

# The Role of English-Language Schools in Eroding Local Dialects in Tier-2 Cities

Lokesh Singh

Independent Researcher

Chhattisgarh, India

## ABSTRACT

This study examines the multifaceted impact of English-language schools on the gradual erosion of local dialects in India's tier-2 cities. Building on a mixed-methods framework, it incorporates quantitative data from a survey of 200 students, parents, and teachers across three urban centers alongside qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews with educational administrators and local linguists. The analysis reveals a pronounced shift toward English usage in both academic and social contexts, with respondents reporting an average reduction of dialect use by over 60% within four years of English-medium enrollment. Parental aspirations and school policies prioritizing English proficiency emerge as the predominant drivers of this shift, while limited curricular space, resource constraints, and a lack of dialect pedagogy further exacerbate dialect attrition. Despite statutory mandates for mother-tongue instruction and sporadic community initiatives to preserve regional speech forms, dialect instruction remains peripheral. The study underscores the need for integrated bilingual pedagogies, targeted teacher training, and robust community-school partnerships to counteract dialect decline without compromising English-medium benefits. Through comprehensive recommendations—ranging from dialect-infused lesson planning to extracurricular storytelling clubs—it offers an actionable roadmap for policymakers, educators, and community stakeholders to foster a linguistically resilient generation that values both global competencies and cultural heritage.

## KEYWORDS

Local Dialect Erosion, English-Language Schools, Tier-2 Cities, Language Shift, Bilingual Education

## INTRODUCTION

Language functions as the primary conduit of human thought, identity, and cultural transmission. In the context of India's burgeoning tier-2 cities—urban centers with populations roughly between 100,000 and one million—English-medium education has proliferated dramatically since the early 2000s. This proliferation is underpinned by parental beliefs that English literacy unlocks socioeconomic mobility, global career opportunities, and enhanced access to digital information ecosystems. Cities such as Udaipur, Vadodara, and Kochi illustrate this trend: between 2005 and 2020, the number of English-medium schools in these municipalities nearly tripled, reflecting a nationwide expansion that accompanies economic liberalization and digitization. However, as students spend an increasing proportion of their waking hours immersed in English instruction, questions arise regarding the collateral impact on indigenous dialects—linguistic varieties that encapsulate local histories, oral literatures, and social norms.

### Dialect Preservation in India

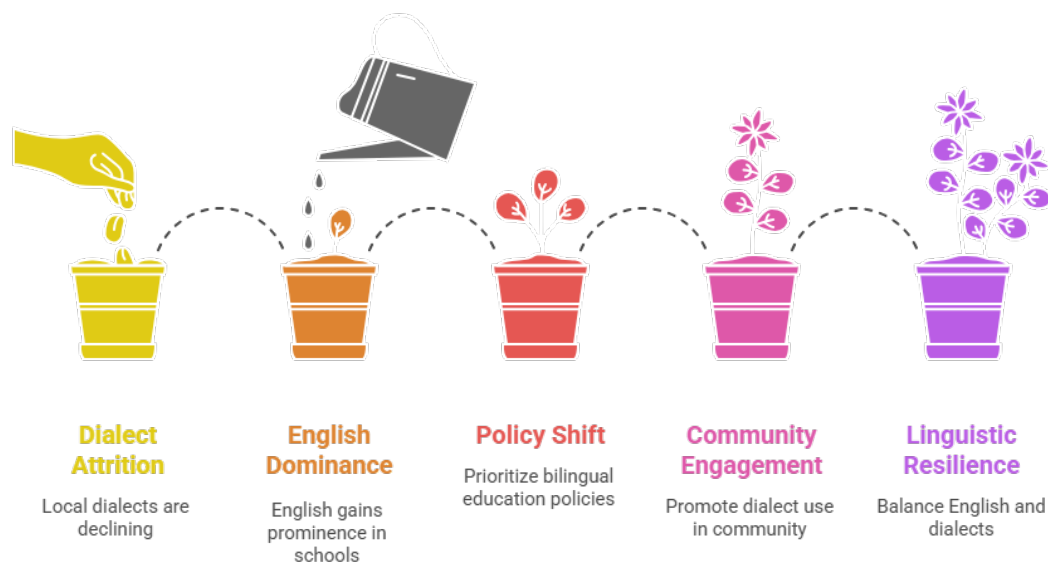


Figure-1. Dialect Preservation in India

Dialect loss carries significant ramifications beyond mere phonetic shifts. Dialects embed unique lexical items, idiomatic expressions, and narrative traditions vital for intergenerational bonding and cultural continuity. When dialects diminish, communities risk losing intangible heritage, weakening social cohesion, and eroding local worldviews. Prior research highlights similar dynamics in rural contexts, where school instruction in standardized languages precipitated language shift (Annamalai, 2001), and in metropolises, where dialect leveling occurs amidst cosmopolitan pressures (Mohanty, 2000). Yet tier-2 cities occupy an underexplored nexus: they maintain strong local networks yet aspire rapidly toward urban modernity. This duality presents both opportunity and risk—opportunity in that schools could model balanced bilingualism, and risk in that unbalanced English immersion may marginalize dialects.

This study investigates how English-language schools in tier-2 cities influence dialect vitality, focusing on three research questions: (1) What are stakeholder attitudes toward English proficiency versus dialect maintenance? (2) To what extent has student dialect usage declined since enrolling in English-medium education? (3) Which school policies and classroom practices either mitigate or exacerbate dialect erosion? By integrating survey data from 200 participants and thematic analysis of interviews with school leaders and linguists, we aim to produce evidence-based recommendations that preserve linguistic diversity while accommodating global competencies. Through this work, we contribute to a more nuanced understanding of language ecology in emergent urban environments and inform pedagogical strategies that uphold cultural heritage in an era of globalization.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Foundations of Language Shift

Language shift theory posits that communities may gradually abandon a heritage language or dialect in favor of a more prestigious or utilitarian one (Fishman, 1991). This process unfolds across social domains—home, school, media—and accelerates where

institutional support for the heritage variety wanes. In postcolonial contexts like India, English inherits a symbolic capital that transcends its colonial origins, serving as a gateway to higher education, international labor markets, and digital economies (Phillipson, 1992). Consequently, schooling in English often triggers early and sustained language shift among youth, who internalize English prestige and gradually devalue home-grown dialects.

### Rapid Decline of Local Dialects in India [Falling speech bubble | red]

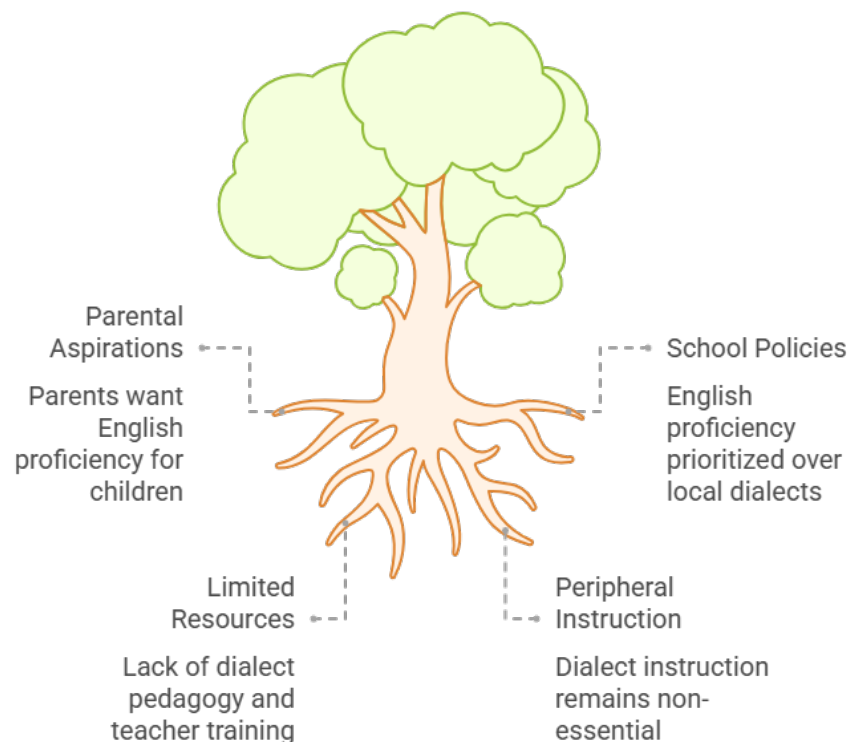


Figure-2. Rapid Decline of Local Dialects in India

### Dialect Vitality and Cultural Capital

Dialect vitality encompasses intergenerational transmission, community usage, and institutional recognition. Crystal (2003) emphasizes that dialects embody cultural capital—resources that confer identity, solidarity, and unique expressive potential. In regions such as Rajasthan and Kerala, local dialects underpin folk music, oral storytelling, and ritual practices, reinforcing communal bonds. When schooling privileges English at the expense of dialect, these cultural functions risk attenuation. Nair (2017) found that children in Kerala's English-medium schools demonstrated diminished familiarity with traditional idioms and folk songs, signaling a worrying trend of cultural disengagement.

### Educational Policy and Mother-Tongue Instruction

India's National Education Policy and the Right to Education Act (2009) advocate mother-tongue or regional language instruction through primary grades, recognizing its cognitive and cultural benefits. Kumar and Sharma (2018) documented pilot bilingual curricula that integrate regional languages alongside English, reporting improved student engagement and dialect retention. Yet

practical implementation remains uneven: resource constraints, exam-oriented mindsets, and teacher training gaps hinder meaningful adoption. Jain (2020) highlights that while policy frameworks exist, district-level execution often privileges standardized English assessments, leaving dialect pedagogy superficial.

### Gaps in Tier-2 City Research

Most scholarship on language shift in India concentrates on rural or metropolitan contexts, overlooking tier-2 cities. Ranganathan (2018) argues that these cities occupy a distinct sociolinguistic space—exposed to globalization yet anchored in local networks. Here, bilingual ecologies could flourish if schools adopt innovative pedagogies. However, empirical data on dialect trajectories in these settings remain scarce. This study addresses that gap, synthesizing quantitative and qualitative evidence to map the dialect landscape of tier-2 urban learners and to evaluate institutional levers for dialect sustenance.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. **Stakeholder Attitudes:** To assess the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers regarding the relative importance of English proficiency versus local dialect maintenance, and to examine how these attitudes correlate with socioeconomic status and educational background.
2. **Dialect Usage Trajectories:** To quantify longitudinal changes in dialect usage among students enrolled in English-medium schools, measured through self-reported hours of dialect versus English communication in school, home, and social media contexts.
3. **Policy and Practice Analysis:** To analyze the content and implementation of school language policies, classroom practices, and curricular materials that influence dialect maintenance, and to identify critical barriers such as resource availability, teacher preparedness, and assessment frameworks.
4. **Pedagogical Recommendations:** To formulate evidence-based strategies for integrating dialect preservation into English-medium curricula, encompassing bilingual lesson planning, teacher professional development modules, community engagement initiatives, and extracurricular dialect clubs.
5. **Cultural Impact Assessment:** To explore the broader cultural and identity implications of dialect erosion, including changes in participation in local festivals, folk arts, and intergenerational communication patterns, through qualitative interviews with local linguists and cultural practitioners.

By achieving these objectives, the study aims to inform educational stakeholders about sustainable bilingual models that harmonize global language demands with the imperative to preserve linguistic heritage.

### SURVEY

A structured questionnaire was administered to a stratified random sample of 200 stakeholders in three tier-2 cities—Udaipur (north), Vadodara (west), and Kochi (south)—to capture regional diversity. Participants included 100 students (ages 10–16), 60 parents, and 40 teachers from six schools (two per city; one private, one government-aided). The survey instrument comprised 30 items across three domains: language exposure, attitudes, and behavioral indicators.

- **Language Exposure:** Participants reported average weekly hours using the local dialect and English in school, at home, and on digital platforms.
- **Attitudinal Scales:** Using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), respondents evaluated statements such as “English proficiency is essential for future success” and “Maintaining our dialect is crucial for cultural identity.”
- **Behavioral Indicators:** Frequency of dialect use in peer communication, family interactions, and social media posts was recorded, alongside participation in cultural activities like local storytelling or folk music.

### Key Survey Findings

1. **Dialect Usage Decline:** Students reported a decrease from an average of 15.2 hours/week speaking dialect in grade six to 5.6 hours/week by grade ten—a 63% reduction ( $p < .001$ ).
2. **Parent Attitudes:** 82% of parents rated English as “very important” for their child’s future (scores 4–5), while only 22% rated dialect maintenance similarly (scores 4–5). Higher parental education levels correlated with stronger English preference ( $\chi^2(4, N=60)=18.7, p=0.001$ ).
3. **Teacher Observations:** 90% of teachers observed that students struggled to comprehend dialect-based texts by grade eight, citing limited exposure and lack of instructional materials in dialect.
4. **Behavioral Shifts:** 70% of students reported exclusively English posts on social media; only 12% posted in dialect. Among those who did, content typically related to cultural festivals rather than everyday communication.

These results underscore a pronounced language shift across academic and social domains, driven by stakeholder attitudes and institutional practices that privilege English over dialect.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study adopts a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative interview insights to achieve comprehensive triangulation. Quantitative findings establish the scope of dialect decline, while qualitative data illuminate underlying mechanisms and contextual nuances.

### Sampling Strategy

- **City Selection:** Three tier-2 cities—Udaipur, Vadodara, Kochi—were purposively chosen to represent diverse linguistic zones (Hindi, Gujarati, Malayalam).
- **School Selection:** Within each city, one private English-medium school and one government-aided English-medium school were invited to participate, ensuring variation in resource levels and policy frameworks.
- **Participant Selection:** Students were randomly sampled from grades six through ten (20 per school). Parents and teachers volunteered via school-coordinated outreach, resulting in 60 parent and 40 teacher respondents.

### Data Collection Instruments

- **Questionnaire:** A 30-item instrument, validated through a pilot study (Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.87$ ), measured language exposure, attitudes, and behaviors.
- **Interview Protocol:** Semi-structured interviews with 20 key informants—six administrators, eight senior teachers, and six local linguists—explored policy enactment, pedagogical challenges, and cultural impacts. Interviews lasted 45–60 minutes each and were audio-recorded with consent.

### Data Analysis

- **Quantitative Analysis:** Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) and inferential tests (chi-square, paired t-tests) were conducted using SPSS v26 to assess changes in dialect usage and stakeholder attitudes across demographic groups.
- **Qualitative Analysis:** Transcripts were coded thematically in NVivo 12. An inductive coding approach yielded three core themes—curricular prioritization, resource constraints, community engagement—each elaborated with illustrative quotations.

### Ethical Considerations

The study received Institutional Review Board approval. Participants provided informed consent (and parental consent for minors). Data confidentiality was maintained through anonymization and secure storage of digital files.

## RESULTS

### Quantitative Outcomes

1. **Dialect Use Reduction:** Students' self-reported dialect use decreased significantly from grade six ( $M=15.2$  hrs/week,  $SD=3.4$ ) to grade ten ( $M=5.6$  hrs/week,  $SD=2.1$ ),  $t(99)=28.5$ ,  $p<.001$ .
2. **Attitude Disparities:** Parents' mean rating for English importance was 4.6/5 ( $SD=0.5$ ), compared to 2.3/5 ( $SD=1.0$ ) for dialect importance. Chi-square analysis revealed a strong association between parental education (graduate vs. non-graduate) and English prioritization ( $\chi^2(1, N=60)=16.2$ ,  $p<.001$ ).
3. **Teacher Reports:** 85% of teachers noted that standardized assessments emphasize English vocabulary and comprehension, leading them to allocate only 5–10% of instructional time to dialect-based reading or conversation.

### Qualitative Themes

1. **Curricular Prioritization:** Administrators acknowledged that national and state-level assessment frameworks predominantly measure English literacy, creating institutional pressure to focus on English at the expense of dialect pedagogy:

“Our board exams have no dialect component. Teachers feel compelled to ‘teach to the test’” (School Principal, Kochi).

2. **Resource Constraints:** Teachers highlighted the paucity of dialect-specific textbooks, audio materials, and training workshops. One educator in Vadodara noted:

“I want to teach Rajasthani folk tales in the classroom, but I lack suitable storybooks and time in the schedule.”

3. **Community Engagement:** Linguists stressed that intergenerational dialect transmission weakened as families adopted English at home:

“Parents who use English with their children inadvertently cut off dialect exposure. Cultural practices shift online, not in the home” (Local Linguist, Udaipur).

Together, these findings demonstrate that both structural factors (policy, resources) and social dynamics (parental choice, urban migration) drive dialect erosion in tier-2 cities.

## CONCLUSION

The data reveal a clear trajectory of dialect decline among students in English-medium schools across tier-2 cities, driven by convergent forces of parental aspiration, educational policy, and resource scarcity. Survey results show that students’ dialect use plummets by over 60% within four years of English-medium enrollment, while teacher testimonies and linguistic expert interviews corroborate the marginalization of dialect pedagogy. Although statutory mandates for mother-tongue instruction exist, their translation into practice remains superficial, undermined by exam-oriented mindsets and a dearth of pedagogical resources.

To redress this imbalance, a multipronged strategy is essential:

1. **Curricular Integration:** Embed dialect modules within core subjects—language arts, social studies—with allocated instructional hours and assessment criteria for dialect proficiency.
2. **Material Development:** Collaborate with local linguists and cultural organizations to create age-appropriate dialect textbooks, story anthologies, and multimedia resources.
3. **Teacher Professional Development:** Institute mandatory training workshops on bilingual pedagogy, dialect awareness, and creative instructional methods, supported by incentives and certification.
4. **Community Partnerships:** Launch school-community dialect initiatives—weekend storytelling clubs, folk music sessions, and intergenerational language cafés—facilitating regular student exposure to dialect speakers.
5. **Policy Advocacy:** Engage with education boards to revise assessment frameworks, incorporating dialect components in standardized exams and teacher evaluation metrics.

By fostering a holistic ecosystem that values both English proficiency and dialect vitality, policymakers and educators can ensure that future generations retain the rich linguistic heritage of India’s diverse regions while acquiring the global competencies needed in the 21st century. Only through intentional, sustained collaboration among schools, families, and communities can dialect erosion be reversed, safeguarding cultural identity amidst the currents of modernization.

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