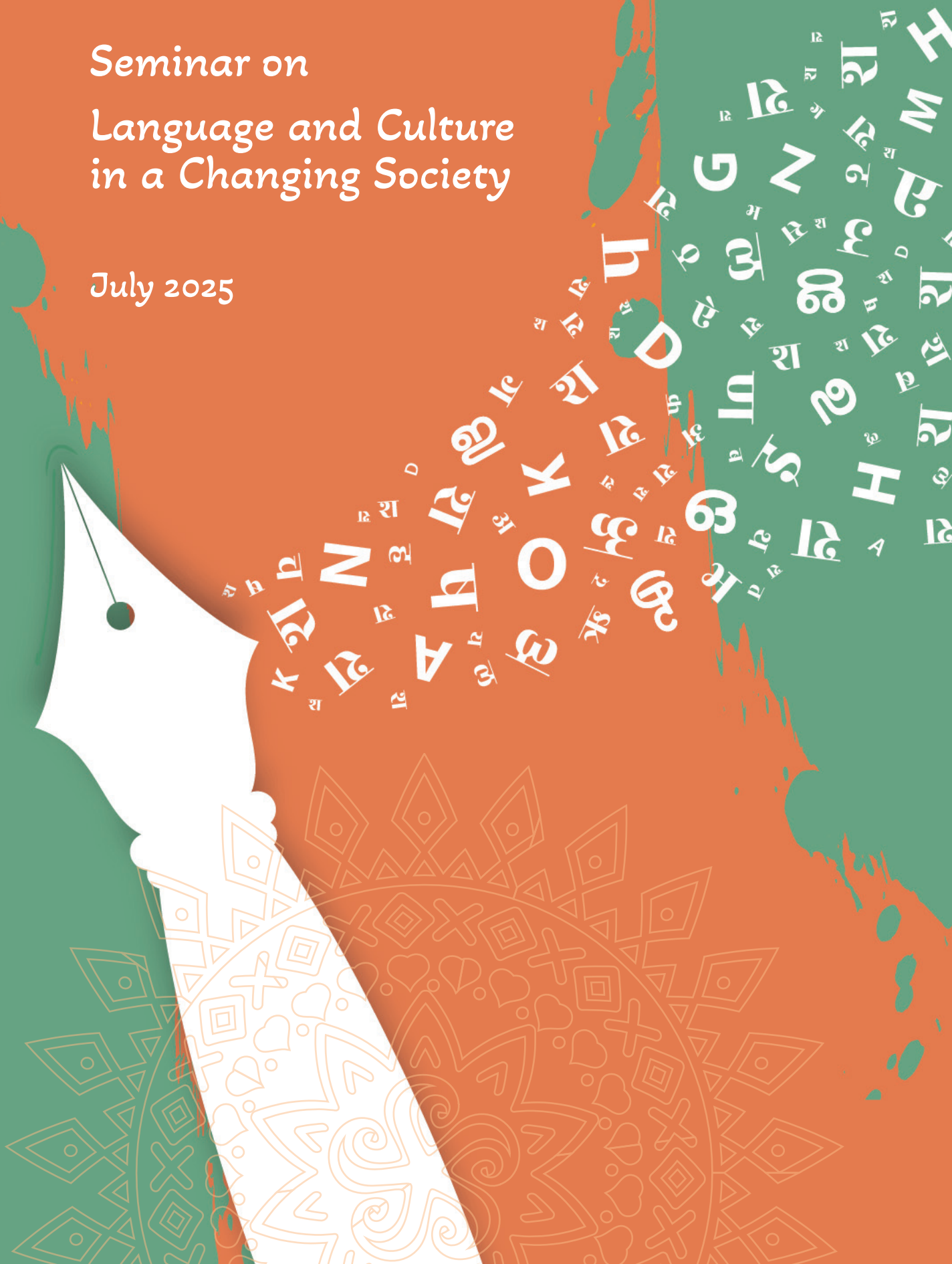




Vakkom Maulavi Foundation Trust

Seminar on
Language and Culture
in a Changing Society

July 2025



ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report presents a detailed account of the international seminar on “Language and Culture in a Changing Society,” jointly organized by the Vakkom Moulavi Foundation Trust (VMFT), Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), and Centre for Development Studies (CDS) in January 2025. The seminar brought together educators, researchers, and policymakers to examine how language and culture intersect with educational access, equity, and identity in Kerala’s evolving social landscape.

Key themes included the growing linguistic divide in schools, challenges of bilingual education, classroom realities in multilingual settings, and the need for culturally responsive teaching practices. The discussions also explored historical patterns of educational exclusion, the cognitive strengths of multilingual children, and innovative assessment models that value all languages students bring to the classroom.

The report synthesizes key insights and policy recommendations. It aims to foster inclusive, equitable, and contextually grounded educational reforms in Kerala by emphasizing the importance of multilingualism and cultural diversity in education systems.

ABOUT VMFT

Constituted in the year 1986, Vakkom Moulavi Foundation Trust (VMFT) has been a powerful presence in the social and cultural landscape of Kerala. With the goal of advancing Kerala’s overall development, it focuses on three broad thematic areas: Inclusive Governance, Education for the Future, and Science and Technology for Social Transformation. As a memorial to Vakkom Muhammad Abdul Khader Moulavi (1879-1932), the Foundation publishes his works and promotes research on his contributions, to shed light on the historical forces that shaped Kerala’s development in the early 20th century.



Er A. Suhair
Chairperson



Dr Sajitha Bashir
Executive Vice-Chairperson



Prof. Jameela Begum
President

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Agenda

Language and Culture in a Changing Society: Research to Support Kerala's School Education System

14 – 15 January 2025

Venue: Centre for Development Studies, Ulloor, Thiruvananthapuram



Tata Institute of Social Sciences
Vakkom Moulavi Foundation Trust
Centre for Development Studies

08:30-09:00 Registration

09:00 -09:30 Session 1- Opening

Welcome remarks: Prof. Jameela Begum, Former Dean of Faculty of Arts, Kerala University and Trustee, Vakkom Moulavi Foundation Trust (VMFT)

Remarks: Prof. Veeramani, Director, *Centre for Development Studies (CDS)*

Remarks: Prof. Padma Sarangapani, *Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS)*

09:30 – 11:00 Session 2 – Language in Kerala's school education: some insights

Chair: Prof. Jameela Begum, Former Dean of Faculty of Arts, Kerala University and Trustee, *Vakkom Moulavi Foundation Trust (VMFT)*

Towards an Equitable Bilingual Education Model in Kerala - Malayalam and English medium instruction in Kerala's schools – findings from UDISE+ and NSS data:

Dr Sajitha Bashir, Executive Vice-Chairperson, VMFT, *Trivandrum*

Reading proficiency in lower primary education in Kerala – the ASER results:

Dr Suraj Jacob, Professor, *Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum*

Reimagining Teaching English in India – Dr Anusha Ramanathan, Associate Professor, *Tata Institute of Social Studies, Mumbai*



11:15-13:00

Session 3 - Classroom realities – the teaching of language and culture in Kerala

Chair: Dr Sajitha Bashir, Executive Vice-Chairperson, VMFT, Trivandrum

The Closing Chapter of Lower Primary Schooling: Exploring Bilingual Reading Proficiency of Grade Four Students in Rural Kerala- Manjima Bhadran, Doctoral Researcher, *Institute of English, Kerala University, Trivandrum*

Followed by

Moderated Round table discussions with (teachers/ teacher educators and others) on classroom realities

Jabeena Ansari, K.G. Sandhya, Neefa Afeen, Neethu U.V., T. S. Nisha, Vidya V. Chandran

14:00-15:30

Session 4 –Multilingualism in education: conceptual models

Chair: Dr Suraj Jacob, Professor, *Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum*

Multilinguality and Language Pedagogy: From Policy to Practice - Prof. Rama Kant Agnihotri, Former Professor and Head, Department of Linguistics, *University of Delhi*.

Pedagogy founded on the principles of “Multi-/trans-languaging and Transknowledging (MTL&T)” - Dr Minati Panda, Professor of Cultural-Historical and Critical Psychology, *Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi*

15:45-17:15

Session 5 - Multilingualism and Multiliteracy (MultiLiLa) Research Project in India: Lessons for Kerala

Chair: Prof. Minati Panda (also gives a brief overview of the project)

Reading comprehension within a translanguaging perspective, teacher education and multi lingual assessment: what does the project tell us?

Professor Lina Mukhopadhyay, Department of Training and Development, *School of English Language Education, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad* - Prof. Rama Mathew, Former Dean of the Faculty of Education, *University of Delhi*

17:15-17:30

Brief Summing Up of Day 1



Wednesday 15 January 2025

09:30-11:00 Session 6– Short presentations: Research studies on Language

Learning and Culture in Kerala Chair: Prof. Rama Mathew, Former Dean of the Faculty of Education, *University of Delhi*

Evaluation of E-Language Labs of E³ English program (KITE) – Reha Sharma, IT for Change, Bengaluru

Cultural Roots and Linguistic Growth: Rethinking English Education for Kerala's Tribal Children - Dr V. K. Karthika, Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, *National Institute of Technology, Tiruchirappalli*.

Enhancing ESL Teaching Through Pedagogic Translanguaging: Evidence from Kerala and Future Directions - Chelsy Selvan, Doctoral student, *School of English Language Education, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad*

11:15 – 13:00 Session 7– Cultural representations in Kerala education

Chair: Dr Anusha Ramanathan, Associate Professor, *Tata Institute of Social Studies, Mumbai*

The Politics of Caste and School Education in Kerala: Dynamics and Challenges – Dr Divya Kannan, Assistant Professor, *School of Humanities and Social Science, Shiv Nadar University*

Youth, Culture, and Nation-State Building: The Emergence of Youth Festivals in Kerala's Education System - Rajashree Raju, Research Scholar, *University of Tuebingen, Germany*

14:00 – 15:30 Session 8 – Culture in a globalizing world

History, Mind and Culture – Prof. David Johnson, Reader in Comparative and International Education, *St. Anthony's College, Oxford University*

Discussant to focus on implications for Kerala

15:30-16:00 Closing – Policy and research priorities for the future

Dr Sajitha Bashir, Executive Vice-Chairperson, *VMFT, Trivandrum*

Dr Suraj Jacob, Professor, *Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum*

Executive Summary

Seminar on Language and Culture

The seminar on Language and Culture brought together researchers, educators, and policymakers to critically examine how language shapes educational access, cognition, identity, and equity in contemporary Kerala and beyond. Rooted in India's complex multilingual and socio-cultural context, the sessions drew from a range of disciplines—linguistics, education, anthropology, psychology, and history—to explore the challenges and possibilities of language-in-education policies and practices. Discussions highlighted the disjuncture between policy intentions and classroom realities, calling for a more grounded, inclusive, and culturally responsive approach to language and learning.

A key concern across presentations was the fragmentation of Kerala's education system, which reflects increasing stratification by language medium, school type, and socioeconomic background. While many children begin their schooling in English-medium private unaided institutions, a large number transfer to government or aided schools at the secondary level, often seeking English-medium sections within these institutions. This shift is shaped by factors like curriculum differences, cost, and the social aspirations tied to English. However, data from sources like Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) reveal that despite high enrollment, reading proficiency remains low—over 30% of Class 5 students cannot read a Class 2-level text, and boys in Malayalam-medium government schools are especially disadvantaged. The seminar emphasized the need for reforms that go beyond access to focus on foundational learning outcomes and equity.

Language was also explored as a powerful cognitive and cultural tool. Presenters argued that multilingual children from marginalized or tribal backgrounds possess advanced cognitive skills—such as code-switching, translation, and linguistic negotiation—but these are often unrecognized or underutilized in formal schooling. Classroom studies in Delhi, Odisha, and Madhya Pradesh revealed that children regularly

engage in “multi-linguaging” and “translanguaging,” adapting their speech fluidly across contexts. Yet, monolingual teaching and assessment frameworks penalize these strategies, limiting students' ability to demonstrate their full comprehension and capabilities.

Several pedagogical interventions presented at the seminar showcased how multilingual and multimodal approaches can enhance student engagement and learning. In projects like MultiLila, lesson plans using oral storytelling, visualization, vocabulary scaffolding, and language-switching strategies helped bridge the gap between students' oral and print literacy. Children were found to perform better in regional languages and when allowed to express understanding in the language of their choice. These approaches showed how oral comprehension, when nurtured, could support reading development across languages, particularly in environments where English is not the home language.

Assessment emerged as a key area in need of reform. Despite policy recognition of multilingualism, evaluation practices remain narrowly monolingual, often punishing students for code switching or responding in non-dominant languages. Presenters highlighted alternative models that treat assessment as a process of communication and meaning-making rather than error detection. Classroom activities such as drawing, dramatization, and oral storytelling were proposed as tools for capturing learning more holistically.

Expanding beyond classroom practice, the seminar engaged with the historical and political dimensions of language and culture. Archival research into Kerala's educational past revealed how early schooling systems were shaped by caste, gender, and colonial ideologies. Textbooks and policies promoted a narrow view of morality, discipline, and merit that persists in contemporary notions of success. The Youth Festival (Kalolsavam), originally envisioned




as a democratic platform for promoting cultural literacy, was critically examined for reinforcing a Savarna-dominated aesthetic. Classical art forms rooted in upper-caste traditions are celebrated as symbols of Malayali identity, while folk and marginalized cultural expressions are often sidelined. These insights challenge the assumption that state-supported education and culture are inherently inclusive or progressive.

The seminar also addressed how global educational paradigms and standardized assessments often fail to account for the cultural and cognitive diversity of learners. Drawing on sociocultural theory, discussions emphasized that cognition is not an individual or fixed biological process, but emerges from social interaction and engagement with cultural tools such as language, storytelling, and everyday practices. In societies where orality plays a significant role, children may excel in

narrative and memory-rich tasks but struggle with abstract, decontextualized literacy tasks imposed by formal schooling. Participants argued for a shift away from universalist models of development and towards frameworks that value localized knowledge systems and learning pathways.

Finally, across sessions, speakers underscored the urgent need to train teachers not only in multilingual pedagogy but also in their disciplinary content. Teachers must be equipped to recognize and integrate the linguistic and cultural resources that students bring into the classroom. Without this foundation, attempts at inclusion through multilingual education may remain superficial. At the same time, participants acknowledged that such pedagogical shifts require systemic change—including political will, curricular reform, and greater community involvement.



Multilingualism is a cognitive and cultural asset, but schooling often treats it as a barrier.

Assessment and pedagogy must reflect students' linguistic realities, using oral, visual, and narrative forms to support learning.

Cultural literacy in education is shaped by caste and class hierarchies, requiring critical examination of what is valued and who is included.

Standardized assessments and curricula often ignore local knowledge systems, risking misrepresentation of learning potential.

Teacher training must focus on both content knowledge and multilingual practice to build inclusive, equitable classrooms.

KEY THEMES
AND TAKEAWAYS



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Session 1

Opening

The seminar opened with a series of thought-provoking addresses that highlighted the importance of making education more inclusive of different languages and cultures, setting the tone for two days of meaningful discussions. The session brought together key academic figures to reflect on Kerala's evolving educational landscape, and the challenges facing it. Each speaker offered a diverse perspective spanning historical context, policy deficits, and teaching methodologies. These opening remarks established a strong foundation for the seminar, highlighting the need for inclusive and research-based approaches to education.

Prof. Jameela Begum, VMFT

In her welcome address, Prof. Jameela Begum emphasized the evolving relationship between language, culture, and education in Kerala, drawing attention to the growing complexity of multilingual classrooms shaped by migration, globalization, and shifting aspirations. She highlighted the urgent need to rethink teaching methodologies, teacher preparedness, and curriculum design to make education more contextually relevant and culturally responsive. Prof. Begum questioned the continued reliance on outdated methods like grammar translation and advocated for fluency-focused, communicative approaches that resonate with learners' lived experiences. She stressed that students' reading challenges often stem not from a lack of ability but from disinterest in culturally disconnected materials, urging educators to incorporate local narratives and interests into classroom content. Her remarks framed the seminar's discussions as a vital opportunity to align Kerala's educational practices with the linguistic realities and aspirations of its diverse student population.

Prof. Veeramani, CDS

In his inaugural address, Prof. Veeramani, Director of the Centre for Development Studies, reflected on Kerala's long-standing achievements in education while drawing attention to the pressing challenges of today—especially the growing learning gaps despite near-universal school enrollment. Situating the problem within the broader historical trajectory of Indian education policy, he highlighted how post-independence priorities favored tertiary education over foundational literacy, leading to structural imbalances and limited inclusivity. Prof. Veeramani pointed out that in Kerala, 33% of Class 5 students cannot read a Class 2-level passage, underscoring that the state is not immune to the national learning crisis. He emphasized that input-based reforms such as increased teacher salaries or technological provisions have had limited impact without addressing core pedagogical deficits. Advocating for innovative approaches like localized volunteer-driven learning support and reforming exam systems that currently prioritize filtration over real learning, he called for a shift toward inclusive, culturally responsive education policies grounded in grassroots realities and absolute learning outcomes.

Prof. Padma Sarangapani, TISS

In her opening remarks, Prof. Padma Sarangapani emphasized the critical importance of exploring the interconnections between language, culture, and education in both the Kerala context and the broader Indian republic. She highlighted how language and culture function not only as means of communication and expression, but also as tools of control, resistance, and identity formation in a rapidly changing socio-political and technological landscape. Drawing attention to emerging literacies, oracies, and multimodal learning, she underscored the need to rethink educational frameworks to better reflect multilingual realities and cultural diversity. Prof. Sarangapani also welcomed the participation of young scholars and affirmed the seminar's role in fostering an engaged community of researchers committed to advancing inclusive and contextually grounded educational practices.

The opening session underscored the historical strengths as well as emerging challenges within Kerala's education system. The speakers emphasized that meaningful change will require not just technical solutions, but a deeper engagement with the social, cultural, and linguistic contexts of education. Their remarks set a thoughtful and purposeful tone for the seminar, inviting all participants to contribute toward building a more inclusive educational framework.





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Session 2

Language in Kerala's School Education – Insights

The growing disconnect between language policies, fair access to education, and what students are actually learning in Kerala's schools formed the core focus of this session. Speakers discussed how language, type of school (government v/s private), and socio-economic background shape educational outcomes in the state. Comprehensive education data revealed growing segmentation within schools, where access to English-medium classes and reading abilities were linked to students' social and economic statuses. The discussions raised important questions about the fairness and effectiveness of current language policies, where English is considered critical for future progress but often not taught proficiently, while the native Malayalam is slowly but surely getting pushed to the background. There was an emphasis on the need for a clearer and more inclusive bilingual education policy in the state.

Language Medium, Social Segregation, and Policy Drift in Kerala's Education System

Dr Sajitha Bashir

In her presentation Dr Sajitha Bashir, Executive Vice Chairperson of VMFT, presented a critical and data-rich analysis of the changing landscape of education in Kerala, highlighting growing linguistic stratification and institutional drift. Drawing from both the National Sample Survey and UDISE data, she painted a picture of a highly differentiated and fragmented school system in which language medium, school type, and social class are increasingly aligned—leading to a segregated educational experience.

Dr Bashir began by establishing the structure of the current educational system in Kerala, emphasizing that nearly all students attend schools where at least one section is English medium. This trend, while now pervasive in Kerala, may serve as a precursor to shifts in other Indian states. In particular, private unaided schools dominate early childhood education, with 60% of pre-primary students enrolled in them. Even at the primary level, 34% of students attend unaided schools. However, a reversal occurs at the secondary and higher secondary levels, where 48–50% of students transition to government or aided schools. This pattern suggests that many parents opt for English-medium unaided schools early on, but later shift their children to state schools—most likely to English-medium sections in

government or aided schools, rather than reverting to Malayalam-medium sections.

This transfer trend becomes even clearer when examining UDISE data, which reveals distinct drop-offs in unaided school enrollment after Grade 4 (end of lower primary) and Grade 7 (end of upper primary). Government and aided school enrollment rises correspondingly, showing a large transition within the schooling system. However, such transitions may not be seamless, as curriculum, medium of instruction, and teacher preparation vary significantly across school types.

Dr Bashir then turned to the issue of inequity. Her analysis shows that government Malayalam-medium primary schools are overwhelmingly populated by students from the poorest, most marginalized communities—particularly rural, tribal, and migrant children. By contrast, unaided English-medium schools serve wealthier populations and show negligible enrollment of students below the poverty line. The result, as Dr Bashir put it, is a “separate and unequal” system: children are sorted into educational tracks early, with limited chances of crossing over. The few who begin in Malayalam-medium sections remain “stuck,” with fewer prospects for progression, while



those in private English-medium schools often ascend more smoothly to higher education and professional pathways.

Despite this systemic change, educational policy and teacher education have failed to keep pace. Kerala was among the last states to introduce English at Grade 1, and its bilingual policy lacks coherence. Decisions about whether students may write exams in Malayalam or English—even within the same test—are left unclear. There is no consistent approach to assessing how language affects learning outcomes. Teacher education programs are similarly outdated: TTIs train teachers in Malayalam, B.Ed. programs ostensibly use English, but in practice, it is not clear what language competencies teachers truly have or how prepared they are to teach in multilingual classrooms.

The erosion of the social consensus that once fueled Kerala's educational progress is another concern.

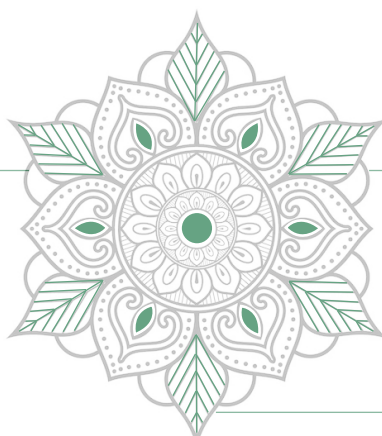
Whereas education was historically viewed as a collective good and a means for social emancipation, it is now primarily seen as a path to individual success, often tied to English-medium instruction. Malayalam, once a cultural unifier, is gradually losing relevance, especially as the student population becomes more multilingual due to interstate migration and global influences. Dr Bashir highlighted that 5 million migrant workers have brought new languages and cultures into the state, raising questions about the future role of Malayalam in schools and society.

She concluded with a call for a coherent, inclusive bilingual education policy that acknowledges on-the-ground realities and centers the need for high-quality English teaching alongside a meaningful role for Malayalam and other languages. She argued that this must be supported by a new coalition of stakeholders—including teachers, parents, policymakers, and local communities—who can rebuild a common vision for education that is both equitable and future-facing.

Key Takeaways

60% of pre-primary students and 34% of primary students are in unaided English-medium schools, but many shift to government schools by secondary level.

Poor and marginalized children are concentrated in government Malayalam-medium schools, while private unaided schools serve wealthier populations, creating a “separate and unequal” system.



Transitions from unaided to aided/government schools typically happen after Grade 4 and Grade 7, often into English-medium sections.

Teacher education and curriculum policy are misaligned with the language realities of classrooms, leaving educators underprepared.

A coherent bilingual education policy is urgently needed to replace the current ineffective and fragmented practice.





Language Proficiency, Medium of Instruction, and Educational Gaps in Kerala – Stylized Facts from Quantitative Data

Dr Suraj Jacob

In his data-rich presentation Dr Suraj Jacob, Professor at the Centre for Development Studies (CDS), laid out a compelling macro-level analysis of language and educational trends in Kerala. Drawing on nationally representative surveys, primarily the NSS (2017–18) and ASER, Dr Jacob examined the complex intersection of language of instruction, school type, and reading proficiency. His goal was not to offer definitive conclusions, but to highlight “stylized facts”—empirical patterns that reveal the evolving educational landscape and raise questions about equity and effectiveness in the state’s schooling system.

Kerala has undergone a sharp shift toward English-medium instruction over the last two decades. According to the NSS data, between 40% to 60% of students in the state are now enrolled in English-medium schools, compared to just over 20% at the national level. This transition has been more pronounced in urban areas and among private unaided schools, which now rarely offer Malayalam-medium instruction. Most students in Malayalam medium today are enrolled in government or aided schools. Dr Jacob emphasized that this linguistic transition appears to be motivated more by social aspiration than by pedagogical evidence.

The ASER survey, based on rural household visits rather than in-school testing, provides the most reliable data on reading proficiency. It categorizes reading ability across five levels—from no reading skills to the ability to fluently read a Standard 2 text, which is considered the minimum expected level by the end of Class 2. Alarming, ASER data shows that even by Class 5, over 30% of students in Kerala cannot read at this basic level. While Kerala performs better than the all-India rural average, the absolute numbers are concerning, particularly because the bar is relatively low—it measures fluency, not comprehension.

An important finding from ASER is that students in English-medium schools consistently outperform

their Malayalam-medium counterparts in reading proficiency, with a margin of 10–20 percentage points from Class 3 onwards. Similarly, students in private unaided schools read better than those in government schools. However, when controlling for language of instruction, the difference between government and private school students narrows considerably. English-medium students, whether in government or private schools, perform similarly, suggesting that the language of instruction is a stronger predictor of reading ability than school type.

A significant gender gap was also evident in the data. Across school types and mediums, girls consistently outperformed boys in reading proficiency, a pattern that was statistically significant. But perhaps the most striking intersection emerged when gender, language, and school type were examined together. Boys studying in Malayalam-medium government schools were clearly lagging behind all other student groups, including girls in the same schools, who performed on par with peers from other institutions. This finding underscores the need to further explore how gendered and linguistic identities interact with institutional settings to affect learning outcomes.

Dr Jacob also highlighted one of ASER’s unique strengths: children are allowed to choose whether to be tested in English or Malayalam. This choice revealed the level of comfort with a language. Less than 10% of Malayalam-medium government school students opted for English. In English-medium government schools, however, a majority of students—often 40% to 60% depending on the grade—chose to be tested in Malayalam. Even in private English-medium schools, only about 50% to 60% of students opted to take the test in English. These patterns suggest that despite formal instruction in English, a large proportion of students remain more comfortable reading in their first language.





To summarize, Dr Jacob presented several “stylized facts” that should inform future research and policy discussions

Reading proficiency remains low despite Kerala’s reputation for high literacy

English-medium students outperform Malayalam-medium students, but comfort with English remains limited

Girls read better than boys across the board

Boys in Malayalam-medium government schools are particularly disadvantaged

The shift to English-medium instruction has outpaced students’ actual ability to read English



Dr Jacob concluded by calling for more nuanced research to understand these patterns. While the data has limitations, particularly in terms of missing information for aided schools, the findings point to a disjunction between educational aspirations and actual learning outcomes. As Kerala—and India more broadly—continues its linguistic transition in education, these insights demand closer scrutiny to ensure that no group of students is left behind.



Rethinking Language Pedagogy and Teacher Preparedness in Multilingual Classrooms

Dr Anusha Ramanathan

Dr Anusha Ramanathan's presentation at the "Language and Culture" Seminar provided a thought-provoking reflection on the state of teacher preparedness in the face of rapidly evolving multilingual classroom realities. Her presentation focused on the intersection of language policy, teacher training, and the digital-cultural shifts that are reshaping classrooms across Kerala and the country at large. Rather than offering conclusive data sets, Dr Ramanathan emphasized critical questions that should guide future research and policymaking.

She began by underscoring a key gap in the current educational landscape: while there is a substantial body of research on Kerala's education system, data on teacher proficiency—especially disaggregated across rural-urban and government-private divides—remains limited. As student populations in Kerala become increasingly diverse, with a visible influx of migrant learners from Hindi, Marathi, and other linguistic backgrounds, the need for inclusive, multilingual pedagogy has grown. Yet, teacher training programs and curriculum frameworks remain rooted in Malayalam-centric models, often failing to account for the multilingual demands of real classrooms.

One major issue Dr Ramanathan identified was the misalignment between curricular intentions and classroom practice. Despite the Kerala curriculum's focus on discourse-oriented pedagogy, multiple studies—including those by George Varghese and SCERT—indicate that many teachers continue to rely on outdated, exam-centric methods that prioritize rote learning and textbook memorization over meaningful communication and contextual learning. While teachers may be formally qualified, their own language proficiency—especially in English—is often inadequate, leading many to teach English through Malayalam or rely on culturally familiar references like local films to bridge understanding.

The talk also highlighted generational and systemic disparities within the teaching workforce. Evidence

suggests that older teachers dominate the government school system, while younger educators are more often drawn to private institutions. With Kerala being one of the most digitally connected states, and with children increasingly immersed in technology and multimedia, Dr Ramanathan questioned whether teachers were being adequately trained to use digital tools responsibly and effectively. She emphasized that current teacher development programs often offer tool-specific workshops (e.g., on Mentimeter or Kahoot) rather than building core digital pedagogical competencies.

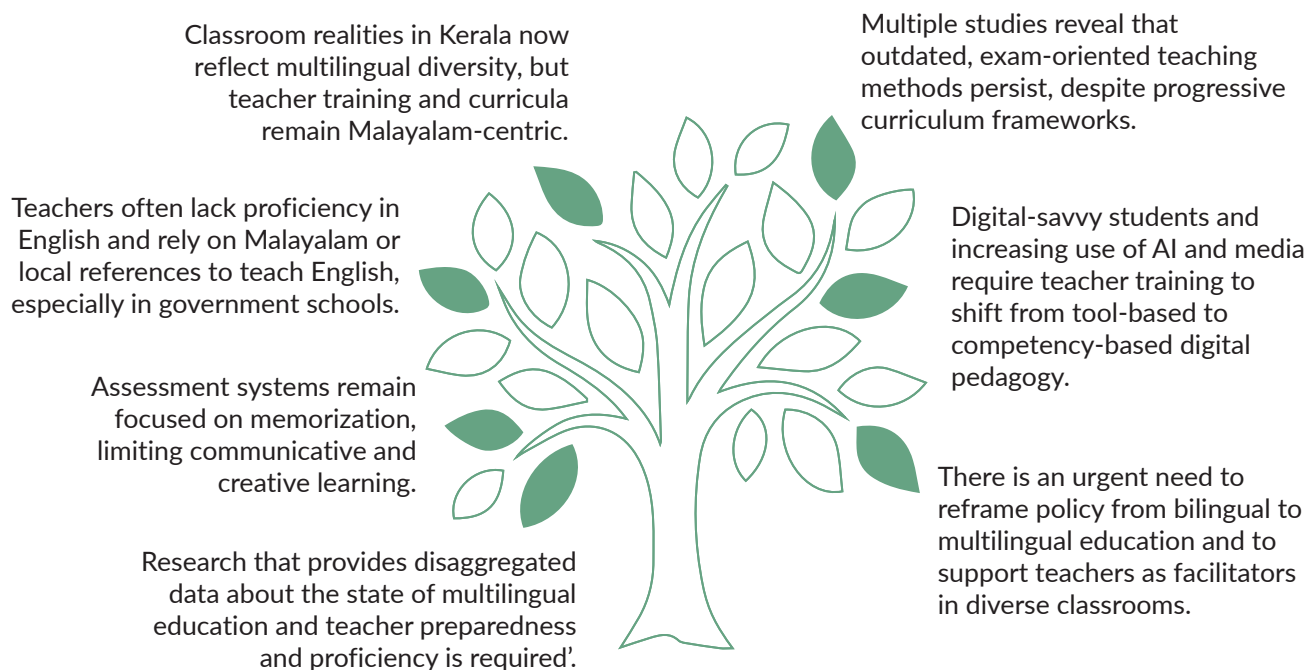
Dr Ramanathan further explored the gap between language teaching goals and the reality of assessment practices. She cited findings that many teachers still measure success through reading and grammar-focused tasks, often promoting rote memorization rather than language use in authentic contexts. The growing influence of English via social media and digital culture is widening the performance gap between urban and rural learners, with urban students often showing better English proficiency due to greater exposure. Teacher Education needs to especially prepare teachers to cope with personalized access to information and entertainment that students increasingly have. This requires us to research how we can ensure shared cognition in a classroom.

Rather than proposing one-size-fits-all solutions, Dr Ramanathan posed fundamental questions: Should teachers be expected to be highly proficient in all languages their students speak? Or should the focus shift to training teachers as facilitators who create space for multilingual expression? She advocated for rethinking the very language of policy and pedagogy—moving from "bilingual" to "multilingual" frameworks to better reflect linguistic realities. Even English, Malayalam and Hindi have varieties amongst them. She also called for deeper engagement with cultural and critical literacy, creative pedagogy, and more robust formative assessments that go beyond written tests.



Ultimately, her presentation was a call to action: for researchers to generate more nuanced data on teacher practices, for curriculum developers to align methods with real-world linguistic diversity, and for training institutions to better prepare teachers for classrooms shaped by both local languages and global influences.

Key Takeaways



Q and A Session

Key points in the discussion included the preference of English medium by students, the need for constant evaluation of government teachers, the importance of understanding reading comprehension rather than just word recognition, and the potential role and caution regarding the use of artificial intelligence in education. Participants identified the need for more qualitative and quantitative data to understand the realities of education in Kerala, a historical perspective on the social reform period and its emphasis on education for enlightenment rather than just jobs, and concerns about potentially overstating the success of social mobilization. The speakers emphasized the need for deeper analysis of gender and economic class dynamics in educational choices, and the importance of ensuring AI does not lead to rote memorization in education.

This session highlighted the urgent need to tackle growing inequalities in Kerala's education system. Although English-medium instruction has spread quickly, it hasn't always led to better learning, especially among students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The speakers stressed that real change should focus on strong basic skills, teaching in languages students are comfortable with, and letting them express and answer in their native language. A strong case for equipping educators with tools to adapt to evolving technologies was also made. As Kerala reviews its language policies for education, the session emphasized the need for treating multilingualism as a strength and creating classrooms where every student can succeed, no matter their background.



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Session 3

Classroom Realities – Teaching Language and Culture

This session delved into the findings of a project conducted by VMFT centered around gauging basic literacy with a focus on bilingual reading proficiency among grade 4 students in rural Kerala. Panelists discussed the reasons for gaps existing in early literacy and the impact of socio economic statuses in reading proficiency among students. From the role of parental support to the preparedness of teachers, the session underscored how these elements influence children's ability to learn to read in both Malayalam and English.

Assessing Bilingual Reading Proficiency in Kerala's Government Schools

Manjima Bhadran

The Reading Assessment and Literacy Project, led by the Vakkom Moulavi Foundation Trust (VMFT), aimed to develop a methodology to assess the bilingual reading proficiency of Grade 4 students in Kerala's government schools. This exploratory study focused on one rural primary school in Kollam district, aiming to replicate and refine the study in more schools. Building on earlier research that revealed sharp divisions in Kerala's school system by language medium and socio-economic background, the study explored student proficiency in both English and Malayalam, examined reading attitudes, and sought to understand how socio-economic status (SES) and other background factors affect literacy development.

All students in Grade 4 were assessed and interviewed individually. Of the 17 students in Grade 4, 15 were in English medium and 2 in Malayalam medium. The study adapted ASER tools to assess reading at letter, word, paragraph, and story levels in both languages, integrating comprehension questions to move beyond basic decoding. Attitude surveys using smiley scales, teacher assessments, and structured student interviews supplemented these tools. SES was estimated based on household vehicle ownership.

Key findings showed stark differences in reading outcomes. Only three students—English-medium learners—reached the “Story” level in both languages, and even among them, comprehension was limited. Malayalam proficiency was more distributed, but

difficulties remained, especially with diacritics and conjunct consonants. In English, students struggled with basic vocabulary and function words, relying on syllable-by-syllable decoding rather than fluent reading.

Students expressed greater comfort with Malayalam, because they understood the words, and showed anxiety about English reading. Two students explicitly stated fear of English, while no such anxiety was reported for Malayalam.

Interestingly, Malayalam and English-medium students were taught together in some classrooms, despite different instructional needs—raising concerns about instructional alignment.

Student schooling histories reflected disruption and transition. While most students had attended preschool, many joined their current school only in Grade 2 or later, following COVID-19 school closures. This disrupted learning continuity could have impacted reading development.

Socio-economic status strongly correlated with English reading proficiency. No students from low-SES backgrounds reached the word level or beyond in English, while students from higher SES groups performed significantly better. Home literacy environments were hard to gauge due to vague or limited responses, pointing to the need for more refined tools in future studies.



In conclusion, the study successfully piloted an enriched assessment framework that goes beyond fluency to include comprehension and contextual influences. It underscores the need for differentiated instruction, better alignment between classroom practices and the language that students are familiar with, and more equitable strategies to address SES-linked learning gaps. The refined methodology offers a strong foundation for future bilingual literacy assessments but requires further development to assess home reading environments and comprehension more effectively.

Panel Discussion Among School Teachers

Ms Jabeena Ansari (Former HM)

In her response during the panel discussion, Ms Jabeena reflected on the motivations and challenges underlying the “Educare” supplementary education initiative in Perumathura, a marginalized coastal village in Thiruvananthapuram. Addressing the question on the need for such a program, she emphasized the area’s educational and socio-economic deprivation—marked by high dropout rates, lack of career guidance, and widespread poverty. Educare, which supports around 200 children from Classes 1 to 8 across English and Malayalam medium schools, offers academic support in Malayalam, given the students’ limited English comprehension and the mentors’ own challenges with the language. Responding to queries on student reading proficiency, she observed that while most students are comfortable with reading and writing in Malayalam, English remains a major barrier. Only about half of Class 8 students could read Level 3 or 4 Pratham books in English, and only a third of upper primary students could manage Levels 1 or 2. On mentor language proficiency, she reported fluency in Malayalam but variable English ability, with only one mentor reasonably confident in English communication. In terms of needed interventions, she highlighted a foundational focus on listening, the use of rhymes and phonics for sound recognition, vocabulary-building through storytelling, and engagement strategies such as games and re-reading exercises to nurture independent reading skills in English.

Nisha T. S. (Teacher in an upper primary school)

In her panel responses, Ms Nisha highlighted the linguistic diversity and practical challenges in her school setting, where approximately 70% of students are in English medium and 30% in Malayalam medium. While most Malayalam-medium students shift to English medium by upper primary, rarely do students move in the opposite direction. She noted that combined classes are often necessitated by limited academic time and the burden of multiple non-teaching responsibilities, including administrative tasks and coordinating co-curricular programs. In such mixed-language classrooms, she attempts to use bilingual resources like English and Malayalam maps and blackboards, but observes that Malayalam-medium students tend to remain silent and develop feelings of inferiority. She reported that only about 50–60% of students demonstrate foundational literacy, with roughly half able to read their textbooks fluently. Furthermore, she expressed concern over the inadequate academic language skills in English-medium divisions, where instruction and classroom discourse often revert to the mother tongue due to students’ limited English proficiency.



Neefa (Teacher in an unaided English medium school)

In response to questions regarding reading proficiency among primary students, the panelist shared insights drawn from experience teaching Classes V and VI in two different school environments. In the current school, where reading is actively promoted through a well-stocked library, teacher-led book reviews, a five-star rating system, and monthly reading rewards, 75–80% of students demonstrate strong reading skills. This culture of literacy is further reinforced by high levels of parental involvement. In contrast, the panelist noted that in a previous private school, only 30–40% of students were fluent readers—largely due to limited support at home and a lack of emphasis on reading within the school. These observations underscore the critical role of a supportive reading ecosystem—comprising resources, teacher enthusiasm, structured incentives, and parental engagement—in fostering literacy development among young learners.

Sandhya (Head of TTI)

In her responses, Ms Sandhya shared insights into the linguistic background and instructional practices at the Teacher Training Institute (TTI) where she teaches. Most student teachers come from government schools, with Malayalam as their primary medium of instruction, though some English-medium students are now entering the program. She explained that language competence in listening, speaking, reading, and writing is assessed individually by teacher educators, depending on the subject—she uses her own strategies while imparting English teaching methodology. The official medium of instruction for the TTI program is Malayalam, and course materials are typically provided in Malayalam, except for the English subject which is taught and assessed in English. Instructional language across theory and practical sessions generally remains consistent with the subject's language. However, the question of whether student teachers receive training to identify or address language difficulties in learners was not addressed in their curriculum discussions. Her responses underscore the continued dominance of Malayalam in teacher education, even as multilingual challenges in classrooms are on the rise.

Neethu U.V. (BEd Student)

In response to questions on language of instruction and teacher education, Neethu reflected on her personal and professional journey navigating between Malayalam and English. She completed her school education in Malayalam medium but shifted to English medium for higher secondary studies, largely due to the poor quality of Malayalam textbooks and peer influence. This transition posed significant challenges, including limited vocabulary, low confidence in English, and difficulties in written expression, as English instruction often relied heavily on Malayalam explanations without strengthening students' actual language proficiency. She emphasized the importance of learning in the mother tongue for conceptual clarity, citing literary figures like Sachidanandan and Kunjunn Mash to illustrate the evolving and inclusive nature of Malayalam. Currently, in her BEd program, both English and Malayalam are used as mediums of instruction, and textbooks are available in both languages. She referenced the 2021 Azim Premji University study supporting the use of regional languages in teacher training. However, she stressed that while teaching in the mother tongue is effective, it is equally important to prepare future teachers to teach in English-medium classrooms with confidence and clarity, suggesting that a balanced bilingual environment is essential for both learner success and teacher preparedness.

This session focused on the often-overlooked challenges of early reading in bilingual settings. While Kerala has done well in getting children into school, reading proficiency, a key foundation of learning remains a challenge. Panel discussions pointed to the fact that fixing this gap will need to go beyond simple changes to the curriculum and involve supporting teachers as well as updating reading materials that reflect the languages children speak. The key takeaway was to make education fair and effective across Kerala, especially in rural classrooms.





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Session 4

Multilingualism in Education – Conceptual Models

This session was centered around the role of multilingualism in learning, beginning with an insightful address on how language is learnt cognitively. The focus was on the concepts of multilinguality, translanguaging, and transknowledging, which allows kids to naturally move between languages. Speakers also discussed the lack of effective systems in schools to leverage the capabilities of multilingual students and how classrooms can make space for this linguistic and cultural diversity.

Conceptualizing Language through Multilinguality

Prof. Rama Kant Agnihotri

In his deeply insightful presentation, Prof. Rama Kant Agnihotri of the University of Delhi emphasized the need for conceptual clarity in discussions around language, education, and social justice. His argument weaved together theory, pedagogy, and linguistic evidence to challenge mainstream educational discourse that often marginalizes the linguistic diversity of India.

Prof. Agnihotri framed his discussion around **three** foundational concepts: 1. Language 2. Knowledge and 3. Social Justice. He argued that educational policy and practice must be grounded in a clear conceptual understanding of these. Without this clarity, efforts in curriculum development, teacher training, and pedagogy remain superficial.

Language is fundamentally constitutive of human experience, central to socialization, knowledge transmission, and cognitive development, and consistently used for potential discrimination and exclusion in educational systems. All languages operate using constituents, not just individual words. All languages are structurally equal. The notion of “dialect” or “inferior language” is a political construct, not a linguistic one. The challenge for education is to understand the universal and local aspects of language.

- The universal aspects of language (e.g., innate grammar) must be balanced with contextual embeddedness—the specific linguistic and cultural landscape of the classroom.

- Using Orwell’s and Plato’s problems as metaphors, he illustrated how:

- Orwell’s problem represents having abundant information but failing to resolve real-world issues.

- Plato’s problem explains language acquisition: children acquire complex linguistic systems from limited and often flawed input.

Language Acquisition is a Complex but Natural Process

Contrary to behaviorist learning models, Prof. Agnihotri emphasized that languages cannot be taught—they are acquired through complex cognitive processes and immersion in rich linguistic environments. Examples of these are:

- Phonological acquisition: Children distinguish subtle sounds like p vs b (e.g., pal vs bal) without formal instruction, even though the difference lies in unobservable features like vocal cord vibration.

- Phonotactics: Children intuitively learn permissible sound sequences in their language (e.g., “street” is valid, “srteet” is not), revealing deep, subconscious grammatical patterning.

- Syntax and movement rules: Forming questions from declarative sentences (“She is writing a letter” → “Is she writing a letter?”) requires understanding of



extremely complex sentence structure, not just linear word order e.g. 'She' may be substituted by say 'The tall boy' in which case the Aux will need to jump a Constituent of three words.

Children naturally acquire linguistic nuance and sophisticated linguistic competencies - such as honorifics in Malayalam or Hindi, causatives, hedging strategies, and discourse cohesion—through socialization with minimal, not direct instruction. They demonstrate remarkable language learning capabilities.

Prof. Agnihotri described multilinguality as a human condition and called for a broader embrace of this in education. Multilinguality is not two or three languages—it is a lived, fluid experience. Kerala classrooms contain speakers of Tamil, Tulu, Kannada, Kurumba, and many more—yet policies focus only on English and Malayalam. Classroom policy and pedagogy must reflect this complexity, acknowledging the multilingual resources students bring to the classroom.

He proposed a reconceptualization of language as multilinguality operating in three intersecting spaces: (1) Innate Universal Grammar (2) Linguistic variability and fluidity and (3) Commitment to social justice. Multilinguality should be understood as a dynamic, fluid system, rather than static bilingual or multilingual categorizations.

Language hierarchies (e.g. English and Malayalam dominating others) lead to educational exclusion of children from marginalized linguistic communities. Students who do not speak the “dominant” school languages are most often pushed out, reinforcing systemic inequity. Classrooms, he argued, must be seen as spaces for analyzing oppression and fostering equity rather than sanitized zones detached from real-world struggles.

In concluding, Prof. Agnihotri called for a paradigm shift: to conceptualize language not as static or singular, but as dynamic, fluid, and central to social and cognitive development. By recognizing multilinguality as the

default human condition, educators and policymakers can foster more just, inclusive, and effective learning environments.

Prof. Agnihotri aptly summarized the nature of language in these words, “Malayalam itself is multilingual. English is multilingual. Hindi is multilingual. We are all part of a world constituted by multilinguality.”

Multilingual Intelligence, Cognition, and Pedagogy in Indian Classrooms

Dr Minati Panda

Dr Minati Panda's presentation offered a rich and layered perspective on multilingualism as a foundational cognitive and cultural resource in education. Challenging conventional views that treat languages as bounded entities, she emphasized that human communication is inherently multilingual, with children acquiring language through fluid, socially embedded repertoires long before formal schooling begins. Drawing on fieldwork from Delhi's urban slums and multilingual tribal areas in Odisha, Dr Panda argued that children from marginalized communities often display high levels of cognitive agility—what she termed “multilingual intelligence”—manifested in their ability to code switch, translate, and navigate complex linguistic environments to meet everyday communicative needs.

She illustrated this with examples from Delhi's Basant Vihar slum, where children from Bihari and Odia-speaking families navigated complex multilingual environments in everyday life. A child speaking to a Haryanvi shopkeeper might gesture, switch between Odia and Hindi, and adapt vocabulary based on social cues and familiarity, all while negotiating her needs. These interactions revealed a deep metalinguistic awareness, use of affective and intersubjective strategies, and the ability to anticipate and respond to the communicative needs of others—traits that reflect high cognitive capacity but are rarely recognized by school systems.






A key concern raised in the presentation was the failure of schools to build upon these sophisticated linguistic capabilities. In schools, children who excel in navigating multilingual realities often “fail” in formal language and mathematics assessments, not due to cognitive deficits, but because classroom practices remain monolingual and detached from students’ lived experiences. Dr Panda questioned the pedagogical value of schools that merely replicate community learning, insisting instead that schools should enable children to engage with abstract, disciplinary knowledge through culturally responsive, conceptually rich learning experiences. Her critique extended to the prevalent reliance on rote instruction and the neglect of deeper conceptual understanding in teaching.

Drawing on Vygotsky’s theory of mediated learning, she stressed that thinking is inherently conceptual and shaped by language, symbols, and artifacts. Schools, she maintained, should provide students access to abstract scientific concepts by anchoring them in metaphors and experiences from their own cultural contexts. In Odisha, for instance, her team

developed mathematics materials using multiple local number systems with varying base values to explore the historical evolution of numerical concepts. In science lessons on magnetism, students’ metaphors from everyday life—like objects that attract or pull—were used to build understanding of abstract physical principles.

Through multilingual classroom experiments such as “Riyari,” “MLE,” and “MLE Plus,” her team demonstrated that integrating children’s linguistic and cultural resources significantly improved learning outcomes. However, she also emphasized that this approach depends on teachers’ strong disciplinary knowledge; multilingual pedagogy cannot succeed if educators themselves lack subject expertise or the confidence to facilitate multilingual exchanges.

Ultimately, her presentation was a call to rethink the political assumptions that underlie monolingual schooling and to adopt educational practices that recognize multilingualism not as a barrier, but as a powerful asset for cognitive development and inclusive pedagogy.



Children in multilingual environments—like urban slums or tribal areas—demonstrate advanced cognitive functions, but formal schooling often overlooks this capacity.

Classroom experiments using everyday metaphors and indigenous number systems showed how multilingual pedagogy can improve conceptual understanding.

Monolingual instruction is not neutral; it reflects political choices. Reimagining education requires systemic reform in both pedagogy and teacher training.

KEY TAKEAWAYS





Q and A Session

One important question focused on how these theoretical concepts can be translated into practical application in community education projects, particularly in contexts where even the local language faces resistance. Another participant raised concerns about the relevance of translanguaging in monolingual settings, questioning whether children in such environments are disadvantaged. Dr Panda addressed the issue of stigma associated with minoritized languages and the power dynamics that perpetuate it, while also advocating for the recognition of dialectical variations within languages. Prof. Agnihotri argued against the construct of a “standard language,” asserting that all languages are inherently multilingual and that social justice and recognizing the human mind are fundamental lenses through which to view this phenomena. He also suggested eliciting data from speakers of different languages in the classroom to create a sense of equality and privilege for every child. The discussion also touched on revising English Literature syllabi to reflect updated realities and incorporate translations from different languages.

This session encouraged a fresh look at how language is taught and used in schools. Instead of seeing children's native languages as separate, speakers called for utilizing all the language skills children bring with them. This can make classrooms more inclusive and help students who feel left out by strict, one-language systems. It highlighted the importance of embracing language diversity as a strength, not a barrier.





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Session 5

Multilingualism and Multiliteracy – Research Lessons

This session shared key insights from the MultiLiLa research project, which focused on how multilingual children learn in classrooms. The speakers highlighted the value of translanguaging, a way of teaching that encourages students to employ all their known languages to understand and express ideas. They also shared examples of how reading and comprehension can be improved, especially in schools with limited resources. The session showed useful ways in which research can help support multilingual students.

Insights from the MultiLiLa and follow-up projects: Multilingualism, Reading, and Comprehension

Prof. Lina Mukhopadhyay

Prof. Lina Mukhopadhyay's presentation offered a compelling overview of the ESRC-DfID funded project titled 'Multilingualism and Multiliteracy: Raising Learning Outcomes in Challenging Contexts in Primary Schools across India' (MultiLiLa) (2016-2020), a four year long large-scale, multi-site research initiative designed to profile the linguistic, cognitive, and mathematical abilities of learners from challenging contexts and studying in multilingual classrooms (refer to Tsimpli et al., 2020 for full report)¹. Conducted across Delhi NCR, Bihar, and Telangana, the study followed over 2,500 learners—mostly from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds—over an 18-to-24-month period. The project assessed learners in both regional-medium and English-medium schools, enabling comparative insights about the impact of language of instruction on children's comprehension and cognitive performance.

A key finding from the study was the significant gap between oral and print-based comprehension. Learners were asked to listen to a story and retell it in a language of their choice. Regardless of the medium of instruction, most children demonstrated stronger comprehension skills when using the oral modality, especially when allowed to speak in their home language. This revealed that children often possess

conceptual understanding that remains untapped when assessed through print alone and in a second or foreign language like English.

Using an adapted version of the ASER tool, the team measured decoding and comprehension in English, Hindi, and Telugu. The results consistently showed that learners performed better in their regional language across all levels—letters, words, paragraphs, stories, and comprehension. Notably, even English-medium students were more confident and accurate when responding in the regional language. A story-based comprehension task involving emotional inference revealed a deeper grasp of meaning when children responded in regional languages. These findings resonate with Jim Cummins' theory of interdependence (1984 and 2021), which argues that cognitive academic language skills developed in a first/stronger language can transfer to other languages, including English.

The MultiLiLa project subsequently led to a series of intervention projects focused on improving reading comprehension through multimodal and multilingual approaches. These included teacher training, multilingual lesson planning, vocabulary scaffolding, and integrating oral support for visual and home

¹Tsimpli, I. M., Balasubramanian, A., Marinis, T., Panda, M., Mukhopadhyay, L., Alladi, S., & Treffers-Daller, J. (2020). Research report of a four-year study of multilingualism, literacy, numeracy, and cognition in Delhi, Hyderabad, and Patna. The University of Cambridge. https://www.britishcouncil.in/sites/default/files/multilila_project_overview_report_final_-_web.pdf



language(s) into instruction. Texts were broken down into manageable segments, and difficult words or culturally unfamiliar phrases were explained using cross-linguistic examples. Children were encouraged to express their understanding in any language to scaffold their understanding and expression in English, to support comprehension and production skills. These methods were particularly effective in enhancing comprehension in expository texts—suggesting that everyday, experience-based content may be more accessible to learners than literary or abstract narratives.

The results from the follow-up projects over a 9-month period were promising in that the learners showed

a marked improvement in English comprehension when assessed through multilingual and multimodal assessment, especially in subjects like EVS and science. This improvement was attributed not only to improved print reading skills, but also to the strategic use of children's oral and multilingual capabilities as a scaffold for literacy development.

Prof. Mukhopadhyay concluded by emphasizing that classrooms are inherently multilingual and multi-cognitive. Recognizing and leveraging this reality through inclusive pedagogy, rather than insistence on rigid language hierarchies, is essential for equitable and effective education.

Key Takeaways

Over 2,500 students were assessed longitudinally in regional and English-medium schools across three states.

Teachers need to be trained to recognize and build on learners' multilingual resources in the classroom.

The findings support Cummins' theory that academic skills in a first language transfer to other languages.

Expository texts yielded more comprehension gains over narrative texts.



Oral comprehension was significantly stronger than print-based comprehension, especially in regional languages.

Learners performed better in reading and comprehension tasks when allowed to use their mother tongue or home language.

English comprehension improved significantly after multilingual, multimodal classroom interventions and assessments.



Reimagining Assessment in Multilingual Classrooms

Prof. Rama Mathew on “Language and Culture”

Prof. Rama Mathew’s compelling talk centered on the persistent challenges and promising potential of multilingual assessment in Indian education. Drawing from decades of research and field projects, she explored the gap between policy rhetoric (like the National Education Policy’s emphasis on multilingualism) and actual classroom practice, especially in assessment methods.

The presentation began with some highlights of the current education system in India.

Policy-Practice Gap: While multilingual education is promoted in policy, assessment remains rigidly monolingual, penalizing students for code switching or using their home languages.

Contradiction in ELT: English language teaching often clashes with multilingual principles. States like Telangana and Andhra Pradesh have shifted to English-medium instruction, yet fail to embrace multilingual assessment that could support learning.

Assessment Literacy: Teachers are largely untrained in effective, let alone multilingual, assessment methods. There is a need for practical orientation on assessment design aligned with multilingual pedagogy.

Language as a Resource: Drawing on Carol Benson’s framework, Prof. Mathew contrasted the negative effects of L2-(second language) only assessment with the benefits of viewing all languages as assets—fostering inclusivity and richer learning experiences. She highlighted the example of a Grade 7 teacher in a Waldorf school who was shocked to discover three or four previously unrecognized languages in her class—highlighting how little we know about students’ linguistic backgrounds.

Prof. Mathew laid out several strategies for multilingual formative assessment, which could be incorporated into the teaching process, mentioning

that this presentation would not highlight summative assessment. These examples are drawn from projects that have proved successful.

Picture-Based Reading Comprehension: Students described pictures, expressed emotions, and predicted storylines in their mother tongues, deepening engagement and comprehension.

Visualization in Reading: In a Delhi government school, Grade 5 students who initially couldn’t read began reading fluently after using drawing and storytelling in Hindi. Within months, their literacy improved significantly, even to the extent that they were able to correct teachers’ errors!

Emotional Depth in Multilingual Writing: Students wrote responses to an emotional story (“The Giving Tree” type narrative) in languages of their choice. Their answers were nuanced and heartfelt, showcasing the expressive power of L1 use.

Meta Cognition Through Code Switching: Students reflected on their own language use and were encouraged to blend Hindi and English in writing, leading to more authentic expression.

Reframing Homework: When students were allowed to design their own homework questions, participation and enthusiasm skyrocketed—an example of learner inclusion and assessment as empowerment.

Prof. Mathew advocated for formative, inclusive, and process-based assessments, integrating observation, feedback, and multilingual expression. She emphasized the urgency of building a strong Multilingual Education (MLE) program, where teachers feel confident and supported in valuing all linguistic resources in the classroom.



Two concrete suggestions for multilingual assessments from Prof. Rama Mathew:

Use Multimodal Communication: Allow students to express understanding through role play, drama, and activities, enabling them to communicate in their preferred languages.

Visualization and Drawing: Have students visualize a text, create drawings based on their understanding, and then discuss their drawings in their own language. This approach helps students comprehend and express ideas beyond language barriers.

She concluded her presentation with: “Don’t restrict imagination—let children bring their languages into learning.” This shift in mindset could unlock not only language development but also emotional intelligence, creativity, and classroom engagement.

This session showed how research-backed approaches like translanguaging can help multilingual children learn better, especially in under-resourced schools. The speakers shared simple ways to improve reading and assessment without adding pressure on students or teachers. The key message was to recognize all of a child’s languages for more inclusive and effective learning.





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Session 6

Research Studies on Language Learning and Culture

This session brought together three diverse studies that looked at different aspects of language learning in Kerala. From exploring the use of technology in language classrooms, to understanding how cultural context affects tribal children's education, each study offered a fresh perspective. One presentation focused on how translanguaging is being used to support English learning in multilingual classrooms. Together, the studies showed how thoughtful approaches can improve language education by considering the needs of students and teachers.

Evaluating Digital Language Learning in Kerala

Reha Sharma

Reha Sharma presented findings from an impact assessment of the KITE E-language Lab program, implemented across government and aided schools in Kerala. The study, conducted jointly by IT for Change and the Regional Institute of English South India, evaluated how the ECube English platform—built around the pillars of “Enjoy, Enhance, Enrich”—was influencing students' English language learning through digital storytelling, interactive activities, and integrated formative assessments. Conducted across three districts and involving over 1,800 interactions with students, teachers, head teachers, and trainers, the study combined quantitative assessments with classroom observations and stakeholder interviews. Significant gains were recorded across grade levels: for example, listening comprehension among Class 3 students improved from 17% to 75% in some schools, while reading skills in Class 5 and writing proficiency in Class 7 showed marked progress, especially where the program was used consistently. The study found that storytelling pedagogy and the integration of audio-visual tools enhanced student engagement and reduced anxiety, while the program's inclusive design supported different learning styles. However, the evaluation also noted challenges such as uneven technological infrastructure and varying implementation levels across schools.

Recommendations included improving teacher training, establishing professional learning

communities, and developing flexible implementation models sensitive to school-specific constraints. The findings reinforced the importance of meaningful, context-aware digital integration guided by the TPACK framework and highlighted the potential of locally rooted, collaboratively designed digital tools to advance multilingual, inclusive education in India.

Language, Identity, and Educational Displacement

Dr V. K. Karthika

Dr V. K. Karthika presented a deeply personal and research-informed account of the educational and linguistic challenges faced by tribal children in Kerala. Drawing from her long-standing fieldwork in tribal residential schools, she argued that English education cannot be understood in isolation from the systemic marginalization and emotional displacement experienced by these learners. Her study focused on government-run tribal model schools, many of which deliver content in English or Malayalam—languages often unfamiliar or inaccessible to students from diverse tribal linguistic backgrounds. Through qualitative interviews with students, teachers, and administrators, she found that students frequently disengaged from schooling due to a profound disconnect between their lived experiences and the language and content of instruction. Teachers, often lacking training in culturally responsive or multilingual pedagogy, attributed students' learning difficulties to factors such as low motivation, “learning disabilities,” or even problematic stereotypes around tribal identity, including references to “gene mutation” and



social deviance. These attitudes reflected a broader failure of the education system to respect indigenous knowledge and linguistic resources.

Dr Karthika underscored the importance of moving toward a pedagogy of care—one that centers identity, emotional well-being, and student agency. Drawing inspiration from alternative models such as the Telangana Social Welfare Schools, she advocated for the integration of art, storytelling, cultural festivals, and bilingual learning materials into classroom practice. Her work challenges educators to rethink not just what languages are taught, but how they are taught, and whose identities and futures are validated through education.

Pedagogic Translanguaging in ESL Classrooms

Chelsy Selvan

Chelsy Selvan presented findings from her doctoral research on the use of pedagogic translanguaging in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms in Kerala, specifically targeting low-income, government-aided schools. Her nine-month longitudinal study involved four in-service teachers and their Class 8 students, combining classroom observations, training sessions,

and teacher reflections. The research demonstrated that integrating learners' home languages—primarily Malayalam—systematically into English instruction significantly enhanced classroom participation, learner engagement, and vocabulary acquisition. Contrary to common assumptions that translanguaging may dilute English learning, the study recorded a notable increase in both English and Malayalam word usage during classroom interactions, with learners exhibiting improved comprehension and output in English. Teachers, after targeted training, began to strategically use L1 to clarify abstract concepts and link unfamiliar terms—such as “racism” or “hamlet”—to culturally familiar narratives, enabling students to construct deeper meaning. The project employed multimodal reading tasks and showed that students' reading and sentence formation improved through collaborative, bilingual instruction.

While some teachers remained uncertain about the impact of translanguaging on students' oral fluency in English, most reported increased confidence, responsiveness, and learner talk time. The study affirms the value of bottom-up teacher education and calls for institutional recognition of translanguaging as a legitimate and effective pedagogical strategy in multilingual classrooms.



Q and A Session

The Q and A session involved a discussion about educational research in Kerala, addressing multiple themes such as digital education, language learning, and challenges in tribal education. The speakers explored heterogeneities among students, teacher training approaches, multilingual pedagogies, and assessment methods. Key points included the importance of understanding cultural contexts, the need for community-centered curriculum design, and the complexities of language instruction. Speakers shared experiences from different states, highlighting persistent challenges in educational systems, particularly for tribal students. The conversation touched upon issues like teacher motivation, linguistic diversity, and the potential of innovative teaching approaches like translanguaging and code switching in educational settings, while also showcasing innovative teaching practices across different educational contexts in India.

The findings shared in this session point to a strong correlation between language learning and the students' cultural and social environments. Through digital tools and flexible classroom practices, language education can be made more inclusive and effective.





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Session 7

Cultural Representations in Kerala Education

This session explored how culture and caste shape learning experiences in Kerala's schools. The presentations looked at how historic caste dynamics and colonial ideas continue to influence students' identities and relationships in classrooms. One study examined the role of a government-organized cultural festival in promoting selective caste-based aesthetics to shape Kerala's popular cultural identity over time. The session reflected on how cultural representation affects inclusion, expression, and belonging in the education system.

Childhood, Education, and the Politics of Language in Kerala's History

Dr Divya Kannan

In her presentation, Dr Divya Kannan from Shiv Nadar University examined the historical roots of education in Kerala through the lens of childhood studies and the history of schooling. Her talk bridged the past and present, showing how many of today's concerns around language, access, and equity in education are grounded in long-standing structural patterns. Drawing from her archival research on the princely states of Travancore and Cochin, and British-administered Malabar, and her recent book 'Contested Childhoods: Caste and Education in Colonial Kerala,' Dr Kannan argued that the widely celebrated Kerala model of education has been shaped as much by resistance and exclusion as by reform and inclusion.


A key theme in her presentation was the social and political construction of childhood. While modern policy tends to define childhood legally and biologically, her research emphasizes that childhood is also a socially embedded, historically contingent category. In Kerala, education has played a critical role in shaping ideas of a "good child" (nallakutti), with literacy and schooling tightly linked to moral, social, and even economic worth. Education, she argued, has historically served as a marker of modernity, progress, and respectability, especially for marginalized communities seeking social mobility.

Dr Kannan challenged the notion of the "enlightened state" often attributed to the Travancore monarchy. She argued that education policies, including those favoring English instruction, were often strategic

responses to colonial pressure and political expediency rather than altruistic efforts at mass literacy. Moreover, education access was shaped by deeply entrenched caste and gender hierarchies. Early missionary schools, while offering education to Dalits and women, also reinforced gendered divisions in curriculum and opportunity. For example, girls were often restricted to feminized tasks like stitching and excluded from English education, reinforcing patriarchal and casteist notions of domesticity and labor.


Caste discrimination was central to the emergence of formal education systems in Kerala. Despite the introduction of public schooling in the 19th century, elite resistance ensured that Dalit and OBC children were often relegated to poorly resourced vernacular schools. Even missionary education, which offered some access to marginalized communities, was embedded within civilizing agendas that sought to "train" Indian children into models of Western discipline, morality, and labor.

Dr Kannan also explored how early textbooks, such as Richard Whately's *Easy Lessons on Political Economy*, were used to instill notions of productivity, individual responsibility, and social conformity. These texts presented poverty as a personal failing rather than a structural issue, foreshadowing today's neoliberal ideologies of merit and individualism. Through such materials, children were taught not just reading and writing but also moral codes aligned with colonial and feudal power structures.



Her talk concluded with reflections on the present. In contemporary Kerala, the “poor child” is no longer only the SC/ST or OBC child but increasingly the child of migrant workers from other states. These children often face linguistic exclusion, as schools remain unequipped to support languages beyond

Malayalam and English. Dr Kannan urged educators and policymakers to consider how deeply ingrained notions of value, belonging, and modernity continue to shape childhood and schooling—and to ask whether all children, especially migrant children, are equally valued in the current educational system.



The concept of childhood is historically and socially constructed; education has long shaped its definition in Kerala.

Early education systems in Travancore and Cochin were deeply shaped by caste, gender, and colonial ideologies.

English education was historically reserved for elites; even missionaries limited its access for girls and marginalized groups.

Curriculum and textbooks reinforced moral and economic hierarchies by portraying poverty as individual failure.

Today’s education system must confront growing inequality, especially for migrant children who fall outside dominant linguistic and cultural norms.

A shift is needed from a homogenized, elitist model of education to one that recognizes and supports linguistic and cultural plurality.

KEY TAKEAWAYS





Cultural Literacy, State Policy, and Caste in Kerala's Youth Festivals

Rajashree Raju

Rajashree Raju, a doctoral researcher at the University of Tübingen, presented a historically grounded and critical analysis of Kerala's government-sponsored school arts competition, popularly known as the Kalolsavam or Youth Festival. Tracing its origins to 1957—just months after Kerala's formation—Raju situated the festival within broader projects of nation-building and regional identity formation. Initially inspired by national cultural festivals in Delhi, the Youth Festival was conceived as a space for instilling cultural literacy among school children and promoting a unified Malayali identity, aligned with emerging Indian national culture.

Raju argued that while the festival has long been celebrated as a democratic platform promoting aesthetic education, it also subtly reinforces caste hierarchies. Drawing from her archival and ethnographic research, she demonstrated how classical art forms like Kathakali—rooted in Brahminical,

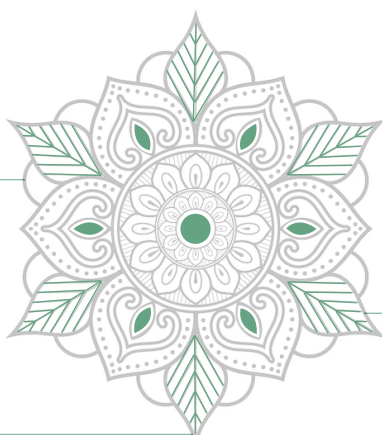
Sanskritic traditions—became the dominant cultural markers promoted by the state. In contrast, art forms historically practiced by oppressed caste communities were marginalized or selectively included. Over time, symbols such as the Nataraja-shaped trophy and Sanskritized visuals reinforced an upper-caste aesthetic under the guise of neutrality.

She further explored how the Communist Party, despite initially mobilizing folk and non-Sanskritic art forms for political outreach, eventually adopted a cultural narrative that privileged upper-caste art practices as universal and representative of Malayali identity. The festival thus became an institutional site for producing a particular form of cultural literacy tied to a modern, elite, Savarna-dominated vision of Kerala. Even as participation has expanded, the structural privileging of certain cultural forms continues to shape what is valued as representative of Malayali culture.

Key Takeaways

The Youth Festival serves as a powerful cultural-political tool that reinforces a Savarna-centric identity under the banner of regional pride.

Institutionalized through public education, the festival has shaped generations of school children's cultural literacy around a narrowly defined idea of Malayali identity.



Though framed as inclusive, the festival privileges classical art forms tied to upper-caste traditions while marginalizing community-based and folk practices.

Through deep-rooted studies around the evolution of Kerala's education system and the influence of caste and colonial ideologies, the session aimed to clarify the ground realities of educational access and inclusion among children from underprivileged families. The influence of selective cultural factors in the forming of a unified regional identity for Kerala was also examined.





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Session 8

Culture in a Globalizing World

This session featured a keynote by Prof. David Johnson from Oxford University, who explored the impact of culture on learning and intelligence. He touched upon ideas from sociology, psychology, and anthropology to show that learning capabilities are often linked to culture, language, and social interaction. His talk offered a new perspective on education and advocated for more culturally aware forms of assessment.

Culture, Cognition, and Learning: Reframing Educational Metrics

Prof. David Johnson

In his presentation, Prof. David Johnson introduced participants to a socio-cultural approach to understanding cognition and learning, rooted in the work of Lev Vygotsky and expanded through the lens of cross-cultural psychology and anthropology. Speaking to the theme of “Language and Culture,” Prof. Johnson emphasized that human cognition is not a fixed, biologically determined process but a dynamic outcome shaped by history, culture, social interaction, and context. His talk invited educators and policymakers to reconsider how we define, measure, and support learning in diverse and rapidly changing societies like Kerala.

Prof. Johnson began by outlining the core principles of socio-cultural theory: learning is embedded in social interactions, mediated by cultural tools—especially language—and shaped by historical context. He challenged the view of cognition as solely individual, asserting instead that it emerges through collaborative activities with others and through engagement with the tools and symbols of one’s environment. These tools range from language and writing systems to everyday cultural practices like storytelling or tailoring, all of which provide cognitive scaffolding that influences how individuals think and learn.

Central to his argument was the idea of a “dialectical relationship” between the individual and the environment. Drawing on examples like the donkey cart or the coordinated work of a ship’s crew, he

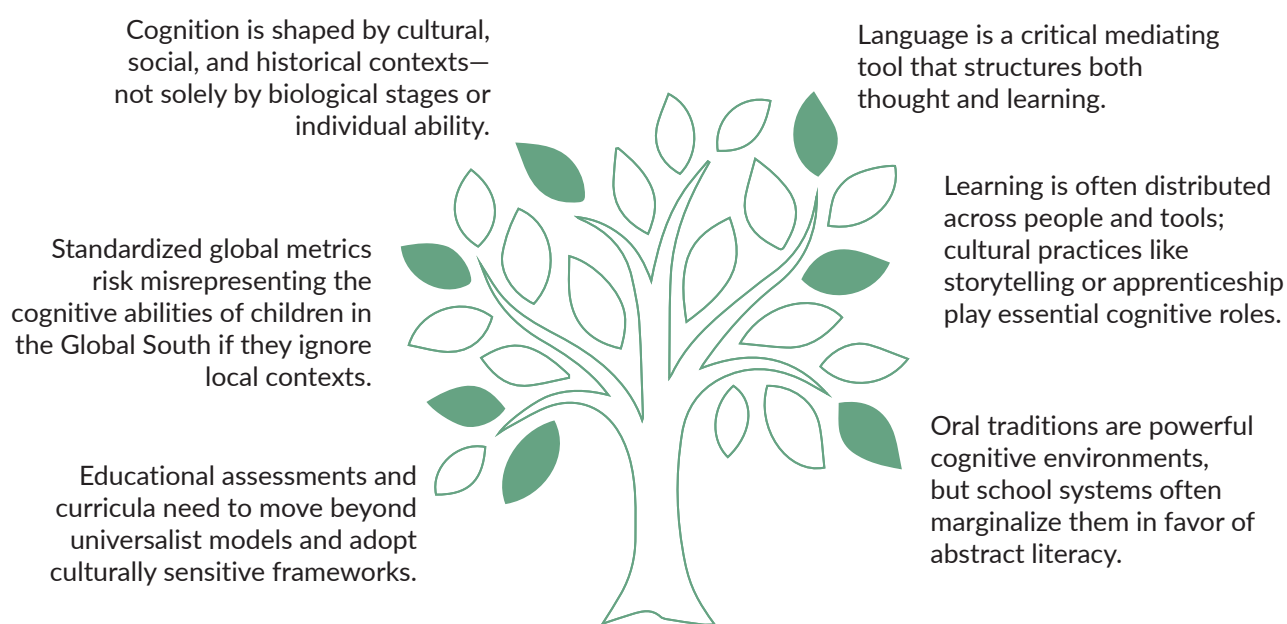
illustrated how cognition is often distributed across people and tools, rather than confined to individual minds. This perspective, he argued, has profound implications for education, especially in contexts where traditional modes of assessment fail to capture the richness of situated learning.

Prof. Johnson also explored the continued importance of orality in many parts of the global South, including India. In such societies, memory, storytelling, and communal knowledge-sharing remain dominant modes of transmission. Yet, educational systems—often modeled on Western literate cultures—emphasize abstract, text-based learning that may not align with these traditions. He pointed out that children raised in oral cultures often excel in narrative-based and memory-intensive learning but struggle with decontextualized assessments imposed by modern school systems.

Turning to historical and cross-cultural research, Prof. Johnson highlighted the work of Gustav Jahoda, who questioned the universality of cognitive development stages proposed by Jean Piaget. Jahoda’s work in African contexts demonstrated that perception, reasoning, and problem-solving are shaped by cultural contexts, not merely developmental age. Yet, modern curricula across the world—including in India—still rely on stage-based models that often misrepresent the learning potential of children in non-Western settings.

In his concluding remarks, Prof. Johnson questioned the reliance on global standardized matrices—such as international tests—to define what learning looks like and to judge educational progress. While acknowledging that some level of standardization is inevitable, he called for a more nuanced understanding of cognition and a more culturally responsive approach to educational policy. He emphasized that true innovation lies not in abandoning tradition, but in recognizing the richness of cultural practices and integrating them meaningfully into teaching and assessment.

Key Takeaways



Q and A

In this Q&A session, David Johnson explored complex themes of cultural cognition, discussing how cultural schemas and distributed cognition shape learning and problem-solving across different societies. He emphasized that progress isn't about individual script mastery, but collective capabilities, highlighting how diverse minds from different cultural backgrounds collaborate to solve complex global challenges. Johnson challenged stereotypical views about oral cultures, arguing that they are equally capable of abstract reasoning and complex thinking, citing anthropological research that demonstrates sophisticated cognitive processes in non-literate societies. He underscored the importance of understanding different cognitive processes, whether oral or written, and how they contribute uniquely to human knowledge and innovation, ultimately advocating for a more nuanced understanding of cultural learning and intellectual capabilities.

Through this engaging session, Prof. Johnson emphasized the role of cultural practices and social influences on learning. The shortcomings of the school system to properly utilize oral traditions, an over-reliance on standardized global metrics, and the need to look beyond them were recognized.

Concluding Session Summary:

Directions for Future Research and Collaboration

The concluding session of the seminar on Language and Culture offered an open, reflective space to deliberate on actionable directions for future research and collaboration. Recognizing the richness of the discussions across sessions, this forum aimed not only to consolidate ideas but also to identify the systemic, methodological, and infrastructural gaps that impede meaningful research in multilingual, educational contexts. Participants—ranging from senior scholars to early-career researchers and educators—shared a wide spectrum of insights, concerns, and concrete proposals. Several thematic areas of future action emerged, shaped by the collective desire to democratize knowledge production, strengthen research capacity, and build inclusive, collaborative communities of practice.

1. Supporting Early-Career and Aspiring Researchers

A prominent concern was the lack of scaffolding for early-career scholars, many of whom struggle with formulating viable research questions, navigating methodological frameworks, and accessing conceptual resources.

Participants emphasized the need for:

- Structured, **mentor-led research methodology workshops** that begin at the ideation stage, allowing young scholars to present preliminary ideas, receive feedback, and refine their focus.
- Platforms that provide **ongoing peer feedback**, beyond formal academic reviews, especially during critical junctures like proposal development and pre-submission.
- Clear support for **interdisciplinary research**, which many young scholars pursue, but often without institutional frameworks to support such cross-boundary inquiry.

It was suggested that such efforts could include postgraduate students, teachers, homemakers, IT professionals, and other non-traditional research aspirants who lack access to academic ecosystems. The creation of a **safe, non-hierarchical platform**—possibly modeled as a moderated online community or ResearchGate-style network—was strongly recommended to support exchange and mentoring.

2. Promoting Collaborative and Practitioner Research

Participants challenged the notion of research as an exclusively individual pursuit. Instead, they proposed models of **collaborative research** where tasks like data collection, analysis, and writing could be distributed among members of a research collective.

This approach would mirror international best practices and allow for:

- **Macro-level, comparative studies** across institutions (e.g., parallel studies by District Institutes of Education and Training) to generate rich, differentiated pictures of regional variation in pedagogy and multilingual education.
- **Practitioner-led research** involving teachers in action research and ethnographic inquiry within their own classrooms. Speakers stressed the need to recognize teachers' experiential knowledge and equip them to document, reflect, and publish on their practice.

A key example was shared from a multi-state British Council-funded project where teachers from Tamil Nadu, Guwahati, and Warangal conducted classroom-based research on multilingual education. Participants noted that similar efforts in Kerala could significantly enhance the knowledge base and offer direct policy implications.

3. Enhancing Teacher Education and Conceptual Depth

Several speakers highlighted the urgent need to integrate **multilingual pedagogy into pre-service teacher education**, especially at B.Ed. and D.El.Ed. levels. It was noted that while the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) allows flexibility within its curriculum, modules on second language acquisition and multilingual pedagogy remain absent or marginal.

Participants suggested:

- Developing **conceptually rigorous and locally adaptable teacher training materials**, aligned with recent research in socio-linguistics and language acquisition.
- Advocating for curricular reform through dialogue with regulatory bodies like NCTE and working through Teacher Training Institutes (TTIs) to localize existing modules.

4. Bridging Research and Public Discourse

Participants expressed concern over the **limited public engagement** with research findings, especially among parents, media, and school managements—key influencers of educational decisions. The group called for the dissemination of research in accessible formats to bridge the gap between academia and public discourse.

Proposals included:

- Creating **position papers, short videos, or bilingual booklets** summarizing key findings for different audiences.
- Hosting **community forums and dialogues** that involve parents, local leaders, and teachers in reflecting on and shaping educational change.

5. Generating Research Agendas and Meta Analysis

It was widely acknowledged that many high-quality micro-studies were shared during the seminar. These studies contain valuable insights and policy implications but often remain unpublished or siloed.

To address this, participants suggested:

- Collating seminar presentations into an **annotated bibliography or resource archive**.
- Extracting **thematic insights and policy pointers** from individual studies to inform a medium-term research agenda for the next 2–5 years.
- Developing discussion **papers or synthesis reports** that integrate findings from small-scale studies into broader national and state-level conversations.



6. Reimagining Methodology and Challenging Hierarchies

The session closed with a call to **de-center expertise and reimagine methodology as a process of collaborative inquiry**. Participants criticized the hierarchical and rigid nature of conventional research training, which often disempowers learners.

Instead, they called for:

- Viewing methodology as something to be **acquired through participation in communities of practice**, not just taught in formulaic, top-down formats.
- Supporting reflexivity and critical pedagogy that interrogates **why existing research has not shifted practice or policy**, particularly in the face of persistent parental and systemic resistance to multilingual and inclusive education.

7. Expanding the Scope of Research and Inquiry

Finally, participants emphasized the importance of **researching resistance itself**—why parents, policymakers, and communities continue to uphold monolingual, exam-driven schooling models despite decades of critique and evidence.

It was argued that:

- Educational researchers must **step beyond disciplinary boundaries**, drawing on political economy, sociology, and cultural studies to understand these deep-seated patterns.
- Understanding **why research fails to influence practice** is itself a pressing research agenda—one that could reshape how educational change is conceived and implemented.

In conclusion, the session reaffirmed the value of building inclusive, context-aware, and collaborative research ecosystems that not only generate knowledge but also democratize its production and use. Participants were optimistic that with sustained dialogue, institutional support, and imaginative methodologies, a new research culture can emerge—one that is responsive to Kerala's multilingual realities and capable of informing transformative educational practice.



Speaker Bios

Chelsy Selvan

Chelsy Selvan is a doctoral student in the School of English Language Education, at The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. Her research examines translanguaging pedagogy in ESL teachers' classroom practices, with a particular focus on its implications for multilingual education. Her academic interests include exploring the potential of multilingual education for classrooms in diverse and challenging contexts across India and the Global South.

Dr Anusha Ramanathan

Anusha Ramanathan is currently an Assistant Professor in the Centre of Excellence in Teacher Education (CETE) at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai. She leads TPD English and coordinates the academic aspects of TISSx, an Open edX-based MOOC platform and is a core part of CETE's Continuing Education (Short Term) Programmes (CEP/STP). She is a Co-Principal Investigator for Connected Learning Initiative, a UNESCO and OEC award-winning action research initiative funded by Tata Trusts and co-led by TISS and MIT, USA. She is also the Co-PI and Project Director for 'Chhattisgarh: Accelerated Learning for a Knowledge-Economy' with focus on Teacher Professional Development (CHALK-TPD). She also co-anchors the Madhya Pradesh NIPUN Professionals (MPNP) program that focuses on Foundational Learning and Numeracy (FLN) as part of Mission Ankur. Her expertise lies in English Language Teaching, English Literature, Assessment and Evaluation, Critical Humanities, technology-based learning and Teacher Professional Development.

Dr Divya Kannan

Dr Divya Kannan is an Assistant Professor at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Shiv Nadar University. Her areas of expertise include 19th and 20th century South Asian history, History of Education, Childhood and Youth, Caste, Gender Studies, Social Movements, Empires and Colonial Violence, Christian missions, and Public and Oral Histories. She has also co-edited several publications, including a special issue on 'Modernity, Schooling, and Childhood in India: Trajectories of exclusion' in the journal *Children's Geographies*, and has written articles on topics such as caste, space, and schooling in 19th century South India, and missionary encounters in 19th century Travancore. She is also the co-founder and co-convenor of The Critical Childhoods and Youth Studies Collective (CCYSC), which aims to bring together scholars and practitioners working on and with children and youth in South Asia.

Dr Sajitha Bashir

Dr Sajitha Bashir, Executive Vice-Chairperson, VMFT, is former adviser to the Global Director of the Education Practice at the World Bank and former Education Manager for over 20 countries in Africa, responsible for a large portfolio of projects and analytical work. She established the first pan-African science fund with an international Board comprising African Ministers and donors. Prior to joining the World Bank, she headed the national research and evaluation unit of the Government of India's primary education program. She has published extensively and holds a PhD in economics from the London School of Economics.



Speaker Bios

Dr V. K. Karthika

Dr V.K. Karthika teaches English at NIT Tiruchirappalli. She has a Master's degree in TESOL Studies from the University of Leeds, England and a Master's in English and Comparative Literature from Pondicherry Central University. She began her career in England as an ESOL tutor for adult immigrant learners and asylum seekers. Her work focussed on empowering survivors of domestic violence to master the English language. She was recognized with the Community Care Award for Teaching from the Word of Grace Community Centre, Leeds, for her contributions to the African immigrant community. Dr Karthika is a member of NCERT's Syllabus and Textbook designing committee where she contributes to the development of syllabi and textbooks in alignment with NEP 2020 under the Ministry of Education, Government of India. She is currently leading an ICSSR-sponsored project on 'Tribal Freedom Fighters of Wayanad' and has been awarded a fellowship from Bridgewater State University.

Manjima Bhadran

Manjima is a doctoral researcher at the Institute of English, University of Kerala. Her doctoral thesis focused on the development of assessment instruments to estimate the writing competence of postgraduate English students in large-scale examinations such as the National Eligibility Test prior to their selection as teachers of English. Beyond academics, she has actively volunteered with Make a Difference (MAD), providing academic support to children in shelter homes. Her work bridges professional training, academic research, and community engagement.

Prof. C. Veeramani

Prof. C. Veeramani is the Director of the Centre for Development Studies (CDS), Thiruvananthapuram. He holds a PhD and MPhil in Economics from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in New Delhi. Prior to his role at CDS, he served as a Professor at the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (IGIDR) in Mumbai. He is the recipient of the EXIM Bank International Economic Development Research Award 2003 for the best doctoral dissertation in international economics.

Prof. David Johnson

David Johnson is a Reader in Comparative and International Education at St. Antony's College, University of Oxford. He is also a Chartered Educational Psychologist and a Fellow of the British Psychological Society. Johnson's research focuses on culture, learning, and cognition, with a particular emphasis on Africa, South Asia, and Latin America. He convenes the Centre for Comparative and International Education and is involved in several significant research programs, including the ESRC-DFID Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Program and the Aga Khan Foundation-funded Research Program on Education and Uncertainty. His work includes assessments of teachers' knowledge and professional competencies in countries such as Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Sudan.

Speaker Bios

Prof. Jameela Begum A.

Prof. Jameela Begum A. is Trustee, Vakkom Moulavi Foundation Trust, and an acclaimed educationist and scholar, with experience in both academics and administration. Her research has covered culture, history, literature and innovations in pedagogy and she has published over a dozen books. Jameela was Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Senate Member of the University of Kerala. Currently, she is the Director of the Literary and Cultural Forum of the All India Women's Conference. She has a PhD in English Literature.

Prof. Lina Mukhopadhyay

Prof. Lina Mukhopadhyay is a professor at the Department of Training and Development, School of English Language Education at The English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), Hyderabad, India. She is also the Director, Research Acceleration Center and Director, AIELTA at EFLU. At present, she is working on several projects in collaboration with the University of Cambridge and a consortium of Indian and German universities on multilingual education, teacher training on translanguaging pedagogy and multilingual reading assessment in India. Her recent publications are in MLE and translanguaging for pedagogical purposes and multilingual assessment for classroom purposes.

Prof. Minati Panda

Prof. Minati Panda is a Professor at the Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She has served as the Chairperson of the Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies from 2014-2016 and again from 2023 onwards. She has been a visiting scholar at various universities, including the University of Cambridge, University of California, San Diego, and Manchester University. She has also been an advisor to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and the Government of Sri Lanka for multilingual education.

Prof. Padma M. Sarangapani

Prof. Padma M. Sarangapani is a Professor and chairperson of the Centre of Excellence in Teacher Education at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai. She has served on several committees and councils, including the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) and the Karnataka Knowledge Commission. She has been involved in initiatives aimed at strengthening teacher education programs and developing professional standards for teachers in India.

Prof. Rama Kant Agnihotri

Prof. Rama Kant Agnihotri is a former Professor and Head, Department of Linguistics, University of Delhi. He is interested in and has taught and written extensively about Applied Linguistics, Morphology, Sociolinguistics and Research Methods for several years. He co-edits, with A.L.Khanna, the Sage series on Applied Linguistics. He was the Chairperson of the NCERT's National Focus Group on the teaching of Indian Languages. On issues



Speaker Bios

of language learning and teaching and teacher training, he has been an advisor among others to CBSE, NCERT, SCERTs and DIETs across the country and a large number of NGOs including Eklavya, Vidya Bhawan Society and Digantar.

Prof. Rama Mathew

Rama Mathew is an ELT consultant and has several years of experience in India (in two Universities - the English and Foreign Languages University and Delhi University), Bangladesh and Sierra Leone. She has been involved in several teacher development and assessment projects, and published articles and books in the area. She has been a consultant on the British Council's ELT research partnership awards, Action Research Mentoring Schemes, ELT Research Advisory Group, and Project Director of the UKIERI funded Teacher Education project at Delhi University.

Prof. Suraj Jacob

Prof. Suraj Jacob is with the Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram. His research draws on his training in political economy and collaborations with anthropologists and development practitioners. His academic work explores development policy, institutions, governance, and social practices. Suraj has published on policy processes, schooling, maternal health, domestic violence, gender politics, and food politics. Suraj previously served as chief executive of Vidya Bhawan (Rajasthan), a 90-year old institution with a staff of 500 reaching underserved populations for schooling, higher education, teacher training, and vocational education.

Reha Sharma

Reha Sharma is a Program Associate with the Education team at IT for Change, Bengaluru, where she contributes to teacher professional development initiatives, curriculum design, and program management with a focus on technology integration in language education. She has extensive experience in designing, implementing and evaluating English language programs in government schools, having previously worked with the Department of Education, Bogota, Colombia and the British Council on curriculum development for English as a Foreign Language. She is the co-founder of Uniting Smiles Foundation, an NGO in Uttar Pradesh that worked to improve educational opportunities for underprivileged children. She holds an MA in Education from Azim Premji University, where she focused on Teacher Professional Development, Language Pedagogy and Program Design and Evaluation.

Rajashree Raju

R. Rajashree is a PhD researcher at the University of Tübingen, Germany. Her work focuses on the history of a government-sponsored youth festival in the south Indian state of Kerala, which has been held annually for school children since 1957. She holds a Master of Arts (Hons.) degree in Liberal Arts with a specialization in Performing Arts from Ashoka University, and a Bachelor of Arts (Hons.) degree in History from Miranda House, University of Delhi.

