Linguistic Inferiority and Mental Health: Examining the Psychological Impact of English-Medium Education on Tamil-Medium Students in Tamil Nadu Colleges

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Abstract

This study investigates the mental well-being of Tamil-medium students in English-medium higher educational institutions in Tamil Nadu, India. It focuses on linguistic inferiority and its impact on participants' mental health. As English is a global language, it has become a second language in India, where people communicate in various regional languages. In India, English is widely used in higher education, where most participants have a vernacular-language background. The impacts of linguistic transition and mental issues of vernacular-medium participants in English-medium colleges are still poorly studied, and they remain a major localized public health issue. The study used a mixed-methods approach, gathered data through purposive sampling method from 32 participants for quantitative and 29 participants for qualitative analyses. The study revealed considerable psychological distress, such as anxiety, embarrassment, humiliation, and a loss of personal dignity. Language barrier becomes a significant reason for depression or symptoms of depression among 75% of participants and linguistic inferiority increased their anxiety and humiliation. Learning is a group process, and a language can be gained through a good companion, depending on the environment; however, it cannot be learned in isolation. Half of the participants reported feeling isolated. These findings highlight an urgent public health issue, as the challenges faced in understanding and using English seem to cause feelings of inferiority, resulting in serious psychological effects on the participants. In addition, the study emphasizes the need to include strategies and pedagogies to support Tamil-medium students in English-medium higher educational institutions. Furthermore, the study insists on the need for awareness of mental health issues.

Keywords: mental health, language inferiority, emotional struggle, accusation issues for second language learners, language depression

1. Introduction

As English continues to gain importance globally, it prevails in higher education in India which has many regional languages in which English is a second language. Tamil Nadu is one of the states of India where Tamil is the mother tongue, and the second language is used to communicate with other states. Hence, English is a lingua franca within the states of India and bridges the country to the world (Elkhodr, 2024). In today's world, English is considered the language of communication. English speaking has grown widely across countries as it offers job opportunities. In India, particularly in Tamil Nadu, English proficiency is lack in some place that affects Tamil-background higher education participants. They need to learn English to communicate with classmates, faculty members, and others. However, their language aspirations are affected by cultural, economic, and other backgrounds which leads them to linguistic subordination. Participants are prone to psychological issues as there is a link between linguistic subordination and linguistic inferiority complexes (Tankosić & Dovchin, 2021). This linguistic barrier predominates their challenges in the process of learning a second language. This study examines the concept of linguistic inferiority, inadequacy, and low self-esteem which were experienced by the participants while comparing with their mother tongue (Chatterjee & Khan, 2023; Hancock, 2022). Hence, this study helps identify the emotional and mental struggles of Tamil-medium students in an English-medium ambience.

1.1 Literature Review

In particular, the concept of linguistic subordination emphasises that language practice can be successful through understanding and influencing the context (Pennycook, 2010; Sultana et al., 2013). This linguistic subordination has led people to believe that English is superior to their mother tongue, and has caused them to suffer both mentally and psychologically. Therefore, linguistic racism, cultural backgrounds, and language-based discrimination have frequently accompanied linguistic subordination (Tankosić & Dovchin, 2021). In other words, disadvantaged groups, whose language repertoire has revealed their identity, became the primary target of linguistic subordination, which also turned them into victims of linguistic racism. These studies have examined the idea of linguistic inferiority, a feeling of low self-worth or inadequacy that develops when the native language is less important than a dominant one, in this case, English (Chatterjee & Khan, 2023; Hancock, 2022). In addition, young individuals with an inferiority complex or low self-esteem engage in risky or undesirable behaviours. Conceptual and correlational studies have found weak links between low self-esteem and risky behaviours, including substance misuse, violence, poor academic performance, and socially undesirable results. This has shown a strong reaction to poor self-worth and frustration. Like that inferiority complex has caused aggressive annoyance among the aspirants (Kenchappanavar, 2012). With regard to linguistic inferiority complexes, they have indicated the mental and emotional harms of people who have experienced linguistic disadvantage. They have included feeling left out, needing to prove oneself, losing a sense of social belonging, withdrawing from society, feeling afraid, anxious, and losing confidence (Dovchin, 2020; Piller, 2016). Furthermore, language inferiority complexes have been linked to serious psychological problems such as substance misuse, eating disorders, anxiety attacks, sadness, paranoia, and suicidal thoughts (Dovchin, 2020). Anxiety has been considered the most researched emotion in the context of language learning (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). In the perception of language, anxiety has been interpreted as a fluid, integrated emotion with feelings, arousal, purposive, and expressive events. In accordance with Reeve's definition, emotions have been linked to linguistic anxiety, which includes tension, apprehension, concern, dread, upset, and related phrases. In addition to that some physical symptoms have listed, they are the hands shake, the body perspires, the heart beats faster, and the stomach sinks. Reeve (2005) identified heritage language anxiety (HLA) and majority language anxiety (MLA) among minority groups and immigrants. The latter felt nervous and experienced decreased language skills while refraining from using certain words. Sevinç and Backus (2017) identified that immigrants with language anxiety had nervous, confused identities and decreased language skills. Consequently, both teachers and participants have felt anxiety while learning a second language in the classroom. Hence, teachers have suggested many pedagogies, such as suggestopedia, communicative language teaching (CLT), and other ideas; however, participants' performance in learning has not been achieved (Horwitz & Horwitz, 1986). In addition, the learning shift has aimed at international academic access and job opportunities, often bringing serious language and emotional challenges for participants who moved from Tamil-medium schools to English-medium colleges (Gurukishore, 2025; Gupta, 2021). These studies revealed that linguistic issues threaten both mental and public health. Hence, the present study focuses on the English proficiency of Tamil-medium students in higher educational institutions in Tamil Nadu, India.

1.2 Research Objective

To analyse Tamil-medium students' struggle in English-medium education.

To identify the mental health impact of language inferiority complex among Tamil-medium students.

To propose strategies and pedagogies for teachers to support Tamil-medium students.

1.3 Research Question

1. What challenges do Tamil-medium students face during their transition to English-medium education?

2. How has English-medium education created an inferiority complex among Tamil-medium students?

3. What strategies and pedagogies help teachers support Tamil-medium students?

2. Method

This study used a mixed-methods approach, combining numerical data (quantitative) and personal experiences (qualitative), to explore how English-medium education affects the mental health of Tamil-medium students. All the respondents were selected through a purposive sampling method, as they studied Tamil-medium in school education, English-medium in higher education. Their responses were collected through offline and online modes using a questionnaire. The study followed ethical research guidelines. Formal institutional ethics approval was not required as the study involved anonymous, voluntary survey responses with informed consent. Data gathered through 32 participants and analysed using a quantitative method. The questionnaire contained participants' background information, language skills, language difficulties, and previous support. The responses were analysed using SPSS software, allowing researchers to examine frequency counts and percentages to identify patterns and to understand how common certain experiences were among the participants. Responses to open-ended questions (qualitative) were gathered from 29 participants through a qualitative approach, and these responses were recorded and further discussed in the study. The collected data revealed that many Tamil-medium students have been victims of emotional struggles due to the language gap in higher educational institutions in Tamil Nadu. The findings show that many participants have anxiety, inadequacy, and symptoms of depression because of their lack of fluency in English. These issues are not only academically but also mentally deep (Chatterjee & Khan, 2023; Horwitz, 1986). Recognizing these emotional challenges is essential from a localized public health perspective, as it helps shape well-rounded support systems that go beyond improving English skills. These systems must also address participants' mental comfort as they navigate linguistically diverse learning

spaces (Ma &Lin, 2022; Jaremus, 2025). Tackling these issues are key to building inclusive classrooms and preventing participants from feeling isolated or left out (Kenchappanavar 2012; Liu 2022).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Demographical Details

Background of the participants including gender, education, medium of instruction, and socio-economic condition are shown in Table-1.

Table 1. Demographic and Educational Background

S. No	Particulars	Details	N=	Percentage
1	Gender	Female	13	40.6
		Male	19	59.4
2	Age	18-21	12	37.5
		22-25	8	25
		26 and above	12	37.5
3	Location of School Education	Rural	11	34.4
		Semi-urban	3	9.4
		Urban	17	53.1
		Urban | Semi-urban	1	3.1
4	Educational Qualification	MPhil	3	9.4
		Other	2	6.3
		PG (postgraduate)	9	28.1
		PhD	4	12.4
		UG (undergraduate)	14	43.8
5	Discipline of Study	Arts	21	65.6
		Commerce	4	12.4
		Engineering	2	6.3
		Other	2	6.3
		Science	3	9.4
6	Type of Institution	Autonomous	17	53%
		Autonomous/Government Aided	4	12.5%
		Government	6	18.8%
		Government Aided	5	15.6%
7	Medium of School Education	Tamil Medium	32	100%
8	What is the First Language Spoken at Home?	Tamil	32	100%
9	What best describes your socio-economic background?	Elite | Rural	1	3.1
		Middle-class	13	40.6
		Middle-class | Rural	1	3.1
		Poor	1	3.1
		Rural	7	21.9
		Urban	9	28.2

3.2 Competency Level

Participants' competency in mother tongue and their second language English is shown in Table-2.

Table 2. Competency and Communication

S. No	Particulars	Details	N=	Percentage
10	Do you consider yourself a fluent English speaker?	No	10	31.3
		Somewhere	13	40.6
		Yes	9	28.1
11	What is your common language of communication with your friends?	Mix of English and Tamil	14	43.8
		Tamil	18	56.2
12	When did you start improving your English language skills?	First year during Degree	4	12.5
		Last year during Degree	12	37.5
		In high school	8	25
		In primary school	5	15.6
		Still struggling	3	9.4

Language learning is a long process, and in Indian academic settings, English plays a pivotal role. Moreover, communication in English is inevitable in the field. Yet, proficiency in that language is crucial among Tamil-medium background participants at English-medium

higher educational institutions. English proficiency secures job opportunities for second-language learners. However, the selected respondents' opportunities were affected by their lack of proficiency in English.

Table-2 shows their language competency.

The 28.1% of English fluency among the participants reveals that they are good at English language skills others are struggling for cope with English speaking. In a nutshell, Participants are known limited language exposer in English, as the participants mostly used their mother tongue to communicate with their peers (56.2%). Furthermore, their responses (37.5%) to Question 12 revealed that most of the participants started to improve their language at the college level which means they did not use the second language to communicate in real-life contexts at Tamil-medium schools. They have poor self-confidence in English, and their job opportunities are affected by linguistic insecurity (Dovchin, 2020). From localized a public health perspective, these feelings of insufficiency are more than academic concerns; they contribute to ongoing psychological stress, anxiety, and a reduced belief in one's abilities, all of which heighten vulnerability to mental health challenges (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Moreover, this internalised sense of linguistic inferiority may lead to self-stigmatisation and withdrawal from academic participation and social interactions. The preference for Tamil in everyday peer interactions indicates that many participants are getting sufficient exposure to English within their social circles while 43.8% used a mix of English and Tamil. As a result, Tamil-medium students often switch between two linguistic worlds: socially Tamil and academically English (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Sun, 2022). This linguistic divide made disconnected or out of place, especially when interacting with more English fluent peers (Chatterjee & Khan, 2023; Dovchin, 2020). Over time, this may reinforce feelings of linguistic inferiority, triggering social anxiety, a sense of exclusion, and lower self-confidence in communication, which can seriously affect participants' mental health and college life (Kenchappanavar, 2012). Although English communication is in practice, the majority of participants (37.5%) stated that they began trying to improve their English skills only last year of degree in higher education. A smaller proportion started this process in high school (25.0%) and primary school (15.6%). Interestingly, 12.5% reported that they started learning English during first year graduation, and 9.4% disclosed that they were still struggling with English. The fact that many participants started to communicate in English during and after higher education reveals a significant gap in the early preparation for English-medium higher education (Arias-Sais, 2014; Bork & Mondisa, 2022). This late preparation for gaining proficiency in English leads to immediate pressure, self-doubt, and a strong sense of linguistic inferiority (Dovchin,2020; Chau, 2024). Some (9.4 %) reported a deeper, long-term problem, such as ongoing language barriers that can result in anxiety, frustration, and academic inadequacy (Ma &Lin, 2022; Pennycook, 2010). This advocates the urgent need for public health and educational support systems to bridge these gaps in early language learning (Pennycook, 2010).

3.3 Cognitive Support

The process of language learning can be successful when it meets all the necessary elements in the academic environment that could reduce stress, anxiety, and low self-esteem. The below table-3 contains the emotional and psychological responses of the participants.

Table 3. Environment and Metal Health

S. No	Particulars	Details	N=	Percentage
13	How do you feel when writing your exams in English?	completely overwhelmed	2	6.3
		Confident	11	34.4
		Nervous but manageable	17	53.1
		struggle to express myself	2	6.2
14	How do you feel when the professor asks or explains something in English in front of the class?	confident to respond	12	37.5
		Do not understand and feel excluded	1	3.1
		understand but hesitate to respond	19	59.4
15	How do you feel when introducing yourself in English in front of others?	Anxious	14	43.8
		Comfortable	11	34.4
		Embarrassed	3	9.3
		Silent or avoid speaking	4	12.5

16	Do you believe the environment (college/classroom/friends) is important in learning to speak English fluently?	No	6	18.8
		Not sure	1	3.1
		Yes	25	78.1
17	Since moving from school to college, have you ever felt depressed due to language issues?	No	8	25.0
		Sometimes	10	31.2

		Yes	14	43.8
18	Do you think there is something called language depression caused by not knowing English well?	Yes	20	62.5
		Not sure	2	6.3
		Sometimes	9	28.1
		No	1	3.1
19	Have you ever felt: Self-worthless due to poor English skills?	No	8	25.0
		Yes	24	75.0
20	Are you alienated from your peers because of your English fluency?	Yes	16	50.0
		No	16	50.0

3.4 The Role of Environmental

A substantial majority (78.1%) strongly agreed that the environment is important for gaining English fluency, and this widespread agreement reflects participants' instinctive understanding of the role of ecological factors in language acquisition (Jaremus, 2025; Workie, 2020). According to a Public Health report, if an essential supportive environment is absent or perceived as hostile (due to language barriers), it directly affects mental well-being (Jaremus, 2025). For Tamil-medium students, an inaccessible or incompatible English-medium environment contributes to their language competency. This withdrawal from social and classroom involvement is a significant concern. Furthermore, it increases their anxiety in learning (Kenchappanavar, 2012).

3.5 Language Depression

Cognition can be blocked by any kind of depression, which plays a crucial role in the process of language learning, especially in a second language. Therefore, an apt, peaceful, and contributing environment leads learners towards competency. The lack of these components in a learning environment certainly causes deep depression to the learners and reduces their language competency. While Table-3 reveals 43.8% explicitly reported feeling depressed due to language issues, an additional 31.2% reported experiencing such feelings occasionally, indicating a high prevalence of language-related emotional distress. The findings show that lectures, teachers' communication, and peer interaction in English at English-medium higher education institutions caused emotional struggles to participants from Tamil-language backgrounds (Arias-Sais, 2014; Piller, 2016). It is evident that participants' mental health is severely affected by their low proficiency in English (Arias-Sais, 2014; Bork & Mondisa, 2022). As the findings revealed the existence of linguistic inferiority among most of the participants, it is not an individual problem; therefore, the study demands attention to public health. English learning is a barrier for second language learners due to its accent and pronunciation. Moreover, they have a lack of opportunities to speak in classrooms and campuses because of their low proficiency in English (Wu, 2015; Xintong & Xiaofei, 2024). Hence, the findings of the study suggest incorporating strategies and pedagogical approaches in higher educational institutions to avoid linguistic and emotional conflicts among participants from vernacular backgrounds (Bork & Mondisa, 2022).

According to Bourdies (1992), language competency confirms one's respect and position in society, as it retains healthy communication. Hence, Linguistic is a bridge to interconnect people. Opportunities are blocked to fewer competencies. As Tamil-medium students in English-medium colleges have lack of English proficiency, their social communication is not increased. So, interconnection between the peer is blocked because of their social exclusion and linguistic capital. This inferiority leads to psychological issues, such as fear, anxiety, and low self-esteem. These elements are withdrawing the participants from active participation, as Krashen (1985) mentioned in *Affective Filter*. The study states most of the participant experienced emotional struggle related to linguistic inferiority increased their anxiety and humiliation. High levels of anxiety-related responses were consistently observed across multiple indicators, including exam situations, classroom interaction, and self-introduction tasks, suggesting that language-related emotional distress is widespread among the participants

3.6 Feeling Self-worthless due to Poor English Skills

Confidence comes when learners know how to use the language. Learners' disposition reinforces motivation towards cognition, whereas it decreases self-esteem, which could be a concern for mental and public health. A total of 75.0% of participants answered "yes" to *feeling worthless due to poor English proficiency*. This impactful finding highlights the serious psychological impact and significant public health concern, as the feeling of "self-worthlessness" deals a deep blow to a person's mental well-being and disrupts their sense of identity (Piller, 2016). This proves that the linguistic inferiority complex of Tamil-medium students in an English-dominant environment directly reduces their significance and self-esteem (Chatterjee & Khan, 2023). This result directs immediate attention from public health practitioners and educators to address the systemic factors that contribute to such distressing emotional states.

Feeling alienated received equal responses from the participants, that is, 50% "Yes" and 50% "No." This proposition reveals a major public health issue related to social integration and mental health. Half of the participants experienced social alienation due to their fluency in English, which indicates that linguistic inferiority complex acts as a barrier to peer bonding (Kenchappanavar, 2012). This social isolation results in worsening conditions such as loneliness, depression, and anxiety. This prevents full participation in college life and leads to withdrawal, which are all major mental health risks (Reeve, 2005).

3.7 Fear of Exam

In the process of learning, especially in a second language, fear closes all doors of hope. Fear arises when learners feel uncomfortable. Regarding exam fear, 53.1% reported that the most common feeling was "nervous but manageable." 34.4% felt "confident" while 6.3% felt "completely overwhelmed" and 6.2% felt "struggle to express myself". For those who are concerned that it is "manageable," the underlying "nervousness" refers to the persistent anxiety that occurs during critical academic tasks. (Shami, 2025). For the 12.6% who are "overwhelmed" or "struggle to express," the language barrier directly impacts their ability to show their knowledge, ultimately leading to poorer academic outcomes and reinforced feelings of linguistic inferiority (Dovchin, 2020; Chau, 2024). Academic stress is increasing, leading to mental health challenges, especially when participants are more concerned about their performance due to language barriers than due to skill deficiencies. Fear or any emotional repercussions cause learners to regret and experience psychological distress (Chen, 2023).

3.8 Respond for Question

A significant majority (59.4%) reported that "understand, but hesitate to respond." Only 37.5% felt "confident to responding," and a small 3.1% reported "do not understand, feel excluded." These responses revealed that most participants had low proficiency in English because they were afraid of peers, committing mistakes, and public judgment (Dovchin, 2020). This leads them to withdraw listening, understanding, clarification, and classroom contribution (Samanta & Banerjee, 2023). These emotional struggles among participants caused social exclusion, which affected their cognition process and resulted in mental health issues (Kenchappanavar, 2012).

The study revealed that the participants needed peer communication to enhance their language skills. However, fear, anxiety, depression, and language inadequacy are known hindrances to public communication. However, language cannot be acquired without interaction with others. The study revealed that 65.7% of participants [43.8 (anxious) + 9.3(embraced) + 12.5 (silent or avoid speaking)] were uncomfortable with public interaction because they were unable to express themselves in front of both teachers and classmates. Thus, this study confirms the public health concerns among the participants. For over half the participants (65.7% reported feeling anxious, embarrassed, or silent/avoid), even a simple social interaction like self-introduction in English triggered negative emotional responses and avoidance behaviors (Dovchin, 2020).This directly links perceived linguistic inferiority to social discomfort and withdrawal, which can severely impact participants' ability to form new relationships, network, and engage in social activities, all of which are vital for positive mental health in a college environment (Reeve, 2005).

3.9 Negative Experience due to Language Barrier

An extensive range of negative emotions was reported, often in combination: Fear, Anxiety, Embarrassment, Grief, Shock, Humiliation, Loss of enjoyment in learning, loss of dignity, and mental anguish (Dovchin, 2020; Kenchappanavar 2012). Very few participants reported the absence of negative emotional experiences, which remains the most compelling evidence for the severe psychological impact of linguistic inferiority within the academic setting (Chatterjee & Khan, 2023). "The sheer breadth and intensity of" reported emotions, particularly "humiliation," "loss of dignity," and "mental anguish," signify a profound and damaging experience for a significant majority of participants (Dovchin, 2020). This is not merely an academic inconvenience but a public health crisis, where the learning environment itself becomes a source of severe psychological trauma due to language barriers (Arias-Sais, 2014). These findings strongly advocate for public health interventions to create more inclusive and psychologically safe learning spaces. (Jaremus, 2025; Workie, 2020). Policy makers should note down these issues for find solution.

4. Qualitative Analyses

In order to understand the emotion and mental ability of the participants, responses were collected through open ended questions.

Question 1: How do you feel when reading academic texts and attending lectures in English?

Responses	Answers
Responses No 1	Afraid to speak in English
Responses No 2	After reading novels attending classes became easy and useful.
Responses No 3	Better
Responses No 4	Confident
Responses No 5	Depressed
Responses No 6	Difficulty understanding vocabulary, technical terms, unfamiliarity with cultural nuances
Responses No 7	Feel bad
Responses No 8	Feel nothing
Responses No 9	Fine
Responses No 10	Good
Responses No 11	Good to read academic texts
Responses No 12	Honest and Growth-Focused Answer
Responses No 13	I can able understand meaning, not to be response
Responses No 14	I can understand the concept of text.
Responses No 15	I feel happy
Responses No 16	I felt confused

Responses No 17	I felt, I need to improve my English fluency and understanding ability
Responses No 18	I could not understanding
Responses No 19	Interesting
Responses No 20	It feels good and comfortable
Responses No 21	It was difficult to understand
Responses No 22	It's good
Responses No 23	Little bit difficult
Responses No 24	Reading no issues while speaking very nervous in front of all
Responses No 25	Some books made me think that I should improve my vocabulary skills.
Responses No 26	Struggling sometimes
Responses No 27	Understandable
Responses No 28	Useful to develop the understanding skill in English language
Responses No 29	Well good

Question 2: If you would like to share a personal experience related to language struggles in your academic journey, please do so here:

Responses	Answers
Responses No 1	All the English period of my 2nd year class going very anxious and nervous because of my English sir
Responses No 2	Due to lack fluency and English accent, I haven't get good job
Responses No 3	Fear
Responses No 4	Fear of public
Responses No 5	I can speak in English, but sometimes I feel low because of lack of vocabularies.
Responses No 6	I felt unhappy in some situations
Responses No 7	I have hesitate to speak in English
Responses No 8	I know the answer to the question, but I doubt myself when it comes to expressing it, so I don't say
Responses No 9	I make some grammar mistake to speak in English at seminar presentation
Responses No 10	I strongly believe that one's effect on self-improvement in reading will lead to basic skills.
Responses No 11	I was really struggled to take seminar in front of everyone
Responses No 12	I would like to get language skills training
Responses No 13	I've never experienced language struggles on my academic journey
Responses No 14	In college, I feel my fluency in English very poor compared to other participants.
Responses No 15	It's very struggle to improve
Responses No 16	lack of vocabulary
Responses No 17	Language support classes, bilingual resources, multilingual instructors.
Responses No 18	Make spelling mistake on examination
Responses No 19	No
Responses No 20	No mention
Responses No 21	Not able to speak English to others.
Responses No 22	Not exposing myself because of hesitation to speak
Responses No 23	Nothing
Responses No 24	Nothing like that
Responses No 25	Once my tongue got twisted while I was pronouncing a word. That's unbearable.
Responses No 26	Stay confident. English is just a language not a burden
Responses No 27	When I first started studying in an English-speaking environmental.
Responses No 28	Whenever i spoke English I feel very fear and nervous , this is the reason
Responses No 29	Yes but manageable

Question 3: How did you overcome the language barrier in English?

Responses	Answers
Responses No 1	After joining college i overcame this barrier through interaction with My friends
Responses No 3	By practicing confidentiality again and again
Responses No 4	By practising everyday
Responses No 5	By taking seminars
Responses No 6	By watching movies, regular practice and learned new vocabulary.
Responses No 7	Communication with friends
Responses No 8	Practicing self-conversation in English
Responses No 9	Frequently speaking in English
Responses No 10	I spoke in mix of Tamil and English to overcome the barrier
Responses No 11	I will start to read books, daily newspaper in English
Responses No 12	I'm still struggling to overcome from this.

Responses No 13	It's good
Responses No 14	None
Responses No 15	Nothing
Responses No 16	observe and interact with others
Responses No 17	Practical Learning Approach
Responses No 18	Practice
Responses No 19	Reading
Responses No 20	Reading books, watching news and movies
Responses No 21	Self Confidence
Responses No 22	Self-studied and it has become my profession
Responses No 23	Speak
Responses No 24	Speaking with my friends
Responses No 25	Still I am struggling to ruler
Responses No 26	Still now. I haven't completely accomplished the barrier of English
Responses No 27	Through consistent efforts to overcome it
Responses No 28	Using variety of learning methods, improve vocabulary and master in grammar.
Responses No 29	Watching English movies with subtitles
Responses No 29	Watching English movies with subtitles

Based on the linguistic inferiority of the respondents, the study has four major themes: emotional struggle and low self-esteem, social alienation and isolation, self-directed coping strategies, and anxiety and mental health impact. An inductive thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to analyse the qualitative data. The study revealed that emotional and mental struggles are not isolated experiences but are statistically and narratively consistent across participants.

Question 1: How do you feel when reading academic texts and attending lectures in English?

4.1 Emotional Struggle and Low Self-Esteem

A common issue that can be observed from the experiences of the contributors was "the extreme emotional pain" and "destruction of self-esteem" caused by the inadequacy felt in the usage of English language (Dovchin, 2020). Participants often experience overwhelming anxiety and insecurity, which can lead to feelings of humiliation. Participants found it emotionally draining when confronted with academic English. This shows how a mere academic difficulty can turn into a psychological issue. The participants expressed the feeling of "anxiety and nervousness" while they attending English classes felt "panic" over the prospect of public speaking in English, which indicates language insecurity that causes social anxiety (Dovchin, 2020). Most of the participants reported "unconsciously lacking" and "insufficient English language skills" that were the direct reason for their "low self-esteem" (Chatterjee & Khan, 2023). This points out how proficiency in English language is directly connected to the respondents' self-worth, as feeling inadequate in the language causes destruction of their worth and dignity (Piller, 2016). The qualitative findings support the quantitative data on mental health, confirming the idea of "language depression" (Arias-Sais, 2014; Bork & Mondisa, 2022).

Question 2: If you would like to share a personal experience related to language struggles in your academic journey, please do so here:

4.2 Communication Difficulties Triggering Detachment and Isolation

The qualitative finding shows difficulty of English language prevent the participant from active participation in the class, which further leads to academic detachment and isolation. Irrespective of understanding the English content presented to them, the preconceived notion of "understand but hesitate" condition is prevalent (Samanta & Banerjee, 2023). While "Though I know the answer, I won't say it because I doubt myself" the question showcased the understanding of academic lectures and texts. Fear to face the public and fear to commit mistakes were reduced active participation among the respondents which reveals their self-established inhibition (Dovchin,2020). Similarly, fear and hesitation prevents the participant from many academic opportunities and the chances for clearing their doubts which further causes inadequate language learning and increases academic anxiety (Chau, 2024). This language barrier extends beyond the classroom scenario and extends to social interactions. As observed earlier, almost half of the participants experienced "a feeling of alienation from their peers due to poor language fluency" (Kenchappanavar, 2012). Answers to Question 29 from the qualitative data reported "inferior compared to other participants" in English, which leads to the conclusion that language inferiority causes social distance. Such conditions lead to poor social interaction with peers and a lack of sense of belonging, both of which are significant for mental health in an academic atmosphere (Reeve, 2005).

Question 3: How did you overcome the language barrier in English?

4.3 The Laborious, Self-Dependent Learning of Language and Its Costs

The qualitative study showed that getting over the English language barrier is considered a laborious, continuous, and basically a self-done process, which was taken without proper aid and caused severe stress (Pennycook, 2010). Responses to the Question 18 "Whether you relayed on some source to help you English language learning process" revealed that most participants were "did it myself (their

selves)" They answered that they got "zero aid", this qualitative data supports the *self-dependent learning process*. Irrespective of the self-driven learning process, the participants expressed *that it was tiresome and draining*. Many of the participants reported, "I'm still trying to overcome the language barrier" or "Till now I'm unable to completely get over the English language barrier", such claims can be seen repeated for Question 29 such as, "I find it difficult to enhance vocabulary," pointing out how English language learning is an ongoing and emotionally draining process instead of being a linear process (Chau, 2024). From the perspective of public health, this signifies the neglected need for convenient, psychologically attuned language assistance and psychological adjustment strategies from educational institutions, instead of allowing participants to figure it out on their own (Ma & Lin, 2022; Jaremus, 2025; Wang Y, 2022).

5. Conclusion

This extensive study firmly indicates the psychological impact of English-medium teaching on Tamil-medium students in Tamil Nadu colleges, insisting that linguistic inferiority is a major cause of mental health issues. The study revealed that the participants experienced high levels of stress. The participants showed *symptoms of depression*, *low self-esteem* due to linguistic inadequacy, language-related emotional distress, ranging from occasional to persistent. The qualitative study further reveals that participants were disengaged and isolated because of communication barriers, such as prevalent anxiety, fear of embarrassment, and humiliation, which affect their academic performance. The most common self-dependent learning strategy without proper academic support contributes to a heavier workload, causing excess stress. This study reveals that the language barrier in English is not only a hurdle to academic achievement but also to public health issues that affect the mental well-being of individuals. To address this issue, educational institutions and policymakers must consider implementing instant cumulative linguistic and psychological measures to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment for participants.

6. Recommendations

Based on the observations of the study, the following recommendations are drawn to ensure mental well-being and improve the academic performance of Tamil-medium students in English-medium colleges:

● Apply Pre-College Bridge Course Programs in English: Provide compulsory English language bridge courses for students from the vernacular medium at the beginning of the college academic session, insisting on building a foundation in grammar, vocabulary, and speaking skills (Gurukishore, 2025).

● Enhance the Language Support Centers in the College: Create convenient language support centers with adequate resources in the college with free, well-designed extra classes, one-on-one teaching, and group discussions in peer groups (Pennycook, 2010).

● Implement Mental Health Checkups: Screen all participants through regular mental health check-ups focusing on language distress, such as anxiety and symptoms of depression (Bork & Mondisa, 2022).

● Provide Linguistically-Informed Counselling Services: Ensure that the college counselling services have well-trained staff who will be able to meet the psychological needs of the student that arise from language inferiority and exposure to a new culture (Bork & Mondisa, 2022).

● Conduct Linguistic Training for the Faculty Members: Conduct compulsory training programs for the faculties on culturally informed teaching, acknowledging linguistic diversity, and implementing inclusive teaching methods to make the learning environment accessible for non-native English-speaking students (Gupta, 2021; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012).

● Embrace inclusive classroom rules: Faculty should create a participant-friendly environment to encourage participants to ask questions in their native language before gradually shifting to English (Samanta & Banerjee, 2023).

● Provide Additional Bilingual Academic Guide: Provide study materials containing glossaries or summaries in both English and Tamil to make the initial transition period easier for the participants to understand without neglecting the need to instruct in English (Jaremus, 2025).

● Encourage Peer Mentoring and Support Systems: Conduct group learning programs where a new student is combined with a senior, which improves both language and social skills (Kenchappanavar, 2012; Liu, 2022).

● Re-evaluate and Establish New Curriculum Design: The college committee responsible for crafting the curriculum must re-evaluate the present design and include a new design that is more accessible for participants through gradual exposure to the linguistic inferiority complex of English (Chau, 2024).

● Establish Public Health Policy Making: Policymakers and public health organizations must recognize that language barriers are prevalent in academia and must allocate resources to research to avoid problems (Arias-Sais, 2014; Ma & Lin, 2022; Jaremus, 2025).

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Authors' contributions

Dr. A Priya and Dr. Devibala B were responsible for study design and revising. Dr. Coumaran G and Dr. Anu Baisel, was responsible for data collection. Dr. Sangeeth Kumar A drafted the manuscript and Saravanan V, revised it. All authors read and approved the final

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Obtained.

Ethics approval

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