



Awareness, Attitudes, and Challenges of Kokborok Language Learning Among Bengali College Students in Tripura: A Case Study of Government Degree College, Teliamura

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DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22049261>

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Received: 23-06-2026

Accepted: 16-07-2026

Published: 20-08-2026

Keywords:

Kokborok language learning, Asymmetric Bilingualism, tribal languages, Tripura language policy, language shift

ABSTRACT

While Kokborok is one of the official languages of Tripura and the mother tongue of several indigenous communities, its acquisition among Bengali students, who constitute the dominant linguistic group, remains relatively unexplored. This study examines the awareness, attitudes, and challenges of Kokborok language learning among Bengali students at Government Degree College, Teliamura, Tripura. Guided by Fishman's Reversing Language Shift framework, the study explores patterns of language engagement between Bengali and tribal students and identifies factors influencing cross-community language learning. Using a quantitative research design involving 137 undergraduate students, the study finds that Bengali students demonstrate positive awareness and generally favourable attitudes toward Kokborok" however, institutional barriers, including limited learning resources, inadequate guidance, and lack of learning opportunities, represent major challenges. The analysis of self-reported language practices provides partial support for the concept of asymmetric bilingualism, while also highlighting the complexity of bilingual patterns among respondents. The study suggests that promoting bilingualism in Tripura requires stronger institutional

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support and expanded opportunities for Kokborok learning rather than focusing only on changing attitudes. The findings have implications for language policy, educational planning, and social integration in multilingual regions.

1.Introduction

The Census of India (2011) reports that Tripura had a population of 3,673,917. The language breakdown shows a strong presence of Bengali spoken by 66.8% (2,455,388) of the people. Kokborok follows with 23.97% (880,537) speakers. Other tribal languages, such as Chakma, Halam, Mog, Manipuri, Kuki-Mizo, and Garo, together account for less than 5% of the state population. Although Kokborok is one of Tripura's official languages and is the mother tongue for many tribal communities it is rarely used in education, administration, media, courts, or other formal areas. In this context, Bengali continues to maintain a strong presence in formal and public domains. (Debbarma, S., & Debbarma, M. 2024) This situation has led to a sociolinguistic pattern in which tribal communities often become bilingual and they use Bengali language for broader communication, while most Bengali speakers have limited exposure to Kokborok or feel no need to learn it.

As Joshua A. Fishman (1991) noted in *Reversing Language Shift*, such situations often result in asymmetric bilingualism, where minority language speakers learn the dominant language for social and economic reasons, while those who speak the dominant language rarely learn the minority one. This gap can result in language shift, decline over generations, and a loss of cultural identity.

In this context, it is very crucial to know and explore the awareness, attitudes, and challenges of Kokborok language learning among Bengali college students in Tripura. Investigating these factors can help shape policy recommendations that support social integration, encourage bilingualism, and protect cultural identity.

2.Research Objectives

- 1.Assess Bengali college students' awareness of Kokborok and its cultural and social importance.
- 2.Explore Bengali college students' attitudes, interest, and motivation for learning Kokborok.
3. Identify the linguistic, social, and institutional challenges Bengali college students face in learning Kokborok.



- 4.Examine the bilingual and monolingual patterns of tribal and Bengali students in using Kokborok and Bengali.
- 5.Provide suggestions to promote Kokborok learning and support bilingualism among college students in Tripura.

3.Literature Review

1. Debbarma and Debbarma (2024, Indian Journal of Language and Linguistics) report that Kokborok is the only language endemic to Tripura among eight minority languages. Although it was officially recognized in 1979, it is underused in education, media, administration, and public life. Speakers accounting for only 25.9% of the population. This limited use has weakened its vitality and shows the urgent need for preservation and protection.
2. According to Fishman (1991), speakers of minority languages often learn the dominant language to keep social mobility and economic opportunities. In contrast, speakers of the dominant language rarely learn the minority language. This asymmetric bilingualism leads to language shift, intergenerational decline, and loss of cultural identity.
3. In “Kokborok Language and Its Role in Identity, Unity, and Modern Challenges,” Debbarma (2024), published in The Academic International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research, examines how Kokborok shapes cultural identity and fosters social unity among the Borok community of Tripura. The study shows that Kokborok helps preserve oral traditions, rituals, and connections between generations. However, the language struggles due to urbanization, migration, globalization, and the influence of other regional languages. The author stresses the need for educational programs, policy support, and digital adaptation to keep Kokborok vital and relevant in today's society.
4. Research on preserving minority languages underscores the importance of digital media. Sanusi, Taiwo, and Shekete (2025) argue that digital engagement and involvement from diaspora communities help maintain the language by expanding its use beyond traditional contexts. Their study on Yoruba illustrates how online platforms and media can strengthen linguistic identity and usage among diaspora groups.

4.Research Gap

Although patterns of unequal bilingualism between dominant and minority language communities have been discussed in previous studies, there is not enough research on the learning experiences, challenges, and attitudes of Bengali students regarding Kokborok. Additionally, the social or policy results of encouraging



bilingualism are unexplored. Filling this gap can offer support for targeted policy changes, educational strategies, and social integration efforts.

5.Theoretical Framework

Fishman's Reversing Language Shift framework explains that minority languages become endangered when dominant languages dominate major social areas like education, administration, and public life. In these situations, speakers of minority languages often become bilingual to improve their social and economic opportunities, while speakers of the dominant language rarely learn the minority language. A key idea in this framework is intergenerational transmission, which means passing a language from parents to children within families and communities. Fishman stresses that keeping a minority language alive across generations is essential for its survival; without active use at home and in the community, support from institutions alone is insufficient to prevent decline. This framework helps to understand why Kokborok despite being officially recognized in Tripura is not widely used among Bengali students and why strengthening intergenerational transmission could support language revitalization.

6. Research Methodology

This study uses a quantitative research design to explore the awareness, attitudes, challenges, and bilingual patterns in Kokborok language learning among Bengali and tribal college students in Tripura. The main goal is to evaluate Bengali students' awareness, perceptions, and learning difficulties while also comparing bilingual and monolingual trends between Bengali and tribal students.

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire given via Google Forms. The Google Form link was distributed through academic communication channels, including student WhatsApp groups, and participation was voluntary. The survey took place at Government Degree College, Teliamura from 20 February 2026 to 21 February 2026. The questionnaire mostly included close-ended questions to support quantitative analysis, with one open-ended question to collect students' suggestions.

Secondary data were collected from academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, Census reports, and relevant policy documents about Kokborok and sociolinguistic studies in Tripura.

6.1 Sampling Method

The study used a non-probability purposive sampling method. Respondents were selected from undergraduate students of Government Degree College, Teliamura, with the objective of including both



Bengali and tribal students for comparison of language awareness and usage patterns. Participation was voluntary, and students participated based on their availability and willingness to complete the survey."

6.2 Data Analysis Technique

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, including frequency distribution and percentage analysis. Comparative analysis looked at differences between Bengali and tribal students regarding language awareness, attitudes, challenges, and bilingual tendencies. Basic statistical tools organized and interpreted the data to ensure clarity and accuracy.

7. Result and Discussion

7.1 Result

This section presents the findings of the study based on analysis of data collected from 137 respondents at Government Degree College, Teliamura.

7.1.1 Table : Demographic Profile (N = 137)

Bengali: N= 77, Tribal: N=59, Other=N=01

Demographic Variable	Category	Percentage
Gender	Male	50.4%
	Female	49.6%
Community	Bengali	56.2%
	Tribal	43.1%
	Other	0.7%

The sample shows balanced gender representation, with 50.4% male and 49.6% female respondents. Bengali students constitute 56.2% of the sample, while tribal students represent 43.1%. This allows for meaningful comparisons between the two linguistic communities.

7.2 Awareness of Kokborok's Cultural Significance

The first research objective assessed Bengali college students' awareness of Kokborok's cultural and social significance

7.2.1 Table : Awareness of Kokborok's Role in Cultural Heritage Preservation

Response	Bengali Students (%)
Yes	70.1%
Not Sure	29.9
Total	100%

The data shows that 70.1% of Bengali students recognize Kokborok's importance in preserving Tripura's cultural heritage. Meanwhile, 29.9% are unsure about its significance. This finding indicates that a large majority of Bengali students are aware of Kokborok's cultural value, although about one-third require further awareness building

7.3 Attitudes, Interest, and Motivation Toward Learning Kokborok

The second research objective explored Bengali college students' attitudes, interest, and motivation toward learning Kokborok.

7.3.1 Table : Interest in Learning Kokborok

Interest Level	Bengali Students (%)
Very interested	27.3%
Some what interested	26.0%
Total Interested	53.3%
Not interested	46.8%

7.3.2 Table Perception of Kokborok's Importance for Cultural Understanding and Social Integration

Response	Bengali Students (n=77)	
	n	%
Yes	42	54.5%
Maybe	20	26.0%
Not sure	15	19.5%
Total	77	100%

The findings show that Bengali students have positive attitudes about learning Kokborok. More than half (53.3%) are interested in learning the language, which includes those who are "Very interested" (27.3%) and "Somewhat interested" (26.0%). Additionally, 54.5% think that learning Kokborok is important for understanding culture and social integration. These results suggest that a large number of Bengali students are open to Kokborok and see its value in connecting different communities.

7.4 Challenges Faced by Bengali College Students in Learning Kokborok

The third research objective identified the challenges faced by Bengali college students in learning Kokborok.

Table 7.4.1: Challenges Faced by Bengali Students in Learning Kokborok

Challenge	Percentage	Category
Lack of learning resources	58.4%	Institutional
Difficulty in understanding the language	55.8%	Linguistic
Lack of learning environment	37.7%	Institutional
Lack of teachers or guidance	36.4%	Institutional
No motivation or interest	27.3%	Attitudinal
Lack of time	26.0%	Personal

The findings show that the main challenges are institutional, not attitudinal. The top four challenges are lack of resources (58.4%), language difficulty (55.8%), lack of environment (37.7%), and lack of teachers (36.4%). These are structural barriers that prevent Bengali students from learning Kokborok. Only 27.3% mentioned lack of motivation, which suggests that attitudinal resistance is not the main obstacle.



7.5. Bilingual and Monolingual Patterns Among Tribal and Bengali Students

The fourth research objective examined bilingual and monolingual patterns of tribal and Bengali students.

Table 7.5.1: Languages Spoken by Respondents

Language	Bengali Students (%)	Tribal Students
Bengali only	88.3%	16.9%
Kokborok only		76.3%
Both Bengali and Kokborok	11.7%	6.8%

The data reveals differences in self-reported language practices between Bengali and tribal respondents. A large proportion of Bengali students reported speaking Bengali only, whereas tribal students demonstrated diverse language patterns, including Kokborok-only, Bengali only and bilingual Bengali-Kokborok responses. Although the relatively high proportion of tribal respondents reporting Kokborok only appears different from the expected pattern of asymmetric bilingualism described by Fishman (1991), it should be interpreted carefully because the data reflects students' self-reported spoken language choices rather than objectively measured language proficiency. Nevertheless, the presence of Bengali-only responses among Bengali students and the diverse language patterns observed among tribal students, including bilingual responses, indicates an unequal pattern of language engagement between the dominant and minority language communities. These findings partially align with Fishman's argument that minority language communities often experience greater pressure to engage with dominant languages.

8. Discussion

8.1 Positive Awareness and Attitudes Among Bengali Students

These findings suggest that many Bengali students recognize the cultural significance of Kokborok and are receptive to learning the language. The coexistence of relatively high awareness (70.1%) and interest in learning (53.3%) indicates that attitudinal resistance may not be the principal barrier to Kokborok learning among the participants. This interpretation is consistent with Fishman's (1991) broader argument that language revitalization requires supportive social conditions, sustained language use, and mechanisms for transmission across generations



8.2 Institutional Barriers to Kokborok Learning

These findings suggest that the principal barriers to Kokborok learning are structural rather than attitudinal. Although more than half of the Bengali respondents expressed interest in learning Kokborok, many reported limited access to learning resources, teachers, and supportive learning environments. This indicates that positive attitudes alone do not necessarily translate into language learning opportunities. This interpretation is consistent with Debbarna and Debbarna (2024), who observed that the limited use of Kokborok in education and public life restricts opportunities for language acquisition. From the perspective of Fishman's (1991) Reversing Language Shift framework, strengthening institutional support is essential for promoting minority language learning beyond the native-speaking community.

9. Recommendations for Promoting Kokborok Learning and Social Integration

The recommendations below are based on the findings of this study, which identified institutional barriers as more significant than attitudinal barriers to Kokborok learning among Bengali students.

9.1 Strengthen Institutional Support

The study found that the most frequently reported challenges were the lack of learning resources (58.4%), difficulty understanding the language (55.8%), and the shortage of teachers or guidance (36.4%). Therefore, educational institutions and the Government of Tripura should expand access to Kokborok learning materials, introduce optional Kokborok courses in colleges, and provide trained instructors to support interested learners.

9.2 Build on Existing Government Initiatives

Rather than creating entirely new programmes, existing initiatives should be expanded. For example, the Government of Tripura has already introduced Kokborok language training for state employees. Similar short-term certificate courses or elective programmes could be adapted for college students to improve access to structured language learning opportunities.

9.3 Promote Intercultural Learning Opportunities

Since more than half of the Bengali respondents expressed interest in learning Kokborok, colleges should encourage interaction between Bengali and tribal students through language clubs, cultural exchange programmes, seminars, and workshops. Such activities can provide practical opportunities to use Kokborok and promote mutual understanding between linguistic communities.



9.4 Integrate Kokborok into Educational Settings

The findings indicate that positive attitudes alone are insufficient without institutional support. Therefore, introducing Kokborok as an elective or value-added course in schools and colleges, together with appropriate teaching materials and digital learning resources, may encourage bilingualism and contribute to language maintenance.

10. Conclusion

This case study shows that Bengali students at Government Degree College, Teliamura have a positive awareness and attitude toward Kokborok. About 70.1% recognize its cultural importance, and 53.3% show interest in learning it. However, they face institutional barriers, such as a lack of resources, teachers, and suitable learning environments. These issues prevent them from achieving proficiency in Kokborok. The findings highlight the need to improve institutional support so that interested Bengali students can learn Kokborok.

The study concludes that promoting bilingualism and social integration requires collaborative efforts between Bengali and tribal communities. By creating support for Kokborok learning and encouraging cultural exchange, Tripura can work toward a united society that appreciates its diverse linguistic heritage. The findings suggest that creating opportunities for Kokborok learning may contribute to greater linguistic interaction and social understanding.

10.1 Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the data were collected from only one college, Government Degree College, Teliamura, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study relied on self-reported questionnaire responses, which may not accurately reflect respondents' actual language proficiency. Third, the use of purposive sampling limits the representativeness of the sample. Future studies should include multiple colleges across Tripura and combine survey data with objective language proficiency assessments.

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