

Challenges and Pedagogical Solutions in Developing English Speaking Skills in Mithilanchal: A Case Study in Bihar

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Abstract. It is universally truth that learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) commonly encounter a range of challenges in developing speaking proficiency, which is a natural aspect of second language acquisition all over the world. This study investigates the specific difficulties faced by Maithili-speaking ESL learners in enhancing their English speaking skills in the Mithilanchal region. Data were collected through classroom observations and direct interactions with college students in Madhubani. The findings reveal that learners experience multiple barriers, including psychological factors (such as anxiety and lack of confidence), physiological constraints, institutional limitations, and environmental influences. These challenges collectively hinder the effective development of oral communication skills. The study highlights the need for targeted pedagogical strategies and supportive learning environments to address these issues. It concludes by offering practical recommendations aimed at reducing these obstacles and facilitating improved speaking competence among ESL learners in this regional context.

Keywords: ESL learners; Maithili speakers; psychological factors; English language learning; communication skills.

Introduction

Maithili, as one of the 22 languages in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution, added in 2003 via the 92nd Constitutional Amendment Act, is an Eastern Indo-Aryan language. Maithili is a distinct language, widely spoken in the Mithila regions of Bihar in India and in the Tarai districts of Nepal. Additionally, this language is also spoken in West Bengal and Assam as a minority language due to the large number of migrations of the labourers and manpower from North Bihar to these states. Maithili is one of the three major languages of Bihar, including Bhojpuri and Magahi. Maithili has its own vast history and native script. However, it is now

written in the Devanagari script, which is used for Hindi. Urdu is the officially second language of Bihar. Bihar is a multilingual state in nature like other Indian states.

English, which originated from the Western-Germanic language, is a universal language. It globally connects people of different cultures and languages together and brings them to the same platform of mutual intelligible communicative thread all over the world. Adding to that, it is widely utilized in many different sectors such as education, technology, trade, commerce, science, business, tourism, health, and so on. English remains the primary language of the press, as books, study material, brochures, and manuals are all written in English. It is simply a passport to any global community. Multinational companies prefer employees who are proficient in English, and the command over the language is a prerequisite. The English language lifts the barriers created by other languages and cultures, helping us gain access to opportunities, people, and careers. Being the most dominant language, it has an impact on every conceivable field of work.

1.1. The Status of English in Bihar: Background

Bihar is a geopolitically significant region, ranking as the second-most populous state in India and the twelfth largest by land area. As of 2024, it stands as the fourteenth-largest state by GDP. Strategically situated, Bihar is bordered by Uttar Pradesh to the west, Nepal to the north, West Bengal to the east, and Jharkhand to the south.

The state possesses a diverse and polyglot linguistic landscape. Under the Bihar Official Language Act of 1950, Hindi is designated as the primary official language. Furthermore, in 1981, Urdu was recognized as the secondary official language. Beyond these official mediums, Bihar is home to several prominent regional languages, including Maithili, Bajjika, Angika, Bhojpuri, and Magahi.

A significant milestone in the state's linguistic history occurred in 2003, when Maithili, an Indo-Aryan language, was inducted into the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. This constitutional recognition elevated Maithili to the status of a recognized regional language of India, authorizing its use in pedagogy, governmental administration, and other formal institutional contexts.

Despite its role as a global lingua franca, English lacks formal legislative status in Bihar, categorized neither as a second official language nor a recognized foreign language within the state's official framework. However, this lack of de jure recognition contrasts sharply with its de facto significance; English maintains a profound sociocultural and pedagogical presence across the state's educational landscape.

In the secondary education system in the Bihar board, English is a mandatory subject through the 10th standard. Yet, a significant pedagogical paradox exists: while the subject is compulsory, it is often not a requirement for the calculation of the aggregate percentage in matriculation examinations. Students are typically required only to achieve a minimum passing threshold, which, as observed in recent trends, is frequently attained with minimal academic rigor. This disconnect between the institutional requirement and the examination weightage reflects a complex challenge in the standardization of English language proficiency within the region.

In the late 1960s, a significant pedagogical shift occurred as the Education Ministry of India and the Government of Bihar proposed a transition toward indigenous and regional languages as the primary media of instruction. This policy led to the systematic marginalization of English within state-run institutions, subsequently restricting its prestige and high-proficiency instruction largely to the private sector. Even within private "English-medium" schools, the actual delivery of curriculum often occurred through local vernaculars, such as Hindi or Maithili, depending on the specific regional demographics.

Despite its early introduction, the subject's academic standing remains influenced by historical socio-political shifts. Under the legacy of the 'Karpoori Governance' initiatives since the late 1960s, English has been maintained as a compulsory subject of study, yet it has been excluded from the compulsory examination requirements at the Secondary (Standard 10) level. Currently, English examination scores do not contribute to the aggregate percentage required for matriculation. This bifurcation between compulsory attendance and non-compulsory evaluation has resulted in a diminished perceived utility of the language among the student population, often leading to a reduction in academic focus and institutional importance (Husain, 2022; Mishra, 2021).

Recent political developments underscore a persistent ideological resistance toward the English language within the Bihar administration. On December 19, 2023, during a high-level meeting of the INDIA alliance, a notable confrontation occurred when the Chief Minister of Bihar and President of the Janta Dal (United), Nitish Kumar, expressed strong opposition to a request for a translation of his three-hour Hindi address. The request, made by Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) leader T.R. Baalu, highlighted the ongoing tension between regional linguistic identities and the status of English as a mediating lingua franca.

Nitish Kumar's career has been characterized by a consistent adversarial stance toward the institutionalization of English. Throughout his two-decade tenure as Chief Minister, there has been no significant legislative attempt to elevate English to a compulsory status equivalent to other core subjects within the state curriculum. This refusal to grant English a definitive academic status reflects a broader commitment to linguistic nationalism and a prioritization of Hindi and indigenous languages in the state's socio-political and educational syllabus.

For many students from the Bihar Board, the intrinsic value of English remains unrecognized throughout their secondary education (up to Standard 10). It is often only during the post-secondary phase (10+2), particularly when migrating to other states for professional or vocational training, that these learners confront the necessity of English proficiency. While a subset of these students eventually achieves intermediate or advanced competency through persistent effort, they often face significant developmental hurdles.

1.2. An Overview of Speaking Skills

Scholars define speaking as a multifaceted, constructive process. According to Chaney and Burk (1998), speaking involves the creation and exchange of meaning through a combination of verbal and non-verbal symbols within diverse contexts. This is echoed by Brown (1994) and Burns and Joyce (1997), who characterize speaking as an interactive mechanism of "meaning-making" that necessitates the simultaneous production, reception, and processing of information.

A comprehensive mastery of speaking requires more than just linguistic competence – the technical knowledge of grammar,

pronunciation, and vocabulary. As [Carter & McCarthy \(1995\)](#) argue, “learners must also develop sociolinguistic competence”. This involves a strategic understanding of the contextual “when, why, and how” of language production, ensuring that speech is appropriate for its specific social environment.

[Hughes \(2006\)](#) further highlights the significance of oral communication by “identifying speaking as the primary mode of language acquisition in childhood”. Beyond individual development, speech acts as the “prime motor” of broader linguistic evolution and change. Furthermore, oral interaction serves as the foundational data set for researchers seeking to comprehend the complex nature of bilingualism and language contact in multilingual societies.

According to [Alsibai \(2004\)](#), achieving fluency in English has evolved “from an optional advantage to an absolute prerequisite for professional advancement across virtually all fields of human endeavor. However, despite its necessity, [Zhang \(2009\)](#) highlights a persistent pedagogical challenge” – speaking remains the most arduous skill for the majority of English learners “to acquire. Consequently, a significant proportion of learners struggle to achieve functional oral competence, remaining linguistically ill-equipped for real-time verbal interaction”.

In contemporary professional landscapes, which are often highly competitive and demanding, English is frequently described as an ‘essential lifeline.’ To achieve socio-economic stability and integrate into the global workforce, learners must move beyond rote memorization to achieve true communicative competence. This is defined as the strategic ability to utilize language both accurately and appropriately to fulfil specific communicative objectives in diverse social and professional contexts.

2. Literature Review

Many studies have been carried out on the problems and difficulties faced by ESL learners who learn English as a second language all over the world, especially in acquiring or learning speaking skills. Research conducted by [Ahmadi \(2014\)](#) at Taibah University in Saudi Arabia investigates the primary impediments to English-speaking proficiency among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The findings indicate that the most significant internal barriers are psychological and

attitudinal, specifically a profound lack of intrinsic interest, motivation, and passion for the language.

Al Hosni (2014) identifies anxiety and a reluctance to participate in speaking-intensive pedagogical sessions as primary barriers for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. This is corroborated by Ahmadi, whose case study at Taibah University suggests that a lack of intrinsic motivation and passion, coupled with a lack of exposure to immersive English-speaking environments, significantly stagnates learner progress. For specific demographics, such as Maithili speakers, these challenges are compounded by a historical reliance on the grammar-translation method, which prioritizes literacy over oral fluency.

Research conducted by Al-Tamimi (2014) on 'Improving Public Speaking Competence and Reduction of Communication Apprehension' underscores the critical role of specialized instruction in language acquisition. The study posits that the presence of well-trained English educators is a fundamental requirement for enhancing both the fluency and linguistic accuracy of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners.

Ali et al. (2019)'s findings posit that both male and female students have a positive attitude towards English language learning as a second language. But they face a lot of external and internal problems, such as lack of surroundings and low interest and motivation, which are the most affecting factors of the learners. Further, female students have more positive attitudes than their male counterparts.

Research conducted by Khan et al. (2018) highlights the fundamental role that vocabulary plays in the efficacy of oral communication. The study identifies the lack of an appropriate and expansive lexicon as one of the most significant impediments for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Specifically, this lexical deficit has a demonstrable negative impact on both listening comprehension and speaking performance, severely constraining a student's ability to articulate complex thoughts, emotions, and internal states.

In their study on English language teaching (ELT) in Gujarat, India, Seenivasan and Gadani (2025) identified a multifaceted array of obstacles to English acquisition. "These include linguistic barriers such as mother tongue interference and complex phonological features, alongside pedagogical deficiencies like inadequate instructional time,

substandard teaching methods, and a shortage of qualified trainers”. Furthermore, systemic and environmental constraints, including overcrowded classrooms, deficient infrastructure, a lack of audio-visual resources, and broader socio-economic challenges, collectively impede the learning process.

A study by [Sahu \(2024\)](#) at A.P.S. University, Madhya Pradesh, in India, investigated the multifaceted barriers to English proficiency among Indian university students. Her findings indicate that “affective factors, such as chronic anxiety, diminished self-confidence, and a fear of peer ridicule, significantly impede linguistic performance”. Furthermore, Sahu identifies pedagogical and systemic constraints, noting that excessive Teacher Talking Time (TTT), inadequate instructional support in the target language, and poorly designed curricula further stagnate progress. These issues are compounded by linguistic interference, specifically a reliance on mental translation from the mother tongue and a lack of authentic communicative opportunities within the classroom environment.

Following an extensive review of the literature, it is evident that English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners face numerous universal barriers. These include psychological constraints, phonological challenges, linguistic interference (specifically mother tongue influence or MTI), limited vocabulary acquisition, and varying learner attitudes.

In the context of Bihar, India, these barriers are further compounded by regional and geographical factors. These underlying variables include limitations in government policy, rigid curriculum structures, inadequate modern infrastructure, and a lack of qualified teaching staff. Furthermore, cognitive, institutional, and environmental factors significantly impact the language learning process. This paper exclusively examines these challenges, with a particular focus on the psychological, physiological, environmental, and institutional barriers encountered by learners in developing speaking competence.

2.1. Objectives of the Paper

This paper explores the specific challenges faced by the Maithili speakers in learning English language as a second language. The primary objectives are categorised as follows :

1. To investigate the psychological challenges affecting the language learning process.
2. To identify physiological barriers that may impede language acquisition.
3. To examine the environmental factors that influence the development of speaking competence.
4. To understand the institutional factors, particularly government policy regarding English language teaching in schools.

2.2. Research Questions

The study focuses on the following research questions:

1. What psychological challenges do the Maithili-speaking ESL learners face while speaking English?
2. What physiological difficulties do they face while articulating English sounds?
3. What environmental factors affect the pace of English language learning?
4. What institutional factors, particularly government policies, influence the status and teaching of English in schools?

3. Methodology

The current paper adopts a qualitative and descriptive study of research in ELT in Mithilanchal in Bihar. This research design is solely based on the observation of the ESL learners' behaviour in the classroom.

3.1. Participants

The participant pool for this study consisted of 10 female students – of the total student body, only these participants demonstrated consistent regularity and punctuality in classroom attendance – currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree at K. V. Sc. Uchchaith College, affiliated with L. N. Mithila University, Darbhanga, Bihar. All participants have enrolled in English as either a minor or a multidisciplinary course.

The participants, aged between 17 and 21, originate from various rural locales within the Benipatti sub-division in the Madhubani district. Linguistically, the cohort is bilingual, possessing proficiency in both Hindi and Maithili. Regarding their educational background, the majority of the participants completed their secondary and higher secondary schooling under the Bihar School Examination Board (BSEB).

3.2. Data Collection

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, utilizing systematic classroom observations as the primary data collection tool. These observations were conducted over a period of around two months to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the classroom environment and the pedagogical interactions between the instructor and the students. Besides, classroom observations, informal interviews, and interactions were also conducted regarding English language learning in schools and their challenges.

The classroom observation checklist used in this study was adapted from a Multidimensional Classroom Observation Framework, which is grounded in several established ESL theories, including Foreign Language Anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986), Willingness to Communicate (MacIntyre et al., 1998), Interlanguage Theory (Selinker, 1972), Communicative Competence (Hymes, 1972), and Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978). The framework integrates psychological, linguistic, and contextual factors affecting ESL learners' speaking performance. In applied linguistic research, such composite observation frameworks are commonly developed by synthesizing multiple theoretical perspectives.

During the classroom observations, a three-point scale was used, where 1 indicated high, 2 indicated moderate, and 3 indicated low as presented in Table 1.

Table-1 Classroom Observation Checklist

Category	Indicators	Observation note	Rate
Psychological factors	lack of motivation	no interest, curiosity or desire to participate	1
	reticence	synthess, anxiety, fear	1
Psychological factors	Physical limitations	difficult in articulating sounds	
Institutional factors	government policies	English treated as a non-credit subjects in schools up to class 10	1
Environmental factors	English Private Schools	English medium instruction without adequate English language teaching	1
	lack of exposure	absence of English speaking environment	1

3.3. Data Analysis

The collected data underwent a meticulous and systematic analysis. Primarily derived from classroom observations, the data illustrate the nature and prevalence of the challenges encountered by Maithili speakers during the process of English language acquisition. Specifically, the analysis highlights the factors that impede the development of communicative competence in English.

Several barriers, difficulties, and influencing factors were identified during data analysis; however, this study focuses specifically on psychological, physiological, institutional, and environmental factors affecting the learners' speaking skills. To enhance clarity and coherence, the identified challenges are presented and discussed in the following sections under the thematic categories.

4. Findings and Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to identify and explore challenges encountered by Maithili speakers in Bihar during their acquisition of the English language. Preliminary findings from the classroom observations indicate that these challenges are multifaceted and systemic. Specifically, the difficulties faced by these learners are deeply rooted in restrictive government policies, environmental factors, and individual psychological and physiological barriers. To provide a structured analysis of these findings, the identified challenges have been classified into several thematic categories, which are discussed in detail below.

4. 1. English Language Instruction in Government Schools

Remarkably, the English language in the Bihar School Examination Board (BSEB) lacks formal status and institutional recognition even today. Although English is a compulsory component of the curriculum until the 10th standard, the marks obtained in the subject do not contribute to the aggregate score in the matriculation examination. Under the current system, students are only required to secure a minimum qualifying grade to pass. This educational policy was established in the late 1960s by the then education minister and Deputy Chief Minister, the late Karpoori Thakur, a prominent socialist leader. Subsequent administrations, including that of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, have maintained this policy, failing to initiate robust programs to support effective English pedagogy in schools.

While there is a global trend toward prioritizing English as a universal lingua franca, Bihar's educational framework remains stagnant. Proficiency in English is a critical gateway to various national and international professional courses; it enhances employability and fosters the development of skilled professionals capable of contributing to society. However, because the subject is treated merely as a qualifying hurdle rather than a competitive requirement, both educators and students often exhibit a lack of interest and a passive attitude toward the language.

Consequently, students lack the motivation and dedication required for rigorous linguistic mastery, prioritizing science and social sciences over English. It is often only after the 10th standard, when students seek higher education outside of Bihar, that they recognize the language's professional necessity. At this point, many have missed the "critical period" for language acquisition, the developmental window that facilitates the easiest internalization of linguistic skills. As a result of these systemic policy failures, students often struggle to build a foundational proficiency across the four core linguistic skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.

Solution: Remedies to Implement Government Policies

The following remedies can be followed to address this issue :

1. Need for Policy Reform in English Education

- English should be recognized as a compulsory and credit-bearing subject across all levels of school education in Bihar.
- Assessment in English should:
 - a) Contribute meaningfully to overall academic performance
 - b) Encouraging students to engage seriously with the language

2. Shift Towards Functional Language Learning

- English instruction should focus on its use as a functional rather than merely an academic subject.
- Pedagogical practices should shift from
 - a) Rote learning
 - b) Examination-oriented approaches
- Emphasis should be placed on developing communicative competence, including:
 - a) Listening
 - b) Speaking
 - c) Reading
 - d) Writing skills

3. Government Initiatives and Policy Implementation

- The government should introduce comprehensive policy measures to strengthen English language education.
 - These initiatives should target:
 - a) Academic institutions (schools, colleges, etc.)
 - b) Vocational education
 - c) Technical education sectors
- Recruitment of qualified and professionally trained English teachers, having certifications in TEF, TESOL, CELTA, DELTA, etc., should be prioritized.

4. Teacher Training and Professional Development

Systematic in-service teacher training programs should be introduced.

These programs should aim to

- a) Upgrade pedagogical skills
- b) Teaching practices with global standards in English language teaching (ELT)

5. Utilization of Existing Academic Resources

By leveraging existing resources within the state, we can implement reforms in a cost-effective manner. Bihar has a substantial pool of qualified professionals, including:

- a) University faculty members
- b) Experts with TEFL and TESOL certifications
- c) Scholars with Master's and PhD degrees in Applied linguistics, ELT, and Linguistics

6. Train-the-Trainer Approach

- A Train-the-Trainer model should be institutionalized with
 - a) High-quality teacher training
 - b) Efficient knowledge dissemination
 - c) Minimal financial burden on the public exchequer

Overall, a policy shift that integrates English as a compulsory, skill-oriented, and professionally taught subject will significantly enhance students' academic outcomes, employability, and access to broader educational and career opportunities nationally and internationally.

4.2. The Paradox of English-Medium Schools without English Instruction

In rural and semi-urban areas, many private institutions operate under the label "English Medium School Affiliated with CBSE." A significant number of students from relatively stable economic backgrounds report

that they began their education in such schools, often up to the fourth standard, primarily due to their parents' desire for English-language learning.

However, despite the “English-medium” designation, the actual medium of instruction in these schools is rarely English. Classroom teaching, explanations, and interactions are predominantly conducted in local or regional languages such as Hindi or Maithili. While some textbooks, particularly English language books, are printed in English, others are in Hindi, creating a mixed and inconsistent learning environment. As a result, students are not meaningfully exposed to English as a medium of communication.

This discrepancy highlights a deeper issue: many such schools appear to prioritize profit over genuine educational development. They capitalize on parental aspirations for English proficiency without providing the necessary academic infrastructure to support it.

A key factor contributing to this problem is the lack of qualified teaching staff. English teachers in these schools are often recruited based solely on their ability to speak the language, rather than on formal training in language pedagogy. Typically, the minimum requirement is a basic bachelor's degree along with conversational fluency in English. Consequently, many teachers lack the skills required to teach English effectively as a language.

Instead of adopting modern, communicative teaching methods, these teachers frequently rely on outdated approaches such as the Grammar-Translation Method. While this method may help develop reading and writing skills to some extent, it does little to enhance students' listening and speaking abilities, which are essential for language proficiency.

Furthermore, the high fees of even average private schools create barriers for students from socially and economically marginalized backgrounds. As a result, many families eventually withdraw their children and enrol them in government schools. However, these institutions often face similar challenges in English language instruction, perpetuating the cycle of inadequate language acquisition.

In summary, the label of “English-medium” in many rural and semi-urban private schools is largely nominal. The continued reliance on

vernacular instruction, combined with untrained teachers and profit-driven management, undermines the goal of meaningful English language education.

Solution: Remedies to Improve Private School Education

To address the challenges associated with so-called English-medium schools that fail to deliver effective English language instruction, a multi-stakeholder approach involving schools, parents, and government authorities is essential.

1. Responsibilities of Private Schools

- Private schools must ensure the quality and authenticity of the education they claim to offer.
- They have an ethical and professional obligation to
 - a) Use English as the actual medium of instruction.
 - b) Promote meaningful communicative competence among students.
- Institutions should align their practices with the social expectations and prestige associated with English-medium education.

2. Role of Parents in School Evaluation

- Parents should play an active and informed role in selecting and monitoring schools.
- They should not rely on
 - a) Institutional claims
 - b) Signboards or advertisements
- Instead, they should verify instructional quality through the following:
 - a) School visits
 - b) Classroom observation (if permitted)
 - c) Interaction with teachers and students
- Such engagement enables informed decision-making regarding their children's education.

3. Government Regulation and Policy Measures

- Government authorities must establish strict criteria for granting recognition to English-medium schools.
- These criteria should include
 - a) Clear guidelines regarding the medium of instruction
 - b) Minimum teacher qualification standards
 - c) Appropriate pedagogical practices Schools should undergo

- Schools should undergo
 - a) Regular inspections
 - b) Continuous monitoring
 - c) Periodic evaluation through standardized mechanisms

4. Accountability and Enforcement

- Institutes that falsely claim to be English-medium schools should face strict regulatory action.
- Possible penalties include
 - a) Heavy fines
 - b) Suspension of recognition
 - c) Cancellation of licenses in cases of repeated or serious violations
- Such enforcement ensures
 - a) Institutional accountability
 - b) Protection of students and parents from misleading practices

5. Transparency and Accreditation Systems

- Governments should develop transparent accreditation frameworks for schools.
- Public reporting mechanisms should be introduced to:
 - a) Provide reliable information about school quality
 - b) Enable parents to compare institutions based on verified data
- This transparency promotes trust, quality assurance, and informed choice.

Overall, the proposed solutions by implementing these measures will definitely improve the quality of English-medium education, enhance students' communicative competence, strengthen institutional accountability, and protect stakeholders from deceptive educational practices.

4. 3. Lack of Motivation

Motivation is a multifaceted construct that “encompasses factors such as interest, curiosity, and the desire to achieve specific goals” (Williams and Burden, 1997, 1999). It is widely recognized as a fundamental prerequisite for effective performance in any domain. Without sufficient willingness and drive, individuals are unlikely to initiate or sustain effort toward achieving their objectives. This principle is particularly applicable to second language acquisition (SLA), where motivation plays a central role in determining learners' success.

In the context of language learning, motivation has been identified “as a key determinant of achievement” (Hedge, 2000). Gardner (1985, 363) conceptualizes motivation as a combination of effort, the desire to attain a language learning goal, and positive attitudes toward the target language. Learners who exhibit high levels of motivation tend to actively seek opportunities to use the second language, thereby enhancing their communicative competence. As noted by Lightbown and Spada (2001), such learners generally demonstrate greater success in developing oral communication skills compared to those with lower motivation levels.

Motivation can be defined more broadly as “the process that initiates, guides, and sustains goal-oriented behaviours” (Cherry, 2015: 5) as cited in Younes (2016). In language learning, this process is crucial for maintaining consistent effort and engagement. Littlewood (1981) emphasizes that “the development of communicative competence depends not only on learners’ motivation but also on opportunities to express themselves meaningfully within social contexts”.

In the context of the present study, despite its importance, a lack of motivation remains one of the major challenges faced by learners of English as a second language. Some students demonstrate minimal interest in improving their speaking competence and engage in language learning primarily to meet examination requirements rather than to develop communicative proficiency. This instrumental and short-term orientation often limits their progress. In contrast, other learners are intrinsically motivated, driven by long-term goals such as pursuing higher education or securing better employment opportunities. These learners are more likely to recognize the global significance of English and its role in enhancing employability and career prospects.

Thus, motivation plays a pivotal role in second language learning, influencing both the process and outcomes of language acquisition. Its dynamic and reciprocal relationship with learning underscores the importance of fostering both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors to support learners in achieving linguistic proficiency.

Solution: Pedagogical Approaches for Enhancing Student Motivation

To address this issue, the following proposed pedagogical approaches can be used :

1. Role of Teachers in Enhancing Motivation

- Teachers play a central role in fostering students' motivation to learn English.
- They should actively raise learners' awareness about the global importance of English.
- Instruction should emphasize that:
 - a) Learning English does not replace or devalue the mother tongue.
 - b) It functions as an additional linguistic resource that enriches communicative competence.

2. English in the Globalized World

- In a globalized and technologically advanced society, English has become indispensable across multiple domains, including:
 - a) Healthcare
 - b) Education
 - c) Transportation
 - d) Tourism
 - e) Business and international trade
- English serves as a lingua franca, enabling communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries

3. Professional Relevance of English

- English is widely used as a medium of professional communication in various fields, such as:
 - a) Teaching
 - b) Nursing
 - c) Accounting
 - d) Tourism
 - e) Technology
 - f) Commerce
- Proficiency in English contributes to:
 - a) Improved employability
 - b) Career advancement
 - c) Access to global job markets
 - d) Participation in international professional networks

4. Impact on Personal and Social Development

- English language competence enhances:
 - a) Self-confidence in communication
 - b) Social mobility
 - c) Ability to engage in diverse socio-cultural contexts
- It supports both personal growth and professional development

5. English as a Tool for Modern Engagement

- English can be regarded as a critical tool for navigating contemporary professional environments. Its importance extends beyond communication to:
 - a) Accessing global knowledge resources
 - b) Facilitating career growth
 - c) Enabling international collaboration and engagement
- Particularly in the context of rapid technological advancement, English proficiency is essential for active participation in the global knowledge economy.

Thus, the pedagogical approaches can help mitigate this challenge among learners. English can be regarded as a critical tool for navigating contemporary professional environments, particularly within the context of rapid technological advancement. Its importance extends beyond mere communication, serving as a gateway to knowledge, career growth, and global engagement.

4.4. Lack of Exposure to English language

From a psychological perspective, the environment plays a fundamental role in shaping individuals' cognitive and behavioural development. In the context of language learning, the presence of a supportive and interactive linguistic environment is essential for acquiring proficiency in English. An English-speaking atmosphere enables learners to engage in meaningful communication, thereby facilitating both language acquisition and skill development. This principle applies to both first and second language learning. For instance, children naturally acquire their first language through continuous interaction with parents and family members, who constitute their primary linguistic environment. In the absence of such an environment, learning a second language becomes significantly more challenging.

When learners are immersed in a rich and communicative setting where the target language is actively used, they are more likely to develop effective communicative competence. In this regard, social media and digital platforms have emerged as valuable tools, as they enhance learners' motivation, engagement, and opportunities for interaction in the target language.

Furthermore, Wong-Fillmore (1989) emphasizes that “a conducive learning environment provides learners with ample

opportunities to acquire a second language more naturally and efficiently”. Similarly, students who are frequently exposed to authentic language use, particularly in real-life contexts, tend to demonstrate higher levels of proficiency (Khan, 2011; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015).

In contrast, learners in regions where English is taught primarily as a foreign or second language often face significant challenges due to limited exposure outside the classroom. In such contexts, opportunities for real-life communication in English are scarce, which hinders the development of fluency and overall language mastery. This issue is evident in regions such as Mithilanchal in Bihar, where learners have minimal exposure to English in their daily lives, creating a substantial barrier to proficiency. However, this challenge is not confined to a single region; it is a global phenomenon affecting both ESL and EFL learners. For example, Wang (2009) notes that “an overemphasis on written practice, combined with insufficient opportunities for spoken interaction”, poses a major obstacle to improving the speaking skills of Chinese learners. Similarly, studies by Khan (2011) and Alrashidi and Phan (2015) indicate that “Arab EFL learners encounter comparable difficulties due to limited exposure to English in authentic communicative settings”. These parallels highlight that an inadequate language environment and limited practice opportunities are universal challenges in second language acquisition.

Solution: Proposed Remedies to Mitigate the Challenges

The proposed remedies can assist in diminishing this challenge among the learners.

1. Contextual Challenges in Limited Exposure Environments

- In regions such as Mithilanchal, learners have limited exposure to English-speaking environments.
- This lack of exposure creates challenges in developing communicative competence, particularly in speaking skills.
- However, these constraints can be mitigated through:
 - a) Deliberate effort
 - b) Strong motivation
 - c) Sustained interest in language learning

2. Learner Autonomy and Initiative

- Learners with a high level of willingness can actively create opportunities to practice English.

- Language development is possible even without a naturally immersive environment when learners:
 - a) Take initiative
 - b) Engage consistently in practice
 - c) Maintain long-term commitment

3. Peer Interaction and Collaborative Learning

- Regular interaction with peers provides a supportive and low-anxiety environment for practicing English.
- Effective strategies include:
 - a) Practicing conversations with classmates or friends
 - b) Participating in group discussions
- Learners can also form online peer groups via platforms such as:
 - a) WhatsApp
 - b) Telegram
 - c) Facebook, etc.
- Benefits of peer-driven learning environments:
 - a) Increased accountability
 - b) Continuous engagement
 - c) Collaborative problem-solving and doubt clarification

4. Use of Social Media for Language Learning

- Social media platforms can be used as effective educational tools when utilized purposefully.
- Learners can follow educational pages, subscribe to English-learning channels, and engage with content created by proficient speakers and instructors.
- Platforms such as:
 - a) YouTube
 - b) Facebook
 - c) Instagram, etc.
- These resources support the development of
 - a) Listening comprehension
 - b) Speaking fluency
 - c) Vocabulary

5. Integration of Digital Tools and Mobile Applications

- Digital tools and AI-driven mobile applications offer interactive and flexible learning opportunities that can enhance overall language skills.
- Applications such as

- a) ChatGPT
- b) Google Gemini
- c) Copilot
- d) Duolingo
- e) ELSA Speak
- f) Promova etc.

It is believed that the proposed remedies can be applicable to lessen the language exposure problems to some extent among the learners.

4.5. Students' Reticence

Student reticence is a concept widely discussed in both psychology and communication studies. It generally refers to an individual's tendency to remain silent or withdrawn in specific social situations, often due to feelings of anxiety, shyness, or fear of negative evaluation. In communicative contexts, such as language classrooms, learners may hesitate to participate because they are concerned about being judged, making mistakes, or lacking the necessary linguistic competence.

Classroom observations in this study indicate that many students prefer to remain quiet and passive during English-speaking activities. Although they regularly attend classes, they often avoid verbal participation, particularly when required to engage in speaking tasks. This behavior suggests not necessarily an absence of ability, but rather an unwillingness to communicate, commonly referred to as student reticence. It is characterized by reluctance to interact with peers, participate in pair or group work, or express ideas orally.

Several factors appear to contribute to this phenomenon. These include low self-confidence, insufficient language proficiency, fear of speaking in front of others, and anxiety about peer judgment. In some cases, students may also experience physiological or articulation-related difficulties, such as problems pronouncing certain sounds, which can lead to embarrassment or ridicule from classmates. Consequently, fear of making mistakes, combined with shyness and anxiety, becomes a major barrier to active participation.

According to Lee and Ng (2010), student reticence is "closely linked to personality traits and influenced by factors such as personal attitudes, confidence, motivation, and anxiety". These interrelated

elements significantly shape learners' classroom behaviour and contribute to limited oral communication skills. Similarly, Williams and Burden (1997) argue that "behaviour in second language classrooms is determined by a complex interaction of motivational, emotional, and attitudinal factors, all of which may lead to reticence".

Furthermore, Arnold (2003) highlights "the connection between oral production and affective variables, particularly anxiety and motivation". Gardner (2001) adds that "while many students initially feel motivated to learn English, they often encounter speaking difficulties when actively engaged in communicative tasks". This realization may lead to increased anxiety, reduced self-confidence, and eventually negative attitudes toward language learning, prompting them to withdraw from participation.

Hedge (2000) also emphasizes that "success in second language learning, particularly in developing oral communication skills, is strongly influenced by learners' individual characteristics". Factors such as motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence play a crucial role in determining the extent of students' engagement and performance. Learners who lack these supportive attributes are more likely to experience difficulties and reduced speech production.

Overall, the findings of this study are consistent with previous research (Gardner, 2001; Hedge, 2000; Williams and Burden, 1997), which identifies student reticence "as a significant challenge in English language learning, particularly in the development of speaking skills".

Solution: Remedies to Mitigate Student Reticence

The proposed remedies can help in mitigating this student's psychological barrier. Addressing student reticence in English language classrooms requires a systematic and empathetic pedagogical approach.

1. Understanding Student Reticence

- Teachers should first carefully observe and identify the underlying psychological and linguistic difficulties faced by reluctant learners.
- A nuanced understanding of these challenges enables the implementation of targeted and effective instructional interventions.

2. Promoting Motivation through Positive Reinforcement

- Teachers should foster motivation by providing praise, appreciations, and encouragement.
- Recognizing even small achievements helps build learners' confidence.
- Positive reinforcement contributes to a supportive, effective and low-anxiety classroom environment.

3. Provide Constructive and Sensitive Feedback

- Immediate corrective feedback during speaking activities should be avoided, as it may increase anxiety.
- Feedback is more effective when delivered sensitively in one-to-one interactions after class.
- This approach allows teachers to address errors while reinforcing students' strengths and emotional security.

4. Encourage Gradual Participation

- Participation in speaking activities should not be forced.
- Forcing students to speak may intensify their anxiety and resistance.
- Learners should be given time to build confidence at their own pace.
- Persistent reluctance can be addressed through individualized support and private discussions.

5. Build Teacher-Student Rapport

- Establishing trust between teachers and students is essential for reducing reticence.
- Teachers should demonstrate:
 - a) Empathy
 - b) Sympathy
 - c) Respect
 - d) Genuine concern for students' progress
- A supportive and approachable teacher encourages greater student engagement.

Thus, mitigating student reticence requires a holistic approach that integrates psychological sensitivity, pedagogical flexibility, and supportive classroom practices, ultimately fostering a conducive environment for the development of oral communication skills.

4. 6. Physiological Barriers

Physiological barriers in language learning, particularly in phonetics, refer to the physical and biological limitations of the human body that hinder the production, articulation, generation, and perception of speech sounds. These barriers play a crucial role in acquiring proficiency in a target language, as successful language learning requires precise control over articulatory mechanisms.

According to Canale and Swain (1980), “learners of a second or foreign language must develop a thorough understanding of its sound system, including individual phonemes and their combinations, to articulate them accurately”. However, the influence of a learner’s first language often creates interference, making it challenging to produce certain sounds in the target language. This is a natural occurrence because the learner’s articulatory organs have been conditioned by the phonetic and grammatical patterns of their mother tongue. When attempting to acquire a second language with a phonetic system that differs significantly from the first language, learners may face considerable difficulties.

Classroom observations in this study indicate that Maithili-speaking students learning English encounter notable challenges in pronunciation, “the phonemic inventory of Maithili differs substantially from that of English, and several English phonemes are absent in Maithili”. For example, the English labio-dental sounds /f/ (fan) and /v/ (van) do not exist in Maithili (Asad, 2026). Consequently, learners often substitute these sounds with the closest bilabial equivalents in their native language, /ph/ and /bh/, respectively, which simplifies pronunciation but results in inaccurate articulation in English. Further, English contains vowel length (long vs. short vowels), but Maithili does not. For example, in English, the short vowel /ɪ/ in *ship* /fjɪp/ and the long vowel /i:/ /fi:dp/. As a result, “such distinctions are often challenging for Maithili speakers, as vowel length may not function in the same phonemic way in their first language – Maithili” (Asad 2026).

Additionally, Maithili speakers struggle with the palato-alveolar fricative /ʃ/ (ship), a sound uncommon in native Maithili phonology, While /ʃ/ appears in Maithili only through loanwords borrowed from Sanskrit, Urdu, Persian, and Arabic, its limited presence makes correct articulation challenging for learners in English (Asad 2026). Such phonetic discrepancies between first (L1) and second language (L2) highlight how

physiological constraints, shaped by prior linguistic experience, can impede accurate pronunciation and oral communication in the target language.

Solution: Pedagogical Solutions to Overcome Physiological Barriers

Addressing physiological barriers in second language acquisition requires systematic and informed pedagogical interventions. The proposed pedagogy and extra activities can help reduce this issue.

1. A Comparative Phonological Analysis (L1 and L2)

- A comparative approach between learners' first language (e.g., Maithili) and English is highly effective (Asad, 2026), and the use of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) enhances phonemic awareness (letters vs. phonemes).
- Learners can
 - a) Easily produce sounds common to both languages
 - b) Experience difficulty with unfamiliar phonemes
- Teachers should provide focused instruction on the articulation of sounds:
 - a) Place of articulation
 - b) Manner of articulation
- This enables learners to consciously adjust their speech organs for more accurate pronunciation.

2. Integration of Multimedia Resources

- Multimedia tools play a significant role in phonological development.
- Teachers should encourage the use of online resources (e.g., YouTube, the British Council, Cambridge, Linguahouse, etc.) that provide a list of vocabulary, grammar rules, reading comprehension, and listening audio, along with many hands-on exercises.
- Exposure to native speakers and professional phoneticians provides reliable auditory models.
- Regular interaction with such resources supports the gradual internalization of correct pronunciation patterns.

3. Importance of Active Listening Practice

- Listening practice is essential for phonological development.
- Learners should engage with authentic English-language content, such as:

- a) News broadcasts
- b) Films
- c) Comedy programs
- d) Web series (e.g., Netflix, Prime Video, YouTube, etc.).
 - This exposure helps to improve
 - a) Listening comprehension
 - b) Awareness of stress, rhythm, and intonation patterns

Overcoming physiological barriers necessitates a holistic approach that combines explicit phonetic instruction, comparative linguistic analysis, multimedia-assisted learning, and sustained exposure to authentic language use. While learners must invest consistent effort to enhance their linguistic competence, teachers play a crucial role in employing effective and supportive strategies to facilitate this developmental process.

5. Summary

The case study on English-speaking skills at a college in Bihar highlights a range of interrelated challenges, problems, and potential solutions affecting learners' communicative competence. The findings indicate that the foremost challenge is the government policy regarding the status of English at schools, irrespective of public and private institutions. Further, many students struggle with linguistic barriers; psychological, physiological, and environmental factors also play a crucial role. Students often exhibit low confidence, fear of making mistakes, and anxiety while speaking English, which negatively affects their classroom participation. Moreover, limited exposure to English outside the classroom and a lack of supportive environments restrict opportunities for authentic language use.

The study also identifies pedagogical shortcomings, such as the reliance on traditional teaching methods, insufficient emphasis on speaking practice, and the use of bilingual instructional materials that reinforce L1 dependency. These factors collectively contribute to students' negative attitudes toward English speaking and hinder the development of communicative competence.

To address these issues, the study proposes a set of practical and context-sensitive solutions. It emphasizes the need for adopting communicative and learner-centred teaching approaches, where grammar and vocabulary are taught in meaningful contexts using authentic English

resources. Regular practice through structured activities, such as sentence construction, drilling, and interactive speaking tasks, is recommended to enhance fluency and accuracy. Additionally, integrating digital media and encouraging exposure to English through films, social platforms, and other authentic sources (mobile apps) can improve pronunciation and vocabulary acquisition.

Equally important is the role of teachers, family members, and peers in fostering a positive attitude toward English learning. Motivational strategies, constructive feedback, and supportive learning environments can help reduce anxiety and build learners' confidence. Family and peer support further reinforce the importance of English as a global language and encourage continuous practice.

Thus, the study underscores that improving English speaking skills requires a holistic approach that addresses linguistic, psychological, physiological, and other factors simultaneously. With sustained effort and collaborative support, learners can overcome existing barriers and develop effective English-speaking abilities for academic, professional, and social advancement.

6. Conclusion

This study concludes that challenges in English speaking skills among college students in Bihar arise from linguistic limitations, psychological, physiological, environmental barriers, and institutional policies. Addressing these issues requires a learner-centered approach that emphasizes contextualized instruction, regular speaking practice through AI-powered applications (ChatGPT, Gemini, Co-pilot, etc.), peers/groups, and the use of authentic resources (the British Council, Cambridge, Linguahouse, etc.). Moreover, the combined support of teachers, family members, and peers is essential in fostering positive attitudes and confidence. With consistent effort and effective strategies, students can improve their speaking abilities and use English as a valuable tool for academic, professional, and personal growth.

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