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Impact of School Type and Locality on English Proficiency of Secondary School Students

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Abstract

In multilingual regions like Manipur, English proficiency plays a vital role in students' academic performance, particularly at the secondary school level, where English is the medium of instruction. This study aimed to examine the impact of school type (private vs. government) and locality (urban vs. rural) on the English language proficiency of Class X students in Thoubal District, Manipur. The objectives included comparing proficiency levels by school type and locality and assessing the overall proficiency distribution. Using a correlational research design, a stratified random sample of 366 students was selected from BSEM-affiliated schools. The English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT) was administered, and data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and independent-samples t-tests. Results revealed that private school students outperformed government school students, and urban students outperformed rural students, with both differences statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Proficiency levels varied widely, with 42.35% of students rated average, while others ranged from extremely low to extremely proficient. The findings highlight the influence of educational context and geographic location on language learning. The study concludes that targeted interventions, such as teacher training, increased exposure to English, and equitable resource allocation, are essential to bridge the proficiency gap and promote inclusive academic success across school settings.

Keywords: english proficiency, school type, locality, secondary school students.

Introduction

In multilingual societies like Manipur, where English is widely used as a medium of instruction, students' proficiency in English often determines how well they can keep up with classroom demands. This is especially true in secondary schools, where students are expected to understand textbooks, participate in discussions, and write coherent answers in English. However, not all students have the same level of access to quality English instruction. Research shows that school type and locality majorly shape English language proficiency (Cummins, 2000; Singh, 2012).

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Private schools, for instance, tend to emphasize English inside and outside the classroom. Students in these schools are often exposed to better learning materials, trained teachers, and structured language environments, contributing to higher English proficiency (Trice, 2007; Colmar, Yong, & Richardson, 2019). In contrast, government schools may face challenges such as larger class sizes, fewer resources, and inconsistent use of English in classroom interactions, leading to gaps in language development (Alidou et al., 2006).

Geography also matters. Students in urban areas typically have greater exposure to English through media, the internet, and English-speaking environments than their rural counterparts. This urban advantage often translates to better speaking, reading, and writing skills in English (Wongtrirat, 2010; Martínez, Kock, & Cass, 2019). In rural areas, where English is rarely spoken outside the classroom, students might find it harder to develop fluency and confidence.

Understanding how school type and location influence English language proficiency is essential for creating fair and adequate education policies. This study compares the English proficiency of students from private and government schools and those from urban and rural settings in Thoubal District, Manipur.

Justification of the Study

This study is particularly relevant for a region like Manipur, where English is not the first language for most students, yet is required across academic subjects. With English as the primary language of instruction in private and government schools, any disparity in students' language proficiency can have long-term consequences on their academic growth and self-confidence.

Several studies have found that students in private schools tend to perform better in English due to access to qualified teachers, better facilities, and more emphasis on English in daily communication (Singh, 2012; Trice, 2007). In contrast, government schools may lack the resources and consistency to foster strong language development (Alidou et al., 2006). This makes it important to examine whether students in private and government schools honestly differ in English proficiency, and if so, how those differences manifest.

Similarly, location plays a significant role in shaping learning experiences. Urban students often benefit from private coaching, digital learning tools, and a general environment where English is used more frequently. Rural students, on the other hand, may rely solely on school instruction to build their language skills (Wongtrirat, 2010). These differences in exposure and practice can lead to unequal language development, even when the same curriculum is followed.

By focusing on students in Thoubal District, this study hopes to shed light on how school context and locality impact language learning. The findings can help educators and policymakers design targeted interventions, such as teacher training, language support programs, or modified classroom strategies, that address the unique challenges faced by students in different settings. Ultimately, this research aims to ensure that all students, regardless of their background, have an equal opportunity to succeed in school through improved English proficiency.

Objectives of the Study

1. To compare the English proficiency of private and government secondary school students.
2. To compare the English proficiency of secondary school students in urban and rural areas.
3. To find out the overall English proficiency level among secondary school students in Thoubal District.

Hypotheses of the Study

1. There exists no significant difference in the English proficiency of secondary school students in private and government schools.
2. There exists no significant difference in English proficiency between secondary school students in urban and rural areas.
3. There exists no significant difference in the overall English proficiency level among secondary school students in Thoubal District.

Literature Review

Many scholars agree that the school environment strongly influences students' language development, particularly in settings where English is not the mother tongue. Cummins (2000) introduced the idea of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), highlighting that students need more than just basic communication skills—they also need academic language skills to succeed in school. This type of proficiency is often better developed in schools where English is used regularly and meaningfully.

Singh (2012) compared private and government school students in Manipur and found that private school students generally had stronger English skills. He attributed this to smaller class sizes, better teacher qualifications, and more emphasis on English usage. Similarly, Trice (2007) emphasized that instructional quality is a key factor in students' language development, sometimes even more important than curriculum alone.

Colmar et al. (2019) also found that students in schools with strong English support were more resilient and confident when using the language. On the other hand, Alidou et al. (2006) warned that when students are taught in a language they do not fully understand, they may struggle across subjects, not due to a lack of intelligence, but because they cannot grasp or express the content effectively.

Location is another factor that shapes language learning. Martínez et al. (2019) observed that urban students often outperform rural students in English because they have more chances to use the language in everyday life. Exposure to English-speaking media, online platforms, and after-school programs strengthens their fluency. Wongtrirat (2010) supported this view, noting that the more students hear and use English, the more confident and capable they become.

By contrast, Sahragard, Baharloo, and Soozandehfar (2011) reported that rural students often lack confidence in English because their environments do not provide enough opportunities to

practice the language outside school. Li, Chen, and Duanmu (2010) found that limited English exposure at home and in the community slows academic progress, even if students are motivated to learn.

While these findings are well-established in broader contexts, limited research focuses specifically on Manipur, especially when comparing school types and rural-urban differences. This study aims to fill that gap by examining how these two factors affect the English language proficiency of secondary school students in Thoubal District.

Methodology

The study's objectives are to find out and compare English proficiency in secondary schools, so the Correlational Research Method is adopted.

Population and Sample

The study population consisted of 4312 students of class X from schools affiliated with the Board of Secondary Education, Manipur (BSEM) in Thoubal District, Manipur. Stratified random sampling included gender and type of families. Using Yamane's formula (1967) with N = 4132 and e = 0.05, 366 samples were selected.

Limitations include potential generalisability issues due to the focus on Thoubal District and BSEM schools and the exclusion of gender and the type of family in the stratification.

Tools

In the present study, the investigator employed the English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT-MKDR), developed by K.S. Misra and Dr. Ruchi Dubey (2024), and published by the National Psychological Corporation, Agra.

The reliability of the tools was established using the test-retest method, with a 10-day interval between administrations on a sample of 100 students. The results demonstrated statistical significance at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

Table 1: Reliability Measures of the test.

Sl. No.	Reliability Methods	Value
1	**Test-Retest method**	**0.81**

*Significant at 0.05 level of significance (two-tailed).

Results

Table 2: Mean Difference of ELPT Scores Between Private and Government School Students.

Type of School	N	Mean	SD	p	t	Sig

Private Government	140 226	38.586 29.221	9.1266 8.4787	0.000	9.971	Significant

Analysis and Interpretation:

The mean score for English Language Proficiency (ELPT) is 38.586 for students in private schools, while students in government schools have a mean score of 29.221. The difference in means is statistically significant, as indicated by a t-value of 9.971 and a p-value of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 significance level. This shows that private school students have significantly higher English language proficiency than their government counterparts.

Table 3: Mean Difference of ELPT Scores Between Students from Urban and Rural Areas

Locality of School	N	Mean	SD	p	t	Sig
Urban Rural	230 136	34.665 29.654	9.8839 8.9512	.000	4.851	Significant

Analysis and Interpretation:

Urban school students scored significantly higher (M = 34.665) in English Language Proficiency than rural school students (M = 29.654). The t-value is 4.851, and the p-value is 0.000, indicating a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level.

This result suggests that the school's geographic location is crucial to students' English language development. Urban schools typically have more access to qualified English teachers, learning materials, language labs, and extracurricular English activities such as debates and elocutions. Rural schools may struggle with teacher shortages, limited English exposure at home or community levels, and infrastructural deficiencies. Therefore, students in urban settings benefit from a more supportive English language environment, leading to better proficiency outcomes.

Table 3: Overall English Language Proficiency Levels of Secondary School Students

Proficiency Level	**Score Range**	**Number of Students (f)**	**Percentage (%)**
Extremely Proficient	51–56	13	3.55
Highly Proficient	43–50	53	14.48
Above Average Proficient	35–42	87	23.77
Average Proficient	24–34	155	42.35
Below Average Proficient	16–23	40	10.93
Low Proficient	8–15	17	4.64

Extremely Low Proficient	0–7	1	0.27
Total	—	366	100

Analysis and Interpretation

The data shows that most secondary school students in Thoubal District (42.35%) have an Average Proficient level of English, indicating moderate language skills. About 23.77% are Above Average Proficient, while 14.48% and 3.55% fall into the Highly Proficient and Extremely Proficient categories, respectively, representing stronger English abilities.

Conversely, 10.93% of students are Below Average Proficient, and 4.64% are Low Proficient, suggesting these students may face challenges in academic tasks requiring English. Only 0.27% are Extremely Low Proficient, indicating minimal skills.

This wide range of proficiency levels shows that while many students are doing well, there is a clear need for targeted language support to help those struggling with English and challenge those already strong. We can help all students improve and reach their full potential by providing focused assistance.

Discussion

The findings of this study align with previous research emphasizing the role of school environment and locality in shaping students' English proficiency (Cummins, 2000; Singh, 2012). Private schools' better resources, smaller class sizes, and more frequent English use likely provide students with richer language exposure, which enhances their proficiency (Trice, 2007; Colmar et al., 2019). Conversely, government schools often face resource constraints and larger classes that may limit personalized language support, lowering student outcomes.

The urban-rural divide is equally significant. Urban students benefit from exposure to English in their everyday lives, through media and social interactions, reinforcing classroom learning (Martínez et al., 2019; Wongtrirat, 2010). Rural students, often confined to English use only within school settings, face challenges developing fluency and confidence, which can hinder their academic progress (Sahragard et al., 2011).

The wide range of overall proficiency levels suggests that while many students meet average standards, there is a critical need to support those struggling, particularly in government and rural schools. This study highlights the importance of equitable resource allocation, teacher training, and language support programs tailored to students' contexts to bridge these gaps.

Conclusion

Private school students show significantly higher English language proficiency than government school students. Urban school students have significantly greater English language proficiency than rural students. The overall English language proficiency among secondary school students in Thoubal District varied widely, with the majority demonstrating average proficiency. While some students showed above-average to extremely proficient levels, a significant portion struggled with below-average or low proficiency, highlighting the need for focused language support.

This study confirms that school type and locality significantly affect English language proficiency among secondary school students in Thoubal District. Private and urban schools provide environments more conducive to developing stronger English skills, while government and rural schools face challenges that need targeted support. Addressing these disparities is crucial for ensuring all students have the opportunity to succeed academically and confidently use English as a medium of instruction. Policymakers and educators must prioritize tailored strategies to support underperforming groups, promoting fairness and excellence in education.

Recommendations and Suggestions for Further Studies

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that targeted efforts be made to improve English language support, especially in government and rural schools where proficiency levels were found to be lower. This could include providing better training and resources for teachers and creating more opportunities for students to practice English through clubs, workshops, and language labs. Schools in rural areas should particularly focus on increasing exposure to English outside the classroom, possibly through community programs and technology. Additionally, ensuring that all schools can access sufficient learning materials and digital tools can help bridge existing gaps. Engaging parents and the community to support English learning at home could also positively impact students' proficiency. For future research, exploring how socio-economic factors and students' motivation influence English proficiency would be valuable, as this could lead to more personalized interventions. Longitudinal studies tracking language development over time and intervention-based research testing different teaching methods would deepen understanding of effective strategies. Finally, qualitative studies investigating students' personal experiences with English learning could provide important insights to guide educators in creating more supportive learning environments. Together, these recommendations and further research directions aim to ensure that all students, regardless of background, have the opportunity to succeed in English.

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