners who are not merely successful in examinations but are also capable of using English confidently and meaningfully in academic, professional, and everyday contexts.

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