



An Analysis of Struggles Faced by Students Studied in Tamil Medium to Cape up College Education and Means to Overcome it with Specific Reference to SOEL

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Abstract

This research paper focuses on analyzing the struggles faced by students who completed their schooling in the Tamil medium and now pursue higher education in English-medium institutions, with specific reference to the School of Excellence in Law (SOEL), Tamil Nadu Dr. Ambedkar Law University. The transition from Tamil to English as the primary medium of instruction often poses significant academic, psychological, and social challenges for these students. The study explores the major difficulties experienced in areas such as understanding lectures, writing assignments, participating in discussions, and coping with peer competition. Many Tamil-medium students face language barriers that lead to reduced self-confidence, classroom anxiety, and a sense of inferiority compared to their English-medium peers. The paper adopts a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative data collected through structured questionnaires and qualitative insights from interviews with Tamil-medium students. The findings reveal that a lack of language proficiency and inadequate institutional support are the primary causes of poor adaptation and performance. However, the study also identifies several positive coping mechanisms, including peer group support, faculty mentorship, and remedial English training programs that help bridge the communication gap. The research highlights the importance of inclusive educational strategies, such as bilingual teaching methods, language support centers, and skill development workshops, to ensure that Tamil-medium students are not academically or socially disadvantaged. Ultimately, this study aims to provide practical recommendations for educational policymakers and institutions like SOEL to create a more equitable learning environment for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Keywords: Tamil-medium students, language barrier, higher education, academic adaptation, coping strategies, bilingual education, communication skills, psychological challenges.

1. Introduction

Language plays a crucial role in shaping one's educational journey, especially in a multilingual country like India, where the medium of instruction greatly influences learning outcomes. For many students in Tamil Nadu, schooling in the Tamil medium provides a strong foundation in regional language and culture but often becomes a barrier when they enter higher education institutions where English is the primary medium of instruction. This linguistic transition creates a gap that affects not only academic performance but also confidence, participation, and overall college experience. At the School of Excellence in Law (SOEL), where legal studies demand a deep understanding of complex English texts, terminologies, and communication, Tamil-medium

students frequently struggle to keep pace with their peers from English-medium backgrounds. These struggles are not simply about language; they extend to emotional and social dimensions as well. Students often feel hesitant to speak in class, participate in debates, or write essays, fearing grammatical mistakes or misinterpretation. Over time, this can lead to feelings of isolation and inferiority, impacting their academic growth and self-esteem. Despite these challenges, many Tamil-medium students exhibit strong determination and resilience in overcoming obstacles, often relying on peer support, self-learning, and mentorship from understanding faculty members. This research aims to analyze the specific struggles faced by Tamil-medium students at SOEL, understand their coping mechanisms, and suggest

effective measures to bridge the language and learning gap. By doing so, the study seeks to promote inclusivity and equal academic opportunity for all students, irrespective of their linguistic background.

2. Review of Literature

- i). **Language and Academic Performance (Kumar & Devi, 2022):** Kumar and Devi (2022) examined how the medium of instruction influences academic success in higher education. Their research found that Tamil-medium students struggle to understand English lectures, textbooks, and assignments, which lowers their confidence and grades. The difficulty is not due to lack of intelligence but limited exposure to academic English. Many students hesitate to ask questions or take part in discussions because of language insecurity. The study highlighted the need for continuous English language support and mentoring. It concluded that building language proficiency early can greatly enhance performance and participation in college.
- ii). **Socio-Linguistic Challenges (Nirmala, 2023):** Nirmala (2023) studied how language differences affect social interaction among Tamil-medium students in English-medium institutions. She observed that these students often feel isolated and hesitant to speak due to accent or grammar fears. This linguistic insecurity leads to reduced class participation and limits peer bonding. The study noted that communication barriers also affect confidence during seminars and group activities. Nirmala emphasized the importance of creating an inclusive classroom where teachers use bilingual explanations. She concluded that encouraging peer collaboration and supportive faculty behavior can break the language barrier effectively.
- iii). **Bridging the Gap (Rajendran, 2021):** Rajendran (2021) focused on practical steps to help Tamil-medium students adjust to English-based education. His research suggested that bridge courses and peer mentoring are the most effective solutions. These programs allow students to gradually improve their vocabulary, writing, and comprehension skills. Rajendran found that learning from peers who faced similar challenges builds comfort and motivation. He proposed that colleges include legal English and communication skill training in the first year. His findings stressed that such measures make education more inclusive and less intimidating for Tamil-medium learners.
- iv). **Psychological Adjustment (Srinivasan, 2024):** Srinivasan (2024) explored the emotional and mental struggles of Tamil-medium students entering English-medium colleges. The study found that these students often develop anxiety, low self-esteem, and fear of failure due to language difficulties. Many experience an inferiority complex when compared to fluent English speakers. The stress of adjusting to a new learning environment affects both mental health and academic performance. Srinivasan suggested that teachers should offer encouragement, empathy, and additional guidance. He also recommended orientation programs and counseling sessions to boost confidence among Tamil-medium students.
- v). **Policy Studies (UGC Reports, 2023):** The UGC Report (2023) emphasized the importance of multilingual education to ensure inclusivity in higher learning. It recommended that universities adopt bilingual teaching

methods and introduce bridge courses for regional-medium students. The policy highlighted that students from vernacular backgrounds need special support during their transition to English-medium studies. It also proposed the establishment of language labs and skill development centers across colleges. The report stated that promoting linguistic diversity improves equality and learning outcomes. Such initiatives can particularly help institutions like SOEL in supporting Tamil-medium students.

3. Research Methodology

i). Population and Sample

The population of this study consists of students who have completed their schooling in Tamil medium and are currently pursuing their legal education at the School of Excellence in Law (SOEL). These students were chosen as they represent a diverse range of academic years and backgrounds. A total of 30 respondents were selected using a convenience sampling method, ensuring easy accessibility and voluntary participation. The sample includes both male and female students from different batches to gain a balanced understanding of their struggles. This approach helps to capture real experiences of Tamil-medium students across various academic levels.

ii). Data Collection Methods

The data for this study was collected through a structured questionnaire and personal interviews with Tamil-medium students of SOEL. The questionnaire was distributed both online via Google Forms and through direct interaction on campus. This dual method ensured that participants could respond comfortably and honestly, in their own time. Each question was designed to explore specific areas such as academic adaptation, communication barriers, and emotional well-being. The use of mixed methods allowed for both quantitative and qualitative insights into the challenges faced by students.

iii). Research Instruments

The main research instrument used in this study was a well-structured questionnaire, which included both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The questions focused on areas like language difficulties, classroom participation, examination pressure, peer interaction, and institutional support systems. Additional interview sessions provided deeper insights into personal coping mechanisms and student experiences. The instrument was carefully designed to maintain clarity and simplicity, allowing respondents to express their views freely. This helped in collecting authentic and relevant data that reflects the true academic experiences of Tamil-medium learners.

iv). Data Analysis Technique

The collected data was analyzed using mean analysis and the percentage method, which helped identify patterns and common challenges among Tamil-medium students. The responses were categorized according to the frequency of recurring issues like language struggle, performance stress, and communication gaps. The mean values were used to interpret overall satisfaction and adaptability levels among students. Charts and tabular summaries were prepared to represent the findings in an organized manner. This method of analysis ensured accuracy and helped in drawing meaningful conclusions from the responses.

v). **Research Questions****1. Age**

- Below 18
- 18-20
- 20-22
- Above 22

2. Gender

- Male
- Female
- Not prefer to say

3. Current year of study

- I Year
- II Year
- III Year
- IV Year
- V Year

4. Family Background

- Rural
- Semi-urban
- Urban

5. Parent's education

- Illiterate
- Primary level
- Secondary level
- Graduate and above

6. Do you face difficulty in understanding English-Medium lecture?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

7. Which type of support would help you the most?

- Bilingual teaching
- Remedial classes
- Peer mentoring programs
- Extra reference materials in Tamil

8. Do teachers provide additional support for Tamil-medium students?

- Yes, always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

9. What methods do you use to overcome language difficulties?

- Extra coaching
- Peer support
- Self-study with dictionary
- Online resources

10. Do you feel inferior compared to English-Medium students?

- Strongly agree

- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree

11. Do you face teasing/bullying due to Tamil-Medium background?

- Yes, often
- Sometimes
- Never

12. Have you attended any language improvement programs conducted by SOEL?

- Yes
- No

13. If yes, were they effective

- Very effective
- Somewhat effective
- No effective

14. Which subject area do you find most difficult due to language barriers?

- Law subjects with technical terms
- Communicational papers
- General electives
- None

15. Has language barrier affected your Self-confidence?

- Yes, significantly
- To some extent
- No

16. Do you think availability of bilingual textbooks/study materials will reduce struggles?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree

17. Do you think SOEL should conduct regular English skill-building workshops?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree

18. Do you feel stressed while writing exams in English?

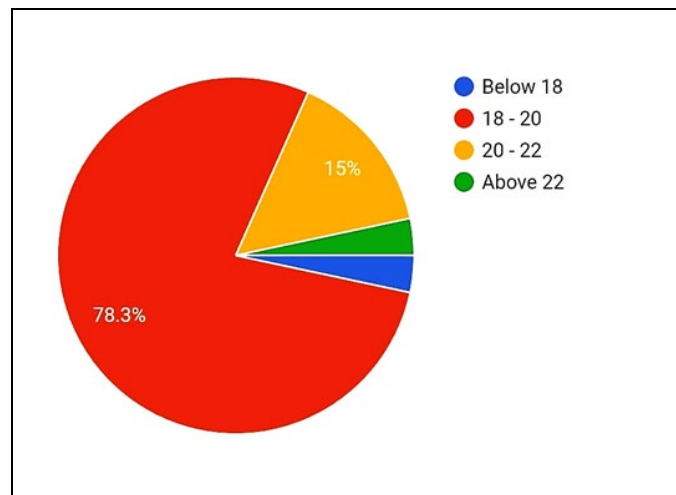
- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

19. In your opinion, single initiative by SOEL would most help Tamil medium students?

- Short answer

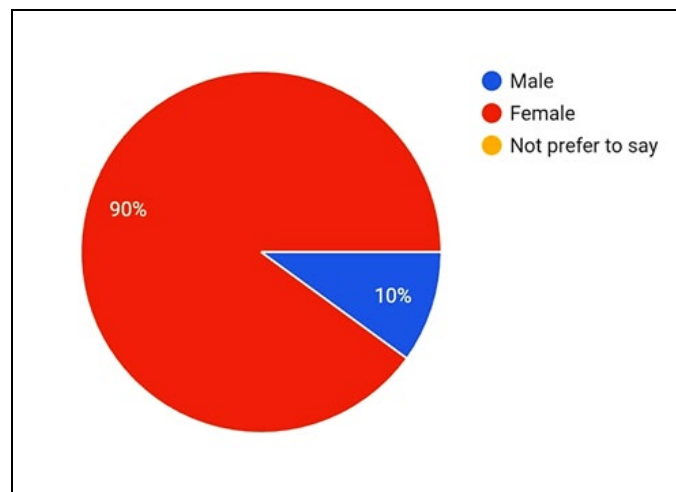
4. Findings

i). Age



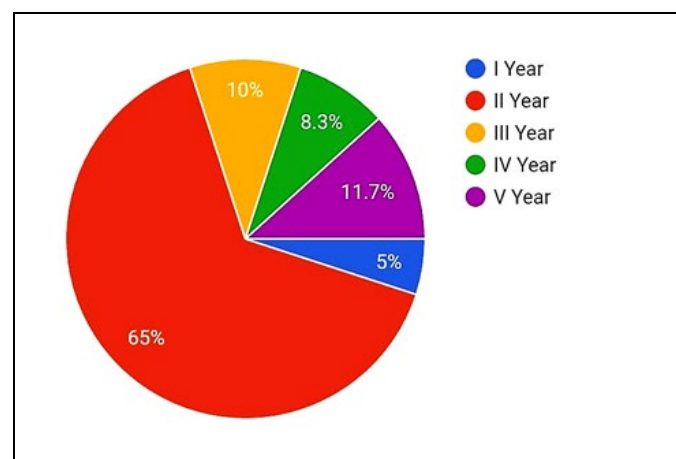
Among the selected population of respondents, A majority of students (78.3%) are between 18–20 years, indicating that most respondents are in their undergraduate years.

ii). Gender



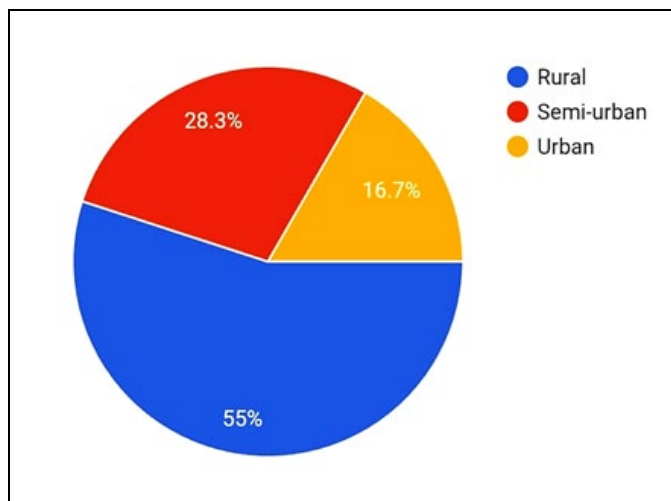
Among the selected population of respondents, The sample is predominantly female (90%), with only 10% male respondents

iii). Current year of the study



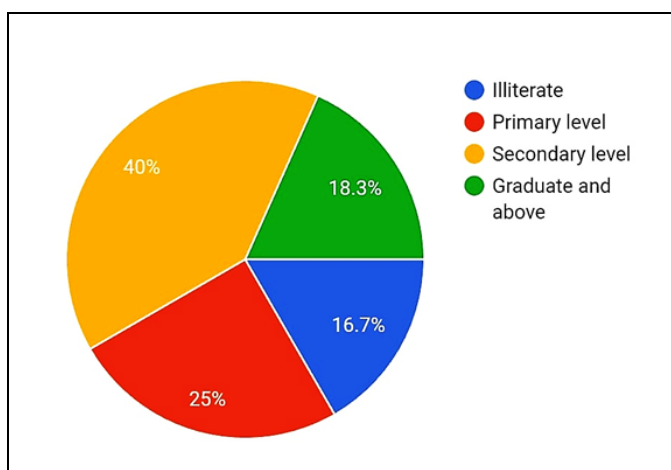
Among the selected population of respondents, Most participants (65%) are II-year students, followed by smaller groups from other years.

iv). Family Background



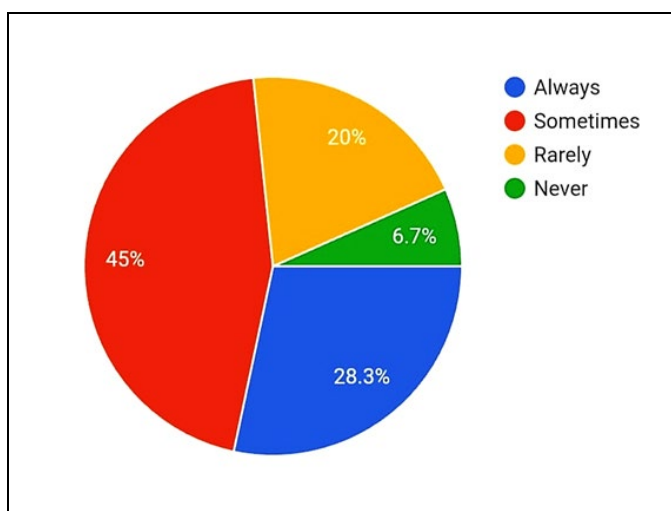
Among the selected population of respondents, Over half (55%) come from rural areas, with 28.3% from semi-urban and only 16.7% from urban families.

v). Parents Education



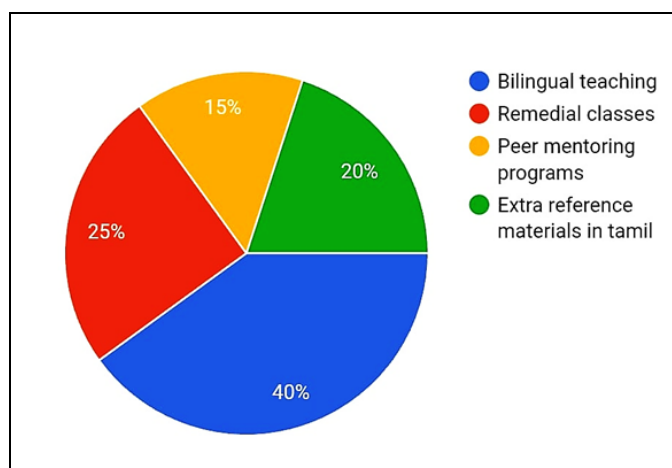
Among the selected population of respondents, 40% of parents have studied up to the secondary level, while 25% are graduates, indicating moderate educational support at home.

vi). Do you face difficulty in understanding English-Medium lecture?



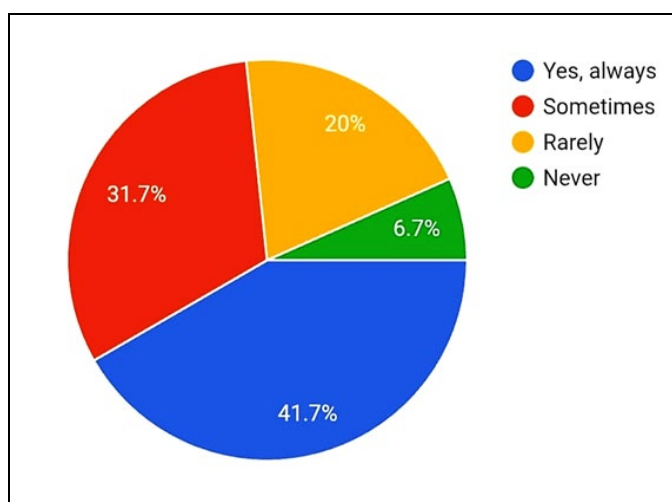
Among the selected population of respondents, 45% of respondents sometimes face difficulty understanding English-medium lectures, and 28.3% rarely face such issues. Only 6.7% reported that they always struggle.

vii). Which type of support would help you the most?



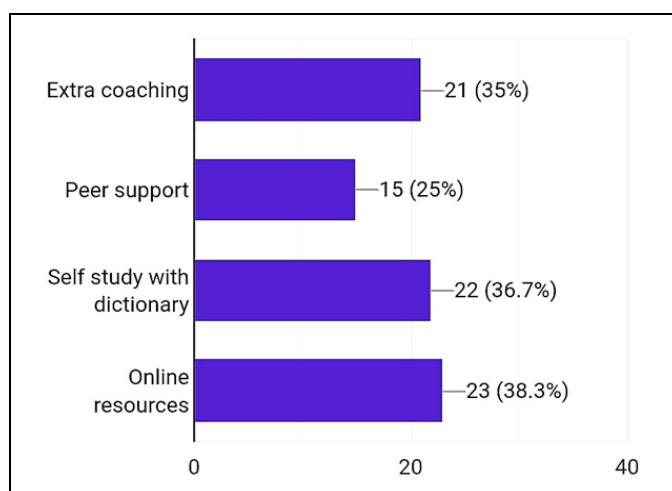
Among the selected population of respondents, The majority (40%) expressed the need for bilingual teaching, followed by remedial classes (25%) and extra reference materials in Tamil (20%).

viii). Do teachers provide additional support for tamil-medium students?



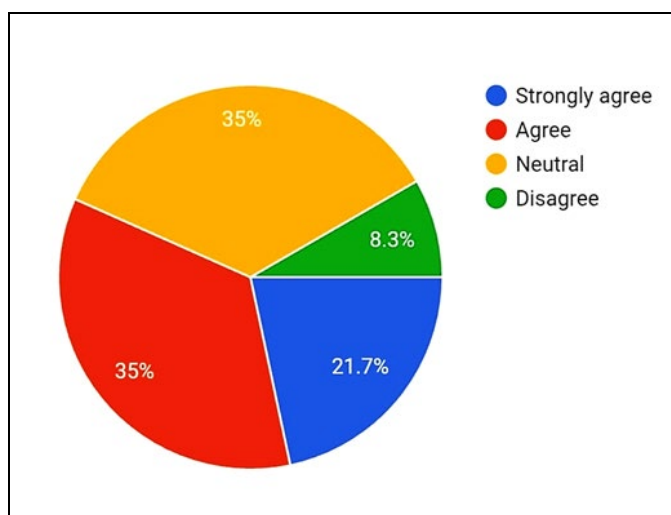
Among the selected population of respondents, While 41.7% stated that teachers sometimes provide additional support, 31.7% said it happens rarely, indicating inconsistency in assistance.

ix). What method do you use to overcome language difficulties?



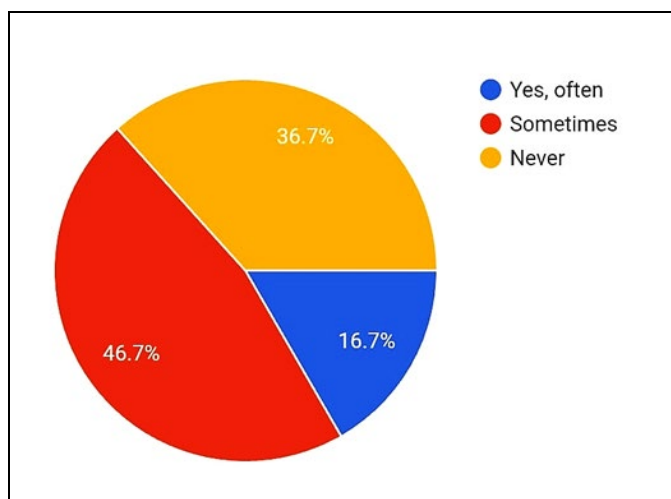
Among the selected population of respondents, Students rely mainly on online resources (38.3%) and self-study using dictionaries (36.7%). Extra coaching (35%) and peer support (25%) are also used, showing that students actively seek supplementary learning strategies.

x). Do you feel inferior compared to English – Medium students?



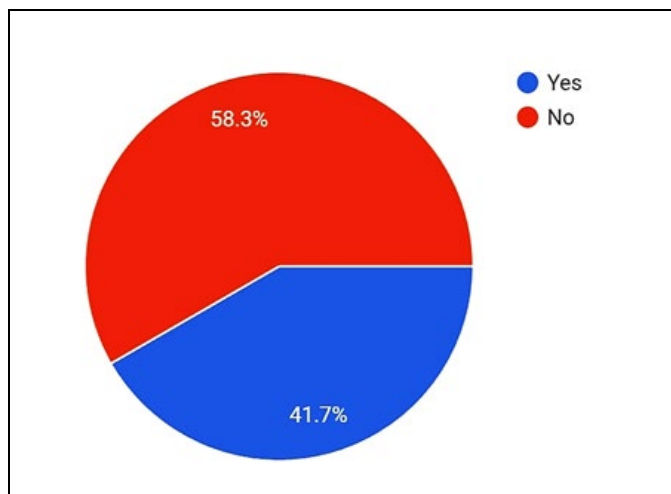
Among the selected population of respondents, 30% strongly agree and agree that they feel inferior compared to English medium students, while 35% remain neutral.

xi). Do you face teasing/bullying due to Tamil-medium background?



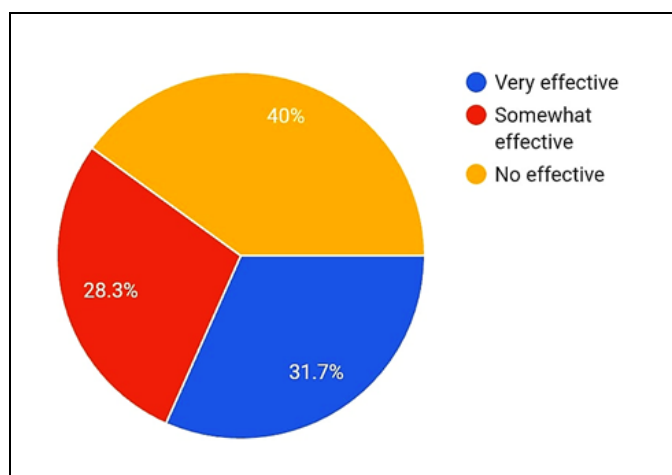
Among the selected population of respondents, 16.7% reported experiencing teasing or bullying often, and 36.7% sometimes, indicating the need for better inclusivity.

xii). Have you attended any language improvement programs conducted by SOEL?



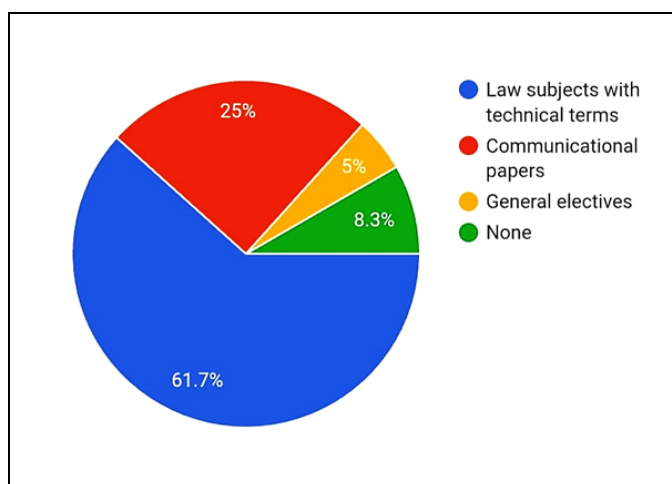
Among the selected population of respondents, 58.3% of students have attended language improvement programs at SOEL.

xiii). If yes, were they effective?



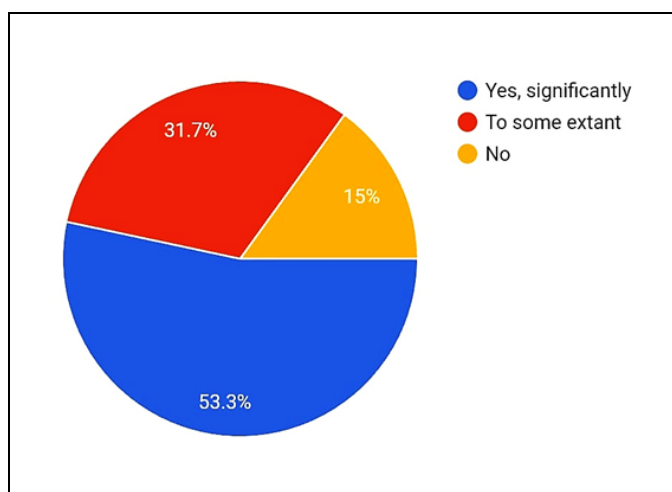
Among the selected population of respondents, Only 40% found them very effective, while 31.7% said they were not effective, suggesting that program quality and continuity need enhancement.

xiv). Which subject area do you find most difficult due to language barriers?



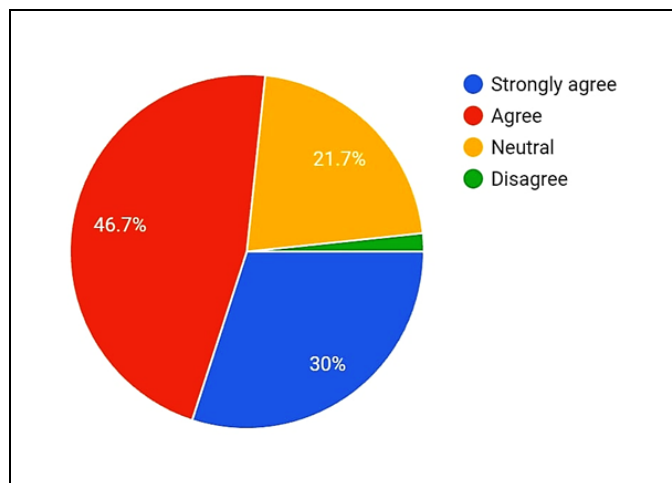
Among the selected population of respondents, 61.7% of respondents found law subjects with technical terms the most difficult due to language barriers. 25% struggled with communicational papers, while only 8.3% found general electives challenging.

xv). Has language barrier affected your Self-confidence?



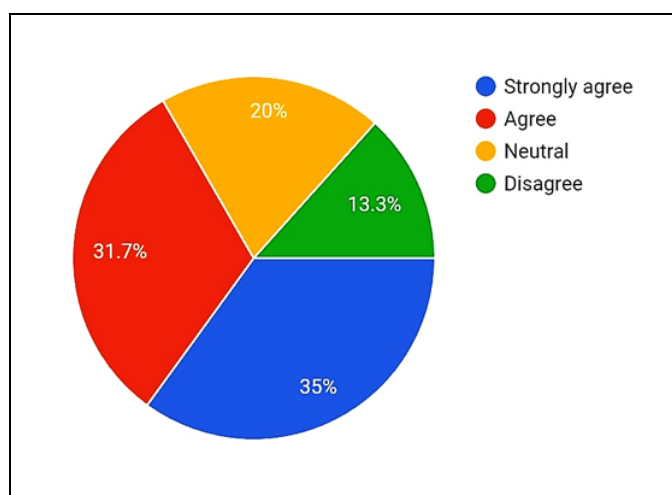
Among the selected population of respondents, Over half (53.3%) admitted that language barriers have significantly affected their self-confidence.

xvi). Do you think availability of bilingual textbooks/study materials will reduce struggles?



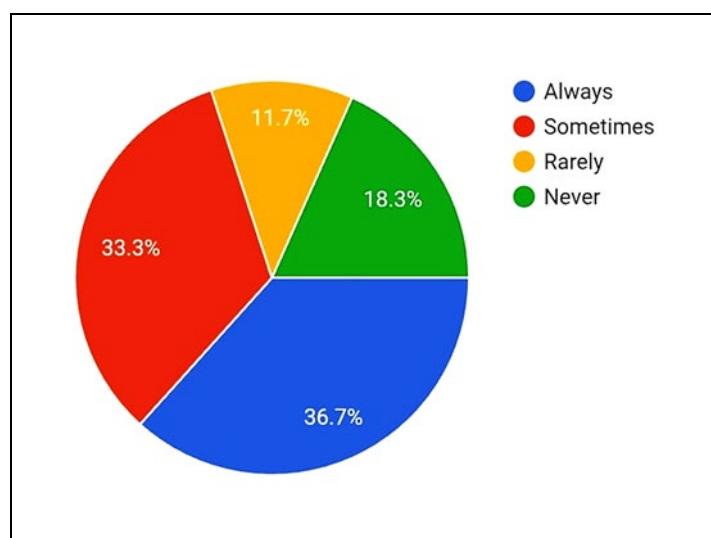
Among the selected population of respondents, 68.4% strongly agree or agree that bilingual textbooks and materials would reduce their struggles.

xvii). Do you think SOEL should conduct regular English skill – building workshop?



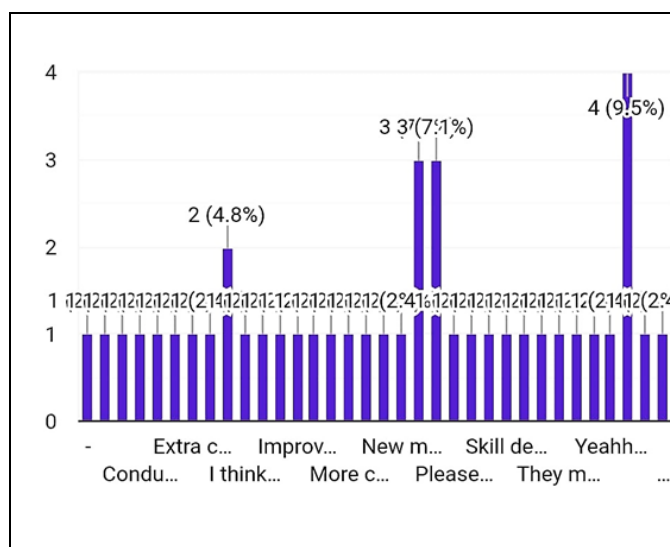
Among the selected population of respondents, 53.3% support regular English skill-building workshops as a helpful initiative.

xviii). Do you feel stressed while writing exams in English?



Among the selected population of respondents, 18.3% always and 33.3% sometimes feel stressed while writing exams in English.

xix). In your opinion, single initiative by SOEL would most help Tamil – Medium students?



Among the selected population of respondents, Open-ended responses highlighted several recurring suggestions: Introduction of bilingual teaching and bilingual study materials. Regular English language workshops and remedial classes for Tamil-medium students. Increased faculty sensitivity and mentoring support. Encouragement for Tamil-medium students to actively participate and overcome inferiority feelings.

5. Analysis

The analysis of the collected data shows that most Tamil-medium students at SOEL belong to rural areas and are in the early years of their college education. Their main difficulty lies in understanding English lectures, legal terminologies, and expressing ideas fluently in class. Many students admitted feeling less confident and hesitant to participate in discussions due to language barriers. However, it was also found that peer support and faculty guidance helped them gradually adapt to the new academic environment. Overall, the study highlights that language difference remains the core challenge, but with proper institutional support, Tamil-medium students can perform equally well as their English-medium peers.

6. Conclusion

The study concludes that Tamil-medium students at SOEL face significant struggles in coping with English-medium college education, mainly due to language and confidence barriers. Despite these difficulties, many students show strong determination to overcome them through peer learning, faculty support, and self-practice. The research emphasizes the need for institutions to provide bridge courses, mentoring programs, and bilingual teaching methods. Such initiatives can help students adapt faster and improve their academic performance. Overall, the study highlights that inclusivity and continuous language support are key to ensuring equal opportunities for all learners, regardless of their medium of schooling.

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