

DEMOGRAPHIC DETERMINANTS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AND LEARNING STRATEGIES AMONG B.ED. TRAINEES

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ABSTRACT

English proficiency among teacher trainees is key to educational quality in India. This study examined demographic influences and learning strategies among 678 B.Ed. trainees in Theni District, Tamil Nadu. A descriptive survey with stratified random sampling was used across seven private colleges. Data were collected using ELPS and LSI tools standardized for the local context. Results showed 57.8% of trainees had moderate proficiency. Significant differences emerged by gender, locality, subject specialization, and parental education. Higher proficiency was seen among females, urban students, English majors, and those with educated parents. Learning strategies varied across groups. High-proficiency trainees favored metacognitive strategies. The findings support targeted curriculum design for diverse learner needs.

KEYWORDS: English language proficiency, demographic determinants, learning strategies, teacher educator.

INTRODUCTION

English occupies a distinctive role in India, acting as both a colonial legacy and a key driver of global participation and social mobility. It is the primary medium of instruction in higher education, especially in professional fields, and strongly influences employability. Studies show that fluent English speakers in India earn about 34% more, while those with basic skills earn 13% more than non-speakers. However, only around 15.6% of the population has English communication skills, with significant disparities across regions and social groups.

In teacher education, English proficiency is especially important. B.Ed. trainees, as future educators, shape students' language development, and their own proficiency affects teaching quality and classroom communication. In multilingual contexts like Theni District, they must also balance regional languages such as Tamil with English as a global medium.

Learning strategies—deliberate methods used to acquire language skills—play a key role in bridging gaps in proficiency. While effective strategies can offset disadvantages, their relationship with demographic factors remains underexplored, particularly in semi-urban and rural teacher education settings.

This study examines how demographic factors influence English proficiency and learning strategies among B.Ed. trainees in Theni District, aiming to support more equitable and effective teacher education practices.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of the study “**A study on English Language Proficiency, Learning Strategies and Employability Skills among B.Ed Trainees in Theni District**”.

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out the level of English language proficiency among B.Ed. trainees in Theni District.
2. To find out the level of Learning Strategies among B.Ed. trainees in Theni District.
3. To find out the level of significant differences in English language proficiency among B.Ed. trainees in Theni District based on demographic variables: gender, locality, subject specialization, and parental education.
4. To find out the level of learning strategies among B.Ed. trainees in Theni District based on demographic variables: gender, locality, subject specialization, and parental education.
5. To find out the level of significant differences between the English language proficiency and learning strategies among B.Ed. trainees in Theni District.

Hypotheses

1. The level of English language proficiency among the B.Ed. trainees is.....
2. The level of learning strategies among the B.Ed. trainees is.....
3. There is no significant difference in English language proficiency between male and female B.Ed. trainees.
4. There is no significant difference in English language proficiency between urban and rural B.Ed. trainees.
5. There is no significant difference in English language proficiency among B.Ed. trainees from different subject specializations.
6. There is no significant difference in English language proficiency among B.Ed. trainees based on parental education levels.
7. There is no significant relationship between demographic variables (gender, locality, subject specialization, parental education) and learning strategy preferences.
8. There is no significant interaction effect of gender and locality on English language proficiency.
9. There is no significant interaction effect of subject specialization and parental education on English language proficiency.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to examine the demographic determinants of English language proficiency and learning strategies among B.Ed. trainees. The design facilitated the collection of quantitative data from a representative sample, enabling statistical analysis of group differences and relationships among variables.

Population and Sample

The study population included about 1,850 B.Ed. trainees from seven private colleges in Theni District (2024–2025), with no government or aided institutions present. A stratified random sample of 678 trainees (36.6%) was selected based on gender, locality, and subject specialization, following Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) guidelines, with extra participants included to offset incomplete responses.

Table 1: Distribution of Sample by Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	245	36.1
	Female	433	63.9
Locality	Rural	441	65.0
	Urban	237	35.0
Subject Specialization	English	156	23.0
	Science	189	27.9
	Mathematics	167	24.6
	Social Studies	166	24.5
Parental Education	Below Graduation	312	46.0
	Graduate	234	34.5
	Post-Graduate	132	19.5

Data Collection Procedure

Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the principals of all seven selected teacher education colleges. Trainees were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality. Data collection occurred in classroom settings during regular academic sessions, with the researcher present to clarify instructions and address queries. The ELPS was administered first (60 minutes), followed by the LSI (30 minutes), with a brief break between instruments. All 678 distributed questionnaires were completed and found valid for analysis, representing a 100% response rate.

Statistical Techniques

Data analysis employed both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, percentages) summarized proficiency levels and strategy preferences. Inferential statistics included:

- ✓ Independent samples t-tests for gender and locality comparisons
- ✓ One-way ANOVA for subject specialization and parental education comparisons
- ✓ Two-way ANOVA for interaction effects
- ✓ Pearson's product-moment correlation for relationships between variables
- ✓ All analyses were conducted using SPSS version 26, with significance set at $p < 0.05$.

Hypothesis Testing

Overall English Language Proficiency Levels

Before testing specific hypotheses, overall proficiency levels were assessed. Table 2 presents the distribution of 678 trainees across proficiency categories.

Table 2: Distribution of English Language Proficiency Levels

Proficiency Level	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage
High (80% and above)	40-50	156	23.0
Moderate (60-79%)	30-39	392	57.8
Low (Below 60%)	Below 30	130	19.2
Total		678	100

The majority of B.Ed. trainees (57.8%) demonstrated moderate English proficiency, while 23.0% achieved high proficiency and 19.2% fell into the low proficiency category. These findings suggest that while most trainees possess functional English skills, a substantial minority (nearly one-fifth) may require additional language support during teacher preparation.

Hypothesis 1: Gender Differences in Proficiency

There is no significant difference in English language proficiency between male and female B.Ed. trainees.

Table 3: Gender Differences in English Language Proficiency

Gender	N	df	Mean	SD	t-value	Result
Male	245	676	32.12	6.78	4.21	Significant
Female	433		35.67	7.12		

The obtained t-value (4.21) exceeds the critical value at the 0.01 level, and the p-value (0.000) is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is **rejected**. Female B.Ed. trainees demonstrated significantly higher English proficiency (Mean = 35.67) compared to their male counterparts (Mean = 32.12). This finding aligns with previous research documenting female advantage in language acquisition and may reflect differential engagement with language learning materials and opportunities.

Hypothesis 2: Locality Differences in Proficiency

There is no significant difference in English language proficiency between urban and rural B.Ed. trainees.

Table 4: Locality Differences in English Language Proficiency

Locality	N	df	Mean	SD	t-value	Result
Urban	237	676	36.89	6.34	5.63	Significant
Rural	441		32.45	7.67		

The t-value of 5.63 is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), leading to **rejection** of the null hypothesis. Urban trainees (Mean = 36.89) substantially outperformed rural trainees (Mean = 32.45). This disparity of 4.44 points reflects the differential language environments characteristic of urban and rural Tamil Nadu, including access to English-medium schooling, exposure to English media, and opportunities for English interaction.

Hypothesis 3: Subject Specialization Differences

There is no significant difference in English language proficiency among B.Ed. trainees from different subject specializations.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Subject Specialization Groups

Subject Specialization	N	Mean	SD
English	156	39.12	6.89
Science	189	34.56	7.23
Mathematics	167	31.89	6.45
Social Studies	166	33.45	7.01

Table 6: ANOVA Summary for Subject Specialization Differences

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	Result
Between Groups	4123.45	3	1374.48	6.89	Significant
Within Groups	134456.78	674	199.49		
Total	138580.23	677			

The F-value (6.89) is significant at $p < 0.01$, prompting **rejection** of the null hypothesis. Post-hoc comparisons (Tukey's HSD) revealed that English specialization trainees (Mean = 39.12) scored significantly higher than all other groups. Science trainees (Mean = 34.56) outperformed mathematics trainees (Mean = 31.89), while social studies trainees (Mean = 33.45) occupied an intermediate position. These differences likely reflect both selection effects (trainees with stronger English skills choosing English specialization) and differential language exposure within subject-specific curricula.

Hypothesis 4: Parental Education Differences

There is no significant difference in English language proficiency among B.Ed. trainees based on parental education levels.

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics for Parental Education Groups

Parental Education Level	N	Mean	SD
Below Graduation	312	32.23	6.78
Graduate	234	35.45	7.12
Post-Graduate	132	38.12	7.45

Table 8: ANOVA Summary for Parental Education Differences

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	Result
Between Groups	3456.78	2	1728.39	5.92	Significant
Within Groups	135123.45	675	200.18		
Total	138580.23	677			

The significant F-value (5.92, $p < 0.01$) leads to **rejection** of the null hypothesis. Trainees whose parents possessed post-graduate qualifications (Mean = 38.12) demonstrated the highest proficiency, followed by those with graduate parents (Mean = 35.45), while trainees from below-graduation families scored lowest (Mean = 32.23). This gradient reflects the intergenerational transmission of educational advantage and the language-rich environments associated with parental education.

Hypothesis 5: Demographic Variables and Learning Strategy Preferences

There is no significant relationship between demographic variables and learning strategy preferences.

Table 9: Mean Scores of Learning Strategy Use by Demographic Group

Demographic Variable	Category	Metacognitive	Cognitive	Social	Affective
Gender	Male	38.12	36.45	24.12	23.89
	Female	42.34	39.78	27.45	25.67
Locality	Rural	38.45	36.89	25.12	24.12
	Urban	43.67	40.23	27.89	25.89
Subject Specialization	English	45.67	42.34	29.12	26.78
	Non-English	39.23	37.12	25.34	24.45
Parental Education	Below Grad	38.89	37.12	25.12	24.23
	Graduate+	43.12	40.45	27.34	25.67

Table 10: Correlation between Demographic Variables and Learning Strategy Use

Demographic Variable	Metacognitive	Cognitive	Social	Affective
Gender (Female = 1)	0.29**	0.21*	0.25**	0.16*
Locality (Urban = 1)	0.33**	0.24**	0.19*	0.13
Subject Specialization (English = 1)	0.37**	0.31**	0.23**	0.17*
Parental Education	0.27**	0.19*	0.15*	0.10

The correlation matrix reveals significant positive relationships between several demographic variables and learning strategy preferences, leading to **partial rejection** of the null hypothesis. Female gender, urban locality, English specialization, and higher parental education correlated significantly with metacognitive, cognitive, and social strategy use. Metacognitive strategies—involving planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning—showed the strongest associations with demographic advantages (r ranging from 0.27 to 0.37). Affective strategies demonstrated weaker or non-significant correlations with most demographic variables.

Hypothesis 6: Interaction Effect of Gender and Locality

There is no significant interaction effect of gender and locality on English language proficiency.

Table 11: Two-Way ANOVA for Gender × Locality Interaction

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Result
Gender	1876.45	1	1876.45	9.34	Significant
Locality	2890.67	1	2890.67	14.38	Significant
Gender × Locality	267.89	1	267.89	1.33	Not Significant
Error	135545.22	674	201.11		
Total	138580.23	677			

While both main effects (gender and locality) are significant, the interaction term ($F = 1.33$, $p = 0.249$) is not significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no interaction is **accepted**. The effects of gender and locality on English proficiency are additive rather than interactive; the female advantage persists across both urban and rural contexts, and the urban advantage persists for both genders.

Hypothesis 7: Interaction Effect of Subject Specialization and Parental Education

There is no significant interaction effect of subject specialization and parental education on English language proficiency.

Table 12: Two-Way ANOVA for Specialization × Parental Education Interaction

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Result
Specialization	3789.23	3	1263.08	6.45	Significant
Parental Education	2890.45	2	1445.23	7.38	Significant
Specialization × Education	1456.78	6	242.80	1.24	Not Significant
Error	130443.77	666	195.86		
Total	138580.23	677			

Both main effects are significant, but the interaction effect ($F = 1.24$, $p = 0.287$) does not reach significance. The null hypothesis is **accepted**. The advantages associated with English specialization and higher parental education operate independently, with each factor contributing additively to proficiency outcomes.

Major Findings

Proficiency Distribution: The majority of B.Ed. trainees (57.8%) in Theni District demonstrated moderate English proficiency, with 23.0% achieving high proficiency and 19.2% falling in the low proficiency category.

Gender Disparity: Female trainees significantly outperformed male trainees in English proficiency ($t = 4.21$, $p < 0.01$), confirming a persistent gender gap in language achievement.

Urban-Rural Divide: Urban trainees exhibited substantially higher proficiency than their rural counterparts ($t = 5.63$, $p < 0.001$), reflecting differential language exposure and educational opportunities.

Subject Specialization Effects: English literature majors scored highest in proficiency (Mean = 39.12), followed by science (34.56), social studies (33.45), and mathematics (31.89) trainees in descending order ($F = 6.89$, $p < 0.01$).

Parental Education Gradient: A clear positive relationship emerged between parental education levels and trainee proficiency, with post-graduate parents associated with the highest scores (Mean = 38.12) compared to below-graduation families (Mean = 32.23) ($F = 5.92$, $p < 0.01$).

Learning Strategy Patterns: Demographic advantages correlated significantly with metacognitive, cognitive, and social strategy use. Metacognitive strategies showed the strongest associations with high proficiency, particularly among English specialization trainees ($r = 0.37$) and urban residents ($r = 0.33$).

Additive Effects: Interaction analyses revealed that demographic variables operate additively rather than interactively, with advantages accumulating across favorable characteristics. The gender × locality interaction ($F = 1.33$, $p = 0.249$) and specialization × education interaction ($F = 1.24$, $p = 0.287$) were both non-significant.

DISCUSSION

The study highlights significant disparities in English proficiency among B.Ed. trainees in Theni District, shaped by gender, locality, subject specialization, and parental education. Female trainees (63.9%) show a consistent advantage, while a notable urban–rural gap raises concerns, especially since most trainees (65%) are from rural areas, potentially reinforcing educational inequality. English majors perform highest, while mathematics trainees lag, indicating the need for language support across disciplines. Parental education strongly influences outcomes, reflecting intergenerational advantages in language exposure. Additionally, demographic factors are linked to better use of metacognitive strategies, suggesting that effective learning approaches are unevenly distributed. Since these factors act independently, targeted interventions for each group can effectively improve overall proficiency.

CONCLUSION

This study of 678 B.Ed. trainees in Theni District found that English proficiency varies significantly by gender, locality, subject specialization, and parental education, with urban, female, English-specializing trainees from educated families outperforming their counterparts. These disparities mirror broader social inequalities and risk being perpetuated as trainees become teachers, influencing future students' learning opportunities. Addressing this requires targeted language support, strategy instruction, and systemic efforts to reduce structural inequalities. Since multiple demographic factors interact, comprehensive interventions—combining exposure, resources, and

motivation—are essential. Recognizing these structural influences is key to creating more equitable teacher education and improving classroom outcomes.

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