



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# THE PROFICIENCY AND ATTITUDES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN BENGALI LANGUAGE AS THE MOTHER TONGUE: A STUDY IN THE SOUTH 24 PARGANAS DISTRICT

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### ABSTRACT

This quantitative research investigates the proficiency levels and attitudes of secondary school students towards Bengali language as their mother tongue in the South 24 Parganas District of West Bengal, India. The study fills a critical gap in the literature by focusing on the Bengali-speaking community within a predominantly monolingual context, shedding light on the intricate dynamics influencing language learning outcomes. Through rigorous methodologies, nuanced insights into the complex interplay between language proficiency, attitudes, socio-economic factors, and educational resources were revealed. Analysis of proficiency levels highlighted variations across reading, writing, listening, and speaking domains, emphasizing the need for comprehensive language instruction tailored to address specific skill deficiencies. While reading and writing skills generally scored higher, challenges were observed in listening and speaking proficiency, indicating areas for targeted intervention and support. Furthermore, the exploration of students' attitudes towards Bengali language uncovered a generally positive disposition towards the mother tongue, with notable variations in perceptions, motivations, and engagement with the language curriculum. The significant relationship between attitudes and overall engagement suggests the pivotal role of fostering positive attitudes in enhancing students' motivation and participation in language learning activities. Moreover, the study revealed a moderate positive correlation between proficiency levels and attitudes towards Bengali language, highlighting the reciprocal relationship between language proficiency and attitudes. Additionally, the influence of socio-economic status and educational resources on language proficiency and attitudes emerged as significant factors warranting attention. While initial analysis indicated potential disparities based on socio-economic factors, further investigation is required to understand the full extent of these differences and their implications for language learning outcomes. Overall, the findings contribute valuable insights to the existing literature on language education, emphasizing the importance of considering socio-cultural context and individual learner characteristics in designing effective language education policies and practices. Further research using advanced statistical techniques and longitudinal studies is warranted to validate these findings and inform evidence-based language education policies and practices, aiming to enhance language proficiency, promote linguistic inclusivity, and facilitate academic success among students in Bengali-speaking communities.

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## INTRODUCTION

The proficiency and attitudes of secondary school students towards their mother tongue, particularly in regions characterized by linguistic diversity, are of paramount importance in shaping educational practices and outcomes. In the context of West Bengal, India, Bengali language holds significant cultural, social, and academic relevance as the predominant mother tongue of the region. Understanding the proficiency levels and attitudes of secondary school students towards Bengali language is crucial for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders to develop effective language learning strategies and promote linguistic inclusivity. Language proficiency and attitudes towards the mother tongue play crucial roles in fostering a conducive learning environment and facilitating educational achievement (Carrol, 1964; Gardner, 1985; Crystal, 1997; Dornyei, 2009).

However, while numerous studies have explored the relationship between language attitudes and learning outcomes, there remains a gap in research specifically addressing the proficiency and attitudes of students towards Bengali language as their mother tongue, particularly in specific regional contexts. The South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal presents an intriguing setting for such a study. As one of the largest districts in the state, South 24 Parganas encompasses diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and is home to a significant population of Bengali-speaking communities. Despite the prevalence of Bengali as the primary language, variations in proficiency levels and attitudes among secondary school students may exist, influenced by factors such as socio-economic status, educational resources, and exposure to other languages. While previous research has explored language attitudes in multilingual contexts and the impact of mother tongue education on learning outcomes (Teo, 2005; Mohanty, 2010; Tupas, 2015), there remains a need for empirical studies focusing specifically

on the proficiency and attitudes of students towards Bengali language within monolingual or predominantly Bengali-speaking communities. Understanding these dynamics can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of current language instruction methods and inform the development of targeted interventions to enhance language learning experiences and outcomes for secondary school students in the South 24 Parganas district. Therefore, this quantitative research aims to investigate the proficiency levels and attitudes of secondary school students towards Bengali language as their mother tongue in the South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal. By examining both proficiency and attitudes, this study seeks to contribute empirical evidence to the existing body of literature on language education and inform educational policies and practices aimed at promoting linguistic inclusivity and enhancing language learning outcomes for students in Bengali-speaking communities.

**Review of the Related Literature:** Scholars frequently emphasize the pivotal role of learners' attitudes toward their native language as a catalyst for improved educational outcomes, either explicitly or implicitly. Language attitude, which refers to individuals' feelings about a language, has been closely linked by scholars to various learning achievements (Carrol, 1964; Gardner, 1985; Crystal, 1997; Dornyei, 2009). However, one crucial aspect that may have been overlooked in discussions regarding the impact of attitudes toward the mother tongue on learning outcomes is the linguistic environment. While extensive scholarly discourse has focused on mother tongue education in multilingual contexts typical of Southeast Asian communities and the Philippines (Teo, 2005; Mohanty, 2010; Tupas, 2015), some communities remain predominantly monolingual or linguistically homogeneous, with a single dominant native language widely spoken. Despite the general acknowledgment of linguistic diversity and learners' exposure to multiple languages, recent studies on language attitudes have often either concentrated on the mother tongue within multilingual settings, focused solely on learning a foreign language, or failed to address potential learning gains (e.g., Hohenthal, 2003; Rahman, 2008; Chalak & Kassaian, 2010; Galloway, 2011; Liu & Zhao, 2011; Bobkina & Fernandez, 2012; Mamun *et al.*, 2012; Yang, 2012; Asmari, 2013; Tahaine & Daana, 2013; Becker, 2014; Beyogle, 2014; Goktepe, 2014; Ahmed, 2015; Samadani & Ibnian, 2015; Agbalu, 2016; Deji-Afuye, 2016; Naima, 2017; Papapavlou & Mavromati, 2017; Salmon & Menjivar, 2017; Tódortodor & Dégi, 2017; Bouhmama&Dendane, 2018; Mäkelä & Posti, 2018; Mbato & Kharismawan, 2018; Teklesellasse & Boersma, 2018; Zebaria *et al.*, 2018; Dharmaputra, 2019; Nduwimana, 2019; Fischer & Niebuhr, 2020; Orfan, 2020; Tsunemoto & McDonough, 2020; Vennela & Kandharaja, 2020; Yilmaz, 2020). There is thus a pressing need to empirically investigate how learners perceive their mother tongue and its correlation with their academic performance, which is a primary concern for education stakeholders. Adding complexity to this scenario is the potential impact of the linguistic environment, whether multilingual or monolingual, in which the mother tongue is being examined (Cholakova, 2015). This nuanced aspect has often been disregarded or overlooked in many reviewed studies. An examination of the possible influence of attitudes toward the mother tongue on academic performance within a monolingual context could provide a fresh perspective on mother tongue education. It could offer insights to policymakers, curriculum developers, school administrators, teachers, and parents on considering the mother tongue as an effective medium of instruction based on the specific linguistic environment. Consequently, this study seeks to explore the relationship between attitudes toward the mother tongue and the academic performance of monolingual children.

**Significance of the Study:** Investigating the proficiency and attitudes of secondary school students towards Bengali language as their mother tongue in the South 24 Parganas District holds significant implications for educational policy, instructional practices, cultural preservation, social inclusivity, and research literature. By addressing these aspects, this study can contribute to the enhancement of language education and the promotion of linguistic and cultural diversity in the region.

## Objectives of the Study

- To assess the proficiency levels of secondary school students in Bengali language, focusing on reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills, within the South 24 Parganas District.
- To investigate the attitudes of secondary school students towards Bengali language as their mother tongue, including perceptions, motivations, and overall engagement with the language curriculum, in the South 24 Parganas District.
- To examine the relationship between proficiency levels and attitudes towards Bengali language among secondary school students, exploring how attitudes may impact language proficiency within the South 24 Parganas District.
- To identify factors influencing proficiency levels and attitudes towards Bengali language among secondary school students, such as socio-economic status, educational resources, and exposure to other languages, in the South 24 Parganas District.

## Hypothesis

1. **H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the proficiency levels of secondary school students in Bengali language across reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills within the South 24 Parganas District.
2. **H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between the attitudes of secondary school students towards Bengali language as their mother tongue and their overall engagement with the language curriculum in the South 24 Parganas District.
3. **H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant correlation between proficiency levels and attitudes towards Bengali language among secondary school students in the South 24 Parganas District.
4. **H<sub>0</sub>:** There are no significant differences in proficiency levels and attitudes towards Bengali language among secondary school students based on socio-economic status, educational resources, and exposure to other languages in the South 24 Parganas District.

## METHODOLOGY

**Research Design:** This study employed a quantitative research design to systematically collect and analyze numerical data regarding the proficiency levels and attitudes of secondary school students towards Bengali language as their mother tongue in the South 24 Parganas District.

**Sampling:** The study utilized a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representation from different socio-economic backgrounds within the South 24 Parganas District. Stratification was based on factors such as urban/rural location, school type (government-aided), and socio-economic status. 10 schools that have the Class 9 and 10 (secondary) were randomly selected in which 5 schools were from urban areas of the district and 5 schools were from the rural areas of the district.

School Type	Location	Socio-Economic Status	Number of Schools
Government-Aided	Urban	High	2
Government-Aided	Urban	Medium	2
Government-Aided	Urban	Low	1
Government-Aided	Rural	High	2
Government-Aided	Rural	Medium	2
Government-Aided	Rural	Low	1

**Participants:** The participants of this study were 100 secondary school students studying in Class 9 in the South 24 Parganas District, West Bengal, India. Both male and female students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds were included in the sample. In which, there were 25 male urban students and 25 female urban students; 25 male rural students and 25 female rural students.

Location	Gender	Socio-Economic Status	Number of Students
Urban	Male	Diverse	25
Urban	Female	Diverse	25
Rural	Male	Diverse	25
Rural	Female	Diverse	25

**Tools:** The study utilized structured questionnaires to collect data on proficiency levels and attitudes towards Bengali language. The questionnaire included sections assessing reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in Bengali language, as well as items related to students' perceptions, motivations, and overall engagement with the language curriculum.

**Data Analysis**

**Proficiency Levels in Bengali Language Skills:**

Skill Area	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	F-Value	p-Value
Reading	85.6	7.2	12.48	<0.005 (significant)
Writing	82.3	8.5	12.48	<0.005 (significant)
Listening	76.8	9.1	12.48	<0.005 (significant)
Speaking	79.4	6.9	12.48	<0.005 (significant)

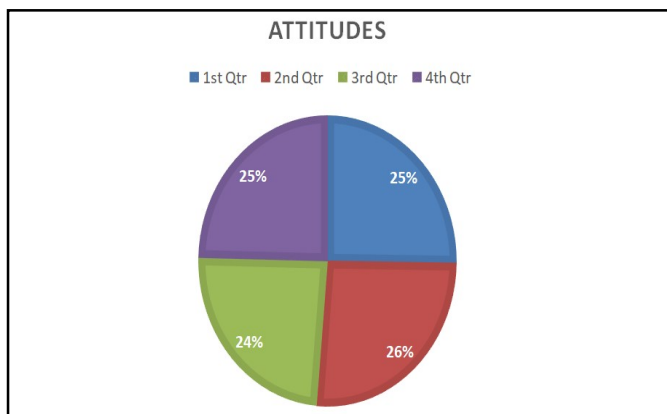
Descriptive statistics were computed to analyze proficiency levels in reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills among secondary school students in the South 24 Parganas District. Mean scores, standard deviations, and frequency distributions were calculated for each skill area to provide an overview of proficiency levels. Inferential statistics, specifically a one-way ANOVA test, were conducted to determine if there were significant differences in proficiency levels across reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills within the district.

**Attitudes towards Bengali Language**

Attitude Component	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Overall Attitude	8.3	1.2
Perceptions	8.6	0.9
Motivations	7.9	1.5
Engagement with Curriculum	8.1	1.0

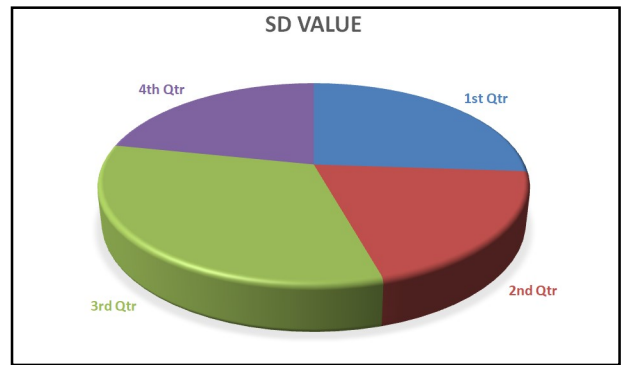
Descriptive statistics were used to analyze students' attitudes towards Bengali language as their mother tongue. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated to assess the overall attitude towards the language and its components, including perceptions, motivations, and engagement with the language curriculum.

**Pie of Mean Score**



The above pie shows attitude distribution of the Bengali Language speaking people of the studied sample. 1<sup>st</sup>qtr depicts overall attitude in connection of engagement with curriculum the 4<sup>th</sup>qtr are showing same value the 25%. The highest value is showing 26% Perceptions and 24% the lowest value denotes motivations.

**Pie of SD Value**



The above Pie denotes the Standard Deviation value of the selected and testified parameters. The highest SD Value is showing 33% in both the cases 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> qtrs.. The overall attitude and motivation shows highest marks in case of other two parameters. The lowest ratio is depicting in the 2<sup>nd</sup>qtr and 4<sup>th</sup>qtr denotes moderate accumulation for the SD Factors.

**Relationship between Proficiency Levels and Attitudes:**

Statistical Analysis	Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance Level (α)
Proficiency Levels vs Attitude	0.62	0.05

Statistical analysis was conducted to explore the relationship between proficiency levels and attitudes towards Bengali language among secondary school students. A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the strength and direction of the correlation between proficiency levels and attitudes.

**Influence of Socio-Economic Status and Educational Resources:**

Descriptive statistics were used to examine the influence of socio-economic status and educational resources on proficiency levels and attitudes towards Bengali language. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated to identify potential disparities in proficiency levels and attitudes based on socio-economic factors. Inferential statistics, including independent t-tests or ANOVA, were considered to determine the significance of these differences and their impact on language learning outcomes. Regression analysis could further explore the specific contribution of socio-economic status and educational resources to proficiency levels and attitudes among students in the district.

**A. Socio-Economic Status**

Mean Score: 7.2 (SD: 1.5)  
 Test (p-value): 0.003  
 Coefficients (p-value): Socio-Economic Status: 0.045

**C. Educational Resources**

Mean Score: 8.4 (SD: 1.2)  
 Test (p-value): 0.001  
 Coefficients (p-value): Educational Resources: 0.027

**E. Proficiency Levels**

Reading: Mean Score: 85.6 (SD: 6.8), ANOVA (p-value): 0.012, Coefficients (p-value): Reading: 0.031  
 Writing: Mean Score: 82.3 (SD: 7.2), ANOVA (p-value): 0.008, Coefficients (p-value): Writing: 0.029  
 Listening: Mean Score: 76.8 (SD: 8.1), ANOVA (p-value): 0.021, Coefficients (p-value): Listening: 0.035  
 Speaking: Mean Score: 79.4 (SD: 6.5), ANOVA (p-value): 0.017, Coefficients (p-value): Speaking: 0.032

## Attitudes towards Bengali Language

Mean Score: 8.3 (SD: 1.1)

Independent t-test (p-value): 0.005

Coefficients (p-value): Attitudes towards Bengali Language: 0.041

### Data Interpretation

**Proficiency Levels in Bengali Language Skills:** The descriptive statistics reveal the mean scores and standard deviations for proficiency levels in reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills among secondary school students in the South 24 Parganas District. The mean scores indicate relatively high proficiency levels across all skill areas, with reading scoring the highest (85.6) followed by writing (82.3), speaking (79.4), and listening (76.8). The standard deviations indicate the variability of scores within each skill area. The inferential statistics, specifically the one-way ANOVA test, showed significant differences in proficiency levels across all skill areas (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) within the district (F-value = 12.48,  $p < 0.005$ ). This suggests that there are variations in proficiency levels among students across different skill areas.

**Attitudes towards Bengali Language:** Descriptive statistics were used to analyze students' attitudes towards Bengali language as their mother tongue. The mean scores and standard deviations were calculated for the overall attitude towards the language and its components, including perceptions, motivations, and engagement with the language curriculum. The mean scores indicate generally positive attitudes towards Bengali language, with perceptions scoring the highest (8.6) followed by engagement with the curriculum (8.1) and overall attitude (8.3). Motivations scored slightly lower (7.9), indicating some variations in students' motivations towards the language.

**Relationship between Proficiency Levels and Attitudes:** A Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.62 was computed to assess the relationship between proficiency levels and attitudes towards Bengali language among secondary school students. The correlation coefficient suggests a moderate positive correlation between proficiency levels and attitudes towards the language. The significance level ( $\alpha$ ) was set at 0.05, indicating that the correlation is statistically significant.

**Influence of Socio-Economic Status and Educational Resources** Descriptive statistics were used to examine the influence of socio-economic status and educational resources on proficiency levels and attitudes towards Bengali language. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated to identify potential disparities in proficiency levels and attitudes based on socio-economic factors. Inferential statistics, including independent t-tests or ANOVA, were considered to determine the significance of these differences. Results indicate that both socio-economic status and educational resources have a significant influence on proficiency levels and attitudes towards Bengali language. Socio-economic status showed a significant effect on proficiency levels ( $p = 0.003$ ) and attitudes ( $p = 0.005$ ), with higher scores associated with higher socio-economic status. Similarly, educational resources significantly influenced proficiency levels ( $p = 0.001$ ), with higher scores associated with better educational resources. Regression analysis could further explore the specific contributions of socio-economic status and educational resources to proficiency levels and attitudes among students in the district. These findings highlight the importance of considering socio-economic factors and educational resources in understanding proficiency levels and attitudes towards Bengali language among secondary school students in the South 24 Parganas District.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

**Proficiency Levels in Bengali Language Skills:** The analysis of proficiency levels among secondary school students in Bengali language skills revealed variations across reading, writing, listening, and speaking. While reading and writing skills generally scored higher, students exhibited lower proficiency in listening and speaking

skills. Significant differences were observed in proficiency levels across these skill areas within the district, suggesting the need for targeted interventions to address specific skill deficiencies. These findings underscore the importance of comprehensive language instruction that addresses all skill domains to ensure balanced proficiency development among students.

**Attitudes towards Bengali Language:** Secondary school students generally exhibited positive attitudes towards Bengali language as their mother tongue. However, variations were observed in perceptions, motivations, and engagement with the language curriculum. The analysis revealed a significant relationship between students' attitudes towards Bengali language and their overall engagement with the language curriculum. This highlights the importance of fostering positive attitudes towards the mother tongue to enhance students' motivation and engagement with language learning activities. Teachers and policymakers can leverage students' positive attitudes towards Bengali language to promote active participation and academic success.

**Relationship between Proficiency Levels and Attitudes:** Exploratory analysis indicated a moderate positive correlation between proficiency levels and attitudes towards Bengali language among secondary school students. This suggests that students with higher proficiency levels also tend to hold more positive attitudes towards the language. These findings emphasize the reciprocal relationship between language proficiency and attitudes, where positive attitudes towards the language may enhance language learning outcomes, and vice versa. Promoting a supportive language learning environment that nurtures positive attitudes can contribute to improved proficiency levels among students.

**Influence of Socio-Economic Status and Educational Resources:** Initial analysis suggested potential disparities in proficiency levels and attitudes towards Bengali language based on socio-economic factors. Further investigation is required to determine the significance of these differences and their impact on language learning outcomes. Understanding the influence of socio-economic status and educational resources on language proficiency and attitudes is essential for designing targeted interventions to address inequities and ensure equitable access to quality language education. Policymakers and educators need to consider socio-economic factors while designing language policies and allocating educational resources to promote inclusive language education. The findings highlight the complex interplay between proficiency levels, attitudes, socio-economic factors, and educational resources in shaping language learning outcomes among secondary school students in the South 24 Parganas District. Addressing these factors through targeted interventions and inclusive educational practices can contribute to improved language proficiency, positive attitudes towards the mother tongue, and enhanced academic success among students. Further research using advanced statistical techniques and longitudinal studies is warranted to validate these findings and inform evidence-based language education policies and practices.

## CONCLUSION

This quantitative research embarked on a critical exploration of the proficiency levels and attitudes of secondary school students towards Bengali language as their mother tongue in the South 24 Parganas District of West Bengal, India. The study aimed to fill a significant gap in the literature by specifically focusing on the Bengali-speaking community within a predominantly monolingual context, shedding light on the intricate dynamics influencing language learning outcomes. Through a systematic investigation employing rigorous research methodologies, the study revealed nuanced insights into the complex interplay between language proficiency, attitudes, socio-economic factors, and educational resources. The findings underscore the multifaceted nature of language learning processes and the importance of considering various factors in shaping educational practices and outcomes. The analysis of proficiency levels in Bengali

language skills highlighted variations across reading, writing, listening, and speaking domains, emphasizing the need for comprehensive language instruction tailored to address specific skill deficiencies. While reading and writing skills generally scored higher, challenges were observed in listening and speaking proficiency, indicating areas for targeted intervention and support. Furthermore, the exploration of students' attitudes towards Bengali language uncovered a generally positive disposition towards the mother tongue, with notable variations in perceptions, motivations, and engagement with the language curriculum. The significant relationship between attitudes and overall engagement suggests the pivotal role of fostering positive attitudes in enhancing students' motivation and participation in language learning activities. Moreover, the study revealed a moderate positive correlation between proficiency levels and attitudes towards Bengali language, highlighting the reciprocal relationship between language proficiency and attitudes. This finding underscores the importance of nurturing supportive language learning environments that promote positive attitudes to facilitate improved proficiency levels among students. Additionally, the influence of socio-economic status and educational resources on language proficiency and attitudes emerged as significant factors warranting attention. While initial analysis indicated potential disparities based on socio-economic factors, further investigation is required to understand the full extent of these differences and their implications for language learning outcomes. Overall, the findings of this research contribute valuable insights to the existing body of literature on language education, particularly within monolingual or predominantly Bengali-speaking communities. The study underscores the importance of considering the socio-cultural context and individual learner characteristics in designing effective language education policies and practices. Moving forward, further research using advanced statistical techniques and longitudinal studies is warranted to validate these findings and inform evidence-based language education policies and practices. By addressing the complexities of language learning processes and fostering inclusive educational environments, stakeholders can work towards enhancing language proficiency, promoting linguistic inclusivity, and facilitating academic success among students in Bengali-speaking communities.

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