

Rural–Urban Differences in English Learning at the Secondary Level: A Study of Learning Environment and Pedagogical Challenges in Paschim Medinipur

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Abstract

The gap between rural and urban areas is a big part of educational inequality in India, especially when it comes to learning English as a second or additional language.

Even though English is a required subject at the secondary level, students learn it under very different social, economic, teaching, and school conditions. This paper looks at the differences in learning English between rural and urban students in Paschim Medinipur, a district in West Bengal. The study explores how where students live, how much they are exposed to English, their family background, access to learning materials, private tutoring, use of digital tools, teacher qualities, classroom activities, and feelings about the language affect their English learning. Recent studies in West Bengal show big differences between rural and urban students when it comes to anxiety about English and how well they perform. A 2025 study found that rural students feel more anxious about English and there is a strong link between anxiety and lower language skills. Another 2025 study showed that urban students perform better in English, while rural students feel more anxious in class. Research on students who study in Bengali also shows that factors like family background, where they live, whether they are the first in their family to learn English, and how much opportunity they have to learn the language are important. This paper uses a mixed-method approach comparing students and teachers from both rural and urban or semi-urban schools in Paschim Medinipur. It argues that the differences between rural and urban students should not be seen as a difference in their ability to learn, but rather as differences in the chances they have to learn, the resources available, and the conditions at school. The paper concludes that to make English education more equal across different places, we need teaching methods that fit the local context, training for teachers, environments that use English a lot, better access to digital tools, group learning, and ongoing chances for students to use English in real-life situations.

Keywords: *Rural–Urban Divide, English Learning, Secondary Education, Paschim Medinipur, Language Anxiety, English Proficiency, Bengali-Medium Schools, Learning Environment, Educational Inequality.*

1. Introduction

Educational inequality doesn't just come from differences in how smart students are.

It also comes from the different environments where students learn. Where a school is located can affect things like the number of teachers, the quality of teaching materials, access to libraries, digital tools, private tutoring, exposure to the English language, and chances to practice speaking. These differences are especially important when it comes to English because learning the language well happens through regular use and real-life experience, not just from classes.

In India, English has become a key part of education and career success.

That means students who can use English well in everyday situations might have an edge over those who only know it from textbooks. This makes the question of fair English education connected to bigger issues about fairness in education.

Looking at the difference between rural and urban areas helps us understand these problems better.

Rural students aren't naturally worse at learning English. But they often don't have the same chances to learn and use the language. A student in the city might hear English through tutoring, online platforms, English-speaking friends, libraries, TV, and casual chats. A student in a rural area might only get English from school and textbooks.

This difference is especially clear in West Bengal.

Studies have shown that rural and urban students in secondary school differ a lot in how anxious they feel about English and how well they do in the language. Sen and Panda found that rural students often feel more anxious and that this anxiety is linked to lower English skills. Chakraborty and Naskar also found that rural students experience more stress in class and have lower English performance compared to their urban peers.

This study looks at Paschim Medinipur to explore these differences in a new area.

2. Context of the Study

Paschim Medinipur has many different types of schools.

These schools vary in where they are located, the facilities they have, the kinds of students they serve, how many teachers they have, their access to technology, and the economic and social conditions of the area. Because of this, a study looking at the whole district cannot treat all schools as being the same.

The difference between rural and urban areas is helpful not because it gives a simple yes-or-no answer, but because it lets researchers look at how access to education and opportunities vary between these areas.

Learning English needs regular exposure.

Students need chances to hear, read, write, and speak the language, get feedback, and use it in real-life situations. When these chances are not the same for everyone, it can lead to differences in how well they know the language.

This idea is backed by research from West Bengal.

A study in 2025 that looked at 400 secondary students used standard tests to measure anxiety and English skills. It found that rural students had higher anxiety than urban ones.

Another 2025 study with 300 secondary students also found big differences between rural and urban students in classroom anxiety and English performance.

It reported a very strong link between high anxiety and lower academic success.

These findings make it important to look at the rural and urban differences in Paschim Medinipur.

3. Rationale of the Study

The reason for this study comes from five main points.

First, English is becoming more important for moving forward in school and work.

Second, just having classes does not make students able to use English well in real life.

Third, learning chances are not the same for rural and urban students.

Fourth, things like anxiety and confidence can affect how much students participate and learn.

Fifth, there is very little information about how these factors affect students in Paschim Medinipur.

The study aims to go beyond the idea that rural students do worse because they are not able.

Instead, it looks at whether differences in learning results are connected to differences in exposure, resources, teaching methods, and the social environment.

4. Statement of the Problem

The main issue this paper looks at is the possible unfairness in the chances rural and urban secondary students have to learn and use English.

The study wants to know if students from rural and urban schools are different in the following areas:

- Their ability in English;
- How anxious they feel about using English;
- How much they are exposed to English;
- How easy it is for them to get learning materials;

- How much they use digital tools;
- How much they take part in class activities;
- How motivated they are to learn English;
- Whether they take private lessons;
- How much support they get from their parents; and
- How many opportunities they have to use English in real-life situations.

The study also looks at what teachers think because the environment of the school can affect how teaching and learning happen.

5. Objectives of the Study

This study aims to look at the differences between rural and urban students in learning English at the secondary level in Paschim Medinipur and find out what educational factors cause these differences.

It specifically wants to check differences in English ability and language anxiety, compare how much students are exposed to English, look into how easy it is to get learning resources and use technology, examine influences from the family and socio-economic background, check how teaching happens in the classroom, understand what teachers think, and suggest ways to reduce unfairness in English education.

6. Research Questions

The study is guided by the following questions:

1. Are there big differences in English skills between students in rural and urban areas?
2. Do students in rural and urban areas feel different levels of worry about speaking English?
3. Do students from rural and urban areas get to use English in different ways outside of school?
4. Are there differences in the resources available to learn English?
5. Does having access to digital technology help students learn English better?
6. How important is private tutoring for improving English skills?
7. How does the educational background of parents affect their children's English learning?
8. Are there differences in how English is taught in classrooms in rural and urban areas?
9. What are the main teaching challenges that teachers face?
10. What steps can be taken to reduce the gap in English learning between rural and urban students?

7. Hypotheses

The following hypotheses will be tested after collecting data:

H01: There is no big difference in English skills between rural and urban students.

H02: There is no big difference in how worried rural and urban students are about speaking English.

H03: There is no big difference in how much rural and urban students use English outside school.

H04: There is no connection between having access to English learning resources and English skills.

H05: There is no connection between a student's family background and their English performance.

H06: There is no connection between feeling worried about English and English performance among secondary students in Paschim Medinipur.

These hypotheses will only be tested using statistical methods after all the data has been collected.

8. Review of Related Literature

The difference between rural and urban areas has become a key topic in studies about English education in West Bengal.

Sen and Panda's 2025 study is especially important because it looked at 400 secondary students from West Bengal, including both rural and urban learners.

The researchers split the group equally and used standard tools to measure English-language anxiety and skill level. The results showed a clear link between anxiety and skill, with rural students having more anxiety than urban ones.

This is supported by Chakraborty and Naskar's study from late 2025.

Their research included 300 secondary students and found big differences between rural and urban areas in classroom anxiety and English performance. Rural students had higher anxiety, while urban students did better in English. The study also showed a strong link between anxiety and English performance.

Another angle comes from research on the social and cultural environment.

A study focused on Bengali-medium Class X students from rural and urban schools in West Bengal looked at whether social and cultural factors affect English skills, especially reading and writing. The researchers used descriptive and correlational analysis along with t-tests.

The role of where someone lives has also come up in studies about writing skills.

Ghosh, Mahato, and Sen's 2026 study used cluster analysis to look at English writing skills among secondary students in Bengali-medium schools. They considered geographical location and whether students were first-generation learners as important factors.

Research on rural Bengali-medium schools has highlighted more teaching challenges.

A 2026 study reported that fear of speaking English, influence from the mother tongue, lack of confidence, limited curriculum, and the absence of supportive social and cultural settings can limit students' use of English. The authors also suggested technology, peer learning, storytelling, language labs, and visual teaching as possible solutions.

The importance of these findings is backed by research in the wider Medinipur region.

A study of secondary schools in Contai found issues like limited vocabulary, weak grammar understanding, low confidence, little exposure to English, poor teacher training, large classes, lack of teaching tools, and a focus on exams as major challenges.

Taken together, these studies show that where someone lives is connected to many educational and psychological factors.

However, the exact connections between these factors in Paschim Medinipur need more research.

9. Research Gap

The literature offers some useful insights into rural–urban differences in West Bengal, but there are still several limitations.

Most of the research is done at the state level or in districts other than Paschim Medinipur.

State-level averages can hide important differences in education within specific areas.

Also, many studies focus on just one main factor, like anxiety or achievement.

A better approach would be to look at how different factors—such as exposure, resources, family background, teaching methods, anxiety, and proficiency—work together.

That's why this study suggests a detailed look at the district level, considering multiple aspects.

10. Conceptual Understanding of Rural–Urban Difference

Rural–urban difference should not be seen as just a simple geographic factor.

It stands for a variety of different conditions and situations.

The location of a school can affect:

- The availability of trained teachers;
- Class size;
- Access to private tutoring;

- Availability of libraries;
- Internet connection;
- Access to digital devices;
- Exposure to English-language media;
- Parents' education levels;
- The school environment of peers;
- Opportunities to practice English.

So, if urban students score higher in tests, it doesn't automatically mean they are more capable.

The difference might come from unequal opportunities.

Similarly, if rural students show higher levels of anxiety, it shouldn't be taken as a sign of a psychological weakness in rural students.

Anxiety could be due to less practice, fear of making mistakes, or a different classroom environment.

11. Research Methodology

11.1 Research Design

A mixed-method approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative methods is suggested.

The quantitative part should help find out differences in language skills, stress, learning opportunities, resources, and other related factors.

The qualitative part should help understand how students and teachers think about these challenges.

11.2 Population

The study should include students and English teachers from secondary schools in selected areas of Paschim Medinipur.

11.3 Sampling

Schools can be selected using a method called stratified sampling to make sure both rural and urban or semi-urban areas are included.

Within these schools, students can be picked randomly or using a systematic method.

The final number of participants must be decided based on the real situation and the research plan.

11.4 Student Questionnaire

The questionnaire should gather information about:

- Personal background;
- Language experience;
- Family education level;
- Access to learning materials;
- Private tutoring;
- Exposure to English;
- Use of digital tools;
- Interest in learning;
- Feelings of stress;
- Involvement in class;
- Opinions about English.

11.5 English Proficiency Test

A test made by the researcher can check grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing skills.

If speaking and listening are included, clear scoring guidelines should be made to keep the results consistent.

11.6 Teacher Interviews

Interviews with teachers should explore differences in:

- Class size;
- Ways of teaching;
- Availability of resources;
- Student involvement;
- Use of English in class;
- Pressure for assessments;
- Teacher training;
- Use of technology.

11.7 Classroom Observation

Observation should show what really happens in the classroom, not just what is said to happen.

The researcher might record:

- How teachers and students interact;
- How students interact with each other;
- How much English and Bengali are used;
- How questions are asked;
- Group activities;
- Practice speaking;
- Use of teaching tools;
- How mistakes are corrected;
- How much students are involved.

12. Differences Between Rural and Urban Areas in English Exposure

Exposure is one of the most important things when learning a second language.

Students can't just learn by memorizing words and grammar.

They need to hear, see, and use the language in real-life situations again and again.

Urban students might have more chances to use English because of things like:

- Private English lessons;
- English TV shows;
- Online videos;
- Social media;
- Books and newspapers;
- Learning websites;
- Groups of friends who speak English.

Rural students may not have as many of these options, but technology is slowly helping to change this.

So, this study should look at how much English people are actually exposed to, not just guess it.

We can ask students how often they read English books, watch English videos, listen to English songs or podcasts, use English online, talk in English, or get private lessons.

13. Access to Learning Tools

Having access to learning tools is another big part of education.

A student with a smartphone and good internet can use tools like dictionaries, educational videos, pronunciation guides, e-books, language apps, and English media by themselves.

But a student without these tools might only learn from their textbook and what the teacher says in class.

This difference can be bigger in rural areas where there may not be good technology or internet.

But technology alone isn't the answer.

It's how students use it and how teachers help them that really makes a difference.

14. Family Background

The way a family is set up can affect how well someone learns English in many ways.

Parents who have more education might be more willing to help with homework, encourage reading in English, arrange extra lessons, or give access to learning tools.

On the other hand, parents who didn't have much chance to go to school might still be very supportive in terms of emotions but might not be able to help directly with studies.

So, the study should make a clear difference between how willing parents are to support learning and how much help they can actually give in terms of education.

This is important because not having enough educational opportunities shouldn't be seen as a lack of interest from the parents.

15. Private Tuition

Private tuition is a big part of the education system in India.

Students who take extra English classes might get more practice in grammar, vocabulary, reading, and preparing for exams.

But private tuition can also push students to focus too much on getting the right answers and solving standard questions.

Therefore, the study should look not just at whether students take private tuition, but also what kind of English teaching they get during those classes.

16. Language Anxiety and Rural-Urban Difference

Anxiety is something that needs to be looked at carefully because it can affect the connection between the learning environment and how well someone performs.

Studies by Sen and Panda show that anxiety is strongly linked to lower English skills among high school students in West Bengal.

Their work also found that students in rural areas feel more anxious.

Similar findings were made by Chakraborty and Naskar, who noticed that rural students face more classroom anxiety and urban students tend to do better in English.

The importance of these findings is in how they affect teaching methods.

If students are scared of making mistakes in English, they might avoid speaking. If they don't speak, they miss chances to practice. Less practice can keep their English skills low, which can make them even more anxious.

This forms a cycle:

Little exposure → Low confidence → Anxiety → Less speaking → Less practice → Continued poor skills.

To break this cycle, teachers need to use teaching approaches that support and encourage students.

17. Teacher-Related Challenges

Teachers are very important in making language learning good or bad.

A teacher with a big class may not be able to give each student enough time to speak.

A teacher who is under pressure to get good exam results may focus more on written tests. A teacher who doesn't have videos or pictures may depend too much on the textbook.

These situations don't mean the teacher is doing a bad job.

They are just problems with the school system that affect how teachers teach.

New research in schools that use Bengali as the main language has found that teacher issues, the way the school's lessons are planned, not enough practice, and limited teaching tools are major problems in English teaching.

So, teacher training should not only improve their English skills but also give them useful ways to teach big classes, groups with different skill levels, check learning through activities, use speaking and listening exercises, and make teaching materials that don't cost much.

18. Classroom Pedagogy

The difference between rural and urban areas is connected with how classes are taught.

If a class is mostly about listening to the teacher, translating words, memorizing things, and doing writing exercises, students may not get much practice speaking or listening.

Communicative teaching doesn't need expensive tools.

Teachers can use:

- Talking in pairs;
- Acting out roles;
- Activities where students find out information from each other;
- Telling stories;
- Describing pictures;
- Giving short talks;
- Helping each other correct mistakes;
- Having group discussions;
- Reading together in small groups.

These activities can work well in both rural and city schools.

The important thing is that students get chances to use English in real ways, not just answer questions about English.

19. Proposed Data Analysis

After collecting data from the field, the study can compare students in rural and urban areas using numbers like averages and how much they vary.

If the data fits certain rules, it can use tests like t-tests to compare groups.

It can use correlation to see how things like nervousness, how much English is used at home, and how well someone speaks are connected. Chi-square tests can be used for things like whether students are in certain groups or not.

If there are enough students, regression can help find out if things like how much English is used at home, family background, teaching tools, nervousness, or private lessons have a big effect on how well students do in English.

Qualitative interviews can be studied by looking at the main themes in what people say.

The numbers should be looked at along with what people say, not just on their own.

20. Discussion

The main point of this paper is that the differences in English learning between rural and urban areas should be seen as differences in the opportunities available, not as differences in the students' ability.

If rural students show lower skill levels, the researcher should look into whether they have less chance to practice English, fewer learning tools, more stress, less private lessons, or different classroom settings.

If urban students show better results, the study should also look into the reasons behind that success.

This way, we avoid blaming rural education for problems.

The aim is not to copy the urban school system in rural areas, but to find out what educational chances are missing and how to create them in ways that work best for each local situation.

21. Educational Implications

This study has several important lessons for English teaching in Paschim Medinipur.

First, rural schools need more chances to practice English regularly.

Activities like English clubs, reading, storytelling, debates, and talking with classmates can help.

Second, digital tools can be used when possible.

Even one shared device can help with listening and videos if used well in class.

Third, teachers need training on how to teach using conversation and manage the classroom.

Fourth, tests should include real use of language, not just memorizing facts.

Fifth, students should feel safe to make mistakes as part of learning.

Sixth, school changes should be made based on the local conditions.

A rural school with little internet might need different help than an urban school with lots of digital tools.

22. Conclusion

The difference between learning English in rural and urban areas is an important and complicated topic.

Studies in West Bengal show that students from rural and urban secondary schools might have different levels of English skills, feel different levels of anxiety in class, and have different learning environments.

But these differences shouldn't be taken as proof that one group is smarter than the other.

How well someone learns English depends on many things like how much they are exposed to it, the resources available, how classes are taught, the environment at home, their confidence, and how much chance they have to use English in real life.

In Paschim Medinipur, the main thing isn't just teaching more English, but making sure the learning opportunities are better and more accessible.

A good plan for the district would include teaching methods that focus on communication, training teachers, giving access to learning materials, including digital tools, offering reading activities, encouraging learning with peers, and creating classroom environments that are sensitive to students' anxiety.

In the end, fair English education means making sure where a student lives doesn't affect how well they can learn and use English.

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