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English Language Learning among Students of Model Residential Schools in the Tribal Areas of Kerala: A Review

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Abstract

English occupies a position in India that is at once academic, administrative and aspirational. For learners from Scheduled Tribe communities, however, it typically arrives as a fourth or fifth code, layered over a tribal mother tongue, a regional language and a link language, and unsupported by exposure outside the classroom. Model Residential Schools, and the national Eklavya Model Residential Schools, were established to break this cycle. This paper reviews the conceptual and empirical literature on English language learning among students of Model Residential Schools in the tribal areas of Kerala. It situates English within global, national and state contexts, tracing the policy architecture that has shaped English Language Teaching in India and the profile of Kerala's thirty-six notified tribal communities, and then reviews twenty studies published between 2015 and 2024 across four strands: learner-centred research on skills and errors; pedagogical, technological and interventionist research; research on access, enrolment and retention; and research on residential schooling and achievement. Three tables present the district-wise distribution of the Scheduled Tribe population in Kerala, the population and sex ratios of major tribes, and a synthesis of the reviewed studies. The review finds that intervention studies report gains with near-uniform consistency while descriptive studies of tribal education report deficits with equal consistency, and that the two literatures rarely meet inside the same institution. The paper closes by identifying research gaps and directions for future enquiry.

Keywords: *English language learning, Model Residential Schools, tribal education, Kerala, Scheduled Tribes, second language acquisition, Eklavya Model Residential Schools*

1. Introduction

Language is the defining instrument of human social life: intentional, conventional, symbolic and structured, and different in kind from the instinctive signalling of other species. Because it is acquired socially, the conditions under which a learner meets a language largely determine what that learner will be able to do with it. English in the schools of tribal Kerala is not met under the same conditions as English in an urban private school, and the research literature has only intermittently taken that difference seriously.

This review concerns one institutional setting: the Model Residential School in a tribal area. Such schools are a deliberate attempt to compensate for geographic isolation, first-generation learning and the near-total absence of English at home by placing learners where the language of instruction operates continuously. Whether that compensation works, and under what conditions, is a question the literature answers only partially. This introduction establishes the four contexts within which it must be read.

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1.1 Language, Learning and the Global Standing of English

English is the most widely distributed language in recorded history. It carries roughly half of the world's scientific and technical publication and around three-quarters of international correspondence, and is one of the six official languages of the United Nations. Some three hundred million people speak it as a mother tongue and a further four hundred million use it as a second or working language, a distribution no other language approaches.

The consequences for the individual learner are well documented. Bilingualism is associated with enhanced working memory, sustained attention and problem-solving capacity, and with delayed onset of age-related cognitive decline; a second language also functions in the labour market as a credential whose value has risen rather than plateaued.

Because these benefits accrue only to learners who reach functional competence, the question of how English is learned has attracted sustained theoretical attention. Second language acquisition theory supplies the justification for structuring training around graded sequences of speaking, listening, reading and writing rather than around grammar description alone, and demonstrates how theoretical insight converts into training method (Gulzar, Ijaz, & Gulnaz, 2017). Courses accordingly progress from foundational vocabulary through more complex sentence formation to idiomatic fluency and professional use. Competence is built cumulatively, and a learner denied the early stages will not arrive at the later ones by exposure alone.

Demand has intensified. Globalisation, the concentration of research output in English, its dominance in digital content, and the reach of English-language entertainment have produced a steady worldwide rise in learner numbers (Ramanujam & Meganathan, 2019). For many learners English represents mobility in a literal sense, and it is this aspirational dimension that makes the uneven distribution of English competence within a single country a question of equity rather than only of pedagogy.

1.2 English within India's Multilingual and Multicultural Fabric

India recognises fourteen major constitutional languages and records roughly 1,620 mother tongues, of which only some two hundred have been formally classified, alongside a dense stratification by religion, caste, occupation and region. Multilingualism is the ordinary condition of Indian society rather than the exceptional one.

Within this arrangement English performs a function that no Indian language performs. It is an associate official language, the language of Supreme Court proceedings, of Union-State correspondence, of higher education, law, business and national media. Where a speaker of Punjabi and a speaker of Bengali share no regional code, and where Hindi is not readily understood across the southern states, English is the practical link language of educated interaction and, in the formulation of the National Focus Group, a symbol of aspirations for quality in education and fuller participation in national and international life.

Teaching a second language in a multilingual classroom is nonetheless a materially different undertaking from teaching it in a monolingual one. Where learners in one room bring several first languages, assumptions about shared transfer, predictable interference and the usefulness of translation cease to hold uniformly. Methodology developed for monolingual settings requires modification to the linguistic ecology of the particular classroom, and inefficient language learning eventually produces inefficient learning across the curriculum.

Teacher belief mediates this at every point. What teachers hold to be true about English and about what their learners are capable of shapes classroom discourse, and therefore the input learners receive (Shinde & Karekatti, 2015). Curriculum is implicated similarly: syllabi structured to transmit content rather than

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https://cgscopus.com/index.php/journals
to develop communicative capacity produce passive recipients rather than competent users, and the objectives of English teaching in India require far more precise specification (Sindkhedkar, 2015).

1.3 Policy, Curricular and Institutional Foundations of English Language Teaching in India

The place of English in Indian education has been settled and re-settled by a long succession of commissions. The Calcutta University Commission (1917-1919) recommended the mother tongue as the secondary medium, reserving English largely for higher education. The University Education Commission of 1948 argued that abandoning English would isolate the country intellectually and sever it from the expanding stream of world knowledge. The Secondary Education Commission (1952-1953) cautioned against overemphasis on English as a medium and pressed for more effective teaching technique.

The Kothari Commission (1964-1966) produced the most comprehensive framework. It endorsed the Three-Language Formula, adopted at the Central Advisory Board of Education conference of 1961, under which non-Hindi-speaking regions would teach the regional language, Hindi and a modern European language, ordinarily English. It designated English a library language, recommended that no candidate lacking competence in a library language receive a master's degree, and called for departments devoted to the language rather than to its literature alone. The National Policies on Education of 1968, 1986 and 1992 carried these positions forward, and the Acharya Ramamurti Committee (1986) insisted that proficiency be assessed on attainment rather than on years of exposure.

The National Curriculum Framework of 2005 shifted the emphasis. Working from the principle of learning without burden, it linked instruction to learners' out-of-school experience, recognised that a medium other than the mother tongue disadvantages children, and urged a move from grammar-translation towards communicative, learner-centred method. The University Grants Commission subsequently identified English proficiency as a defining attribute of the globally competent graduate and funded provision in conversational English, remedial grammar and business communication, while the All India Council for Technical Education developed parallel four-skill curricula.

Two implications follow. India resolved long ago, at the level of stated policy, that English must be taught well and taught as a skill; and the distance between that policy and its classroom realisation is itself a documented finding, since demand has repeatedly outpaced the adequacy of policy and of implementation technique (Ramanujam & Meganathan, 2019). The gap is widest where institutional capacity is weakest, which is to say in tribal and remote areas.

1.4 Tribal Communities of Kerala and the Model Residential School System

The term tribe entered Indian administrative usage through colonial census practice and was formalised after independence, when backward tribes in the Government of India Act, 1935 gave way to Scheduled Tribes. Article 342 empowers the President to notify tribes as Scheduled, but the Constitution nowhere defines a tribe substantively. The Lokur Committee (1965) supplied working criteria: indications of primitive traits, distinctive culture, shyness of contact, geographical isolation, and social and economic backwardness.

Kerala has thirty-six notified tribal communities totalling 484,839 persons, or 1.45 per cent of the state's population, distributed very unevenly (Table 1). Wayanad alone accounts for 31.24 per cent of the state's tribal population, and tribal people form 18.55 per cent of that district; Idukki follows at 11.51 per cent of the state total, then Palakkad at 10.10 and Kasaragod at 10.08. Together these four districts hold close to two-thirds of the state's tribal population. Paniyan is the largest single community, followed by

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Kurichchan, Malai Arayan, Kuruman, Irular, Muthuvan, Kattunayakan, Uraly and Adiyan (Table 2). Five communities, Kattunaikan, Koraga, Cholanaikan, Kurumbar and Kadar, are notified as particularly vulnerable.

These communities inhabit, for the most part, the forest ecosystems of the Western Ghats. Historically they lived by cultivation, hunting, gathering and forest produce, organised authority through lineage rather than inherited office, and maintained distinct dialects and ritual practice. Colonial forest law and later development displaced many from ancestral land and traditional livelihood. Although Malayalam or a closely related dialect is now widely spoken in Adivasi households, these communities remain substantially disadvantaged in health and education relative to the general population.

Model Residential Schools, and the Eklavya Model Residential Schools introduced nationally in 1997-1998, were designed as a direct response. By providing residential, quality-oriented schooling in or near tribal areas, they aim to remove distance as a barrier, stabilise attendance, and surround the learner with an academic environment the home cannot supply. Evaluation of Kerala's provision indicates real benefit delivered under real constraint in infrastructure, staffing and academic support (Rejimon & Smitha, 2021). Whether these schools succeed specifically in English, the subject in which tribal learners are most disadvantaged and which most directly governs access to higher education, is the question this review addresses.

Table 1. District-wise distribution of the Scheduled Tribe population in Kerala

District	ST Population	ST as % of District Population	% of State ST Population
Kerala (Total)	484,839	1.45	100.00
Kasaragod	48,857	3.75	10.08
Kannur	41,371	1.64	8.53
Wayanad	151,443	18.55	31.24
Kozhikode	15,228	0.49	3.14
Malappuram	22,990	0.56	4.74
Palakkad	48,972	1.74	10.10
Thrissur	9,430	0.30	1.94
Ernakulam	16,559	0.50	3.42
Idukki	55,815	5.04	11.51
Kottayam	21,972	1.11	4.53
Alappuzha	6,574	0.31	1.36
Pathanamthitta	8,108	0.68	1.67
Kollam	10,761	0.41	2.22
Thiruvananthapuram	26,759	0.81	5.52

Note. Wayanad, Idukki, Palakkad and Kasaragod together account for approximately 62.93 per cent of the state's Scheduled Tribe population.

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Table 2. Population and sex ratios of major tribal communities in Kerala

Sl. No.	Community	Population	% of Total	Sex Ratio	Child Sex Ratio
	All tribes	364,189	100.0	1021	974
1	Paniyan	81,940	22.4	1048	971
2	Kurichchan	32,746	8.9	987	956
3	Malai Arayan	32,332	8.8	1031	953
4	Kurumans	26,177	7.1	994	948
5	Irular	23,998	6.5	993	960
6	Muthuvan	21,266	5.8	975	943
7	Kattunayakan	14,715	4.0	981	1024
8	Uraly	11,103	3.0	1002	1019
9	Adiyan	10,715	2.9	1084	1037

Note. Paniyan, Kurichchan, Malai Arayan, Kuruman, Irular, Muthuvan and Kanikkaran together constitute close to 75 per cent of the state's Adivasi population.

2. Literature Review

A review of related literature maps what is already known, exposes the limits of earlier work and supplies the designs on which new work can build. The studies surveyed below were selected for their direct bearing on English language learning among disadvantaged and tribal learners and were published between 2015 and 2024. They are grouped into four strands: the learner and the errors that arise; method, technology and intervention; the structural conditions of tribal education; and residential schooling, its language environment and the achievement it produces.

2.1 Learner-Centred Studies: Skills, Errors and Language Difficulties

The dominant finding of learner-centred research is that learner difficulty is systematic rather than random, and therefore remediable. Working with a stratified random sample of 570 secondary students, Singaravelu (2023) found substantial difficulty with conjunctions, sentence structure, pronunciation and the comprehension of grammar, together with widespread memorisation without understanding. Teacher perception of these problems varied significantly with the gender, location and management type of the school.

Pronunciation has attracted particular attention because it is both highly visible and highly tractable. In an action research study of fifty pre-service teacher education students selected by purposive sampling, Muthaiah (2021) used oral instruction supported by articulatory diagrams and pre-recorded audio to improve the production of pure vowel sounds, rating performance on a three-point scale before and after; the post-test showed marked improvement. The two error sources identified were mother tongue interference and the reinforcement of mispronunciation within the peer group. The second is directly relevant to residential schools, where peer contact is continuous and a mispronounced form can propagate through an entire cohort.

Reading has been reframed as an active rather than a receptive process. Fitzgerald and Graves (2020), developing the Scaffolded Reading Experience for multilingual classrooms, argue that language learners

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https://cgscopus.com/index.php/journals

acquire literacy most effectively when the reading task is supported by temporary structures pitched within the learner's zone of proximal development. Their framework divides the reading event into planning and implementation, with pre-reading work on vocabulary, prediction and first-language discussion; during-reading work through guided reading, reading aloud and text modification; and post-reading questioning, writing and re-teaching, while cautioning against attempting the full repertoire for every text. The principle addresses a difficulty widely reported among second language learners, namely the treatment of reading as passive decoding in which meaning is assumed to reside entirely within the text.

Productive skills present a further order of difficulty. Rao (2021), in a descriptive survey combining qualitative and quantitative methods with a randomly selected sample of 1,440 college students, assessed creative writing ability and sought to develop it through creative mobilisation techniques, gathering data through achievement tests, socio-economic scaling, creative language tasks, rating scales and observation. Urban students outperformed rural students, appropriate learning environments were positively associated with writing ability, and students who received excessive support displayed reduced creative capacity. The last finding sits in productive tension with the scaffolding argument: support must be temporary and calibrated, since support persisting beyond the point of need substitutes for the learner's own productive effort rather than enabling it.

Read together, these studies describe a consistent profile: difficulty concentrates in the productive skills, originates in foundational gaps, and is associated with institutional rather than individual variables. For learners in residential tribal schools every one of these variables is adverse at once.

2.2 Pedagogy, Technology and Instructional Interventions

The second strand tests whether particular methods produce measurable gain, and the evidence is consistently positive, which raises the question of why classroom practice has changed so little. Subbaiah (2024), examining the use of information and communication technology in English language teacher education, surveyed 71 teacher educators and 200 student teachers across 29 District Institutes of Education and Training. That sixty-six per cent of teacher educators lacked fundamental computer knowledge contrasts sharply with the strongly positive attitude towards ICT the same respondents reported. Equipment availability determined both the extent and the quality of use, and students taught through interactive multimedia outperformed those taught conventionally.

Virtual learning environments have been tested at scale. Windsor (2020) evaluated the Independent Grammar Study Scheme, a fourteen-week programme of short grammar exercises delivered through a virtual learning environment to two successive first-year cohorts at a Chinese university. Grammar scores improved in both 2018 and 2019, and in 2018 the gains were larger among students with lower initial proficiency, a differential of obvious interest for learners entering secondary school with weak foundations.

Task-based and communicative approaches have produced comparable results. Rahman (2022), working with engineering students at the Indian School of Mines, Dhanbad, built an oral communication course around a project methodology intended to develop communicative technique, cooperative interaction, spontaneity and confidence, and reported it both feasible and effective. Arun Raj (2022), using probability sampling with a hundred college students in a pre-test and post-test design, found that video programmes, conversational texts and role-play substantially improved spoken and written communication, and argued for systematic evaluation of teaching practice alongside teacher orientation. Soundara (2019) reached convergent conclusions on communicative strategy at the collegiate level.

Provision architecture completes the picture. Sharma and Thakran (2018) examined open educational

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Volume 19, Issue 2, 2024
https://cgscopus.com/index.php/journals

resources as a response to two conditions that define tribal schooling directly: geographical disparity in educational access and the shortage of qualified and experienced faculty. They describe a delivery model combining graded general courses with specialised business, academic and test-preparation tracks, and identify interactive method, regular assessment and small batch sizes as the conditions under which such provision works. The relevance to remote residential schools is immediate, since open resources can supply subject expertise that a school cannot recruit.

The pattern is unambiguous: where a structured intervention has been applied and measured, it has produced gain, whatever the medium and whatever the target skill. Technology does not, however, displace the teacher. The binding constraint is teacher capacity and motivation rather than method, which matters directly for schools staffed from outside the community and subject to high turnover.

2.3 Access, Enrolment and Retention in Tribal Education

The third strand shifts from the classroom to the structural conditions that determine whether a tribal learner reaches it at all. Khan (2018), studying Ashram Schools and examining literacy patterns among Scheduled Tribes across the census decades from 1961 to 2011, concluded that the education of tribal populations requires specialised institutions and targeted policy rather than general provision. The study also noted the role of the first language in comprehending new terms in the target language, a mechanism that argues for deliberate use of the mother tongue as a bridge rather than for its exclusion.

Enrolment and dropout among tribal girls have been examined directly. Mishra (2020), investigating enrolment at Raibol High School in Odisha through an ethnographic case study, documented an enrolment ratio for tribal girls far below that of the general category despite a long succession of schemes intended to raise it. The persistence of the problem across decades of intervention suggests that its causes lie outside the reach of enrolment-focused schemes alone.

The structural determinants recur with unusual consistency: poverty and the opportunity cost of schooling; distance between school and habitation; irregular teacher attendance; inadequate infrastructure; a curriculum whose cultural content is unfamiliar and therefore inert; and first-generation learning without domestic academic support. Rajasekaran (2022), analysing common communicative problems, identified weak foundational skills, low motivation, poor teaching technique and institutional deficiency as the principal obstacles, and argued that responsibility for remedy is distributed across teachers, learners, parents and society. The relevance to tribal education lies in the insistence that the foundational deficit, not the terminal stage, is where intervention must be located.

Fear of English is a specific and consequential outcome of these conditions. An unsuitable curriculum combined with ineffective method generates negative affect towards the language, and because English is compulsory at higher stages that affect translates into dropout. Tribal children are reported to perform below non-tribal children from the primary grades onward, attributable principally to lower motivation and difficulty adjusting to an unfamiliar curriculum. The compounding factor is linguistic load: a learner may manage four or five codes at once, the tribal mother tongue at home, the regional language at school, Hindi as a third language and English as a fourth, with substantial inter-language interference and frequently no adult at home able to assist.

2.4 Residential Schooling, the Language Environment and Achievement

The fourth strand addresses the institutional response most directly relevant to this review. Dash (2018, 2024) conducted the most closely comparable study available, evaluating the English achievement of Class VIII tribal students across three institutional types, Eklavya Model Residential Schools, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas and SC/ST schools, in two districts selected for the highest and lowest literacy

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Volume 19, Issue 2, 2024
https://cgscopus.com/index.php/journals

rates recorded in the 2011 Census. Using a descriptive survey design with an English achievement test and teacher interview schedules, and a sample of 52 students and 40 teachers, the study found that EMRS students outperformed those in SC/ST schools while JNV students outperformed both. Residential provision designed for tribal learners thus produces a real advantage over ordinary special-category schooling, yet falls short of what a general-purpose residential school achieves. Since all three are residential, residence alone does not explain the gap, which points instead to academic input, teacher quality and language environment.

Language is repeatedly identified as the mechanism. Ramanujam and Meganathan (2019), reviewing language, textbook and medium of instruction in tribal education, show that the medium is itself a primary determinant of comprehension and that textbooks written for a mainstream readership act as a barrier rather than a support. Because most tribal languages lack a written script, children learn from the outset in a code that is not their own, and the scarcity of teachers drawn from tribal communities removes the most natural bridge between home and school language. Surveys of tribal residential schools in Kerala report these problems on both sides of the classroom and strongest at the primary stage, which locates the deficit early: by the secondary years the foundational gap is already established.

Evaluations of the Kerala Model Residential School sector specifically remain limited. Rejimon and Smitha (2021) found the model effective in improving educational participation and outcomes while identifying continuing constraints in infrastructure, academic support and staffing. The wider administrative literature frames the central Kerala paradox directly: a state with exceptionally high aggregate social development continues to record poor tribal educational outcomes, with poverty, exclusion and dropout persisting alongside a residential school network identified as the principal instrument of integration. Notably, none of the Kerala-specific evaluations isolates English as a subject, and none applies the intervention designs surveyed above.

Taken as a whole, the four strands describe a literature divided against itself. Intervention studies report gains with near-uniform consistency; descriptive studies of tribal education report deficits with equal consistency; and the two rarely meet inside the same institution. The interventions that demonstrably work have been tested largely on college and pre-service populations in accessible settings, while the populations most in need of them have been studied descriptively. Table 3 sets out this pattern.

Table 3. Synthesis of studies reviewed (2015-2024)

Strand	Study	Focus / Design	Principal Finding
Learner-centred	Shinde & Karekatti (2015)	Teacher beliefs about ELT	Beliefs shape classroom discourse and learner input
Learner-centred	Singaravelu (2023)	Survey, 570 secondary students	Difficulty with grammar, structure, pronunciation; rote learning
Learner-centred	Muthaiah (2021)	Action research, 50 pre-service teachers	Pronunciation gains; L1 and peer interference identified
Learner-centred	Fitzgerald & Graves (2020)	Scaffolded Reading Experience	Temporary scaffolds convert decoding into comprehension
Learner-centred	Rao (2021)	Descriptive survey, 1,440 students	Urban advantage; excess support reduces creativity
Pedagogy	Sindkhedkar (2015)	Curriculum critique	Current syllabi produce passive learners

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Volume 19, Issue 2, 2024
https://cgscopus.com/index.php/journals

Strand	Study	Focus / Design	Principal Finding
Pedagogy	Gulzar, Ijaz & Gulnaz (2017)	SLA theory and training design	Theory converts into graded four-skill training
Pedagogy	Sharma & Thakran (2018)	Open educational resources	OER addresses access disparity and faculty shortage
Pedagogy	Soundara (2019)	Pre/post design, 100 students	Conversational texts and video improve communication
Pedagogy	Windsor (2020)	VLE grammar scheme, two cohorts	Gains across cohorts; larger for weaker learners
Pedagogy	Rahman (2022)	Project-based oral skills course	Task-based method feasible and effective
Pedagogy	Arun Raj (2022)	Pre/post design, 100 students	Role-play and video improve oral and written skill
Pedagogy	Subbaiah (2024)	Survey and experiment, 271 respondents	Multimedia outperforms conventional; ICT skills lacking
Access	Khan (2018)	Ashram Schools, 1961-2011 literacy data	Specialised institutions and targeted policy required
Access	Ramanujam & Meganathan (2019)	Policy and curriculum analysis	Demand for English outpaces implementation capacity
Access	Mishra (2020)	Case study, tribal girls' enrolment	Low enrolment and high dropout persist despite schemes
Access	Rajasekaran (2022)	Communicative problems analysis	Weak foundations, low motivation, institutional deficiency
Residential	Dash (2018, 2024)	Survey, EMRS / JNV / SC-ST, 52 students	EMRS above SC/ST schools; JNV above both
Residential	Rejimon & Smitha (2021)	MRS evaluation, Kerala	Model effective but constrained by infrastructure

Note. Studies are grouped by analytical strand rather than chronology.

3. Conclusion

This review set out to synthesise what is known about English language learning among students of Model Residential Schools in the tribal areas of Kerala. Four conclusions emerge.

First, the case for English is settled and the policy machinery for delivering it is in place, but implementation is not. From the Kothari Commission onward, policy has treated English as a skill to be taught systematically rather than a literature to be transmitted. Yet demand has outpaced the capacity of policy and curriculum technique to meet it (Ramanujam & Meganathan, 2019), the shortfall is greatest where institutional capacity is weakest, curricula that produce passive recipients remain in circulation (Sindkhedkar, 2015), and teacher belief continues to shape classroom discourse in ways curricular reform does not reach (Shinde & Karekatti, 2015).

Second, the methods that work are known and are not exotic. Structured pronunciation training with modelled audio produces measurable improvement (Muthaiah, 2021); scaffolded reading converts

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Volume 19, Issue 2, 2024
https://cgscopus.com/index.php/journals

decoding into comprehension (Fitzgerald & Graves, 2020); interactive multimedia outperforms conventional instruction (Subbaiah, 2024); virtual grammar provision raises attainment, disproportionately for weaker learners (Windsor, 2020); task-based and role-play methods improve oral and written competence (Rahman, 2022; Arun Raj, 2022; Soundara, 2019); and open educational resources can supply expertise where faculty cannot be recruited (Sharma & Thakran, 2018). None of this lies beyond the reach of a residential school. What it requires is trained, motivated teachers, and here the evidence is discouraging: two-thirds of teacher educators surveyed lacked basic computer competence, and technology use was governed by equipment availability rather than pedagogical intent (Subbaiah, 2024).

Third, the obstacles in tribal settings are structural before they are pedagogical. Distance, poverty, first-generation learning, irregular staffing, culturally unfamiliar textbooks and the management of four or five languages constitute the environment within which any method must operate (Khan, 2018; Mishra, 2020; Rajasekaran, 2022). Weak foundational skill, not terminal-stage difficulty, is the point of failure, and the deficit is established early (Ramanujam & Meganathan, 2019). Fear of English converts into dropout precisely because the subject is compulsory at the stages that matter most for mobility.

Fourth, residential provision works, but incompletely. Tribal learners in Eklavya Model Residential Schools outperform their counterparts in SC/ST schools while remaining behind students in Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (Dash, 2018, 2024). Residence alone does not explain the difference; academic input, teacher quality and the density of the English environment do.

The central gap is therefore not a gap in knowledge about English teaching, nor about tribal disadvantage, but the gap between them. Interventions with demonstrated effect have been tested on accessible populations; the populations that most need them have been documented descriptively. Kerala's Model Residential Schools, which concentrate tribal learners where intervention is administratively feasible and where residence could supply the exposure the home cannot, have not been the site of that work.

4. Future Work

Several lines of enquiry follow directly from the gaps identified above.

Intervention research inside Model Residential Schools. The immediate requirement is experimental and quasi-experimental work that transplants demonstrated methods into the residential tribal setting and measures the result. Pronunciation training with modelled audio, scaffolded reading, task-based oral work and virtual grammar provision have each shown gains elsewhere, but none has been systematically tested with tribal secondary learners in Kerala. Pre-test and post-test designs with matched controls, of the kind used by Muthaiah (2021) and Arun Raj (2022), transfer directly.

Explaining the EMRS-JNV differential. Since residence is common to both, the gap reported by Dash (2018, 2024) must be attributable to variables operating within the schools. Comparative work isolating teacher qualification and turnover, instructional time in English, the density of out-of-class exposure, library and laboratory provision and assessment practice would identify which of these is doing the work, converting a descriptive finding into an actionable one.

Culturally responsive materials. Tribal learners repeatedly find textbook content inert because it depicts unfamiliar urban experience. Developing and evaluating English materials built on local contexts, tribal oral tradition and familiar narrative would test whether cultural proximity in content produces measurable gain in comprehension and retention (Ramanujam & Meganathan, 2019).

Longitudinal tracking. Because the deficit is established early and dropout concentrates at the transitions

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Volume 19, Issue 2, 2024
https://cgscopus.com/index.php/journals

where English becomes compulsory, cohort studies following tribal learners from entry to higher education would establish where attrition actually occurs and permit intervention to be timed rather than merely applied.

Teacher preparation and the tribal teacher. The scarcity of teachers drawn from tribal communities removes the natural bridge between home and school codes. Research on the recruitment, preparation and retention of tribal-origin English teachers, and on bilingual transition methods that treat the mother tongue as a resource rather than as interference (Khan, 2018), would address the mechanism rather than the symptom. In-service technology training for teachers posted to remote schools is equally warranted (Subbaiah, 2024).

Measurement of affect and of oral competence. Fear of English is widely asserted in the tribal education literature but rarely measured, and written examination alone does not capture the speaking and listening skills in which this population is weakest. Validated instruments for language anxiety, administered alongside oral assessment protocols suited to residential tribal schools, would quantify the relationship between affect and attainment and improve both diagnosis and the incentives facing teachers.

Finally, the sample base requires widening. Most Kerala-specific evidence rests on small samples in single districts. Multi-district studies covering Wayanad, Idukki, Palakkad and Kasaragod, which together hold close to two-thirds of the state's tribal population, would supply the statistical power current work lacks and allow the regional variation evident in Table 1 to be examined rather than assumed away.

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