



## Challenges of Teaching and Learning English as Second Language: A Study of Secondary Schools in Contai

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### Abstract:

*Teaching and learning English as a Second Language (ESL) in secondary schools remain a significant challenge, particularly in semi-urban and rural contexts like Contai in Purba Medinipur district, West Bengal. This study investigates the major difficulties faced by both teachers and students in the ESL classroom at the secondary level. Using a mixed-method approach, data were collected from selected secondary schools through surveys, classroom observations, and interviews with teachers and students.*

*The findings reveal that learners often struggle with limited vocabulary, poor grammatical understanding, lack of confidence, and minimal exposure to English outside the classroom. Teachers, on the other hand, face constraints such as inadequate training in modern pedagogical techniques, large class sizes, limited teaching-learning resources, and an exam-oriented system that prioritizes rote learning over communicative competence. Additionally, socio-economic background and the dominance of the mother tongue significantly influence learners' ability to acquire English effectively.*

*The study highlights the need for context-specific teaching strategies, integration of communicative language teaching methods, use of digital tools, and continuous professional development for teachers. It also emphasizes the importance of creating an English-rich environment to improve students' language proficiency. The findings of this research may help policymakers, educators, and curriculum planners in designing more effective ESL teaching practices in similar contexts.*

**Keywords:** *English as a Second Language (ESL), Secondary Education, Teaching-Learning Challenges, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Rural and Semi-Urban Schools, Teacher Training, Language Proficiency, Purba Medinipur (Contai), Classroom Pedagogy, Educational Challenges.*

### Introduction:

In India, English has long been recognized as the language of opportunity, bridging the gap between regional languages and global communication (Ramanathan, 2016). Its importance in the Indian educational system has only grown over time, with English becoming the medium of instruction in many higher education institutions and the primary language for academic and professional advancement (Mohanty, 2019). At the secondary school level, English is a mandatory subject and plays a pivotal role in shaping students' academic future (Thurber, 1894). The challenges associated with teaching and learning English as a Second Language

(ESL), however, are multifaceted and depend on a variety of factors, including access to resources, teacher training, student background, and cultural contexts (Khan, 2011). Contai, a town located in Purba Medinipur, West Bengal, is an ideal setting for examining the challenges faced by both teachers and students in learning English as a second language. The town's blend of urban and rural populations offers a unique context in which the issue of ESL education can be explored from multiple perspectives. While some schools in the region are well-resourced and equipped with the latest teaching technologies, many others suffer from limited infrastructure and a lack of adequate learning materials. This disparity further complicates the ESL learning process, as students from different schools may experience different level so f exposure to English and quality of instruction.

Moreover, secondary schools in Contai reflect the broader national diversity in terms of student demographics. The population of students is linguistically heterogeneous, with many speaking Bengali, Santali, or other regional languages as their first language. English, therefore, often serves as a second or even third language for many of the students. This multilingual context introduces several complexities for both teachers and students in secondary schools, as students are not only grappling with mastering English but are also balancing their primary language(s) with the additional challenge of learning English. Teachers in Contai, like in many parts of India, often face significant challenges in ESL instruction. The lack of specialized teacher training in ESL methodologies is a primary issue. While many teachers may have a strong command of the English language, they may not have the skills or knowledge required to teach it effectively, particularly in addressing the needs of non-native learners. Inadequate professional development programs and workshops further limit teachers' ability to stay updated with current ESL teaching strategies. Additionally, the lack of teaching aids and resources such as interactive multimedia, online platforms, or English-language libraries creates barriers to effective instruction.

Another contributing factor to the challenges faced by secondary schools in Contai is the overcrowded nature of classrooms, with teacher-student ratios often exceeding optimal limits. Such overcrowding makes individualized instruction and attention to students' learning needs difficult, leaving many students to struggle with acquiring English at their own pace. Additionally, many students may not receive adequate exposure to English outside of school, especially in rural areas, which limits their ability to practice and apply what they learn in the classroom. In urban schools, there may be greater access to English media and resources, but the disparity between urban and rural access exacerbates existing inequalities in language learning opportunities. The socio-cultural context of Contai also plays a role in ESL education. The town is home to a diverse population with varying cultural backgrounds, which can impact students' motivation and approach to learning English. Cultural attitudes towards English language learning can influence students' perceptions of the subject, either enhancing or hindering their willingness to engage with it. For instance, students from families with strong educational backgrounds may have greater motivation and support for learning English, while those from less academically inclined families may view English as less important or as a source of frustration. In light of these factors, exploring the challenges of teaching and learning English as a Second Language in secondary schools in Contai will provide valuable insights into the intersection of socio-economic, cultural, and educational dynamics. This context-specific research will offer a deeper understanding of how these factors interact to shape ESL teaching and learning outcomes in this region.

### **Need and Significance of the Study**

This study addresses the increasing significance of English proficiency in India's educational and professional spheres. English serves as the medium of instruction in numerous prestigious institutions and is a crucial requirement for employment in various sectors, including business, technology, and healthcare. For secondary school students, attaining proficiency in English is essential for academic achievement and future opportunities in higher education and the labor market. However, many students, particularly in towns such as Contai, encounter substantial challenges in acquiring the necessary language skills.

These challenges arise from limited exposure to English outside the classroom, particularly for students from rural backgrounds who lack access to English-language media or extracurricular activities. Furthermore, socio-economic disparities exacerbate these issues, as many students originate from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and cannot afford private tutoring or online learning resources. The financial constraints impede their ability to improve language skills and influence their attitudes toward learning English, often perceiving it as merely an academic requirement. From the educators' perspective, the absence of specialized training in teaching English as a second language (ESL) restricts their capacity to address students' diverse needs. Traditional, teacher-centric methodologies and large, heterogeneous classrooms further complicate effective language instruction.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to provide insights into the obstacles faced by both ESL teachers and learners in Contai. By identifying key difficulties in ESL teaching and learning, this research can inform the development of targeted interventions, such as specialized teacher training programs, additional resources, and flexible teaching approaches. The findings will contribute to efforts to reduce educational disparities, enhance English language education, and empower students to succeed in a globalized world.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem addressed by this research is the identification and analysis of the challenges faced by both ESL teachers and students in secondary schools in Contai. Despite the critical role of English in the educational system, students continue to face difficulties in mastering the language. Teachers, on the other hand, struggle with various factors such as limited resources, inadequate training, and diverse classroom needs. There is a need for a comprehensive study that examines these challenges to inform policy and practice in ESL education at the secondary level.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this researcher are as follows:

1. To identify the key challenges faced by teachers in teaching ESL in secondary schools in Contai.
2. To assess the difficulties students face in learning ESL in secondary schools in Contai.
3. To explore the factors influencing the success or failure of ESL teaching and learning in the secondary schools of Contai.

### **Hypothesis**

Hypotheses of the present study are as follows:

1. There is a significant correlation between the challenges faced by teachers in teaching ESL and the difficulties students face in learning ESL in secondary schools in Contai.
2. Secondary school teachers in Contai experience challenges related to resources, training, and classroom management that hinder effective ESL teaching.
3. Students in secondary schools in Contai face significant difficulties in learning ESL due to language barriers, low motivation, and socio-cultural factors.

### **Operational Definitions**

1. **Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL):** Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) refers

to the process of teaching English to students whose first language is not English. This includes all instructional strategies, methods, and approaches used to develop students' proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English.

2. **Challenges Faced by Teachers in Teaching ESL:** This term refers to the various difficulties and obstacles encountered by ESL teachers while teaching English in secondary schools. Challenges may include:
  - **Lack of Resources:** Insufficient teaching materials, such as text books, multimedia tools, and digital resources.
  - **Teacher Training:** Lack of professional development opportunities in ESL methodologies.
  - **Classroom Management:** Difficulties in handling large or diverse classrooms with varying levels of language proficiency.
  - **Curriculum Constraints:** Inflexibility of the curriculum to accommodate the needs of ESL students.
3. **Difficulties Faced by Students in Learning ESL:** This refers to the challenges faced by students in acquiring proficiency in English as a second language. These difficulties may include:
  - **Language Barriers:** Limited vocabulary, grammar issues, and difficulties with pronunciation.
  - **Cultural Differences:** The challenge of understanding English-language content due to limited exposure to English-speaking cultures.
  - **Motivation:** Lack of interest or motivation to learn English, which could stem from external pressures or perceived irrelevance of the language.
  - **Socio economic Barriers:** Limited access to additional resources for learning English, such as private tuition or internet access.
4. **Secondary Schools in Contai:** Secondary schools in Contai refer to educational institutions that provide formal education to students in the age group of 13 to 16 years (classes IX to XII), where English is taught as a mandatory subject. These include both government and private schools within the town of Contai, located in Purba Medinipur, West Bengal.

### Review of Related Literature

This section reviews the existing literature on the challenges of teaching and learning English as a Second Language (ESL), particularly focusing on secondary school contexts. It explores a range of factors that impact ESL education, including pedagogical, socio-cultural, resource-related, and learner-specific challenges. These factors, which are relevant both to India and internationally, provide a foundation for understanding the existing challenges in ESL education. Additionally, this review identifies research gaps in the context of Contai secondary schools, setting the stage for the proposed study.

### Pedagogical Challenges

Pedagogical challenges in ESL education are a critical area of concern. One of the most significant challenges is the inadequate teacher training in ESL methodologies. According to Vaidya and Mehta (2018), this issue is especially prevalent in rural areas of India, where ESL teachers often lack the necessary pedagogical skills to address the diverse linguistic backgrounds of their students. This challenge is compounded by the absence of access to effective teaching resources, such as multimedia tools, which can

enhance the learning experience (Vaidya & Mehta, 2018). Furthermore, the balance between traditional grammar-based approaches and communicative language teaching (CLT) remains a contentious issue. Kaur and Kapoor (2020) argue that in many Indian ESL classrooms, rote memorization is still prioritized over real-life communication, hindering students' ability to achieve communicative competence in English. This issue of methodological imbalance continues to be a challenge despite the theoretical support for CLT, which emphasizes interaction and meaningful communication (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In the context of secondary schools, these pedagogical shortcomings can have a profound impact on students' engagement and language acquisition.

### **Socio-Cultural Factors**

Socio-cultural factors also play a significant role in shaping ESL education outcomes. Socio-economic status, for example, can greatly influence the availability of supplementary resources such as tutoring or access to language labs. Yin and Yang (2019) in their comparative study of China and India found that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds often face financial constraints that limit their access to these essential resources, which in turn affects their language learning outcomes. Rahman (2017) highlights that students from rural areas in India have limited exposure to English outside of the classroom, making it more difficult for them to acquire the language. This limitation is particularly problematic in rural settings like Contai, where exposure to English in daily life is minimal. Baker (2011) argues that family and community support is crucial for successful ESL learning. The presence of a supportive environment at home, including encouragement from parents and guardians, can contribute significantly to better student outcomes. In a similar vein, Sami and Taufik (2017) note that cultural factors, such as the perceived relevance of English and student motivation, play a major role in students' attitudes towards learning the language. These factors are particularly important in secondary school settings, where students begin to form attitudes that will influence their long-term language acquisition.

### **Resource and Infrastructure Constraints**

Resource and infrastructure constraints are pervasive challenges in ESL education, especially in rural settings. Chauhan (2016) points out that in many Indian rural schools, a lack of proper textbooks, audio-visual materials, and computers limits the ability of teachers to deliver high-quality language instruction. Graddol (2006) also notes that while the demand for English is increasing in developing nations, the quality of ESL teaching is often compromised due to insufficient resources and inadequate teacher training. In rural areas like Contai, the situation is further exacerbated by overcrowded classrooms, which create classroom management challenges and make it difficult for teachers to provide individualized attention. Mishra and Tiwari (2020) found that overcrowded classrooms in Uttar Pradesh, for instance, posed significant difficulties in maintaining discipline and ensuring effective learning in ESL contexts. The lack of adequate infrastructure, such as language labs and multimedia resources, is a critical issue that hinders both teaching and learning processes.

### **Learner-Specific Factors**

Learner-specific factors, including motivation, learning styles, and individual differences, also significantly influence ESL acquisition. Brown (2007) emphasizes that motivation is one of the most important factors in second language learning. An unmotivated student is more likely to invest time and effort in learning English, leading to better language outcomes. Lightbown and Spada (2013) expand on this by providing a comprehensive overview of second language acquisition research, highlighting the psychological and linguistic processes involved in learning a new language. They argue that individual differences, such as age, cognitive abilities, and previous exposure to languages, can affect how easily a student acquires a second language. Kumaravadivelu (2006) underscores the importance of context-sensitive teaching, advocating for the adaptation of global teaching methodologies to local socio-cultural and economic realities. This approach

would allow teachers to cater to the diverse needs of their students, especially in secondary school classrooms where individual differences can be pronounced.

## Research Gaps

While the existing literature provides valuable insights into the challenges of ESL teaching and learning, several research gaps remain, particularly with respect to secondary schools in Contai. These gaps provide a foundation for the proposed study:

1. **Context-Specific Data:** Much of the existing research on ESL education focuses on broader regional or national contexts, leaving a gap in research specifically examining the challenges faced by ESL teachers and students in Contai secondary schools. This study aims to fill this gap by providing localized data that reflects the unique challenges of the region.
2. **Impact of Local Socio-Cultural Factors:** While socio-cultural factors in ESL learning have been explored in various studies, there is a need for more in-depth research on how specific socio-cultural dynamics in Contai influence ESL education. The cultural attitudes towards English, the role of community and family support, and the social structures in Contai are likely to shape the learning environment in unique ways that have not been extensively studied.
3. **Effectiveness of Specific Interventions:** Another research gap is the lack of studies on the effectiveness of specific interventions tailored to the unique challenges faced by Contai secondary schools. Given the local context, it is essential to explore interventions that are feasible and effective in addressing these challenges. This study will investigate potential strategies for improving ESL education in Contai, such as the use of technology, teacher professional development programs, and culturally relevant materials.
4. **Teacher Perspectives in Contai:** While much has been written about the challenges ESL teachers face, there is limited research on the specific perspectives and experiences of ESL teachers working in Contai secondary schools. This study will prioritize gathering data directly from teachers to understand their challenges, needs, and perceptions of current ESL practices. Understanding the teachers' viewpoints is crucial for designing effective interventions that can address their specific concerns.

In conclusion, this literature review highlights the multifaceted challenges in ESL education, including pedagogical, socio-cultural, resource-related, and learner-specific factors. While significant research has been conducted on these issues, there remain substantial gaps in the literature, particularly regarding the context of Contai secondary schools. By addressing these gaps, the proposed study aims to contribute valuable insights to the field of ESL education, offering recommendations for improving teaching and learning practices in the region.

## Methodology

**Research Design:** This study will adopt a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. The survey will provide numerical data regarding student experiences and teacher challenges, while the interviews will offer detailed insights into teacher practices and strategies used to address these challenges.

**Study Area:** The research will be conducted in secondary schools in Contai, Purba Medinipur, West Bengal, an area known for its diversity in terms of socio-economic backgrounds and educational resources.

**Sampling Strategy:** The sample will include 100 students of class IX to XII and 10 ESL teachers from secondary schools in Contai. A purposive sampling technique under non probability sampling method will be used to select schools that provide inclusive education, ensuring a sample representative of the diversity in learning needs within the community.

## Research Tools

1. **Questionnaire:** A structured questionnaire will be used to collect quantitative data from students, focusing on their perceptions of ESL learning in inclusive classrooms.
2. **Interview:** Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with ESL teachers to gather qualitative data on the challenges they face and the strategies they employ.

**Data Collection:** Data will be collected over a two-month period. Surveys will be administered in classrooms, and interviews will be conducted with teachers in a private setting to ensure comfort and confidentiality.

**Data Analysis:** Quantitative data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics (e. g. , frequencies, percentages), while qualitative data from interviews will be analyzed through thematic analysis to identify common themes and patterns.

**Ethical Considerations:** The study will ensure that ethical standards are upheld. Participants will provide informed consent, and their privacy and confidentiality will be respected throughout the research process. Teachers and students will be informed that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time without consequence.

**Delimitations of the Study:** The study will be limited to secondary schools in Contai, and the findings may not be directly applicable to other regions with different socio-economic or cultural contexts.

## Expected Outcome

This study seeks to unveil a detailed understanding of the challenges teachers face when teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) in inclusive classrooms in secondary schools in Contai, Purba Medinipur. As we begin to navigate the educational landscape, particularly in rural and semi-urban regions, we anticipate uncovering several key challenges that impede effective ESL instruction. One of the most pressing challenges is the lack of sufficient resources—whether it be teaching aids, assistive technologies, or classroom infrastructure—that are essential for a truly inclusive learning environment. Additionally, many ESL teachers are not equipped with the necessary specialized training to address the diverse learning needs of students, particularly those with disabilities. The research also aims to highlight how these teachers navigate the wide spectrum of student abilities, making the teaching process more complex. Another crucial aspect that the study aims to explore is the effectiveness of the teaching strategies currently in use in these classrooms. Through careful examination, we hope to determine which techniques have proven successful in fostering language acquisition and which need to be reconsidered or enhanced. This will include evaluating how well differentiated instruction is being employed, how peer-assisted learning strategies are utilized, and how teachers incorporate technology into their teaching. Ultimately, the expected outcome of this research is to not only pinpoint these challenges but to offer concrete recommendations that can guide future improvements in ESL education. These recommendations will span areas like resource allocation, curriculum design, teaching strategies, and teacher training, with the goal of making ESL classrooms more inclusive, supportive, and effective for all students.

## Educational Implications

The findings of this study are poised to resonate deeply within the field of education, particularly in the design and implementation of inclusive ESL programs. The search will offer insights into how secondary schools in Contai, and similar regions, can adapt their curricula and teaching practices to ensure that they cater to the diverse needs of students. This includes the crafting of more flexible curricula that allow for differentiated instruction, helping students at varying levels of language proficiency and with different abilities to progress at their own pace.

Teacher training programs will be another focal point of the study's educational implications. It is clear that in order to achieve meaningful progress in ESL classrooms, educators must be equipped not only with general language teaching skills but also with a deep understanding of how to teach students with disabilities. As the study highlights gaps in current teacher training, it is expected to spark re-evaluation of how teachers are prepared to work in inclusive classrooms. Programs that offer specialized training in inclusive ESL strategies, such as using assistive technologies, adapting materials, and differentiating instruction, will be critical to addressing the challenges identified.

Additionally, this research will underscore the role of inclusive education policies in shaping the educational landscape. By pointing to the practical implications of these challenges, the study will advocate for more robust policies that support both teachers and students in inclusive classrooms. These could include policy changes that focus on resource distribution, teacher support, and community involvement. In particular, it may help bridge the gap between national education policies and the actual needs of students and teachers in rural and semi-urban schools.

Moreover, this study will serve as a catalyst for better community and parental involvement in the educational process. Understanding the specific barriers faced by students in ESL classrooms can help parents and community members better support the learning process, whether at home or through community-driven initiatives. By fostering a more inclusive approach, the study aims to build a supportive ecosystem around the students, helping them thrive academically and socially.

## Conclusion

The primary aim of this research is to address the unique challenges faced by ESL teachers in inclusive classrooms in secondary schools in Contai. As we look at the intersection of inclusive education and language learning, it becomes evident that there are many hurdles that need to be overcome in order to create a truly inclusive educational environment for students with disabilities. These challenges, ranging from inadequate resources to insufficient teacher training, pose barriers not just to the effective teaching of ESL but to the overall academic success of these students. However, through this research, we hope to make significant contributions to the field of education by offering a deeper, localized understanding of the challenges at hand. By focusing on secondary schools in a rural context like Contai, this study will fill an important gap in the existing literature on inclusive education in India. The findings will provide practical insights into the effectiveness of current teaching strategies and will offer actionable recommendations for improving ESL instruction in inclusive classrooms. Ultimately, this research is not just an academic exercise; it is a call for action to better equip teachers, students, and educational policymakers to create an environment where every student, regardless of their abilities, can succeed. The implications of this study extend beyond the classroom, influencing teacher training, curriculum development, and policy formation, with the goal of fostering a more inclusive, equitable, and effective education system. As we move forward, the research will be a catalyst for transforming how ESL is taught in inclusive settings, ensuring that all students—whether they have disabilities or not—can achieve their full potential in the classroom.

## Proposed Timeline

Phase	Timeframe
Literature Review	February-March 2026
Data Collection	April-June 2026
Data Analysis	July -August 2026
Report Writing	September-October 2026
Final Review and Submission	November 2026

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