



# **Pedagogical Challenges in Teaching English to Arts and Commerce Students in Gujarat's Tribal Colleges**

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**Abstract-** This research paper examines the pedagogical challenges faced by educators in teaching English to Arts and Commerce students in Gujarat's tribal colleges. The study highlights various socio-cultural and linguistic barriers that hinder effective language learning, particularly in the context of tribal communities. Additionally, it explores the institutional and resource constraints, including inadequate infrastructure and teaching materials, that further complicate the learning process. The paper critically analyzes existing pedagogical approaches and classroom practices, identifying their limitations and suggesting strategies for improvement. Through this analysis, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the unique challenges faced by students and educators alike, offering insights into enhancing English language education in tribal colleges. The research emphasizes the need for tailored teaching methods that consider the socio-cultural realities of the students and advocates for better institutional support and resources to bridge the gap in education.

**Keywords-** Pedagogical challenges, English language teaching, tribal colleges, socio-cultural barriers, linguistic barriers, educational constraints, classroom practices, Arts and Commerce students, Gujarat, institutional support.

## **I. Introduction**

English has become a global lingua franca, significantly influencing higher education, career prospects, and intercultural communication. In India, English literacy is often associated with academic achievement and job prospects, especially in fields such as Arts and Commerce, where students must engage with numerous books, theories, and professional practices. The instruction and acquisition of English in Gujarat's tribal areas face distinct challenges shaped by socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors.

This study aims to examine the pedagogical obstacles faced in teaching English at the undergraduate level in tribal colleges of Gujarat. The study seeks to identify the primary hurdles, institutional constraints, and socio-cultural factors affecting English language teaching in these contexts through the analysis of secondary data, including government reports, educational surveys, and prior research. The findings will enhance understanding of systemic challenges and underscore potential avenues to advance English language instruction in marginalised educational contexts.



## II. Socio-Cultural and Linguistic Barriers

The teaching of English in the tribal regions of Gujarat is fundamentally hampered by an intricate interaction of socio-cultural and linguistic elements that influence learners' relation with the language. These obstacles are not solely educational issues but are intricately rooted in the lived experiences of indigenous groups, their linguistic environments, and their cultural perspectives.

At a fundamental level, tribal students in Gujarat's hinterlands contend with a multilingual reality that significantly diverges from the linguistic assumptions inherent in the mainstream English language curriculum. The indigenous communities residing in the mountainous forest regions bordering Gujarat communicate in native languages that often lack a written tradition, exhibiting grammatical structures and intonation patterns that differ from those of standard (Gujarati and English Bharateeya et al., n.d.). The linguistic distance indicates that, for many tribal learners, English is not a second language but a third, learned after their native dialect and regional Gujarati (Bharateeya et al., n.d.). The cognitive burden of traversing three linguistically disparate systems—the unscripted home dialect with its distinct syntax, the official state language, Gujarati, and the target language, English—poses fundamental obstacles that conventional educational methodologies seldom recognise.

The lack of instructional continuity exacerbates this language difficulty. Investigations into tribal education in Gujarat have regularly highlighted the pressing necessity for instruction in the native tongue, contextualised textbooks, and supportive resources in tribal dialects. However, the actual situation diverges significantly from these educational goals. When educators from non-tribal areas enter classrooms and teach in Gujarati, students frequently struggle to understand the medium of instruction, let alone the English-language material presented (Vasava, 2024). A resident of the Narmada neighbourhood articulated this disconnection poignantly: "Our children do not understand. They feel lost" (Vasava, 2024). They experience a sense of disorientation. This feeling of disorientation is not merely figurative; it signifies a significant epistemic exclusion, rendering the entire educational endeavour alienating rather than empowering.

The cultural dimensions of language acquisition interface with these linguistic obstacles in equally important ways. Tribal tribes in Gujarat have a wealth of oral literature, music, dance, and rituals that form their own systems of knowledge. (Bharateeya et al., n.d.). Conventional educational resources, however, hardly incorporate these cultural assets. Textbooks designed for urban and non-tribal student demographics contain text, examples, and cultural references that are mostly irrelevant to the lived experiences and cognitive frameworks of tribal students. This cultural disjunction transforms the English classroom into an environment where students confront not just a novel linguistic system but also a comprehensive worldview that appears remote from, and occasionally indirectly undermines, their own cultural legacy.

Cultural and linguistic discrepancies between teachers and students further intensify the issue. A recent controversy in Gujarat's Eklavya Model schools exemplifies this dynamic: around 500 teaching and non-teaching staff recruited from outside the state



lacked proficiency in Gujarati, hindering their ability to communicate with tribal students and comprehend their cultural contexts and limitations. (Vasava, 2024). Dediapada MLA Chaitar Vasava observed, “these teachers are 'not familiar with the students, their culture, their mother tongue of Gujarati or the constraints that these students face,' leaving students' exasperated as they are unable to communicate with the teachers to express their difficulty" (Vasava, 2024). Communication breakdowns not only hinder language instruction but also undermine the trust and rapport vital for the success of any educational interaction.

Cultural perceptions of English acquisition within indigenous cultures introduce an additional dimension of difficulty. For numerous indigenous learners, English signifies both aspiration and alienation—a language of empowerment that offers access to employment and movement, yet is entrenched in institutional frameworks that have historically marginalised their communities (Bharateeya et al., n.d.). A significant number of Aboriginal students are first-generation English learners, entering classrooms devoid of the familial or communal supports that facilitate language acquisition for more fortunate peers (Bharateeya et al., n.d.).

This role as pioneers in English literacy encompasses both motivational potential and psychological load. The desire for proficiency in English to enhance employment opportunities coexists with apprehension about navigating a foreign-language landscape without the support of familiar reinforcement. Recent policy actions indicate an increasing acknowledgement of these socio-cultural impediments. The Narmada District Education and Training Centre's creation of specific modules that integrate the local Dehwali and Ambudi dialects aims to bridge the disparity between home and school languages. (Vasava, 2024). This effort recognises that linguistic continuity is essential for effective learning by producing a "3,000-word repository of knowledge translated into students' native languages" and educating over 160 teachers in local dialects. A participating instructor remarked that the module serves as "a bridge between our children and the education system," allowing students to "express themselves freely, pose enquiries, and engage actively in class" (Vasava, 2024).

However, such projects are constrained in scale and breadth compared to the enormity of the situation. The multilingual education approaches envisioned in the National Education Policy 2020, with their emphasis on mother tongue-based instruction and contextualised learning materials, have yet to be systematically implemented across Gujarat's tribal schools (Terang, 2022). The disparity between policy acknowledgement and educational implementation is significant, resulting in many tribal English language classes managing socio-cultural and linguistic obstacles without the necessary structural support to do so effectively.

### **III. Institutional and Resource Constraints**

The educational challenges in teaching English to tribal undergraduate students in Gujarat are significantly influenced by institutional and resource limitations that extend well beyond the classroom. The institutional constraints, including faculty availability, infrastructure deficiencies, and resource limits, foster an educational atmosphere in which even the most dedicated teachers and students find it challenging to attain



significant language learning. The presence of qualified faculty represents a significant institutional limitation in tribal colleges. Teaching English in these circumstances requires educators with topic expertise, cultural sensitivity, multilingual proficiency, and pedagogical flexibility to meet the distinct requirements of indigenous learners. Nonetheless, colleges in tribal regions sometimes have challenges in attracting and retaining experienced English instructors. Educators assigned to these positions frequently come from non-tribal backgrounds, introducing instructional methodologies tailored to urban, Gujarati-speaking student populations that significantly diverge from the language and cultural contexts of tribal classrooms (Bharateeya et al., n.d.). The resultant disconnection is evident in pedagogical approaches that do not align with students' life experiences and cognitive structures. This communication breakdown signifies not only a linguistic challenge but also a fundamental barrier to the teacher-student relationship, which is crucial for effective language training.

The infrastructure deficiencies faced by tribal universities considerably exacerbate these faculty-related difficulties. The eastern tribal region of Gujarat exhibits inferior infrastructure relative to the state's overall infrastructure. This disparity directly affects educational institutions, where basic facilities are often unevenly distributed or lacking. The COVID-19 outbreak revealed these weaknesses starkly, as the abrupt transition to online schooling highlighted the significant digital divide between tribal children and their urban peers. Research involving tribal postgraduate students highlighted various aspects of this exclusion: absence of internet connectivity in remote regions, inadequate financial resources to acquire internet services and electronic devices, and inconsistent electricity supply to operate any devices students may own (Vasava, 2024).

The results of this investigation illustrate a significant infrastructure deficit. The majority of tribal students encountered connectivity issues so severe that they were compelled to travel considerable distances and climb hilltops solely to obtain sufficient internet signal to access online programs. None of the surveyed students attended 80 percent of their online classes and faced considerable challenges with online examinations and oral assessments in environments devoid of academic support (Vasava, 2024). These infrastructural limitations are not mere momentary inconveniences but rather fundamental obstacles that routinely preclude tribal youth from fully engaging in educational opportunities. The research suggests that "the excluded groups of tribal students in education became more marginalised during the COVID-19 pandemic" (Vasava, 2024).

The accessibility of instructional materials and educational resources constitutes an additional aspect of institutional limitation. Standard English-language textbooks designed for mainstream student populations presume a certain degree of prior exposure to English, familiarity with metropolitan environments, and access to other learning resources, which tribal students often lack. The lack of contextualised resources that incorporate tribal students' linguistic origins, cultural references, and lived experiences results in English language training often being based on cultural and epistemic disjunction (Bharateeya et al., n.d.). Students encounter textbook examples, reading passages, and language exercises that lack relevance to their lives, rendering the English classroom a site of estrangement rather than engagement. The material deprivation of indigenous students transcends the institutional context and permeates



their family environments. A significant number of indigenous learners come from households with limited financial resources, making it unattainable to afford additional educational materials, private tutoring, or English-language media.

The lack of an intellectual atmosphere at home suggests that any learning achieved at college may be insufficient without the support and enrichment that more affluent students receive from their home environments (Bharateeya et al., n.d.). This discrepancy exacerbates the strain on institutional resources to compensate for students' lack of access elsewhere. At the same time, these institutions simultaneously encounter their own resource limitations that hinder their ability to offer complete support. Recent attempts illustrate the potential and challenges of resolving these institutional limitations.

The Narmada District Education and Training Centre's creation of specific modules that integrate the local Dehwali and Ambudi dialects aims to bridge the disparity between home and school languages. Nonetheless, these projects are confined to local contexts and reliant on the dedication of specific institutions rather than on systemic support. The multilingual education strategies outlined in national education policies, which prioritise mother tongue-based instruction and contextualised learning materials, have not been routinely executed in Gujarat's tribal educational institutions (Terang, 2022).

The residential nature of numerous educational institutions for Aboriginal students presents both advantages and obstacles. Ashram Shalas and residential schools offer complimentary food and accommodation, facilitating access to education for students from labourer, small-scale farmer, and migrant worker households. Government scholarships and grants that cover tuition fees, books, uniforms, and other materials have led to increased enrolments and instilled renewed optimism about educational options within tribal communities (Vasava, 2024).

However, these favourable advancements are accompanied by enduring resource deficiencies that compromise the quality of education delivered. The disparity between policy acknowledgement and institutional practice is considerable, resulting in most tribal English-language classrooms managing resource limitations without the structural assistance that could effectively mitigate them. Unless institutional and resource constraints are consistently addressed, the innovative teaching methods of individual educators and institutions, no matter how inventive, will be inadequate to overcome the systemic obstacles faced by tribal students in their English language acquisition.

#### **IV. Pedagogical Approaches and Classroom Practices**

The instructional methods utilised in English-language classrooms within Gujarat's tribal universities and colleges reveal a fundamental conflict between traditional teaching practices and the unique learning requirements of indigenous students. The prevalence of teacher-centered pedagogies in tribal universities and colleges constitutes a substantial barrier to effective English-language instruction. Lecture-based methodologies, rote memorisation tasks, and grammar-translation techniques continue to shape classroom practices across numerous institutions, despite substantial evidence



that language acquisition is most effectively facilitated through meaningful communication and learner involvement. These educational traditions, derived from metropolitan settings, are based on assumptions regarding students' language readiness that are not applicable in tribal schools (Bharateeya et al., n.d.) note that these methods function within a "monolithic framework" that does not acknowledge the "multilingual reality" of tribal learners who transition among unscripted native languages, regional Gujarati, and target English across three diverse linguistic systems. When instruction assumes that children possess a uniform linguistic basis with their urban peers, the outcome is not just inefficient teaching but also a pronounced estrangement from the learning process.

The endurance of these old approaches stems from several interrelated factors. Educators sent to indigenous universities frequently come equipped with pedagogical training tailored for mainstream student demographics, employing approaches intended for learners who already have basic literacy in Gujarati and some familiarity with English. When these methods engage first-generation learners navigating several linguistic systems, the educational incongruence becomes evident.

The repercussions encompass not only inadequate instruction but also active student disengagement. Classroom observations in tribal institutions indicate patterns of quiet, passive obedience, and limited voluntary participation, which reflect not student inability but the basic irrelevance of teaching methods to students' life experiences. Students who do not see themselves or their communities represented in textbook examples, who find it difficult to understand the medium of instruction, and who receive no recognition of their home languages as valid learning tools inevitably disengage from classroom participation.

The constraints of conventional pedagogies are most apparent in their approach to errors and language output. Grammar-translation methodologies, prioritising precision and proper structure, foster classroom atmospheres in which students dread making errors and hence refrain from engaging in English writing altogether. This error-averse methodology exacerbates existing concerns among tribal students, who are already apprehensive about their linguistic abilities relative to more privileged peers, and stifles the risk-taking behaviours crucial for language acquisition. The outcome is classrooms populated by students who can recite grammatical rules yet cannot formulate original sentences, who execute workbook exercises mechanically but cannot participate in spontaneous dialogue, having acquired knowledge of English without mastering its practical application.

Contemporary, learner-focused instructional methods that could meet the needs of tribal students are still exceptional rather than standard in these circumstances. Communicative language instruction, task-based learning, and subject- and language-integrated learning necessitate both educator training and institutional support, which are inconsistently available across Gujarat's tribal colleges. Innovative approaches reveal the transformational potential of pedagogies that value students' linguistic and cultural capabilities rather than treating them as shortcomings to be surmounted.



The development of mother-tongue-based instructional modules in Narmada district, incorporating the local Dehwali and Ambudi dialects, represents one such innovation. This method facilitates students' engagement with English through their native languages, serving as "a bridge between our children and the education system," allowing them to "express themselves freely, ask questions, and participate actively in class" (Vasava, 2024). The disparity between classrooms employing contextualised approaches and those following traditional methods is striking—the former are vibrant with student engagement and enquiries. At the same time, the latter are marked by silence and inactivity.

The incorporation of tribal students' cultural assets into English instruction represents an additional, potentially transformational practice. Tribal groups maintain profound traditions of oral literature, music, dance, and ceremonial activities that represent unique modes of knowledge and communication. By using these resources—employing folk tales to deepen understanding, integrating song structures into language exercises, and encouraging students to articulate cultural practices in English—English teachers affirm students' identities while enhancing language proficiency. Such approaches acknowledge that language learning transcends mere skill development; it constitutes identity formation, and students are more inclined to engage in learning when they see their identities and communities are valued within the classroom.

Nevertheless, the systematic integration of tribal cultural elements into English instruction is infrequent, reliant on the initiative of individual educators rather than established practices. The first-generation learner status of several tribal students complicates pedagogical decision-making. Students enter English courses lacking the familial or community resources that support language acquisition for more privileged peers, navigating novel linguistic environments without the reinforcement typically provided at home (Bharateeya et al., n.d.). This reality necessitates educational strategies that transform classrooms into surrogate homes for language practice, where the intensive support usually offered by educated families is replaced by structured peer interaction, extensive teacher modelling, and meticulously organised learning activities.

The desire for proficiency in English to enhance employment opportunities coexists with the fear of poor performance, generating both motivational potential and psychological vulnerability that require attention from sensitive pedagogy. Peer learning in tribal college classrooms warrants particular attention due to the resource limitations these schools face. In contexts where instructor attention is constrained and individualised support is unfeasible on a large scale, effectively designed peer learning activities can significantly enhance possibilities for language practice and feedback. Students collaborating in small groups on communicative activities, participating in pair work that necessitates English production, and offering mutual support through collaborative learning exemplify ways of utilising student numbers as benefits rather than limitations.

Studies from analogous situations indicate that tribal students, hailing from communities with robust collective traditions, may particularly thrive in collaborative learning frameworks that align with communal ideals. Such techniques necessitate



educators proficient in fostering collaborative work, classrooms equipped with adaptable seating configurations, and institutional timetables that allow for prolonged interactive engagements—resources that are sometimes inconsistently accessible. Assessment techniques in tribal colleges expose an additional facet of pedagogical challenges with significant implications for learning.

Standardised tests intended for statewide implementation presume consistent curriculum coverage and equivalent learning opportunities, which resource-limited tribal institutions are unable to offer. When students are evaluated on content they have not sufficiently mastered, using forms that favour test-taking abilities they have not cultivated. In language that is still somewhat inaccessible, assessment outcomes indicate not learning but a compounding of disadvantages. The COVID-19 pandemic illuminated the inequities inherent in assessment systems, as students compelled to traverse long distances and ascend hilltops to access internet connectivity encountered formidable obstacles in demonstrating their learning through online examinations (Vasava, 2024).

These experiences indicate that assessment approaches, akin to teaching methods, necessitate contextualisation within tribal realities to measure learning rather than merely reflect privilege. The disparity between pedagogical innovation and systemic practice persists significantly in Gujarat's tribal colleges. Promising methodologies—mother tongue-based instruction, culturally responsive resources, collaborative learning frameworks, contextualised assessment—have proven effective in localised initiatives but have not attained the systematic implementation necessary to transform tribal English education on a larger scale. The individual educators who create and maintain such innovations often do so in the face of institutional challenges, lacking collegial support, administrative endorsement, and professional development opportunities to sustain and disseminate their approaches. Until pedagogical reform garners the sustained institutional focus it requires, tribal children will continue to face English classes in which the methodologies utilised are largely disconnected from their needs, resources, or aspirations.

## V. Conclusion

The issues facing English language teaching in Gujarat's tribal universities or colleges are not isolated or intractable; rather, they are intricately interconnected. Linguistic distance, cultural disjuncture, institutional limits, educational mismatches, socio-economic deprivation, and policy gaps are interdependent; they mutually reinforce each other, forming an ecology of barriers that necessitates equally interrelated remedies. Tribal students navigate a bilingual landscape that conventional curricula overlook, bringing valuable cultural assets that educational environments often fail to acknowledge.

They encounter educators who are unable to communicate in their languages, curricula that depict unfamiliar environments, and organisations lacking basic infrastructure. They bear the cognitive burden of poverty in classrooms where conventional teaching methods demand passive acquiescence rather than active participation. They face



policies that guarantee inclusion, yet implement curricula created without their involvement and evaluations that assess privilege rather than competence.

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