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Barriers To English Acquisition: An Interplay of Social, Cultural, Psychological and Economic Factors Among Adivasi Learners In Tinsukia District

Abstract

The Adivasi communities of Assam were brought from different parts of the country to engage them as tea plantation workers during the British rule. Having brought as migrant labourers, the Adivasis remained steeped in social, economic and cultural marginalization that persists even today. Over the generations, these communities have remained outsiders, often lacking entitlements and facing exclusion from the mainstream Assamese society. Due to this background, their educational progress has lagged- especially when it comes to acquiring globally relevant languages such as English, which is seen as a pathway to mobility and opportunity. Psychological factors such as fear, low self-esteem, and a sense of "otherness" further impede the process of English language acquisition. This paper investigates how Adivasi learners often encounter language anxiety, hesitation and lack of confidence due to lack of exposure. This is along with the persistence of historically being marginalized intersect to shape the learner's relationship with English. Methodologically, the research is based on field based surveys and interviews to evaluate the community's attitude towards English.

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1. Introduction

The migration of Adivasi communities to Assam can be traced back to 1823, when Scottish adventurer Robert Bruce discovered tea in the region, prompting the British East India Company to establish large-scale plantations. To meet labour demands, the British transported tribal workers—mainly from Central and Eastern India, particularly the Chotanagpur region—into the tea gardens of Upper Assam. Today, these descendants identify themselves as "Adivasis", "Tea Tribes" or "chahjonogosthi", a name attributed to them by the broader Assamese society (Phookan 2019).This history of migration and settlement of the Adivasi community in Assam has had long-standing implications not only for their cultural identity but also for their linguistic practices. Having been uprooted from their original linguistic and cultural environments and resettled within a heterogeneous, multilingual region, the community has had to constantly negotiate between inherited languages and those of the surrounding society. This layered history of displacement and assimilation continues to shape their communicative repertoires today. Consequently, the question of English language acquisition cannot be studied in isolation; it must be understood against the backdrop of this complex ecology, where factors such as anxiety, multilingual negotiation, and shifting language attitudes play a decisive role in shaping learners' experiences. Since language acquisition is an inherently dynamic process, shaped not only by structural and pedagogical conditions but also by a complex interplay of social, cultural, and psychological factors,among these, anxiety emerges as one of the most decisive influences, particularly in the context of acquiring a foreign or second language. When learners perceive the target language—such as English—as carrying global prestige and socio-economic value, the pressure to attain proficiency often heightens their psychological barriers. Anxiety in this sense does not merely operate as a fleeting emotional state, but as a persistent affective filter that can impede learners' confidence, participation, and ultimately, their ability to internalize the language effectively.With growing concern being devoted to foreign language learning, anxiety has been ranked to be a crucial challenge to language learners (Oteir and Al- Otaibi 2019). Krashen (1982) explains that anxiety associated with a foreign language can be as barriers that prevent information to reach the language acquisition areain a learner's brain.

While affective factors such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence significantly shape the trajectory of language acquisition, they cannot be examined in isolation from the classroom ecology in which learning unfolds. The ecology of the classroom extends beyond the teacher and learners to include a network of physical, temporal, and social elements that collectively mediate the learning experience. Elements such as the spatial arrangement of desks, classroom size, lighting, and even the time of instruction can subtly reinforce or alleviate learners' sense of ease(Kasbi and Elahi Shirvan 2017). Equally crucial is the interactional dynamic between teachers and learners: the teacher's discourse strategies, attitudes, and ability to foster an inclusive atmosphere directly impact how students negotiate their language anxiety.

In this way, classroom ecology operates not merely as a backdrop but as an active agent in amplifying or mitigating affective barriers to second language learning. In the case of Adivasi learners in Assam, these factors acquire a sharper relevance. Owing to economic marginalization, most Adivasi students are confined to government schools where classroom ecology is hindered by inadequate infrastructure, absence of technological tools such as language laboratories, and a shortage of proficient teachers, making English acquisition an uneven and often unsuccessful process, as their aspiration remains highly unfulfilled due to inadequate tools. At the same time, the psychological dimension of anxiety is intensified for Adivasi learners, who, in a predominantly Assamese majoritarian society, grapple with cultural stigmatization and the perception of being "underdeveloped." This dual pressure of an unsupportive classroom ecology and heightened anxiety underscores why these factors are critical to any discussion of English language acquisition in marginalized communities.

Moreover, the fact that the Adivasis in Assam are an ethnic minority, they have to navigate multiple linguistic systems. While the various Adivasi communities use Sadri as a lingua franca among them, Sadri itself is further modified by regional languages such as Assamese, Hindi and Bengali, which can be a determining factor in the language acquisition process. "The Britishers named the language of the tea tribes as *'kulibaat'* but it was later changed to *Saah bagisarasamiya bhasha*. Now this language is known by different names such as *Sadani/ Sadri* or *BaganiyaAsamiya/ Baganiyabhaxa*."(Saikia 2020). This results in frequent code-switching and code-mixing, where phrases and vocabulary from several languages coexist within a single interaction. While such practices embody a form of cultural negotiation and linguistic adaptability, they also complicate the acquisition of English.Code-switching (CS), the alternation between two or more languages within a singlediscourse, is a common phenomenon in multilingual settings, including second-languageclassrooms (Gumperz, 1982; Woolard, 2005). However,the presence of multiple contact languages diverts attention from developing proficiency in English, and the constant blending of codes often reinforces translational habits rather than independent linguistic competence. Thus, multilingual negotiation, while a marker of cultural resilience, becomes another crucial factor shaping and at times constraining the trajectory of English language acquisition among Adivasi learners.

2. Literature Review:

Baruah (2025) highlights that balancing the target language with dominant regional languages remains a prominent pedagogical challenge in multilingual classrooms which is very common in Assam. The study shows that incorporating regional languages like Assamese, Hindi and Bengali in classroom instruction positively impacts learning, while students remain utterly confused and silent when taught entirely in English. Most of them do not respond due to fear of speaking the language incorrectly. However, this paper does not address the cognitive overload that

students experience due to the overwhelming interference of so many languages which ultimately hinders the efiicient learning of English.

Chakraborty (2019) studied from a survey conducted in Khanamukh, Amguri, Sivasagar that many children show signs of errors in pronunciation , spelling and composition along with fear of speaking English, due to lack of exposure. Teachers in rural Assam, though often newly trained, face severe infrastructural deficits—multi-grade classrooms, lack of electricity and computers etc which makes instruction difficult. Parental attitudes toward English are mostly positive, recognizing its value for future opportunities, but direct academic involvement is minimal due to economic constraints and low literacy. Vernacular medium schools in Assam rely on outdated grammar-translation methods, with little emphasis on practical usage of English.

Dutta (2023) observes the challenges in English language learning especially in the rural areas of Assam. English is taught as a subject rather than a skill, and students often have preconceived notions about the language being difficult. This fear of adapting to a presumably unfamiliar language hinders the language acquisition process.

Gogoi and Nath (2025) highlights challenges in English language acquisition among indigenous tribes including Adivasi learners in Assam's tea garden schools, where Assamese as the primary medium of instruction and limited teacher awareness of students' dialects-often generalized as "baganiya", affects comprehension. Classroom observations revealed predominant reliance on Assamese translations for teaching English, restricting learners' linguistic development.

Kumar (2024) analyses the challenges to effective implementation of ELT in rural areas through a case study and brings forward a host of persistent barriers-psychological, linguistic, institutional, environmental, geographical, cultural and social, which disables children from flourishing in the field of English language learning. These interwoven challenges include lack of motivation, limited access to educational resources, neglect and marginalization of rural communities, geographical isolation and cultural and social stigma associated with people from rural sections.

Kullu and Chingakham (2024) examine the impact of parental socio-economic status on the academic performance of Adivasi higher secondary students in Tinsukia district, Assam. The authors argue that parental education, income, and occupational status significantly influence students' access to learning resources and overall academic achievement. Drawing attention to the fact that a majority of Adivasis in Assam are engaged as tea plantation labourers, the study reveals how poor working conditions, low wages, and cultural marginalization lead to limited parental involvement in the education of their children.

Saikia (2014) provides an exploration of how the Sadri language influences English language acquisition among Adivasi learners in upper primary schools in Assam. The

study reveals that these learners typically attend Assamese-medium government schools, where the quality of English instruction is markedly poor due to inadequately trained teachers. Majority of English teachers in these settings possess limited proficiency in the language, which significantly hampers both the exposure and practice necessary for effective second language acquisition. Furthermore, the lack of English usage in classrooms, in addition to students' reliance on Sadri and Assamese for everyday communication, contributes to the persistent gap in English competence.

Shrikhande (2017) establishes that although English is a highly aspired language in rural India, it is also a fertile site for facilitating the urban-rural gap which is mostly due to some prominent factors such as inadequately qualified teachers, lack of basic infrastructural facilities like blackboard, the availability of substandard materials, less technological access to advanced study tools etc. English is often viewed as a distant and elite language which necessitates psychological barriers among parents and children. However, Shrikhande's arguments are made very generalized and they do not deal with any specific marginalized group. While he mentions the "fear" of English, he does not examine the kind of fear which paralyzes their learning. Multilingualism is acknowledged but he does not analyse whether it promotes or constrains English learning.

Upadhyaya (2017) highlights the constitutional obligation of governments to provide adequate facilities for instruction in mother tongue for linguistically minority groups, while also noting the persistent dilemmas faced in Assam. Learners from minority groups confront tensions between safeguarding self-identity and adapting to the demands of a globalized world, which necessitates English language learning.The coexistence of diverse indigenous languages further complicates this dilemma, thereby underscoring the challenges of English language acquisition in rural Assam.

3. Rationale of the study

This study is necessary because English proficiency is increasingly vital for academic success and socio-economic mobility among Adivasi youth, yet Sadri-speaking learners remain underrepresented in applied linguistics research. For speakers of linguistically and socially marginalized languages such as Sadri, acquiring English presents persistent challenges that have not been adequately studied. This paper is driven by the urgent need to investigate these challenges through a multifaceted lens: social, economical, psychological, geographical, institutional etc. The findings will inform teachers, policymakers, and curriculum designers, helping them to develop more effective, inclusive approaches for English language education among Sadri speakers.

4. Methodology

This research adopts a qualitativemethod approach using random sampling across three distinct regions in Tinsukia district: a tea garden area with predominantly illiterate Adivasi speakers, a semi-urban locality with moderate exposure to

Assamese and English, and a rural setting shared with the Assamese Mottok community. Purposive sampling is used for key informants (community elders, language teachers). Both primary and secondary data have been collected to examine the objectives of the study.

By using structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires,observations in classrooms and community settings (home,school,workplace) and field observations, the study investigates the impact of social structures on language acquisition. The responses are analyzed using the theoretical frameworks ofStephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and the concept of Foreign Language Anxiety, put forward by Elaine Horwitz, Michael Horwitz and Joann Cope.

Target groups: Participants were interviewed, segmented into three generational brackets:

1.Elders (50+)

2.Middle Generation (30–50)

3.Youth (under 30)

Again three divisions were made under:

1.Students (classified by age/region)

2.Parents/guardians

3.Teachers and local education administrators

Data Collection Tools:

Semi-Structured Interviews and questionnaires: Conducted in the local dialects (Sadri, or Assamese,) depending on respondent preference**.**

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained verbally, with the purpose of the research clearly explained. Respondents were assured anonymity. In cases of illiterate participants, questions were explained orally in a culturally sensitive manner. Schools and institutions granted verbal permission for survey administration.

5. Limitations of the study

1) **Geographical Factor:** The study was confined to selected tea garden, semi urban and rural areas of Tinsukia district. While these sites provide valuable insights into the linguistic scenario of this marginalized community, the findings cannot be generalized to all Adivasi populations across Assam or India, given the community's diversity in language use, literacy levels and socio economic conditions.
2) **Sampling Constraints:** The population's overall low literacy levels and limited awareness restricted the range of responses because many of them were reluctant and even confused about what really to say.

3) **Language Barrier:** Since many respondents primarily used Sadri or other Adivasi dialects, translation and interpretation were necessary during interviews. This may have caused subtle loss of meaning or affected the precision of responses, despite careful efforts.

Some important factors that impacts English language acquisition among Adivasi communities in some areas of the Tinsukia district, as observed from the survey samples are listed below. The survey was conducted in four L.P Schools of

the district, namely- Raidang T.E Lower Primary School, Hansara T.E Lower Primary School, Samdang T.E Lower Primary School and Borhapjan High School. The following is a set of interview responses collected from students, teachers and parents across four regions. Responses reflect various factors affecting English language acquisition among Adivasi communities.

6. Main Text

Sample 1:

Q1/ We're trying to understand the unique challenges Adivasi students face in learning English. Could you describe the language environment for your students, especially considering what they speak at home versus in school?"

Headmaster: *It's a very clear situation here. Almost all our students, 99% of them, are Adivasi. At home, and even among themselves in the school compound, they speak Sadri. That's their first language,they are the most comfortable in it. But when they come into the classroom, the medium of instruction is Assamese. So, we teach them everything – arithmetic, environmental studies – in Assamese.*

Q2/ And how does English fit into this picture?

Teacher: *Learning English is limited only to textbooks. So, for these children, English is not even a second language; it's a third language. They are first learning to understand and speak Assamese, which is already different from their Sadri. Then, on top of that, they have to learn English. This makes them grapple with a lot of difficulties at the same time. And since ours is an Assamese medium school, and they read everything in Assamese, we also don't force them much into learning English properly. The multiple language scenario- this sequence of Sadri to Assamese to English, is the principal problem they face.*

Q3/ What language do you speak with your friends here at school, and what about in class with your teacher?

Student: All of us speak Sadri at home and in the school too, with friends. The teacher teaches us in Assamese, we understand that quite well and we speak good too. But, when the teacher is absent or isn't looking at us, we still use Sadri. We are very poor in English because we don't understand anything. It is difficult for us to try to learn both Assamese and English at the same time. Assamese is still easier because we hear people around us speaking in Assamese; no one knows English here. But we want to learn it because when we see other English medium children

using English words, we feel as if they are very smart. But we don't have the required opportunities.

Q4/, Do you find that the students' Sadri or Assamese interferes socially with their English learning?

***Teacher**: Yes, definitely. They speak Sadri all the time. Since they are all from the same community here, even exposure to Assamese is limited. When they try to form English sentences, sometimes they translate directly, word-for-word, and it doesn't make sense in English. It's like their brains are constantly switching between three different systems, and English is the newest and most unfamiliar one. Sometimes when we teach certain English words and they don't understand, we give an Assamese equivalent word. But when they fail to comprehend that too, we ask, "what do you call this thing in your language?" In such cases an equivalent Sadri word is used to understand Assamese, which again is used to learn an English word. So it is really complex and results are that they don't know English at all.*

Q5: How is English integrated into the curriculum and what attitudes do you observe in the students? Are they willing or reluctant to learn it?

***Headmaster (Response 1)**: Our school follows the SEBA (Assamese medium) curriculum. English is introduced as a subject from Class 1, but students get very limited exposure to it outside of textbooks. Assamese is the medium of instruction in all classes and English language proficiency is almost negligible. A lot of students fear the subject because they view it as the toughest subject, even more complicated than subjects like maths and science. But they say , they would want to learn the language and that they admire people who know how to speak it.*

***English Teacher (Response 2)** Some of them are surely willing to learn the language despite the difficulties accompanying the process, in terms of resources or text books etc. But I feel, the government's constant imposition of Assamese as a compulsory subject across all boards has pushed our children into a passive zone, especially regarding English language acquisition because the children have somehow internalized the fact that English learning can be compromised but Assamese cannot, as it has been dictated by the government.*

Q6: How often do students use English in the classroom or playground?

***Teacher (Response 1)**:Negligible. English classes are nothing more than translation exercises. And even then, it's mostly reading or repeating after the teacher. Students speak in Sadri or Assamese the rest of the time.*

***Teacher** (Response 2): "Students mostly speak Sadri at home and little Assamese in school. English is only used in the textbook. They don't hear or speak it outside exited opportunity to practice English. Even in the classroom, we translate word for word while teaching them basic sentences. They cannot volunteer while reading or if asked questions.*

Q7/: What kind of teaching-learning resources do you use to teach English?

Teacher: *We mostly rely on the textbook provided by the government. There are no audio-visual aids or language labs.*

Q8/: Are your English teachers trained in English Language Teaching (ELT)?

Teacher*: I am actually a graduate in Economics. I have not done any B.Ed. or D.El.Ed. I joined this school 26 years ago. Since then, I have been teaching different subjects—right now, I teach English in Class 7 and Social Science in Class 9.*

Q9/: How do students feel about learning English? Do they enjoy it or fear it?

Student(Response 1*): I want to speak English, but I get very nervous. First, I have to understand Assamese, and then I try to learn English. Sometimes, I don't understand what the teacher says in Assamese, so learning English becomes even harder. I wish I could speak English like the ones from English medium schools, but my parents don't have enough money.*

Student (Response 2) *I am shy to try to speak English because we fear that we would be wrong and people will laugh at us. We cannot speak English like the private school students. In front of them we feel "less smart".*

Q10/ What kind of support do students receive at home regarding English learning?

Teacher (Response 1): Most parents are tea-garden workers. They are not educated. Some students miss school because they help their families with daily chores or themselves work in the tea gardens and as househelps in other people's houses. So, English is completely foreign at home.

Teacher (Response 2): "Most of our Adivasi learners speak only Sadri at home. Some may know Assamese from the market or neighbours, but English is completely absent. These learners face challenges because for them, English is not just a second language—it's a third one. Educated parents can help bridge this gap by introducing English words early, but that's rare here."

Teacher (Response 3) If learners practised English even a little at home—maybe watching English cartoons or using mobile phones in English—they would be more confident with vocabulary. But it is not possible because they cannot afford it at all.

Q11/ How do you assess English language progress among students?

Headmaster*: We go by the standard unit tests and half yearly and annual term exams. The questions are mostly short answers and translation and they reproduce whatever they are made to write by their teachers. The English subject is more important from the grammatical aspect in our schools. There's very less oral or listening test.*

Q12/ Do you have access to a smartphone, internet, or tuition in English?"

Parent: *We cannot afford English tuition. My son learns from the government school only. Even though we know that he could learn good English at a private*

English medium school, we do not have the money to send him there. Both I and my husband work in the tea garden.

The following section presents a critical analysis of the above interview responses through the lens of key sociolinguistic factors that impact English language acquisition among Adivasi students in Tinsukia district. Each response reveals specific linguistic, social, economic or pedagogical barriers that shape the language learning environment of these learners. The analysis aims to classify and interpret these responses according to recurring themes—such as multilingual interference, socio-economic limitations, pedagogical shortcomings, and institutional practices—thus offering a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by these communities in acquiring English as a second language.

7. Observation and Explanation

I. Linguistic plurality or multilingualism and cross linguistic interference

Many countries like Canada, Belgium and Switzerland operate within officially multilingual frameworks or engage in habitual bilingualism as a matter of daily necessity (Lyons 1982). This observation is especially relevant in the sampled schools, where multilingualism or language shift is a common phenomenon among the Adivasi students. Responses to Q1, Q2 and Q4 explains linguistic plurality as a hurdle in English learning. While Sadri often functions as the community's lingua franca, the survey responses reveal frequent use of multiple languages- varying degrees of Assamese, Hindi and very less English across different domains, such as household, playground and school. This complex linguistic ecology presents a primary barrier to English language acquisition. For the majority of Adivasi children in the surveyed schools (Raidang TE LP, Hanchara TE LP, and Samdang TE LP and Naharsapori LP School), their linguistic journey begins with Sadri as their native language and primary means of communication within their immediate community and among peers, even within the school premises. However, the formal educational system introduces a significant linguistic shift: Assamese serves as the primary medium of instruction in these Lower Primary schools. This means that before English is even formally introduced as a subject, Adivasi children are already navigating a transition from their mother tongue, Sadri, to Assamese as their language of learning. English, therefore, becomes a third language in this already complex linguistic hierarchy, rather than a direct second language, thereby, significantly complicating the learning process because this necessitates a demanding cognitive shift, as they must acquire academic proficiency in Assamese (effectively their L2) while struggling with a foreign language simultaneously. This creates multiple points of potential cross-linguistic interference, not only from Sadri but also from Assamese, impacting English phonology, syntax, and lexicon creating substantial hurdles in English language acquisition. Students are required to bridge gaps between their home language (Sadri), the school language (Assamese), and the target language (English), often without adequate scaffolding.

II. Parental education level and poor economic status

Responses to Q10 and Q12 reveal that the illiteracy of parents and economic hardship present a crucial challenge to English language acquisition. Since the Adivasis in the sampled schools live under extremely deprived conditions, their parents mostly tea pluckers or daily wage earners- this results in a complete lack of awareness about education in general because they themselves have not had access to formal education at all. They send their children to government schools, solely because they are educated for free. This language learning barrier created due to poverty is also seen in the response to Q9. As a result, they often remain unaware of what is taught at school or the critical role that English should play in their child's academic and social mobility. This lack of awareness means they do not actively monitor or support their childs' English learning at home. Response to Q12 also shows that even if economically deprived parents express desire for English education, they lack the material means or awareness to support it actively. For instance, parents with limited formal education may lack confidence or knowledge to support their children's English learning or interact with the school authorities to monitor their child's performance. Also, their children can suffer from "negative interference" due to a lack of follow up or extra materials at home. Similar trends have been noted in rural sub Saharan Africa by Ayo Bamgbose's *Language and Exclusion: The Consequences of Language Policies in Africa (2000),* where he notes that economically downtrodden populations may aspire English medium education for their children but lack the resources to realize these aspirations. Similar factors that hinder English language acquisition have also been addressed in " *Parental Language and Learning Directed to the Young Child*", as- "The home learning environment encompasses an array of characteristics, including hands-on parenting behaviors such as reading to children or exhibiting responsiveness and warmth in interactions, as well as more indirect practices such as making learning materials available in the home"(Kapengut and Noble 2020).

While the responses collected clearly indicate that the educational and economic status of parents, and lack of awareness significantly hinder English language acquisition among Adivasi children in the surveyed schools, it is important to note that such outcomes should not be taken as a generalized idea applicable to every individual within the Adivasi community. There are notable cases where children from such backgrounds demonstrate an extreme aspirational urge or quest for English learning. Despite facing significant challenges, some of these individuals become remarkably successful in acquiring English proficiency. However, in the specific samples that were surveyed—where over 90% of the student population comes from tea estate backgrounds, and where almost all families are engaged in daily-wage tea garden labour—such cases of exceptional language achievement were found to be extremely rare, if not altogether absent.

III. Limited exposure and usage in English, leading to lack of confidence

Responses to Q3 and Q6 indicate that negligible use of English outside the classroom manifests as a significant barrier to learning English. Even in the classroom, during their English class, students admit to speaking in Sadri. Even the teacher's role is reduced to that of a translator only or making them write answers to be reproduced in exams. There is therefore a huge gap that remains unfulfilled, in terms of teaching the students, speaking and writing skills. This means that for the majority of Adivasi learners, English remains largely confined to the academic sphere only and even that limited exposure is extremely less. Since there is no reinforcement of learning in their social repertoire, they forget even the little of whatever was taught in the class. And as we saw in the responses to Q10 and Q12, the home environment also doesn't facilitate English language learning for most students. A significant factor that contributes to the hesitancy in speaking the language is the limited opportunities learners have to converse outside the classroom environment.Limited exposure to English in the classroom, often constrained by limited instructional time and the demands of other subjects, tends to prioritize grammar and literacy skills over the development of communicative fluency (Butler, 2015; Jeon, 2009; Lightbown and Spada, 2013).This also leads to reduced motivation to learn and practice the language because there is practically no compulsion for them to use the language at school and home or with friends. This limited usage can further reinforce negative stereotypes about their proficiency, leading to withdrawal and reluctance to participate in social contexts where English is spoken.

IV. Curriculum rigidity and ineffective assessment methods

The responses to Q7 and Q11 reveals that the reliance on rigid and mechanical assessment practices do not support a holistic development in the process of English language acquisition. The over dependence on government prescribed textbooks indicates a lack of diversified teaching learning materials, thereby limiting students' exposure to language usage in real life situations. The absence of audio visual aids and language labs create a traditional and monotonous classroom environment where language learning is reduced to rote memorization rather than interactive engagement. Moreover, the assessment system which is confined to written tests only containing grammer and translation based exercises further narrows the scope of language acquisition. The emphasis on grammatical accuracy and reproduction of materials taught by the teacher sidelines essential communicative competencies like speaking and listening. Such rigidity not only undermines student motivation to learn the language but also illustrates a systematic neglect of language as a dynamic, social skill- thus forcing the students into a text centric model of language education that is poorly aligned with real world linguistic demands. This pedagogical shortcoming, when viewed through a sociolinguistic lens reflects broader institutional attitudes towards English- it is taught as a subject and not as a skill. Further, response to Q8 reveal that English is taught by teachers who are themselves not proficient in the language. This means that teachers are often assigned subjects regardless of their academic specialization or pedagogical training, directly impacting the quality of English language acquisition among students. The teachers

are therefore unable to apply correct methods of teaching language, ultimately hindering students' English acquisition and their understanding of other subjects taught through English.

V. Psychological hindrance due to fear and stereotype

Research from the field of psychology has shown that stereotype threat is a genuine phenomenon that has a consistent and quantifiable negative effect on individuals' performances on a variety of cognitively demanding tasks (Nall 2021). Response 2 to Q9 indicate that language behaviour is influenced by social stereotypes and even lower groups begin to accept these stereotypes. This reflects stereotype internalization, where linguistic minorities self-censor for fear of ridicule. The shyness and anxiety of students due to their English "not being like the children from private schools", indicates being under-confident due to perceived differences in proficiency or accent from those whom they consider to be superior in the language and this often results from lack of social support. The variables of accent and dialect are determined by stereotypes and we judge a particular personality trait according to it in our superficial day to day dealings. Such experiences of linguistic insecurity, fuelled by stereotypes about "perfect" English, can lead to reduced confidence and avoidance of speaking despite a clear desire for learning English.

IV. Excessive emotional and cultural value associated with Assamese language

In recent years, the Assam government has initiated substantial policy changes aimed at strengthening the position of the Assamese language within the educational system. **The Assam government will make Assamese compulsory in English-medium schools, promoting linguistic heritage and cultural identity (** Sentinel Digital Desk, 10 Mar 2025). These mandates include making Assamese compulsory in all English-medium schools across the Brahmaputra Valley. Response 2 to Q5 indicates that such policies have become partly complicit in affecting the English language acquisition of students in the state. The implementation of these policies has brought to the forefront a critical tension within Assam's academic landscape. Students, particularly those aspiring to specialize in English literature or achieve high English proficiency, face considerable challenges in balancing these new linguistic impositions with their existing curriculum**.** The promotion of regional languages, while vital for maintaining cultural identity, can be perceived as directly competing with the practical necessity of English proficiency, because it limits students' ability to freely choose other languages or subjects of interest, such as advanced English or literature, especially for those from non-Assamese backgrounds, like the Adivasis.. News outlets report protests and debates by various social groups and civil society organizations, who argue that such language policies may marginalize non-Assamese speakers and make balancing other academic interests, like English or literature studies, more difficult.

VII. Cognitive Overload

One critical insight emerging from interviews is that English functions as a third language for many Adivasi learners. Sadri is the first language and Assamese, the medium of instruction in many primary schools, serves as the second. As a result, English is often introduced at the secondary school level, by which time learners already have well-established cognitive-linguistic patterns in their L1 and L2, making English acquisition more challenging. Many students are forced to learn three languages by the time they're 14—Sadri at home, Assamese in lower classes, and then suddenly English. This burden affects their vocabulary acquisition. It's cognitive overload."

The interaction with teachers, students and parents from the sampled areas reveal a complex interplay of linguistic, social and institutional barriers to English language acquisition. The inherent linguistic plurality, where Sadri serves as the mother tongue and Assamese as the medium of instruction, positions English as a challenging third language in their acquisition sequence. This linguistic complexity is compounded by prevailing parental education levels and socio-economic status, often resulting in a critical lack of home-based follow-up and material support, though it is vital to acknowledge the inspiring resilience of individuals who overcome these barriers through sheer dedication and hardwork. Furthermore, the limited opportunities for authentic English interaction beyond the classroom, exacerbated by rigid curricula emphasizing rote memorization over communicative competence, directly contribute to a pervasive lack of confidence and deep-seated linguistic insecurity among learners. Persistent fears of ridicule and entrenched stereotypes undermine students' willingness to participate. Finally, the heightened emphasis on Assamese language and literature, reinforced by current educational policies and community attitudes, often sidelines English and intensifies the linguistic and cultural distance Adivasi students must navigate. Together, these factors do not function in isolation but intersect to produce a lack of confidence and proficiency in English among Adivasi learners.

8. Theoretical Frameworks

I. Affective Filter Hypothesis and Foreign Language Anxiety

Stephen Krashen, one of the most influential figures in second language acquisition research, proposed a series of hypotheses in his Monitor Model (1982), of which the Affective Filter Hypothesis remains particularly relevant to studies of learner psychology. Krashen argued that language acquisition is not solely dependent on input, but also on the learner's emotional state. Variables such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety form what he calls an "affective filter." When the filter is low, input is processed and internalized effectively; when high, even abundant input may fail to translate into acquisition. This idea has been central in understanding why learners with access to similar instructional conditions may show vastly different outcomes.

In the context of this study, the Affective Filter Hypothesis is particularly useful in explaining the hesitation among Adivasi learners to use English actively. While English is present in their curriculum, the fear of committing errors, coupled with limited opportunities for practice, raises their affective filter, preventing them from gaining confidence or fluency. The psychological burden outweighs the availability of instructional material, demonstrating that affective variables are as significant as structural or institutional ones in shaping acquisition.

Building on this perspective, Elaine Horwitz, Michael Horwitz, and Joann Cope's work on Foreign Language Anxiety (1986) provides a more specialized framework. Their research identifies three interrelated components: communication apprehension, or the fear of engaging in spoken interaction; test anxiety, arising from the high stakes of formal evaluation; and fear of negative evaluation, the worry of being ridiculed or judged for errors. This framework has become foundational in language education studies, as it pinpoints the precise psychological pressures that prevent learners from active participation.

Applied to the findings of this study, Foreign Language Anxiety clarifies why Adivasi learners, despite recognizing the prestige of English, often remain silent in classrooms. Reports of reluctance to speak for fear of humiliation or ridicule resonate directly with Horwitz's emphasis on negative evaluation. The lack of speaking practice, in turn, reinforces a perpetual cycle of silence regarding English language acquisition. Thus, these two theoretical models together account for the paradox observed in the community: although learners hold a positive attitude toward English, psychological barriers shaped by fear and insecurity obstruct their acquisition process**.**

II. Suggestions

In relation to the findings on constraints facilitated by numerous factors, specific recommendations include organizing parental awareness workshops that emphasize the value of English language acquisition while still retaining their native language. Additionally, in-service teacher training programs must be developed specifically for English language teaching in multilingual rural contexts, rather than relying on generic primary teacher training. Resource enhancement is also crucial: the introduction of low-cost audio-visual aids and textbooks on English phonology can boost proficiency in teaching English. Moreover peer mentorship circles where students from government /vernacular medium schools are paired with slightly more proficient peers, so that progress feels achievable can be a boosting factor. Introducing low cost school based counselling sessions where students can openly talk about language anxiety, stereotypes and fear of comparison can help them overcome their feeling of inferiority.

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