



The Linguistic Leap: Challenges Faced By Odia Medium Students In English Medium Higher Education In Khordha District Of Odisha

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the challenges faced by Odia medium students transitioning to English medium instruction in higher education institutions within Khordha district, Odisha. Employing a cluster sampling method, data was collected through surveys administered to 160 students from 10 colleges, ensuring balanced representation across rural/urban areas, gender, and academic streams (science, arts, commerce). Simple percentage analysis revealed significant difficulties for Odia medium students adapting to English medium teaching. Rural students, in particular, faced greater obstacles. These findings highlight the need for targeted support mechanisms to bridge the linguistic gap and ensure equitable access to quality higher education for all students.

KEY WORDS: Odia medium, English medium instruction, higher education, challenges, rural-urban divide

INTRODUCTION

The increasing use of English as the primary medium of instruction in Indian higher education presents both opportunities and challenges. While English proficiency offers advantages in a globalized world, it creates hurdles for students whose primary education occurred in their native languages. This study explores the experiences of Odia medium students in Khordha district, Odisha, as they navigate the transition to English medium programs in higher education. Specifically, it investigates the challenges they face in adapting to this linguistic shift.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Panigrahi S. S (2018) conducted a study on the problems of tribal students in learning English as a second language in Odisha. The objectives of the study were (i) to find out the problems of tribal students in learning English as a second language. (ii) To examine the effect of a first language on learning a second language. (iii) To identify the factors affecting learning English namely home environment, family background, income, medium of instruction and method of teaching. Their major findings were (i) the tribal students face many problems still learning English. (ii) Tribal students spell the English words incorrectly due to the effect of the first language on learning English. (iii) Girls face more problems in learning English comparatively than boys

Dash B (2019) conducted a study on challenges to regional language learners in addition to the English language at undergraduate level in Odisha. The objectives of the study were (i) To pick out the challenges looked out by local speakers of the selected region in English as a subsequent language. (ii) To review and examine the affecting elements of regional language learners. (iii) To endorse possible solutions for the difficulties looked out by ESL learners of L1 learners of two regions. Their major findings were (i) It was detected that most of the L1 learners were of the opinion that they could acquire English superior in unofficial or unstudied context than informal classroom.

Dash R.K (2022) conducted a study on learning of English as a second language in the rural areas of Odisha: A special reference to Kantapada block of Cuttack district. The objectives of the study were (i) To develop the communicative competence among the learners in senior secondary High schools of rural areas of Odisha. (ii) To develop the habit of reading and listening skills. (iii) To investigate the major and minor errors made by the learner in speaking activities inside the classroom. Major findings of the study were (i) In a single classroom there are more than 100 students in the language class which is the biggest obstacle for language learners. (ii) Most of the students have major problems i.e. lack of confidence, anxiety or nervousness to speak

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The rationale behind this study is twofold. Firstly, understanding the challenges faced by Odia medium students is crucial to ensuring equitable access to quality higher education. A smooth transition to an English medium environment is vital for student success. Identifying the specific difficulties allows for the development of targeted support mechanisms, such as bridge courses or tailored pedagogical approaches. Secondly, the potential disparity between rural and urban students' experiences warrants investigation. Socioeconomic factors might contribute to varying levels of English language proficiency. Highlighting this potential gap can inform efforts to bridge the digital divide and ensure all students, regardless of background, have the resources needed to thrive in English as the primary medium of instruction (EMI) settings.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To assess whether Odia medium students experience difficulty comprehending lectures delivered in English.
2. To determine if students from rural backgrounds face a greater challenge adapting to English medium instruction compared to their urban counterparts.
3. To investigate if students perceive their prior Odia medium education as adequately preparing them for the linguistic demands of English textbooks and course materials.

4. To explore student interest in additional support mechanisms, such as bridge courses, to enhance their English language proficiency.
5. To evaluate whether students believe a language gap hinders their academic performance within the English medium environment.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a survey method to investigate the challenges faced by Odia medium students transitioning to English medium higher education in Khordha district, Odisha. A cluster sampling approach was utilized to select a representative sample of students. Ten colleges across both rural and urban areas within Khordha district were chosen as clusters. A total of 160 undergraduate students participated in the survey, ensuring balanced representation across the following categories: 80 students from rural colleges and 80 students from urban colleges. Equal representation of male and female students (80 each) was ensured. Additionally, there was an even distribution of students from Science, Arts, and Commerce streams. A self-administered questionnaire was developed specifically for this study. The questionnaire consisted of yes/no questions designed to address the research objectives outlined previously. Furthermore, the questionnaire was translated into Odia to ensure clarity and accessibility for all participants.

DATA ANALYSIS INTERPRETATION

Descriptive statistics (simple percentages) used to analyze the quantitative data collected through the yes/no questions. This will allow us to identify the prevalence of various challenges faced by Odia medium students in adapting to the English medium environment.

1: Difficulty with Lectures

Question No.	Question	Rural (Yes)	Rural (No)	Urban (Yes)	Urban (No)
1	Difficulty understanding lectures	70%	30%	40%	60%
2	Trouble grasping information in fast-paced lectures	80%	20%	45%	55%
3	Preference for Odia lectures or translation	95%	05%	50%	50%
4	Struggle to follow explanations due to English proficiency	60%	40%	30%	70%
5	Unfamiliarity with lecture vocabulary	75%	25%	45%	55%
6	Difficulty taking lecture notes	60%	40%	30%	70%
7	More confusion after English lectures	90%	10%	48%	52%
8	Missed opportunities to ask questions	55%	45%	25%	75%
9	Desire for more engaging lectures with visuals	75%	25%	55%	45%
10	Potential for professors to improve teaching methods	65%	35%	40%	60%

English medium lectures pose significant challenges for students, particularly those from rural backgrounds. The language gap hinders comprehension, with 70% of rural students struggling compared to 40% in urban areas. This leads to confusion, missed opportunities to ask questions, and difficulty taking notes. Students, especially in rural areas, also express concerns about their English impacting academic performance. To bridge this gap, students strongly desire Odia-based support, slower lecture pace, and improved teaching methods. Additionally, there's a high demand for bridge courses, workshops, peer tutoring, and alternative assessments to enhance English proficiency and ensure equitable learning opportunities for all.

2 Rural vs. Urban Student Challenges

Question	Rural Students (%)	Urban Students (%)
Less prepared for English medium instruction?	80	15
Comfortable understanding English lectures?	25	90
Classmates from rural areas struggle more?	80	50
Fewer opportunities to learn English in rural areas?	60	30
Need for additional English language support for rural students?	75	45

Rural students face a significant disadvantage in transitioning to English medium education. They feel less prepared, have limited English exposure, and struggle more with lectures compared to urban students (80% vs. 25%). This disparity is acknowledged by urban students, with 50% recognizing the challenges faced by their rural peers. Both rural and urban students overwhelmingly support providing additional English language support specifically for rural students (75% and 45% respectively) to bridge the gap and ensure equitable learning opportunities.

3: Prior Education & Materials

Question	Yes (%)	No (%)
Odia education prepared for English materials	40	60
Textbook vocabulary and sentence structure difficult	55	45
Struggle to complete reading assignments	45	55
Difficulty understanding assignment/exam instructions	40	60
Benefit from translated materials or glossaries	75	25

Students' prior Odia medium education often leaves them unprepared for the demands of English textbooks and course materials. Over half (55%) find the vocabulary and sentence structure difficult, and nearly half (45%) struggle with reading assignments. They also report difficulty understanding instructions in English (40%). To address this gap, students overwhelmingly desire additional support resources like translated materials and glossaries (75%) to improve their comprehension and facilitate their learning experience.

4: Interest in Support Mechanisms

Question	Yes (%)	No (%)
Interest in bridge course	75	25
Benefit from English language workshops	70	30
More confident with stronger English skills in discussions	85	15
Peer tutors helpful for English language challenges	80	20
Alternative assignments/assessments for limited English proficiency	70	30

Students are highly receptive to various support mechanisms aimed at improving their English language proficiency. They are interested in bridge courses (75%), workshops (70%), peer tutoring (80%), and alternative assessments (70%) to enhance their confidence, participation, and overall academic performance in an English medium environment. This strong commitment to improvement highlights the importance of providing targeted interventions to address the language gap and empower students to thrive in their studies.

5: Language Gap & Academic Performance

Question	Yes (%)	No (%)
Language gap hinders understanding of course content	82	18
English proficiency impacting academic performance	55	45
Hesitant in class discussions/questions due to English skills	78	22
Worry about grades suffering due to English medium challenges	55	45
Increased English language support improves academic performance	70	30

The language gap between Odia and English poses a significant barrier to students' academic success. A vast majority (82%) believe it hinders their ability to understand course content, and many worry about their grades suffering (55%). This language barrier also limits their engagement in class, as 78% of students report feeling hesitant to participate due to their English skills. Students recognize the need for improved English language support services, with 70% believing it would lead to better academic performance.

CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS

This paper reveals significant challenges faced by students transitioning to English medium education. Rural students struggle more than their urban counterparts, hindered by limited English exposure and inadequate preparation from Odia-based education. They grapple with lecture comprehension, vocabulary, and course materials, leading to difficulties in understanding content, participating in class, and potentially impacting their grades. Despite these challenges, students actively seek solutions. They express strong interest in bridge courses, workshops, and peer tutoring to improve their English proficiency. Additionally, they emphasize the need for Odia-based support in lectures, slower lecture pace, and alternative assessment methods to ensure fair evaluation. This demonstrates a clear desire for targeted interventions to bridge the language gap and enhance their learning experience.

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