

Addressing Challenges in Teaching English to Young Learners: A Case Study from Thane, Mumbai

Megha Tushar Shah¹, Dr Rajesh Kumar Malik², Dr. O.P Gupta³

^{1,2,3}English, School of Humanities, Social Sciences, Arts and Fine Arts Shridhar University, Pilani-Chirawa Road, Pilani-333031, Rajasthan, India

Abstract

The teaching of English to young learners in non-native English-speaking contexts presents a range of pedagogical and contextual challenges. This study investigates the key difficulties encountered by educators while teaching English to young learners in Thane, Mumbai, and its sub-cities—Kalyan, Ulhasnagar, Bhiwandi, Badlapur, and Kasara. Adopting a mixed-methods research approach, data were collected through teacher surveys, semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving teachers, students, parents, and school administrators. The findings reveal that linguistic limitations, cognitive and psychological factors, environmental constraints, and insufficient teacher training significantly affect the effectiveness of English language instruction. The study offers practical recommendations for improving teaching strategies, enhancing teacher preparedness, and strengthening policy support to promote better learning outcomes among young learners in non-native English-speaking environments.

Keywords: English language teaching, young learners, linguistic challenges, teaching strategies, learning environment, teacher training, Thane, Mumbai

1. Introduction

The growing importance of English as a global language has resulted in its introduction at the primary level across India. Early exposure to English is often viewed as advantageous; however, teaching English to young learners in non-native English-speaking environments poses substantial challenges. Learners are frequently exposed to multiple regional languages at home and in society, which influences their ability to acquire English effectively. Teachers, on the other hand, must address learners' developmental needs while working within constraints such as large class sizes, limited resources, and curriculum pressures. This study aims to identify and analyze the major challenges faced by English language teachers of young learners in Thane, Mumbai, and its sub-cities. It also seeks to propose contextually appropriate strategies to enhance English language teaching practices in urban and semi-urban settings.

1.1 Linguistic Challenges in Thane, Mumbai

Young learners often have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. As a result, difficulties related to pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, and sentence formation are commonly observed. Interference from the mother tongue further affects learners' spoken and written English.

1.2 Cognitive Barriers in Urban and Semi-Urban Contexts

At the primary level, learners may struggle with abstract grammatical concepts due to their developmental stage. Differences in learning pace, attention span, and prior exposure to English also contribute to uneven language development among students.

1.3 Psychological Factors Influencing Learning

Psychological aspects such as fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, and anxiety while speaking in English significantly influence learners' participation. A lack of a supportive and encouraging classroom environment can further hinder language acquisition.

Figures

Figure 1: Language Proficiency Levels of Young Learners in Thane, Mumbai

Description: This figure illustrates the distribution of young learners across three proficiency levels—Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced—based on teacher assessments. The data indicate that a majority of learners fall within the beginner and intermediate categories, reflecting limited exposure to English outside the classroom.

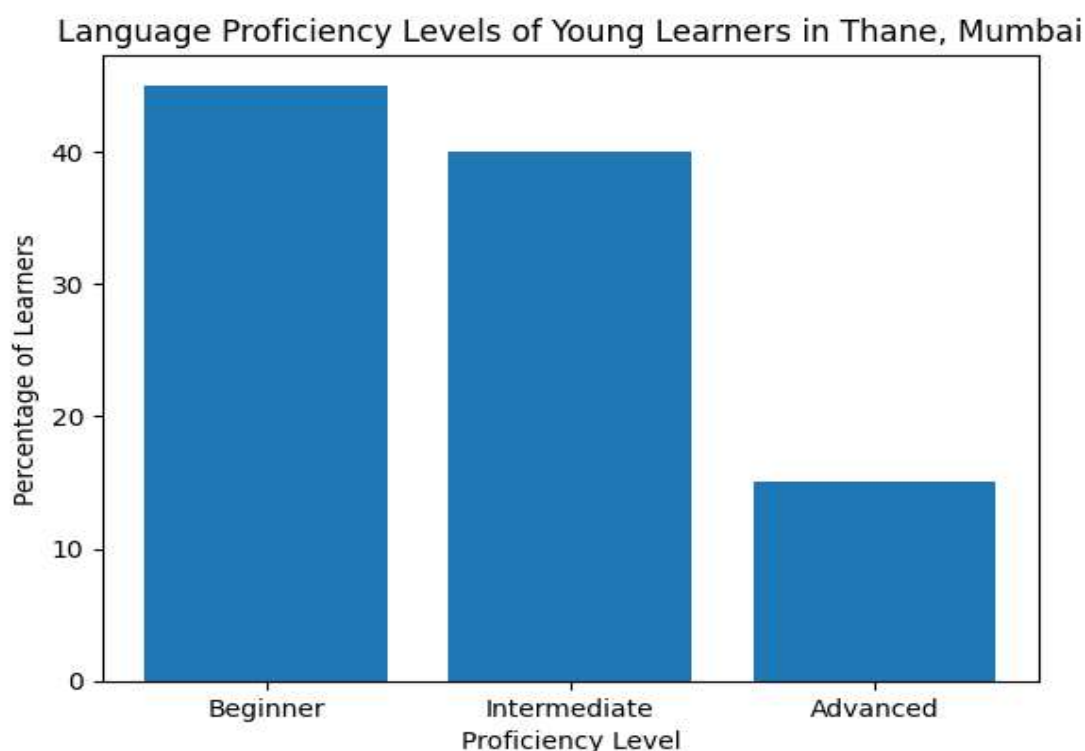


Figure 2: Common Challenges Faced by Teachers in Non-Native English-Speaking Environments

Description: This figure presents a graphical representation of the major challenges encountered by teachers, including lack of English exposure, large class sizes, inadequate teaching resources, low student motivation, and insufficient teacher training.

Common Challenges Faced by Teachers in Non-Native English-Speaking Environments

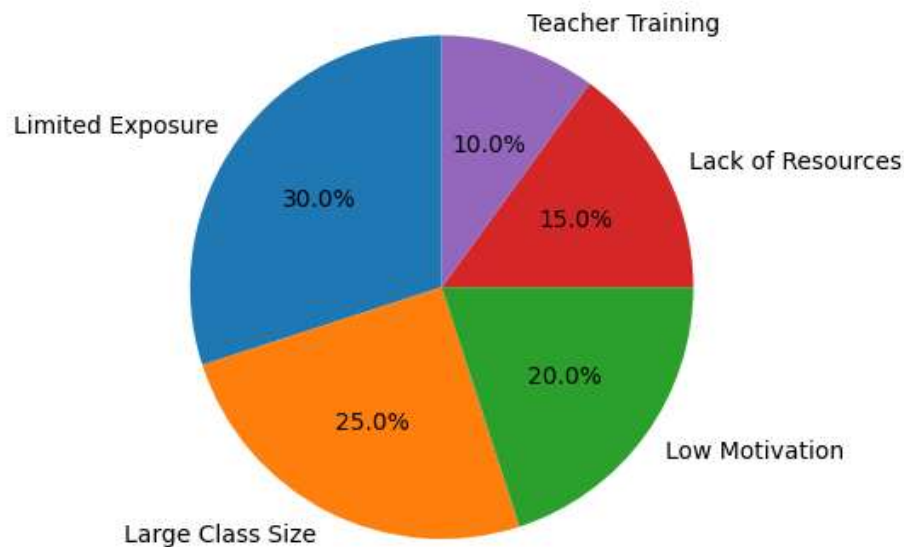


Figure 3: Preferred Teaching Methods and Their Effectiveness

Description: This figure compares various teaching methodologies such as storytelling, phonics-based instruction, interactive activities, and multimedia-based learning. Interactive and phonics-based approaches were perceived as the most effective by teachers.

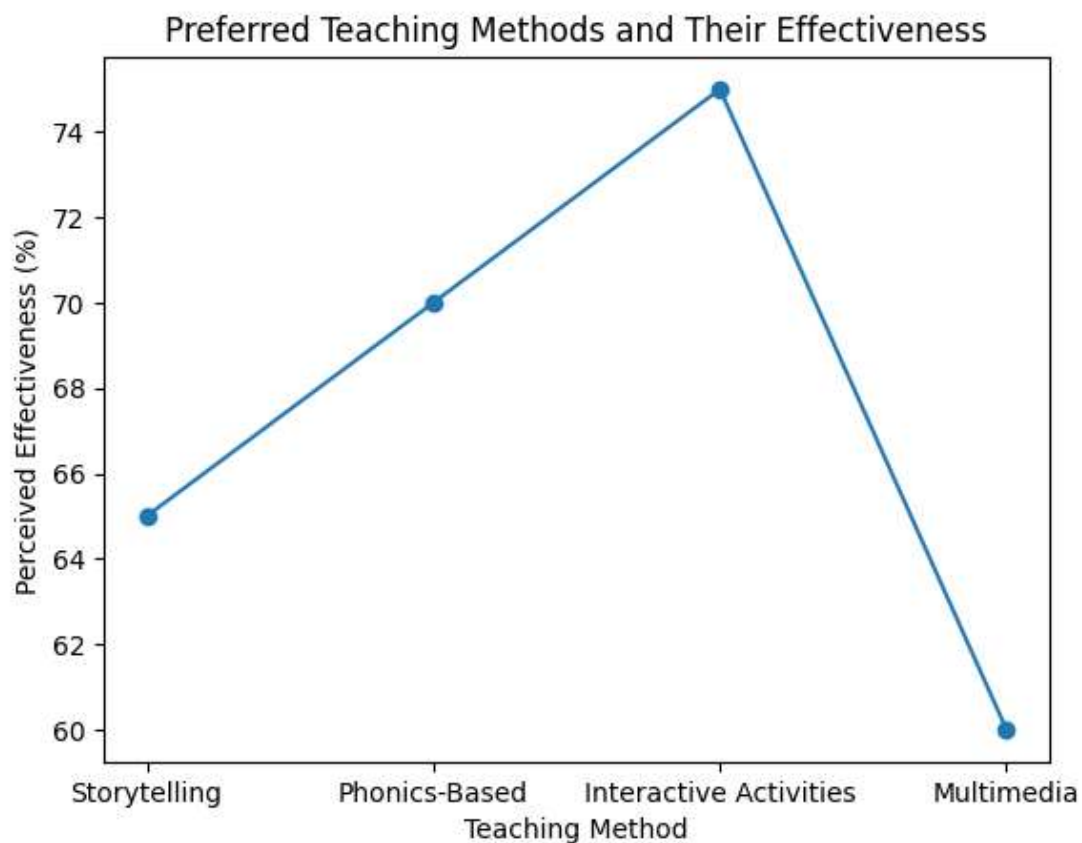


Table 1:
Key Barriers in Teaching English to Young Learners

Barrier Category	Description	Example
Linguistic	Limited English exposure at home	Students struggle with pronunciation
Cognitive	Difficulty in grasping abstract grammar rules	Young learners mix up tenses
Psychological	Fear of making mistakes and low confidence	Students hesitate to speak in English
Environmental	Large class sizes, lack of teaching aids	Overcrowded classrooms, few English books

Table 2:
Recommended Strategies for Effective English Teaching

Strategy	Implementation	Expected Outcome
Interactive Learning	Use of games, role-plays, and storytelling	Increased student engagement
Phonics-Based Approach	Focus on sound recognition before spelling improves	pronunciation and reading skills
Teacher Training	Workshops on child-friendly teaching strategies	Enhanced teaching effectiveness
Parental Involvement	Encouraging English use at home	More practice outside the classroom

2. Methodology

The study employs a mixed-methods approach with a dominant qualitative orientation. Data were collected from primary school English teachers working in schools across Thane and its sub-cities.

2.1 Research Design

A descriptive research design was adopted to explore teachers' perceptions and classroom practices related to English language teaching for young learners.

2.2 Data Collection Methods

Data collection tools included questionnaires administered to 50 primary school teachers, semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and focus group discussions. These methods helped capture both instructional practices and contextual challenges.

2.3 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed thematically. Quantitative survey data were presented using percentages, while qualitative data from interviews and observations were coded to identify recurring patterns and themes.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Survey Findings

The survey responses indicated that teachers face multiple challenges while teaching English to young learners:

- 72% of teachers identified limited English exposure outside school as the most significant barrier.
- 65% reported large class sizes as a major challenge affecting individual attention.
- 58% noted that learners' low confidence and fear of making mistakes reduced classroom participation.

3.2 Impact of Teaching Strategies

Teachers who adopted interactive teaching methods such as games, storytelling, role-plays, and group activities reported positive outcomes:

- Approximately 70% observed increased student engagement.
- Nearly 60% reported improvements in learners' vocabulary and pronunciation.
- Enhanced classroom participation was noted due to a reduction in learners' anxiety.

Similarly, the use of phonics-based instruction resulted in:

- Improved pronunciation and reading skills among 65% of learners.
- Better comprehension as students were able to decode unfamiliar words more effectively.

3.3 Addressing Barriers through Policy and Practice

The findings suggest that reducing class size, strengthening teacher training programs, and increasing parental involvement can significantly improve English language learning outcomes. The integration of multimedia tools such as videos, audio resources, and interactive applications was also found to be beneficial in non-native English-speaking contexts.

4. Conclusion

The study highlights that teaching English to young learners in Thane and its sub-cities is influenced by a complex interplay of linguistic, cognitive, psychological, and environmental factors. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts from teachers, school administrators, parents, and policymakers. By adopting child-friendly teaching strategies, enhancing teacher training, and providing supportive learning environments, English language education for young learners can be made more effective and inclusive.

5. Acknowledgement

The researcher sincerely thanks the educators who participated in this study and shared their valuable experiences. Gratitude is also extended to school administrators for granting permission to conduct classroom observations. Special appreciation is expressed to the research guide for continuous guidance and support, and to family members for their encouragement throughout the research process.

6. References

1. Cameron, L. (2001). *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*. Cambridge University Press.
2. Krashen, S. D. (1985). *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications*. Longman, Lightbown, P. M., & Spada, N. (2013). *How Languages Are Learned*. Oxford University Press.
3. Nunan, D. (2011). *Teaching English to Young Learners*. Anaheim University Press. Pinter, A. (2017). *Teaching Young Language Learners (2nd ed.)*. Oxford University Press.
4. Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India. (2020).
5. *National Education Policy 2020*. Retrieved from <https://www.education.gov.in> Shin, J. K., & Crandall, J. (2014). *Teaching Young Learners English: From Theory to Practice*. National Geographic Learning.
6. UNESCO. (2016). *Early Childhood Care and Education: Global Report*. Retrieved from



<https://www.unesco.org>