

PROJECT SUMMARY

Key objectives

To investigate perceptions of target groups in Bihar regarding:

- the value of English for future employment
- the English language and prestige and status
- English language teaching and learning within the state.

To investigate the use of English in the workplace.

Target groups

- Parents of school-age children.
- People employed in private or government enterprises.
- Higher education students.
- Private language school students.

The context of Bihar

- Third largest state in India by population and the second poorest.
- Almost 98 per cent of the state classified as rural: high levels of migration.¹
- Low levels of literacy (74 per cent).²
- High growth rates in urban centres such as Patna.
- Service sectors rapidly expanding³ and a developing tourist industry.
- A decade of efforts made to improve education in Bihar despite many challenges.

Research questions

- To what extent do people in Bihar see English as a language of aspiration?
- What connections do people in Bihar see between English and social status?
- To what extent do people in Bihar see English as important for national progress?
- How do people in Bihar feel about their own language proficiency?
- What variety of English do people in Bihar prefer?
- How is English used in the workplace?
- How important do people in Bihar think it is to learn English?
- What attitudes are there to the teaching of English in school?



The research team

Professor David Hayes:

Lead researcher and consultant

Responsible for design and leadership of this research project and the production of the research report.

EvalDesign:

Local partner for the research programme

Responsible for collecting and processing data and producing a preliminary progress update.

Dr Chris Tribble

Responsible for development of a photographic record of the use of English in Bihar.

British Council India: English Partnerships team

Responsible for logistical and academic support for the core research team.

Tools

Survey

1,949 respondents in three districts of Bihar:

- **Patna:** 742 respondents
- **Bhojpur:** 716 respondents
- **West Champaran:** 491 respondents

A range of urban, semi-urban and rural areas.

Interviews (across the three districts)

Twenty seven interviewees shared more extended perceptions.

Tracer studies

Four tracer studies in Patna recorded actual language use by respondents who indicated they used English in their daily work.

Research undertaken: January – March 2016

Respondents

Parents of school-age children: average age 37.48 years.

Higher Education: students in university or college – average age 21.20 years.

Professionals: people in employment in the private sector or with the government – average age 36.79 years.

Language students: students in private language schools and coaching centres – average age 18.61 years.



Survey and interviews: design



- Direct attitude survey (25 items).
- Research instruments prepared in English, translated into Hindi and checked by bilingual members of the team.
- Separate surveys prepared for each target group of respondents.
- Statements scored on a four point Likert scale.
- Data collectors worked in teams across the state following a pilot in Patna.
- Purposive/convenience sampling undertaken.
- Random selection of respondents for more detailed interviews: all interviews digitally recorded.

Tracer studies: design

Tracking English in the workplace

Tracer studies recorded, illustrated and clarified daily language use at work.

All four participants were employed in businesses or the professions and had said that they made use of English in their work.

Participants were accompanied by a project researcher throughout a complete working day.

The researcher recorded the participant's interactions and when, why and how languages were used.

Tracer study participants	
Field of employment	Position in organisation
State government	Clerk
University	Laboratory technician
Information technology firm	Software engineer
Construction	Managing director

Limitations to the study

Much higher proportion of **male** compared to **female** respondents.

Smaller number of **parents** and **professionals** surveyed in Patna in comparison to those in Bhojpur.

Possible limited representation of the wider population due to researcher subjectivity in approaching potential respondents (although all data collectors trained and experienced).

Possible bias arising from awareness that this was a British Council survey (although all data collectors based in Bihar and operating in Hindi).



Research question: what connections do people in Bihar see between English and social status?

- 70 per cent of parents and professionals strongly agreed that English was necessary for the future.
- 63 per cent of higher education and language students strongly agreed that English was necessary for the future.

What respondents said

'English is a requirement of our time.'

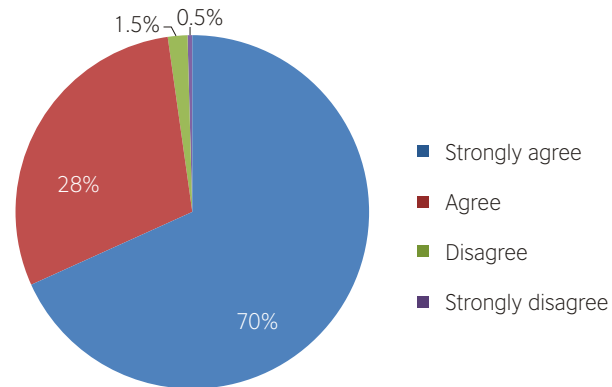
'The English language helps to give our children a bright future. It is also necessary for development.'

'Without [English] our children's future will be dark.'

'To prosper you should know English.'

'People who know English are never jobless.'

'The English language is essential for my children's future career'



Responses from parents and professionals (n=952)



Contrasting views from the literature

*'The pay gap in certain sectors between individuals who are proficient in English and those who are not is as much as 30 per cent.'*⁴

*'For recent entrants [to the Indian labour market], English skills help increase wages only when coupled with higher education.'*⁵

*'There are probably too few jobs in India requiring English to justify the investment being made in it by individuals, families and government.'*⁶



Research question: what connections do people in Bihar see between English and social status?

- 80.5 per cent of respondents agreed that English was a symbol of an educated person. However, 'the association between English and being educated is powerful, but by no means universal.'
- While groups agree English raises status, this feeling is strongest amongst the Language students group.
- Respondents stress that both English and national/regional languages are important.

What respondents said

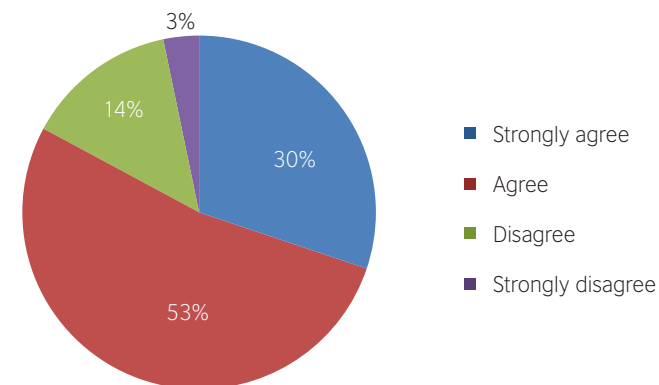
'Knowing English helps in gaining respect in society.'

'When someone speaks in English we say 'see how educated the person is.' These thoughts come in your mind. The person may not have any degree but when he speaks in English, people think the person is highly educated.'

'English should be used in learning technical subjects, however the status of Hindi should be maintained.'



'If I use English my status is raised'



English and status: whole group response (n=1895)

Views from the literature

*'English is the language of the intellect and formality.'*⁷

*'English is considered a distinction of social class.'*⁸

*'The level of introduction of English is now a matter of political response to people's aspirations rather than an academic or feasibility issue.'*⁹

Research questions: how do people in Bihar feel about their own language proficiency? What variety of English do people in Bihar prefer?

- Only one per cent and five per cent of parents and professionals felt their English was excellent.
- A third of professionals and more than half of the parents describe their English as limited.
- 20 per cent of parents surveyed do not speak English at all.
- Less than one per cent of parents use English in their homes.
- Around 20 per cent stated that they don't use English at all.
- Respondents tended to see English as a language of India and that Indian English was an acceptable variety to be taught in schools.
- They had no particular attachment to British English (but no significant aversion to it either).
- Language students selected British English and Indian English almost equally.



What respondents said

'How can I speak English? I don't know English. I would not be driving an auto if I knew English.'

'I speak it when I feel there is a requirement to speak in English and when I want to make an impact on the other person, so that he thinks I am well-educated.'

'Mostly I speak [English] with my friends, when I meet them or they come to my house. I try to speak with them a little, when they speak [English], I also speak it. They laugh and say 'try, try' so we all try to improve.'

Views from the literature

*'With 125 million users, it is not surprising that English has become an Indian language in its own right.'*¹⁰

*'English only constitutes some 10 per cent of the total population and degrees of expertise vary across this group.'*¹¹



Research question: how is English used in the workplace?

- Only 17 per cent of professionals recorded that English was the main working language in their place of employment.
- English is very seldom used for everyday communication, conversation and socialising in the workplace.
- There is a strong association amongst respondents between English and national economic development.
- Where English is used in the workplace, it is more likely to be used with clients and customers in Bihar and in other states across India than with international contacts.
- English is more a state and national language of business than it is of international communication.



What respondents said

'English is necessary for modernisation in Indian society.'

'English is an important language for development.'

'Knowing English is very important for India's development.'

'All my work is done in English and in Hindi. Hindi and English are both equal.'

- Tracer studies indicated that very little English is actually used even by professionals who claim to use it.
- English only was used to talk about work-related matters with senior personnel within the tracer studies.
- Brief greetings may be made in English – *'Good morning'* for the office guard and *'Good morning, sir'* for the senior clerk.
- A tracer study in the IT sector of a software engineer showed little interaction in English and suggested English was used mainly for technical tasks than anything else.



The importance of English: does everyone agree?

Cultural impact?

Very little evidence of negative attitudes to English in Bihar or its impact on Hindi or other languages.

Very little evidence of negative attitudes to the impact of English on India's traditions and culture in Bihar or its impact on Hindi or other languages.

However, not everyone agrees: **a small minority have concerns.**

Negative views: what respondents said

'For India the English language is the symbol of slavery.'

'Hindi is our national language so we should prefer Hindi over English. Hindi is important to maintain Indian traditions.'

'If someone speaks in Hindi and another person speaks in English and the person who speaks in Hindi feels bad about it and gives importance to English, and the other person feels proud to speak in English, these kinds of thoughts are bad.'

Urban and rural contrasts

The more exposure people have to English (at work, for example) the **less important** for employment and status they feel it is.

Respondents with experience with the language may have a **more realistic view** of the benefits that it can bring for personal economic improvement.

Professionals with more contact with the language have **less anxiety** about it bringing unwanted changes to society.

In **less developed areas** of the state such as West Champaran, **English is viewed more positively** and continues to be associated with higher status.



Research questions: how important do people in Bihar think it is to learn English? What attitudes are there to the teaching of English in school?

Should people in India learn English?

- 98 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they should.

Can the school experience of learning English be improved?

- Widespread perceptions that the quality of English teaching in government schools is not high.
- Negative experiences of learning English at school.

'I tried hard to learn English, even complained but they never taught properly. Actually, English was not considered a subject at all like other subjects – chemistry, physics, maths – English was never taught. [...] Sir [the teacher] used to speak two or three lines only like 'good morning, sit down please, heads down please'. So what will be the experience?'

The private sector

- 55 per cent of professional sample respondents' children attend private English-medium schools.
- 30 per cent of parents sample respondents' children attend private English-medium schools.
- Choice of private school may not be motivated by the medium of instruction, but by broader perceptions of the quality of educational provision.
- Language school students are seeking to fill a skills gap resulting from inadequate school experience.



Respondent suggestions for improving the delivery of English in schools

- hiring good teachers
- improving school inspection
- increasing the priority given to English
- changes to the examination system.



What respondents said

'We help [our children] a lot by giving them what they need. We think they should be enrolled in a good school and given all the facilities to learn.'

Views from the literature

*'Even a rural child of the underprivileged has an equal right to gain a sufficiently good level of proficiency in [English] so that he should not suffer discrimination for lack of it.'*¹²

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- ¹ See Das, K.C. and Saha, S. (n.d.) Inter-state migration and regional disparities in India.
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- ⁴ Euromonitor (2012). *The benefits of the English language for individuals and societies: quantitative indicators from Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen*. London: Euromonitor International
- ⁵ Azam, M., Chin, A. & Prakash, N. (2010). *The returns to English language skills in India*. Discussion Paper Series CDP No 02/10. London: Centre for Research and Analysis of Migration, Department of Economics, University of London. 2010 p. 21
- ⁶ Graddol, D. (2010). *English Next – India*. London: British Council p. 114
- ⁷ Sailaja, P. (2009). *Indian English*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press p. 6
- ⁸ NCEE (National Center on Education and the Economy) (2005). *India education report*. Available at: www.ncee.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/India-Education-Report.pdf p. 6
- ⁹ National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) (2005). *National Curriculum Framework 2005*. New Delhi, India: NCERT p. 38.
- ¹⁰ British Council (2016) *Social Attitudes towards the English Language in Bihar*. British Council: Kolkata p. 4
Available at <https://www.britishcouncil.in/state-project-research>
- ¹¹ British Council (2016) *Social Attitudes towards the English Language in Bihar*. British Council: Kolkata p. 5
Available at <https://www.britishcouncil.in/state-project-research>
- ¹² Bihar Curriculum Framework: Bihar School Examination Board, cited in British Council (2016) *English in Education: Bihar state profile*. New Delhi: British Council p. 25.
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