



Mother Tongue Use and its Influence on Identity Development during Adolescence

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ABSTRACT

Language as a communication tool and culture are products of each other giving individuals a sense of belonging and basic acceptance in a given group or community. Being born to an ethnic group is a primary source of self-esteem, affirmation and belonging. Adolescence, a crucial stage in development is characterized with salient problems such as the quest for identity for the production of meaningful self-concept. The task is more daunting in a historical period where the past has lost anchorage of the family and community traditions, the present more characterized by social change, and future has become less predictable. This study was designed to examine the effects of the use of mother tongue on identity formation in adolescence, specifically to determine how domain of language use and language preference affects identity formation. The descriptive survey design, triangulation precisely involving qualitative and quantitative data collection was used. The study had a sample 278; with purposive sampling technique for respondents and snowball technique for parents. Results showed domain of language use significantly influences identity formation with indication of mother tongue the least spoken in schools (21.8%) and gatherings (29.7%), a high percentage at primary level (63.3%). Furthermore, language preference had a significantly influenced identity formation, with adolescents in rural areas (44.1%) having more preference for the mother tongue than their urban counterparts (39.0%). Late adolescence had a higher rate of preference for the language (45.8%) than early adolescents (38.5%). Parental opinions towards language preference indicated more use of English language, 49% over 28% and 23% for mother tongue languages and other languages respectively. Study recommends parents encourage the use of mother tongue for posterity and transmission of cultural values. Cultivate in children trust, confidence for their language and ethnic pride, while building positive self-esteem. The creation of home language schools to ensure learning, expression and promotion of mother tongue.

Résumé

La langue, en tant qu'outil de communication, et la culture sont interdépendantes et procurent aux individus un sentiment d'appartenance et d'acceptation au sein d'un groupe ou d'une communauté. L'appartenance à un groupe ethnique est une source primordiale d'estime de soi, de reconnaissance et d'appartenance. L'adolescence, étape cruciale du développement, est marquée par des problématiques importantes telles que la quête d'identité et la construction d'une conception de soi significative. Cette quête est d'autant plus complexe à une époque où le passé s'est affranchi des traditions familiales et communautaires, où le présent est davantage caractérisé par des mutations sociales et où l'avenir est devenu plus incertain. Cette étude vise à examiner l'influence de l'usage de la langue maternelle sur la construction identitaire à l'adolescence, et plus précisément à déterminer comment le domaine d'utilisation et la préférence linguistique affectent ce processus. Une enquête descriptive, utilisant la triangulation de données qualitatives et quantitatives, a été menée auprès d'un échantillon de 278 adolescents, sélectionnés par échantillonnage raisonné et par la méthode « boule de neige » pour les parents. Les résultats ont montré que le domaine d'utilisation de la langue influence significativement la construction identitaire. La langue maternelle est la moins parlée à l'école (21,8 %) et lors des rassemblements (29,7 %), tandis qu'elle est largement utilisée au niveau primaire (63,3 %). De plus, la préférence linguistique influence significativement la construction identitaire : les adolescents des zones rurales (44,1 %) privilégient davantage leur langue maternelle que ceux des zones urbaines (39,0 %). La préférence pour la langue maternelle est plus élevée en fin d'adolescence (45,8 %) qu'en début d'adolescence (38,5 %). L'opinion des parents sur la préférence linguistique indique une utilisation plus fréquente de l'anglais (49 %), contre 28 % pour la langue maternelle et 23 % pour les autres langues. L'étude recommande aux parents d'encourager l'utilisation de la langue maternelle pour la transmission des valeurs culturelles aux générations futures. Il est important de cultiver chez les enfants la confiance en leur langue et la fierté ethnique, tout en développant une estime de soi positive. La création d'écoles de langue maternelle est également recommandée pour garantir l'apprentissage, l'expression et la promotion de la langue maternelle.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a central component of human socialization and a powerful marker of identity. Beyond its communicative function, language embodies cultural knowledge, shared history, and social values that shape how individuals understand themselves and relate to others (Kramsch, 1998). The mother tongue, as the first language acquired in early childhood, plays a foundational role in transmitting cultural norms and fostering a sense of belonging within a particular ethnic or social group (Fishman, 1991). Through everyday interaction, the mother tongue becomes a key resource for self-expression, emotional connection, and identity construction.

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by intense biological, cognitive, and psychosocial changes. One of the most salient developmental tasks during this period is identity development, as adolescents actively explore and negotiate their sense of self in relation to family, peers, and society at large (Erikson, 1968). Identity formation involves the integration of personal experiences with social and cultural affiliations, including language, ethnicity, and community membership (Phinney, 1990). Language use during adolescence therefore

has significant implications for self-esteem, ethnic pride, and psychological well-being.

In multilingual societies, particularly those shaped by colonial histories and globalization, the use of mother tongue is often diminished in favor of dominant or international languages such as English or French. These languages are frequently associated with educational success, economic advancement, and social mobility, leading families and schools to prioritize them over indigenous languages (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). As a result, adolescents may experience reduced exposure to and proficiency in their mother tongue, especially within formal domains such as schools and urban social spaces (Baker, 2011). This linguistic shift has raised concerns about cultural erosion and weakened identity development among younger generations.

Empirical studies suggest that sustained use of the mother tongue contributes positively to adolescents' identity development by reinforcing cultural continuity, group belonging, and self-worth (Giles et al., 1977; Ndhlovu, 2015). Conversely, limited opportunities to use one's indigenous language may lead to linguistic insecurity and identity conflict, particularly during adolescence when individuals are highly sensitive to social evaluation and acceptance (UNESCO, 2003).

Despite these insights, there remains a need for more context-specific research examining how patterns of mother tongue use and language preference influence identity development during adolescence.

This study therefore examines mother tongue use and its influence on identity development during adolescence, with particular attention to domains of language use and language preference. By exploring adolescents' linguistic experiences across home, school, and community contexts, the study seeks to contribute to ongoing discussions on language preservation, adolescent development, and culturally responsive educational practices.

Context and understanding of Mother Tongue Use and Identity Development During Adolescence

Nishanthi (2020) defines mother tongue as the language learned from birth, foundational for thought, emotion, and overall growth. It is the language deeply connected to one's culture, providing fundamental linguistic structures, boosting confidence, fostering identity, aiding cognitive development and enabling better expression and connection to heritage, emphasizing its role in early learning. Mother tongue becomes a distinctive characteristic feature of man which has the major function of communication. The child acquires knowledge of this language from his immediate family; parents, siblings, uncles and aunts at home before he is exposed to formal instruction and education.

Language shapes thoughts and emotions, determining one's perception of reality (Pei, 1996). It is thus an intrinsic expression of culture, and a fundamental aspect of cultural identity. It is the means by which we convey our innermost self from generation to generation

Fishman (2001) describes the cultural devastation that can accompany language loss stating, "a traditionally associated language is more than just a tool of communication for its culture. It is often viewed as a very specific gift, a marker of identity and a specific responsibility vis-à-vis future generations». The preservation of our language is thus essential as the mother tongue is seen as a necessary tool for communication. He indicates that when we take away the language of a culture we take away, "its greetings, its curses, its cures, its praises, its laws, its literature, its songs, its rhymes, its proverbs, its wisdom, and its prayers".

Also, Cho (2000) studied second-generation Korean - Americans and found that participants with greater heritage language competence showed a stronger sense of who they are. A close relationship between one's ethnic identity and heritage language concurs with the findings in the literature: the stronger the heritage language proficiency, the more positive the sense of ethnic identity. Cummins (2000) says 'students become lost and undervalued; they may lose their roots, their identity' - subtractive bilingualism -

English replaces their mother tongue as their best academic language.

Overall, the research is very clear about the importance of children's mother tongue for their personal their and educational development (Baker, 2000; Cummins, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). When parents spend time with their children and tell stories or discuss issues with them in a way that develops their mother tongues' vocabularies and concepts, children come to school well prepared to learn and succeed educationally.

The findings from You (2005) study of young Korean children enrolled in Korean weekend schools were also consistent with those of the studies mentioned previously. A study carried out on Chinese students learning English, Kevin (2007) states that a student's first language and cultural background can be seen to influence the student's second language acquisition. In China learning English is considered a valuable skill and is not considered to be threatening to the dominant identity of Chinese people in general.

Social factors are interwoven and as Ellis (2008) points out, "there are obvious dangers in seeking to isolate the effects of individual social factors such as age, gender, social class, and ethnic identity." Learners have agency and are likely to try to shape the social context in which they learn rather than passively let it position them. That's why teenagers who have grown up with a minority language can easily mark their independence from their parents and their rejection of parental values by choosing not to speak the minority language (Andersson & Andersson, 1999).

In addition to parents, administrators and teachers also encouraged children to use Turkish. This was observed on all grade levels. Especially lower grade teachers, while they sometimes needed to use English for pedagogical purposes, frequently warned students not to speak English. Students using Turkish were praised. They reject the adults Discourses by speaking English to their peers in the school, but they also speak Turkish to adults and accept their Discourses. In an era when bilingual education is silenced (Garcia, 2005, 2009), this overall function of ethnic mother tongue schools such as the Turkish school is worth highlighting. These complementary schools certainly fill gaps in the current family and educational system by promoting the home languages of bilingual students.

Findings of this study indicate that Kenyan youths are shifting from the usual trilingual which has been the case in the past. Indigenous languages are not the preferred languages in most domains. English is preferred in most domains, especially formal ones. This could not be a problem if that preference was restricted to formal domains; in any case, in most multilingual contexts such coexistence is expected. The official language is used for instruction and hence becomes the language of reading and writing; it is used to keep - official records, it is the language of the law

and ultimately the language of governance. As long as the domains of use are clearly delineated, the indigenous languages can continue to have their place.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey design with triangulation as main method for data collection was used for the study. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected with use of interviews and questionnaires respectively. The study had 278 participants sample with the participants selected from towns within Fako Division, Southwest Region through hat and draw. They were Bokwaongo, Bova II, Muea and Buea town. Qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis, with

concepts grouped under umbrella terms. The Epi Data Version 3.1 was used for quantitative data with the SPSS version 21.0. Chi square test of independence was used to measure the association between the conceptual indicators and background information such as sex, age, area of residence. Logistic Regression Model was to appraise the explanatory power of independence predictive components on speaking ability of mother tongue.

FINDINGS

The findings on how Mother tongue influences adolescent identity formation in Fako Division, South West Region of Cameroon are presented as follows:

Table 1: characterization of domains of language.

Domain of Language		Agree	Disagree	N
I speak my mother tongue with neighbors and others of our community		68 (41.1%)	97 (58.8%)	165 (100%)
I speak my mother tongue at home		99 (60%)	66 (40%)	195 (100%)
I speak my mother tongue anywhere I find myself		74 (45.1%)	90 (54.9%)	164 (100%)
I speak my mother tongue in school with my classmates		36 (21.8%)	129 (78.2%)	165 (100%)
I speak my mother tongue in social gatherings or youth meetings		49 (29.7%)	116 (70.3%)	165 (100%)
MRS		326 (39.6%)	498 (60.4%)	824 (100%)
Sex	Male	180 (45.6%)	215 (54.4%)	395 (100%)
	Female	146 (34.0%)	283 (66.0%)	498 (100%)
Age	Early Adolescence	153 (36.1%)	271 (63.9%)	424
	Late Adolescence	256 (45.4%)	308 (54.6%)	564
Setting Type	Rural	205 (49.5%)	209 (50.5%)	414 (100%)
	Urban	121 (29.5%)	289 (70.5%)	410 (100%)
School Attainment	Primary	19 (63.3%)	11 (36.7%)	30
	Secondary	345 (39.2%)	535 (60.8%)	880
	Tertiary	45 (57.7%)	33 (42.3%)	78

It was generally perceived that adolescents hardly spoke their mother tongue in public places, schools or during meetings and the problem was more pronounced among the female respondents 283 (66.0%) than the male 215 (50.4%), with more in the

urban areas than rural areas. The descriptive statistics indicates that mother tongue was the least spoken in schools, 36 (21.8%) with a higher percentage at the primary level (63.3%) and (29.7%) in public gatherings.

Table 2: Influence of Domain of language on identity formation

Domain of Language Use		Identity Formation					
		I like to associate myself with my ethnic group	I love my mother tongue	I feel proud to speak my mother tongue in the midst of others	I prefer to speak even when laughed at; or when I make mistakes	I feel more accepted in my community and amongst friends	I feel more attached to parents and siblings at home
I live with my parents in an Urban area	Agree	51 (63.8%)	70 (86.4%)	45 (55.6%)	47 (58.0%)	52 (64.2%)	68 (85.0%)
	Disagree	57 (68.7%)	76 (86.7%)	56 (68.3%)	57 (68.7%)	68 (81.9%)	75 (90.4%)
I speak my mother tongue with neighbors and members in my community	Agree	55 (82.1%)	67 (98.5%)	56 (82.4%)	59 (86.8%)	58 (85.3%)	60 (89.6%)
	Disagree	53 (54.6%)	76 (78.4%)	46 (47.9%)	46 (47.4%)	62 (63.9%)	84 (86.6%)
I speak my mother tongue at home	Agree	75 (76.5%)	96 (97.0%)	77 (78.6%)	83 (83.3%)	77 (77.8%)	90 (91.8%)
	Disagree	33 (50.0%)	47 (71.2%)	25 (37.9%)	22 (33.3%)	43 (65.2%)	54 (81.8%)
I speak my mother tongue anywhere I find myself	Agree	59 (80.8%)	72 (97.0%)	61 (82.4%)	64 (86.5%)	61 (82.4%)	66 (90.4%)
	Disagree	49 (54.4%)	70 (77.2%)	40 (44.9%)	41 (45.6%)	59 (65.6%)	77 (85.6%)
I speak my dialect in school with my classmates	Agree	29 (82.9%)	36 (100.0%)	32 (91.4%)	32 (88.9%)	31 (86.1%)	32 (88.9%)
	Disagree	79 (61.2%)	107 (82.9%)	70 (54.3%)	73 (56.6%)	89 (69.0%)	112 (87.5%)
MRS (aggregated score)							
Domain of Language use	Identity Formation						
	Agree		Disagree		N		
	2017(83.0%)		412(17.0%)		2429		
Agree	2308 (66.3%)		1173 (33.7%)		3481		
Logistics Regression Model (Predictive of domain of language use over identity formation)	Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients: P<0.001 Explanatory Power(EP): Cox & Snell R.Square: = 13.1%						161

From results obtained; a significant relationship was observed between the correlates. those who speak their mother tongue at home are likely to associate with their ethnic group 75 (76.5%), loved their mother tongue 96 (97.0%), felt proud of the language 77 (78.6%), preferred to speak even when laughed at 83(83.3%), felt more accepted in their community 77 (77.8%), and were more attached to parents and siblings; 90

(91.8%). in all, domain of language use affects identity formation on a scale of 83.0% as against 66.3%. Interview with parents showed that only 26.0% of them spoke the mother tongue anywhere and most often at home settings or when they intend to pass a message in privately. Findings on research question two shows language preference and its influence on adolescent identity formation.

Table 3: Characterization of language preference

Language Preference		Agree	Disagree	N
I prefer to express myself in a language other than my mother tongue		109 (66.1%)	56 (33.9%)	165 (100%)
I speak our mother tongue only when I visit the village		63 (38.4%)	101 (61.6%)	164 (100%)
Communication at home is in my mother tongue		56 (33.9%)	109 (66.1%)	165 (100%)
While playing with friends we use our mother tongue to communicate		31 (18.8%)	134 (81.2%)	165 (100%)
I understand when spoken to but chose to respond in English language		111 (67.3%)	54 (32.7%)	165 (100%)
I speak neither of the languages because both my parents are not from same tribe		40 (24.5%)	123 (75.5%)	165 (100%)
MRS		421 (42.7%)	566 (57.3%)	987 (100%)
Sex	Male	192 (40.6%)	281 (59.3%)	473(100%)
	Female	218 (42.4%)	296 (57.6%)	514 (100%)
Age	Early Adolescent	164 (38.5%)	262 (61.5%)	426
	Late Adolescent	257(45.8%)	304 (54.2%)	561
Setting Type	Rural	219 (44.1%)	278 (55.9%)	497 (100%)
	Urban	191 (39.7%)	299 (61.0%)	490 (100%)
School Attainment	Primary	11(36.7%)	19 (63.3%)	30
	Secondary	369 (42.0%)	510 (58.0%)	879
	Tertiary	41 (52.6%)	37 (47.4%)	78

The table above shows adolescents have preference for expression in other languages than their mother tongue, (66.1%), and chose to respond in English when spoken to than their mother tongue, (67.3%). On the other hand, a lesser number do speak their mother tongue when they visit the village; 63 (38.4%) or while playing with their friends

31(18.8%). With setting types, those in rural settings had more preference for mother tongue, (44.1%), than their urban counterparts with (39.0%). Females had a higher preference of 42.4% than males with 40.6%. Age of respondents gave early adolescence 45.85% over 38.5% for late adolescence.

Table 4: Influence of language preference on identity formation

Language Preference		Identity Formation					
		I like to associate myself with my ethnic group	I love my mother tongue	I feel proud to speak my mother tongue in the midst of others	I prefer to speak even when laughed at; or when I make mistakes	I feel more accepted in my community and amongst friends	I feel more attached to parents and siblings at home
I prefer to express myself in a language other than my dialect	Agree	68 (63.0%)	90 (82.6%)	63 (57.8%)	61 (56.0%)	76 (69.7%)	95 (88.0%)
	Disagree	40 (71.4%)	53 (94.6%)	39 (70.9%)	44 (78.6%)	44 (78.6%)	49 (87.5%)
I speak our mother tongue only when I visit the village	Agree	33 (52.4%)	48 (76.2%)	27 (43.5%)	30 (47.6%)	45 (71.4%)	55 (87.3%)
	Disagree	74 (74.0%)	94 (93.1%)	74 (73.3%)	74 (73.3%)	74 (73.3%)	88 (88.0%)
Communication at home is in my mother tongue	Agree	44 (78.6%)	55 (98.2%)	43 (78.2%)	45 (80.4%)	43 (76.8%)	53 (94.6%)
	Disagree	64 (59.3%)	88 (80.7%)	59 (54.1%)	60 (55.0%)	77 (70.6%)	91 (84.3%)
While playing with friends, we use our mother tongue to communicate	Agree	24 (77.4%)	28 (90.3%)	25 (83.3%)	25 (80.6%)	27 (87.1%)	28 (90.3%)
	Disagree	84 (63.2%)	115 (85.8%)	77 (57.5%)	80 (59.7%)	93 (69.4%)	116 (87.2%)
I understand when spoken to but chose to respond in English/pidgin for easy expression	Agree	72 (65.5%)	96 (86.5%)	64 (58.2%)	70 (63.1%)	83 (74.8%)	98 (89.1%)
	Disagree	36 (66.7%)	47 (87.0%)	38 (70.4%)	35 (64.8%)	37 (58.5%)	46 (85.2%)
MRS (aggregated score)							
Language preference	Identity Formation						
	Agree		Disagree				N
Agree	1986 (73.8%)		533(21.2%)				2429
Disagree	2331 (68.8%)		1055 (31.2%)				3481
Logistics Regression Model (Predictive power of language preference over identity formation)	Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients: P<0.001 Explanatory Power (EP): Cox & Snell R.Square: = 9.6%						162

Findings showed differences were not quite significant for those who could speak their mother tongue only when they visit the village, and associate with their ethnic group, 68 (63.0%). Results showed that 47.6 % preferred to speak even when laughed at or made mistakes during expression while 87.3% felt more attached to their parents and siblings at home. In all, those who had preference for language on identity formation had 78.8% as against 68.8%.

Parental opinions to support adolescents' perception towards language preference above indicates parents had more preference for English language than the other tongue and other languages. Their justifications preference for

English language was attached to aiding the academics process as the learners easily understood. On the other hand, 53% of parents preferred use of mother tongue to promote cultural values and integration

DISCUSSION

The results from the study shows a there is a significant influence of domain of language use on identity formation in Fako Division in the South west region of Cameroon. Adolescents sparingly spoke their mother tongue in public places, schools or other gatherings. Often times those from rural areas speak more at home than those from urban areas.

Lack of confidence and language mastery are among reasons presented by the respondents. This result is in line with the work by Mugane (2000), which shows Kenyan indigenous languages were not preferred languages in most domains such as communication with family members. Consequently, depending on the area the child/ren find themselves, they decide which language to use and most often use English language, having adverse effects on ethnic identity. Language is seen as a site of identity construction in the works of Caldas & Caron-Caldas (2002) where bilingual children who had access to both English and French identities choose which one suits them depending on the context they found themselves.

Results showed language preference affects identity formation. Adolescents had less preference for their mother tongue than English or pidgin language; with more in urban than rural areas. Respondents linked this to their inability to speak due to inter-tribal marriages where the children sort to pidgin or English. This is in conformity to a study on choice of language use by Alba & associates (2002), where parents' education and intermarriages are positively related to the likelihood of speaking English language at home, and consequently affects speaking the mother tongue. Regardless of the generation, the impact is linked to the composition of the home and by implication the language spoken by the adults. Furthermore, the study by Maduewsi (1999), the importance attached to English language to the detriment of heritage language affects identity formation. Most parents within urban settings prefer to communicate in English language and neglect the native language; and a child unable to speak the former are considered a failure.

The study by Kevin (2007), in China indicates how a student's first language (mother tongue), and cultural background influences the acquisition of second language. Other studies have shown how mother tongue helps in the development of personal and educational development in children (Baker, 2000; Cummins, 2000). Arnett (2002), mentions the onset of globalization has a grip on maintaining the mother tongue as more attention is given to English language at home and in schools. Landweer (2000), also attest that languages die not because other speakers die but as a result of a shift in allegiance by their speakers to other languages. Code switching, location contact with other cultures and migration are amongst factors that affect language loss. Dumatog & Dekker (2003), reiterates the benefits of using mother tongue as a language of instruction in classroom, to aid the development of cognitive skills.

The findings of this study confirm that language use, particularly the mother tongue, plays a significant role in identity formation during adolescence. This supports the widely held view that language and culture are inseparable and jointly shape an individual's sense of

belonging and self-concept. Scholars such as Fishman (1991) and Kramsch (1998) have long argued that language functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a symbolic marker of cultural identity and group membership.

The study revealed that the mother tongue is least used in formal domains such as schools and social gatherings, while its use is higher at the primary level. This gradual decline aligns with findings by Baker (2011) and Cummins (2000), who observed that formal educational systems in multilingual societies often prioritize dominant or global languages, leading to reduced use of indigenous languages as learners advance academically. The marginalization of mother tongue in schools may therefore weaken adolescents' cultural attachment and identity development, as noted by UNESCO (2003) in its advocacy for mother-tongue-based education.

The significant influence of domain of language use on identity formation corroborates Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor's (1977) Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory, which posits that frequent use of an ethnic language in meaningful domains strengthens group identity and self-esteem. When adolescents are restricted from using their mother tongue in public and institutional spaces, their linguistic identity may become devalued, affecting overall identity coherence.

Findings also showed that adolescents in rural areas exhibited a higher preference for mother tongue use than their urban counterparts. This supports studies by Adegbiya (2004) and Ndhlovu (2015), who found that rural communities tend to preserve indigenous languages due to stronger communal ties and cultural continuity, whereas urbanization promotes language shift toward dominant or global languages. Urban adolescents are therefore more susceptible to identity dilution due to increased exposure to linguistic globalization.

The result that late adolescents demonstrated greater preference for mother tongue use than early adolescents is consistent with Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory, which emphasizes that identity exploration becomes more pronounced in later adolescence. As adolescents mature cognitively and socially, they are more likely to reflect on their ethnic roots and cultural affiliations. Similar findings were reported by Phinney (1990), who noted increased ethnic identity affirmation in later stages of adolescence.

Parental preference for English over mother tongue, as revealed in this study, reflects broader societal attitudes that associate global languages with social mobility and academic success. This finding concurs with Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), who argue that parents' language choices are often shaped by colonial legacies and economic considerations. However, such preferences may unintentionally undermine cultural transmission and adolescents' linguistic confidence.

Overall, the findings affirm that mother tongue use is a critical resource for fostering positive identity formation, self-esteem, and ethnic pride among adolescents. Reduced use of indigenous languages, particularly in schools and urban settings, poses a risk to cultural continuity and coherent identity development, echoing concerns raised by Fishman (2001) and UNESCO (2016) on language endangerment and identity loss.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Parents should intentionally promote the use of the mother tongue within the home environment to ensure intergenerational transmission of language and culture. Encouraging daily communication in the mother tongue will help adolescents develop confidence, cultural pride, and a stronger sense of identity.

Educational stakeholders should strengthen the use of mother tongue in schools beyond the primary level. Policies that support bilingual or multilingual instruction, especially in early and middle adolescence, can help balance global language demands with cultural preservation.

Community-based language programs and home language schools should be established to promote learning, literacy, and expressive competence in indigenous languages. Such initiatives can provide safe spaces for adolescents to engage with their linguistic heritage.

Parents, teachers, and community leaders should actively cultivate positive attitudes toward indigenous languages. Adolescents should be encouraged to view their mother tongue as a source of pride and identity rather than as a limitation in modern society.

Government and educational policymakers should design and implement policies that protect and promote mother tongue use in formal and informal domains. Support for indigenous

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the use of mother tongue plays a significant role in identity formation during adolescence. Findings revealed that both the domain of language use and language preference meaningfully influence adolescents' sense of self, belonging, and cultural affiliation. The limited use of mother tongue within formal settings such as schools and social gatherings, contrasted with its higher usage at the primary level, highlights a gradual decline in indigenous language engagement as adolescents progress developmentally and socially. This decline appears more pronounced among urban adolescents compared to their rural counterparts, suggesting that environmental context significantly shapes language preference and, by extension, identity construction.

Furthermore, the study established that language preference varies across developmental stages, with late adolescents exhibiting a stronger inclination toward mother tongue use than early adolescents. Despite this, parental attitudes largely favour the use of English, which may inadvertently contribute to reduced mother tongue transmission and weaken cultural continuity. These findings underscore the critical role families, schools, and communities play in sustaining indigenous languages as vital tools for fostering positive self-esteem, ethnic pride, and coherent identity formation in adolescents.

In conclusion, promoting the use of mother tongue is not merely a linguistic concern but a developmental and cultural imperative. Intentional efforts by parents, educators, and policymakers to create supportive environments such as home language schools and culturally responsive language policies are essential for preserving linguistic heritage and strengthening adolescent identity formation in an increasingly globalized society.

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