

Role of Languages in Skill Development and Its Impact on Employability

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Abstract - Languages are always playing vital role in skill development as the languages also serve as the basis for communication, learning, and cognitive development. Multilingual proficiency enhances cognitive abilities, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and multitasking. Language skills also improve access to diverse educational resources, allowing individuals to acquire knowledge from different cultures and perspectives. In an increasingly global and competitive job market, the role of languages in skill development and its impact on employability has become an important area of study. This study examines and highlights the fundamentals of how language proficiency affects the acquisition of essential skills and the resulting employment prospects. For the purpose of the present study, questions asked through a questionnaire, theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence have been used. The present paper examines the relationship between language skills and employability by analyzing data from questionnaires. The research shows that linguistic abilities can significantly enhance career prospects in fostering language skills not only equips individuals with competitive advantages. Ultimately, this study advocates for the inclusion of comprehensive language learning frameworks within skill development agendas to optimize employability outcomes in a globalized economy.

Keywords – *Language Skill, Employability, Linguistic Medium, Higher Education, National Education Policy, NEP-Policy Reforms.*

INTRODUCTION

The Indian education system is unique in the world since its inception, which helps in maintaining the culture, history, values, tradition, and customs in the country. Traditionally, the goal of education in India has been to achieve equality in children's education and the right to education for all children regardless of social class. Gurukul was the first education system in India where the main objective of education for the students was attainment of supreme knowledge, development of character, all round development, social qualities, spiritual development, and being the best in cultural education. In the year 2020, the third National Education Policy (NEP 2020) was brought and being implementing by the various state government. The main objective is to universalize education from pre-school to secondary level. In the NEP 2020, the age group of compulsory schooling has been increased from 6-14 years to 3-18 years of schooling. Hence NEP 2020 will replace the 10+2 curriculum structure with the 5+3+3+4 structure. This system proposes 12 years of schooling with 3 years of pre-schooling/Anganwadi.

India is home to the largest population of 287 million illiterate adults in the world. This is 37% of the global total. India's literacy rate has increased six times since independence. Although the literacy rate has increased from 12% in 2001 to 74% in 2011 [Fig. 1], India still has the world's largest population of illiterate adults.

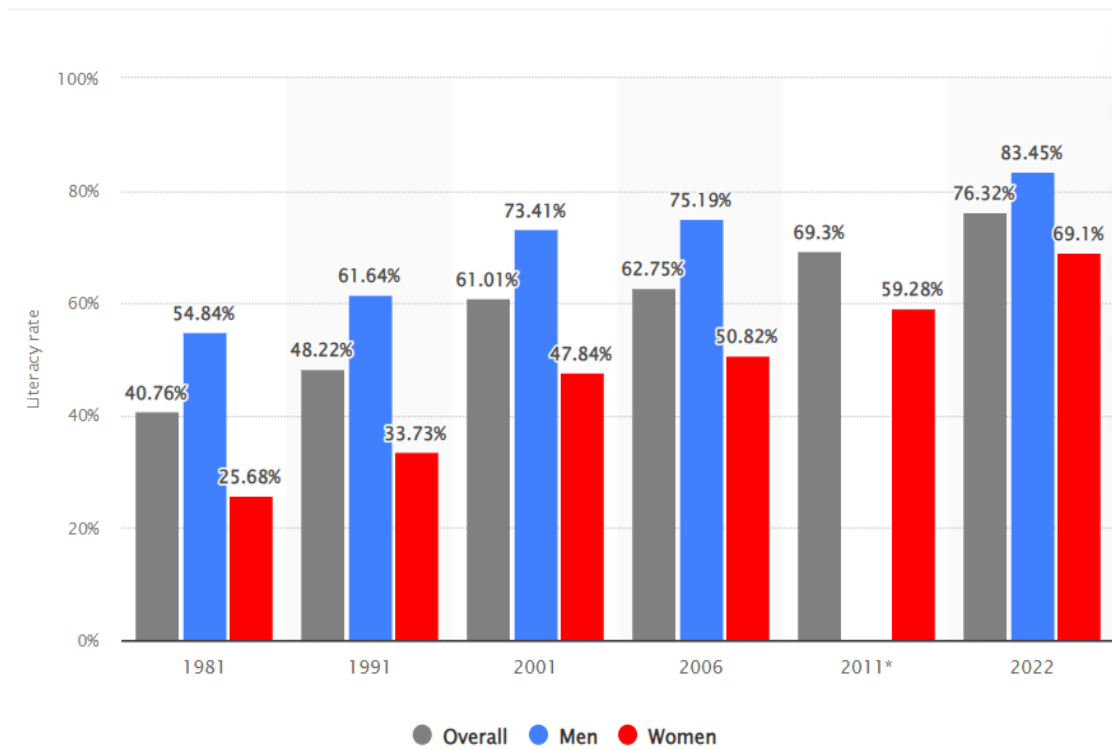


Fig. 1. India Literacy rate from 1981 to 2022 by gender

Even in this era of modern technological development, the goal of advancement in education is still beyond our reach. The main reason for this is of some basic problems like lack of funds, expensive higher education, ignoring Indian languages, problem of brain-drain, mass illiteracy, general education oriented, problems of primary education etc.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

People of all age groups, regardless of ethnic background, feel comfortable conversing in their mother tongue or local/native/vernacular language. They are able to connect with their fellow citizens with great ease. Language is a significant aspect of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, especially in the context of higher education. The policy addresses language-related issues with the aim of promoting multilingualism and ensuring a more inclusive and flexible approach. NEP 2020 emphasizes using the mother tongue or local language as the medium of instruction at least until Grade 5 and preferably beyond. The policy promotes a multilingual approach in higher education. It encourages higher education institutions to offer programs in regional languages alongside English to facilitate access for a broader section of the population. It allows students the flexibility to choose the medium of instruction in higher education. This is aimed at allowing students to pursue their studies in a language they are comfortable with. The policy emphasizes the promotion of Indian languages and classical languages in higher education. It encourages universities to develop programs that promote the rich linguistic diversity of the country. The policy envisions a higher education system that is not only globally competitive but also rooted in the country's diverse linguistic and cultural fabric. Education is undoubtedly very important for the overall growth and development of any society, but its penetration is uneven across the geographies, not only in India but worldwide. This is prevalent across all education segments, i.e. pre-primary, primary, middle, and higher education. In 2018,

GER in Indian higher education was 26.3 per cent. Although the GER is increasing gradually and if education is being provided in their native language, then many students who could not join higher education earlier due to the linguistic barriers and were forced to be away from the workforce for high-profile jobs/careers can join and contribute their efforts. This will increase the availability of a well-qualified human resource pool. This will bring in the much-needed benefits to all the stakeholders, i.e. employers, employees, families, society, government and so on. This will help them in improving their livelihood and lifestyle. After acquiring higher education, they will be able to earn better, which in turn leads to more disposable income. This will trigger a positive cycle or virtual loop in the country's economy and society (Schofer et al., 2021). The researcher shows that if higher education is being imparted in vernacular language, it is expected to bring down anxiety or stress levels and significantly improve students' comprehension capabilities. It will encourage other students also who could not join HEIs due to the fear of English as a medium of course curriculum delivery.

As per the survey research conducted by Saxena and Khandelwal (2020), English was the first choice among the respondents (43.4 per cent), followed by Hindi, with a nominal difference of 2.5 per cent of respondents as a medium of instruction in higher education. Whereas more than two-thirds of respondents have clearly indicated that Native/regional/vernacular language as medium of instruction has helped them in grasping/understanding the subject matter/concepts, enriching their knowledge and understanding better in higher education. There is a paucity of empirical evidence that depicts the use of a vernacular language as a mode of instruction at higher education institutions (HEIs) and its impact on the overall effectiveness of educational outcomes and better career prospects in the real world (Nyika, 2015). There is enough empirical evidence that countries use their vernacular language as a mode of instruction at various levels in their education system. In India, education is not only considered as a mode of acquiring knowledge rather most students. Currently, for most students, the goal/objective of education has changed from being knowledgeable to becoming employable. Hence, students put more emphasis on their communication and soft skills to get well-paid jobs. In this blind rush, they cannot provide much-needed attention to their subject matter/content. As per Khandelwal and Kumar (2022), imparting higher education in Hindi or regional/vernacular/native languages has a lot of positive and negative effects on students, employers, society, regulatory bodies and other stakeholders. As per these researchers few of the positive outcomes of offering higher education in the local language are as- increased GER by significantly reducing the dropout rate, poor and first-generation students will benefit immensely, students will emphasize more on the content of the subject/domain, Indian culture, value system, and moral values will get promoted etc. As per Kim and Mattila (2011), language plays a crucial role in an individual's identity. It facilitates an individual's ability to express emotions, narrate experiences and communicate with others. This becomes very easy by using the mother tongue. Hence, English as a language is creating a hindrance for the people of India to enroll themselves in higher education courses. English is not their first or primary language, so they find it difficult to build a reasonable amount of expertise/command of the English language. They face much difficulty in conversing with others in this foreign language. As per Khandelwal et al. (2023), higher education should be imparted in the mother tongue, vernacular or native language so that students can acquire knowledge without putting much effort into the language. The advantages of delivering higher education courses in vernacular language are numerous, but the path to adopting this is not easy. Even hiring managers prefer bilingual people (i.e., those who know the local and English languages) (Saarela & Finnäs, 2003). After going through the extensive literature related to the impact of local languages on the outcomes of higher education, so it conclude that holistic efforts need to be made by all the stakeholders to promote the usage of vernacular/local/native languages as the mode of teaching and learning in the higher education institutions and universities.

METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is the systematic process of planning, conducting, and analyzing research activities. The key component of the research methodology for this study is:

Research Design: Experimental and Quantitative

Population: UG/PG Students, Working Professionals

Sampling: Descriptive, and Exploratory

Sample Size: 2586

Data Collection Method: Online via various webinars, seminars, panel discussions

Data Analysis: Experimental and Descriptive

Data Collection: PAN India

The data for this questionnaire was collected over a period of three academic years. Here, six demographic questions are used for the purpose of analysis. In this questionnaire, 45.6 percent were female, 54.3 percent were male, and only 0.1 percent of the participants chose not to reveal their gender [Fig. 2a]. It was found that 60.8 percent of the participants who filled out this questionnaire came from Hindi speaking areas, 35.7 percent from non-Hindi speaking areas and 3.5 percent related to others [Fig. 2b]. Also, it was found from the questionnaire that among the participants who filled this questionnaire, 66.2 percent of the participants were from the age group of 18 to 40 years, and 24.1 percent of the participants were from the age group of 40 to 50 years, the rest are above 50 plus [Fig. 2c].

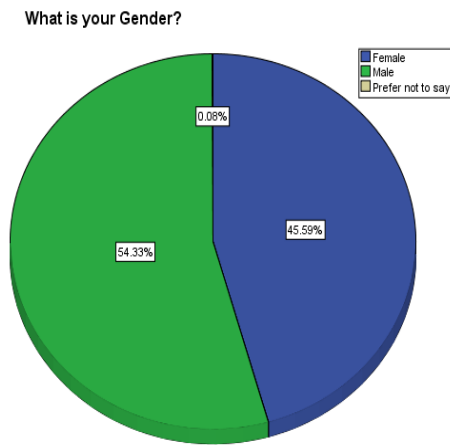


Fig. 2a. Gender Wise Categorization

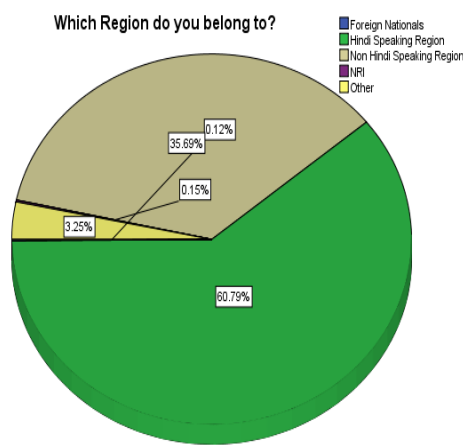


Fig. 2b. Region Wise Categorization

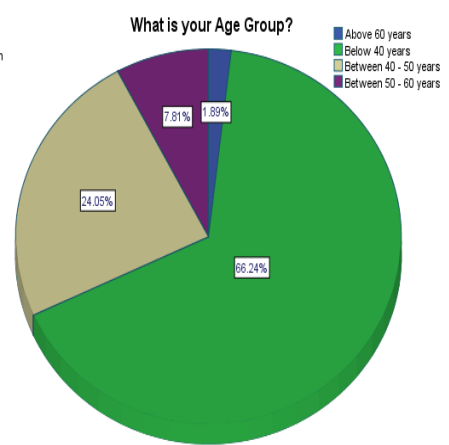


Fig. 2c. Age-group Wise Categorization

Here, 10 different disciplines were taken from the field of education, and professions were also divided into 5 different parts. The answers received from the questionnaire show that 1338 i.e., 51.74 percent of the respondents were related to the arts and humanities stream, and 755 i.e. 29.19 percent were from science disciplines, and remaining from various other disciplines [Fig. 3a]. The qualification of the respondents has been taken into 6 different categories. Various answers related to the profession received from the respondent reveal that the highest number of university and college teachers is 1154 i.e., 46.4 percent who all have Doctoral/Post-Doctoral level education [Fig. 3c]. The 60.1 percent of them belongs to profession under government sector [Fig. 3b].

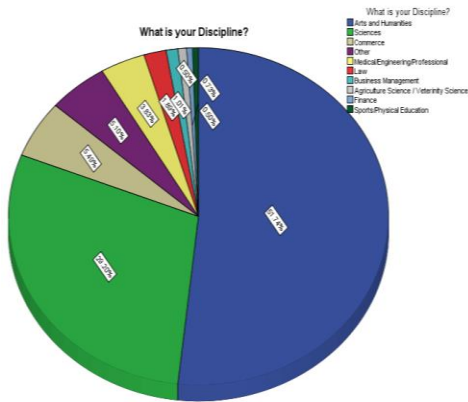


Fig. 3a. Discipline Wise Categorization



Fig. 3b. Profession Wise Categorization

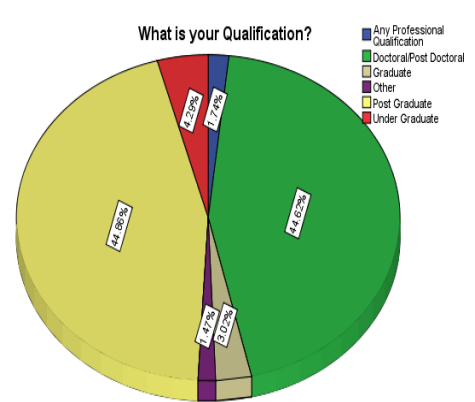


Fig. 3c. Qualification Wise Categorization

Reliability refers to the consistency and stability of a measurement tool. It assesses the extent to which items within a test are consistent with one another. Here the reliability test i.e. Cronbach's alpha for 6 items are 0.856. The Validity assesses the accuracy and meaningfulness of the inferences made from the test scores. A test cannot be valid if it is not reliable. The KMO and Bartlett's Test for Validity Analysis is performed here and have test score of 0.819.

RESULTS & ANALYSIS

The process of analysis through questionnaire highlights the important fact in this study. The responses received for this analysis is 2586 in count in which 71.69% of respondent [Fig. 4a] are in favor of education in India should be in multilingual. The important fact in this analysis is that 41.69% of respondent [Fig. 4b] think that primary education in English medium hurts cognitive growth of the child. Also, 64.85% of respondent [Fig. 4c] think that comprehension, learning and original thinking will improve if medium of instruction is Indian languages. Here only 15.51% respondent are in favor of English language only.

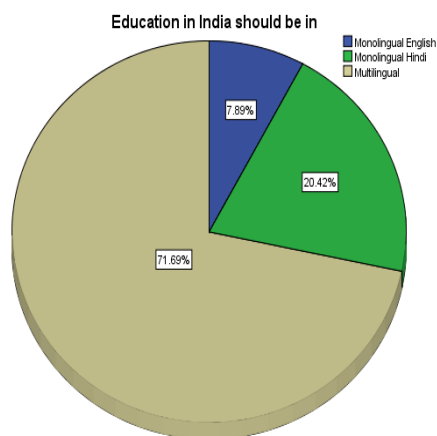


Fig. 4a. Respondent View for Language

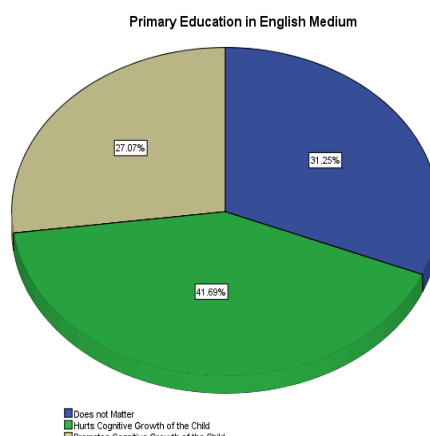


Fig. 4b. Respondent View for Primary Education

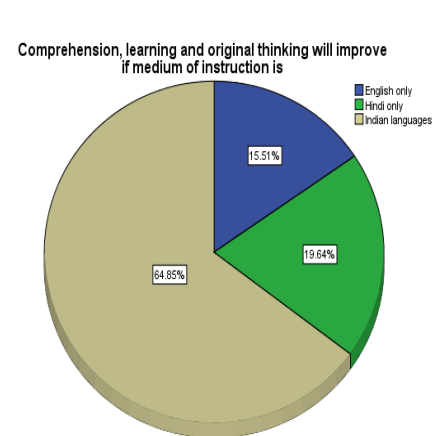


Fig. 4c. Respondent View for Medium of Instruction

In this analysis, 38.94% of respondent [Fig. 5a] think that the growing stress on English medium education is curtailing original thinking and innovation where as 34.36% respondent with none of the given option i.e. it represent that they also accept the point but not comfortable to give their views in this phase. Here 80.78% of respondent [Fig. 5b] think that deeper understanding and knowledge of the subject is one's own language is better for the career growth.

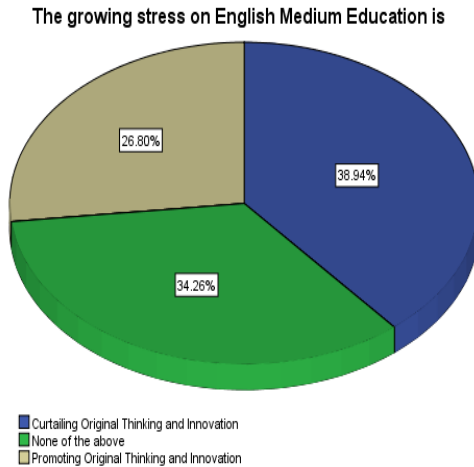


Fig. 5a. . Respondent View on Growing Stress

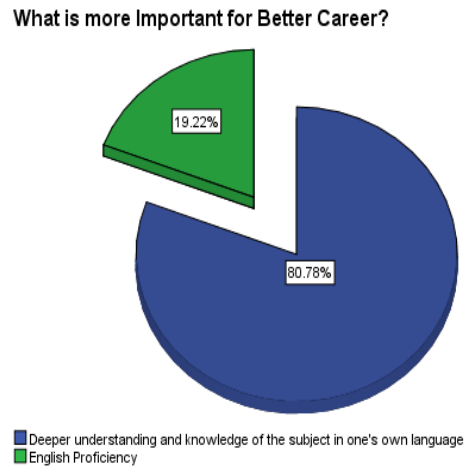


Fig. 5b. . Respondent View for Better Career

CONCLUDING NOTE WITH FUTURE SCOPE

Ultimately, this study advocates for the inclusion of comprehensive language learning frameworks within skill development agendas to optimize employability outcomes in a globalized economy. In an increasingly interconnected and globalized world, the ability to communicate across languages has become a vital skill. The rise of multinational corporations, international trade, and cross-cultural collaborations has transformed the linguistic landscape, making multilingualism more than just a cultural asset it is now a professional necessity. Language skills are pivotal in enhancing employability and career advancement. Proficiency in multiple languages facilitates effective communication, fosters better customer relations, and enables seamless collaboration with international partners. These programs can be implemented at various educational levels, from early childhood through higher education, and can help students achieve fluency in multiple languages. The research highlights the significant impact of language skills on employability, demonstrating a clear correlation between language proficiency and enhanced job opportunities. The research contributes to the field of employability and skill development by providing a comprehensive analysis of the impact of language skills on career prospects. It emphasizes the need for a strategic approach to language education.

Some of the future research topics should explore the following areas to build on the findings of this study:

- Conduct longitudinal studies to track the long-term impact of language proficiency on career trajectories and economic outcomes.
- Examine the role of language skills in specific industries, particularly emerging sectors such as technology and environmental sustainability, to understand the evolving demands for multilingualism.
- Investigate the cultural dimensions of language learning and its impact on employability, focusing on how cultural competence and language skills intersect in the workplace.

- Explore the potential of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality, in language education and their effectiveness in enhancing language proficiency.

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