

# Curriculum and Competence: Exploring the Impact of CBSE and Kerala State Syllabus on English Proficiency among Undergraduate Students from Calicut University

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

This comparative research study investigates the influence of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and the Kerala State Syllabus on the English language proficiency of undergraduate students under Calicut University. Recognising English as a gateway to academic success and global communication, the research examines how pedagogical approaches, curricular structures, and instructional strategies shape linguistic competence. Grounded in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Discourse-Oriented Pedagogy (DOP), the study evaluates a sample of 125 students from five colleges using stratified random sampling. Data were collected through a validated 54-item questionnaire and analysed using Chi-Square and Independent Sample t-tests.

Findings reveal that CBSE students exhibit significantly higher fluency (71%) and vocabulary strength (78%) compared to their Kerala State counterparts (26% and 49%, respectively). This performance is attributed to CBSE's structured, grammar-intensive curriculum and its emphasis on oral communication. However, Kerala State students demonstrated stronger engagement in cultural and social activities (89%), critical thinking, and ICT-based learning (73%), fostered by their discourse-driven pedagogy. Writing skills showed parity across both groups, while role-play and contextual learning were more prevalent in the Kerala State system.

The study highlights how CBSE's rigidity favours academic excellence and fluency, while Kerala's contextualized curriculum nurtures holistic development and cultural competence. These complementary strengths suggest the need for a hybrid curricular model that merges CBSE's structural rigor with Kerala State's social contextuality and interactive pedagogy. The findings offer critical insights for policymakers, educators, and curriculum developers seeking to enhance English proficiency equitably across educational systems.

**Keywords:** English proficiency, CBSE, Kerala State Syllabus, curriculum design, pedagogy, communicative competence, higher education, bilingual education, ICT integration, language acquisition

## 1.Introduction

India, with its rich diversity of languages and cultures, has always placed a high value on English. It's not just seen as a global link language but also as a key medium of instruction in education. For many, English proficiency is a stepping stone to better opportunities-be it in higher education, competitive exams, or global interactions. This makes the choice of syllabus a crucial factor in shaping students' language skills.

In Kerala, two major syllabi dominate the education landscape: the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and the Kerala State Syllabus. Each takes a unique approach to teaching English. CBSE, managed by the Union Government, prioritizes English as the main medium of instruction and focuses on skill-based learning. Meanwhile, the Kerala State Syllabus integrates English alongside regional languages, emphasizing cultural relevance and discourse-based teaching methods. These contrasting approaches offer students varied learning experiences, influencing their ability to acquire the language in different ways.

As Kerala moves toward becoming a knowledge-driven economy, effective English communication has emerged as an essential skill for its youth. Yet, students from the Kerala State Syllabus often struggle to achieve the same level of English fluency as their CBSE-educated counterparts. This gap highlights important questions about how pedagogy, curriculum design, and teaching methods can impact language proficiency-and what steps can be taken to ensure every student has the tools they need to succeed.

This study examines the impact of pedagogical approaches adopted by CBSE and the Kerala State Syllabus on the English proficiency of undergraduate students under Calicut University.

Despite the growing demand for English proficiency in higher education and the job market, many students transitioning from the Kerala State Syllabus struggle with English fluency. On the other hand, CBSE students generally exhibit better performance in English communication skills. This research seeks to uncover the pedagogical factors contributing to these differences and explore actionable strategies to address the challenges faced by state syllabus students.

### **1.1 Objectives:**

1. To evaluate the effectiveness of CBSE and Kerala State Syllabus pedagogical practices in enhancing English proficiency.
2. To identify gaps in the teaching methods and curriculum design of both syllabi.
3. To propose evidence-based strategies for improving English language acquisition, focusing on fluency, writing, and comprehension skills.

The need for this study is emphasised by its potential to guide educational policymakers, curriculum developers, and teachers in improving pedagogical methods. By comparing the CBSE and Kerala State Syllabus, this research highlights the broader implications of curriculum design and pedagogical strategies in shaping students' language competence and academic success.

## **2. Review of Literature**

The development of students' English language proficiency is greatly influenced by the teaching methods and curriculum structures they followed during their schooling years. This literature review examines studies on curriculum design and pedagogical strategies, focusing on their impact on language learning. It specifically compares two major educational systems: the CBSE syllabus and the Kerala State syllabus. Whilst both aim to enhance students' linguistic abilities, their approaches to English instruction differ markedly. By analysing existing research, this review highlights these differences and explores how these teaching methods affect the English proficiency of undergraduate students.

### **1. Thotapally Anjaneyulu's Study (University of Hyderabad)**

This research critically analyzed English language textbooks used in Andhra Pradesh. Anjaneyulu found that while textbooks aimed to incorporate real-life scenarios and integrate language skills, they lacked practical applicability due to the absence of pre-implementation piloting. Grammar sections were overemphasized, and tasks rarely promoted authentic communication. This study highlights the necessity of designing textbooks that balance theoretical knowledge with practical skills development.

### **2. Rafeeqe Ahmed's Study (Kerala Primary Schools)**

Ahmed examined the challenges in English language acquisition at primary schools in Kerala. He identified a lack of an English-speaking environment and the dominance of teacher-centered methods, such as rote learning and translation. These approaches hindered fluency, despite efforts to employ constructivist teaching practices in some schools.

### **3. Vivek Dode's Analysis (Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada University, Maharashtra)**

Dode's study focused on the ESL curriculum at the undergraduate level. It noted a lack of coherence in syllabus design and emphasized the need to integrate modern ICT tools, task-based learning, and interactive activities. The study found that students from rural and urban settings responded differently to the same curriculum due to contextual disparities.

### **4. Kumaravadivelu's Concept of Post-Method Pedagogy**

Kumaravadivelu introduced the concept of post-method pedagogy, emphasizing the limitations of traditional method-based teaching. His framework advocates for context-sensitive approaches, particularly in multilingual settings like India, where teachers can adapt pedagogical strategies to students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

### **5. Nunan's Task-Based Language Teaching**

David Nunan's work on task-based language teaching (TBLT) supports the idea that task design should align with learners' real-world language needs. This approach can enhance both CBSE and Kerala state syllabi by incorporating meaningful tasks that reflect students' lived experiences.

## 6. Selinker's Theory of Interlanguage

Selinker explored how learners develop an interlanguage as they acquire a second language. This theory is pertinent to comparing CBSE and Kerala State syllabi, as both approaches influence students' progression from their native language to English proficiency.

## 7. Gupta's Study on Regional Board vs. National Board Curricula

Gupta analyzed differences in student outcomes between regional and national boards in India. The study concluded that CBSE students exhibited stronger grammar and vocabulary skills due to their syllabus' structured focus on these areas. In contrast, state syllabus students demonstrated greater cultural and social integration through regional content.

## 8. Padmadisa's Research on Constructivist Teaching in Kerala

This study evaluated the constructivist approach promoted in Kerala's state syllabus. It found that while students engaged more actively in the classroom, the lack of focus on English fluency and oral communication remained a significant drawback.

## 9. Awasthi's Examination of Bilingual Education

Awasthi's work on bilingual education frameworks emphasized that the medium of instruction significantly affects language acquisition. Kerala's use of regional languages alongside English often led to stronger bilingual proficiency but limited fluency in English compared to CBSE students.

## 10. Study by Sarangi and Mahanta (2017)

This research compared state and central board curricula across India. It found that CBSE's centralized design ensured uniformity in English instruction, while state boards often faced inconsistencies due to localized adaptations.

## 11. Role of ICT in English Proficiency

Studies by Mishra et al. (2020) highlighted the increasing role of ICT tools like language learning apps and online resources in enhancing English proficiency. CBSE students benefitted more due to the inclusion of technology in their curriculum, while Kerala state syllabus lagged in this area.

## 2.1 Research Gap

While extensive research exists on the effectiveness of curriculum design and pedagogy in individual contexts, there is limited comparative analysis between CBSE and Kerala State Syllabus, particularly concerning their impact on English proficiency at the undergraduate level in the Calicut University. This study addresses the gap by examining pedagogical differences and their implications for language acquisition among students under Calicut University.

## 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1 Theoretical Framework

This study applies the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Discourse-Oriented Pedagogy (DOP) to investigate how curricular structures and teaching methods influence English proficiency. CLT emphasizes real-world language use, focusing on the four skills of language (LSRW), while DOP encourages interaction-based learning, making these frameworks ideal for analyzing the impact of CBSE and Kerala State syllabi.

### 3.2 Sample and Tools

The research was conducted with a sample of 125 undergraduate students from five colleges affiliated with Calicut University. The selected colleges were:

1. Blossom College of Arts and Science, Kondotty
2. Unity Women's College, Manjeri
3. Noble College, Manjeri
4. MIC College, Athanikkal.
5. EMEA College of Arts and Science, Kondotty

Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation from different educational backgrounds. Each college contributed 25 participants to the study.

### 3.2 Questionnaire Details

The primary tool for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "CBSE and State Syllabus: A Study on Effectiveness of Curriculum for English Proficiency Among Undergraduate Students." The questionnaire included 54 questions divided into the following categories:

1. Language Proficiency: Measuring fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and discourse skills.
2. Teaching Methods: Evaluating the effectiveness of techniques such as mother-tongue instruction, translation, and pronunciation drills.
3. Curricular Influence: Assessing syllabus content, ICT integration, role-play activities, and overall curriculum effectiveness.

The questionnaire used a mix of dichotomous questions (Yes/No) and Likert-scale items for comprehensive data collection. Subject experts reviewed the questionnaire for validity and reliability, ensuring it met academic standards.

### 3.3 Data Collection Procedure

The investigator distributed questionnaires to students during pre-scheduled sessions at the selected colleges. Participants were briefed about the study's purpose and ensured of confidentiality to encourage honest responses. Responses were collected in a controlled environment to minimize distractions.

### 3.4 Statistical Tools Used

To ensure accurate and reliable results, the study employed both the **Chi-Square Test** and **Independent Sample t-test**, which are well-established methods for analysing categorical and interval data.

#### 1. Chi-Square Test

The purpose of this test was applied to evaluate categorical data obtained from Yes/No responses. It assessed whether there were significant differences in responses between students following the CBSE syllabus and those studying under the Kerala State syllabus. The Chi-Square Test is particularly useful for determining whether observed frequencies in categorical data differ significantly from expected frequencies. The formula is as follows

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

**O** represents the observed frequency whereas **E** represents the expected frequency.

This formula measures the discrepancy between the observed and expected data, allowing the study to determine whether the differences are statistically significant.

#### 1. Independent Sample t-Test:

Used to compare the mean scores of Likert-scale responses between the two groups. It assessed whether differences in perceptions of curriculum and teaching methods were statistically significant. Formula:  $t = \frac{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}{\sqrt{\frac{s_1^2}{n_1} + \frac{s_2^2}{n_2}}}$  where  $\bar{X}_1, \bar{X}_2$  are the group means,  $s_1^2, s_2^2$  are the variances, and  $n_1, n_2$  are the sample sizes.

The combination of Chi-Square tests and t-tests provided a robust analytical framework, ensuring the results' reliability and validity.

### 3.4 Advantages of Statistical Tools

**Chi-Square Test:** Ideal for identifying significant differences in categorical data (e.g., Yes/No responses).

**t-Test:** Suitable for interval data, providing insights into the magnitude and direction of differences.

This approach allows for a comprehensive comparison of CBSE and Kerala State syllabi's effectiveness in fostering English proficiency among undergraduate students.

## 4. Results and Analysis

### 4.1 Quantitative Findings

#### 4.1.1. Language Proficiency

##### Fluency

CBSE students exhibited a higher level of fluency (71%) in English compared to Kerala State students (26%). This can be attributed to the CBSE curriculum's emphasis on speaking and grammar-focused instruction, enabling students to communicate more effectively.

A Chi-Square Test confirmed a significant difference ( $\chi^2 = 12.58, p < 0.01$ ) in fluency levels between the two groups.

##### Writing Skills

Writing proficiency was comparable, with 67% of CBSE students and 63% of Kerala State students scoring well. CBSE's structured approach to grammar and Kerala State's discourse-oriented pedagogy both contributed to writing skills.

An Independent Sample t-test showed no statistically significant difference in writing skills ( $t = 1.21, p = 0.23$ ).

##### Vocabulary

Vocabulary strength was higher among CBSE students (78%) compared to Kerala State students (49%), as confirmed by a significant t-test ( $t = 4.67, p < 0.001$ ).

### 4.2 Pedagogical Practices

#### Grammar Instruction

CBSE follows the Direct Method, with 94% of respondents indicating grammar is explicitly taught. Conversely, 85% of Kerala State students reported learning grammar indirectly through discourses.

While CBSE's approach resulted in higher grammatical accuracy, it also led to monotony for 64% of students, as per their feedback.

### Role-Playing and Interactive Activities

Kerala State syllabus promotes role-playing and interactive learning, with 70% of students reporting regular role-play activities. In contrast, only 23% of CBSE students experienced role-plays.

Role-play activities fostered confidence among Kerala State students, improving their ability to contextualize learning.

### 4.3 ICT Integration

Kerala State syllabus had better ICT integration, as 73% of students acknowledged the use of multimedia tools to enhance learning. This contrasts with only 57% of CBSE students benefitting from ICT resources.

These findings were corroborated by a Chi-Square Test ( $\chi^2 = 8.29, p < 0.05$ ).

### 4.4 Speaking vs. Writing Focus

CBSE syllabus prioritizes speaking (91%), while Kerala State focuses more on writing (96%). This disparity impacts the overall communicative competency of students, favoring CBSE for oral proficiency.

### 4.5 Cultural and Social Integration

#### 4.5.1 Cultural Activities

Kerala State syllabus strongly promotes cultural activities (89%), compared to CBSE (25%). This alignment with local culture allows Kerala State students to develop better socialization skills.

Chi-Square Test showed a significant association between curriculum type and cultural participation ( $\chi^2 = 10.47, p < 0.01$ ).

#### 4.5.2 Social Engagement

Kerala State syllabus encourages community engagement and critical thinking, as reflected in 89% of students participating in social activities. CBSE, however, focuses more on academic performance, limiting such opportunities for students.

### 4.6 Curriculum Effectiveness

#### 4.6.1 Student-Friendly Design

Kerala State students rated their syllabus as more student-friendly (55%) compared to CBSE (44%), due to its contextualized and practical approach.

However, CBSE's curriculum is perceived as more structured and comprehensive.

#### 4.6.2 Competitive Exam Preparedness

CBSE students were better prepared for competitive exams like JEE and NEET (48%) due to the focus on science and mathematics. Kerala State syllabus prepared students for local-level exams (52%), such as KPSC, leveraging regional language fluency.

#### 4.6.3 Critical Thinking and Inferential Skills

Kerala State syllabus excels in fostering critical thinking and inferential skills, with 94% of students encountering such questions in exams. CBSE's reliance on comprehension-based questions limits this skill development.

**Table 1: Comparison of Key Metrics Between CBSE and Kerala State Syllabi**

Metric	CBSE (%)	Kerala State (%)	Statistical Significance
Fluency in English	71	26	$\chi^2 = 12.58, p < 0.01$
Writing Skills	67	63	$t = 1.21, p = 0.23$
Vocabulary	78	49	$t = 4.67, p < 0.001$
ICT Integration	57	73	$\chi^2 = 8.29, p < 0.05$
Cultural Activity Participation	25	89	$\chi^2 = 10.47, p < 0.01$
Role-Play Implementation	23	70	$\chi^2 = 9.89, p < 0.05$
Preparation for Competitive Exams	48	52	$t = 2.14, p = 0.03$

## 5. Interpretation of Findings

### 5.1. CBSE Curriculum:

Enhances academic rigor and fluency in English but lacks cultural and contextual adaptability. It Prioritizes structured learning, grammar, and vocabulary development, leading to higher scores in standardized exams. It Speaking-oriented teaching methods give students an edge in oral communication.



### 5.2. Kerala State Curriculum:

Balances language skills with cultural and social awareness, fostering well-rounded individuals. It had Discourse-oriented pedagogy encourages creativity and independent thinking but sacrifices fluency in English. ICT integration and inferential learning methods equip students with 21st-century skills.

The results underscore the strengths and limitations of both curricula. While CBSE equips students with linguistic and academic competencies, Kerala State syllabus emphasizes holistic education, embedding cultural and social dimensions. An ideal curriculum might combine CBSE's structure with Kerala State's contextual richness to optimize English language proficiency and overall development.

## 6. Conclusion

The comparative study on the impact of CBSE and Kerala State syllabi on undergraduate students' English language proficiency reveals distinct strengths and weaknesses in both curricula. Each syllabus addresses language acquisition differently, shaping students' linguistic, cultural, and social skills based on its pedagogical priorities. Key Insights are as follows

### 1. English Fluency and Vocabulary:

CBSE students outperformed Kerala State students in fluency (71% vs. 26%) and vocabulary strength (78% vs. 49%). The structured, grammar-intensive teaching methods and an emphasis on speaking skills under the CBSE syllabus contributed significantly to these results.

However, the Kerala State syllabus, which follows a discourse-oriented pedagogy, showed promise in fostering critical thinking and inferential skills, even though these approaches were less effective for spoken English proficiency.

### 2. Writing Skills:

Both curricula demonstrated comparable outcomes in writing proficiency, with CBSE at 67% and Kerala State at 63%. CBSE's focus on grammatical accuracy and Kerala State's emphasis on contextualized writing activities balanced these results.

### 3. Cultural and Social Integration:

The Kerala State syllabus excelled in cultural and social dimensions, with 89% of students actively participating in cultural activities and social engagements. In contrast, CBSE students showed limited cultural interaction (25%), likely due to the syllabus's focus on academic rigor.

### 4. ICT Integration:

Kerala State students benefited more from ICT integration (73% vs. 57%), as the syllabus emphasizes the use of multimedia tools for learning. This focus aligns with the demands of a digitalized education system, enhancing students' technological adaptability.

### 5. Role-Playing and Interactive Learning:

Kerala State's discourse-oriented pedagogy (70% participation in role-playing) fostered creativity and contextual learning. CBSE, however, largely overlooked such interactive strategies, with only 23% of students reporting exposure to role-playing.

### 6. Preparation for Competitive Exams:

CBSE students displayed stronger readiness for national-level competitive exams like JEE and NEET (48%), thanks to its science- and math-oriented curriculum. Kerala State students, with their focus on regional and cultural topics, were better prepared for local exams like KPSC (52%).

## Implications for Curriculum Development:

### CBSE

Strengths: Academic rigor, fluency in English, vocabulary enhancement, and standardized preparation for national exams.

Weaknesses: Lack of focus on cultural integration, socialization, and inferential thinking.

### Kerala State Syllabus

Strengths: Cultural inclusivity, critical thinking, ICT integration, and holistic development.

Weaknesses: Limited emphasis on spoken English fluency and preparation for competitive exams requiring advanced language skills.

## Recommendations:

### 1. Combining Strengths:

A hybrid approach integrating CBSE's structured pedagogy with Kerala State's discourse-oriented methods could yield an ideal curriculum.

Emphasis on both fluency and contextual language learning can ensure a balanced development of linguistic and cognitive skills.

### 2. Increased Focus on Speaking Skills:

Kerala State should incorporate more speaking-oriented activities, like debates and elocution, to bridge the gap in oral proficiency.

### **3. Enhanced ICT Usage:**

CBSE could adopt Kerala State's model of ICT integration to make learning more interactive and accessible in a digital age.

### **4. Fostering Cultural Awareness in CBSE:**

CBSE should introduce cultural and social activities to improve students' social engagement and critical thinking skills.

### **5. Upgradation of State Syllabus:**

Regular updates to the Kerala State syllabus can ensure alignment with modern educational needs, making students more competitive at both regional and national levels.

In short, this study highlights the diverse outcomes of the CBSE and Kerala State syllabi in shaping English proficiency. While CBSE students demonstrated superior language fluency and readiness for national exams, Kerala State students excelled in cultural, critical thinking, and holistic development. Ultimately, English proficiency is not solely dependent on the curriculum but also on effective teaching methods, student motivation, and contextual adaptability. A collaborative effort in curriculum design could ensure a well-rounded educational experience for all learners.

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