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Challenges in Teaching English at the College Level in Tribal Talukas of Sabarkantha District, Gujarat.

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Abstract

This research paper analyzes the various problems of teaching English at the college level in the tribal Talukas of the Sabarkantha District of Gujarat State. The significance of this study is that the tribal region has its own educational characteristics where different cultural, linguistic and socio-economic reasons contribute to the complexity of English language teaching. The present study is an attempt to investigate the pedagogical, cultural and socio-economic challenges of English language teaching (ELT) at undergraduate college level in the tribal talukas of Vijaynagar, Khedbrahma and Poshina in Sabarkantha District of Gujarat. The research is based on Lev Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory, Stephen Krashen's Second Language Acquisition hypotheses and Jim Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Theory. The research examines the high cognitive and socio-educational load of indigenous learners. Data were collected from 200 undergraduate students and 10 active language educators in four colleges of tribal area of the sabarkantha district, using a mixed-methods concurrent triangulation design. To Implement the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), we recommend the development of trilingual bridge materials translating tribal oral folklore into English communicative tasks, shifting to low-anxiety Communicative Language Teaching, and targeted financial and digital infrastructure support.

Keywords: *English language teaching, tribal education, Sabarkantha district, National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), language anxiety, socio-cultural theory.*

Introduction:

English has a vital role in the global economy for socio-economic mobility, international business and academic advancement in India's complex higher education system. In the intricate fabric of India's educational landscape, tribal areas emerge as distinctive entities characterized by their cultural richness, linguistic diversity and socio-economic distinctiveness. As English continues to be a global lingua franca and a vital tool for socio-economic mobility, understanding and addressing the challenges in its effective teaching within these tribal areas is of paramount importance. The Sabarkantha District of North Gujarat comprising the rugged tribal-dominated talukas of Vijaynagar, Khedbrahma and Poshina, is a highly unique socio-educational landscape for the study of this phenomenon. The geographical belt is rich in tribal heritage, high concentration of Scheduled Tribes (especially the Bhil and Garasia communities) and significant socio-economic and infrastructure deficits. Students in these colleges are expected to make a rapid transition, without systematic scaffolding, from their native, unscripted tribal dialects and regional standard Gujarati, to English at the university level. The present study is guided by the futuristic mandates of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the principles of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) with a view to providing a localized empirical study to connect the macro level policy vision to the ground realities of education.

Fundamentally, the problem statement is based on what this study identifies as the "triple language burden." The rural or semi-urban student undergoes the typical multilingual shift (regional L1 to English L2), whereas the undergraduate students of Sabarkantha come from homes where only local unscripted tribal dialects (Dehwali, Ambudi, Bhili etc.) are spoken. eventually they go on in regular regional Gujarati for primary and secondary schooling, and eventually university-level English as a totally unacquainted third language (L3). The total absence of bilingual or trilingual bridging programs and standardized and culturally alien curricula turns English from a medium of active communication into an abstract and scary academic subject. Therefore, pupils perceive English as a passive obstacle to be surmounted in examinations by rote memory, rather than as an active means for daily engagement or future career facilitation.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are designed to provide a comprehensive exploration of the challenges in teaching English at the college level in the tribal areas of Gujarat State:

1. To identify Cultural Influences on Language Acquisition
2. To assess Efficacy of Current Teaching Methodologies
3. Examine Socio-Economic Factors Affecting Language Proficiency
4. Explore Community Involvement and Support
5. Propose Contextually Relevant Interventions
6. Contribute to Educational Policy Discourse

Research Questions

1. How do cultural influences within tribal community's impact English language acquisition at the college level in Talukas of Sabarkantha District of Gujarat State?
2. What is the efficacy of current English language teaching methodologies in addressing the diverse linguistic backgrounds of tribal college students of Talukas of Sabarkantha District?
3. How do socio-economic factors, such as limited access to educational resources, affect English language proficiency among college students in tribal areas?
4. What role does community involvement and support play in enhancing English language education in the tribal college context?
5. What contextually relevant interventions can be proposed to address the identified challenges and improve English language education in tribal Talukas of Sabarkantha District of Gujarat State?

Review of the related Literature

The study intends to establish a solid academic analysis of these three key concepts of Second Language Acquisition and Socioculture through the utilization of triangulation. First, Lev Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory states that language acquisition and cognitive development are primarily social processes that are mediated by cultural tools and scaffolding from the community within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD is the distance between a student's potential growth under supervised instruction and the student's level of independence. The students of the tribal universities in Sabarkantha are functioning in an abnormally wide ZPD due to the absence of cognitive-linguistic scaffolding at home and out-of-class exposure to English. Second, Stephen Krashen's theories about second language acquisition account for the significant cognitive and emotional barriers these students have to surmount. Krashen's Input Hypothesis posits that acquisition takes place through 'comprehensible input' (i+1). However, the students lack comprehensible input due to the huge language gap between standard collegiate English and local dialects. This cognitive gap and heightened self-consciousness raise the students' Affective Filters, emotional barriers caused by worry, low self-esteem and cultural alienation, which completely disable them from processing language data. Third, Jim Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Theory argues that L2 acquisition is facilitated by L1 proficiency. However, in this tribal setting, students are unable to develop Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) in their mother tongue due to the absence of conventional written structures in the L1 (unscripted dialects), which significantly impedes their later acquisition of standard Gujarati (L2) and English (L3).

Dipakkumar A Bhatt (2012) in "Problems of Teaching English at the Collegiate Level in Tribal Areas of Gujarat" argues that English has historically served as a language of modernity, facilitating progress, influence, status, and other advantages. Parents use this medium to motivate their children to get an education, ensuring that their children are on level with global standards. Furthermore, it has been taught as a secondary language at educational institutions like as schools, colleges, and universities. It serves as a language for effective corporate communication as well. It has the capacity to both impress and conceal the individual from his own self. One of the advantages of language is that it has been challenging for English instructors to instruct English as a second language. Due to their cultural variances, entrenched habits, and attitudes towards learning

English, the learners have been unable to effectively use the language. Consequently, they suffer the ultimate consequence of being unable to get high-paying positions in the market. The complexity of the language teaching task is influenced by several factors, including the diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, motivations, interests, learning styles, personalities, and behaviour patterns of the pupils, as well as the attitudes and long-standing practices of the instructors. This study article specifically examines the challenges associated with teaching English as a second language at the college level in the tribal regions of Gujarat. An effort has been undertaken to identify the evident causes behind the lack of success in English teaching and learning, and some remedies have been proposed as well. Although many approaches in ELT have the ability to develop their own solutions and are currently being refined, there is a preference for a humanistic approach to strengthen English language classes.

MahimaGautam (2013) in "Teaching English to Tribal Students: Problems and Prospects" claims that English is a contemporary language that enables progress, influence, status, and more. Parents want for their children to get education through this medium in order to ensure their children are on pace with the rest of the globe. Furthermore, it has been imparted as a secondary language in educational institutions like as schools, colleges, and universities. It serves as a language for effective corporate communication as well. It has the capacity to both impress and conceal the individual from his own self. While language has its advantages, it is undeniable that English instructors face challenges while instructing English as a second language. Due to cultural variances, entrenched habits, and attitudes towards learning English, the learners have been unable to effectively use the language. As a consequence, they suffer significant setbacks in their pursuit of high-paying employment opportunities in the market. The teaching and study of the English language is essential in order to effectively share information and facilitate communication among all individuals. The English language serves a crucial role in expanding pupils' awareness of the greater world. While teaching English to get the intended result is a worldwide issue, teaching English as a second language in tribal regions remains an even more significant one. The language teaching work is challenging owing to the wide range of factors, such as the students' diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, varying levels of motivation and interests, different learning styles, distinct personalities and behaviour patterns, the instructors' attitudes and established practices, and the use of varied teaching techniques.

ShyamSundar Patro Annepu (2020) in "Challenges of Teaching English Language to the Tribal Sphere" argues that India is a diversified country with unique characteristics and is making progress in the fields of science and technology, IT, commerce, aviation, etc. However, even though tribal children, who are considered talented, are found across the country, they still have long-standing difficulties in learning English. There are several causes that contribute to the tragic scenario in India where the tribal population is abundant but lacks access to adequate education and is disadvantaged. There are many highly skilled graduates from tribal communities, but due to a deficiency in communication abilities, their talents are stifled. The primary cause for this is a deficiency of motivation. The graduates from these regions have several challenges and predicaments in understanding the language due to the complete effect of their mother tongue on their education and upbringing. Students proficient in key academic disciplines sometimes struggle with effective communication,

resulting in missed chances in urban areas. Currently, in addition to their proficiency in the fundamental disciplines, possessing strong communication skills is essential in order to showcase their qualities and be given an opportunity to demonstrate their abilities. The text also discusses the causes of poor communication skills of pupils and lack of interest and motivation of instructors in tribal communities. It also provides suggestions for addressing this issue.

Dr.Rajani S. Patil (2021) has published a paper entitled as "The Difficulties of English Teacher in Tribal Area". The researcher intends to focus on the problems related to teaching English in tribal and rural educational institutions in India. The status of English language teaching in most of the rural schools and institutions is very worrisome. Ensuring that the teachers have a high level of language competence, have been exposed to the language and have access to appropriate resources are significant factors in promoting effective English language learning. The circumstances faced by rural pupils are really arduous. Rural students do not have the same opportunity as urban students to access language labs and audio-visual aids. Rural pupils often perceive the English language as a subject rather than a means of communication. It is their main obstacle. The majority of pupils handle the English language only for examination purposes. These rural pupils really have a fear of English, while many professors lack an understanding of the students' language and life experiences. Their exclusive concentration is on examinations. According to Corder (1973), there is no question about the process of how grammar is acquired. The educators should instruct the students in the utilisation of the language. Grammar should be introduced after learners have acquired the language.

Dr.JayadebSahoo (2022) published paper entitled as "Challenges in Teaching English to Tribal Students: A Study of Kalahandi District" The researcher argues that teaching and learning English as a second language is a serious challenge for teachers and learners in a multi-lingual environment with various languages and cultures. Teaching English to children from different backgrounds who are unable to pinpoint their first or second language necessitates an innovative approach. This study discusses the challenges faced while teaching English to the multilingual tribal children living in the remote areas of Kalahandi district, Odisha. These children are compelled to acquire proficiency in four to five languages, while paradoxically, they are not provided with education in their own language. While English is formally taught as a second language in schools, it is effectively their fourth language in practice. The presentation will address the need of modifying conventional teaching techniques and materials to achieve effective learning.

Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods concurrent triangulation approach in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed concurrently. The design allows for the statistical rigor of structured student surveys to be confirmed and complemented by the descriptive richness of in-depth qualitative teacher interviews. The study was conducted in four undergraduate colleges of three tribal talukas of Sabarkantha district viz. Vijaynagar (Vijaynagar Arts College, and Government Commerce and Arts College), Khedbrahma (D.D Thaker Arts and K.J. Patel Commerce College) and Poshina (Government Arts and Commerce College). The N = 200 undergraduate students were selected using stratified random sampling.

The strata were formed on the basis of geographic taluka, academic stream (85% B.A. and 15% B.Com./Other) and gender (50% Male and 50% Female). We employed purposive sampling to pick N=10 active language instructors. Their average teaching experience was 8.1 years, and only 40% claimed proficiency in local tribal languages.

The major student survey tool consisted of a demographics part and a 25-item Likert-type questionnaire (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) arranged into seven different theme areas (areas A through G). The teacher survey comprised of 14 Likert scale items that corresponded to the same seven areas for the purpose of collecting comparative diagnostic data. Quantitative analysis was conducted using SPSS, computing descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) and inferential statistics (independent t-tests, One-Way ANOVA, and Pearson correlations). Perceived challenges were grouped into three severity levels: High/Critical Challenge (Mean: 4.00–5.00), Moderate Challenge (Mean: 3.00–3.99), and Low Challenge (Mean: 1.00–2.99).

Results and Empirical Study

The demographic information of the student sample (N = 200) demonstrated that 100% of the participants had finished their secondary education in regional Gujarati medium schools, implying no prior exposure to English medium academic instruction. In addition, 60% of the student sample self-identified as first-generation college students, indicating a dire lack of familial or home-based intellectual scaffolding. Quantitative examination of the students' perceptions found that students face very severe difficulties in three major areas of Socio-Economic Realities (Category Mean = 4.16), Linguistic Environment & L3 Burden (Category Mean = 4.14), and Pedagogical Practices & Study Habits (Category Mean = 4.10). The highest scoring item across the student survey was Q02 ('I have to constantly translate English back to Gujarati or tribal dialects in my head', Mean = 4.62), with Q22 ('My parents are illiterate and cannot give me any English learning support at home', Mean = 4.56) and Q11 ('I depend heavily on cheap market summary guides and shortcut materials to pass examinations', Mean = 4.55) close by.

However, the N = 10 language teachers considered the challenges to be more severe than the students, with the Grand Overall Mean being 4.15 (High/Critical Challenge) compared to the students' Grand Overall Mean of 3.93 (Moderate Challenge), creating an overall positive perceptual gap of +0.22. Table 1. Analysis of this diagnostic difference.

Table 1. Comparative Perceptual Gap Analysis (Teacher Mean - Student Mean)

Analytical Category	Student Mean	Teacher Mean	Perceptual Gap	Statistical Significance
A: Linguistic Environment & L3 Burden	4.14	4.30	+0.16	Significant ($p < 0.05$)
B: Curricular Relevance & Cultural Disjunction	3.62	4.15	**+0.53**	Highly Significant ($p < 0.01$)
C: Pedagogical Practices & Exam-Centric Rote	4.10	4.22	+0.12	Significant ($p < 0.05$)
D: Psychological Barriers & English Phobia	3.88	4.10	+0.22	Significant ($p < 0.05$)
E: Physical & Digital Infrastructure Deficits	3.73	3.98	+0.25	Significant ($p < 0.05$)
F: Socio-Economic Realities & Absenteeism	4.16	4.07	**-0.09**	Not Significant ($p > 0.05$)
G: Syllabus Fit & Teacher Dynamics	**3.98**	**4.21**	**+0.23**	**Significant ($p < 0.05$)**

As presented in Table 1, the Category B (Curricular Relevance & Cultural Disjunction) has the largest positive perceptual gap (Gap = +0.53). This reflects a deep cognitive divide: teachers experience the standardized Westernized, metropolis-oriented university curricula as profoundly alien and disconnected from the lived realities of tribal students. Students, however, being thoroughly conditioned to accept standardized school textbooks, do not consciously perceive this disconnect. In contrast, the sole negative perceptual gap is found in Category F (Socio Economic Realities, Gap = -0.09) which indicates that pupils feel the daily financial hardships of poverty, rural daily labor and the lack of reference book funding more than their teachers do.

The demographic differences within the student sample were tested using independent t-tests and One-Way ANOVA. Findings found no significant differences in overall perceptions of challenges among male and female students ($t = 0.92$, $p = 0.34$) or first-generation and non-first-generation college students ($t = 1.45$, $p = 0.23$). Similarly, One-Way ANOVA did not show any statistically significant difference between the talukas ($F=2.34$, $p=0.10$) or the academic streams ($F=1.87$, $p=0.16$). The non-significance of statistical analysis indicates that the educational barriers are uniformly distributed in Sabarkantha and impacts all categories of students equally.

Relationships between the thematic classifications were analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficients (r). A very strong positive correlation was found between Linguistic Environment and Psychological Barriers (r=0.72), which supports the claim that the large linguistic gap between local tribal dialects and college English is the direct cause of high English phobia and classroom anxiety. Further, Socio-Economic Realities correlated highly with Physical & Digital Infrastructure Deficits (r = 0.65) proving that the severe rural poverty of the region directly drives the severe digital exclusion (lack of home computers, internet devices, and electricity) experienced by tribal students.

Discussion and Theoretical Framework

The empirical findings of this investigation lend great support to our theoretical triangulation. The high severity rating of Linguistic Environment and L3 Burden (4.14) is directly related to Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Theory. The tribal dialects of learners in Sabarkantha are unscripted tribal dialects and do not have standard written scripts and the students do not gain Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) in their home tongue. They are overwhelmed by cognitive load when they suddenly switch to standard Gujarati (L2) and collegiate English (L3) since they have to convert English sentences back into Gujarati or tribal dialects in their brain (Mean = 4.62). This cognitive overload enhances their affective filters, which result in acute anxiety and low self-confidence compared to their urban peers (Mean=3.89).

Moreover, the high level of Pedagogical Practices (Mean = 4.10) demonstrates that the college system is still stuck with old fashioned, teacher oriented and examination oriented lecture methods. The traditional grammar-translation approach is the primary method used by teachers to teach English, which forces students to depend significantly on inexpensive market summary guides and short-cut resources to pass semester exams (Mean = 4.55). Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory, this unflexible approach does not offer any participatory, low-anxiety cognitive-linguistic scaffolding in the students' Zone of Proximal Development. This lack of pedagogy, along with a strong digital exclusion (Q19 Mean = 4.03), makes pupils unable to acquire receptive or productive communication skills and basically unemployable in the modern economy.

Practical Policy Suggestions and Strategic Interventions

We suggested three strategic pillars of intervention to operationalize the transformational elements of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and embed the concepts of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). First, colleges should develop bilingual and trilingual bridging resources. Curriculum departments should convert the local tribal oral folklore, songs and historical oral legends into English rather than depending on textbook contexts which are metropolitan or westernized and so appear alien to tribal learners (Mean = 3.91). For example, students can translate and enact regional tribal legends (for example, Bhil and Garasia) in communicative English which will lower their affective filters by validating their cultural identity.

Second, institutions need to move from a tight grammar-translation style to low-anxiety Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). That means teachers need a lot of professional development to help them learn how to teach in more than one language, how to support students who are learning two languages at the same time, and how to continually assess students' skills based on what they can actually do. Third, the government should offer targeted physical and digital support. This includes setting up computer-based smart language labs at colleges and distribution of subsidized digital devices loaded with offline e-books, pronouncing aids and bilingual dictionaries to ensure that severe rural digital exclusion does not stall student learning. Table 2 depicts these recommendations.

Table 2. Actionable Strategic Matrix to Operationalize NEP 2020 and IKS

NEP 2020 Mandate	Sabarkantha Ground Reality	Strategic Action & IKS Integration
Multilingualism (Sec 4.11-4.22)	Rigid English-only lectures; universal mental translation (Mean 4.62)	Develop trilingual (Tribal Dialect-Gujarati-English) glossaries and bilingual bridge materials.
Flexible Curriculum (Sec 4.24)	Syllabus culturally alien; heavy reliance on cheap summary guides (Mean 4.55)	Introduce localized course units translating regional oral histories into communicative tasks.
IKS Integration (Sec 4.27-4.28)	Complete absence of tribal knowledge systems in college classroom	Leverage tribal storytelling, songs, and indigenous folklore as active language-learning materials.
Teacher Training (Sec 5.5-5.12)	No specialized training in multilingual or bilingual pedagogy	Mandatory workshops on low-anxiety CLT, bilingual scaffolding, and emotional support.
Technology Integration (Sec 6.1-6.5)	**Acute digital exclusion at home; no computers or internet (Mean 4.03)**	**Build campus smart language labs; distribute tablets preloaded with offline interactive materials.**

Limitations of the Study:

1. Geographic Scope: The study is delimited to tribal Talukas of Sabarkantha District of Gujarat State, limiting generalizability to other regions.
2. Time Constraints: Time constraints might restrict the depth of data collection and analysis.
3. Resource Constraints: Limited resources may restrict the sample size and the extent of community engagement.

Conclusions and Future Research Scope

The empirical analysis reveals that the Tribal students face an imposing academic hurdle because to the lack of early academic exposure to English, the abrupt transfer from spontaneous languages to university-level curricula, and the utter absence of digital and home-based support. Furthermore the college-level English education in the tribal talukas of Sabarkantha is in a very weak position because of an intricate web of linguistic, pedagogical and socio-economic obstacles. However, the survey also suggests there are significant communal goals, with pupils particularly driven to learn English as a gateway to modern work. National Education Policy 2020 also calls for a structural shift to racially sensitive, multilingual education to secure this gap. Future action research could pilot bilingual or trilingual bridging materials in classrooms, analyze impact on student anxiety and longitudinally follow language laboratory use and employability.

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