

Language Identity and Belonging: Narratives of Young Adults

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Abstract:

The 2011 Indian census revealed that inter-state migration accounts for 12% of total migration, with 26% of the population being bilingual. Rising migration means more children are growing up in states where the regional language differs from their native language; leading to fluid identities that affect belonging. Drawing on the post-structuralist theories of identity as fluid, relational, and shaped by power, this qualitative study aims to explore the narratives of five young adults raised in non-native language states and how language shapes identity and belonging.

Findings highlighted three overarching themes: negotiation of hybrid identity, including experiences resembling 'third culture' individuals, a fragmented sense of belonging due to complex identities, and the role schools played in how individuals navigate their identity and sense of belonging. Native languages grounded the participants' identities in non-native states, while some connected to the local language. However, the language differences generated both connection and barriers, causing participants to question where they truly belonged. These findings highlight the need for educational institutions and policy frameworks to account for the linguistic complexities of a multi-lingual landscape such as India, and foster inclusive environments that acknowledge hybrid identities.

Keywords:

Belonging, language identity, post-structural identity, third culture.