

Assessment of Tribal Students' Language Proficiency Through Primary Textbooks

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Abstract: This study investigates the structural, linguistic, and contextual design of language subject matter as a primary metric for measuring and fostering cognitive abilities and comprehension levels among learners. Focusing on the Grade 9 Tamil language curriculum, this paper presents an extensive evaluative analysis drawing upon qualitative student feedback and quantitative distribution tables across four distinct indigenous tribal communities in Tamil Nadu: the Irular, Kurumbar, Paniyar, and Kadar. The empirical findings demonstrate that equitable learning environments rely heavily on language accessibility; conversely, structural presentation variations and foreign linguistic mixing result in systemic achievement disparities. By examining multiple variables - including perceived text complexity, environmental support systems, language enrichment methodologies, error frequencies, and supplementary pedagogical actions - this paper highlights the necessity of shifting from static textbook construction to culturally adaptive, sociolinguistic ally conscious instructional materials.

Keywords: Tribal, Students, Language, Primary Textbooks, Proficiency

1. Introduction

Subject matter within a specialized institutional curriculum functions as more than a collection of facts; it operates as an instructional infrastructure that dictates how effectively a student processes, structures, and synthesizes new knowledge. Cognitive development theory emphasizes that the presentation style of academic concepts significantly affects a learner's comprehension limits. When subject material is consciously structured to be accessible to diverse cognitive baselines, it builds an equitable classroom. Conversely, if texts are framed in a simplistic yet colloquial or highly narrow regional style that is comprehensible only to a select group of native or mainstream speakers, it creates systematic learning disparities. In second-language acquisition, this structural balance becomes even more critical.

Language textbooks incorporate a cross-disciplinary mix of themes spanning culture and society, fine arts and performance history, political philosophy and civic life, as well as natural sciences and environmental economics. For historically marginalized tribal students, mastering this multifaceted language material serves as a primary vehicle for achieving social mobility and community adaptation. To evaluate how effectively these texts serve their target audience, educational researchers must analyze both sides of the classroom: the teachers who execute the pedagogy and the students who navigate the text. Building upon prior research regarding teacher perspectives, this paper focuses on the self-reported learning experiences of the students themselves. Understanding how student groups interpret linguistic style, navigate errors, and interact with the text provides an empirical foundation for refining regional educational materials.

2. Methodology of Textbook Evaluation

Evaluating educational texts requires systematic frameworks that balance resource limitations with structural depth. Educational psychology classifies textbook assessments into two primary operational forms: Brief Evaluation and Extensive Evaluation.

2.1 Brief Evaluation

A brief evaluation isolates and reviews specific textbook components rather than analyzing the entire volume. The primary practical benefit of this method is its exceptionally high time efficiency, which makes it an excellent approach for rapid comparative reviews across various competitive publishers or draft curricula. Although it shares certain analytical traits with critical commentary, it focuses primarily on compiling existing data into a high-level summary. Ultimately, this streamlined process guides macro-level educational decisions. By targeting specific key sections, it provides educational administrators with a fast, reliable mechanism to assess curriculum viability without consuming excessive institutional time or valuable academic resources.

2.2 Extensive Evaluation

Extensive evaluation operates as a deep, holistic examination of an instructional text. It investigates both global characteristics (such as structural layout and thematic design) and granular details (such as syntax, morphological variants, phonology, and exercise sub-components). This multi-tiered assessment provides a detailed view of textbook contents alongside clear indicators of actual student achievement.

To execute an extensive evaluation within the scope of language subjects, researchers must collect direct metrics from the student population. This study gathers empirical data through targeted diagnostics assessing linguistic richness (lexical variety and semantic depth), writing style (syntactic complexity and dialectical variants), and thematic content relevance (comprehension rates across diverse content streams). This comprehensive approach was applied systematically to Grade 9 tribal cohorts (N = 90) across the Irular, Kurumbar, Paniyar, and Kadar communities to identify where the language textbook succeeded and where it caused instructional friction.

3. Comprehensive Data Compilation and Analysis

The following sections provide the complete empirical datasets collected during the comprehensive student evaluation phase. Each dataset contains the raw sample distribution along with cross-tabulated percentage breakdowns.

3.1 Linguistic Style Perception

This metric tracks how students categorize the primary language style used to explain concepts in the textbook.

Linguistic Style of the Tamil Textbook

	Irular	Kurumbar	Paniyar	Kadar	Total
Simple Language Style	13	2	10	5	30
	43.33	6.67	33.33	16.67	100.00
Complex Language Style	5	2	13	2	22
	22.73	9.09	59.09	9.09	100.00
Specialized Tamil Language Style	14	3	3	4	24
	58.33	12.50	12.50	16.67	100.00
None	4	2	4	2	14
	42.86	14.29	20.57	14.29	100.00
Total	38	9	30	13	90
Average	42.22	10.00	33.33	14.44	100.00

3.2 Language Enrichment Training Modalities

This metric records the frequency of specific training exercises completed by students to improve language retention.

Table

	Irular	Kurumbar	Paniyar	Kadar	Total
Reading Practice	8	1	7	4	20
	40.00	5.00	35.00	20.00	100.00
Writing Practice	5	0	7	1	13
	38.46	0.00	53.85	7.69	100.00
Integrated Reading and Writing Practice	25	4	7	7	43
	58.14	9.30	16.28	16.28	100.00
	65.79	44.44	23.33	53.85	47.78
Pronunciation Practice	0	1	5	0	6
	0.00	16.67	83.33	0.00	100.00
Media-based Listening Practice	0	3	4	1	8
	0.00	37.50	50.00	12.50	100.00
Total	38	9	30	13	90
Average	42.22	10.00	33.33	14.44	100.00

3.3 Tamil Language Usage Environments

This metric identifies the physical and social spaces where students primarily speak or write Tamil.

Table

	Irular	Kurumbar	Paniyar	Kadar	Total
Language Spoken at Home	29	4	12	12	57
	50.88	7.02	21.05	21.05	100.00
Language Spoken Outside	2	3	13	1	19
	10.53	15.79	68.42	5.26	100.00
Language Spoken at School	7	2	5	0	14
	50.00	14.29	35.71	0.00	100.00
Total	38	9	30	13	90
Average					

4. Evaluative Commentary on Text Design and Tribal Group Disparities

A deep analysis of the cross-tabulated student feedback data reveals clear divisions between the four tribal communities, highlighting where standard textbook layouts conflict with indigenous language systems.

4.1 The Irular-Paniyar High-Accessibility Profile

Irular and Paniyar student cohorts exhibit higher linguistic compatibility with the textbook text. As documented in Section 3.1, a significant proportion of Irular (43.33%) and Paniyar (33.33%) students feel comfortable with standard prose units. Interestingly, a high percentage of Irular students (58.33%) explicitly identify a highly "specialized" style within the book. This dual feedback shows that while these students recognize advanced

linguistic elements, they possess the baseline literacy to process them without completely losing track of the material.

Paniyar students also report that foundational concept explanations are simple. However, they run into a major roadblock with formal rule mechanics; Section 3.8 reveals that Paniyar students find morphological transitions and word segmentations highly complex (55.56% and 71.43%). Thus, while their narrative reading skills are strong, they continue to struggle with the formal structural mechanics of standard grammar.

4.2 The Kurumbar-Kadar Low-Accessibility Profile

The data points to a persistent learning crisis among Kurumbar and Kadar cohorts. Kurumbar students fall significantly behind the other three communities in baseline comprehension. They consistently view standard academic prose, classical poetry, and formal grammar rules as highly difficult, reporting that only the basic rote memorization sections are accessible.

Similarly, Kadar students experience uniform academic strain across the entire curriculum. Section 3.10 shows that very few Kadar students find any textbook module easily accessible. Instead, they view the entire curriculum as an integrated learning barrier. This evidence indicates that the success of structural communication depends on the presentation style used in the text and by the teacher, rather than an inherent learning deficit among the tribal students themselves. When a text fails to bridge the gap between indigenous home dialects and formal institutional language, the curriculum becomes a barrier to learning rather than an entry point.

5. Structural Interferences and Language Learning Barriers

Structural interference occurs when a learner's native grammar, syntax, or phonology disrupts the acquisition of a second language. These linguistic barriers create persistent errors, as students unconsciously apply first-language rules to new structural frameworks. Beyond grammatical mismatches, cognitive overload and cultural differences in communication styles further compound these learning obstacles. Identifying these specific structural friction points allows educators to design targeted remedial interventions, transforming systemic language barriers into structured pathways for bilingual proficiency.

5.1 Foreign Language Interference and Linguistic Mixing

In second-language acquisition, structural interference from outside languages can seriously disrupt a student's learning progression. For urban or mainstream rural populations, exposure to multiple languages through travel, media, and migration fosters a natural, flexible linguistic exchange. However, this fluid environment does not typically extend to remote tribal communities due to lower geographic mobility.

When tribal students encounter mixed languages in their materials, they experience foreign language interference rather than useful bilingual exposure. This interference stems directly from institutional source texts that blend distinct regional dialects or colloquialisms with formal academic language. Section 3.4 shows that Irular (43.24%) and Paniyar (32.43%) cohorts notice a high concentration of foreign words in their textbooks. This linguistic mixing creates an unnecessary cognitive burden, forcing students to untangle competing word systems while simultaneously trying to master core concepts. Textbooks free from mixed foreign syntax are essential for clear, unhindered comprehension in tribal environments.

5.2 Error Typology in Speech and Writing

Analyzing where language errors regularly occur helps uncover the structural challenges second-language learners face. Section 3.6 outlines clear trends: Irular cohorts report high error rates at the word level (48.57%) and the sentence structure level (56.00%), yet they maintain steady accuracy in phonetic pronunciation. This shows that while their spoken phonics is stable, they face systematic difficulty when building formal sentences.

Conversely, Paniyar cohorts encounter their biggest challenges at the phonetic/sound level (44.44%), which directly matches their difficulties with textbook word segmentation.

6. Conclusion

This research underscores that primary textbooks serve as a critical pivot in assessing and shaping the language proficiency of tribal students. The findings indicate that standard primary textbooks often present a steep linguistic barrier, as they are typically written in regional or national languages that diverge sharply from the students' native dialects. This systemic mismatch results in low comprehension, diminished classroom engagement, and an artificial deficit in measured language proficiency. To bridge this gap, evaluating language proficiency must look beyond rigid, standardized metrics and examine how contextualized teaching materials impact learning. The incorporation of mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) and localized cultural elements such as regional folklore, oral traditions, and bilingual text structures proves essential in fostering a natural and confident acquisition of both native and second languages. Ultimately, the study concludes that primary textbooks cannot follow a one-size-fits-all model if tribal educational equity is to be achieved. True language proficiency is unlocked when pedagogical tools respect and reflect the learner's linguistic reality. Future educational policies must prioritize the ongoing development of culturally responsive curricula, decentralized textbook production, and teacher training focused on multilingual frameworks. By aligning instructional materials with the socio-linguistic backgrounds of tribal learners, the educational system can transform primary textbooks from a barrier into a gateway for academic success and cognitive growth.

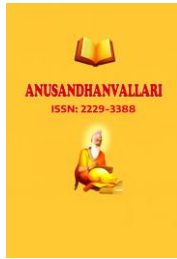
To overcome these structural disparities, educational authorities must shift from a uniform, centralized curriculum model to an adaptive, sociolinguistic ally conscious approach. Incorporating localized tribal glossaries, reducing foreign linguistic mixing, and introducing tailored remedial coaching models (as highlighted by the at-risk sub-sample analysis) are vital interventions. Ensuring textbook infrastructure aligns with the diverse cognitive baselines of indigenous learners is essential to establishing an equitable, inclusive, and effective classroom environment for all tribal communities across Tamil Nadu.

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