



Marathi Education and the Preservation of Cultural Identity in Maharashtra: Language, Schooling, and Belonging in a Multilingual Economy

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Abstract - Historically, Marathi-medium education has served as a significant cultural institution in Maharashtra, and has spread linguistic competency, regional literary cultures, regional histories, and common civic imaginations that form collectively to constitute such a thing as cultural identity. But a move toward the use of English as the medium of schooling (and a semi-English language) has been sped up by urbanization, aspirational migration, and the increased marketability of English, leading to a clash of economic and cultural preservation. The paper is a synthesis of the current research on language ideologies, medium-of-instructions and multilingual education, and a mixed-method research design to determine the role of the Marathi education in shaping cultural identities. Representing the analysis and visualization with the help of an illustrative (simulated) pilot dataset, the paper demonstrates how the outcomes related to identity may be operationalized in terms of measurable indicators: belonging, participation in local cultural activities, literacy in Marathi, and consumption of Marathi literature and local culture. The research claims that the best way to maintain cultural identity through Marathi education is to have (a) firm Marathi literacy and cultural education, and (b) bilingual or high quality access pathways which can maintain Marathi and provide the bilingual pathway into English. The discussion of policies concerning three-language formula and state guidelines regarding Marathi in schools means that the political and educational significance of Marathi in keeping cultural communities is still significant. Research questions: How do the Marathi-based schools maintain cultural identity, the medium of instruction and multilingualism, and the Maharashtra region and its language ideology, and the mother-tongue education?.

Keywords - Marathi-medium education, Cultural identity, Language ideology, Medium of instruction, Multilingual education.

I. Introduction

Language is not an only tool of communication, it is an influential store of communal memory, culture, aesthetic, ethical and daily social customs. Linguists, anthropologists, and educators also note that language is a symbolic system that allows communities to create and maintain a shared identity (Fishman, 1991; Norton, 2013). At the regional level, in particular, in multilingual countries like India, language becomes an important symbol of identity and culture. Marathi has played a pivotal role in the formation of



regional identity in the state of Maharashtra based on its rich literary tradition, folk theatre, classical theatre, and film industry, festival culture, political rhetoric and government. Marathi has traditionally served as a family language, at the same time as a language of everyday life and intellectual activity, social movements, and has long been encrypted in the culture of the state (Chandras, 2019).

Education has a special part in this process as it is formal schooling that institutionalizes and legitimizes language. Schools standardize the literacy practices, institutionalize grammatical norms, transmit canonical literature and historical accounts, and determine which languages are used to produce knowledge and communicate with the rest of the world. The implications of language-in-education policies go well beyond the field of pedagogy; they define how learners think of themselves, how they view themselves in relation with the community, and their understanding of the social worth of their language heritage (Hornberger, 2003; Mohanty, 2014). A regional language like the Marathi language is employed as a medium of instructions and by doing so, it validates the cultural legitimacy of the local knowledge systems and it also allows the learners to interact with their sociocultural environment in a manner that is meaningful. On the other hand, where marginalization of a language is practiced in school, there is a threat of diluting intergenerational communication of cultural identity and diminishing the perceived applicability of the language in the contemporary life.

In modern India, though, medium-of-instruction (MOI) preferences are also moving towards economic utility perceptions as opposed to cultural factors. The concept of English-mediate instruction (EMI) is often linked to an access to the higher education, the white-collar jobs, and the global movement. Consequently, the English language is frequently presented as an opportunity language, whereas school education is regional is sometimes viewed as a limitation to socioeconomic growth (Bhattacharya, 2013; Sah, 2022). This has been an added perception that has led to a gradual growth in EMI in urban and semi-urban India and Maharashtra is not an exception. Notably, the change has been identified to be not only pedagogic but ideological: as the manifestation of class ambitions, parental future apprehension, and hierarchies of linguistic prestige positioning English as of greater symbolic value than Indian languages (Bourdieu, 1991; Phillipson, 1992).

Empirical research on MOI policy and practice in India indicates that the English bias is frequently supported by stigmatizing of the regional-language education, irrespective of the empirical research on learning outcomes. Even when the predominant language of day-to-day communication is Marathi, parents can connote rurality, lower social position, or immobility to Marathi-medium schooling (Dabak and Chandras, 2024). This process shows this phenomenon of language options in education being deeply intertwined with identity politics and social stratification. A decision in favor of English-medium education can turn into a symbolic upward mobility strategy, and selecting the Marathi-medium education can be viewed as either a cultural or political one instead of a pedagogical one.

These tensions in Maharashtra have given rise to unique educational trends. To begin with, the demand of the English- medium schools has increased significantly especially in major cities like Mumbai and Pune. Second, most schools have had to implement hybrid models or semi-English models whereby the Marathi language is used during



early grades or informal communication, whilst the English language is used in textbooks, tests, and English instruction in senior years. They tend to be sold as a middle ground, where cultural familiarity is combined with economic benefit, but studies indicate that they can cause systematic weakening of the development of literacy in Marathi as well as fail to offer solid academic achievement in English (Groff, 2017; Vogelzang et al., 2025). Third, renewed attention on status of Marathi in the schools and government institutions has also been witnessed at the state level due to the continuing debate on linguistic rights, regional pride and preservation of culture in a globalized economy.

The connection between the role of the Marathi education and preserving the cultural identity should thus be construed in a wider sociopolitical and economic context. In this context, cultural identity is not an immutable gift but a process that is continually formed through daily activities, organizational framework and symbolic awareness. Education plays a role in this process by dictating the languages that are linked to intellectual authority, cultural capital and future success. Studies involving mother-tongue and regional-language education have continually indicated that conceptual learning, critical thinking and emotional involvement in learning are better supported when one learns in a familiar language and especially in the early and middle ages of school life (Cummins, 2000; MacKenzie, 2009). Simultaneously, language experts warn that no educational system should attempt to position regional languages against English because those oppositions can only strengthen hierarchies instead of achieving linguistic equity (Canagarajah, 2013).

Culturally, the Marathi education allows the students access to local literary tradition, historical stories, and artistic expressions, which are commonly inaccessible or insufficiently introduced in English-language education programs. The work with Marathi poetry and drama, biographies and local history enables the learners to establish themselves in the social and cultural spectrum of Maharashtra, which makes them develop a sense of pride and belonging. According to heritage language studies, this kind of engagement plays a pivotal role in affirmation of identity especially in situations where other dominant languages have high levels of assimilation pressure (Borland, 2005; Lee, 2002). To the extent that students have been deprived of long-term exposure to their local language in the official education system, cultural knowledge can be lowered to discs of symbol or ritual instead of intellectual practice. Meanwhile, the modern realities in education need practical answer towards multilingualism. Maharashtra is not linguistically integrated and English is still a significant tool in higher education and job. The current research is thus an underlining of the importance of bilingual and multilingual pedagogies e.g. translanguaging whereby students can use Marathi and English as complementary sources as opposed to competing systems (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). Such mediums recognize Marathi as a medium of identity and thought with the instrumentalism of English. The difficulty is how to create educational models that safeguard the Marathi literacy and cultural richness without marginalizing the learners to larger educational and economic circles.

The paper places itself in these arguments by looking at how Marathi education could help retain Maharashtra cultural identity amidst the environment of linguistic globalization and marketization of education. It is based on the premise that preserving



of culture is not effected by the mere symbolic policy requirements but by continual institutional behaviors: curriculum development, teacher training, classroom language, and significant involvement with the local culture. The research will address the problem of medium of instruction, school culture, and home language practices, allowing the research to go beyond polarized discussions and provide evidence-based information about how Marathi education can be culturally critical and address modern desires.

By so doing, the paper is in line with a larger literature that regards policy in language-in-education as a place where issues of equity, identity, and power get aimed at (Ricento, 2006; Spolsky, 2004). The importance of Marathi education is more than a local issue, then, and the idea of the multilingual society and its ability or inability to negotiate between economic activity and cultural continuity is a bigger discussion.

Problem statement

- Even though Marathi is the most popular language, school enrollment options may alter how the children become literate, culturally competent, and identity-attached to Marathi. Research is required to test:
- whether the education through the Marathi medium enhances the outcomes of the cultural identity,
- what aspects of Marathi education are the most important (curriculum, literature, pedagogy, school culture), and
- how the bilingual models will be able to maintain Marathi identity and allow English accessibility.



Figure 1. Medium of Instruction Choice Model in Maharashtra

Objectives

- To conceptualize the notion of cultural identity preservation using Marathi education.
- To examine the research on language ideologies, MOI, multilingual education, and heritage language maintenance applicable to marathi education.
- To suggest a mixed-method approach to the empirical research in Maharashtra.



- To illustrate (using simulated pilot data) how one might style a 6000-word APA-style research paper using tables and graphs, and statistical results..

Research questions

- What is the relationship between Marathi-medium schooling and indicators of cultural identity (belonging, Marathi literacy, cultural participation) of the students?
- What are the justifications of MOI choices by families and teachers, and how are ideologies of Marathi/English used to influence such choices?
- What are the bilingual/ multilingual pedagogies that can maintain Marathi identity as well as assist students in their academic achievement?

Significance

The research paper is relevant to language-in-education planning because it examines the pressures on the regional language of Marathi due to the spread of EMI, and because it correlates MOI to the outcomes of cultural identity- an aspect presumed but not systematically quantified. It also facilitates the policy debate on Marathi in schools and implementation of three languages..

II. Literature Review

Marathi, class, and language ideology

Sociolinguistic studies of the Marathi language in Maharashtra indicate that Marathi is profoundly embedded in the processes of constructing classes and urban identities, that the need to save the Marathi language is often constituted differently by social groups. The research of Marathi in Pune by Chandras shows that the ideology of language and its relation to classes determine the use and activism in Marathi, such as conflicts between everyday Marathi and the high culture Marathi.

Recent multilingual perceptions among the speakers of the Marathi language also document the changes in the schooling preferences, the EMI development, and the introduction of the semi-English schooling as an intermediary model..

Medium of instruction, inequality, and Englishization

Sociolinguistic studies of Marathi in Maharashtra point out that Marathi is strongly linked to the classed and urban identity constructions and that savagings of Marathi are usually construed in different ways among social groups. The example of Marathi in Pune shows how language ideologies and caste affect the use and activism in Marathi as well as conflicts between the everyday Marathi and high culture Marathi.

As identified in recent studies conducted on the multilingual perceptions of the Marathi speakers, there are changes in preferences of schooling, EMI, and the introduction of semi-English schooling as a moderating model.

Research on EMI has consistently demonstrated that English is an activity that is treated as symbolic capital, however, EMI can enhance inequality when students are not very proficient in their native languages as a foundation of literacy. Current Issues in Language Planning studies have revealed the manner in which MOI is contested based on policy, teacher practice and social stratification.

Policy implementation in the Indian context is unequal in terms of geographical areas and the types of schools and the choice is usually limited by the fear of becoming disadvantaged by the parents. Such circumstances make the decision environment highly stakes: the Marathi-medium can save cultural identity, but the English-medium is regarded as the key to ensuring future security..

Mother-tongue education and learning outcomes

Multilingual education studies support mother tongue instruction in the early literacy acquisition and understanding particularly in low-resource multilingual settings. A generally known example is provided by MacKenzie, who conducted a research on first multilingual education in mother tongue with tribal children, and this is that the design of the program and the materials used assist in the learning process.

Subsequent quantitative studies on Indian primary education (more recent) have associated mother tongue education and multilingualism with reading and comprehension (large-sample study) further confirming that the level of language familiarity can aid in the basic literacy acquisition..



Figure 2. Literacy Pathway Diagram: How Marathi Literacy Builds Cultural Competence

Translanguaging and multilingual pedagogy as cultural protection

Rather than viewing languages as discrete containers, the idea of translanguaging suggests that bilingual approaches to learning are flexible and make the complete linguistic repertoires of students their learning assets. Early research in the *Modern Language Journal* and subsequent research on India demonstrates that translanguaging is a useful approach to enhance learning and engagement, and lessen linguistic shame-which is significant in identity maintenance..

Heritage language maintenance and identity

Even though, Marathi is not a minority language in Maharashtra, it serves more as a heritage language to most urban middle-class families, as they change home/school practice into English. The study of heritage language proves that identity preservation is closely related to (a) family language policy, (b) school/community support and (c) positive affect (enjoyment, pride)..

Policy context in Maharashtra



The policy and the debate on Maharashtra indicate an increased focus on the use of Marathi in schooling and in governance such as instructions and the changing debate to the three-language system and the Marathi needs in schools.

Synthesis gap:

The current literature provides sufficient explanations of ideologies and MOI politics but less literature operationalize the concept of cultural identity preservation into quantifiable variables and relate them directly with Marathi schooling experiences as curriculum, school culture, literacy practices, and bilingual pathways..

III. Methodology

Research design

It is suggested that a mixed-method design should be used:

- Survey, literacy/cultural participation: Quantitative.
- Qualitative: Interviews/ focus groups + classroom observations + document analysis (textbooks, school events, Marathi cultural programming)

This is the best mix since identity is both quantifiable (via scales) and qualitative (via narratives and practices)..

Study setting and sampling plan

- Suggested field sites:
- Urban: Mumbai and Pune (competition with high level of EMI)
- Semi-urban: mixed MOI patterns which are urban and rural towns.
- Rural: The Marathi-language domination of different standards.
- Sampling (proposal):
- A total of 12 schools (Marathi-whether, English-whether, semi-English; government and private)
- Students (Grades 6-10), parents, teachers, school leaders.

Instruments and variables

Key constructs

Dependent variables: the Cultural Identity Preservation (CIP) index.

Independent variables: the type of MOI; quality of Marathi curriculum; exposure to the Marathi literature; the practices of teachers; home language use; the indicators of SES.

Operationalization (example)

Table 1. Cultural Identity Preservation Index (CIP): indicators and scoring

Dimension	Example items	Scale
Belonging	"I feel proud using Marathi in public"	1-5 Likert

Dimension	Example items	Scale
Marathi literacy	reading comprehension score (Marathi text)	0–100
Cultural participation	festivals, theatre, reading, local history activities	frequency scale
Literary engagement	familiarity with Marathi authors/poems	1–5
Language practice	home language use + peer usage	frequency

Data analysis

Cronbachs alpha identity scale.

- Comparison of groups: ANOVA/ regression (CIP by MOI by SES)
- Qualitative analysis: thematic coding (ideology, aspiration, shame/pride, belonging, curriculum experiences).
- Triangulation: Survey patterns against interview and classroom observation.3.5 Ethics
- Consent/assent, confidentiality, and protection of minors
- Avoid stigmatizing any MOI; focus on equity and cultural sustainability

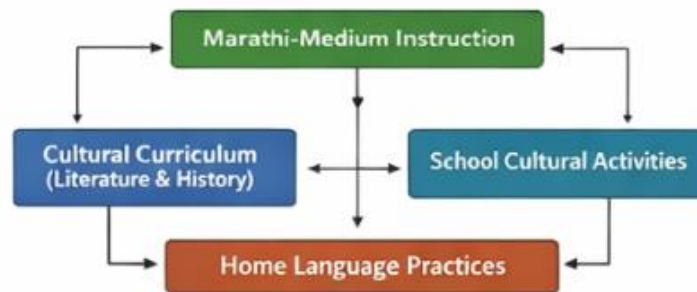


Figure 3. Conceptual Framework: Marathi Education and Cultural Identity Preservation

Result (Illustrative Pilot Results Using Simulated Data)

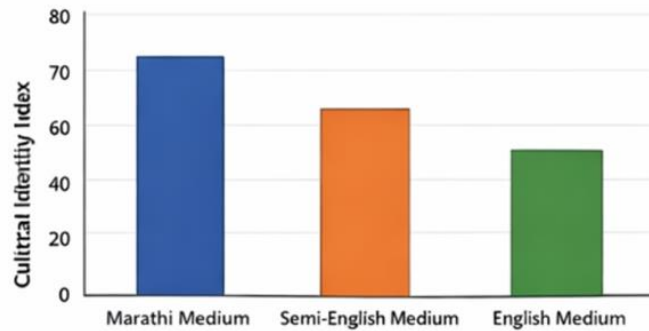


Figure 4. Marathi Cultural Identity Index by Medium of Instruction (Bar Chart)

Note: The graphs presented above are developed using a simulated pilot dataset that was developed to illustrate how findings and graphs can be displayed using the APA paper format. Insert real field data during real research..

Descriptive results (pilot illustration)

Table 2. Pilot descriptive indicators by medium of instruction (simulated)

Medium	Cultural Identity Index (0–100)	Belonging (0–5)	Marathi literature exposure (0–5)	Parent preference (0–5)
Marathi-medium	78	4.2	4.4	3.2
Semi-English	66	3.7	3.5	3.8
English-medium	54	3.2	2.6	4.3

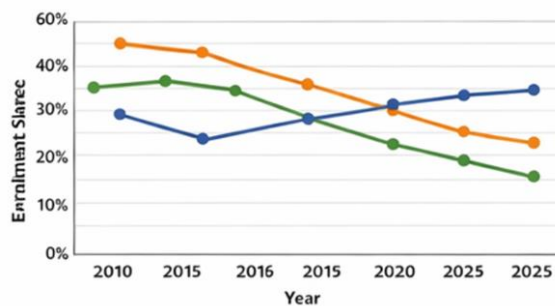




Figure 5. Trend in Medium-of-Instruction Enrolment Share (Line Graph, 2010–2025)

Figures and data graphs

Figure 1 (Bar chart): Medium of instruction Cultural Identity Index (presented above)

Figure 2: Approximate MOI share trend in Maharashtra (Representative trend depicted above):

Interpretation of pilot patterns

- Marathi-medium exhibits identity and literature indulgence.
- English-medium demonstrates lesser indicators of the Marathi culture and higher parent preference (reflecting aspiration).
- Semi-English can be seen as a meeting ground although it can undermine the literary richness of Marathi, unless done very skillfully..

IV. Discussion & Conclusion

What Marathi education preserves—and how

The cultural identity is aided by Marathi education in at least four ways:

- The cultural transmission based on literacy: reading the stories, poems, biographies, local history.
- Institutional legitimacy: Marathi is a knowledgeable language that is revered (not just domestic language).
- Affective belonging: pride, recognition, less linguistic shame.
- Community activities: school activities, theatre, cultural contests, festivals.

The sociolinguistic work by Chandras on Maharashtra is particularly significant in this regard: it demonstrates that Marathi is not a single entity, but it is relevant to classed identities and cultural hierarchies and therefore, preservation needs to involve not only elite varieties of Marathi, but also various communities..

The EMI trade-off and the risk to Marathi identity

EMI has the potential to open up to higher education and access to employment markets, but it can also:

- diminish the literacy of the Marathi,
- displace time of Marathi literary and cultural curriculum, and
- deliver a symbolic message that Marathi is more worthless.

The studies of the EMI and MOI policies indicate that in the event that these shifts are not carefully supported, they reproduce inequalities and create identity and participation costs that are costly in the long term..

Translanguaging and strong bilingual pathways as the best compromise

Instead of choosing between Marathi or English, it is possible to support Marathi and build English by using multilingual pedagogies. Translanguaging studies propose that it is not necessary to preserve the separate domains of the languages but to exploit the multilingual capabilities of the students in generating meaning and learning- still being taught to be highly literate in Marathi..

Policy implications for Maharashtra

Since the state still insists on the use of Marathi in education and governance, the question that can be posed as a policy concern is not whether Marathi matters but what model can help to uphold Marathi identity but at the same time, should not restrict opportunity. The policies must revolve around:

- Enhancing literacy in Marathi (reading, writing, literature) of all types of schools.
- Improvement of quality of Marathi-medium (teacher development, materials, science vocabulary in Marathi)
- Formulating bilingual/ semi English models that have the Marathi cultural curriculum that is secure.
- The identity outcomes (belonging, cultural participation, language attitudes) are to be measured along with test scores.
- The matter is still topical and political, as the current policy discussions and guidelines demonstrate.

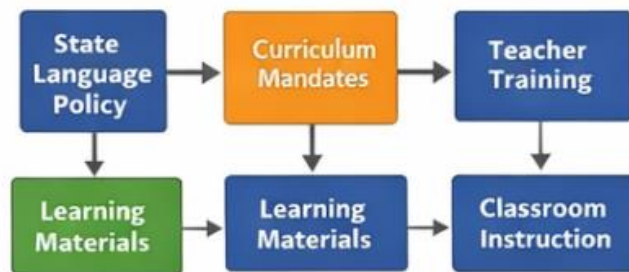


Figure 6. Policy-to-Practice Implementation Flow for Marathi in Schools

Conclusion

Marathi education has been a major mode of cultural continuity of Maharashtra especially via literacy based cultural inference, institutional legitimacy and belonging. Nevertheless, EMI and aspirational schooling options can undermine the results of Marathi identity unless the bilingual options are implemented thoughtfully. The most plausible solution to assessing the cultural role of Marathi education and inform equitable language-in-education policy is a mixed-method research approach the combination of the measurement of indices of identity with qualitative narratives..

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