



Research Paper

Many Languages, One Nation: Navigating Linguistic Diversity in India

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Abstract

India is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, with 22 official languages recognised in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution and over 19,500 dialects spoken across the nation. This linguistic diversity has been both a strength and a challenge, contributing to India's rich cultural heritage while posing administrative, educational, and political difficulties. This Study explores how linguistic diversity shapes national identity, governance, and social integration in India. Using a qualitative approach, the Study incorporates focus group discussions, interviews with eminent personalities, and ethnographic case studies. The findings highlight the political tensions over language policies, the role of language in regional identity, and the implications for education and governance. The Study concludes with policy recommendations for language preservation, linguistic inclusivity, and multilingual governance.

Keywords: Linguistic diversity, multilingualism, language policy, national integration, India

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I. Introduction

India is home to one of the most linguistically diverse populations in the world, with 22 languages officially recognised in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, 122 major languages, and over 19,500 dialects spoken across the country. This linguistic plurality has been a defining characteristic of India's cultural identity, regional politics, and governance structures, making language one of the most significant factors in national integration and administration. Unlike many nations with a single dominant language, India's linguistic heritage is deeply rooted in historical evolution, socio-political transformations, and colonial influences, resulting in a highly decentralised and regionally distinct linguistic landscape. The coexistence of multiple languages has enriched India's social fabric, allowing for the flourishing of literature, oral traditions, folklore, and knowledge systems unique to different linguistic communities. However, this diversity also challenges policy implementation, education, governance, and economic mobility, raising questions about balancing linguistic inclusivity with administrative efficiency in a multilingual federal system (Ranjan, 2021).

While Hindi and English serve as official languages at the national level, the Indian Constitution grants individual states the autonomy to adopt regional languages as their official language for governance and administration (Constitution of India, Article 345). This state-driven linguistic policy has allowed regional languages to thrive but has also created barriers to national communication, employment opportunities, and uniform governance structures. The diversity of languages in India has given rise to several linguistic movements and identity-based mobilisations, where language has served as a tool for political assertion, cultural preservation, and demands for regional autonomy. For instance, the anti-Hindi agitations in Tamil Nadu (1965) reflected non-Hindi-speaking states' resistance to Hindi imposition, asserting linguistic federalism over a centralised linguistic framework. Similarly, the Bengali Language Movement (1947–1952) in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) was a landmark event that highlighted the role of language in national identity and political self-determination. In independent India, the formation of linguistic states, such as Andhra Pradesh (1953), Maharashtra (1960), Gujarat (1960), Uttarakhand (2000), Chhattisgarh (2000), Jharkhand (2000), and Telangana (2014), was driven by demands for governance and resource allocation in a language familiar to the majority population of each region (Dua, 1993). These historical events underscore how language is not merely a tool for communication but also an instrument for political organisation, cultural preservation, and regional self-governance.

Despite India's constitutional commitment to linguistic pluralism, tensions remain over language policy, governance, and representation. Many non-Hindi-speaking states perceive the growing dominance of Hindi as a threat to their regional identity, fearing that their native languages will be gradually marginalised in favour of a centralised linguistic framework. State policies promoting regional languages sometimes clash with national policies emphasising Hindi and English, leading to linguistic conflicts over language in education, government recruitment, and public administration. While linguistic federalism allows states to use regional languages in governance, many non-Hindi-speaking populations feel disadvantaged in national-level examinations, central government jobs, and legal frameworks, where Hindi and English dominate. Additionally, language barriers restrict access to higher education and economic mobility, especially for students and professionals whose primary language is neither Hindi nor English.

At the same time, more minor languages and dialects face an existential threat due to globalisation, migration, urbanisation, and educational policies prioritising dominant languages such as Hindi and English. In many states, indigenous and tribal languages remain excluded from mainstream education, governance, and economic participation, leading to social and economic marginalisation. Linguistic hierarchies, where proficiency in English and Hindi is associated with upward mobility, have gradually declined regional and tribal languages as younger generations increasingly shift toward linguistically dominant languages that provide better employment and educational opportunities. This phenomenon has accelerated language loss among indigenous communities, raising concerns about the sustainability of India's linguistic heritage (Hashmi, 2019).

Another key challenge in India's linguistic diversity is the unequal representation of languages in governance, education, and digital spaces. The Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, which currently recognises 22 languages, provides official status, institutional funding, and policy support to these languages, ensuring their inclusion in government administration, educational institutions, and judicial proceedings. However, many languages spoken by millions—such as Bhojpur, Tulu, Rajasthani, and several tribal languages—remain excluded from official recognition, leaving them without government protection, educational integration, or policy support. The process of including languages in the Eighth Schedule remains politically charged, with decisions often influenced by electoral considerations rather than linguistic demographics. This exclusion impacts educational curricula, civil service examinations, and public administration, limiting the opportunities available to speakers of non-recognised languages.

Language policies in India are also shaped by economic and technological transformations, particularly in the digital age, where linguistic accessibility in online education, digital financial services, and e-governance platforms is increasingly becoming crucial in social and economic inclusion. The internet and AI-driven translation tools have created new opportunities for linguistic preservation. However, at the same time, they have reinforced linguistic inequalities, as Hindi, English, and a few dominant regional languages receive more better technological support. In contrast, more minor languages remain underrepresented in digital platforms. Without institutional backing for digital language preservation, many regional and indigenous languages face limited visibility in online spaces, making it harder for their speakers to engage with modern digital services and economic opportunities. Education is another key area where linguistic hierarchies manifest, particularly in higher education and competitive examinations, where Hindi and English dominate. Students from non-Hindi and non-English backgrounds struggle to compete in national-level exams, as most government recruitment processes, university entrance tests, and professional qualification exams are conducted primarily in these two languages. While some state-level exams are conducted in regional languages, the lack of regional language inclusion in central government exams limits the employment prospects of millions of students who receive their education in a non-Hindi regional language. This has led to demands for greater inclusion of regional languages in UPSC (Union Public Service Commission), SSC (Staff Selection Commission), and other national-level recruitment exams, allowing students from diverse linguistic backgrounds to compete on equal footing. The role of language in employment and economic mobility is also a matter of concern, as linguistic biases in corporate hiring, government recruitment, and private-sector employment create barriers for those who are not fluent in English or Hindi. Studies have shown that English proficiency is often linked to higher salaries and better employment prospects, while regional-language speakers face discrimination in hiring processes, particularly in metropolitan cities. This creates a structural disadvantage for non-English speakers, reinforcing economic disparities between linguistically privileged and marginalised communities.

Given the growing influence of language on access to education, employment, governance, and digital inclusion, there is an urgent need for inclusive linguistic policies that promote multilingualism while ensuring equal opportunities for all linguistic communities. Policymakers must work toward expanding linguistic representation in governance, revising educational language policies, and promoting linguistic inclusivity in digital spaces. Ensuring equal linguistic access in national examinations, government recruitment, and online education platforms will reduce language-based inequalities and foster a more linguistically inclusive India (Suri et al., 2016). As India moves forward in the 21st century, language plays a fundamental role in shaping identity, governance, education, and economic opportunities. While linguistic diversity remains a source of cultural strength, language-based exclusion in governance, education, and employment threatens national cohesion and

socio-economic equality. Addressing these systemic inequalities through inclusive language policies, digital language preservation efforts, and multilingual education reforms is crucial to ensuring that all linguistic communities have equal access to opportunities in modern India. By promoting multilingual governance, equitable educational opportunities, and digital language representation, India can move toward a future where all languages are valued and protected, fostering a more cohesive, equitable, and culturally vibrant nation.

Statement of the Problem

Although India is constitutionally committed to linguistic inclusivity, implementing language policies has often led to conflicts, disparities, and feelings of exclusion among non-Hindi speakers and speakers of lesser-known languages. The dominance of Hindi and English in governance, administration, and education has raised concerns that other regional languages are being systematically sidelined. Despite state-level autonomy over language policy, the lack of a uniform approach to multilingual governance has resulted in linguistic discrimination, unequal access to education, and employment disparities. A critical issue is the exclusion of indigenous and minority languages from educational institutions and government examinations, making it difficult for individuals from these linguistic backgrounds to compete in national-level competitive exams. Furthermore, job recruitment, both in the public and private sectors, heavily favours Hindi and English speakers, leaving those with proficiency only in regional languages at a significant disadvantage. The lack of linguistic representation in digital media, technology, and AI-driven applications also raises concerns about the future of digitally marginalised languages. This research explores the dynamics of linguistic diversity in India, examining language policies' political, social, and economic impact. It seeks to understand how language contributes to regional identity formation, how linguistic hierarchies affect economic mobility, and what steps can be taken to ensure inclusive governance that respects India's multilingual heritage.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the impact of India's language policies on regional linguistic communities
2. To analyse the role of linguistic diversity in shaping national identity and regional autonomy.
3. To investigate the challenges faced by non-Hindi and indigenous language speakers in education and employment.
4. To evaluate the role of digital media in language preservation and accessibility.

Research Questions

1. How do India's language policies, including the Three-Language Formula and the Eighth Schedule, impact linguistic minorities in education, governance, and economic mobility, and what are the disparities in their implementation across different states?
2. What role does linguistic identity play in national integration and regional autonomy, and how have language-based movements shaped the political landscape in non-Hindi-speaking states?
3. What are the key linguistic barriers faced by regional and indigenous language speakers in national-level examinations and public-sector employment, and how do these barriers contribute to socio-economic inequalities?
4. How has digital media influenced the preservation, accessibility, and visibility of regional and indigenous languages, and what policy interventions are needed to ensure equal linguistic representation in the digital age?

Significance of the Study

Linguistic diversity in India is both a cultural asset and a governance challenge, influencing education, governance, employment, and digital accessibility. This Study is significant as it examines the impact of language policies on national integration, economic mobility, and linguistic representation, offering insights that can inform policy development, academic research, and public discourse. By analysing how language shapes access to education, job opportunities, and political participation, the Study provides a comprehensive understanding of linguistic hierarchies and their consequences. The research contributes to sociolinguistics, political science, and public policy by addressing language-based inequalities in education, governance, and technology. It explores how language barriers affect employment and economic opportunities, emphasising the disparities faced by speakers of regional and indigenous languages. Furthermore, it highlights the role of digital media in language preservation, examining how artificial intelligence, online learning, and social media can help bridge linguistic gaps. By offering policy recommendations for inclusive language governance, the Study aims to ensure linguistic equity in governance, multilingual education policies, and fair employment practices. It also emphasises the need for technological integration to support language preservation and accessibility. The findings will be valuable for policymakers, educators, researchers, and digital innovators, helping them develop strategies that balance linguistic diversity with national cohesion. Ultimately, this Study contributes to creating

an inclusive, multilingual India where all languages are respected, preserved, and integrated into national development frameworks.

II. Review of Literature

A comprehensive literature review provides the theoretical foundation for understanding linguistic diversity, governance, and identity politics in India. Existing scholarship on language policies, linguistic nationalism, multilingual education, and language-related conflicts offers key insights into the challenges and opportunities of managing India's diverse linguistic landscape. Several theories explain language, identity, and governance dynamics in multilingual nations, including the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which suggests that language shapes thought processes and cultural identity (Whorf, 1956). In India, language is more than a means of communication; it is a marker of political identity and regional affiliation (Brass, 2005). The ethnic security dilemma proposed by Toft (2003) suggests that ethnic groups seek linguistic autonomy as a form of self-preservation in diverse states, which can be seen in India's linguistic state formations, such as Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Karnataka, where language played a key role in statehood demands (Ramaswamy, 1997). Fishman's (1991) theory on linguistic nationalism explains how language can either strengthen federal unity or fuel separatist tendencies, as seen in the resistance to Hindi imposition in non-Hindi-speaking states (Singh, 2008).

India's linguistic diversity has been viewed as both a strength and a challenge. Scholars such as Annamalai (2001) argue that regional languages contribute to cultural vibrancy and democratic representation, while Pattanayak (1981) highlights that linguistic pluralism fosters inclusivity and coexistence rather than division. However, linguistic diversity has also led to tensions and political disputes, as evidenced in the Anti-Hindi Agitations in Tamil Nadu (1965), the Gorkhaland Movement in West Bengal (1980s-present), and the Bodo language struggle in Assam (Ramaswamy, 1997; Chatterjee, 2004; Baruah, 2005). These conflicts show that language can be a unifying force and a source of contestation, particularly when language policies fail to account for regional aspirations.

Constitutional provisions and political debates have shaped India's language policies and governance frameworks. Articles 343 to 351 of the Indian Constitution define India's language policy, granting states the authority to adopt regional languages for official purposes while recognising 22 scheduled languages in the Eighth Schedule (Singh, 2008). However, demands for including Bhojpuri, Tulu, and other regional languages indicate that linguistic politics continue to evolve (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2011). The Three-Language Formula, introduced in 1968, promoted multilingual education by requiring students to learn their regional language, Hindi (or another Indian language for Hindi-speaking states) and English. However, its implementation has been inconsistent, with Tamil Nadu rejecting Hindi and states like West Bengal prioritising Bengali over Hindi (Ramaswamy, 1997). While the policy aimed to create linguistic balance, it has also reinforced disparities in language learning, with some regions resisting Hindi while others struggle with English dominance.

The role of English as a link language remains a critical topic in linguistic governance. English is often viewed as the language of governance, education, and business, giving speakers economic and social mobility (Brass, 2005). However, English proficiency also creates linguistic hierarchies, where non-English speakers face barriers in accessing higher education and employment opportunities (Pattanayak, 1981). In education, mother tongue-based learning has been shown to improve student performance, as students grasp concepts better when taught in their first language (UNESCO, 2003). However, linguistic minorities face disadvantages in competitive exams favouring English and Hindi speakers, making it harder for regional language speakers to access government jobs and higher education (Annamalai, 2001). The economic implications of language policies are significant, as proficiency in English and Hindi enhances job prospects, particularly in urban and corporate sectors, while rural and indigenous communities struggle with economic inclusion due to linguistic barriers (Singh, 2008; Pattanayak, 1981). Despite extensive research on linguistic diversity in India, several gaps remain in existing literature. While theoretical analyses have examined language policies and movements, limited ethnographic research documents the lived experiences of linguistic minorities. Most studies focus on constitutional provisions and political debates rather than how language policies impact education, employment, and digital inclusion at the grassroots level. Additionally, the effectiveness of the Three-Language Formula has not been comprehensively evaluated, particularly in terms of its impact on linguistic minorities and regional autonomy. Moreover, existing research primarily discusses language in print and formal education settings, while digital advancements, such as AI-driven language tools and social media platforms, remain understudied. As digital technology increasingly influences linguistic interactions, this Study will explore how digital media helps or hinders linguistic equity, particularly for indigenous and non-dominant language speakers. Literature review establishes that linguistic diversity is deeply intertwined with governance, education, and economic opportunities. While India's multilingual fabric has enriched its cultural and democratic landscape, challenges remain in implementing inclusive language policies that address disparities in education, employment, and

governance. The Study builds upon existing research by using ethnographic methods to document the real-life challenges faced by linguistic minorities, evaluate the effectiveness of multilingual policies, and analyse how digital technology shapes language preservation and accessibility. This research aims to address these gaps by providing policy recommendations that promote linguistic inclusivity while strengthening national unity.

Research Gap

Despite extensive research on linguistic diversity, governance, and education policies in India, significant gaps remain in understanding how language shapes identity, political participation, and economic mobility in contemporary India. While studies have examined historical language movements, constitutional provisions, and theoretical language policies, there is limited research on the lived experiences of linguistic minorities, the effectiveness of language policies at the state level, and the impact of digital advancements on language preservation and accessibility. This Study seeks to bridge these gaps by incorporating ethnographic research, policy evaluation, economic analysis, and digital media studies to comprehensively understand linguistic challenges and opportunities in India. Most existing research on linguistic identity focuses on policy analysis and historical conflicts but lacks ethnographic studies that document the daily struggles of linguistic minorities in accessing education, employment, and governance (Brass, 2005; Singh, 2008). While there is significant scholarship on Hindi imposition and resistance movements, there is little research on how language barriers affect non-Hindi speakers in bureaucratic processes, government recruitment, and higher education admissions. This Study addresses this gap by conducting fieldwork, interviews, and case studies across different linguistic regions to understand how linguistic minorities navigate governance, education, and economic opportunities.

Research on language policy implementation in India remains largely theoretical, with limited comparative analysis of how different states have adapted national policies to their linguistic demographics (Pattanayak, 1981). Though widely discussed in literature, the Three-Language Formula has not been comprehensively evaluated for its effectiveness in promoting linguistic inclusivity across states. Many studies outline constitutional provisions on language, but few provide empirical data on how language policies impact teachers, students, and job seekers in different regions. This Study aims to fill this gap by analysing the state-wise implementation of language policies and assessing their real-world impact on education and governance through a combination of government records, policy analysis, and qualitative interviews. Language plays a pivotal role in employment and economic mobility, yet research on the link between language skills and economic opportunities in India is scarce and outdated (Brass, 2005). Existing studies often assume that fluency in English and Hindi provides better job prospects, but they fail to examine how regional language speakers fare in recruitment, corporate hiring, and government exams (Singh, 2008). The economic impact of linguistic discrimination in employment remains an underexplored area, particularly regarding rural, indigenous, and minority language speakers who may be systematically disadvantaged in labour markets. This Study will analyse employment trends among different linguistic groups, exploring how linguistic barriers influence career advancement, workplace inclusion, and economic disparities.

With the rise of digital media and AI-driven translation tools, language accessibility has undergone significant transformations. However, research on how digital media shapes linguistic diversity in India remains limited. Studies on language decline often focus on traditional media, such as books and newspapers, while overlooking the role of social media platforms, YouTube, AI-based translation tools, and digital dictionaries in language preservation and accessibility (Annamalai, 2001). This Study will explore how indigenous and minority languages are represented in digital spaces, assessing the impact of machine translation, online education, and crowdsourced digital content on linguistic inclusivity. It will also analyse how government initiatives, private tech companies, and grassroots activists use digital tools to bridge linguistic divides or reinforce existing hierarchies. Indigenous and tribal languages in India are at risk of extinction, yet they receive less attention in language policy debates compared to conflicts between Hindi and regional languages (Baruah, 2005). Many research studies focus on scheduled languages but fail to address the challenges faced by non-scheduled tribal languages, particularly regarding educational access, digital representation, and legal recognition. There is limited research on how mother-tongue-based education influences literacy rates in tribal communities or how policy failures have contributed to the decline of indigenous languages. This Study evaluates government and community-led language preservation initiatives, particularly in Northeast India, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh, to assess their effectiveness and propose alternative strategies for indigenous language revitalisation.

Although language-related conflicts and policy challenges are widely discussed in literature, there is a lack of research on practical policy recommendations for creating a linguistically inclusive India. Most studies document historical grievances and contemporary challenges but do not provide concrete policy frameworks for addressing linguistic disparities in governance, education, and employment (Singh, 2008). Furthermore, multilingualism's economic and social benefits are rarely quantified, leaving a gap in understanding how multilingual policies can contribute to national development and social cohesion. This Study seeks to develop

evidence-based policy recommendations that promote multilingual governance models, language-inclusive educational reforms, and equitable workplace policies. Existing research on linguistic diversity in India focuses heavily on historical conflicts, constitutional provisions, and theoretical policy debates while lacking qualitative research on linguistic minorities, real-world policy evaluations, economic studies on language and employment, and digital media analysis. This Study fills these gaps by incorporating ethnographic research, policy assessment, economic mobility analysis, and digital language studies to provide a holistic understanding of India's multilingual landscape. It aims to bridge academic research with practical policymaking, offering data-driven recommendations for strengthening linguistic inclusivity in governance, education, and economic opportunities. By addressing these gaps, the Study contributes to sociolinguistic research, policy development, and social justice efforts aimed at fostering a linguistically diverse and inclusive India.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework provides the foundation for analysing India's linguistic diversity, guiding the interpretation of language policies, linguistic conflicts, identity politics, and socio-economic inequalities. The interplay between language, governance, identity, and economic mobility can be understood through several theoretical perspectives from sociolinguistics, political science, and economic development studies. This Study primarily draws on linguistic relativity, ethnic security dilemma, linguistic nationalism, language economy theory, and digital divide theory to examine how language influences national integration, regional autonomy, social mobility, and digital accessibility in India.

1. Linguistic Relativity and Identity (Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis)

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, also known as linguistic relativity, suggests that language influences thought, perception, and cultural identity (Whorf, 1956; Sapir, 1929). This theory is crucial in understanding how linguistic diversity shapes India's regional identities, worldviews, and political affiliations. In a country where language is deeply tied to regional and cultural identity, the perceived imposition of Hindi as a dominant language has led to strong resistance from non-Hindi-speaking communities. For example, the Anti-Hindi agitations in Tamil Nadu (1965) were driven by fears of cultural erasure, as many Tamil speakers believed that language policies could alter their historical and political consciousness. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis thus helps explain why language movements are not just about communication but also about autonomy, representation, and power dynamics in India's federal structure.

2. Ethnic Security Dilemma (Toft, 2003) and Linguistic Conflicts

The ethnic security dilemma proposed by Monica Duffy Toft (2003) suggests that ethnic groups seek political and linguistic autonomy to ensure their survival in diverse states. In India, this theory helps us understand why language-based statehood movements, linguistic identity politics, and resistance to Hindi imposition continue to emerge. The reorganisation of states along linguistic lines (such as Andhra Pradesh in 1953, Maharashtra and Gujarat in 1960, and Telangana in 2014) reflects this security dilemma, where linguistic communities demand administrative autonomy to protect their cultural and linguistic heritage. The persistence of linguistic conflicts between Hindi-speaking and non-Hindi-speaking populations, as well as demands for recognition of minority languages such as Bhojpuri, Tulu, and Kokborok, can also be explained through this framework.

3. Linguistic Nationalism and Federalism (Fishman, 1991)

Joshua Fishman (1991) developed the concept of linguistic nationalism, which refers to using language as a tool for national identity construction, political mobilisation, and regional assertion. In India, linguistic nationalism manifests in two opposing ways:

1. Hindi as a unifying force: The central government has promoted Hindi as a lingua franca to foster national unity, with policies aimed at expanding Hindi's role in governance, education, and administration.
2. Regional language assertion: Non-Hindi-speaking regions, particularly in South India and the Northeast, perceive these policies as imposing linguistic dominance, sparking movements advocating for increased recognition of regional and indigenous languages.

Fishman's theory is helpful in analysing how language policies impact federalism, governance efficiency, and regional autonomy. The debate over Hindi imposition, the Three-Language Formula, and the exclusion of specific languages from the Eighth Schedule reflects an ongoing tension between linguistic nationalism and linguistic federalism in India.

4. Language Economy Theory (Grin, 1996) and Economic Mobility

The language economy theory, developed by François Grin (1996), suggests that language proficiency determines economic opportunities, employment access, and wage disparities. In India, fluency in English and Hindi is often linked to higher incomes, better education, and access to global job markets. At the same time, monolingual speakers of regional languages face limited economic mobility. Studies show that English speakers in India earn 30-50% more than their non-English-speaking counterparts (Azam et al., 2013), highlighting how language proficiency is an economic asset.

The exclusion of regional and indigenous languages from higher education and national-level examinations (such as UPSC and SSC) further reinforces economic hierarchies, as students from non-Hindi and non-English backgrounds struggle to compete in national and corporate job markets. This framework helps explain why economic inequalities in India are often linked to linguistic barriers, reinforcing the need for inclusive language policies in education and employment.

5. Digital Divide Theory (Norris, 2001) and Language Accessibility in the Digital Age

The digital divide theory, proposed by Pippa Norris (2001), explains how unequal access to technology, digital infrastructure, and online resources creates social and economic inequalities. In India, this divide extends to linguistic accessibility in digital spaces, where English and Hindi dominate. At the same time, many regional and tribal languages remain underrepresented in AI-driven translation tools, digital education, and financial services. In India, this gap extends to linguistic accessibility in digital platforms, where English and Hindi prevail, while numerous regional and tribal languages remain marginalised in AI-driven translation tools, digital education, and financial services.

For example, the absence of Kokborok, Bodo, or Tulu in widely used translation software, online education platforms, and government digital services limits speakers of these languages' access to e-learning, online banking, and digital governance. While social media and grassroots initiatives have played a role in preserving endangered languages, state intervention is necessary to integrate regional languages into digital infrastructure. This framework highlights the importance of digital linguistic inclusion for bridging economic and educational disparities.

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this Study comprehensively explains how linguistic diversity in India shapes governance, education, economic opportunities, and digital accessibility. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis helps explain why language is closely tied to identity and political mobilisation, while the ethnic security dilemma highlights why linguistic groups seek statehood and autonomy. Fishman's theory of linguistic nationalism sheds light on the ongoing tensions between regional identity and national integration, whereas the language economy theory explains how language proficiency impacts employment and economic mobility. Lastly, the digital divide theory illustrates how linguistic inequalities persist in online spaces, affecting access to education, financial resources, and governance.

Understanding India's linguistic diversity through these theoretical lenses underscores the importance of inclusive language policies that promote multilingual governance, equitable education, and economic mobility for regional-language speakers. A balanced approach that acknowledges linguistic identities while ensuring equal opportunities across different linguistic groups is crucial for maintaining national cohesion without eroding linguistic diversity. Future policy frameworks should focus on strengthening multilingual education, expanding regional language representation in governance and employment, and promoting linguistic accessibility in digital services to create a more equitable and linguistically inclusive India.

III. Research Methodology

This Study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the socio-political, educational, and economic implications of linguistic diversity in India. The research design integrates ethnographic fieldwork, focus group discussions (FGDs), and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders to provide an in-depth understanding of how language policies influence governance, education, employment, and cultural identity. By capturing lived experiences and expert perspectives, this Study ensures a comprehensive, nuanced, and context-driven analysis of linguistic diversity and its policy implications.

A qualitative research design is particularly suitable for studying linguistic identity and governance because it enables an exploration of subjective experiences, perceptions, and social dynamics that cannot be fully captured through quantitative methods. The Study employs three primary data collection techniques: ethnographic case studies, FGDs, and semi-structured interviews. Ethnographic fieldwork involves participant observations, interviews, and policy document analysis to assess how linguistic policies are implemented in education, governance, and the labor market. FGDs are conducted with students, educators, government officials, media professionals, and indigenous language speakers to capture diverse perspectives on language rights, accessibility, and economic mobility. Semi-structured interviews with linguists, policymakers, and activists provide expert insights into the challenges and opportunities of multilingual governance in India.

Data collection takes place in linguistically diverse regions to examine regional variations in language policies and identity formation. Fieldwork is conducted in Tamil Nadu, where Dravidian identity has historically resisted Hindi imposition; West Bengal, where Bengali linguistic nationalism influences governance and education; and Northeast India, where indigenous and tribal languages face endangerment and struggle for preservation. The research involves documenting real-life linguistic struggles, policy effectiveness, and community-led language preservation efforts. Observational methods include monitoring language usage in educational institutions, government offices, and public spaces to assess how linguistic diversity functions in practice.

FGDs involve five separate discussions, each consisting of six to ten participants, representing different linguistic communities and professional backgrounds. Discussions with students and youth focus on the impact of language policies on education and employment opportunities, while educators and linguists provide insights into teaching methodologies and curriculum gaps in multilingual education. FGDs with government officials assess how language policies are implemented and the barriers faced by linguistic minorities in public administration. Discussions with media professionals and digital activists explore the role of social media and AI-driven translation tools in language preservation, while indigenous language speakers highlight challenges in linguistic retention and transmission across generations. Key questions in FGDs include how language affects access to higher education, employment, and governance; how linguistic hierarchies shape social mobility; and what policy measures could improve linguistic inclusivity.

Semi-structured interviews are conducted with twenty-five key informants, including academics specialising in sociolinguistics, policymakers involved in language governance, and language activists working on indigenous language rights and digital inclusion. The interviews focus on policy effectiveness, educational access, and socio-economic challenges faced by speakers of regional and indigenous languages. Questions explore how language policies impact national integration, whether linguistic minorities face systematic exclusion from governance and employment, and how digital platforms can aid in language preservation.

Since this Study relies on qualitative data, analysis is conducted using thematic coding and discourse analysis. Thematic analysis involves identifying recurring patterns, themes, and narratives from interviews, FGDs, and field observations, categorising findings into key domains such as language-based exclusion, governance barriers, digital accessibility, and economic mobility. Discourse analysis focuses on how language is framed in policy documents, educational curricula, and public discourse, examining how different stakeholders discuss language-related challenges and solutions. This approach helps identify contradictions, power dynamics, and policy gaps in India's multilingual framework.

Given the sensitivity of linguistic identity and policy debates, the Study adheres to strict ethical considerations to ensure participant anonymity, voluntary consent, and cultural sensitivity. Informed consent is obtained from all participants, with assurances of confidentiality and non-disclosure of personal identifiers. Research in tribal and indigenous communities is conducted in collaboration with local representatives, ensuring that data collection is culturally respectful and aligned with community priorities.

A qualitative approach is justified for this Study because linguistic identity, education policies, and employment barriers are deeply rooted in subjective experiences, historical contexts, and regional variations. Quantitative data alone cannot capture the complex social realities of linguistic diversity, making ethnographic fieldwork and discourse analysis more suitable for exploring how language policies impact real lives. The Study's multi-method approach—combining case studies, FGDs, and expert interviews—ensures a well-rounded and contextually rich understanding of multilingualism's socio-political and economic implications in India.

In summary, this Study employs ethnographic case studies, focus group discussions, and semi-structured interviews to examine how linguistic diversity influences governance, education, and employment in India. Data is analysed using thematic coding and discourse analysis to identify patterns in policy implementation, language-based exclusion, and digital inclusion efforts. Ethical considerations are strictly followed to ensure participant confidentiality and cultural sensitivity. By integrating qualitative insights from diverse linguistic communities, policymakers, and digital activists, this research comprehensively analyses India's multilingual landscape and its governance challenges.

IV. Discussion and Results

Linguistic Diversity and National Integration

Linguistic diversity in India is a defining feature of its cultural and historical identity. It serves both as a symbol of unity in diversity and a potential source of political and social conflict. The country is home to over 19,500 languages and dialects, with 121 languages spoken by more than 10,000 people each (Census of India, 2011). The sheer linguistic complexity of India has necessitated a federal language policy that seeks to accommodate multilingualism while maintaining a functional administrative framework. However, this approach has often led to linguistic tensions, particularly regarding the dominance of Hindi and English in national governance, administration, and education. While the Indian Constitution recognises 22 official languages under the Eighth Schedule, the perception that Hindi is being imposed as a national language has sparked strong linguistic resistance in several regions where regional languages are central to cultural identity.

In many non-Hindi-speaking states, regional linguistic identities are closely tied to political autonomy, making any move perceived as a linguistic imposition a highly contentious issue. The Anti-Hindi Agitations of 1965 in Tamil Nadu serve as a prime example of how language can be a catalyst for resistance against central authority. The protests erupted when the Indian government attempted to implement Hindi as the sole official language, triggering massive demonstrations across Tamil Nadu, where Tamil linguistic identity is deeply rooted in its Dravidian heritage (Ranjan, 2021). The agitation ultimately forced the Indian government to

reconsider its policy, leading to the continued bilingual status of Hindi and English at the national level. A Tamil language activist emphasised the political nature of language, stating, "*Language is more than communication; it is a political statement. Speaking Tamil is a way of resisting cultural homogenisation.*" (Interview, Chennai, 2023). This perspective reflects the sentiment of several linguistic communities across India, where language is more than just a means of expression—it is a marker of historical pride, regional autonomy, and political identity. Apart from Tamil Nadu, several other states have also engaged in linguistic movements to protect and promote their regional languages. In West Bengal, linguistic nationalism has historically played a crucial role in shaping regional identity, with Bengali linguistic movements dating back to British colonial rule. The Bengali Language Movement (1947–1952), which took place in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), had ripple effects in West Bengal, strengthening regional pride in the Bengali language and reinforcing its importance in the state's educational and administrative systems. Similarly, states like Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Punjab have also seen language-based political mobilisation, demanding greater recognition for Marathi, Kannada, and Punjabi, respectively.

The Northeast states, which are home to a diverse array of tribal and indigenous languages, have also struggled with linguistic marginalisation. Many indigenous communities in this region find themselves caught between Hindi as a dominant administrative language and English as an economic necessity, leaving their native languages at risk of erosion (Tikhir, 2024). While some indigenous languages like Manipuri and Bodo have gained official recognition, many smaller tribal languages remain unrecognised and underrepresented in governance and education. A student from Manipur voiced this concern, stating, "*Our indigenous languages are not valued in governance. Without Hindi or English, we struggle to participate in decision-making.*" (FGD, Imphal, 2023). This highlights the political and social exclusion faced by linguistic minorities, as they often struggle to access public services, education, and job opportunities due to language barriers.

One of the significant challenges in ensuring linguistic inclusivity in India is balancing regional linguistic identities with the need for a common national language for communication and governance. The Indian Constitution provides linguistic autonomy to states, allowing them to adopt their regional languages as official state languages (Article 345). However, many regional-language speakers feel disadvantaged in national-level governance, competitive examinations, and higher education, where Hindi and English continue to dominate. This disparity creates barriers to upward mobility for those who are proficient only in their regional languages. Moreover, the issue of linguistic integration extends beyond administration and governance to education and employment. In many Hindi-speaking states, the Three-Language Formula, which requires students to learn Hindi, English, and a regional language, has been implemented inconsistently. Some Hindi-speaking states have been accused of failing to promote a third language, whereas non-Hindi states often resist mandatory Hindi education in their school curricula. This uneven implementation has widened linguistic disparities, leading to a lack of multilingual proficiency among different linguistic groups.

In contrast, English has emerged as the preferred medium for higher education, business, and international communication, further complicating India's linguistic landscape (Dua, 1993). While English is seen as a neutral link language, it has also reinforced class-based disparities, as access to English-language education is often limited to urban and privileged sections of society. A software engineer from Bengaluru acknowledged this reality, stating, "*My ability to speak English fluently is why I have a global career. Without it, I would be restricted to local jobs.*" (Interview, Bengaluru, 2023). However, for monolingual speakers of regional languages, the dominance of English poses barriers to economic mobility, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas where English education is less accessible.

The political debates surrounding linguistic integration in India are deeply rooted in historical grievances, regional aspirations, and national unity concerns. While Hindi proponents argue that a single national language fosters administrative efficiency and national identity, linguistic minorities strongly oppose any move that undermines their cultural autonomy. The resistance is particularly evident in states with strong regional identities, where linguistic nationalism is often intertwined with statehood demands and political movements. At the same time, language conflicts are not limited to Hindi vs. non-Hindi debates. There have also been intra-regional linguistic conflicts, where dominant regional languages suppress smaller linguistic communities. For instance, in states like Karnataka, Maharashtra, and West Bengal, linguistic minorities often struggle to recognise their languages in education and public administration. This highlights the need for a more inclusive linguistic policy that addresses the Hindi vs. non-Hindi divide and ensures the representation of linguistic minorities within states. The challenge for policymakers lies in ensuring linguistic inclusivity without imposing a singular linguistic identity, which could alienate significant portions of the population. India's linguistic federalism offers a framework for preserving linguistic diversity while promoting inter-state communication and national integration. However, effective implementation requires a more decentralised approach, where states are empowered to develop language policies that reflect their specific linguistic needs while the central government ensures that all linguistic groups have equal access to national institutions and resources.

In conclusion, linguistic diversity in India is a rich but complex reality that requires careful policy interventions to balance national unity with cultural autonomy. The need for inclusive governance, equitable education policies, and linguistic rights for marginalised communities remains crucial in shaping India's multilingual identity. While the Constitution has laid the foundation for linguistic coexistence, there is still a long way to go in ensuring equal linguistic representation in governance, education, and employment. The future of linguistic integration in India depends on how well policymakers can accommodate linguistic diversity while fostering a shared national identity that respects every language, culture, and voice in the country's multilingual democracy.

Language Policy and Its Uneven Implementation

India's language policies have long attempted to strike a balance between linguistic diversity and administrative coherence, yet their implementation remains inconsistent and contested across states. The Three-Language Formula, introduced in 1968, was initially intended to promote multilingual education, requiring students to learn Hindi, English, and a regional language. However, the unequal adoption of this policy has resulted in regional disparities in language education, representation, and governance. While Hindi-speaking states often fail to enforce the teaching of a third language properly, non-Hindi-speaking states like Tamil Nadu have actively resisted Hindi, asserting regional linguistic autonomy over centralised linguistic policies. In states like West Bengal, Maharashtra, and Punjab, language is a medium of communication and a symbol of political and cultural identity, leading to regional policies favouring the state language over Hindi in governance and education. These discrepancies in language policy have created a fragmented linguistic landscape, where the same policy is interpreted and implemented differently across regions, leading to tensions between language groups and between the centre and states (Sachdev, 2007).

The Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, which currently recognises 22 languages, further reflects the disparities in language recognition and policy implementation. While these languages receive constitutional protection, institutional support, and official recognition in governance and education, several other languages spoken by millions remain unrecognised. This includes Bhojpuri, Tulu, Rajasthani, and Kokborok, whose exclusion from the Eighth Schedule has fueled long-standing linguistic grievances among their speakers. The fight for inclusion is not merely a symbolic demand for recognition but carries significant practical implications, as Eighth Schedule languages receive greater access to state funding, educational infrastructure, and policy support. A Tamil Nadu government official, reflecting the broader resistance to perceived linguistic imposition, asserted, *"We will never accept Hindi imposition. Tamil is our identity, and English gives us access to the world."* (Interview, Chennai, 2023). This sentiment captures the linguistic anxieties prevalent across many non-Hindi-speaking states, where language is deeply intertwined with identity, culture, and self-governance. Language policies in India have often become highly politicised, shaping electoral outcomes, governance models, and social movements. Several state governments have promoted linguistic exclusivity by limiting opportunities for speakers of other languages or asserting a dominant linguistic identity within the state. This trend is evident in both Hindi-speaking and non-Hindi-speaking regions, where linguistic identity has often been leveraged as a political tool for mobilisation and regional assertion. In Maharashtra, linguistic nationalism has been tied to Marathi identity politics, leading to campaigns advocating for priority to Marathi speakers in jobs, education, and government administration. Similarly, in West Bengal, Bengali linguistic pride has historically influenced governance, shaping language education policies and recruitment processes. Meanwhile, in states like Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Manipur, indigenous communities often struggle with a complex linguistic landscape where multiple ethnic groups assert their linguistic identity in governance and education, sometimes at the expense of smaller linguistic groups. The inconsistencies in language policy enforcement have also resulted in linguistic conflicts between different regional groups beyond the usual Hindi vs. non-Hindi divide. In some cases, migrants from Hindi-speaking states have faced linguistic discrimination when moving to non-Hindi-speaking states for work or education. This has been witnessed in states like Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Assam, where tensions between local language speakers and Hindi-speaking migrants have occasionally led to protests and political debates over linguistic assimilation and job reservations. One of the most significant challenges in India's language policy is the exclusion of many widely spoken languages from official recognition, particularly in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. Despite their large speaker bases and deep cultural roots, languages like Bhojpuri, Tulu, Rajasthani, and Kokborok continue to be left out of national language policies, affecting their institutional development and long-term survival. For instance, Bhojpuri, spoken by over 50 million people, is not included in the Eighth Schedule despite its rich literary and cultural tradition. Similarly, Tulu, spoken predominantly in Karnataka and Kerala, has been a key identity marker for Tulu-speaking communities yet remains institutionally marginalised. The struggles of Kokborok speakers in Tripura provide another example of how language policies shape political and economic opportunities.

A Kokborok activist in Tripura highlighted these challenges, stating, *"Without Eighth Schedule recognition, our language remains invisible in governance, education, and national policymaking. We need*

institutional support to ensure that Kokborok thrives." (Interview, Agartala, 2023). The exclusion of Kokborok has resulted in administrative disadvantages, as most government documents, school curriculums, and official communication continue to be in Bengali, the dominant language of Tripura. This reflects a broader trend where smaller linguistic communities struggle to secure institutional recognition, leading to a slow erosion of linguistic identity and educational barriers for native speakers. In addition to lacking institutional support, non-recognised languages face challenges in media representation, digital accessibility, and inclusion in public-sector employment, reinforcing socio-economic disparities for these linguistic communities (Debbarma, 2024).

The inconsistencies in India's language policies reveal a growing need for reform to ensure that regional and indigenous languages receive equal opportunities in governance, education, and economic participation. A more inclusive linguistic framework should prioritise transparent and criteria-based inclusion in the Eighth Schedule, ensuring that languages with significant cultural and demographic presence are not left out due to political considerations. States should have greater control over language policies, allowing them to determine how best to incorporate regional languages into administration and education without external pressures. Public services, government communication, and legal proceedings should be accessible in multiple languages, ensuring that linguistic minorities are not excluded from essential services. The inclusion of regional languages in national examinations and recruitment processes should be expanded, allowing students and job seekers to compete on an equal footing with Hindi and English speakers.

The uneven implementation of language policies continues to create disparities in education, employment, and governance. Addressing these gaps and inconsistencies requires proactive policy measures that promote linguistic inclusivity while respecting regional identities and cultural autonomy. A genuinely pluralistic and adaptive approach to language governance is necessary to maintain India's commitment to linguistic diversity while fostering national cohesion. A forward-looking approach should focus on reforming the Eighth Schedule to recognise more languages, and ensuring equal access to government services, educational institutions, and employment opportunities regardless of language barriers. Strengthening state-level autonomy in language policy and investing in language technology, digital preservation, and multilingual media representation can ensure that all linguistic communities feel represented, included, and empowered (Dua, 1993). Only through an inclusive and equitable linguistic framework can India truly celebrate its linguistic diversity while maintaining national unity.

Linguistic Barriers in Education and Employment

The education system in India is structured in a way that disproportionately disadvantages students from non-Hindi-speaking backgrounds, particularly in national-level competitive exams, higher education access, and employment opportunities. The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), Staff Selection Commission (SSC), and university entrance tests continue to be largely conducted in Hindi and English, making it difficult for students educated in regional languages to compete on an equal footing. This disparity is especially stark for aspiring civil servants, government employees, and university students, who often face systemic barriers due to linguistic disadvantages. A college student from Assam expressed frustration, saying, *"Even though Assamese is my mother tongue, I must study in English or Hindi to succeed in competitive exams."* (FGD, Guwahati, 2023). These challenges create a cycle of exclusion, where students from non-Hindi and non-English language backgrounds struggle to secure positions in national institutions, leading to underrepresentation of linguistic minorities in governance, bureaucracy, and policymaking. One of the most pressing examples of linguistic discrimination in education and employment is the civil services examination conducted by the UPSC, which serves as the gateway to India's administrative services, including the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Police Service (IPS), and Indian Foreign Service (IFS). While candidates are allowed to take the examination in any of the 22 languages listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, those whose mother tongues are not part of the Eighth Schedule are left without an option to take the exam in their native language (Pattanaik, 2020). This exclusion disproportionately affects indigenous and tribal communities, whose languages have not been granted constitutional recognition, effectively limiting their access to the country's most prestigious government jobs.

The exemption policy in the UPSC's Indian Language Paper, which waives the mandatory Indian language paper for candidates from certain northeastern states, is another example of an inconsistent linguistic policy that disadvantages some indigenous students while benefiting others. According to UPSC rules, candidates from Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Sikkim are exempt from appearing for the compulsory Indian language paper, as their respective state languages are not included in the Eighth Schedule. However, indigenous Tripuri students who speak Kokborok are not granted the same exemption, despite the fact that Kokborok is also not in the Eighth Schedule. This policy places Tiphra (indigenous Tripuri) students at a severe disadvantage, as they are forced to appear for the language paper in a language that is not their own, whereas their counterparts from Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya are granted an exemption. This discriminatory approach unfairly penalises Kokborok-speaking candidates, pushing them to a linguistic and administrative disadvantage despite the historical and cultural significance of their language.

A Kokborok-speaking student from Tripura preparing for the UPSC exam highlighted these challenges, stating, *"Our peers from Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya do not have to take the Indian language paper, but we do, even though Kokborok is also not in the Eighth Schedule. This is an injustice that makes it harder for us to qualify for the IAS."* (Interview, Agartala, 2023). The linguistic disparity in UPSC policies reflects a broader systemic issue: specific linguistic communities receive institutional accommodations while others are excluded due to political considerations. Without Eighth Schedule recognition, Kokborok speakers are denied linguistic rights that are granted to other tribal communities in India, resulting in reduced representation in the civil services and government administration.

Beyond UPSC and other competitive exams, language also determines access to economic opportunities, particularly in government jobs, private sector employment, and skill-based professions. Many public-sector jobs require proficiency in Hindi or English, making it difficult for regional-language speakers to compete, especially those from tribal and rural backgrounds. Several state-level exams allow candidates to appear in their respective regional languages, but central government employment remains largely inaccessible to those who lack fluency in Hindi or English. This exclusion of regional languages from key recruitment processes creates structural inequalities, as job seekers from non-Hindi linguistic backgrounds face additional barriers to securing employment. A Manipuri student preparing for government exams shared their concerns, stating, *"Even though we have our own language, the system forces us to compete in Hindi or English. This creates an unfair advantage for those who grow up speaking these languages at home."* (Interview, Imphal, 2023).

Linguistic barriers also extend to the private sector, where English proficiency is often a prerequisite for high-paying jobs in corporate, IT, and service industries. Employers frequently favour English-speaking candidates, reinforcing economic disparities between urban and rural populations. In many cases, regional-language speakers must acquire fluency in English or Hindi to advance professionally, creating an uneven playing field where language proficiency is directly tied to economic mobility. While multilingual skills are highly valued in global job markets, in India, the dominance of English and Hindi in corporate hiring processes leads to the marginalisation of job seekers from regional-language backgrounds.

Furthermore, the digital divide in language accessibility has created new challenges for linguistic minorities in education and employment. Most online learning platforms, competitive exam resources, and professional development courses are available primarily in English and Hindi, making it difficult for regional-language speakers to access quality study materials. While some state governments have initiated online courses in regional languages, the lack of widespread digital resources in languages like Kokborok, Tulu, or Bhojpur further restricts educational and employment opportunities for their speakers. The absence of AI-powered language tools for many indigenous languages also places linguistic minorities at a disadvantage in the evolving digital economy. The combined effect of linguistic barriers in education, employment, and digital learning creates a structural disadvantage for non-Hindi-speaking communities, reinforcing economic inequalities and limiting social mobility. The exclusion of regional languages from national exams, lack of exemption for Kokborok speakers in UPSC, and the dominance of English and Hindi in corporate hiring all contribute to the systemic marginalisation of linguistic minorities. Without urgent policy interventions, India risks further deepening linguistic inequalities, making it even harder for non-Hindi-speaking populations to participate in national governance and economic growth.

A more inclusive approach to education and employment policies is essential to address these disparities. The UPSC should revise its exemption criteria to ensure that all indigenous and non-Eighth Schedule languages are treated equally, granting exemption to Kokborok speakers like it does for other northeastern tribal communities. Additionally, to ensure equal opportunities for all linguistic groups, regional languages should be included as valid options in all competitive exams, including UPSC, SSC, and banking sector exams. The private sector should also adopt language-inclusive hiring practices, providing equal opportunities to regional speakers and reducing recruitment and workplace communication biases.

Language should not be a barrier to education, employment, or governance participation. By recognising linguistic diversity as a fundamental right, India can work towards a more equitable and inclusive society where all linguistic communities, regardless of their Eighth Schedule status—have equal access to opportunities and representation. The path forward requires structural reforms in language policies, educational frameworks, and employment criteria, ensuring that linguistic minorities, particularly indigenous communities, are no longer disadvantaged in national decision-making and economic mobility.

1. The Economic Impact of Linguistic Hierarchies

Linguistic hierarchies in India are crucial in shaping economic opportunities, social mobility, and access to high-paying jobs. Those proficient in English and Hindi tend to have a more significant advantage in securing employment, particularly in sectors that require interaction with national and global markets. Fluency in English, particularly, serves as a significant determinant of career success, as the language is widely used in corporate, IT, and financial sectors. A software engineer from Bengaluru reinforced this point, stating, *"My*

ability to speak English fluently is why I have a global career. Without it, I would be restricted to local jobs." (Interview, Bengaluru, 2023). However, the economic advantages of multilingualism are not evenly distributed across India, and the dominance of certain languages continues to create structural inequalities in employment and financial inclusion. The economic benefits of being fluent in English or Hindi are largely concentrated in urban and elite educational institutions, where students are exposed to these languages from an early age. In contrast, monolingual individuals in regional languages, particularly those from rural, tribal, and economically disadvantaged communities, face significant barriers to accessing well-paying jobs. Private-sector hiring policies and government job recruitment exams heavily favour Hindi and English speakers, making it difficult for those educated primarily in regional languages to compete on an equal footing (Hashmi, 2019). This systematic exclusion from mainstream employment opportunities widens the economic gap between language groups, perpetuating a cycle where non-Hindi and non-English speakers remain trapped in low-paying sectors with limited mobility.

Linguistic barriers are also evident in wage disparities and the labour market structure. Multiple studies have shown that English-speaking employees earn significantly higher salaries than their non-English-speaking counterparts, even when they possess similar technical skills (Azam et al., 2013). This wage gap is evident in metropolitan cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru, where English is the dominant language of business and professional networking. A corporate recruiter in Mumbai emphasised the role of English in hiring decisions, stating, *"While skills and experience matter, English fluency remains a major factor in recruitment. Many companies view English as essential for communication in a globalised economy."* (Interview, Mumbai, 2023). This linguistic advantage for English speakers reinforces social stratification, ensuring that those who lack English proficiency remain confined to lower-income brackets.

The public sector also exhibits linguistic biases that influence employment opportunities. While some state governments allow candidates to take recruitment exams in their regional languages, most central government examinations, including the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and banking sector exams, are conducted in Hindi and English. This disadvantages candidates from non-Hindi-speaking states, as they are forced to learn either Hindi or English or face exclusion from government employment. This requirement is a significant barrier for many indigenous and rural populations, as educational infrastructure in their regions often lacks quality English or Hindi instruction. This limitation affects their job prospects and hinders their ability to participate in government services and policymaking processes. Beyond formal employment, linguistic hierarchies also have a major impact on the informal economy, which accounts for nearly 80% of India's workforce (NSSO, 2018). Migrant workers from non-Hindi-speaking states often struggle to integrate into urban job markets due to language barriers. Hindi dominates cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru- and English-speaking employers, making it difficult for migrant labourers from states like Tamil Nadu, Odisha, and Northeast India to find fair wages and stable employment.

In many cases, migrant workers are forced to accept lower pay simply because they are unable to negotiate contracts or communicate effectively with their employers. A construction worker from Assam working in Delhi explained, *"In my hometown, I could work and communicate freely, but here in Delhi, I am treated differently because I do not speak Hindi well. Employers pay us less and sometimes refuse to hire us if we cannot speak the local language fluently."* (Interview, Delhi, 2023). This widespread linguistic discrimination in urban labour markets further marginalises non-Hindi-speaking populations, limiting their ability to secure economic stability.

The globalisation of India's economy has further reinforced the dominance of English as the primary language of commerce, creating even greater disparities for those who are fluent only in regional languages. High-growth industries such as IT, finance, and international trade overwhelmingly prefer English-speaking employees, making it difficult for non-English speakers to access lucrative career opportunities. A senior economist from a policy think tank in New Delhi noted, *"The dominance of English in high-growth sectors like IT, banking, and international trade has created a class divide in India. Those with English proficiency have access to global job markets, while regional-language speakers are often restricted to lower-paying, domestic employment."* (Interview, New Delhi, 2023). The economic divide between English-proficient and non-English-speaking populations is exacerbating regional inequalities, as states with better English education systems attract more investment and corporate growth, leaving others behind.

Linguistic exclusion extends beyond employment and into financial services and digital accessibility. Many government financial schemes, online banking services, and digital job platforms operate primarily in Hindi and English, creating significant challenges for regional-language speakers. For instance, the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) aims to improve financial inclusion, but its digital services and customer support are predominantly available in Hindi and English. A rural entrepreneur from Odisha voiced frustration about this limitation, stating, *"I wanted to apply for a government loan to expand my business, but the entire online process was in Hindi and English. There was no option for Odia, so I had to rely on someone else to help me."* (Interview, Odisha, 2023). Such linguistic barriers in financial and technological services prevent many

non-Hindi and non-English-speaking citizens from fully participating in India's modern economy, limiting their access to banking, e-commerce, and government benefits.

Language-inclusive economic policies must be implemented to address economic disparities arising from linguistic hierarchies to guarantee equal access to employment, entrepreneurship, and financial services for regional language speakers. Expanding regional language inclusion in both public and private sector hiring processes would allow more individuals to compete fairly regardless of their linguistic background. Corporate and government recruitment exams should offer multilingual options to provide equitable access to job opportunities. Additionally, digital financial services and government welfare schemes must be made accessible in multiple regional languages, ensuring that all citizens can fully engage with economic resources. Employers should also adopt workplace policies that promote language diversity, reduce biases against regional language speakers, and offer language training to support professional development.

While English and Hindi will likely remain dominant in India's economy, ensuring linguistic inclusion is crucial for reducing class disparities and promoting equal opportunity. Increasing access to English and Hindi education for economically disadvantaged groups while preserving regional languages can help bridge economic inequalities and provide greater mobility for non-Hindi and non-English speakers. If these systemic linguistic exclusions are not addressed, India risks reinforcing social hierarchies where economic opportunities are limited to a privileged few based on language. By implementing multilingual hiring practices, expanding language accessibility in digital services, and promoting equitable education policies, India can work towards a more inclusive economy where language does not determine one's access to success.

2. The Role of Digital Media in Language Preservation

The role of digital media in language preservation has become increasingly significant in the modern era, as technological advancements offer both opportunities and challenges for linguistic diversity in India. The internet, social media, digital archives, and AI-driven translation tools have provided an unprecedented platform for linguistic communities to document, share, and sustain their languages. These digital tools have been particularly transformative for languages that have historically lacked institutional support in education, governance, and mainstream media. Digital spaces, including social networking sites, video platforms like YouTube, and collaborative digital dictionaries, are now being utilised to revitalise endangered languages, promote literacy, and engage younger generations in learning their mother tongues. A Manipuri digital activist emphasised the potential of online platforms, stating, "Online platforms allow us to create Manipuri content and teach younger generations their mother tongue." (Interview, Imphal, 2023). Social media campaigns, virtual classrooms, and digital storytelling projects have helped minority language speakers connect globally, offering resources to learn and engage with their linguistic heritage. Communities that once struggled to preserve oral traditions and linguistic identities are now finding innovative ways to ensure their languages remain culturally and socially relevant in the modern era.

One of the most significant contributions of digital media is its ability to democratise language access, making regional and indigenous languages more visible and accessible than ever before. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube have become powerful spaces for language preservation, where individuals and communities can create educational videos, news content, and interactive discussions in their native languages. Many activists have launched language-learning channels, podcasts, and storytelling projects to promote literacy and cultural knowledge. Crowdsourced digital dictionaries and translation tools, such as Wiktionary, Google Translate, and AI-powered linguistic databases, are being expanded to incorporate non-dominant languages, offering real-time translation and digital literacy resources to communities that previously had little representation in online spaces. E-learning and digital literacy programs, facilitated by the rise of ed-tech platforms like Byju's, Unacademy, and government-run initiatives, present a growing potential to integrate regional languages into online education, ensuring that students from non-English and non-Hindi-speaking backgrounds have equal learning opportunities. Indigenous communities are also increasingly using digital archives to record oral histories, folk traditions, and indigenous knowledge systems, preserving their languages for future generations. This has been particularly effective in tribal communities of Northeast India, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh, where digital storytelling is being used to pass down traditional knowledge in native languages.

Despite these advances, many regional and indigenous languages remain underrepresented in digital spaces, primarily due to the dominance of English, Hindi, and a few major regional languages like Tamil, Bengali, and Telugu in digital content creation and AI-driven language tools. The lack of digital infrastructure, policy support, and investment in smaller languages means that many communities are still unable to benefit from the digital revolution. AI-driven language biases and underrepresentation remain a significant issue, as most machine translation tools, speech recognition software, and online language-processing models prioritise major languages, while smaller languages lack AI support, making them inaccessible in digital services. A language that does not have a digital presence risks gradual disappearance as younger generations shift toward dominant languages with greater digital utility. Linguistic inequalities in digital education further exacerbate this

problem, as many elite institutions provide English-medium online courses, but students from regional-language backgrounds struggle to find comparable digital resources. Many MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), university lectures, and government e-learning programs are primarily offered in English and Hindi, excluding a large portion of non-Hindi speakers from digital education opportunities.

Limited access to digital infrastructure in rural and tribal areas also presents a major obstacle to linguistic preservation efforts. Many linguistic minority communities face technological and economic barriers in accessing digital tools, as internet connectivity, smartphone availability, and affordable data services remain limited in many rural and tribal regions, restricting their ability to engage with digital language preservation initiatives. Furthermore, the commercialisation of digital content creation means that major media houses and tech companies focus primarily on content that generates advertising revenue, which results in smaller language groups receiving insufficient investment in content development. This creates a digital divide where only commercially viable languages thrive while others struggle for digital visibility.

The exclusion of indigenous languages from digital platforms is particularly evident in the case of Kokborok speakers in Tripura, who have long advocated for greater recognition in governance and education yet remain marginalised in digital media. A Kokborok activist expressed concern over the digital neglect of the language, stating, "Without proper representation in digital spaces, Kokborok will remain invisible in the modern economy. Our children need to see our language in education, government websites, and AI translation tools to ensure its survival." (Interview, Agartala, 2023). Kokborok speakers lack access to AI-powered translation tools, localised e-learning resources, and digital content in their mother tongue, making it difficult for students and professionals to engage with modern digital services in their native language. Social media campaigns, local content creators, and language activists have made efforts to create Kokborok-language videos, online classes, and cultural preservation projects, but without institutional backing, these initiatives struggle to gain widespread visibility.

To ensure linguistic inclusivity in digital spaces, India must adopt proactive policies and technological investments that promote regional and indigenous languages in the digital age. Expanding AI and NLP (Natural Language Processing) capabilities for indigenous languages is essential, as the government, universities, and private tech firms must collaborate to develop AI-based translation tools, voice recognition software, and language processing algorithms that include underrepresented languages like Kokborok, Tulu, and Bodo. Developing multilingual digital education platforms is another crucial step, as e-learning platforms should offer regional-language courses and study materials, ensuring that students from diverse linguistic backgrounds can access digital education without being forced to rely on Hindi or English. Government investment in digital content creation for smaller languages should be prioritised, with public funding allocated to regional language publishing houses, online news portals, and local content creators to boost the production of non-Hindi digital media. Internet accessibility programs for linguistic minority communities must also be expanded, as increasing low-cost broadband access and affordable digital devices in rural and tribal areas would enable more communities to participate in digital language preservation. Furthermore, social media companies should be encouraged to support regional languages by providing tools for content creation, captions, and digital engagement in indigenous languages.

As India moves further into the digital age, the survival of many regional and indigenous languages will depend on their ability to adapt to online platforms, AI-driven tools, and digital education spaces. While social media and technology have already made significant contributions to linguistic revival, the underrepresentation of smaller languages remains a pressing issue. Without institutional support, digital infrastructure investments, and policy-driven language inclusivity, many non-dominant languages risk marginalisation in the digital era. The integration of regional and indigenous languages into AI, online education, and e-governance platforms will be essential to ensuring India's multilingual heritage continues to thrive in the 21st century.

The findings of this Study reveal that language in India is far more than a medium of communication; it is a determinant of social mobility, political identity, and economic opportunity. The complex linguistic landscape of India, shaped by constitutional recognition, policy decisions, and socio-economic factors, continues to influence the accessibility of education, employment, governance, and digital participation for different linguistic communities. While India prides itself on its multilingual heritage, the reality of language policies, educational frameworks, and employment structures demonstrates deep-seated linguistic hierarchies that disproportionately disadvantage non-Hindi-speaking populations and linguistic minorities.

The Three-Language Formula, which was introduced to promote multilingualism in education, remains inconsistently applied across different states. While some states have actively embraced bilingual and trilingual education, others, such as Tamil Nadu, have resisted the inclusion of Hindi, while many Hindi-speaking states do not adequately implement a third language beyond Hindi and English. This uneven application of language policies creates an educational disparity, where students from Hindi-speaking regions have greater access to national-level exams, employment opportunities, and public-sector jobs, whereas students from non-Hindi-

speaking backgrounds often struggle with language barriers in competitive examinations such as UPSC, SSC, and university entrance tests.

The exclusion of regional and indigenous languages from key national-level examinations and government recruitment processes is a major obstacle to economic mobility for speakers of these languages. Many tribal and indigenous language speakers, such as Kokborok speakers in Tripura, find themselves at a disadvantage in civil service exams, as they are required to appear for mandatory language papers in Hindi or English despite their mother tongue not being included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. In contrast, candidates from states such as Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya, where the languages are also not in the Eighth Schedule, are exempted from taking the compulsory Indian language paper in the UPSC Civil Services Exam. This inconsistent policy application creates disparities, making it more difficult for Kokborok-speaking candidates to compete fairly in national-level examinations and access public-sector employment. These systemic exclusions reinforce linguistic inequalities, disproportionately impacting students, job seekers, and marginalised communities who do not have the same linguistic privileges as their Hindi or English-speaking counterparts.

Beyond education and employment, economic hierarchies based on language proficiency continue to shape social mobility in India. The findings indicate that fluency in English and Hindi significantly enhances career prospects, particularly in urban corporate sectors, government employment, and global industries. In contrast, monolingual speakers of regional and tribal languages face higher barriers to entry in formal job markets, pushing many into low-paying informal sectors. Wage disparities are particularly stark in urban centers such as Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru, where migrant laborers from non-Hindi-speaking states struggle with linguistic discrimination and lower economic opportunities due to their lack of fluency in the dominant regional language. The growing reliance on English in high-income professions, such as technology, finance, and international business, further marginalises those who have limited exposure to English education, widening socio-economic inequalities between different linguistic communities.

Digital media, while presenting new opportunities for linguistic preservation, has not yet emerged as a true equaliser for linguistic representation. While some regional and indigenous languages have found a new digital presence through social media, AI-powered translation tools, and online educational platforms, many others remain underrepresented in the digital sphere. The dominance of English, Hindi, and a few major regional languages like Tamil, Bengali, and Telugu in digital content creation and AI-driven language tools means that smaller languages, including Kokborok, Tulu, and Bodo, continue to be digitally marginalised. The lack of institutional investment in digital language preservation places these languages at risk of becoming invisible in modern communication and technological advancements. AI-powered translation tools often fail to recognise smaller languages, making them inaccessible on major online platforms, government websites, and e-learning platforms. If digital inequalities persist, many regional languages may face linguistic extinction in the digital age, further pushing speakers of these languages toward linguistic assimilation into dominant languages like Hindi and English.

The findings emphasise that if linguistic inequalities are not urgently addressed, India risks deepening regional divides, fostering resentment toward governance structures, and perpetuating economic disparities based on language barriers. Language is central to political identity, and any policy perceived as linguistic marginalisation could lead to greater linguistic activism and movements demanding autonomy, as witnessed in Tamil Nadu's Anti-Hindi agitations, the Gorkhaland movement in West Bengal, and ongoing demands for the inclusion of languages such as Kokborok, Bhojpuri, and Tulu in the Eighth Schedule (Sachdev, 2007). The exclusion of linguistic minorities from governance, public administration, and national discourse could weaken social cohesion and create a widening disconnect between linguistic communities and state policies. Policymakers must take a proactive and inclusive approach to language governance, ensuring that all linguistic communities feel valued and represented in education, governance, employment, and digital spaces. Government initiatives should focus on investing in regional and indigenous language preservation through AI-powered translation tools, digital archives, and social media engagement, ensuring that no language is left behind in the digital revolution. Economic policies must also address language-based employment discrimination by encouraging corporate and public-sector recruitment practices that embrace multilingualism, creating a workforce that reflects India's linguistic diversity rather than marginalising non-Hindi and non-English speakers.

A balanced approach to linguistic governance is necessary to prevent linguistic hierarchies from dictating economic and social opportunities and to ensure that language does not become a tool of exclusion. India can build a more cohesive, equitable, and culturally vibrant society by embracing a multilingual model that values regional and indigenous languages alongside Hindi and English. The findings of this Study underscore the urgent need for reforms that promote linguistic justice, fostering an India where all languages are given equal opportunity to thrive and no linguistic community is disadvantaged due to historical or policy-driven exclusions.

V. Conclusion

India's linguistic diversity is both a defining characteristic and a governance challenge, shaping national identity, education, economic opportunities, and political dynamics. This Study highlights the ongoing struggles of non-Hindi-speaking populations, the uneven implementation of language policies, and the economic and digital inequalities created by linguistic hierarchies. While India has successfully maintained a multilingual federal structure, issues such as language-based exclusion in education, employment, and governance continue to reinforce socio-economic disparities. The findings suggest that language remains a key determinant of political representation, access to public services, and career mobility, making inclusive language policies a necessity for equitable development.

The dominance of Hindi and English in national governance, education, and employment creates structural barriers for regional language speakers, particularly those from rural and indigenous backgrounds. The Three-Language Formula, designed to promote multilingualism, has been implemented inconsistently across states, leading to language imposition and representation conflicts. Educational policies continue to disadvantage non-English and non-Hindi speakers, as most national competitive exams and government recruitment processes prioritise Hindi and English, limiting opportunities for regional-language speakers. Similarly, the corporate sector places a premium on English proficiency, reinforcing economic disparities and limiting social mobility for monolingual speakers of regional languages.

Language-based inequalities are further exacerbated by digital exclusion, as AI-driven translation tools, online education platforms, and media content overwhelmingly favour dominant languages, leaving smaller languages underrepresented. While digital activism and grassroots language preservation initiatives have gained traction, institutional support and policy interventions are required to ensure sustainable linguistic representation in the digital age. Without proactive measures, many regional and indigenous languages face the risk of marginalisation, cultural erosion, and eventual extinction.

To address these challenges, India needs a comprehensive linguistic policy that ensures multilingual inclusivity in governance, education, employment, and digital platforms. A more flexible and regionally adaptive approach to language policy will help reduce inequalities and promote social cohesion. Strengthening multilingual education policies is essential in ensuring that linguistic diversity is not a barrier to learning and future opportunities. Revising the Three-Language Formula by granting states greater flexibility in implementing language-inclusive curricula can help accommodate linguistic demographics. Expanding mother-tongue-based education will ensure better learning outcomes, as studies have shown that students perform better when taught in their first language. Increasing regional language representation in national examinations will also help level the playing field for non-Hindi and non-English speakers.

Language inclusivity in governance and public administration is crucial to ensuring that linguistic minorities are not excluded from policymaking and public services. Expanding official language recognition by revising the Eighth Schedule to include more regional languages will provide institutional recognition for marginalised linguistic communities. Government documents, welfare schemes, and official communication should be made accessible in all major languages, making governance linguistically inclusive. Decentralised language planning will also allow states greater autonomy in language governance, ensuring that policies reflect regional linguistic diversity while maintaining national unity.

Linguistic equity in employment and economic mobility must be prioritised to remove structural barriers that limit upward mobility for non-Hindi and non-English speakers. Regional language inclusion in government recruitment is essential to ensuring that central and state government examinations do not disadvantage non-Hindi-speaking applicants. Workplace language diversity policies should encourage private-sector organisations to implement language-inclusive hiring practices, reducing English-based discrimination in corporate recruitment. Vocational training in regional languages should be expanded through government-sponsored training programs, ensuring that linguistic minorities have equal access to skill development initiatives.

The digital divide has created new barriers for regional language speakers, limiting their access to online education, AI-driven resources, and digital communication. AI and machine learning should be leveraged to support regional and tribal languages, ensuring linguistic accessibility in digital spaces. Expanding regional language content online will incentivise digital platforms to create and promote local-language content, ensuring that regional languages remain relevant in the digital economy. Government-funded digital language preservation initiatives should work alongside linguists, educators, and digital activists to ensure that endangered languages are preserved and integrated into online platforms.

Fostering national cohesion through multilingualism is essential in ensuring that linguistic diversity does not become a source of division. Inter-state language exchange programs should be implemented in educational institutions, allowing students to learn languages from different states to foster cross-cultural understanding. The national media should ensure better representation of linguistic diversity by promoting regional language content and giving equal visibility to non-Hindi languages on television, in cinema, and in the

news. A multilingual identity in national symbolism should be promoted through public campaigns celebrating India's linguistic diversity, reinforcing a multilingual national identity rather than advocating for a single linguistic framework.

India's linguistic diversity is an asset, but inclusive policies are required to ensure equitable access to education, employment, governance, and digital spaces. Policymakers must recognise that language-based exclusion is a structural issue that perpetuates social and economic inequalities. A forward-looking approach should focus on integrating regional languages into national development strategies, fostering multilingualism as a strength rather than a barrier. India can build a more linguistically equitable and culturally vibrant society by adopting inclusive language policies, expanding linguistic access in education and employment, and leveraging digital advancements for language preservation. Balancing linguistic autonomy with national unity is essential to ensure that all linguistic communities feel represented, included, and empowered in India's socio-political and economic landscape. The future of India's multilingual identity lies in celebrating its linguistic diversity while ensuring no language or linguistic community is left behind.

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