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Research Paper

Multilingualism and Personality in Indian Young Adults: An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT

Multilingualism is a norm in India. While rigorous research has found multilingualism to be related to personality, the extent of this influence remains to be seen in India. Through this study, we aim to investigate the relationship, if any exists, between multilingualism and personality traits for Indian young adults. The study was conducted on 218 young adults in the age range of 18-25 who filled out an online personality test. We used the Dimensional Personality Inventory (DPI) to measure the personality traits of Activity-Passivity, Enthusiastic-Non-enthusiastic, Suspicious-Trusting, Assertive-Submissive, Depressive-Non-Depressive, Emotional-Instability-Emotional Stability. The study considered bilinguals as a comparison group. Correlational analysis revealed that the number of languages had a statistically significant relationship with Suspiciousness, Depression, and Emotional instability scores. The study failed to find any statistically significant correlations between the number of languages and Activity, Enthusiasm, or Assertiveness scores. ANOVA analysis revealed a statistically significant interaction effect between the factors of age, bilingualism/multilingualism, gender, and scores ($F= 2.998$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, there is some evidence that multilingualism is significantly related to an individual's Suspiciousness, Depression, and Emotional Instability, but for Activity, Assertiveness, and Enthusiasm the interaction among age, gender, and number of languages was found to be inconsequential.

Keywords: *Multilingualism, Bilingualism, Personality, Suspiciousness, Emotional Instability, Depression, India*

The phenomenon of multilingualism has recently attracted considerable scholarly attention. Having knowledge of multiple languages influences one's worldview, one's exposure to diverse cultures, and thus also one's personality. These influences on personality are especially relevant to the educational sector because teaching children a variety of languages can help them develop and mature as individuals (Mepham and Martinovic, 2018). Children who are taught various languages have the potential to develop more unbiased, open, and inclusive personalities. Multilingualism is enmeshed throughout the fabric of the social climate in India. The average Indian speaks 2 languages or more. This leads us to the question if multilingualism, as a norm, still has a significant relationship with personality.

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In a study conducted by Tsimpli, Vogelzang, et al. (2020), bilingualism/multilingualism enhanced cognitive performance among Indian children and fluid intelligence was increased among monolingual children in diverse sociolinguistic environments.

Another study done by Veltkamp, Recio, et al. (2012) administered the 'Neuroticism Extraversion Openness-Five-Factor Inventory' to two groups of late bilinguals (second-language learners) in both languages (viz. German and Spanish). When Spanish was the test language, both groups, regardless of the participants' first languages, scored better on Extraversion and Neuroticism. In addition, ratings on agreeability were higher when the test was administered in German. The findings are viewed as proof of cultural frame changes in line with cultural norms connected to the currently used language. Beyond the development of linguistic abilities, acquiring a second language seems to give people a wider range of ways to perceive and express their own personalities.

The study 'Multilingualism, empathy and multicompetence' was conducted by Dewaele and Wei (2012) examined 2158 monolingual and multilingual individuals, the relationship between multilingualism and the personality attribute of cognitive empathy. The study found that more language proficiency was not associated with cognitive empathy, according to statistical analyses. They also examined the relationship between monolinguals, bilinguals, and multilinguals and the personality attribute Tolerance of Ambiguity (TA). Compared to multilinguals, monolinguals and bilinguals performed much worse on the TA.

Dewaele and Pieter van Oudenhoven (2009) examined the relationship between multilingualism/multiculturalism, acculturation, and the personality profile of 79 young London teenagers. According to statistical analysis, teenagers who were born overseas and settled in London during infancy scored lower on the dimension of Emotional Stability and higher on Open-mindedness and Cultural Empathy. Language dominance (first language [L1], L1 and one or two other languages [multidominance], or any language other than the L1 [LX]) considerably influenced the participants' personality profiles, with the multidominant group scoring significantly higher on open-mindedness, marginally higher on cultural empathy, and significantly lower on emotional stability than people dominant in one language only.

Thus, this study aims to address the gap and investigate the relationship of multilingualism with personality in the Indian context. For this study, we will define multilingualism according to Li (2008) as "*someone who can interact in more than one language, be it active (through speaking and writing) or passive (through reading and listening)".* The term "personality" refers to the persistent traits, interests, motivations, values, self-concept, abilities, and emotional patterns that make up a person's particular way of adjusting to life. Although different theories have varied explanations for the formation and organisation of personality, they all concur that personality influences behaviour.

This study was an attempt to find a relationship with the six dimensions of the Dimensional Personality Inventory (DPI) which measure: Active-Passive trait, Enthusiastic- Non-Enthusiastic trait, Assertive-Submissive trait, Suspicious-Trusting trait, Depressive-Non Depressive trait and Emotional instability-Emotional stability trait with the number of languages spoken by Indian Young Adults.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

***Participants*:**

The sample population included Indian young adults in the age range of 18-25 who were recruited using a snowball sampling technique. They were mostly undergraduate and graduate students studying in the Greater Mumbai region. 64.5% of the sample people identified as female and 35.5% as male. There were 14.7% 18-year-olds, 16.1 % 19-year-olds, 42.2% 20 years old, 14.2% were 21 years old, 7.8% were 22 years old, 1.8% were 23 years old, 1.4% were 24 year olds, and only 1.8% were 25 year olds. The sample was made up of 0.5% monolinguals, 24.4% bilinguals, 50% trilinguals, 21.1% quadrilinguals, 2.8% people who spoke 5 languages, 0.9% people who spoke 6 languages.

The study employed a non-experimental, exploratory research design. The study employed the Dimensional Personality Inventory developed by Bhargava Mahesh in 1998 to quantify personality variables of Activity, Enthusiasm, Suspicion, Assertiveness, Depression, and Emotional Instability. Responses were gathered using an online Google form containing some demographic questions and the DPI items. A total of 218 responses were received including bilinguals and multilinguals. The sample was not randomly sampled or randomly assigned to any conditions as multilingualism is a naturally occurring variable. Thus, no manipulation of the variables was attempted.

***Procedure*:**

The consent form informed the prospective participants of the purpose of the study, expected duration of participation, participants' rights to decline to participate and withdraw participation at any time, that there were no risks of the research to the participants, confidentiality rights of the participants, and whom to contact for questions and then gained their consent for participation. The form was circulated among the acquaintances of the researchers who were told to forward it to more prospective participants and ask them to do the same. The form was circulated for some weeks, after which responses were stopped and data analysis undertaken.

RESULTS

Before the analysis, the data was thoroughly checked for meeting the criteria and genuineness. Respondents who did not fit the criteria for the study were eliminated. The responses were also checked for following an answer pattern (all agree) and those that did were eliminated (*n=10*). The measure used for assessing personality was the Dimensional Personality Inventory created by Bhargava Mahesh, (1998). The reliability of the questionnaire using split-half method ranged from 0.64 to 0.82 for college going girls and from 0.69 to 0.84 for college going boys. There was a modest correlation between all the dimensions of the inventory which is evidence of its internal consistency. The questionnaire was also correlated with Sen's Original Personality Trait Inventory and the coefficient of correlation ranged from 0.66 to 0.84.

Shapiro-Wilk Normality test was used to determine that the data distribution showed a significant departure from normality ($W(648) = .97$, $p < .001$). Correlation analyses including Pearson r and Spearman rho correlations were then run between number of languages spoken by the participants and their scores on the dimensions measured by the DPI, viz. Activity-Passivity, Enthusiastic, Non-Enthusiastic, Assertive-Submissive, Suspicious-Trusting, Depressive-Non-depressive, Emotional-Instability-Emotional-Stability.

Scores on Activity, Enthusiasm, and Assertiveness showed a statistically insignificant relationship with the number of languages. However, the correlations for Suspiciousness, Depression and Emotional instability were found to be statistically significant as indicated under.

Table 1.1 The correlational coefficients between the six dimensions on the DPI and the number of languages spoken.

	Activity-Passivity	**Enthusiastic-Non enthusiastic**	**Assertive-Submissive**	**Suspicious-Trusting**	**Depressive-Non depressive**	**Emotional instability-stability**
Pearson r	0.15787	-0.1001	-0.1028	-0.51645	-0.3302	-0.29328
Spearman rho	0.12013	-0.04737	-0.1017	-0.57607	-0.41533	-0.36388

Further analysis indicated a possible interaction effect between age, gender, and bilingualism/multilingualism on scores of Activity, Enthusiasm, and Assertiveness. The two-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant interaction effect between these factors.

Table 1.2 Anova: Two-Factor with Replication

ANOVA						
Source of Variation	***SS***	***Df***	***MS***	***F***	***P-value***	***F crit***
Sample	6.890741	1	6.890741	0.903747	0.342212	3.859064
Columns	17557.38	4	4389.344	575.6794	2.7E-191	2.388753
Interaction	91.45185	4	22.86296	2.998566	0.018244	2.388753
Within	4041.056	530	7.624633			
Total	21696.78	539				

The interaction effect is illustrated graphically below.
Thus, there is a significant relationship between the level of multilingualism and the scores on personality factors of Suspiciousness, Depression, and Emotional instability of Indian Young Adults. Thus, personality and multilingualism are related to each other even when multilingualism is so widespread. But this relationship is true for only some factors and cannot be generalized to the overall personality as no relationships were found between Activity, Enthusiasm, Assertiveness and the level of Multilingualism.

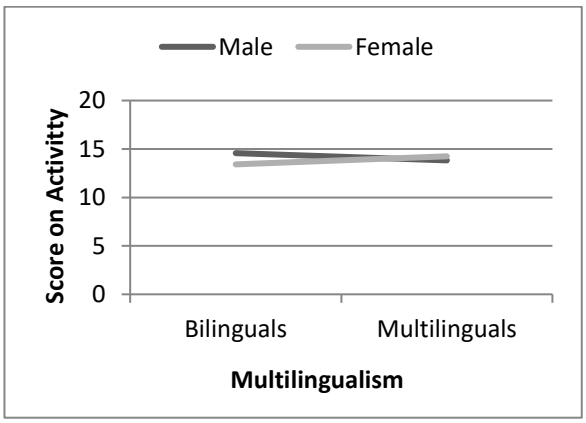

Figure 1.1 Interaction effect between Gender and Bilingualism/Multilingualism on Activity

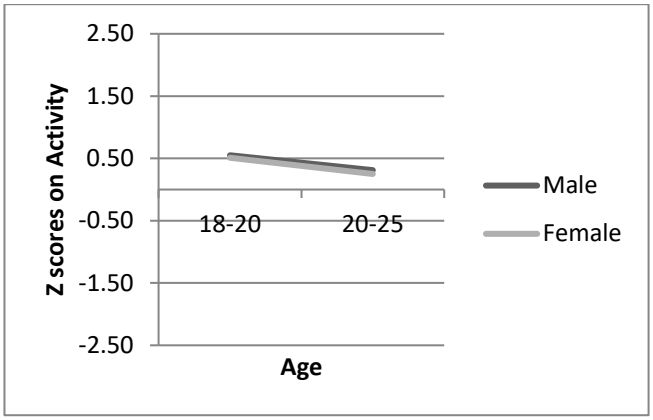

Figure 1.2 Interaction effect between Age and Bilingualism/Multilingualism on Activity

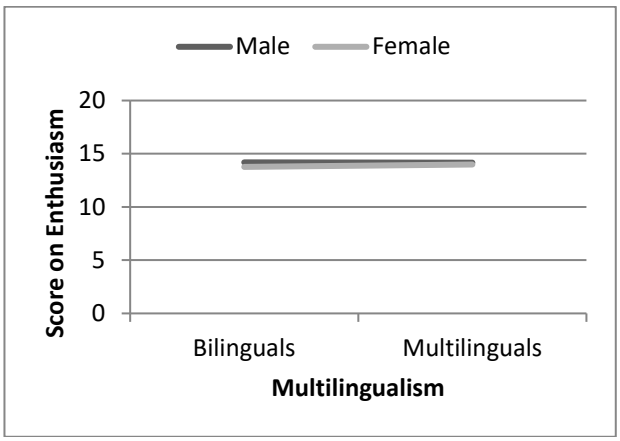

Figure 1.3 Interaction effect between Gender and Bilingualism/Multilingualism on Enthusiasm

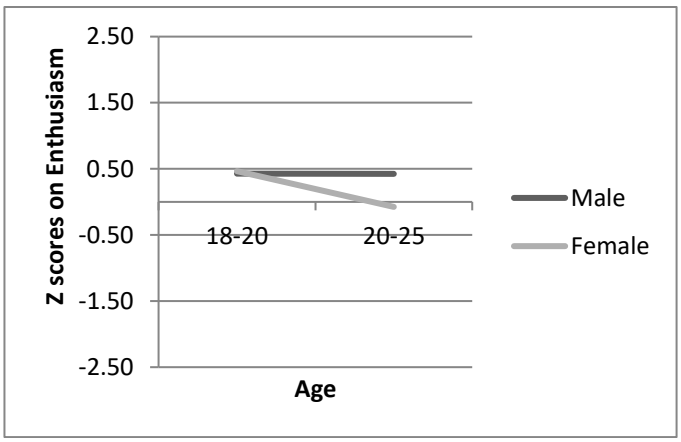

Figure 1.4 Interaction effect between Age and Bilingualism/Multilingualism on Enthusiasm

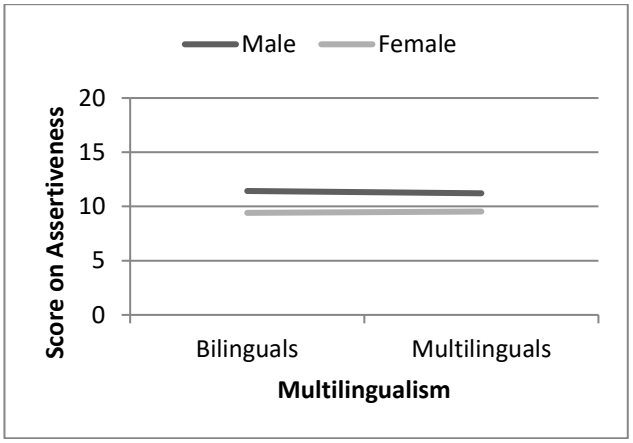

Figure 1.5 Interaction effect between Gender and Bilingualism/Multilingualism on Assertiveness

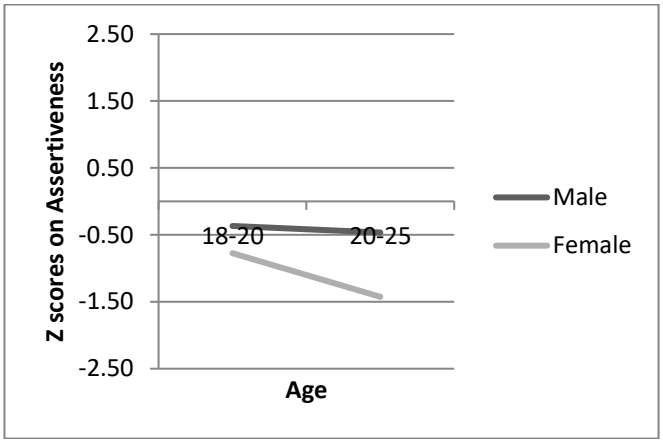

Figure 1.6 Interaction effect between Age and Bilingualism/Multilingualism on Assertiveness

DISCUSSION

The Shapiro-Wilk test found the data to be skewed and thus, Spearman's rho correlations are more appropriate for use. The correlational analysis revealed statistically significant negative relationships between the number of languages spoken by the young adults and their scores on the traits of Suspiciousness, Depression, and Emotional instability.

The strongest correlation was for the scores on Suspiciousness (ρ = *-0.58*) which implies that as the number of languages spoken by an individual increases, his/her score on Suspiciousness decreases. There was also a negative correlation found for the Depression dimension (ρ = *-0.36*) which means that people who spoke more languages tended to score less on the Depression scale. The correlational coefficient for Emotional instability *(ρ = -0.42*) was also negative, meaning that people who spoke more languages scored lesser on emotional instability.

It is also worth noting that the traits of emotional instability and depression are related (r = *0.742*). People with high scores on emotional instability have high scores on depression i.e. emotionally instable people are more likely to show depressive symptoms. Thus, the two factors show similar correlations with the number of languages spoken. A person who

speaks more languages scores lower on depression and emotional instability. This finding has important implications for the education sector, as it shows a possibility that teaching children more languages could have an effect on their levels of depression and emotional instability. However, the study does not establish causality so it cannot be said whether multilingualism is decreasing depression and emotional instability, or if emotional stable people with less depressive symptoms tend to learn more languages or a third variable causes both.

There were no statistically significant correlations found in the scores of Indian young adults on Activity-Passivity ($\rho = 0.12$), Enthusiastic-Non enthusiastic ($\rho = -0.05$), and Assertive-Submissive ($\rho = -0.10$) tested by the DPI and the number of languages spoken by them. This suggests that multilingualism is not as strong a predictor of personality factors of Activity, Enthusiasm, and Assertiveness for young adults in the Indian population.

The interaction effect found in the graphical and ANOVA analysis suggests that the scores on the personality factors of Activity, Enthusiasm, and Assertiveness on the DPI differed on the basis of one's gender, age, and multi/bilingualism and thus, cannot be predicted by bilingualism/multilingualism alone. This interaction effect also explained the lack of any statistically significant correlations between these variables. Thus, Activity, Enthusiasm, and Assertiveness are related to the gender, age, and bilingualism or multilingualism. None of these factors can, in isolation, predict personality completely.

There are numerous limitations of the study, however, including the sample size which may not be suitable for generalization. This study represents an attempt to discover possible relationships for further investigation and thus, its findings are plausible at best and must be treated in the same manner. Further research is needed to identify more personality factors that may be related to multilingualism. These researches should make use of larger samples and more comprehensive measurements to enable generalization.

CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed statistically significant relationships between the number of languages and scores on Suspiciousness, Depression, and Emotional instability. No statistically significant correlations were found between the number of languages and Activity, Enthusiasm, or Assertiveness scores. The interaction between age, gender, and number of languages was found to be more influential than these factors alone. Thus, the study provided evidence that some personality factors were related to the level of multilingualism in Indian young adults.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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