

AI-Assisted English Learning Among Undergraduate Students in Rural India

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Abstract: Artificial intelligence can extend opportunities for English practice beyond the classroom, but its usefulness in rural undergraduate education depends on access, instructional design, and evidence of independent learning. This critical narrative review synthesizes 45 journal articles on AI-supported language learning, feedback, multilingual education, and digital participation. It examines writing, vocabulary, reading, and oral communication while distinguishing generative chatbots from automated correction systems and earlier conversational agents. Indian classroom studies indicate possible benefits from guided feedback; wider chatbot research identifies opportunities for interaction alongside technical limitations and declining novelty. Evidence specifically combining rural Indian settings, undergraduate populations, and measured English proficiency remains limited in the reviewed literature. A proposed framework links an access audit and initial language assessment with independent attempts, focused AI consultation, teacher and peer discussion, and unaided transfer tasks. Shared devices, locally meaningful content, and equivalent offline activities are incorporated into the design. The paper argues that colleges should judge AI integration through retained competence and equitable participation, rather than the fluency of assisted assignments or the frequency of tool use. It provides a practical research agenda for evaluating these conditions across diverse rural institutions.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, English Learning, English Proficiency, Higher Education, Rural India

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1. Introduction

English learning at undergraduate level involves using language to understand disciplinary texts, explain ideas, participate in discussion, and communicate for academic and professional purposes. For students studying outside major urban centres, opportunities for such practice can vary considerably. AI tools offer additional explanations and interaction, making their educational role an important question. The present paper examines how these possibilities can be incorporated into rural Indian colleges without equating access to a chatbot with the acquisition of English proficiency.

The economic and social significance of English in India provides a reason to investigate effective support, but it also requires care in defining the purpose of instruction. Azam et al. (2013) document labour-market returns associated with English skills. Kachru (1986) locates English within relationships of power and linguistic legitimacy. These contributions establish contextual stakes; neither demonstrates that an AI application improves employment prospects. Undergraduate English education should help students communicate their knowledge and aspirations while recognizing Indian English and the multilingual resources they already possess.

Rural students are not a uniform population. A college situated in a rural locality can enrol students with markedly different schooling, household resources, language backgrounds, and prior exposure to digital tools. Conversely, students living in villages may attend urban colleges. The distinction matters when interpreting research or organizing support. This paper uses rural undergraduate education to refer broadly to colleges and learners whose participation is shaped by rural location and associated resource conditions. It does not assume that all rural learners lack devices, have low proficiency, or require the same teaching strategy.

The pandemic literature supplies relevant evidence about participation, even though it predates contemporary generative AI. Kapasia et al. (2020) identify obstacles to online learning among students in West Bengal, including connectivity and unfavourable learning environments. Muthuprasad et al. (2021) examine Indian agricultural students' preferences and constraints in online education. Dhawan (2020) discusses both the possibilities and practical difficulties of online learning. These sources support attention to conditions of participation; they do not establish current national access rates or demonstrate an AI effect.

The review addresses three connected questions. What language-learning activities can AI support, and what evidence distinguishes improved assisted performance from independent competence? Which contextual barriers influence rural undergraduates' participation? How can colleges design and evaluate instruction that combines AI assistance with teacher judgement and multilingual learning? The contribution is a context-sensitive synthesis and a proposed teaching framework. No claim is made that the framework has already been tested or that a single tool can resolve inequalities rooted in institutions and communities.

2. Materials and Methods

The paper adopts a critical narrative review, appropriate for bringing together heterogeneous classroom studies, conceptual arguments, and contextual research. Targeted web searches conducted for this review used combinations of artificial intelligence, ChatGPT, English learning, undergraduate students, rural India, feedback, multilingual education, and digital access. Publisher and journal pages were used to identify publications and check titles, authors, publication details, and persistent links. Accessible article texts were consulted where available; descriptions based on abstracts were restricted to the information those abstracts supplied.

The final bibliography contains 45 journal articles. Selection was purposive: sources were retained for direct relevance to language-learning activities, explanatory value for feedback and learner agency, or relevance to rural and Indian educational conditions. Journal-based reviews and conceptual articles were included alongside empirical investigations. Books, book chapters, policy reports, conference proceedings, news items, and preprints were excluded from the reference list. Established theoretical articles were retained to interpret learning processes, with their historical and indirect relationship to present-day AI made explicit.

Sources were considered through four interpretive questions: what technology was used, what learners actually did, what outcome was measured, and how closely the setting matched rural Indian undergraduate education. A generative chatbot, an automated writing evaluator, and a speech-enabled conversational agent were treated as distinct technologies. Perceptions of usefulness were distinguished from proficiency scores. Assisted assignments were distinguished from unaided and delayed assessments. Studies of school pupils, postgraduate students, professionals, or other countries were retained only when their relevance and limits could be explained.

This review does not claim a comprehensive database search or a systematic screening procedure. It provides no PRISMA flow, pooled effect size, or formal risk-of-bias score. No participants were recruited and no original survey, interview, or proficiency data were collected. Selection may privilege accessible English-language publications and writing research. The findings therefore constitute an analytical interpretation of the selected literature rather than an estimate of the overall effectiveness of AI across rural India. These boundaries also guide the proposed research agenda.

3. Conceptual Perspectives

AI-assisted English learning refers here to activities in which computational systems support language practice, feedback, or adaptation. Generative systems produce responses to prompts; other tools identify probable language errors or guide practice through more restricted functions. Kohnke et al. (2023) discuss the teaching and learning possibilities of ChatGPT. Lo (2023) reviews early educational literature on the system. Neither contribution warrants treating every AI-labelled product as pedagogically equivalent. Learning depends on the task and the learner's response to assistance, not simply the technological category.

Noticing, feedback engagement, and self-regulation provide useful explanations for how assistance might lead to development. Schmidt (1990) highlights attention to linguistic features in second-language learning. Hattie and Timperley (2007) explain how feedback can address performance, processes, and regulation. Zimmerman (2002) describes learners' capacity to set goals and monitor progress. Applying these perspectives to AI suggests a possible sequence: a student attempts an expression, examines a focused explanation, makes a reasoned adjustment, and later uses the relevant feature independently. This sequence is a theoretical application, not an established causal model.

Feedback literacy helps explain why a detailed response may still produce little learning. Carless and Boud (2018) emphasize learners' capacities to appreciate feedback, judge quality, manage reactions, and act. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) connect feedback with self-regulated learning. In the proposed rural college

framework, students should therefore practise asking manageable questions and explaining which suggestion they accept. A response that rewrites an entire assignment can conceal the reasoning needed to make those choices. The design should reduce such concealment through brief revision explanations and subsequent independent tasks.

Context-sensitive pedagogy also matters. Prabhu (1990) questions universal claims about a best method, while Kumaravadivelu (2001) articulates a post-method pedagogy grounded in local conditions. Agnihotri (2007) argues for pedagogy rooted in multilinguality. Together, these perspectives support adapting AI activities to learners' actual language repertoires and opportunities for participation. An English task can begin with discussion in a familiar language and move towards an English explanation. The aim is to increase communicative capability without treating the student's other languages as evidence of deficiency.

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4. Evidence and Discussion

The wider educational evidence is useful for locating possibilities, but its relevance must be evaluated rather than assumed. Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019) reviewed AI applications in higher education and drew attention to the role of educators. Crompton and Burke (2023) examined the field through research published between 2016 and 2022. These reviews encompass technologies and purposes beyond English learning. Their value here lies in showing why educational applications require pedagogical interpretation; they cannot establish the effectiveness of current generative tools in rural Indian colleges.

Huang et al. (2022) reviewed 25 empirical studies of chatbot-supported language learning. They identified affordances such as timely responses and personalization alongside technical limitations, novelty effects, and cognitive load. Their review concerns several chatbot types and language-learning settings, not only generative AI. Fryer et al. (2017), comparing chatbot and human task partners, found declining task interest in the chatbot condition. Together, these sources encourage teachers to assess sustained engagement rather than infer lasting motivation from enthusiasm during an initial demonstration.

Evidence about productivity must also be interpreted separately from learning. Noy and Zhang (2023) report productivity benefits from generative AI in professional writing tasks. That finding does not establish improved English proficiency among students. Faster completion may create time for further practice, but it may also result from delegation of the language task. A college evaluation should therefore identify what students can do after assistance is withdrawn. This distinction is especially important when a polished assignment is the only available record of performance.

Chan and Hu (2023) examine higher education students' perceptions of generative AI, including benefits and challenges. Such accounts help explain acceptance and concerns, but a learner's confidence is not a substitute for a language assessment. Devasena (2024) discusses possibilities for AI in education and English instruction. These contributions can inform teaching questions without being treated as direct proof of rural undergraduate learning gains. The selected evidence supports cautious experimentation with purposeful activities and explicit evaluation, rather than a broad conclusion that AI improves every language skill for every learner.

Indian writing research offers more direct classroom evidence. Mahapatra (2024) investigated ChatGPT-supported formative feedback with undergraduate ESL learners and reported improved academic writing performance. The intervention and its setting provide evidence for guided use, while the selected learners, genres, and duration constrain generalization. Jamshed et al. (2024) examine mobile ChatGPT feedback with Indian English learners in a senior-secondary setting. Their findings concern targeted writing outcomes; the participants should not be described as rural undergraduates. Earlier work by Mahapatra (2021) informs online feedback practice across India, Bangladesh, and Nepal rather than contemporary generative AI.

Other sources help clarify the kinds of evidence included in this review. Makwana (2025) compares AI-powered and teacher-led feedback using an automated writing platform. Priyadharshini and Bavya (2025) examine writing support with a small group of female postgraduate students. Gayed et al. (2022) investigate an AI-based writing assistant rather than present-day unrestricted chatbot use. These studies make technology, population, and outcome distinctions essential. Table 1 summarizes selected sources and their relationship to the present question; it is an evidence map rather than a ranking of study quality.

Source	Evidence and setting	Relevance and boundary
Mahapatra (2024)	ChatGPT feedback intervention with Indian undergraduate ESL writers	Direct writing evidence; does not establish rural-wide effectiveness
Jamshed et al. (2024)	Mobile ChatGPT feedback in an Indian senior-secondary setting	Targeted writing evidence; different age and educational level
Huang et al. (2022)	Review of 25 chatbot language-learning studies	Multiple chatbot types; technology and context differ
Goswami and Bhattacharjee (2026)	Survey of rural and urban undergraduates in Tripura	Access and perceptions; no English proficiency intervention
Kapasia et al. (2020)	Pandemic online-learning study in West Bengal	Participation context; neither current access rates nor AI effects
Mayr and Oppl (2023)	Blended learning in marginalized communities across countries	Delivery and facilitation context; not an AI English trial

Table 1: selected journal evidence and its relevance to rural undergraduate English learning.

Note: Author's synthesis of the cited studies.

Writing is the skill with the most direct evidence in the selected AI literature, but grammatical accuracy alone does not establish academic competence. Barrot (2023) discusses the potentials and pitfalls of ChatGPT for second-language writing. Yan (2023) explores learners' experiences in an L2 writing practicum. Su et al. (2023) develop a classroom approach to collaboration in argumentative writing. Hyland and Hyland (2006) provide an earlier review of feedback on second-language writing. Collectively, these contributions support examining how students interpret assistance, develop ideas, and revise, with evidence of learning separated from the appearance of a final text.

An illustrative writing activity can begin with a student's short account of a local environmental concern, campus event, or disciplinary observation. The student marks one unclear sentence and asks for an explanation of its grammar or organization. After discussing the suggestion with a peer, the student revises the passage and explains the change. The teacher then assigns a new unaided paragraph on a related topic. This example is a proposed classroom activity, not an observed result. Its value for research is that it makes the student's contribution and the transfer of learning visible.

Vocabulary support can be organized around meaning in context, appropriate register, and productive use. Moulieswaran (2025) proposes generative AI strategies for Indian ESL vocabulary instruction in a conceptual analysis. A teacher might select a small number of useful words from an undergraduate reading, ask learners to compare generated examples, and require a new sentence of their own. Students can explain why one example fits a formal paragraph and another fits conversation. Retention should be checked later through use in a different context rather than through recognition of examples already displayed by the tool.

For reading, the teacher can use a verified passage and ask students to compare their interpretation with an AI-generated explanation. The original text remains the basis for resolving disagreement. Questions should require evidence from the passage, including inference, reference words, and the relationship between ideas. A generated summary may reduce difficulty while omitting important qualifications; learners need practice noticing that omission. Vogelzang et al. (2025), studying mother-tongue education and multilingualism in India, contribute contextual reading evidence. Their study concerns children and does not test AI, so its relevance is to multilingual design rather than a measured chatbot effect.

Oral communication requires attention to real interaction as well as sentence production. A text chatbot can help learners prepare possible responses, but text exchange alone is not evidence of speaking improvement. A speech-enabled system may provide additional practice, subject to recognition accuracy and suitable feedback. Colleges can connect preparation with peer role-play, short classroom explanations, and listening tasks based on checked recordings. Human listeners can assess whether a student communicates meaning, responds appropriately, and sustains interaction. Accent imitation should not be the sole criterion of successful communication.

The rural context becomes particularly visible in Goswami and Bhattacharjee's (2026) study of 276 undergraduates in Tripura, including 151 urban and 125 rural participants. The reported rural challenges include unreliable internet and gaps in technical knowledge. The abstract also reports no significant rural–urban difference in certain perceived benefits. This is a questionnaire study of AI awareness and use, not an

intervention measuring English proficiency. Its relevance is diagnostic: participation and perceptions can diverge, and apparent acceptance does not show that students have equal opportunities to benefit.

Rural language teaching also needs to account for the movement between home languages, schooling languages, and English. Hornberger and Vaish (2009) examine multilingual policy and linguistic practice in several settings, including India. Their work supports attention to local language relationships without proving an AI outcome. The proposed framework allows students to discuss ideas in a familiar language, attempt an English explanation, and then consult AI selectively. Translation should be treated as material for comparison, since local terms and culturally situated meanings may require explanation that an automatic rendering does not provide.

Access is more than device ownership. A student may borrow a phone, have intermittent data, or be unable to practise privately at home. A college should establish these conditions through a brief local audit instead of assuming them from rural residence. Shared sessions, downloadable teacher-checked materials, and classroom discussion can preserve participation when live consultation is unavailable. Mayr and Oppl (2023), examining blended learning in marginalized communities across several countries, highlight facilitation and infrastructure. Their evidence informs delivery design; it does not validate an AI English-learning intervention in any particular Indian college.

Overreliance can develop when learners repeatedly ask a system to perform the activity they are expected to practise. Makwana (2026) discusses the erosion of writing agency among ESL undergraduates in Gujarat. Mohanraj (2024) offers a critical view of AI and ELT, while Verma and Arora (2025) examine authorship and originality. The practical implication is to define the learner's responsibility for ideas, wording decisions, and evidence. These contributions raise questions for evaluation; their different designs and purposes should not be collapsed into a single causal claim about all AI users.

The reliability of generated content presents a further difficulty. Ji et al. (2023) review hallucination in natural language generation, explaining problems in which fluent outputs are unsupported or inconsistent with relevant information. In an English lesson, a plausible explanation may contain a false rule, an unsuitable example, or an invented source. Students should compare important claims with teacher-approved materials and ask for reasons grounded in the supplied passage. Asking the same system whether its answer is correct does not independently verify that answer. The classroom activity should make verification a normal part of language work.

Feedback can also overload learners. Sweller's (1988) cognitive-load account provides a theoretical reason to limit the number of problems addressed at one time. For a beginning writer, a long list of grammatical and stylistic comments may compete with the task of communicating meaning. The teacher can identify one priority, invite an explanation, and return to other features in later tasks. Luhach (2025) addresses student feedback literacy in technology-mediated peer tasks, contributing a relevant Indian perspective. Combining peer interpretation with selected AI comments may help make feedback usable, but that specific combination requires empirical testing. Assessment and privacy conditions should be stated clearly. Cotton et al. (2024) discuss academic integrity in the ChatGPT era. Liang et al. (2023) show bias in AI detectors against non-native English writers, making detector scores unsuitable as sole evidence of misconduct. Teachers can instead examine drafts, revision explanations, and short discussions of the work. Students should remove identifiable personal and peer information before external consultation and should disclose the assistance used. These measures are proposed educational practices; they do not imply that every platform provides the same data protections or that every unexplained improvement constitutes misuse.

5. A Pedagogical Framework for Rural Colleges

The proposed framework connects access, language practice, feedback judgement, and independent performance. It begins with a local audit of devices, connectivity, language backgrounds, accessibility needs, and initial proficiency. Teachers identify a small number of course outcomes and choose tasks that directly practise them. Before students consult AI, they attempt the task themselves. Assistance is then limited to a question they can explain. Peer and teacher discussion help evaluate the response, after which learners revise and complete a new task without assistance. The sequence is a proposal derived from the review, not a validated intervention.

A first-year class, for example, can use a short descriptive paragraph and an oral explanation on a familiar topic. The same learning objective should be available through a shared-device session or a teacher-prepared feedback sheet. Students with greater access may explore additional examples, but marks should reflect common criteria and independent outcomes. Table 2 links each stage to a classroom action and an observable record. Those records are intended to help teachers distinguish participation, assisted improvement, and learning transfer without requiring continuous digital surveillance.

Stage	Classroom action	Evidence of learning or participation
Assess conditions	Check access and obtain a short unaided language sample	Access profile and initial performance
Attempt independently	Draft a paragraph or prepare an oral explanation	Student's initial contribution
Consult selectively	Ask for one explanation or compare two examples	Focused question and relevant response
Discuss and revise	Check feedback with a peer or teacher and explain the choice	Revision with a brief reason
Demonstrate transfer	Complete a new task without AI and repeat after a delay	Independent performance and retention

Table 2: stages of the proposed framework and observable classroom evidence.

Note: Proposed teaching framework; not an evaluated intervention.

Implementation can begin with a modest teaching unit rather than institution-wide dependence on an application. Teachers prepare and check materials before class, demonstrate how to ask a focused question, and discuss a deliberately unsuitable response. Students practise explaining the reason for rejecting it. Tool selection should consider ease of access, language functions, accessibility, and the institution's ability to maintain support. Product popularity is a weak basis for adoption. When service features change, the learning objective and equivalent non-AI activity should remain usable, even if the original interface is no longer available.

Teacher development should emphasize instructional decisions rather than lists of applications. Teachers need to recognize when a task offers worthwhile practice, when assistance displaces that practice, and how to interpret a student's revision. Collegial discussion can examine anonymized examples of accepted and rejected feedback. A common rubric can distinguish meaning, organization, language control, and response to an audience. Such preparation is particularly useful where staff teach large mixed-proficiency classes. The proposed approach gives teachers responsibility for the learning design while using AI to supplement the opportunities students have to practise.

A future evaluation should compare clearly specified instructional conditions, such as teacher feedback alone and teacher feedback combined with structured AI consultation. Both groups need comparable teaching time, content, and assessment opportunities. Baseline proficiency, prior AI experience, and access conditions should be recorded. Where students are assigned by class, analysis must account for clustering and initial differences. A sample size should be justified from a realistic design and intended effect, rather than chosen to make significance likely. No sample size, participant outcome, or statistical result is invented in this review. Evaluation should include an unaided immediate task and a later task requiring transfer to a new text or situation. Writing can be rated by trained assessors unaware of the instructional condition, with agreement reported. Speaking requires recordings or structured observation assessed for communication, not only pronunciation. Vocabulary can be examined through new contextual use. Participation records and interviews can explain barriers and unsuccessful feedback episodes. Findings should report uncertainty, missing data, and subgroup patterns cautiously. Confidence and satisfaction remain useful secondary outcomes, but they should accompany evidence of what learners can perform independently.

The research agenda should also examine who benefits and who is left behind. Colleges can compare participation under personal-device and shared-session arrangements while keeping learning opportunities comparable. Analyses should distinguish access barriers from initial proficiency and prior experience. Rurality should be described through the study location, catchment, and relevant resource conditions, rather than used as an unexplained label. Student accounts can clarify whether support increases willingness to communicate or creates additional demands. Findings from one college should be presented as local evidence until replication establishes their wider relevance.

Several limitations constrain the present synthesis. The purposive set of 45 articles is not exhaustive and includes substantial writing research. Some publications concern school pupils, postgraduate learners, professionals, or international populations; others are conceptual or predate current generative AI. Abstract-based descriptions permit only limited appraisal of study procedures. The paper consequently makes no pooled effectiveness claim and no estimate of AI adoption among rural Indian undergraduates. The framework requires testing with actual learners, and its feasibility depends on institutional resources and teacher preparation. Its contribution is to connect relevant evidence with explicit, testable instructional decisions.

6. Conclusion

AI-assisted English learning offers additional practice and feedback that can be useful in rural undergraduate education when colleges design for meaningful participation. The reviewed literature indicates promising possibilities for writing support and chatbot interaction, alongside limits involving access, reliability, motivation, and learner agency. Evidence specifically measuring English development among rural Indian undergraduates remains insufficient in this selected literature for a universal effectiveness claim. Rural and multilingual contexts therefore need to shape both instructional design and interpretation of outcomes.

The proposed framework begins with local conditions, preserves an independent attempt, makes feedback choices visible, and assesses transfer without assistance. Its practical focus is on what students understand and can communicate after consultation ends. Colleges can use shared sessions and equivalent offline tasks to make participation more equitable, while teachers retain responsibility for selecting objectives and interpreting evidence. Future multi-site studies should test sustained proficiency gains and access conditions together. The educational aim is an undergraduate learner who can use assistance critically and communicate English with increasing independence.

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