

Blended Learning in Rural Tamil Nadu: The Role of ‘Naan Mudhalvan’ in Enhancing English Proficiency

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Abstract

Integrating digital learning platforms into traditional classrooms is known as blended learning, which transformed English Language Teaching (ELT), especially in regions with limited infrastructure for education. This research explores the impact of the Naan Mudhalvan digital program initiative on enhancing English proficiency among rural students in Tamil Nadu. As a state government offered skill development program, Naan Mudhalvan offers a wide range of English language learning modules created in a way to improve communication skills, career readiness, and digital fluency. This research mainly focuses on how face to face learning and digital content brings out the challenges faced by rural peoples in Tamil Nadu where they are lack exposure, have minimal access to internet and insufficient teacher training. Through a mixed method approach, the study states that students’ confidence level grows, learner outcomes increase in vocabulary growth and comprehension skills improve through Naan Mudhalvan.

Even though challenges do exist like inconsistent internet access and limited digital literacy, the program promises to bridge the language divide among urban-rural populations. The paper recommends improving digital integration, teacher training, and localized content development to maximize the successful outcomes of blended learning in rural ELT contexts.

Keywords: Blended Learning, Digital Learning, English Language Teaching, Naan Mudhalvan, Rural Education.

Introduction

In India, English proficiency remains a vital skill for academic success and employability. However, students in rural areas of Tamil Nadu often face major barriers for effective English language learning, including under-resourced schools, minimal efficient teachers, and a lack of immersive linguistic environments. In response to these difficulties, technology-driven education systems have been introduced to supplement traditional classroom learning. Naan Mudhalvan is one such initiative, that empowers youth through skill development and personalized learning pathways – it is a flagship program established by the Government of Tamil Nadu. Naan Mudhalvan provides a digital platform featuring career-oriented courses, and modules focus on English language acquisition. This paper investigates the effectiveness of Naan Mudhalvan in improving English proficiency among rural learners. It seeks to understand how the platform supports the development of language skills, the role of teachers in facilitating blended learning, and the challenges faced in implementing such a model in rural contexts. Through a mixed-methods analysis study with student assessments and tutor feedback, the research aims to provide insights into how blended learning can be optimized to transform English Language Teaching in underserved communities.

Naan Mudhalvan Program - Background

Naan Mudhalvan (translated as “I am the First”) is a flagship initiative established by the Government of Tamil Nadu in 2022 under the leadership of Chief Minister M.K. Stalin. This program aims to provide skill development and career guidance to over ten lakh college students all over Tamil Nadu annually through both online and offline interventions. The program provides curated learning paths in areas like artificial intelligence, language and communication skills, interview readiness, and more that align with the National Education Policy (NEP) and global employability trends. The platform’s English language learning modules are structured to improve proficiency through interactive videos, self-paced exercises, quizzes, and real-time performance tracking. These features reflect the core tenets of blended learning allows students to actively participate with content beyond the classroom and at their own convenience. Naan Mudhalvan also collaborates with reputed academic institutions and with industry experts for

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need-based content that is regionally relevant yet globally competitive. The unique aspect of Naan Mudhalvan is it focuses on inclusivity and is accessed easily through mobile phone. It gives real time instant feedback and skill assessments, which helps to customize the learning paths of students over different linguistic and academic levels. Naan Mudhalvan serves as a bridge between traditional ELT and modern skill-based education. This initiative is a progressive step towards democratizing English education and preparing rural students for global communication demands.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to examine how the Naan Mudhalvan platform supports English language acquisition among rural learners through blended learning. The research was conducted among students from rural background where the students have been engaging in this platform.

Participants: A total of twenty students and five English teachers participated in the study.

Data Collection Tools: Pre- and post-tests were administered to students to assess English proficiency language domains of listening, and reading. Student Surveys collected feedback on the ease of use, engagement level, and self-perceived progress using the platform. Semi-structured interviews with teachers gathered insights on how blended learning impacted teaching practices and students' outcomes. Classroom observations noted student participation, use of multimedia, and teacher-student interaction.

Analysis and Discussion

Aligning Teaching Techniques with Cognitive Function: One of the major key findings is that students responded positively to learning content like videos, audios and interactive quizzes through Naan Mudhalvan. This aligns with neuro-educational research, which highlights that emotionally engaging, repetitive, and contextual learning reinforces memory and language learning (Ansari, De Smedt, and Grabner 108). Students demonstrated active participation and retention when content was delivered in visually rich and interactive formats.

Naan Mudhalvan effectiveness in Rural ELT Settings: Statistical data analysis states that students in the experimental group improved their scores by an average of 20%, compared to an 8% increase in the overall control group. Listening and speaking skills showed the most significant improvement attributed to the platform's repeated use of audio content. This proves the value of blended learning in addressing the lack of native exposure and practice opportunities in rural settings (Garrison and Vaughan 27).

Challenges in Implementation: Despite promising outcomes, several difficulties have to be addressed. These include limited access to devices, intermittent internet access, and varying levels of teacher familiarity with technology. Some teachers felt underprepared to execute their lesson plans effectively in this platform, confirming earlier studies that highlight the need for teacher training in TPACK (Mishra and Koehler 1031). Additionally, students who are low in digital literacy struggled to navigate the platform initially, requires additional orientation.

Opportunities and Future Directions: The program holds great promise in tailoring learning pathways and empowering rural learners, specifically if it is integrated with offline supports like printed modules and peer mentoring. The study also suggests that further research can explore longitudinal impacts, content localization in Tamil-English bilingual formats, and teacher training models for rural ELT contexts.

Findings

The study yielded several key insights into the effectiveness of Naan Mudhalvan as a blended learning tool in enhancing English proficiency among rural students:

Improved Language Skills: Students in the experimental group who engaged with Naan Mudhalvan platform showed an average improvement of 17% in their English language test scores, with the most notable gains in listening and speaking skills. This suggests the platform's multimedia content supported better language retention for students' career enrichment.

Increased Engagement and Motivation: Surveys indicated that 81% of students found digital modules more interesting and motivating than traditional textbook learning. Elements such as quizzes and career-based tasks increased learner participation and confidence.

Positive Teacher Feedback: Teachers observed that students were more interested to participate in language activities through this platform. However, they also report that there is a need for professional development to integrate digital modules into regular lessons effectively.

Technological Barriers: Despite the potential, challenges such as lack of internet connectivity, limited access to digital devices, and inconsistent technical support affected the full-scale adoption of blended learning techniques.

Need for Localized Content: Both students and teachers recommended the inclusion of more bilingual (Tamil-English) materials to support learners with limited English exposure, specifically or Tamil medium students and at the beginner level.

Conclusion

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The Naan Mudhalvan program shows strong potential to transform English Language Teaching (ELT) in rural Tamil Nadu through a blended learning approach. Combining traditional instruction with digital innovation, the platform helps to bridge the urban-rural divide in language education among learners, and provides students in under-resourced areas greater access to quality learning materials with greater experiences. While there are positive student outcomes and engagement is promising, the findings also emphasize the significance of overcoming infrastructural and pedagogical challenges. There is a pressing need for investment in teacher training and offline accessibility solutions to maximize its impact. In conclusion, Naan Mudhalvan not only serves as a skill development program but also as a stepping stone towards inclusive, effective, and modern ELT practices in rural India. Through continued refinement and thoughtful implementation, this program can play a significant role in empowering youth through language proficiency and digital literacy.

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