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**FROM EXTINCTION TO EDUCATION: STRATEGIES TO SAFEGUARD
ENDANGERED LANGUAGES**

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Abstract:

“Revitalizing endangered languages through education fosters a sense of identity and belonging among indigenous communities.”

This paper explores effective methodologies, challenges, and the broad-ranging benefits of incorporating endangered languages into formal and informal educational contexts. There is a significant need to recognize and cultivate a positive outlook towards the revitalization of endangered languages. The preservation and revitalization of endangered languages have become critical concerns in today's globalized world. These languages, often spoken by indigenous communities, carry rich cultural heritage and knowledge that are at risk of being lost. Therefore, it is essential to identify and foster positive attitudes towards revitalizing these languages, particularly through educational initiatives. By doing so, we not only preserve linguistic diversity but also strengthen the cultural identity and sense of belonging among indigenous populations. Education plays a pivotal role in language revitalization. Schools and educational programs can serve as powerful platforms for teaching endangered languages to younger generations. When children learn their ancestral languages, they gain a deeper understanding of their heritage, traditions, and values. This educational approach helps to ensure that the language is not only preserved but also actively used and passed down through generations. This loss of languages isn't just about communication or about silence; it's the loss of a civilization's heritage, collective memory, and worldview. For many indigenous communities, their language embodies their worldview, social values, and ancestral knowledge. When a language is endangered, it signals the potential loss of these invaluable cultural elements. Therefore, it is essential to recognize the urgent need to support the revitalization of these languages. By promoting educational initiatives, raising awareness, and leveraging technology, we can create an environment where endangered languages thrive, preserving the cultural heritage and enriching the global tapestry of human diversity. The journey towards language revitalization is challenging, but with a committed and positive outlook, it is a goal that can be achieved. The integration of endangered languages into education not only aids in their preservation but also promotes multilingualism, enhances cognitive development, and strengthens social cohesion.

Keywords: *Endangered languages, Indigenous populations, Heritage, Revitalizing, Multilingualism, Cognitive development, etc.*



Introduction:

The preservation of endangered languages is essential for maintaining cultural diversity and fostering a sense of identity within communities. Integrating these languages into education systems is a critical strategy for their revitalization. “To lose a language is to lose a piece of human history, a part of our collective identity” (Hale, 1-3). India, with its vast linguistic diversity, faces the challenge of preserving numerous endangered languages. Integrating these languages into the education system is a crucial strategy for their revitalization. Through an analysis of successful case studies and policy initiatives, the paper offers comprehensive recommendations for policymakers, educators, and community leaders. The integration of endangered languages into education not only aids in their preservation but also promotes multilingualism, enhances cognitive development, and strengthens social cohesion.

The vibrant tapestry of Indian languages faces a growing threat – the silence of extinction. This isn't mere hyperbole. UNESCO defines an endangered language as one where "speakers cease to use it, use it in an increasingly reduced number of communicative domains, and cease to pass it on from one generation to the next" (UNESCO, 2003a). In simpler terms, children are no longer learning these languages, leading to their decline and potential disappearance. The reasons for this endangerment are complex. Dominant languages often take center stage in education, administration, and media, pushing minority languages to the periphery. Globalization and economic factors can further marginalize these languages, making them seem less practical in an interconnected world.

This loss of languages isn't just about communication. It signifies the erosion of entire cultures, knowledge systems, and unique ways of seeing the world. The silence of a language can leave a gaping hole in the collective human story.

India's linguistic landscape is a vibrant tapestry, woven with hundreds of languages. But this rich diversity faces a growing threat: silence. Many languages are endangered, teetering on the edge of extinction due to a phenomenon called language shift. This is where speakers abandon their native tongue in favour of a dominant language, often seen as more prestigious or practical. A recent example is Madhika, a unique blend of Telugu, Tulu, Kannada, and Malayalam spoken by the Chakaliya community. Migrating from Karnataka centuries ago, the community now finds itself with just two remaining speakers of Madhika, as younger generations have shifted to Malayalam. This story, though heartbreaking, is not unique. Many languages in India struggle to survive in the face of dominance and globalization.

Defining Endangered Languages:

Exposed languages are languages at threat of getting defunct, meaning they're no longer spoken as a native language by a community. The endangerment of languages can affect from colorful factors, including globalization, artistic assimilation, migration, and socioeconomic pressures. The extermination of a language frequently implies the loss of artistic knowledge, traditions, and a unique way of understanding the world.

UNESCO's Bracket of Language Endangerment:

UNESCO defines four situations of language endangerment between “safe” (not risked) and “defunct”

- Vulnerable Languages spoken by utmost children but confined to certain disciplines.
- Surely Exposed Languages not learned by children as a mama lingo.



- Oppressively Exposed Languages spoken by grandparents and aged generations, with the parent generation understanding it but not speaking it to children.
- Critically Exposed Languages spoken by veritably many members of the oldest generation, frequently only incompletely and rarely (UNESCO, 2003a).

Numerous experimenters expostulate to the term “moribund,” as it makes it feel natural that languages should vanish. Still, linguists agree that if present trends continue, numerous languages face extermination. “About 97% of the world's people speak about 4 of the world's languages; again, about 96% of the world's languages are spoken by about 3% of the world's people, utmost of the world's language diversity, also, is under the stewardship of a veritably small number of people” (UNESCO, 2003a 2). Auspicious estimates are that half of the moment's spoken languages may be defunct or seriously risked by the end of the century (UNESCO, 2003b; www.unesco.org/endangeredlanguages). Pessimistic but realistic estimates place 90 to 95 percent of the world's languages in this order, as does UNESCO's report (2003a 2). Not only would most languages with fewer than 10,000 speakers — over half the world's spoken languages vanish, but so too would numerous of those having 10,000 to 1 million speakers. However, the maturity of “faded” languages would be Indigenous languages. If pessimistic prognostications are valid, utmost of our exemplifications, thus, are Indigenous languages, although the content is applicable to numerous minoritized languages.

The Indian Context:

India, known for its rich verbal diversity, still boasts thousands of languages spoken moment. Still, the beliefs, culture, and languages of the land have been significantly affected by different autocrats throughout history. Following the 1971 tale, the Indian government declared that any language spoken by lower than 10,000 people didn't need to be included in the sanctioned list of languages. Presently, the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution recognizes only 22 major languages. While not all of them have a large number of speakers, numerous are still thriving (Census of India, 1971).

The part of Mother Tongue:

The conception of the mama lingo is central to the preservation of languages, especially in the face of the extermination of numerous languages around the world. The mama lingo, the first language a person learns at home, plays a vital part in artistic identity. As dominant languages continue to spread encyclopedically, there's a threat of losing verbal diversity. Sweats to revitalize and cover risked languages are essential to maintaining the rich shade of verbal heritage in our global community.

Language Loss in India:

Indian languages haven't entered the attention and care they earn, leading to the loss of over 220 languages in the last 50 times alone. According to United Nations studies, an indigenous language dies every two weeks. This intimidating rate of language loss highlights the critical need for measures to cover and revive risked languages (UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2016).

Why Should We Be Concerned about Exposed Languages?:



Language and culture cannot be separated. Our language and culture tell us who we are, where we came from and where we're going. (Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and societies, 2005 58) While some may question the significance of conserving risked languages, arguing that children need to master languages of wider communication (LWCs) for success in a global frugality, it's essential to consider the broader counteraccusations. High- position multilingualism, where individualities acquire and use multiple languages consummately, has been shown to enhance cognitive capacities and creativity. Thus, the accession of LWCs shouldn't come at the expenditure of losing one's mama lingo. The loss of a language, as the epigraph illustrates, is a loss of a vital connection to our culture and history. When a language becomes defunct, the collaborative wisdom, beauty, and uproariousness essential in that language are lost. Each language possesses unique ways of expressing ideas, feelings, and gesticulations, contributing to the diversity of mortal expression. Losing a language is akin to destroying a masterpiece of art or an artistic treasure. As Kenneth Hale, a famed linguist, expressed, "When you lose a language, you lose a culture, intellectual wealth, a work of art. It's like dropping a lemon on (The Economist, November 3, 2001).

Factors Contributing to Language Endangerment:

1. **Globalization:** The dominance of global languages such as English, Spanish, and Mandarin often marginalizes minority languages. Economic opportunities linked to these dominant languages incentivize their use over native tongues.
2. **Cultural Assimilation:** The process by which a minority group gradually adopts the customs and attitudes of the prevailing culture often leads to the abandonment of native languages.
3. **Migration:** Movement to urban areas or different countries can result in the abandonment of native languages in favor of the dominant language of the new environment.
4. **Socioeconomic Pressures:** Socioeconomic factors such as education and employment opportunities often compel communities to adopt more widely spoken languages.

Efforts to Preserve and Revitalize Languages:

Efforts to preserve and revitalize endangered languages are crucial for maintaining cultural diversity and heritage. Some strategies include:

Community Involvement: Engaging community members, especially elders who are fluent in the language, in language preservation activities ensures that the language remains a living, vibrant part of daily life.

Bilingual Education: Implementing bilingual education programs where endangered languages are taught alongside dominant languages helps maintain linguistic diversity. This includes developing curricula and teaching materials in endangered languages.

Technological Integration: Utilizing technology, such as language learning apps, online courses, and social media, can promote the use and learning of endangered languages. Digital archives and databases can also document and preserve linguistic resources.

Policy Support: Governments should implement policies that protect and promote endangered languages. This includes legal recognition, funding for language programs, and integrating these languages into public services.

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Case Studies in Language Revitalization:

New Zealand's Maori Language: The revitalization of the Maori language through immersion schools and media initiatives has significantly increased the number of speakers and the language's presence in public life (King, J. (2001).

Hawaiian Language Programs:

The establishment of Hawaiian language immersion schools and university programs has led to resurgence in the use of the Hawaiian language among younger generations (Warner, S. L. N. (1999).

Kuleana: The Right, Responsibility, and Authority of Indigenous Peoples to Speak and Make Decisions for Themselves in Language and Cultural Revitalization (Anthropology & Education Quarterly).

Welsh Language Revival: Government policies in Wales, including compulsory Welsh language education and media broadcasting in Welsh, have successfully increased the number of Welsh speakers (Williams, C. H. (2000).

Conclusion:

To conclude, the future of India's endangered languages hangs in the balance. While the path to revitalization won't be easy, the stakes are high. Integrating these languages into education systems is a cornerstone of any successful strategy. Schools can become sanctuaries where these languages flourish, taught not just as dusty relics but as living, breathing testaments to rich cultures. Challenges abound. Limited resources, competing priorities, and societal biases that favor dominant languages can create roadblocks. However, the benefits of preserving this linguistic biodiversity are undeniable. Imagine a world where every language thrives, each adding its unique melody to the human chorus. This diversity fosters cultural understanding, promotes social cohesion, and unlocks a wealth of knowledge and perspectives. The key lies in collaboration. Community involvement is paramount – elders as language teachers, cultural practices incorporated into lessons, and a sense of ownership fostered among speakers. Bilingual education programs can empower younger generations to navigate both the dominant language and their heritage tongue. Technology offers exciting possibilities: digital dictionaries, online language learning platforms, and social media can all be harnessed to promote these languages. Finally, supportive policies are essential. Government initiatives that recognize and celebrate endangered languages send a powerful message. Financial aid for language revitalization programs and recognition of these languages in official capacities can significantly bolster preservation efforts. The choice is ours: to witness the silencing of irreplaceable voices or to champion their resurgence. Let us embrace the tapestry of Indian languages and ensure they continue to resonate for generations to come. This is not just a fight for languages, but a fight for the very soul of India's rich cultural heritage.

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