

**FAMILY ATTITUDES TOWARDS MULTILINGUALISM IN
BILINGUAL EDUCATION CLASSROOM WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH AS SECOND
LANGUAGE IN INDIA**

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ISSN 2277-7733
Volume 14 Issue 4,
March 2026

Abstract

This study looked at what families think about multilingualism in education classrooms in Manipur, India and how important they think English is as a second language. The study used a combination of methods, including a survey of 350 families of children in schools affiliated with the Board of Secondary Education Manipur and interviews with 23 people. The survey asked questions about six aspects of multilingualism by utilizing a rating system to measure attitudes. The results showed that families think multilingualism is very good for getting socially and economically and also good for cognitive abilities. However, they are not as positive about code-switching and using multilingualism to show status. The study also found that English is seen as an important language for many reasons, including its use in international communication, trade and education. The study found that families have attitudes towards multilingualism and these attitudes are complex and have many dimensions. The study used tests to compare the attitudes and found that they are significantly different. The interviews with families also showed that they think English is a language for getting ahead in life.

Keywords: *multilingualism, family attitudes, English, as a language bilingual education, Indian classroom, code-switching, Manipur*

Multilingualism is the act of using or promoting the use of, multiple languages, either by an individual speaker or by a community of speakers. Multilingualism is becoming a social phenomenon governed by the needs of globalization and cultural openness. The word “Multilingualism” is derived from two words, “multi” & “lingual”. “Multi” means two or more and “lingual” means language. In simple terms, a person who knows two or more than two languages at a time is called a multilingual person. Multilingualism serves the necessity of effective communication and for that it is not necessary to have competence in all the languages. Many scholars use the notion of bilingualism and multilingualism interchangeably to refer to the knowledge of more than one language.

Apart from the natural multilingualism (acquired generally in the early stages of childhood) and artificial multilingualism (when a person learns it in classroom settings); may be in childhood or adulthood, has classified multilingualism as – Individual Multilingualism and Social Multilingualism. Individual Multilingualism is the ability of an individual to have competence in two or more languages. For example, if a child has a Meitei father, a Tangkhul mother and is raised by a Nepali maid and is living in a city like Bangalore, then, the child will grow up

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acquiring individual multilingualism. On the one hand, Societal Multilingualism is defined as the linguistic diversity present in society. In it, some issues such as role and status, attitudes towards languages, determinants of language choices, the symbolic and practical uses of the languages and the correlation between language used and social factors such as ethnicity, religion and class are important.

Multilingualism has not always been evaluated in terms of its advantages. So there are two aspects of multilingualism. One is negative attitude while the other shows positive attitude. Hence, for, some, multilingualism is a nuisance as its acquisition is considered a load and for some it is an asset, as there is no restriction in the choice of languages. In the dominant monolingual countries, two languages are considered a nuisance, three languages as uneconomic and many languages as absurd. But there are others who look at multilingualism as a resource. But several studies have demonstrated that bilingual/multilingual children can perform better than monolingual children. Therefore, multilingualism can rather be evaluated as an asset and is not a barrier in the development of a nation like India. It is this fact which makes Indian multilingualism unique.

In post independent India, the Macro-sociolinguistic processes of language planning resulted in carving out a small group of so called “Major languages” and “mother tongues” out of thousands of real languages on the ground. Contemporary Indians are facing a hierarchical relation among the languages even within each state.

Of the 1652 languages listed in the 1961 census of India, the number of indigenous languages was 1018 classified under the four major language families listed. It should be noted that the hierarchy based on percentage of speakers from highest to the lowest, Indo-Aryan > Dravidian > Austro-Asiatic > Tibeto-Burman does not match the hierarchy based on actual number of languages within each family. Specifically Tibeto-Burman family has the highest number of different languages compared to the other three families.

Characteristics of a Multilingual Classroom are: A multilingual classroom is formed by learners of various ethnic groups and social sections of society; Various intonations are also seen and heard in the multilingual classroom; Different languages and different body languages are also used in the classroom; There is complexity in a diversified language class; Multilingual classroom is primarily conducted in a language which is known and understandable to all; and The task of a teacher in a multilingual classroom is always challenging as the teacher needs to study the learners individually.

On the other hand, multilingual education refers to first language education i.e. schooling begins in the mother tongue of the child and transition to language 2 (L2) or additional languages. According to Pearce (2024), “*Multilingualism is the use of several languages by an individual or society. Sometimes bilinguals are described as multilingual but usually the term is reserved for speakers or socio linguistic situations in which more than two languages are used*”. Sometimes also referred to as “*bilingual education*”, multilingual education employs the use of two or more languages as media of instruction in

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primary education. In mother tongue based multilingual programs, the student's home language, or a regional or national language and as international language are used for instruction. Stages of Multilingual Education In Indian Classroom are: Stage 1: Learning takes place entirely in the home language/mother tongue of the student; Stage 2: Introduction of L2 in the oral form after building fluency in mother tongue; Stage3: Building oral as well as written fluency in L2; and Stage4: To be able to use both L1 and L2 for lifelong learning.

Mother tongue is the language that a child learns from his/her mother. It helps a child in thinking, reasoning, analyzing, elaborating as well as discussing. The acquisition is unconscious and gradual. It is learnt in informal learning situations. In other words, the child learns the language not for grammar but for communication and to express himself/herself. He learns it through play and conversation and gradually with spontaneous use of language; he/she develops the language skills. According to Ryburn (1943), *"The strength of the mother tongue will mean strength in English."* Calcutta University Commission also stated that *"A severe training in the use of mother tongue is not a vital but a necessary preliminary of training in the use of English."*

Importance of Mother Tongue in a Child's Education can be seen from four major points: 1) Mother tongue is important in the mental development of the child; 2) It is important for the social development of the child as it helps him/her to interact with others and to express himself/ herself; 3) It is important for the emotional development of the child; 4) It is also important for the moral development of the child.

NEP-2020 also advocates that wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/local language. Thereafter, the home/local language shall continue to be taught as a language wherever possible by both public and private schools.

There will be a major effort both from the central and state governments to invest a large number of language teachers in all regional languages around the country, and in particular all schedule 8 languages. NEP-2020 also mentions that students whose medium of instruction is the local /home language will begin to learn science and mathematics, bilingually in Grade 6 so that by the end of Grade 9 they can speak about science and other subjects both in their home language and English.

However, one point of departure is that "English is a language which has a very important role in the present day India. Indian government has consistently supported and encouraged the teaching and learning of English. Today, English is recognized officially as the Associate National Official Language, and as inter-regional link-language; educationally it is recognized as an essential component of education and as the preferred medium of learning, with specialized education in science and technology available through the medium of English only; socially it is recognized and upheld as a mark of education, culture and prestige." (Gupta & Kapoor, 1991).

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In the context of the foregoing background, the present study focused on the attitudes towards multilingualism with special reference to the importance of English as a 2nd language in the Indian classroom of the families of 350 children enrolled in the schools affiliating with BOHSEM across Manipur.

Our three main objectives in this study were (1) to understand and characterize the multidimensionality of these families' attitudes towards multilingualism; and (2) to identify the reasons for the rise of English as a second language in the multilingual and multicultural Indian classroom.

Materials and Methods

Participants: Quantitative phase: Parents and family of children exposed to Manipuri and English were oversampled to ensure sufficient representation for this more difficult-to-reach group. To ensure that participants were able to read and understand the survey in their preferred language (English or Manipuri) we included three comprehension checks consisting of multiple-choice items asking for the synonym of a common word. To ensure that participants read each scale item carefully we included two attention checks asking that a particular response be selected. In this first wave, 51 respondents were excluded due to failing either a comprehension check or an attention check, resulting in a final sample of 350 participants.

These selected three hundred and fifty families ($n = 350$) took part in this study by voluntarily completing the questionnaire that was distributed among the families of the schools affiliated with Board of Secondary Education Manipur (BOSEM). In 295 cases, it was the mother of the child who completed the questionnaire. In 48 instances, it was the father, and in 7 cases, it was a legal guardian who was neither the father nor the mother of the child. Children did not complete the questionnaire.

Overall, families of children attending 25 different schools affiliating with BOSEM in 3 different Manipuri communities took part in the study. Some of these schools were situated in 3 different districts (where, for at least some of the population, a vernacular language is spoken in addition to Manipuri), but in no case was English a societal language for any of them.

Two hundred and three of the children were girls, and the mean age of the sample was 14.76 years ($SD = 2.06$). The mean socio-economic status of the families was measured by a scale following the Kalia and Sahu (2012) SESS-UR-KASS was 57.31 ($SD = 17.27$). All participants provided informed consent prior to starting the questionnaire.

Qualitative phase: 23 participants consisting of 15 females have been selected for the structured interview on the basis of percentile scores obtained by them in threshold more than 75th percentiles.

Tools: Quantitative phase: A self-constructed questionnaire was used to collect on respondents' socio-demographic information. This questionnaire was then accompanied by a rating task in which respondents were presented with a list of 30 different statements that tapped into different categories of attitudes towards

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multilingualism, and they were asked to indicate using a 1-to-5 Likert scale their degree of agreement with the sentence (1 corresponding to “strongly disagree” and 5 to “strongly agree”). These statements were adapted from previous studies exploring attitudes toward multilingualism (González Alonso & Duñabeitia, 2024). As claimed by the authors of the original scale all the 6 categories have a high goodness of consistency and reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.85).

Qualitative phase: A semi-structured interview was used to collect data from the participants 3 week after quantitative phase.

Data Coding and Analysis: Data from the first part of the questionnaire were processed and analyzed descriptively. As for the attitudes towards multilingualism, the 30 statements were classified into 6 different categories prior to analyzing these data. Across-category differences in ratings were analyzed statistically using an analysis of variance (ANOVA) and pairwise comparisons. As for the qualitative data gathered from the semi-structured interview was thematically analysed using NVivo software.

Results: Attitudes towards Multilingualism

Table 1 : The mean polarity of the family attitudes towards Multilingualism

Sr. No.	Category	M	SD
1	(Socio) economic benefits of multilingualism (6 Statement)	4.47	1.16
2	Cognitive benefits of multilingualism (4 statement)	4.12	1.50
3	Multilingualism as multiculturalism (7 statement)	3.89	1.59
4	Multilingualism and general learning (5 statement)	3.79	1.77
5	Attitudes towards code-switching (6 statement)	3.29	1.99
6	Multilingualism and social status (2 statement)	3.17	1.97

The mean polarity of the family attitudes about the Socio-economic benefits of multilingualism, as evidenced by the mean recorded responses to the six statements of this category, was very positive (mean = 4.47, SD = 1.16). When considering the responses to the four statements classified under the category of Cognitive benefits of multilingualism, the mean value resulted in a generally positive view (mean = 4.12, SD = 1.50). The mean of the seven statements making up the category Multilingualism as multiculturalism also showed a generalized positive trend (mean = 3.89, SD = 1.59). The category Multilingualism and general learning included five statements, and the mean ratings of these items also showed a positive attitude (mean = 3.79, SD = 1.77). Responses to the six statements constituting the category Attitudes towards code-switching showed a mean value of 3.29 (SD = 1.99). Finally, responses to the two statements that together created the category labelled as Multilingualism and social status resulted in a mean rating of 3.17 (SD = 1.97).

A statistical analysis of the differences between these mean scores per category was conducted using SPSS Version 22 and *PMCMRplus* package.

The of results Shapiro-Wilk test showed that these data were not normally distributed for all categories: (Socio) economic benefits of multilingualism ($W = .977$, $df = 350$, $p < .001$), Cognitive benefits of multilingualism ($W = .942$, $df = 350$, $p < .001$), Multilingualism as multiculturalism ($W = .983$, $df = 350$, $p <$

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.001), Multilingualism and general learning ($W = .976$, $df = 350$, $p < .001$), Attitude towards code switching ($W = .974$, $df = 350$, $p < .001$), and Multilingualism and social status ($W = .864$, $df = 350$, $p < .001$). Similarly, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test with Lilliefors Correction yielded significant results for all categories ($p \leq .001$ in all cases) further confirming non normality.

Non-parametric Friedman repeated-measures ANOVA showed significant differences between the scores obtained in each category ($\chi^2 (5) = 351.28$, $p < .001$). Durbin–Conover pairwise comparisons showed that the numerical differences observed in the mean ratings obtained across categories were endorsed by statistically significant differences (all p -values < 0.001), with the only exception of the scores in the Attitudes towards code-switching and Multilingualism and social status categories, which did not significantly differ from each other ($p = 0.187$).

Importance of English as a Second Language in India: International Language: English is the language of the world. It has established itself as an international language. It is known as a library language, a link language and a window to the modern world. Thus, English has claimed to be an international language. When I talked to the person I interviewed I asked her about English being a global language. She said that *English helps us connect with people around the world. It lets her talk to people, from different countries.* She also said *it helps her get into schools and find a job internationally. English language connects people globally.*

Importance for Publishing and Media: English has an important place in the print as well as electronic media. Most of the broadcasting, interviews, discussions and music programmes are conducted in English. Also there is a lot of preference for printed material in English. When one of the people I interviewed number 2 was asked about English being the states language they said: *English is really important for official things. This is because the government usually writes documents makes policies and communicates with people in English. So English plays a role in how the government works. The interviewee felt that English is needed for business. They gave examples, like government papers and policies which are often in English.*

Language of the judiciary: Article 348 of the Indian Constitution mandates the use of the English language for all the essential legal functions in India, with almost no leegroom to change or accommodate any other language. Regarding importance of English as a second language about a theme *Language of the judiciary*, interviewee number 3 a female participant stated that: *“English is important in the legal system since most laws, court proceedings, and legal documents are written and interpreted in English.”*

Language of trade and commerce: English has become the global gold standard when it comes to fostering international trade and doing businesses. It is the language used in business proceedings as well as being a common language among geographically located organization. When a male respondent (interviewee number 4) asked about English as the Language of trade and

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commerce he stated that: *“In business and commerce, English plays a key role because it helps in dealing with clients, understanding contracts, and participating in global markets.”*

Cultural Importance: English has cultural significance. It has the ability to be transferred from one generation to another by a process of learning. This is because books are translated in English which creates awareness about the cultures of different nations of the world. Even renowned authors, educationists and philosophers are the product of English education. About the question English for inter-regional and intra-regional communication one male participant (interviewee number 5) answered that: *“In a multilingual country like India, English serves as a common language that helps people from different regions communicate easily.”*

Academic importance: English language is taught not only as a compulsory subject in English medium schools from the beginning but also all the subjects are taught through the medium of English. In Vernacular Medium, English is taught from class 6 onwards although its implementation varies from region to region. The three language formula ensures that no students can pass out of school and go on to vocational or higher education without having learnt English as a subject. The knowledge of English is important from disciplinary viewpoint. It gives an insight to the people as they are in a position to compare and contrast the good and bad points of different nations. Statement given by one male respondent (interviewee number 6) about English as a library language is that: *“Most academic books, research journals, and digital resources are available in English, so it becomes essential for higher studies and research.”*

Professional importance: Knowledge of English is an important qualification as far as employment opportunities are concerned and especially for getting white-collar jobs in government and multinational companies. When asked about English as a window on Modern world one female respondent (interviewee number 7) replied that. *“English opens access to modern knowledge, technology, and global developments, helping us stay updated with the changing world.”*

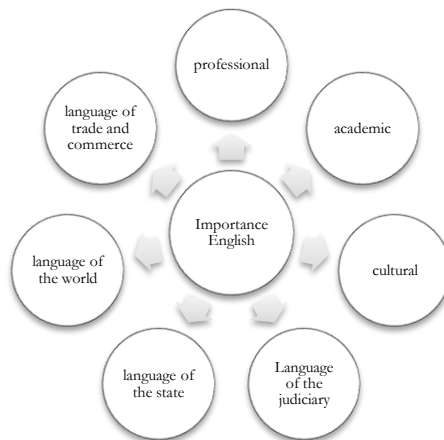


Figure 1: Importance of English

Discussion

The present study aimed to understand the multidimensional nature of family attitudes towards multilingualism and to identify the reasons for the rise of English as a second language in multilingual and multicultural Indian classrooms. The findings revealed that families held the most favorable attitudes towards the socio-economic and cognitive benefits of multilingualism, while attitudes towards code-switching and multilingualism as a marker of social status were comparatively less positive. These results are consistent with previous research demonstrating that multilingualism is increasingly perceived as an asset rather than a burden in globalized societies (González Alonso & Duñabeitia, 2024).

The highest mean rating for socio-economic benefits of multilingualism ($M = 4.47$) aligns with the view that multilingual competence enhances employability and economic opportunities in a competitive global market (Kapoor & Gupta, 1991). In the Indian context, where English serves as an associate national official language and a preferred medium for specialized education in science and technology (Gupta & Kapoor, 1991), families appear to recognize the tangible advantages that multilingualism confers. This finding also supports the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020's emphasis on multilingual education as a means to prepare students for diverse professional and social contexts (Ministry of Education, 2020).

The positive attitudes towards cognitive benefits of multilingualism ($M = 4.12$) corroborate a substantial body of literature indicating that bilingual and multilingual children often outperform monolingual peers in executive function, problem-solving, and metalinguistic awareness (Bialystok, 2017). Families in this study seemingly appreciate that multilingualism facilitates mental development, reasoning, and analytical thinking, as suggested by the theoretical framework emphasizing mother tongue as foundational to cognitive growth (Ryburn, as cited in the manuscript).

Interestingly, the mean rating for multilingualism as multiculturalism ($M = 3.89$) was moderately positive, suggesting that families acknowledge the role of multiple languages in fostering cultural awareness and openness. This finding is particularly relevant in Manipur, a linguistically diverse region where the Tibeto-Burman language family alone comprises numerous distinct languages (Census of India, 1961). However, the slightly lower score compared to socio-economic and cognitive benefits may indicate that families prioritize pragmatic and instrumental over cultural and integrative motivations for multilingualism.

The attitudes towards code-switching ($M = 3.29$) and multilingualism and social status ($M = 3.17$) were the lowest among the six dimensions and did not differ significantly from each other. This finding suggests that families do not strongly associate code-switching with either positive or negative social evaluation, nor do they strongly view multilingualism as a definitive marker of social prestige. This result diverges from earlier research that positioned English proficiency as

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a symbol of education, culture, and prestige in post-independent India (Gupta & Kapoor, 1991). One possible explanation is that in the specific context of Manipuri communities, where English is not a societal language, the social stratification associated with English may be less pronounced than in metropolitan Indian cities. Alternatively, the neutral stance towards code-switching may reflect a pragmatic acceptance of natural language mixing in bilingual environments, as codified in the NEP 2020's recommendation that students learn to discuss academic subjects bilingually by Grade 9 (Ministry of Education, 2020).

The qualitative findings provided rich contextual insights into why English has emerged as a crucial second language in Indian classrooms. Participants identified English as an international language that facilitates global communication, access to educational and employment opportunities, and engagement with modern knowledge and technology. These perceptions are consistent with the characterization of English as a “*window to the modern world*” (Rai, 2021) and as a library language essential for higher studies and research. The interviewees also highlighted English's dominance in legal systems, trade and commerce, print and electronic media, and inter-regional communication. These findings collectively affirm that English occupies a unique functional niche in Indian multilingualism, serving as a link language that bridges linguistic diversity without replacing mother tongues (NCF, 2005).

The academic and professional importance of English was another prominent theme. Families recognized that English is a compulsory subject from elementary school onwards under the three-language formula (NCF, 2005) and that proficiency in English is a prerequisite for white-collar employment and higher education. This pragmatic orientation towards English aligns with the broader sociolinguistic reality that specialized education in science, technology, and medicine is predominantly available through English in India (Gupta & Kapoor, 1991).

It is noteworthy that the NEP 2020 advocates for mother tongue-based multilingual education until at least Grade 5, while simultaneously acknowledging the importance of English as a global language of knowledge and commerce (Ministry of Education, 2020). The present findings suggest that families in Manipur endorse this dual approach: they value mother tongue as foundational for cognitive, social, emotional, and moral development yet recognize English as indispensable for academic and professional advancement. This balanced perspective is reminiscent of the Calcutta University Commission's assertion that “severe training in the use of mother tongue is a necessary preliminary to training in the use of English.”

Limitations and Future Directions

There are some limitations to our study. The sample only included families from Manipur with children in BOSEM schools. This means our findings may not apply to Indian states or language groups. Also we relied on people answering

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questions honestly about their attitudes. Sometimes people might not answer truthfully because they want to seem acceptable. Our study only looked at one point in time. This makes it hard to say if family attitudes really affect kids academic performance. Future studies should look at achievement follow kids over time and include different regions and languages across India.

Conclusions

This study shows that in Manipur families have attitudes towards speaking multiple languages. They think it's good for economic reasons and for learning. English is seen as important for talking to people, from other countries for business, education and getting ahead. These findings support teaching kids in their mother tongue and also teaching English well. This is what the NEP 2020 plan suggests. We should not think that English is the only language that matters for being successful.

Acknowledgments: The authors wish to thank the families that took part in this study the schools and their staff for their disposition and cooperation.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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