

Evaluating the Impact of English Immersion in Kolkata's High-Cost Private Schools

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Abstract : This study aims to investigate whether the English immersion experience offered by Kolkata's high-cost private English-medium schools lead to additive or subtractive language learning outcomes for students. In India, English has increasingly become associated with power, social status, and socio-economic mobility. As a result, a proliferation of English-medium schools has emerged across Kolkata and the wider Indian context. While in some contexts, English language learning can be an additive experience, in others, it can be subtractive where proficiency in English is developed at the expense of students' native language proficiency development. Subtractive educational experiences can potentially have severe implications, including heritage language loss, detachment from cultural roots, and a diminished sense of national identity. Thus, with the use of semi-structured interviews, the language practices and lived experiences of 12 former students who attended high-cost private English-medium schools in Kolkata were thoroughly explored. The data collected was thematically coded and analysis was conducted using the Thematic Analysis approach. The findings indicate that the English immersion experience at Kolkata's high-cost private English-medium schools provide a subtractive language learning experience to students. Additionally, this study suggests that robust home-based support for native languages might be crucial for mitigating the effects of subtractive English education. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of integrating opportunities within schools that promote Indian languages and cultures as it can create a more positive, inclusive, and culturally responsive environment. Finally, although subject to further evaluation, the study recommends the implementation of bilingual and multilingual educational systems and provides suggestions for future research in this area.

Keywords : bilingual education, English immersion, language loss, multilingual education, subtractive language learning

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