

Original Research Article

English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) - Impact on Regional Languages

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Abstract

The increasing use of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in schools and higher education institutions in multilingual countries like India has led to significant sociolinguistic changes. While EMI offers access to global opportunities and improves employability, it also presents a challenge to the survival and growth of regional languages. This study investigates the impact of EMI on regional languages, with a focus on language usage patterns, student and teacher perceptions, and institutional language policies. Quantitative and qualitative methods were employed, involving surveys, interviews, and document analysis. The findings reveal a noticeable shift in linguistic preferences, reduction in fluency in regional languages, and limited use of native languages in academic and social domains. The paper concludes with suggestions to ensure linguistic balance and preserve cultural identity.

Keywords: English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), Regional Languages, Language Shift, Bilingual Education, Language Policy, Linguistic Identity, Multilingualism etc.

Introduction

The expansion of English as a global lingua franca has significantly influenced educational policies worldwide, particularly in multilingual and post-colonial societies like India. The implementation of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in schools, colleges, and universities has been widely promoted as a strategy to enhance students' access to global knowledge, international job markets, and higher education opportunities. However, this shift has sparked concerns about the diminishing status and utility of regional and indigenous languages in educational, social, and cultural contexts. In India, where the Constitution recognizes 22 scheduled languages and hundreds of dialects, the preference for EMI is increasingly visible across urban and rural settings. Parents often perceive English education as a gateway to economic advancement and social prestige, leading to the

proliferation of English-medium private institutions even in linguistically diverse regions. The transition to EMI is fraught with pedagogical and sociolinguistic challenges, especially for students who do not speak English at home or within their community. This creates an imbalance in learning outcomes, cultural identity, and self-esteem. The dominance of English has resulted in the marginalization of regional languages, which are often limited to informal or domestic use. As academic and professional communication becomes increasingly English-centric, regional languages face the threat of being perceived as inferior or less useful. This phenomenon affects language proficiency and literacy rates in the mother tongue and erodes traditional knowledge systems embedded in local languages.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the growth and implementation of EMI in educational institutions.
2. To analyse the impact of EMI on the usage and status of regional languages.
3. To explore the perceptions of students, teachers, and parents regarding EMI and regional languages.
4. To propose measures to maintain a balance between EMI and regional language instruction.

Literature Review

The rise of **English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI)** has become a pivotal phenomenon in global educational systems, especially in multilingual and post-colonial countries. While earlier studies have extensively critiqued the cultural and linguistic consequences of EMI, more recent research has examined its nuanced impact on **language hierarchies, educational equity, and cognitive development**.

Bourdieu's theory of linguistic capital (1991) provides a theoretical lens to understand EMI's socio-economic implications. English, being a global language, has been positioned as a tool of mobility and modernity¹. Tsui and Tollefson (2004) caution that EMI, though ostensibly neutral, often reproduces existing socio-economic inequalities by privileging speakers of English². In contexts like India, this dynamic creates a divide between English-medium educated elites and the regional-language-educated majority.

Heugh (2009) has argued that language-in-education policies that emphasize EMI in early education often overlook the cognitive and academic disadvantages for non-native speakers³. Drawing from African and Asian contexts, she points out that students taught in a second language without adequate support tend to perform poorly and experience identity dissonance. Similarly, Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (2010) argue that EMI without mother tongue reinforcement mount to linguistic genocide, gradually eliminating the functionality of indigenous languages in formal domains⁴.

The Indian context presents a complex interplay between **multilingual realities** and **English dominance**. Pattanayak (1981) emphasized the richness of India's multilingualism and warned against the "killer" influence of dominant languages like English and Hindi on regional and tribal languages⁵. More recent empirical studies by Panda and Mohanty (2009) show how mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) can improve learning outcomes while preserving linguistic diversity⁶.

Kumar (1990) emphasized that regional languages in India historically played a key role in knowledge production and democratic participation. However, the growing popularity of EMI has led to a decline in publishing, academic discourse, and institutional support for these languages⁷. This linguistic displacement has been particularly acute in tribal and rural regions, where the lack of foundational instruction in the mother tongue widens achievement gaps.

Norton (2000) highlights how language learning and use are intertwined with identity negotiation⁸. In EMI settings, students may experience identity loss or internalized linguistic inferiority if their native language is deemed irrelevant or inferior in academic contexts. This phenomenon has been observed in multiple Indian studies, such as those by Jhingran (2005), where tribal students in EMI schools struggled both academically and emotionally due to language alienation⁹.

With the rise of digital learning and social media, EMI is further reinforced through platforms that predominantly operate in English. Warschauer (2000) notes that the digital divide is about access to technology and access to language¹⁰. In India, English-medium online education (especially during COVID-19) exacerbated inequities among students with limited English proficiency¹¹, as found by Choudhury and Mohanty (2021).

Garcia and Wei (2014) propose **trans-language** as a pedagogical strategy that allows students to draw on all their linguistic resources in learning, including their mother tongue and English¹². This approach encourages fluid language practices, challenging the rigid separation of languages in classrooms and promoting multilingual competencies.

Sholars like Hornberger (2002) advocate for the **continua of bi-literacy** model, which suggests integrating languages across modes (oral/written), contexts (home/school), and content areas to develop balanced bilinguals¹³. These models are particularly relevant in Indian classrooms, where multiple languages coexist, and rigid EMI models often prove exclusionary.

Methodology

- **Research Design:** A mixed-method approach was used to triangulate data and provide a comprehensive analysis.
- **Quantitative:** Structured surveys were conducted among students, teachers, and parents.
- **Qualitative:** Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were held.
- **Document Analysis:** Language policies, curricula, and institutional reports were reviewed.

Sampling

- Location: Maharashtra (urban and rural areas)
- Sample Size: 500 students, 100 teachers, 100 parents
- Sampling Technique: Stratified random sampling

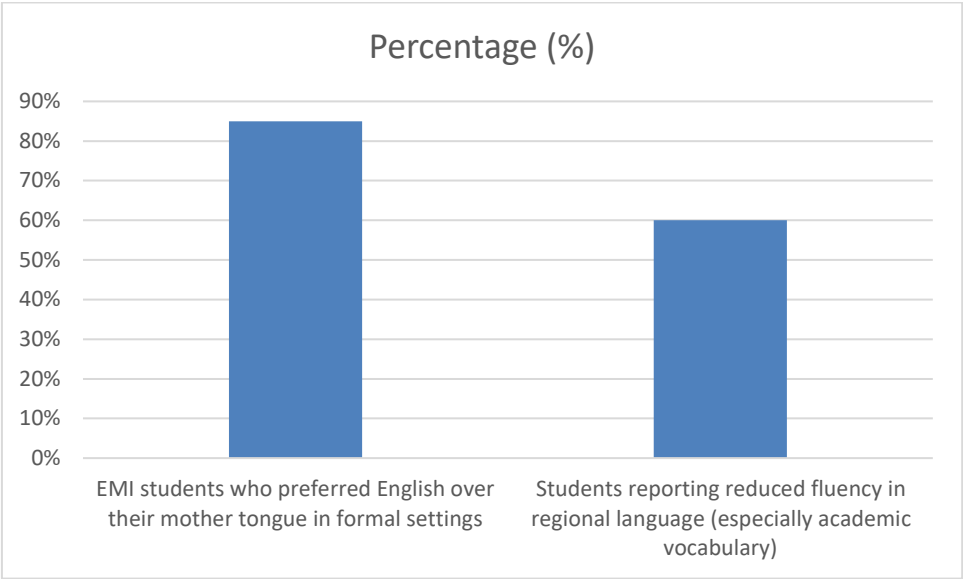
Data Collection Method

- **Surveys:** Administered to gather data on language preferences, academic performance, and linguistic confidence.
- **Interviews:** Conducted with teachers and parents to explore attitudes and challenges.
- **Observation:** Classroom practices were observed to understand the real use of languages.
- **Institutional Documents:** Policy documents and curriculum outlines were analysed to track language mandates.

Result of Data Analysis

Table 1: Language Use among EMI Student

Indicator	Percentage (%)
EMI students who preferred English over their mother tongue in formal settings	85%
Students reporting reduced fluency in regional language (especially academic vocabulary)	60%

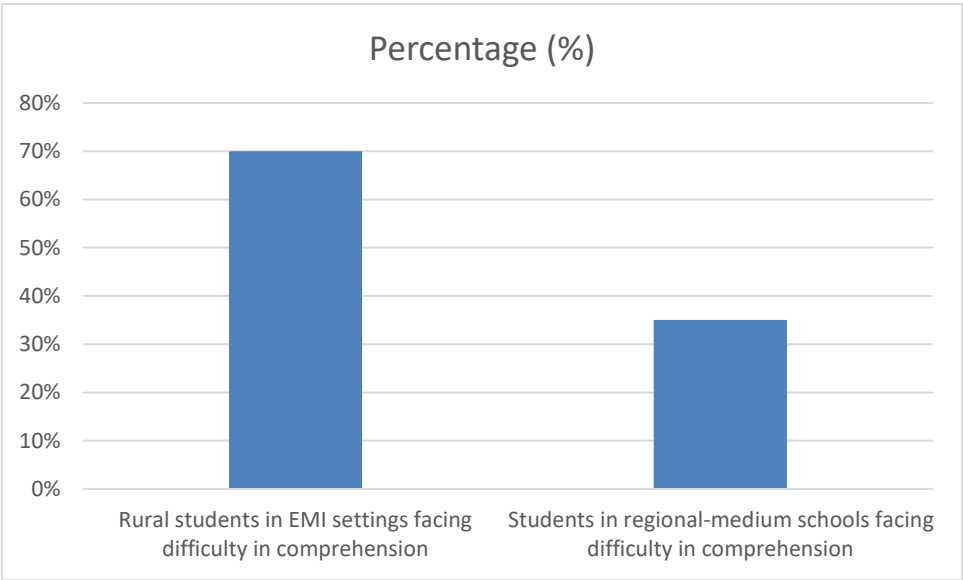


Graph 1: Language Use Among EMI Students

The table and graph 1 show the preference for English over regional languages and the decline in fluency in native languages among students in EMI settings.

Table 2: Academic Performance

Indicator	Percentage (%)
Rural students in EMI settings facing difficulty in comprehension	70%
Students in regional-medium schools facing difficulty in comprehension	35%

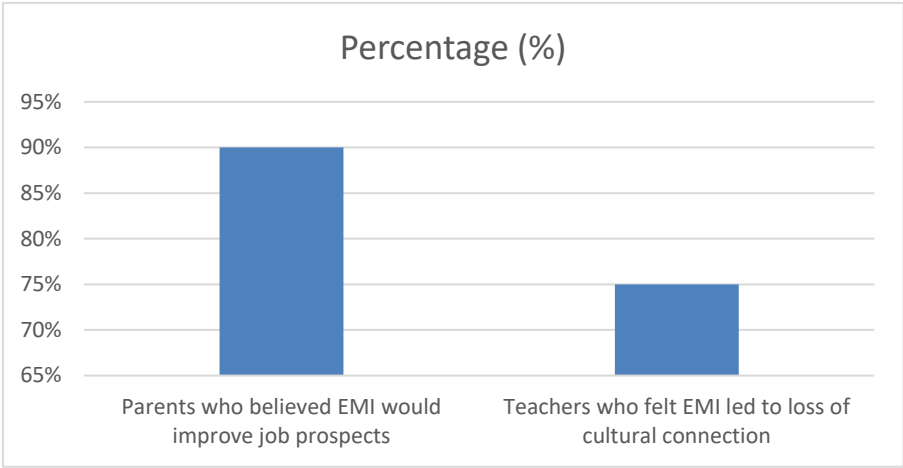


Graph 2: Academic Performance Comparison

The table and graph 2 compare the comprehension difficulties faced by rural students in EMI settings with those in regional-medium schools.

Table 3: Stakeholder Perceptions on EMI

Indicator	Percentage (%)
Parents who believed EMI would improve job prospects	90%
Teachers who felt EMI led to loss of cultural connection	75%



Graph 3: Stakeholder Perceptions on EMI

The table and graph 3 present parental and teacher perceptions of EMI's impact on job prospects and cultural identity.

Policy Implementation

Many institutions adopted EMI for prestige, without training for teachers or support for bilingual education.

Findings

- 1. **Language Shift:** A clear shift from regional to English in education, communication, and aspirations.
- 2. **Cultural Disconnection:** Students exhibit weaker ties to their linguistic heritage.
- 3. **Educational Disparity:** EMI benefits urban students but challenges rural learners lacking English proficiency.
- 4. **Policy-Implementation Gap:** Institutions adopt EMI without proper pedagogical planning or regional language support.

Suggestions

- 1. **Bilingual Education Models:** Promote parallel instruction in English and regional languages to ensure comprehension and cultural continuity.
- 2. **Teacher Training:** Develop EMI-specific pedagogy and train teachers in bilingual teaching methods.
- 3. **Curriculum Design:** Include regional literature and history to preserve linguistic identity.
- 4. **Awareness Programs:** Conduct community workshops on the value of regional languages.
- 5. **Incentives for Regional Language Use:** Offer scholarships and recognition for excellence in regional language studies.

Future Scope of Study

- 1. Longitudinal studies on EMI’s effect on cognitive development in multilingual learners.
- 2. Comparative studies across Indian states with different linguistic policies.
- 3. Impact of EMI on language attitudes in the context of digital media and technology.
- 4. EMI effects on tribal and endangered languages in India.

Conclusion

The adoption of English as a Medium of Instruction, though beneficial in terms of global access and employability, has unintended consequences on regional languages, particularly in countries like India. EMI often marginalizes local languages, creating social and cognitive disparities. A balanced approach—incorporating both English for global relevance and regional languages for cultural integrity is essential. Educational policies must ensure linguistic inclusivity and support sustainable multilingualism to foster both academic success and cultural preservation.

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