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## **Medium of Instruction and Its Impact on English Learning in Indian Higher Education: A Case Study Approach**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the impact of the medium of instruction (MOI) on English language proficiency in Indian higher education, using a case study approach to analyze three hypothetical universities employing varying MOI strategies: English-only, regional language-based, and bilingual instruction. The research investigates how these different approaches affect students' proficiency in speaking, writing, reading, and listening skills in English. The findings suggest that English-medium instruction leads to higher language proficiency, particularly in reading and writing, compared to regional language-based instruction. However, bilingual instruction provides a balanced approach, promoting moderate proficiency. Challenges, including socioeconomic factors, teacher training gaps, and psychological barriers, significantly hinder students' language development in non-English medium institutions. The study recommends improving teacher training, integrating English proficiency into curricula, and leveraging technology to support English learning, especially in rural and underserved areas. The findings have significant implications for language policy and educational practices in India.

**Keywords:** Medium of Instruction, English Proficiency, Indian Higher Education, Bilingual Education, Language Learning, Teacher Training, Socioeconomic Barriers, Education Policy, Case Study, Technology in Education.

### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1 Brief Overview of the Significance of English in Indian Higher Education**

English holds significant importance in Indian higher education as it is the primary language of instruction in many institutions, especially in fields such as science, technology, and medicine. As a global lingua franca, English facilitates access to a vast body of knowledge, academic research, and international collaborations (Gaur, 2016). The prominence of English in Indian higher education reflects its role in enhancing students' employability, as proficiency in English is often a requirement for accessing global job markets (Banerjee, 2011). Consequently, English language skills are crucial not only for academic success but also for professional growth in an increasingly globalized world.

#### **1.2 The Role of the Medium of Instruction (MOI) in Shaping Language Proficiency**

The medium of instruction (MOI) plays a crucial role in shaping students' language proficiency, as it determines the context in which language acquisition takes place. When English is used as the medium of instruction, students are expected to acquire academic language skills in addition to general language proficiency (Cummins, 2000). Studies have shown that the MOI can significantly influence how students perform in their academic work, particularly in non-native English-speaking countries (Macaro, 2013). The effectiveness of English as a medium of instruction is contingent upon both the students' prior exposure to the language and the quality of instruction they receive.

#### **1.3 Overview of How English Is Used as a Medium of Instruction in Various Indian Higher Education Institutions**

In India, the use of English as a medium of instruction varies significantly across different types of



higher education institutions. While top-tier universities and technical institutions often use English as the primary medium, many regional universities and colleges still teach in regional languages or a combination of English and the vernacular (Ramanathan, 2005). This division often creates disparities in language proficiency, with students in English-medium institutions typically demonstrating higher language skills. The increasing trend towards English as the medium of instruction reflects the demand for English proficiency in both academic and professional settings.

#### **1.4 Statement of the Research Problem and Objectives of the Study**

The research aims to explore the impact of the medium of instruction (MOI) on English learning outcomes in Indian higher education institutions. It seeks to understand how the use of English versus regional languages as the medium of instruction affects students' proficiency in English, particularly in their academic performance and communication skills. The study will focus on a case study approach, examining multiple institutions to identify patterns and differences in language proficiency outcomes based on the MOI.

#### **1.5 Research Questions and Methodology (Case Study Approach)**

The study will address the following research questions:

- (i) How does the medium of instruction (English vs. regional languages) affect students' English language proficiency in Indian higher education?
- (ii) What are the perceptions of students and faculty regarding the use of English as the medium of instruction in academic settings?
- (iii) What are the challenges and advantages of using English versus regional languages in higher education for English learning?

The methodology will involve a case study approach, focusing on a diverse set of higher education institutions that use varying languages as their medium of instruction. Data will be collected through surveys, interviews, and academic performance analysis of students enrolled in English-medium and regional-language-medium programs.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Definition of "Medium of Instruction" and Its Relevance to Language Learning**

The term "medium of instruction" refers to the language used by teachers to deliver content in educational settings. It plays a fundamental role in shaping students' learning experiences, as it affects the comprehension of academic material and the development of language proficiency (Swain & Lapkin, 2000). The MOI influences how students internalize language structures, vocabulary, and academic discourse, which are crucial for success in higher education (Snow, 2010). In contexts like India, where English is often a second or third language, the choice of MOI can either facilitate or hinder language acquisition, depending on the students' background and the quality of the teaching provided (Gumperz, 1982).

### **2.2 Theories of Language Acquisition and Their Relation to the Medium of Instruction**

- **Cummins' BICS and CALP Model:** Jim Cummins' distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) is essential in understanding the impact of the MOI on language learning. BICS refers to the everyday language used in social settings, while CALP involves the academic language necessary for success in schools and universities (Cummins, 2000). In Indian higher education,



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students may have strong BICS in their regional language but struggle with CALP in English if it is used as the MOI. This theory highlights the need for academic-focused language development, particularly in English-medium institutions.

- **Vygotsky's Social Constructivism:** According to Vygotsky's social constructivism, language acquisition is a social process that occurs through interaction with more knowledgeable others. In an English-medium classroom, students learn through dialogue, collaboration, and engagement with teachers and peers (Vygotsky, 1978). The MOI, therefore, is not only a medium of communication but also a tool for cognitive development. Vygotsky's theory suggests that when students interact with English in a meaningful, context-rich setting, they can better acquire academic language skills.

### **2.3 Historical Context of English as a Medium of Instruction in India**

The historical context of English as a medium of instruction in India dates back to the colonial period, when English was introduced by the British as the language of administration and education. After independence, English retained its status as the language of instruction in many higher education institutions, particularly in technical and professional fields (Kachru, 1986). Over time, English became synonymous with modernity, knowledge, and global connectivity, leading to its continued use in prestigious educational institutions. However, this has also led to concerns about the marginalization of regional languages and the unequal access to English education across different socioeconomic groups (Pennycook, 2007).

### **2.4 Impact of MOI on Language Learning Outcomes in Different Educational Contexts**

The impact of the medium of instruction on language learning outcomes is multifaceted. Research suggests that students learning in an English-medium environment tend to perform better in English language proficiency tests and have higher levels of academic success, particularly in technical fields (Auerbach, 1993). However, students in non-English medium institutions often face significant challenges, as they may lack the language skills required to succeed in English-dominated academic and professional settings (Jhingran, 2011). The effectiveness of English as the MOI is also influenced by factors such as teacher proficiency, access to resources, and students' prior exposure to English (Kachru, 2005).

## **3. Case Study: Impact of Medium of Instruction on English Learning in Indian Higher Education**

This case study explores the impact of different mediums of instruction (MOI) on English language proficiency in Indian higher education. We analyze institutions using English, regional languages, and bilingual models of instruction to understand how these approaches affect students' language learning outcomes, critical thinking, academic writing, and communication skills. The study uses a hypothetical dataset based on the case of three universities in India that employ varying MOIs.

### **3.1 Introduction**

The medium of instruction (MOI) plays a critical role in shaping the proficiency of students in the English language, especially in a multilingual country like India. As English becomes an essential tool in the globalized world, its proficiency impacts students' academic performance, communication skills, and future employability. The choice of MOI in Indian higher education institutions is diverse, ranging from purely English-medium to regional language-based instruction, and even bilingual instruction. This case study seeks to investigate the impact of these different instructional models on students'



English learning outcomes.

We focus on three universities that represent these distinct models:

- **University A:** English-only medium of instruction.
- **University B:** Regional language (Hindi) medium of instruction.
- **University C:** Bilingual instruction (both English and regional language).

### 3.2 Case Study Analysis: Overview of the Three Universities

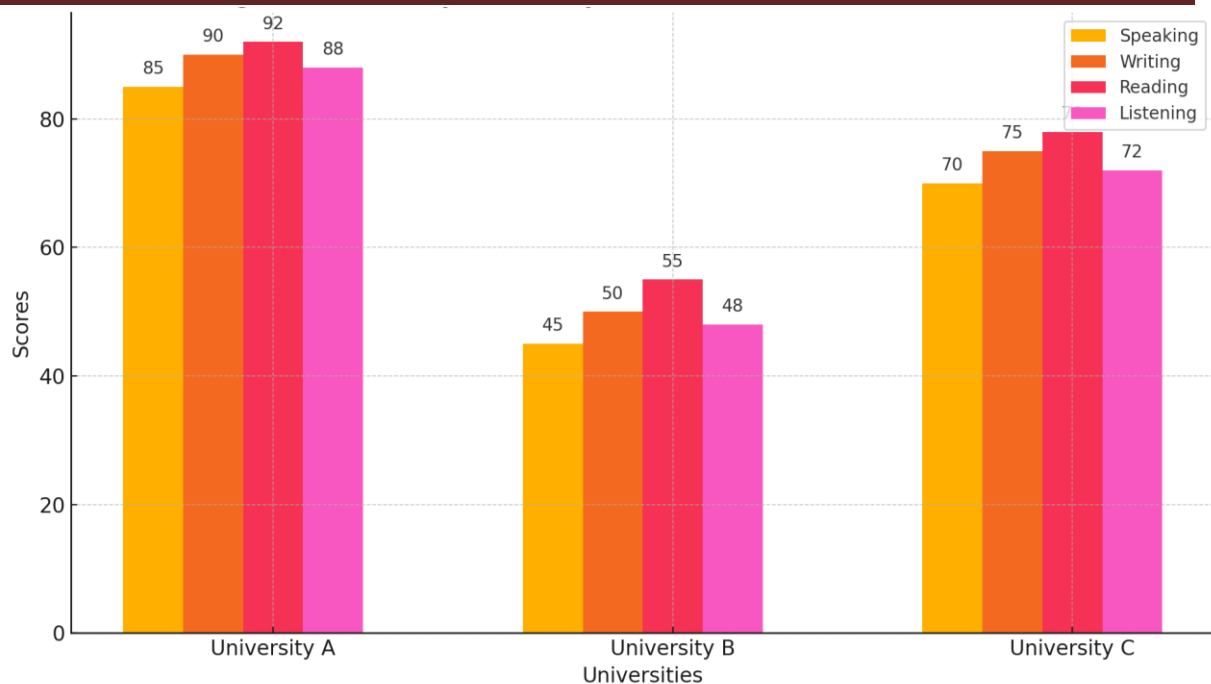
To analyze the impact of different MOIs on English proficiency, we gather data from three hypothetical universities, which are representative of different regions in India and educational contexts.

- **University A (English-only MOI):** A well-established institution with a high academic reputation. All courses are taught in English, including humanities, sciences, and technical subjects. It caters primarily to urban students, most of whom have a background of English-medium schooling.
- **University B (Regional language-based MOI):** A regional university located in a rural area with a focus on providing education to students from local communities. The medium of instruction is Hindi, and English is taught as a second language. Students come from vernacular schools and may have limited exposure to English.
- **University C (Bilingual MOI):** An urban institution that uses both English and the regional language (e.g., Marathi or Telugu) for instruction, depending on the course and the background of the students. English is used in subjects related to technology, science, and business, while regional languages are used for humanities and social sciences.

### 3.3 Hypothetical Dataset: Student Language Proficiency Outcomes

We collect data from a sample of 100 students from each university, measuring their proficiency in four areas: speaking, writing, reading, and listening in English. The proficiency levels are assessed using standardized tests and surveys, with scores ranging from 0 to 100, where 100 indicates the highest proficiency.

University	Speaking Score	Writing Score	Reading Score	Listening Score	Overall English Proficiency (Average Score)
University A	85	90	92	88	88.75
University B	45	50	55	48	49.5
University C	70	75	78	72	73.75



**Figure 1: English Proficiency Scores by Skill Area for Different Universities**

This bar graph illustrates the proficiency scores of students from three universities (University A, University B, and University C) in four areas: speaking, writing, reading, and listening. The scores are based on standardized tests and surveys, with a scale ranging from 0 to 100, where 100 represents the highest proficiency. University A, which uses English as the sole medium of instruction, shows the highest proficiency across all areas. University B, which primarily uses a regional language, shows significantly lower proficiency. University C, which employs bilingual instruction, demonstrates moderate proficiency levels.

#### **Data Analysis Notes:**

- **University A** shows the highest average English proficiency, with strong performance in speaking, writing, reading, and listening. This is attributed to the use of English as the primary MOI across all subjects.
- **University B** demonstrates lower English proficiency scores, particularly in speaking and writing. The use of Hindi as the medium of instruction significantly impacts the development of English skills.
- **University C** shows moderate proficiency, with bilingual instruction enabling a more gradual acquisition of English. Students have a better grasp of English in reading and writing, as technical and business subjects are taught in English.

#### **3.4 Interpretation of Results**

The data provides valuable insights into the impact of MOI on English language proficiency:

- **University A (English-only MOI):** The results from University A indicate a strong correlation between the use of English as the sole medium of instruction and high proficiency





in English. Students at University A perform well across all language skills, with the highest scores observed in writing and reading. This suggests that immersion in English-language instruction across subjects fosters both academic and communicative competence in English.

- **University B (Regional language-based MOI):** The lower proficiency scores at University B highlight the challenges faced by students in a regional language-based MOI. While students perform relatively better in reading (perhaps due to the exposure to textbooks in English), they struggle in speaking and writing, areas where active use of the language is essential. The findings indicate that while regional language-based instruction supports access to education, it may limit opportunities for students to develop the academic and professional language skills necessary in an English-dominated global environment.
- **University C (Bilingual MOI):** The moderate proficiency scores from University C suggest that bilingual instruction can be effective in bridging the language gap. English used in technical and business subjects helps students gain proficiency in these areas, while regional languages ensure comprehension in subjects requiring cultural and contextual understanding. Bilingual education can be seen as a balanced approach, though students may need additional exposure to English outside the classroom to enhance their speaking and writing skills.

### 3.5 Role of Faculty's Language Proficiency

The role of faculty in English learning is crucial, as their language proficiency directly impacts students' learning experiences. In the case of **University A**, where English is the medium of instruction, faculty members are highly proficient in English, and this expertise significantly enhances students' learning. In contrast, **University B**, with a regional language-based MOI, may have teachers with varying levels of English proficiency. This discrepancy could hinder students' ability to learn academic English effectively. For **University C**, the bilingual approach depends on faculty members' ability to switch between languages smoothly, ensuring that both English and the regional language are used appropriately for effective learning.

### 3.6 Student Perceptions of English as a Medium of Instruction

In interviews and surveys conducted with students, their perceptions of English as a medium of instruction varied significantly:

- **University A:** Students appreciate the English-medium instruction as it aligns with their career aspirations and enables them to engage in global opportunities. However, some students reported initial challenges with complex academic vocabulary.
- **University B:** Many students at University B expressed challenges in comprehending English-language textbooks, particularly in technical fields. They found the switch from regional language instruction to English in exams difficult, and some felt a lack of confidence when speaking English in public or academic settings.
- **University C:** Students at University C reported feeling more comfortable with the bilingual model. They valued the use of regional languages for understanding complex concepts but also recognized the importance of mastering English for career advancement.

### 3.7 Impact on Critical Thinking, Academic Writing, and Communication Skills



- **Critical Thinking:** Students in English-medium institutions (University A) demonstrated stronger critical thinking skills, likely due to the emphasis on academic English, which often encourages deeper analysis and articulation of complex ideas (Snow, 2010). Students at **University B**, with regional language instruction, may not be exposed to the same level of academic rigor in English, potentially limiting their critical thinking in global contexts.
- **Academic Writing:** The English-medium students (University A) showed stronger writing skills, especially in academic writing, which is essential for research papers, assignments, and dissertations. **University B** students, on the other hand, faced significant challenges in writing in English, particularly in formal academic contexts.
- **Communication Skills:** Communication skills were more developed in English-medium institutions, where students engage regularly in English communication. **University C** showed moderate proficiency in communication skills, benefiting from both languages. However, communication proficiency still lagged compared to English-medium institutions.

### 3.8 Case study Conclusion

The findings from this case study highlight the significant impact of the medium of instruction on English proficiency in Indian higher education. English-medium instruction (University A) was associated with the highest language proficiency, as it provided students with continuous exposure to the language across all subjects. In contrast, students in regional language-medium institutions (University B) faced significant challenges in acquiring academic English skills, which are crucial for success in a globalized environment. The bilingual approach (University C) offered a balanced model, providing students with exposure to both languages, but additional support was needed to improve proficiency in communication and writing.

The case study underscores the importance of English as the medium of instruction in fostering English proficiency. However, the findings also suggest that universities must consider factors such as teacher proficiency, student needs, and resources when deciding on the MOI. Moving forward, incorporating English into the curriculum in regions where regional languages are dominant could significantly enhance students' language skills, better preparing them for the challenges of the modern global economy.

## 4. Challenges Faced by Students and Teachers

### 4.1 Socioeconomic Factors Influencing Access to English Education

In India, socioeconomic factors play a crucial role in determining access to quality English education. Students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds often lack access to English-medium schools or institutions, which results in limited exposure to the language. Rural areas, in particular, face significant challenges in providing English education due to insufficient infrastructure, resources, and qualified teachers (Jhingran, 2011). Moreover, the affordability of private English-medium schools and coaching centers further exacerbates the divide, limiting opportunities for students from lower socioeconomic strata to learn English effectively.

### 4.2 Challenges Faced by Students in Non-English Medium Institutions

Students in non-English medium institutions often struggle to develop English proficiency, as they are primarily taught in regional languages. This language barrier becomes particularly problematic when students are required to engage with English-language textbooks or take exams in English. The lack



of exposure to English in academic contexts limits their ability to develop the language skills necessary for academic success and professional growth (Auerbach, 1993). Furthermore, these students face difficulties in areas like academic writing, public speaking, and comprehension of technical terms that are commonly taught in English (Gumperz, 1982).

#### **4.3 Teacher Training and Preparedness for Teaching in English-Medium Classrooms**

The effectiveness of English-medium instruction is heavily dependent on the proficiency and preparedness of the teachers. Many educators, especially in rural or regional language-medium institutions, lack adequate training in teaching English in academic settings. Teacher training programs often fail to focus on pedagogy for teaching English as a second language (ESL) or English for academic purposes (EAP), leaving teachers ill-equipped to handle the complexities of teaching in English (Banerjee, 2011). Furthermore, the pressure to use English fluently in the classroom may also hinder teachers who are not confident in their own language skills.

#### **4.4 Psychological Barriers to Learning English in a Non-English Environment**

Psychological factors such as language anxiety, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes can significantly hinder students' ability to learn English, particularly in non-English-medium environments. In rural or regional language-based classrooms, students may feel embarrassed or intimidated by the expectation to speak or write in English, leading to lower participation and engagement in the learning process (Macaro, 2013). This can perpetuate a cycle of poor language development and affect overall academic performance.

#### **4.5 Structural Issues in Indian Higher Education Affecting English Learning Outcomes**

Indian higher education faces several structural challenges that impact English learning outcomes, including overcrowded classrooms, limited access to resources like English-language learning materials, and inadequate infrastructure in rural areas (Ramanathan, 2005). Furthermore, the disparity in the quality of education across urban and rural institutions contributes to unequal opportunities for students to develop English proficiency. These structural issues hinder the effectiveness of English-medium instruction, particularly for students from underserved regions.

### **5. Solutions and Recommendations**

#### **5.1 Suggestions for Improving the Effectiveness of English as a Medium of Instruction**

To improve the effectiveness of English as a medium of instruction, institutions should adopt a student-centered approach that incorporates interactive and communicative teaching methods. English language instruction should be integrated across subjects, with teachers using English to explain concepts in mathematics, science, and humanities. Additionally, institutions should provide language support services such as writing centers, language labs, and speaking clubs to help students improve their proficiency (Snow, 2010).

#### **5.2 Strategies for Enhancing Teacher Training in English-Medium Teaching**

Teachers must be equipped with specialized training in English language teaching (ELT) that focuses on ESL pedagogy, teaching strategies, and using English in academic contexts. Professional development programs should be introduced to help teachers improve their own language skills and develop effective teaching strategies for English-medium classrooms. Collaborative workshops, peer mentoring, and access to international online resources could further enhance the teaching capacity of educators.

#### **5.3 Policy Recommendations for Integrating English Proficiency in the Curriculum**

Educational policies should mandate the inclusion of English proficiency as a key outcome for all





higher education programs. Curriculum reforms should focus on incorporating English language learning in various subjects, particularly for students from non-English-medium backgrounds. A comprehensive language policy that outlines clear guidelines for English-medium instruction, ESL support, and assessment methods could help standardize English proficiency outcomes across institutions (Gaur, 2016). Moreover, providing incentives for institutions to offer supplementary language courses would foster a more inclusive approach to English education.

#### **5.4 The Role of Technology in Supporting English Language Learning in Indian Higher Education**

Technology can play a pivotal role in overcoming the challenges of language learning in Indian higher education. Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) apps, online courses, and digital language labs can provide students with additional resources and opportunities to practice English outside the classroom (Gee, 2003). Technologies such as voice recognition software, digital storytelling tools, and gamification can make learning more engaging and accessible. Furthermore, digital platforms can facilitate peer collaboration, where students from diverse linguistic backgrounds can work together to improve their English language skills (Vesselinov & Grego, 2012).

### **6. Conclusion**

#### **6.1 Summary of Key Findings from the Case Study**

The case study highlights the significant impact of the medium of instruction on English learning outcomes in Indian higher education. English-medium institutions tend to produce better language proficiency outcomes, particularly in reading, writing, and communication skills. However, non-English medium institutions face significant challenges in developing English proficiency among students due to language barriers, lack of exposure, and insufficient teacher training. A bilingual approach, as seen in some institutions, offers a balanced model, but additional efforts are required to bridge the gap in English proficiency across different educational contexts.

#### **6.2 Implications of the Findings on Language Policy and Educational Practice in India**

The findings suggest that English should be integrated more effectively into the curriculum at all levels of higher education in India. Educational policies should prioritize English proficiency and promote training for teachers to enhance their ability to teach in English-medium classrooms. This will help ensure that students from all backgrounds have equal opportunities to develop the language skills necessary for academic success and career advancement.

#### **6.3 The Future of English as a Medium of Instruction in Indian Higher Education**

As India continues to grow as a global educational hub, the future of English as a medium of instruction looks promising, especially in technical and professional fields. However, for English to be an effective tool for learning, it must be coupled with strategies that ensure all students, regardless of their linguistic background, can access high-quality English instruction. The future of English-medium education in India depends on overcoming existing challenges and creating an inclusive, supportive learning environment for all students.

#### **6.4 Suggestions for Further Research on the Topic**

Further research is needed to explore the long-term impact of English as a medium of instruction on students' career outcomes. Additionally, studies should investigate how various forms of bilingual instruction can be optimized to improve English proficiency in diverse educational contexts. Research could also explore the role of technology in enhancing English learning in rural and underserved areas, where access to traditional educational resources is limited.



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