

AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF PROBLEMS IN LEARNING ENGLISH AMONG UPPER PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN JORHAT BLOCK UNDER JORHAT DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

English is a crucial global language for education and personal growth. However, many upper primary students in Assam's Jorhat block struggle to learn it. This study aimed to identify these learning problems and see how they differ by gender and school type. Using a descriptive survey and a self-developed questionnaire, data were collected from students in government and private schools. Analysis involved mean, standard deviation, and t-tests. Findings indicate students face moderate to great difficulties in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, writing, and comprehension. While no significant gender difference was found, there was a notable difference between government and private school students. The study suggests that better teaching methods, more exposure to English, and supportive learning environments could help reduce these difficulties and improve English proficiency.

Keywords: *English language learning; Learning difficulties; Upper primary students, Jorhat block; Teaching strategies; English proficiency;*

INTRODUCTION

English has emerged as the predominant language across various domains, including global communication, scientific discourse, technological advancement, international commerce, media dissemination, and tertiary education. Within the Indian context, English fulfills a dual function: it operates both as a pivotal second language and as the primary medium of instruction in numerous educational institutions. Furthermore, the Government of Assam has recently underscored the critical importance of enhancing communication proficiencies through strategic initiatives, notably the “Foundations for Conveyed in English” program. This programmatic emphasis highlights the imperative for fostering robust English language skills from foundational stages, recognizing its overarching impact on academic trajectories and future professional opportunities (Bindra et al., n.d.). However, despite its pervasive influence and governmental impetus, many students, particularly in rural areas, encounter substantial challenges in acquiring proficiency in English (Ponmozhi & Thenmozhi, 2017).

These difficulties manifest in various forms, including issues with spelling, grammar, vocabulary, and syntax, which significantly impede their overall English language development (Awal et al., 2023). This challenge is particularly pronounced in regions where resource limitations and pedagogical approaches may not adequately address the

complexities of second language acquisition, often leading to significant learning gaps among upper primary students (Hossain, 2018). Consequently, understanding the specific dimensions of these learning difficulties—ranging from phonological interference to syntactic irregularities—is crucial for developing targeted pedagogical interventions. Despite prolonged exposure to English instruction, a significant proportion of students exhibit a lack of confidence and proficiency in its practical application. While English is taught as a subject, many students struggle to achieve competency in speaking, writing, and comprehension. Assessments and observations indicate that effective communication in English is limited to a small subset of students, with a majority experiencing difficulties in vocabulary, grammar, sentence construction, and oral expression.

These challenges often stem from inadequate pedagogical approaches, insufficient exposure to the language outside the classroom, and a curriculum that may not adequately address the diverse learning needs of students (Ponmozhi & Thenmozhi, 2017). In India, these difficulties are often compounded by the early emphasis on memorization over analytical and creative skills, leading to rote learning that fails to translate into lasting comprehension or application (Singh & Halim, 2023). This widespread issue ultimately impedes students' overall language development and proficiency, as they receive limited authentic exposure to English (Behera et al., 2024). Consequently, this lack of genuine engagement with the language outside of structured, often inflexible, classroom settings can severely hinder the natural acquisition processes, making it challenging for students to develop intuitive understanding and fluent application of English in real-world contexts (Islam et al., 2025).

The upper primary stage is crucial for establishing a strong foundation in language learning. Nevertheless, deficiencies in pedagogical approaches, insufficient practice, limited linguistic exposure, and apprehension regarding errors contribute to suboptimal English language proficiency. Acknowledging these challenges, this study was undertaken in the Jorhat block to investigate the scope and characteristics of English language learning difficulties encountered by upper primary school students. This research delves into specific factors such as vocabulary gaps, reading comprehension difficulties, and limited exposure to English in daily life as significant contributors to these challenges, especially in rural settings (Farmasari et al., 2025). Furthermore, the quality of teacher preparation and continuous professional development for English language teachers in these regions often needs to be improved, directly impacting instructional efficacy and student learning outcomes (Suar et al., 2025). For instance, disparities in educational quality between vernacular government and private schools, as highlighted by reports from Odisha, further exacerbate these issues, with a significantly lower percentage of government school students demonstrating English reading comprehension (Behera et al., 2024). These systemic shortcomings, including inadequate infrastructure and a scarcity of qualified teaching professionals, contribute to a cycle of underachievement in English language acquisition, particularly in rural India (Sharma & Dwivedi, 2025; Singh & Halim, 2023). Such disparities often lead to challenges in comprehending technical terminology and concepts in science subjects among students from vernacular government schools due to a lack of adequate English skills (Behera et al., 2024). This situation is further complicated by the limited exposure to English outside the classroom, outdated textbooks, and cultural barriers that often hinder natural language acquisition among Indian students (Singh & Halim, 2023). Addressing these multifaceted challenges necessitates a comprehensive approach that includes enhancing teacher training

programs, providing more communicative language learning opportunities, and improving access to English language resources, particularly in rural areas (Singh & Halim, 2023; Kumar, 2024). This aligns with observations that in classrooms where textbooks are the primary instructional tool, poor reading ability significantly impacts students' access to content and slows learning progress (Farmasari et al., 2025). Moreover, the lack of specialized training for teachers in many Indian states, including Odisha, further exacerbates these pedagogical limitations, impeding effective curriculum implementation and contributing to poor English language instruction (Suar et al., 2025). This inadequacy in teacher preparation is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where limited access to professional development opportunities can perpetuate traditional, less effective teaching methodologies (Kumar & Kumar, 2024). Compounding these issues is the prevalent practice of emphasizing syllabus completion over actual language proficiency enhancement, a problem noted within the English language education framework in Odisha (Suar et al., 2025). The scarcity of resources and inadequate infrastructure for English language teaching in Indian schools, particularly in rural areas, further hinders effective learning, with many institutions lacking essential facilities like textbooks and language laboratories (Singh & Halim, 2023; Kumar & Kumar, 2024).

1. NEED FOR THE STUDY

English has a significant impact on today's global society. It is widely used across countries for communication, higher education, employment, and digital interaction. The increasing importance of English has made it essential for students to develop strong language skills. The "Foundations for Conveyed in English" initiative in Assam highlights the need for competent English users from early schooling.

However, classroom observations indicate that despite years of learning English, students often lack fluency and confidence. Many students hesitate to speak English, make frequent grammatical errors, possess limited vocabulary, and show poor comprehension skills. Only a small number of students are found to communicate confidently.

Therefore, there is a need to investigate why such problems exist and what factors contribute to poor performance in English. This study is significant because it identifies the barriers faced by students and provides insights that can help teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers to design effective interventions for improving English learning at the upper primary level.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To assess the level of problems in learning English among upper primary school students.
2. To find out whether there is a significant difference between Boys and Girls in upper primary school students in their problems in learning English.
3. To examine whether government and private school students differ significantly in their problems in learning English.

Hypotheses of the Study

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between Boys and Girls in upper primary school students in problems in learning English.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between government and private upper primary school students in problems in learning English.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Method

The study adopted the descriptive survey method, suitable for obtaining information regarding the current status of students' learning problems.

Population

The population of the study included all upper primary school students (Classes VI–VIII) in Jorhat block.

Sample

A sample of 140 students was selected from different government and private schools using random sampling techniques. The sample was adequately representative of gender and school type.

Tool Used

A self-constructed questionnaire on problems in learning English was used. It covered the following areas: Vocabulary difficulty, Grammar and syntax, Pronunciation, Listening comprehension, Reading comprehension, Writing problems, and Confidence and motivation. The tool was validated by experts in Education and English language teaching.

Data Collection

Data were collected through direct administration of the questionnaire in the selected schools.

Statistical Techniques

Mean, Standard Deviation (SD), and t-test were used for analysis.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

This section discusses the study's findings regarding English language learning challenges among upper primary students.

Table 1: Level-wise Distribution of Problems in Learning English

Level	Score Range	Students (N)	Percentage (%)
Low	38–65	33	23.6%
Average	66–92	59	42.1%
High	93–120	48	34.3%
Total	—	140	100%

Interpretation

The level-wise distribution indicates that most upper primary school students experience moderate difficulties in English language learning, encompassing challenges with vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, comprehension, and writing tasks. Approximately 34.3% of students demonstrate a high level of learning problems, suggesting that over one-third face significant challenges in English acquisition.

These students would benefit from remedial instruction, individualized support, and increased exposure to English-speaking environments. Conversely, only 23.6% of students exhibit a low level of problems, indicating fewer difficulties and comparatively better performance in English. Collectively, these findings reveal that a substantial number of students encounter English language difficulties across a spectrum of severity, underscoring the need for targeted interventions to mitigate these learning deficits.

Figure 1: Distribution of English Learning Problems Across Different Levels

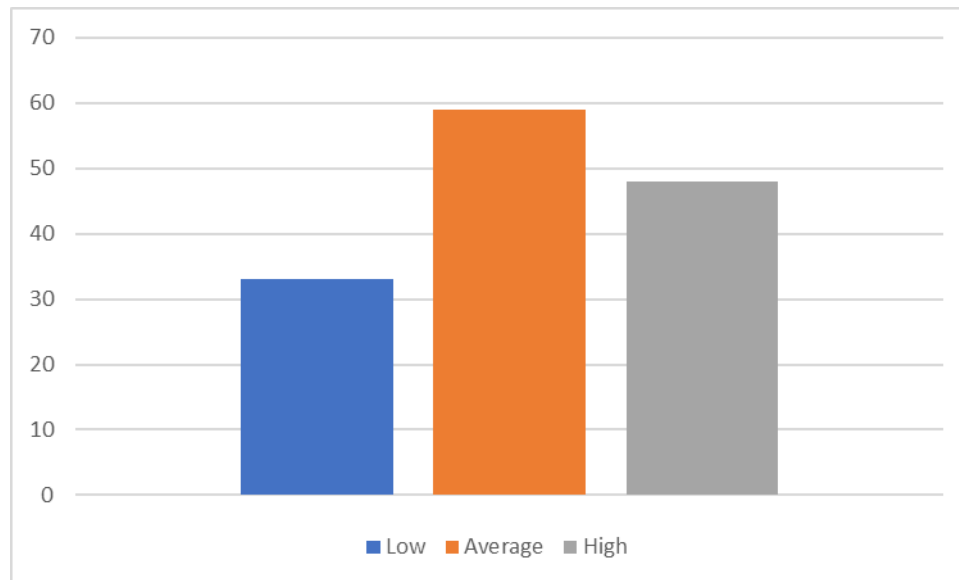


Table 2: Gender-wise Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-value of Problems in Learning English among Upper Primary School Students

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	't' value	Significant value	Level of significance
Boys	66	52.3	8.2	138	0.37	1.96	0.05
Girls	74	51.8	7.9				

Interpretation

The mean scores for boys and girls students were found to be nearly identical, and the computed t-value was considerably lower than the critical value. This result indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between genders regarding the challenges encountered in English language acquisition. Both boys and girls demonstrate comparable levels of difficulty, suggesting that gender is not a determining factor influencing English learning problems at the upper primary stage. Instead, these difficulties might stem from universal elements such as teaching methodologies, exposure to English, vocabulary demands, or available school resources, rather than gender-specific influences.

Figure 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of English Learning Problems by Gender

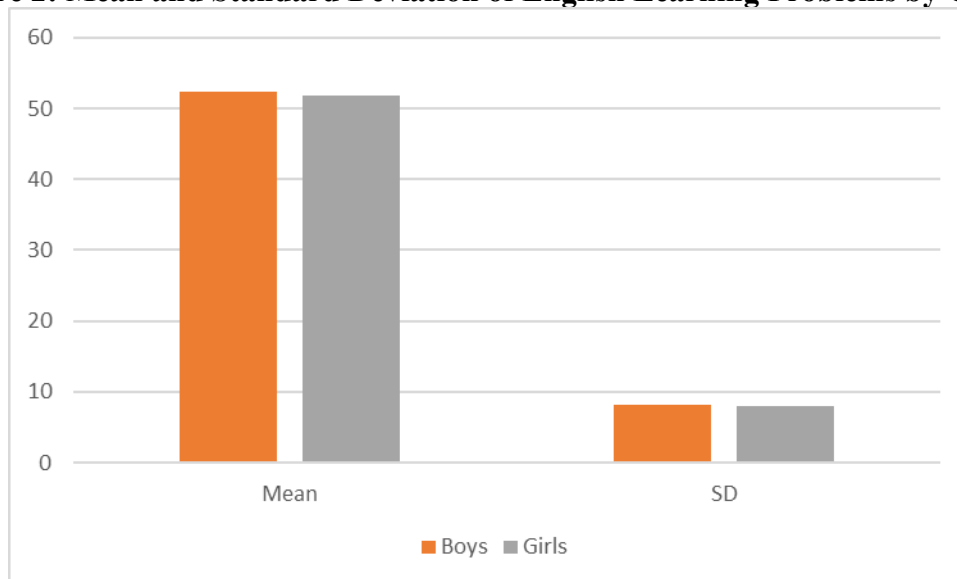


Table 3

School-type-wise Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-value of Problems in Learning English among Upper Primary School Students

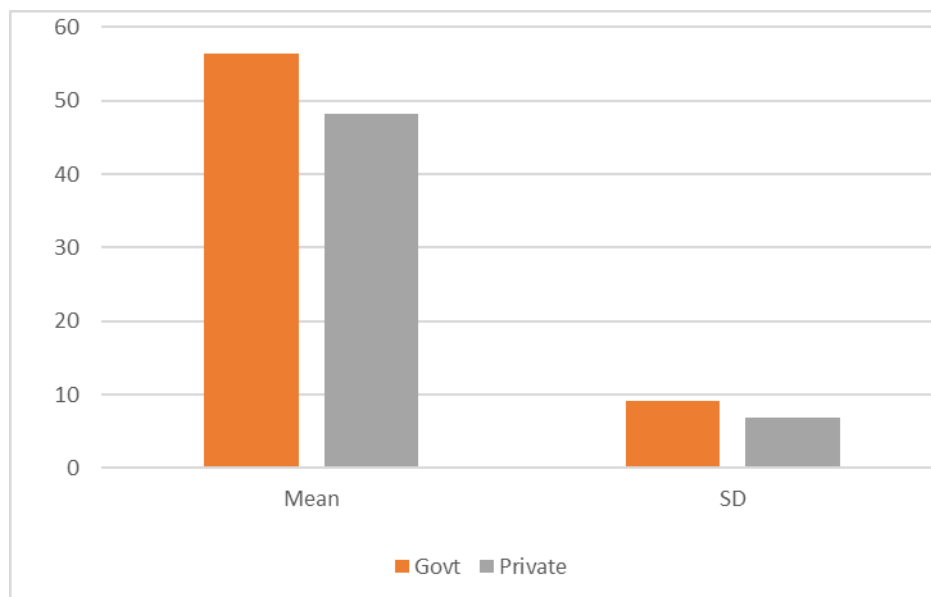
Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	't' value	Significant value	Level of significance
Govt	86	56.4	9.1	138	6.08	1.96	0.05
Private	68	48.2	6.8				

Interpretation

An independent samples t-test was conducted to assess whether significant differences exist in English learning problems between government and private school students. Government school students recorded a higher mean score than private school students, suggesting they experience greater difficulties.

The calculated t-value of 6.08 significantly exceeded the critical t-value of 1.96 at the 0.05 level of significance. Consequently, the null hypothesis, which posited no significant difference in English learning problems between these two groups, was rejected. This indicates that school type notably impacts students' English learning difficulties, with government school students exhibiting significantly higher problem levels.

Figure 3: Mean Scores of Problems in Learning English among Government and Private School Students



4. MAJOR FINDINGS

1. Overall Level of Problems in Learning English

The analysis revealed that a large proportion of upper primary school students experience moderate to high levels of difficulty in learning English. Specifically, 42.1% of students fall in the average level and 34.3% in the high-problem level. Only 23.6% reported low levels of difficulty. This indicates that English learning challenges are widespread among students in Jorhat Block.

2. Gender Differences in Problems in Learning English

The mean scores of boys ($M = 52.3$) and girls ($M = 51.8$) were found to be very close. The calculated t -value (0.37) was lower than the table value (1.96) at a 0.05 significance level. This shows that boys and girls do not differ significantly in the extent of learning problems they face in English. Hence, gender is not a determining factor in English learning difficulties.

3. School-Type Differences in Problems in Learning English

A significant difference was found between government and private school students. Government school students reported a higher mean score ($M = 56.4$) than private school students ($M = 48.2$), indicating greater difficulties. The calculated t -value (6.08) was much higher than the critical value (1.96), confirming that the difference is statistically significant. This suggests that school type plays an important role in shaping students' English learning experiences.

Results of the Study

- A considerable number of students struggle with grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, writing skills, and comprehension, indicating weaknesses in foundational language components. These pervasive issues, particularly in areas like grammar and vocabulary, align with findings suggesting that a significant portion of students

experience considerable challenges in English acquisition, often necessitating targeted interventions (Hashmi, 2016).

- No statistically significant difference exists between male and female students regarding their problems in learning English. This finding implies that pedagogical approaches and resource allocation should address general learning difficulties rather than gender-specific strategies (Choudhury et al., 2024).
- A statistically significant difference exists between government and private school students, with government school students demonstrating greater learning challenges. This disparity highlights potential discrepancies in educational resources, teaching methodologies, and overall academic support between these two educational settings (Bindra et al., n.d.).
- The findings clearly show that English learning problems remain a major concern at the upper primary level and require sustained attention from teachers, schools, and educational authorities. These persistent challenges necessitate a re-evaluation of current instructional practices and a systemic focus on enhancing language acquisition strategies to foster greater proficiency among students (Banditvilai & Cullen, 2018). These challenges often manifest as difficulties in vocabulary acquisition, spelling, and grammar, which can be further exacerbated by first language interference (Ghulamuddin et al., 2021). Moreover, students frequently grapple with comprehending teacher instructions and have limited time for dedicated English language acquisition, further impeding their progress (Chang & Wang, 2024).

Educational Implications

1. Schools should prioritize strengthening fundamental language abilities, such as grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, through well-structured language tasks, engaging exercises, and activity-based learning approaches.
2. Students require increased opportunities to engage in English conversation within authentic contexts. Incorporating activities like role-playing, storytelling, debates, dialogue practice, and conducting morning assemblies in English can significantly enhance both confidence and spoken fluency.
3. Educators, particularly those in government schools, need comprehensive training in contemporary language teaching methods. This includes communicative language teaching, activity-based learning, and phonics-focused instruction.
4. The notable disparity between government and private schools highlights an urgent need to improve facilities in government schools, providing more English reading materials, audio-visual resources, and supportive classroom environments.
5. Leveraging digital tools, language applications, and various multimedia resources can offer students engaging ways to practice listening, pronunciation, and vocabulary skills.
6. Students demonstrating significant difficulties should receive targeted remedial instruction, personalized assistance, and regular evaluations to monitor their progress effectively.
7. Schools ought to encourage greater exposure to English by promoting activities such as reading storybooks, watching educational English videos, and participating in simple English-based club activities, thereby extending language engagement beyond the classroom.

CONCLUSION

The present study highlights that upper primary school students in Jorhat Block face considerable challenges in learning English, with a significant proportion falling in the average and high-problem levels. These difficulties are particularly evident in foundational areas such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, writing skills, and comprehension. While gender does not significantly influence the extent of these learning difficulties, school type significantly affects students' performance, with government school students exhibiting higher levels of problems compared to their private school counterparts. These findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive and sustained interventions to strengthen English language learning at the upper primary stage. Addressing these persistent challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including improving teaching methods, increasing English exposure through authentic contexts, enhancing teacher training—especially in contemporary methodologies—and ensuring resource-rich classrooms, particularly in government schools. By strategically addressing these areas, educational stakeholders can help students develop stronger language skills, greater confidence, and improved academic performance in English.

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