

LANGUAGE BARRIERS AND MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOM PRACTICES: EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Language plays an important role in academic communication and social interaction in higher education. This study explores the experiences of international students studying at Indian universities where English, Hindi, and regional languages coexist in academic and everyday communication. A mixed-methods approach was employed to collect data. Questionnaire responses were obtained from 48 international students enrolled in three Indian universities, while semi-structured interviews were conducted with 8 participants. The findings show that most students arrived in India without prior knowledge of Hindi and relied primarily on English for communication. The study found that local languages were frequently used during group discussions, classroom activities, and informal interactions. The results also revealed that language barriers affected students' understanding of lectures, interactions with lecturers, participation in classroom activities, and social integration. Interview responses further indicated that code-switching between English and local languages sometimes reduced students' engagement in academic discussions. The findings suggest that basic language orientation programmes can facilitate communication and support international students' adaptation to university life. The study highlights the discrepancy between the official use of English as the medium of instruction and the multilingual realities encountered by international students in Indian higher education institutions. The findings further emphasize the importance of institutional language support and inclusive communication practices in promoting academic engagement and social integration. Overall, the study underscores the need for universities to develop strategies that address the linguistic and cultural needs of students from diverse backgrounds.

Keywords: international students; language barriers; higher education

Language Barriers and Multilingual Classroom Practices: Experiences of International Students in Indian Higher Education.

International student mobility has increased substantially over the past three decades, becoming a defining feature of contemporary higher education systems (Khamisu et al., 2024). Driven by globalization, advances in transportation and communication technologies, and the internationalization strategies of universities, student mobility has expanded beyond its traditional destinations. Consequently, higher education institutions increasingly compete to attract international students because they contribute to institutional diversity, academic reputation, and institutional sustainability (Selten et al., 2020). Although the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia have historically been the preferred destinations for international students, countries such as China and India have increasingly emerged as important educational hubs (Ma & Zhao, 2018). This shift reflects the growing attractiveness of affordable higher education systems offering internationally recognized academic programmes that meet students' educational aspirations (Ennin & Manariyo, 2023). In particular, Indian higher education has gained international recognition for its strengths in fields such as information and communication technology, medicine, and engineering.

As the number of international students in India continues to grow, understanding their academic and social experiences has become increasingly important (Mduwile et al., 2026). Unlike many English-medium higher education systems, Indian universities operate within a multilingual environment where English, Hindi, and numerous regional languages coexist. English serves as the principal medium of instruction in most universities, particularly in

scientific, technological, and professional programmes, whereas Hindi and regional languages continue to play important roles in classroom discussions, peer interactions, administrative communication, and everyday campus life (Groff, 2016). Consequently, students and lecturers frequently alternate between languages during lectures, classroom discussions, and other academic activities, reflecting the multilingual character of Indian higher education (Sarkar & Ahmad, 2025). While this multilingual environment represents an important educational and cultural resource, it also creates a distinctive context in which international students must navigate communication that extends beyond the official language of instruction.

For international students, multilingual classroom practices may present both opportunities and challenges. Although English enables students to access formal instruction and academic content, the use of Hindi and regional languages alongside English may influence their comprehension, classroom participation, and access to informal academic support (Pawar & Dasgupta, 2024). Language has consistently been identified as a key factor influencing international students' academic achievement and social integration in higher education (Rienties et al., 2011). However, meeting institutional English-language requirements does not necessarily guarantee successful participation in multilingual learning environments. International students may continue to encounter difficulties related to unfamiliar accents, discipline-specific terminology, and communicative practices that affect classroom interaction and academic engagement (Evans & Morrison, 2011). Beyond formal academic settings, limited familiarity with Indian varieties of English and locally spoken languages may also restrict opportunities to establish peer relationships and participate fully in university life.

Language-related challenges are frequently accompanied by broader processes of cultural adjustment. Ennin and Manariyo (2023) argue that international students' adaptation is closely associated with the degree of difference between their home cultures and the culture of the host society. Linguistic and cultural factors therefore interact to shape students' academic participation and social integration within multilingual higher education environments. Given the increasing internationalization of Indian universities and the multilingual nature of campus communication, understanding how international students experience multilingual classroom practices has become an important area of inquiry. The following literature review examines existing scholarship on multilingualism in higher education, international students' language barriers, pre-sessional language programmes, and the role of Hindi and regional languages in Indian academia to provide the conceptual foundation for the present study.

Literature Review

Multilingualism in Higher Education

Multilingualism has become a defining characteristic of contemporary higher education as universities continue to internationalize and attract students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Rather than viewing multilingualism as the mere coexistence of multiple languages, recent scholarship conceptualizes it as the dynamic use of learners' linguistic repertoires to facilitate knowledge construction, participation, and communication. Within this perspective, multilingualism is increasingly regarded as an educational resource that promotes inclusion, intercultural competence, and equitable access to learning rather than a challenge to be overcome (García & Li, 2015). This resource-oriented perspective is further reflected in UNESCO's *Languages Matter: Global Guidance on Multilingual Education*, which advocates multilingual education as a means of improving educational quality while recognizing learners' linguistic identities and promoting inclusive learning environments (UNESCO, 2025).

Although scholars broadly agree on the pedagogical value of multilingualism, they differ in their assessment of how effectively multilingual principles are implemented in higher education. García and Li (2015) argue that drawing on students' full linguistic repertoires

through multilingual and translanguaging pedagogies enhances learning by allowing learners to mobilize all available linguistic resources. Similarly, Cenoz and Gorter (2020) contend that flexible multilingual practices strengthen both academic engagement and intercultural communication, particularly in linguistically diverse classrooms. In contrast, other scholars caution that institutional multilingualism does not necessarily translate into equitable educational experiences. They argue that universities often promote linguistic diversity rhetorically while maintaining monolingual norms in teaching, assessment, and academic communication, thereby privileging proficiency in the dominant language of instruction over students' broader multilingual competencies.

This tension between multilingual ideals and institutional practice has important implications for international students. While multilingual campuses may foster intercultural interaction and broaden opportunities for learning, they may also create additional barriers when classroom discussions, peer interactions, or administrative communication extend beyond the official language of instruction. UNESCO (2025) similarly emphasizes that multilingual education requires not only language policies but also institutional practices that meaningfully accommodate linguistic diversity if learners are to benefit fully from multilingual environments. Consequently, multilingualism in higher education should be understood as both an educational opportunity and a contextual factor that may shape students' academic participation differently depending on how multilingual practices are enacted within universities. This perspective provides an important foundation for examining the language-related challenges experienced by international students in multilingual higher education contexts.

International Students and Language Barriers

Language proficiency is widely recognized as a key determinant of international students' academic success, influencing not only comprehension of course content but also participation in classroom discussions, academic writing, and access to institutional resources. However, recent scholarship suggests that the challenges faced by international students extend beyond proficiency in the official language of instruction. Rather, they emerge from the interaction between students' multilingual repertoires and the linguistic expectations embedded in university policies, teaching practices, and everyday communication. In this regard, language barriers should be understood as socially and institutionally constructed rather than solely as individual linguistic deficiencies (de Saint-Georges, 2025).

Although scholars generally agree that language plays a central role in students' academic adjustment, they differ in their emphasis on the nature of these challenges. Studies focusing on academic communication highlight the importance of proficiency in the language of instruction for understanding lectures, producing written assignments, and engaging in assessment (Andrade, 2006; Sawir et al., 2008). In contrast, more recent research argues that international students often encounter difficulties even when they possess adequate proficiency in the instructional language because classroom interaction and campus life frequently involve multilingual practices that extend beyond formal academic discourse. De Saint-Georges (2025), for example, argues that institutional expectations often privilege native-like academic communication despite the multilingual realities of contemporary universities, creating additional barriers for students whose linguistic repertoires differ from dominant institutional norms.

Beyond the classroom, language barriers also influence students' social integration and overall university experience. Sawir et al. (2008) found that limited opportunities to participate in informal communication contribute to feelings of isolation and reduce students' sense of belonging, while Yi and Zhang (2025) similarly emphasize that difficulties in everyday interaction may restrict the development of peer networks and access to academic and

emotional support. Together, these studies suggest that language proficiency alone does not guarantee successful integration; meaningful participation also depends on students' ability to navigate the multilingual communicative practices of their host institutions.

These challenges become particularly salient within Indian higher education, where English frequently serves as the medium of instruction alongside Hindi and numerous regional languages that are widely used in informal academic and social interactions. Ennin and Manariyo (2023) argue that this layered multilingual environment presents unique challenges for international students who may be proficient in English but unfamiliar with locally spoken languages. Consequently, international students may encounter difficulties participating in peer discussions, accessing informal academic support, or engaging fully in campus life. This indicates that understanding international students' experiences in multilingual universities requires moving beyond English proficiency alone to consider the broader linguistic ecology in which academic and social interactions take place.

Pre-sessional Language Programs

Pre-sessional language programs have become an important component of internationalization strategies in higher education, particularly in countries that host large numbers of international students. Traditionally offered before the commencement of academic studies, these programmes are designed not only to improve students' proficiency in the language of instruction but also to develop academic literacy, disciplinary communication skills, and familiarity with university learning practices. Consequently, they are increasingly viewed as facilitating students' transition into higher education by supporting both academic preparedness and sociocultural adjustment (Montgomery, 2010; Evans & Morrison, 2011).

Although scholars generally acknowledge the value of pre-sessional language programmes, they differ in their understanding of the outcomes such programmes should prioritize. Research on English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programmes primarily emphasizes the development of academic language proficiency. For example, Evans and Morrison (2011) found that language preparation enhances students' ability to comprehend lectures, participate in classroom discussions, and engage with discipline-specific texts, while Tseng et al. (2021) reported improvements in academic vocabulary, linguistic accuracy, and learner confidence following intensive pre-university language instruction. Together, these studies suggest that pre-sessional programmes contribute significantly to students' academic readiness by reducing linguistic barriers during the transition to university.

In contrast, a growing body of literature argues that language preparation should extend beyond academic proficiency to include intercultural competence and familiarity with the communicative practices of the host society. Montgomery (2010) contends that successful adjustment depends not only on students' command of the instructional language but also on their ability to navigate the social and cultural norms of university life. Similarly, Wilczewski and Alon (2022) demonstrate that host-language competence promotes meaningful interaction with peers and faculty, strengthens students' sense of belonging, and facilitates engagement with local communities. These findings broaden the role of pre-sessional programmes from language instruction alone to comprehensive preparation for academic and social participation.

Despite this growing evidence, existing research has focused predominantly on English-medium universities in contexts such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and Hong Kong, where pre-sessional programmes are largely designed to support English academic proficiency (Evans & Morrison, 2011). Comparatively little attention has been paid to multilingual higher education systems in which students must navigate not only the official language of instruction but also locally spoken languages that shape classroom interaction, administrative communication, and everyday campus life. This gap is particularly evident in the Indian higher education context, where English coexists with Hindi and numerous regional

languages. Consequently, it remains unclear whether pre-sessional orientation programmes that incorporate locally spoken languages could better support international students' academic engagement and social integration in multilingual university environments.

Hindi and Regional Languages in Indian Academia

The linguistic landscape of Indian higher education is characterized by the dynamic coexistence of English, Hindi, and numerous regional languages, reflecting the country's longstanding multilingual tradition. Although English functions as the principal medium of instruction and the dominant language of formal academic communication in many universities, language use on campus extends well beyond the classroom. Scholars broadly agree that multilingualism is an inherent feature of Indian higher education; however, they differ in their interpretation of how this multilingual reality shapes academic participation and university life. While educational policy perspectives portray multilingualism as a resource for inclusive and equitable learning, sociolinguistic research emphasizes the functional distribution of languages across different communicative domains (Mohanty, 2019; National Education Policy 2020).

From a policy perspective, multilingualism is regarded as an educational asset that enhances learning, cultural understanding, and social inclusion. The National Education Policy 2020 advocates the use of multiple languages to strengthen educational quality while preserving India's linguistic diversity. Similarly, Mohanty (2019) argues that multilingualism promotes cognitive development, epistemic access, and social participation by enabling learners to draw upon their diverse linguistic repertoires. These perspectives therefore conceptualize linguistic diversity as a pedagogical resource capable of enriching teaching and learning. In contrast, sociolinguistic studies suggest that multilingualism in Indian universities is shaped not only by educational ideals but also by the communicative demands of everyday academic life. Although English predominates in lectures, assessments, and official documentation, Hindi frequently serves as a *lingua franca* among students from different linguistic backgrounds, whereas regional languages remain integral to peer interaction, administrative communication, and engagement with local communities. Rather than functioning as competing systems, these languages are deployed flexibly according to communicative purpose, interlocutors, and social context.

These contrasting perspectives suggest that multilingualism in Indian higher education should be understood not merely as a language policy but as a situated communicative practice. Whereas policy frameworks emphasize the educational value of linguistic diversity, everyday language use reflects a fluid multilingual ecology in which English, Hindi, and regional languages are strategically employed according to communicative purpose and institutional context (Mohanty, 2019; National Education Policy 2020). This interpretation is consistent with the theory of translanguaging, which argues that multilingual speakers mobilize their integrated linguistic repertoires rather than treating languages as separate and autonomous systems (García & Li, 2014). From this perspective, language choice is shaped by interactional needs rather than fixed linguistic boundaries. Consequently, multilingual practices can facilitate collaborative learning, intercultural dialogue, and engagement with local communities while simultaneously increasing the linguistic complexity of academic and social communication. Participation in Indian higher education therefore depends not only on proficiency in English but also on students' ability to navigate multilingual interactions across both formal and informal settings.

The implications of this multilingual ecology are particularly significant for international students. Research on international student adjustment consistently demonstrates that successful integration depends not only on competence in the language of instruction but also on participation in the informal communicative practices through which students exchange

academic information, establish peer relationships, and develop a sense of belonging (Andrade, 2006; Montgomery, 2010; Sawir et al., 2008). Viewed in the context of Indian universities, where multilingual interaction constitutes an ordinary feature of academic and social life, these findings suggest that students' experiences are shaped by the interplay between institutional language policies and everyday multilingual practices. Consequently, understanding how English, Hindi, and regional languages function together within Indian universities provides an important foundation for examining international students' academic participation and social integration.

Overall, the literature reviewed indicates that empirical research on international students' language barriers in Indian higher education remains relatively limited. The available studies have largely been conducted within specific institutional or regional contexts, such as Gujarat (Ennin & Manariyo, 2023) and Assam (Mduwile et al., 2026), providing only a partial understanding of international students' experiences across India's multilingual higher education system. Moreover, while these studies have documented linguistic and intercultural challenges, they have paid little attention to international students' perceptions of pre-sessional Hindi or local language orientation programmes and their potential role in facilitating academic participation and social integration. Addressing these issues is important for informing language support initiatives that reflect the multilingual realities of Indian higher education. Accordingly, the present study investigates international students' language backgrounds, their experiences of multilingual classroom practices, and their perceptions of pre-sessional or local language orientation in Indian higher education.

Research Objectives and Research Questions

Building on the gaps identified in the preceding literature, this study aims to examine the experiences of international students in multilingual Indian higher education. Specifically, the study investigates how multilingual classroom practices shape international students' academic participation and social integration within universities where English functions as the medium of instruction alongside Hindi and regional languages. In addition, the study explores international students' language backgrounds and their perceptions of pre-sessional or local language orientation programmes as a potential form of institutional language support. By addressing these issues, the study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of language-related challenges in multilingual higher education and to provide evidence that may inform language support initiatives for international students in Indian universities.

To achieve these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the language backgrounds of international students, and to what extent are they familiar with Hindi and other local languages?
2. How do multilingual classroom practices and language barriers influence international students' academic participation and social integration in Indian higher education institutions?
3. How do international students perceive the potential role of pre-sessional or local language orientation programmes in supporting their academic participation and social integration?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In the current research, a mixed-methods research design was adopted since it involved a combination of both quantitative and qualitative techniques to examine the linguistic challenges faced by international students in multilingual learning environments in India. The use of mixed methods was appropriate for this research due to its effectiveness in uncovering

general patterns in students' experiences as well as exploring students' perceptions of multilingual learning environments (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

The quantitative method helped in examining the perceptions of the participants regarding the use of Hindi and regional languages in English-medium higher education institutions. Survey questions were used to collect the data to examine the issues of lecture understanding, participation, and interaction in both academic and social environments. This section of the research enabled the identification of patterns and problems faced by participants in multilingual learning environments.

In addition, the qualitative method helped in analyzing the issue in depth through examining individual experiences and perceptions of the participants. It involved the use of a semistructured interview technique where the participants could describe their challenges in multilingual classrooms in more detail. Moreover, the participants had an opportunity to voice their opinions on the benefits of pre-sessional training programmes in Hindi and other regional languages aimed at equipping international students before their academic work began.

Through a combination of statistical patterns and individuals' experiences, the present research managed to establish the relationship between multilingual teaching methods, academic engagement, and socialization in Indian higher education institutions among international students.

Overview of Data Collection and Analysis Methods

For the current study, several instruments were employed to collect data. Specifically, two main instruments were developed – an online questionnaire and semistructured interviews. As stated above, the former instrument served as a primary means of collecting data. Namely, a set of questions for measuring participants' opinions concerning their experience of being engaged in multilingual classrooms was distributed among the target population. Thus, the purpose of the online questionnaire was to measure participants' attitudes towards multilingual classrooms as well as the influence of language barriers on the academic process.

In order to complement the results, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a number of participants. Through interviews, researchers attempted to reveal more insights into the problem under discussion. Specifically, the interviewees were invited to discuss their opinions regarding challenges that arise due to the fact that lecturers sometimes change between English and local languages when communicating within a class. In addition, it was possible to learn about the way in which participants cope with language barriers in educational environments.

Quantitative data obtained after distributing questionnaires were analyzed through descriptive statistics. Particularly, the frequency of certain answers as well as the percentage of respondents providing particular answers were calculated. Furthermore, the mean score measured based on the data obtained from the Likert scale was analyzed in terms of identifying major trends in participants' perception. Statistical analysis was performed by using Microsoft Excel and IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 27.0) where the latter program was used for calculating the Cronbach's alpha.

Finally, the data collected through interviews were analyzed through thematic analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The ethics involved in the study were meticulously observed during its entire course. Voluntary participation in the study was emphasized, and each participant was adequately briefed regarding the study and procedures before completing the questionnaire and participating in the interview. Adequate explanations were provided regarding the objectives of the study and the involvement of the participants.

For privacy and confidentiality purposes, anonymity was observed while collecting data. All data were kept confidential and were used for academic purposes alone.

The participants were made aware of the fact that they could opt not to participate in the study or withdraw anytime during the study, and that no adverse effects would arise because of such actions. Furthermore, the collected data were kept secure, and could only be accessed by the researcher.

Participants

This study comprised of international students undertaking English medium academic programs at the following universities located in India: Tezpur University, University of Delhi, and Sharda University. The universities were selected since they offer a linguistically diverse environment and hence represent the academic environments in Indian higher education.

The participants included in this study were those who had previously been exposed to multilingual classrooms whereby lecturers and students spoke both Hindi and other regional languages in addition to English in class or during informal discussions.

Survey Participants

There were 48 international students who took part in the survey. Participants included students from diverse parts of Africa and Asia.

The demographic composition of the participants included:

Gender

- Male: 33 students (70.8%)
- Female: 15 students (29.2%)

Level of Studies

- Undergraduate: 31 students (62.5%)
- Master's: 14 students (31.3%)
- Doctoral: 3 students (6.2%)

Time Spent in India

- Less than 1 year: 17 students (31.3%)
- 1-2 years: 23 students (52.1%)
- 2-3 years: 2 students (6.2%)
- More than 3 years: 6 students (10.4%)

All participants had previously studied at multilingual academic institutions wherein they were faced with linguistic issues while in class and in their interactions.

Interview Participants

Apart from administering the survey to the respondents, semi-structured interviews were carried out with eight international students. The selection of the interviewees involved purposive sampling to include students who differed in terms of nationality, academic level and language background. The characteristics of the selected interviewees included:

- 3 undergraduate students
- 3 master's students
- 2 doctoral students

The participants had resided in India for durations ranging from six months to three years. The interviewees had rich experience in facing the difficulties that come with studying in multilingual universities, especially those related to classroom interaction and participation.

Inclusion Criteria

To be included in the current study, candidates needed to:

- enrol as international students in one of the participating universities;
- engage in an academic programme offered in English; and

- be involved in classroom or campus interaction in Hindi or regional languages.
- Students from all language backgrounds were eligible for participation irrespective of their knowledge of Hindi or regional languages. The above criteria were used to obtain insights on languages usually spoken and understood by the participating international students and how language diversity affects their academic experiences.

Data Collection Instrument

Questionnaire Design

Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire to investigate the experiences of international students within multilingual academic settings in Indian universities.

The questionnaire comprised two sections.

Section A: Demographic Data

This section aimed at collecting demographic information of the participants such as gender, academic level, country of origin, period stayed in India and exposure to Hindi or other local languages.

Section B: Multilingual classroom experience and students' opinion regarding pre-sessional Hindi or Regional Language Supports

This section of the questionnaire contained 19 Likert-scale questions aimed at assessing the experience of international students within the multilingual environment of Indian education institutions. Ten important questions out of the 19 Likert-scale questions were chosen to analyse classroom experience and its impact on students academically and socially as well as students' opinions on pre-sessional Hindi or regional language programmes.

The answers provided by the respondents were evaluated according to the 5-point Likertscale:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

Reliability of the Questionnaire (Cronbach's Alpha)

In order to analyse the reliability of the developed questionnaire, an internal consistency test (Cronbach's Alpha) was conducted through IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 27.0). Internal consistency analysis based on Cronbach's Alpha was used for 19 questions in Section B of the developed questionnaire, which concerned multilingual classroom experience, language barriers students face and their opinion on pre-sessional programmes.

Results of the reliability analysis are shown in the table below:

Table 1:

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
,825	19

A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.825 can be considered satisfactory since alpha values greater than 0.7 are regarded as acceptable in social science. Values exceeding 0.8

usually reflect excellent of the items included in questionnaires. Thus, the results of the analysis indicate high reliability of the questions asked in the questionnaire.

Validity of the Instrument

The validity of the questionnaire was achieved through an extensive review of previous literature on multilingualism, language contact, international students' experiences, and interactions in the classroom in higher education institutions. This enabled the researcher to select those aspects of interest to be covered in the questions included in the questionnaire and related to the objectives and the research problem.

Further, the questionnaire was peer-reviewed by individuals who held academic credentials in linguistics and applied language studies. Feedback received in the process helped make necessary adjustments to the questionnaire items to improve their clarity, relevance, and suitability before conducting the actual survey. Particular attention was paid to the wording of the questions included in the questionnaire to ensure they were clear enough and not inappropriate.

Results

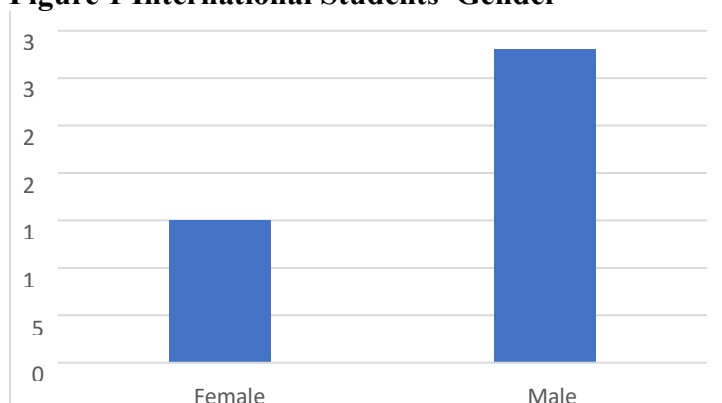
This part contains the results generated from the quantitative data collected using the questionnaire. The discussion centers on the background information of participants, their proficiency in Hindi and regional languages, problems they encounter in multilingual classrooms, and their attitude toward Hindi and regional language preparatory courses.

Participant Characteristics

This section presents demographic information.

Gender Distribution

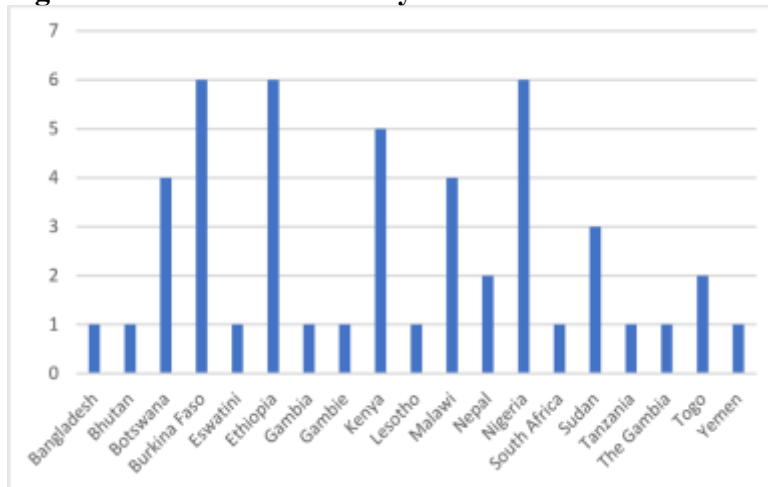
Figure 1 International Students' Gender



The results in Figure 1 above show that 29.2% of the participants in the study were female, while 70.8% were males.

Nationality Distribution

Figure 2 students' nationality

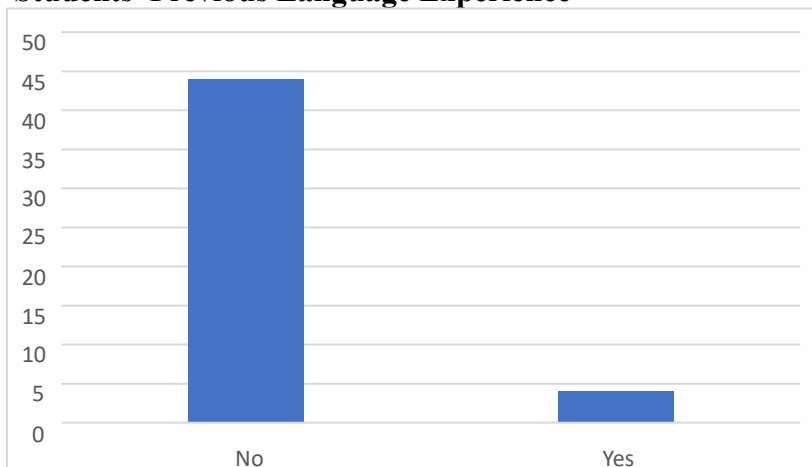


In terms of nationality, countries such as Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Kenya recorded relatively higher numbers of participants. In contrast, several countries including Bangladesh, Bhutan, Eswatini, Lesotho, Nepal, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, and Yemen were each represented by only one participant (approximately 2.1%).

Prior Language Experience

Figure 3

Students' Previous Language Experience



The figure shows that out of 48 students, 44 reported no prior knowledge of Hindi, representing 91.7% of the participants, while only 4 students (8.3%) indicated some prior experience.

Classroom Language Practices and Effects of Language Barriers

This section presents the results on classroom language use and the effects of language barriers on international students.

Figure 4
Classroom Language Practices and Effects of Language Barriers

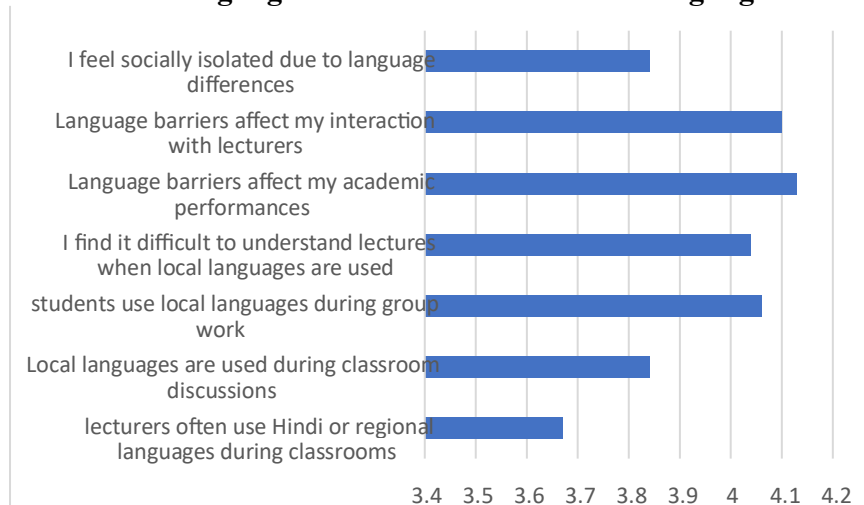


Figure 4 presents the mean scores related to classroom language practices and the effects of language barriers among international students. “Language barriers affect my academic performance” recorded the highest mean score ($M = 4.15$), followed by “Language barriers affect my interaction with lecturers” ($M = 4.10$). “Students use local languages during group work” recorded a mean score of 4.05, while “I find it difficult to understand lectures when local languages are used” had a mean score of 4.02. “Local languages are used during classroom discussions” and “I feel socially isolated due to language differences” both recorded mean scores of 3.84. The lowest mean score was recorded for “Lecturers often use Hindi or regional languages during classrooms” ($M = 3.67$).

Students’ Views on Pre-sessional Hindi or Regional Language Support

This section shows students’ views on pre-sessional Hindi or regional language support programmes.

Figure 5
Students’ Views on Pre-sessional Hindi or Regional Language Support

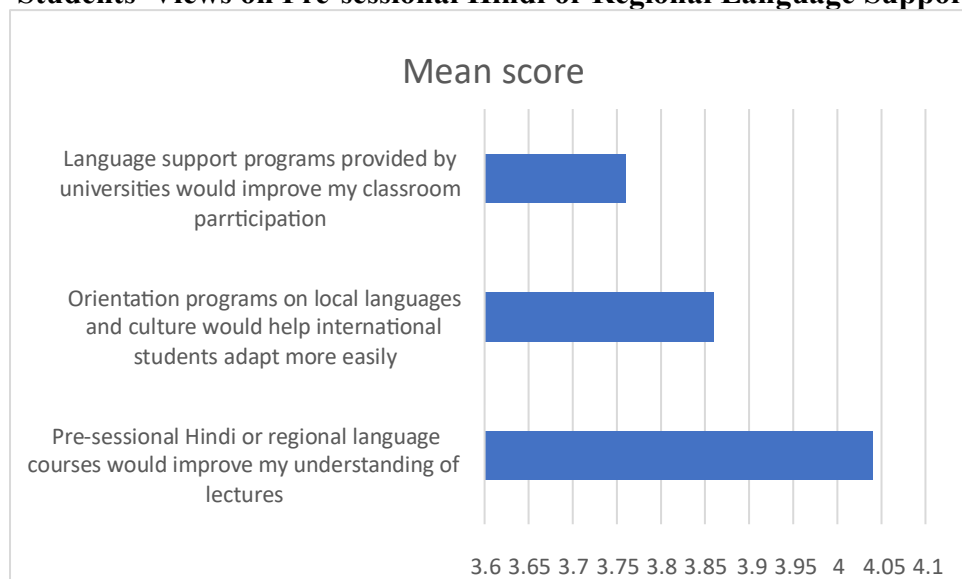


Figure 5 presents students' views on pre-sessional Hindi or regional language support. The statement "Pre-sessional Hindi or regional language courses would improve my

understanding of lectures" recorded the highest mean score ($M = 4.02$), followed by "Orientation programs on local languages and culture would help international students adapt more easily" ($M = 3.81$). The statement "Language support programs provided by universities would improve my classroom participation" recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 3.74$).

Results from the Interviews

As mentioned earlier in the Methodology chapter, the participants of this study were eight international students who took part in the interviews conducted at Tezpur University. The variety in their background and academic level, along with various years of staying in India, made them able to report a range of experiences related to multilingual class environment.

Accordingly, the analysis of the interview responses indicates that English was regularly mixed with Hindi and other regional languages when delivering lectures and interacting with fellow students and teachers. Interviewees also reported instances where switching of the language occurred during both lectures and discussions.

At the same time, the interviews showed various perspectives on using the local languages in class environments. Specifically, five out of eight participants demonstrated negative attitude towards using Hindi or regional languages in classrooms, while the rest of the participants were free from language barriers in their classroom environment.

The issue of language support was also addressed through the interviews. Accordingly, all but one of the interviewed students supported the idea of introducing preessional programs to help international students adjust to Hindi and regional languages better.

Thus, the interviews mostly provided diverse viewpoints on multilingual class practices and language barriers faced by international students in India.

Discussion

This chapter is devoted to the discussion of the results obtained within the scope of this research and their implications for international student life in multilingual classrooms of India.

International Students' Linguistic Profiles

The findings of this study reveal that male students are more prevalent than females among those participating in this research. At the same time, the nationality findings indicate that most participants come from African countries, while only several of them were born in Asia. These findings are evidence of increased presence of students from Africa in Indian universities.

One of the significant findings of this study relates to the language background of students. Quantitative analysis has demonstrated that the vast majority of participants had no previous experience with Hindi language in their home country before going to India for studies. It means that most of the international students used English as their only language.

The same conclusion can be made based on interview results. Several participants explained that they expected English to be the sole language of communication at Indian universities since their program descriptions included English medium. However, they learned that Hindi and regional languages were often used for discussion in informal situations.

One of the participants said, "Even before arriving at Indian universities, I thought all classes would be taught in English however, students and at times lecturers use Hindi during the discussion." (Participant 3)

Another participant pointed out, "I completely rely on English because I do not understand Hindi." (Participant 7)

These narratives suggest that international students attending multilingual Indian universities have inadequate knowledge of what language-related experiences await them

there. Despite English being the official language of instruction, multilingualism appears to characterize everyday academic discourse among participants. This conclusion agrees with previous studies claiming that language issues arise when using local languages along with the language of instruction (Liu et al., 2024).

Multilingual Classroom Communication and Its Impacts

The results of quantitative analysis show that multilingual language practices exist within the selected institutions. The participants gave relatively high scores regarding language use in the classroom setting. In addition, language barriers influenced students' academic performance, interactions with teachers, and lecture comprehension.

Among those statements that received high scores, the one that language barriers influence academic performance scored the highest. Participants gave high scores for experiencing problems with interacting with lecturers and understanding lectures, particularly during multilingual classroom interaction. This implies that multilingual classroom practices can cause comprehension issues for foreign students since English is the only language that they understand.

Some participants from interviews indicated that in most cases, teachers switch between languages, particularly English and Hindi, while teaching and explaining difficult topics. While students were able to grasp the general idea of the lecture, they admitted that some parts got lost due to switching to a local language.

One of the participants said, "sometimes the teacher begins speaking English but switches to Hindi while giving additional explanation to students. At that point, I miss some information about the lecture." (Participant 2)

A second student noted, "group discussion gets difficult because students start speaking their local language to one another." (Participant 5)

Thus, language barriers influence not only formal learning but also communication within groups of students. Moreover, findings demonstrate that multilingual classroom practices can have social effects on international students. Participants from surveys indicated that they experienced a feeling of social exclusion due to language differences. Similarly, interviewees mentioned instances where they were not included in the conversation because students started discussing something in Hindi.

A participant remarked, "At certain moments, all my colleagues laugh but do not explain the joke they started talking in Hindi." (Participant 1). Thus, language barriers not only influence academic perception but might have adverse impacts on the sense of belonging among students. Tavares (2022) reported similar problems proving that multilingual classroom environment can be counterproductive for international students who lack awareness of linguistic conventions in the local language.

It is essential to highlight that the findings should not be seen as negative perceptions of multilingualism. Instead, the results prove that multilingual environments need better communication practices to ensure all students feel comfortable and can participate in class discussions. Thus, the problem does not arise from linguistic diversity but the lack of support for students unfamiliar with the local languages.

International Students' Views on Pre-sessional Hindi or Regional Language Support Programmes

The findings revealed that participants had rather positive attitudes towards pre-sessional Hindi or regional language support programmes. Participants agreed that pre-sessional language training would facilitate lecture understanding, participation in class discussions, and adjustment to university. The highest average score of this section corresponded to the idea that pre-sessional Hindi or regional language courses will enhance students' understanding of the lecture content.

These results are supported by the data obtained through interviews. Many participants believed that basic language orientation before enrolment in academic programmes would make it easier for international students to interact within the classroom and other communication contexts.

For example, one participant stated: "Basic Hindi lessons before classes would allow international students to communicate better." (Participant 7)

Another participant added: "Learning basic expressions and vocabulary will reduce stress for international students." (Participant 5)

Participants stressed the importance of both language and culture orientations in preparing international students to communicate in class and in other social settings. Some students admitted that learning about cultural specifics of the local community and communication practices might help integrate into university life.

These results are congruent with the findings of research related to the effect of language orientation programs for international students. Wilczewski & Alon (2022) found out that preliminary language training enhances classroom participation, academic adjustment, and intercultural interaction for international students. Therefore, this study proves that pre-sessional Hindi or regional language support programmes can positively affect international students in multilingual university settings.

Overall, the study findings clearly indicate that multilingual classroom practice plays a significant role in the experience of international students studying at Indian universities. Although English is the official language used in class discussions, the frequent use of Hindi and regional languages in classroom context poses additional linguistic challenges for many international students. However, language support programmes can help resolve some of these problems.

Conclusion, Limitations, and Recommendations

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to examine the impact of multilingual classroom practices on the academic experiences of international students in Indian higher education institutions. The study involved students' linguistic profiles, classroom comprehension, participation, and the role of pre-sessional Hindi or regional language support programmes. The findings obtained from both the quantitative and qualitative data provide clear answers to the research questions and contribute to a better understanding of the linguistic realities experienced by international students in multilingual academic environments.

First, regarding international students' linguistic profiles and prior knowledge of Hindi or regional languages (RQ1), the findings reveal that most participants came from African countries and that the majority had no prior knowledge of Hindi before arriving in India. As a result, most students relied mainly on English for academic and social communication. These findings suggest that many international students enter Indian universities with limited preparation for the multilingual realities of campus life, despite studying in officially English-medium programmes.

Second, concerning multilingual classroom practices and their effects on academic experiences (RQ2), the findings demonstrate that the use of Hindi and regional languages alongside English significantly influences students' classroom experiences. The high mean scores related to lecture comprehension, classroom participation, interaction with lecturers, and academic performance indicate that language barriers affect several aspects of students' academic engagement. The interview findings further confirm that code-switching between English and local languages during lectures and group discussions sometimes limits students' understanding and participation in classroom interaction. Some participants also reported

difficulties in social integration when peer interaction shifted to languages they could not understand. These findings reveal a gap between English as the official language of instruction and the multilingual communication practices that characterize everyday academic life in Indian universities.

Finally, regarding students' views on pre-sessional Hindi or regional language support programmes (RQ3), the findings indicate that international students generally perceive such programmes positively. Both the survey and interview data suggest that many students consider structured language orientation programmes useful for improving lecture comprehension, classroom participation, communication with peers and lecturers, and overall adaptation to multilingual academic environments. The findings therefore suggest that international students recognize the importance of institutional language support in facilitating academic and social integration.

In short, this study demonstrates that multilingual practices in Indian universities reflect the country's linguistic diversity and sociolinguistic realities, but they may also create academic and social challenges for international students who rely mainly on English. The findings further suggest that more inclusive communication practices and tailored language support measures could help international students adapt more effectively to multilingual higher education environments in India.

Limitations of the Study

In spite of the valuable findings obtained through this study, certain limitations should be taken into consideration. First, as the study was based largely on the participants' opinions, some results could be affected by personal experience, feelings, or even individual interpretation of multilingual classroom activities.

Second, the sample of participants involved was rather small with 48 students responding to the questionnaire and only 8 taking part in interviews. While the results are relevant in understanding experiences of international students in multilingual Indian universities, they cannot claim universal validity for all students in India.

Another important limitation is related to the setting of the research. The study was conducted in particular universities only and therefore the results may differ depending on where exactly in India and in what context multilingual classroom activities occur.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the study had a cross-sectional character and thus focused on one-time experiences of international students. This implies that the study does not provide an account of changes in students' adaptation and engagement in classroom activities.

It should be noted that the study investigated students' perceptions of the importance of pre-sessional Hindi or regional language preparation but did not assess the effectiveness of such initiatives. Further research could focus on this aspect.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several recommendations for future research on international students' experience of multilingual Indian universities can be made basing on the findings of the current study.

Firstly, further studies should involve larger samples of participants coming from various universities and regions of India. This would allow providing representative results and gaining a deeper understanding of multilingual classroom experience.

Secondly, longitudinal studies could be conducted to investigate how the process of language adaptation, engagement in classroom activities, and social integration takes place in the case of international students.

Thirdly, the effectiveness of pre-sessional Hindi or regional language preparation programmes needs to be assessed. For instance, future studies could involve comparison of

experiences of two groups of students, one of which has participated in preparation programmes before entering the university and another one has not.

Fourthly, further research could pay attention to lecturers' opinion about multilingual classroom activities and using local languages during teaching sessions and interactions with students.

Moreover, university language policies could be compared with the reality of classroom activities in order to make suggestions regarding improvement of those policies.

Lastly, teaching strategies could be studied in order to enhance multilingual communication and participation of international students.

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