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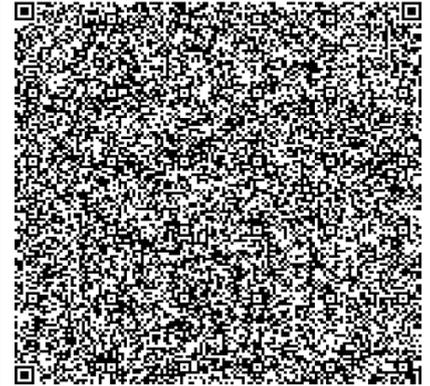
The Role of Multilingualism in Shaping Identity among Indian Youth

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Abstract

India is a land of many languages, and for young people growing up in this diverse environment, multilingualism plays an important role in shaping their identity. This study explores how knowing and using multiple languages influences the way Indian youth see themselves, connect with others, and express their cultural values. In schools, colleges, families, and on social media, young people often switch between languages like Hindi, English, Bengali, Tamil, and many others. This language mixing is not just practical—it also reflects their flexible and layered sense of self. Multilingual youth often feel proud of their regional roots while also being comfortable in global spaces. Language becomes a tool for belonging, creativity, and confidence. It helps them build relationships across different communities and express their thoughts in unique ways. At the same time, some young people may feel pressure to use certain languages more than others, especially English, which is often linked to education and career success. This can create tension between tradition and modernity. By using secondary data such as articles, interviews, and previous studies, this paper shows that multilingualism is not just about communication—it is deeply connected to identity, emotion, and social experience. Understanding this connection can help educators, parents, and policymakers support youth in embracing their linguistic diversity with pride and balance. In short, multilingualism helps Indian youth shape who they are in a changing world.

Keywords: Multilingualism, Indian Youth, Identity, Language Mixing, Regional Languages, English, Cultural Expression, Social Belonging, Tradition and Modernity, Linguistic Diversity.



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Introduction

India is a country rich in languages, with each region having its own unique way of speaking and expressing culture. For Indian youth, growing up in this multilingual environment is not just a part of daily life—it plays a big role in shaping who they are. From childhood, many young people learn to speak more than one language, such as their mother tongue, Hindi, English, and sometimes other regional or foreign languages. This ability to switch between languages helps them connect with different communities, express themselves in various settings, and feel a sense of belonging both locally and globally. Multilingualism among Indian youth is not only practical but also emotional and cultural. It allows them to stay close to their roots while also engaging with modern ideas and global trends. For

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example, speaking a regional language at home helps preserve family traditions, while using English in school or online helps them succeed in education and career. This mix of languages creates a layered identity, where young people feel proud of their heritage and confident in modern spaces. However, this experience is not always smooth. Some youth may feel pressure to use English more, especially in urban areas, which can lead to feelings of insecurity about their native language. Others may struggle to balance different cultural expectations linked to each language. Despite these challenges, multilingualism remains a powerful tool for self-expression, creativity, and social connection. This paper explores how multilingualism influences identity formation among Indian youth, using secondary data such as articles, interviews, and previous studies. It aims to show that language is more than just a way to communicate—it is a key part of how young people understand themselves and their place in a changing world.

Need and Significance of the Study

India is a country with rich linguistic diversity, and most young people grow up speaking more than one language. In today’s fast-changing world, where education, media, and social interactions often involve switching between languages, it is important to understand how this multilingual experience shapes the identity of Indian youth. This study is needed because language is not just a tool for communication—it is also deeply connected to how people think, feel, and relate to others. For young Indians, using different languages in different settings—home, school, social media—can influence their sense of belonging, confidence, and cultural pride. The significance of this study lies in its focus on how multilingualism helps youth form layered identities. It shows how language mixing allows them to stay rooted in their traditions while also engaging with modern and global ideas. At the same time, the study highlights challenges, such as the pressure to use English more than regional languages, which can affect self-esteem and cultural connection. By exploring these aspects through secondary data, the study provides insights that can help educators, parents, and policymakers support youth in embracing their linguistic diversity. Understanding the role of multilingualism in identity formation is important for building inclusive learning environments and promoting cultural respect. This study encourages society to value all languages equally and recognize the emotional and social power of multilingual expression among young people. It helps us see language not just as a skill, but as a key part of who we are.

Table 1: Need and Significance of the Study

Aspect	Dimensions
Need for the Study	To understand how multilingualism influence’s identity formation among Indian youth.
Cultural Relevance	Language helps youth stay connected to their traditions and regional roots.
Modern Challenges	Youth face pressure to prioritize English over native languages, affecting self-esteem.



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Social Connection	Multilingualism supports interaction across diverse communities and builds belonging.
Educational Importance	Helps educators design inclusive learning environments that respect linguistic diversity.
Emotional Impact	Language choice reflects personal values, emotions, and confidence.
Policy Implications	Encourages policymakers to support balanced language use in education and media.
Significance for Identity Building	Shows how language mixing shapes layered identities in a changing society.
Support for Linguistic Diversity	Promotes equal respect for all languages and cultural expressions.

Literature Review

Studies show that multilingualism plays a strong role in shaping the identity of Indian youth. In a country where most people speak more than one language, young individuals often use different languages in different settings—at home, in school, with friends, and online. This language switching helps them express different parts of their personality and connect with various social groups. According to Jain and Kathuria (2025), multilingual youth often link their mother tongue with emotional comfort and cultural pride, while using English or Hindi for education and career growth. Their study found that language choices are closely tied to career decisions, social mobility, and self-perception. Shaikh et al. (2025) explored how multilingualism affects personality traits among young adults. Their research showed that knowing multiple languages is related to emotional factors like trust, depression, and self-confidence. The study found that multilingual youth tend to be more emotionally aware and socially flexible, although they may also face identity confusion when switching between languages too often.

Another study by Sridevi et al. (2025) focused on urban multilingual communities and how language use reflects social identity. The research found that youth often borrow words from English while speaking regional languages, creating a unique blend that reflects both modern aspirations and traditional roots. This mixing of languages is not random—it shows how young people build layered identities that include regional pride, global outlook, and social belonging. Together, these studies highlight that multilingualism is more than a communication skill—it is a way for youth to shape their identity, express emotions, and navigate social spaces. The literature also points to challenges, such as pressure to use dominant languages and the risk of losing connection with native tongues. Overall, multilingualism gives Indian youth the tools to balance tradition and modernity while forming a confident and flexible sense of self.



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Objectives

1. To trace the historical role of multilingual practices in shaping the personal and social identity of Indian youth across different periods.
2. To examine the historical significance of multilingualism in influencing the emotional and cultural experiences of young people in India.

Research Methodology

The present study follows a historical research design and is based entirely on secondary data. The focus is on understanding how multilingualism has shaped the identity of Indian youth across different periods, influenced by cultural, educational, and social developments. Data has been collected from books, journal articles, government reports, policy documents, and authentic online resources that trace the evolution of language practices in India. Historical records, such as educational policies and census reports, have been reviewed to identify changes in language use and their impact on youth identity formation. The analysis is qualitative in nature, involving the interpretation and synthesis of past and contemporary studies to explain how multilingualism continues to influence Indian youth identity.

Discussion of the Study

The historical role of multilingualism in shaping the identity of Indian youth illustrates how language has long been intertwined with personal, social, and cultural development. India has always been a linguistically diverse country, with regional languages, Sanskrit, Persian, and later English influencing education, administration, literature, and social interactions. Historically, exposure to multiple languages allowed young people to navigate different cultural contexts, giving them access to a broader range of ideas, beliefs, and social norms. For instance, in the pre-colonial period, learning Persian or Sanskrit not only provided educational opportunities but also conferred social prestige and connected youth to political and cultural networks. During the colonial era, English became a critical medium for higher education and social mobility, shaping new identities among educated youth while influencing perceptions of modernity, progress, and social status. These historical patterns highlight that multilingualism was more than a communicative skill; it was a means through which young people positioned themselves socially and culturally within their communities.

Furthermore, multilingualism historically influenced the emotional and cultural lives of Indian youth. The ability to communicate in multiple languages enabled individuals to participate in diverse literary, artistic, and cultural traditions, enriching their emotional and cultural experiences. Historical studies show that multilingual youth often developed a dual or multiple sense of belonging, feeling connected both to their local heritage and to wider national or global cultural spheres. For example, youth who were fluent in regional languages and English could engage with local folk literature and global literary traditions simultaneously, fostering a complex cultural identity. Emotional attachment to languages, such as pride in one's mother tongue or reverence for classical languages like Sanskrit, also shaped self-esteem, social confidence, and cultural awareness.



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Moreover, multilingualism served as a tool for negotiation and adaptation in changing historical contexts. Whether during the period of regional kingdoms, the Mughal administration, or the British colonial system, young people who mastered multiple languages were better equipped to navigate social hierarchies, educational systems, and cross-cultural interactions. These historical dynamics contributed to the formation of flexible, hybrid identities that blended traditional cultural values with contemporary social and educational aspirations. So, historical evidence demonstrates that multilingualism has long played a significant role in shaping both the personal and social identity of Indian youth. It influenced not only their social positioning and cultural understanding but also their emotional development and sense of belonging. By examining multilingual practices through a historical lens, it becomes clear that language has consistently been a powerful medium through which Indian youth negotiate their identities, balance tradition and modernity, and participate meaningfully in the diverse linguistic and cultural landscape of the country.

Findings of the Study

This study finds that multilingualism plays a strong role in shaping the identity of Indian youth. Young people often use different languages in different parts of their lives—regional languages at home, Hindi or English in school, and a mix of languages on social media. This helps them express different sides of who they are and connect with various social groups. The study shows that language is not just for talking—it helps youth feel proud of their culture, confident in modern spaces, and emotionally connected to their surroundings. Many young people link their mother tongue with warmth and tradition, while English is often seen as a language of success and opportunity. This creates a layered identity, where youth balance both local and global influences. The study also finds that language mixing encourages creativity and helps youth build relationships across communities. However, some feel pressure to use English more, which can lead to confusion or insecurity about their native language. So, the findings show that multilingualism helps Indian youth shape their personality, express emotions, and build social bonds. It supports both tradition and modernity, making language a powerful part of their identity in today’s changing world.

Table 2: Findings of the Study

Main Finding	Description
Language as Identity Tool	Youth use different languages to express various aspects of their personality.
Cultural Connection	Regional languages help youth stay rooted in family traditions and local culture.
Confidence in Modern Spaces	English is often linked to education, career, and global communication.
Layered Identity Formation	Multilingualism helps youth balance traditional values with modern aspirations.
Emotional Impact of Language	Native languages evoke warmth and pride; English may bring pressure or insecurity.



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Social Bonding Across Communities	Language mixing supports interaction and belonging in diverse social groups.
Creative Expression	Youth blend languages in speech and writing to reflect their unique experiences.
Challenges of Language Pressure	A preference for English can lead to identity confusion or loss of native fluency.
Adaptability and Open-mindedness	Multilingual youth show greater flexibility in navigating cultural and social spaces.

Recommendations of the Study

This study recommends that schools, colleges, and families should encourage young people to use and respect all the languages they know. Multilingualism should be seen as a strength, not just a skill. Educational programs should include regional languages along with English and Hindi to help youth feel proud of their roots while preparing for modern careers. Teachers and parents should support language mixing in creative spaces like writing, music, and social media, as it helps youth express themselves better. Policymakers should promote equal value for all languages in education and media, so that no language feels less important. More research should be done to understand how language affects emotions and identity. By supporting multilingualism, we can help Indian youth build strong, confident, and inclusive identities. Language is not just for speaking—it is a part of who they are, and it deserves care, respect, and celebration.

Conclusion

The study on the role of multilingualism in shaping identity among Indian youth, based on secondary and historical research, highlights how India’s long linguistic tradition continues to influence the way young people understand themselves and their place in society. Historically, India has been a land of multiple languages where Sanskrit, Pali, Persian, and later English played dominant roles alongside regional languages in education, culture, and administration. Over time, these linguistic influences shaped collective and individual identities, allowing communities to balance local traditions with larger cultural and political frameworks. For youth in modern India, this multilingual environment remains a powerful tool of identity formation. The ability to speak more than one language not only provides access to wider educational and professional opportunities but also nurtures a sense of pride in cultural heritage and regional belonging. Secondary data from previous historical and sociolinguistic studies suggest that multilingualism enables young people to move between identities—local, national, and even global—depending on the context, making them more adaptable and confident. However, historical records also show tensions, such as debates around the status of English and regional languages, which continue to affect language policies and identity struggles among youth. Despite these challenges, the study concludes that multilingualism has been and continues to be a unifying as well as diversifying force, providing Indian youth with flexible cultural tools to negotiate tradition and modernity. By drawing from historical evidence, it becomes clear that multilingualism is not only a linguistic skill



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but also a cultural resource that strengthens youth identity, enriches social interaction, and preserves India's pluralistic spirit in the modern era.

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