
A Study on the Language Attitudes of Multilingual Indian Students towards English and their Mother Tongue

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the language attitudes of multilingual Indian students towards English and their mother tongue using secondary data sources. It explores how historical, educational, social, and economic factors shape these attitudes. Language serves as a crucial identity marker and a means of communication, and in a multilingual country like India, the coexistence of various languages influences personal, academic, and professional domains. English, introduced during the colonial era, has evolved into a language of power, prestige, and global communication. It is often perceived as a pathway to better education, career advancement, and economic mobility, leading to a significant preference for English-medium instruction, particularly in urban areas. However, the mother tongue remains deeply ingrained in cultural identity, emotional expression, and local interactions, especially in rural and semi-urban communities. The study reviews existing literature, surveys, and policy documents to analyze the linguistic trends and attitudes of students towards English and their native languages. The findings suggest that while English is widely regarded as a language of opportunity, the preservation of the mother tongue is essential for maintaining linguistic and cultural diversity. The paper also highlights the impact of educational policies, parental influence, and media exposure on students' language preferences. Recommendations include promoting balanced

bilingualism through inclusive education policies, encouraging mother tongue-based primary education, and ensuring that language policies support linguistic diversity alongside English proficiency.

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1. Introduction:

India is one of the most linguistically diverse countries, with 22 officially recognized languages and hundreds of regional dialects. English, introduced during the colonial era, has gained prominence in education, business, and governance. The language policies adopted post-independence have continued to reinforce the significance of English, making it a primary medium in higher education, administration, and corporate sectors. However, multilingualism remains a key characteristic of Indian society, and many regional languages play a crucial role in personal, cultural, and local communication. The coexistence of English and mother tongues presents an interesting dynamic in shaping students' attitudes towards language learning and usage. This paper examines the attitudes of multilingual Indian students towards English and their mother tongue, relying on secondary data from existing studies, surveys, and policy reports. The research explores how English is perceived as a tool for socio-economic advancement while the mother tongue remains integral to identity, tradition, and emotional expression.

2. Literature Review:

Research on language attitudes in India reveals a complex relationship between English and regional languages. Studies indicate that the perception of English as a language of power and social mobility has been ingrained due to historical colonial influence and contemporary global trends. Scholars like Kachru (1990) have emphasized the spread and function of English in India, highlighting its dominance in educational institutions and professional sectors. Graddol (2010) further elaborates on the growing demand for English proficiency in an increasingly globalized economy, noting its impact on employment prospects and social status. Government policy documents such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 advocate multilingual education while reinforcing the importance of English as a second language. Surveys by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) indicate that English-medium education is preferred in urban areas but faces resistance in rural regions, where regional languages hold greater significance. Additionally, studies by Sridhar (2008) and Annamalai (2004) underline the



emotional and cultural attachment individuals have to their mother tongues, illustrating how language is deeply connected to personal identity, familial relationships, and societal belonging.

3. Research Methodology:

This study employs secondary data analysis from various sources to understand multilingual students' attitudes toward English and their mother tongue. Government reports, such as the Census of India, National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) studies, and policy documents like the National Education Policy (2020), serve as primary references. Academic research papers and journal articles provide theoretical insights into language preference and bilingualism in India. International organizations such as UNESCO and the World Bank have conducted extensive research on multilingual education, adding a global perspective to the discussion. Additionally, previous sociolinguistic surveys and language studies contribute empirical data, helping to analyze trends and patterns in language usage. This methodology enables a thorough examination of language attitudes while ensuring that data is drawn from reliable, well-documented sources.

4. Findings and Discussion:

4.1 Preference for English vs. Mother Tongue :

English is widely accepted in urban and middle-class communities due to its association with career opportunities, technological advancement, and global connectivity. Data from the NSSO (2019) indicates that students in metropolitan areas prioritize English proficiency to enhance their employability and access to quality education. However, in rural areas, the mother tongue remains the primary medium of communication and education, reinforcing local cultural ties and preserving linguistic heritage. The divide between urban and rural perspectives suggests that socio-economic factors significantly influence language preference. Furthermore, students from privileged backgrounds are more likely to receive formal education in English, while those from economically disadvantaged communities often rely on their mother tongue for education and daily interaction.

4.2 Perceived Benefits of English

English proficiency is linked to better job prospects, higher education opportunities, and increased global interaction. Graddol (2010) asserts that fluency in English provides access to international markets, higher salaries, and better career advancement. As a result, there has been a



marked increase in parental preference for English-medium education, leading to the proliferation of private schools offering English instruction (Desai, 2012). Despite this preference, students often struggle with balancing English acquisition with the retention of their native languages, highlighting the challenges of bilingual education.

4.3 Cultural and Emotional Significance of Mother Tongue

Students express stronger emotional connections with their mother tongue, especially in informal settings, as language is deeply intertwined with familial bonds and community identity. Research by Sridhar (2008) shows that linguistic shifts towards English have led to concerns about native language attrition, particularly among younger generations exposed to English at an early age. The emotional value attached to the mother tongue emphasizes its role in shaping an individual's worldview, heritage, and self-expression.

4.4 Influence of Family, Education, and Media

Family language policies significantly impact students' bilingual or multilingual abilities. Parents who encourage bilingualism often see their children achieving fluency in both English and their mother tongue. The media and entertainment industries also play a crucial role in promoting a bilingual culture, with television, movies, and digital content incorporating both English and regional languages to cater to a diverse audience. The rise of social media platforms further enhances language exposure, enabling students to navigate between English and their mother tongue seamlessly.

4.5 Challenges in Language Maintenance and Shift

The dominance of English in higher education, corporate settings, and government institutions raises concerns about the gradual decline of native language proficiency (Census of India, 2011). The increasing preference for English often leads to diminished usage of regional languages in formal domains. Government initiatives, such as the three-language formula, aim to balance linguistic diversity and English learning, ensuring that students retain their mother tongue while acquiring proficiency in English.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings indicate that while English holds immense value for economic and social mobility, the mother tongue remains essential for cultural identity and emotional well-being. Strengthening



bilingual education policies can help maintain linguistic diversity while promoting English proficiency. Policymakers should encourage mother tongue-based education in primary schools, promote English learning without diminishing native language use, and implement language-friendly policies in higher education and employment sectors. Such efforts will ensure that linguistic diversity is preserved while equipping students with the necessary skills for global engagement.

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