



Endangered Kashmiri Language: Threat to Kashmiri Identity

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Abstract

This paper examines the endangerment of the Kashmiri language in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). The primary objective of the study was to identify the key factors contributing to the endangerment of the Kashmiri language in Muzaffarabad, AJK. A quantitative research design was employed within the positivist tradition, using a cross-sectional research method. The study was conducted in Khawaja Mohalla, Muzaffarabad, a predominantly native Kashmiri-speaking

community. A sample of 400 respondents was selected using the Taro Yamane formula, with participants chosen through purposive sampling. We collected data via a questionnaire and analysed it through SPSS. The overall conclusion we have drawn from the study is that the Kashmiri language is endangered due to several factors. To prevent further endangerment, several measures need to be taken immediately. One significant issue identified is the failure of elders to fulfill their role in preserving and passing down the language to younger generations, leading to reduced motivation among youth to learn their mother tongue. We substantiate the social identity theory that the Kashmiri language becomes marginalized, leading to identity endangerment. This is best understood as a process that threatens both individual and collective identity. To safeguard the language, authorities must include Kashmiri literature in school curricula.

Keywords: Language, Endangerment, Kashmir, Generations, Social Identity.

Introduction

Research on language identity, diversity, extinction, and endangerment has been conducted worldwide, highlighting the great tragedy of language loss for human culture across societies^{1,2,3}. These

¹ K. U. Luwum Street, *A Right to Protect Indigenous Languages: A Threat Against Extinction* (2023).

² S. O'Neill, "Extinctions: Language Death, Intangible Cultural Heritage, and Early 21st-Century Renewal Efforts," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication* (2025).

³ Suzanne Romaine, "The Global Extinction of Languages and Its Consequences for Cultural Diversity," in *Cultural and Linguistic Minorities in the Russian*

studies revealed that globalization has negatively impacted language diversity, leading to the endangerment of many languages. Besides, they emphasized the preservation of language identity through intergenerational transmission. Failure to pass down a language to younger generations often results in its endangerment and, hence, extinction⁴. A similar trend has been observed in developing countries^{5,6}, including Pakistan⁷, where languages under the influence of modernity are increasingly endangered due to multiple factors. One of the major issues that contribute to the language endangerment is negligence of elderly people in transcending their native language to next generations⁸. Likewise, native communities are merely engaging with government/authorities to protect and preserve this language heritage through literature as well as educational initiatives at all the level of school, college, and university^{9,10}. Moreover, researchers,

Federation and the European Union: Comparative Studies on Equality and Diversity (2015), 31–46.

⁴ M. Khawaja, “Consequences and Remedies of Indigenous Language Loss in Canada,” *Societies* 11, no. 3 (2021): 89.

⁵ H. Atifnigar, M. Safari, and A. Rafat, “Exploring the Causes of Language Death: A Review Paper,” *International Journal of Arts and Social Science* 4, no. 4 (2021): 180–186.

⁶ John Orman, “Linguistic Diversity and Language Loss: A View from Integrational Linguistics,” *Language Sciences* 40 (2013): 1–11.

⁷ A. Hameed, “Mother, Mother Tongue, and Language Endangerment Process: An Exploratory Study,” *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 12, no. 4 (2022): 726–735.

⁸ Barbra A. Meek, “Language Endangerment in Childhood,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 48, no. 1 (2019): 95–115.

⁹ Sarah G. Thomason, *Endangered Languages: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

¹⁰ Stephen R. Anderson, *Languages: A Very Short Introduction*, vol. 320 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

scholars, and academicians have ignored this important issue of language preservation through curriculum¹¹. Similarly, the exclusion of the Kashmiri language from curriculum is another alarming threat contributing to endangerment¹². Additionally, the lack of interest in research from native speakers on the language preservation further adds to the language loss¹³.

In subcontinent, the Kashmiri language is one of the oldest languages that has a great rich literary tradition spanned over centuries¹⁴. However, following the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, the State of Jammu and Kashmir was divided into two parts, with the smaller part administered by Pakistan, known as Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). This smaller part is rich in language diversity, while Kashmiri is predominantly spoken in a few districts, including Neelum, Haveli, Hatian, and Muzaffarabad. Kashmiri-speaking people speak several local languages in addition to their mother tongue¹⁵. This is due to their small population living within a

¹¹ Friederike Lüpke, "Language Endangerment and Language Documentation in Africa," in *The Cambridge Handbook of African Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 468–490.

¹² Jenny L. Davis, "Resisting Rhetorics of Language Endangerment: Reclamation through Indigenous Language Survivance," *Language Documentation and Description* 14 (2017).

¹³ Bernard C. Perley, *Defying Maliseet Language Death: Emergent Vitalities of Language, Culture, and Identity in Eastern Canada* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011).

¹⁴ Braj B. Kachru, "The Dying Linguistic Heritage of the Kashmiris: Kashmiri Literary Culture and Language," in A. Rao, *The Valley of Kashmir* (2008), 303–338.

¹⁵ S. Amir, "Language Shift from the Kashmiri Language to the Urdu Language: Investigation of Factors in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan," *Psocialsciences* 4, no. 1 (2024): 1–16.

dominant culture, influencing language usage¹⁶. Kashmiri is primarily spoken by the native communities, while minimal efforts have been made to preserve the language and pass it on to the younger generations¹⁷. Snedden, in his recent study on the significance of Kashmir and Kashmiri Identity, found several factors that vividly contribute to the endangerment of the Kashmiri language and identity¹⁸. He argued, although the community speaks their native language at home to maintain their identity, their interactions are increasingly influenced by other local languages. He further stated that families in general and youth in particular often switch between languages such as Urdu, English, Hindko, and Pahari, rather than communicating in their mother tongue. Thus, youth have less interest in learning or speaking their mother tongue. Despite having a rich body of literature, unfortunately, Kashmiri is not taught at any educational level within the state^{16,17}. They further uncovered that neither the Kashmiri community nor the government has taken substantial measures to prevent the language loss so far.

Owing to the scarcity of literature coupled with our experiences, it is evident that the Kashmiri language is endangered in Muzaffarabad.

¹⁶ U. Nisar, "Language an Identity Viz-a-Viz Kashmiri Language: Challenges in the Changing Scenario," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Linguistics* 14 (2021): 171–178.

¹⁷ A. Murad, "Exploring Language Attitudes through Matched Guise Technique: A Case of Young Kashmiris of Azad Jammu & Kashmir," *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research* 6, no. 1 (2023): 1–18.

¹⁸ Christopher Snedden, "*The Significance of Kashmir and Kashmiri Identity in J&K*," in *Independent Kashmir* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 93–136.

Furthermore, there is a lack of significant academic research on this issue, with only a few research articles and seminar minutes published in newspaper articles. Thus, we examined endangerment of the Kashmiri language in AJK.

Literature Review

A substantial body of literature has been conducted on the relationship between identity, culture, and language across the globe^{19,20,21}. These studies highlighted that language is a primary source of transmitting cultural values and norms. It is also argued that language plays a crucial role in integrating individuals into social communities, fostering harmony, and promoting a sense of belonging. They further stated that language and culture are intrinsically linked, and the death of a language is often a sign of the disappearance of the associated culture. Language also plays a vital role in shaping identities, fostering a diverse environment, and preserving cultural heritage^{22,23}.

¹⁹ J. Carjuzaa, "Revitalizing Indigenous Languages, Cultures, and Histories in Montana, across the United States and around the Globe," *Cogent Education* 4, no. 1 (2017): 1371822.

²⁰ A. Dega, "Language Endangerment: Globalisation and the Fate of Minority Languages in Nigeria," *Language Endangerment: Globalization & the Fate of Minority Languages in Nigeria* 12 (2015): 17–28.

²¹ S. Drude, J. Birchall, A. V. Galucio, D. Moore, and H. van der Voort, "Endangered Languages in Brazil in 2021," in *Endangered Languages in the 21st Century* (London: Routledge, 2023), 21–40.

²² S. O'Neill, "Language Endangerment and Renewal," in *A New Companion to Linguistic Anthropology* (2023), 49–65.

²³ R. Elliott, "Language Revitalization as a Plurilingual Endeavour," in *The Routledge Handbook of Plurilingual Language Education* (London: Routledge, 2021), 435–448.

Thus, to maintain cultural identity, it is essential to keep languages alive. Unfortunately, many languages are either endangered or facing extinction²⁴.

Over the past few decades, extensive research has focused on the preservation of endangered languages^{25,26}. Among various contributing factors, they identified globalization as one of the significant threats to language use across societies. Currently, there are approximately 7,000 languages spoken worldwide, with one language disappearing every ten days²⁷. This means that languages are constantly dying out across the globe.²⁸ People use about 6,000 languages worldwide, and half of these languages are at risk of becoming endangered or extinct in many regions of the world²⁹. Both man-made and natural phenomena contribute to the endangerment and extinction of languages³⁰. Similarly, societal and cultural trends,

²⁴ Leanne Hinton, *Bringing Our Languages Home: Language Revitalization for Families* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday, 2013).

²⁵ Lyle Campbell and Anna Belew, "Introduction: Why Catalogue Endangered Languages?" in *Cataloguing the World's Endangered Languages* (London: Routledge, 2018), 1–14.

²⁶ Luna Filipović and Martin Pütz, "Introduction: Endangered Languages and Languages in Danger," in *Endangered Languages and Languages in Danger: Issues of Documentation, Policy, and Language Rights* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2016), 1–22.

²⁷ K. David Harrison, *When Languages Die: The Extinction of the World's Languages and the Erosion of Human Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

²⁸ William R. Leben, "Languages of the World," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Linguistics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

²⁹ Stephen A. Wurm, *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger of Disappearing* (Paris: UNESCO, 2001).

³⁰ Christopher Moseley, *Encyclopedia of the World's Endangered Languages* (London: Routledge, 2008).

migration, intermarriage, and attitudes toward a language are also identified as significant factors in language endangerment³¹. However, the primary cause is the neglect of the older generation in passing the language down to the younger generation³². Additionally, the lack of interest by the younger generation in learning and preserving their mother tongue further accelerates the endangerment process³³. Research indicates that 50% (approximately 3,000) of the currently spoken languages are at risk of extinction³⁴.

The situation in Pakistan also reflects this global trend. As mentioned earlier, nearly 70 languages spoken in Pakistan are listed on the Ethnologue list, and most of these languages are at risk of extinction³⁵. In the coming decades, a significant number of these endangered languages will become extinct³. The intergenerational transmission of languages, with the younger generation showing less interest in learning and speaking their native tongues²⁷. Language identity, however, may be maintained through various means, with

³¹ Peter Mühlhäusler, "Causes of Language Death," in *Questioning Causality: Scientific Explorations of Cause and Consequence across Social Contexts* (2016), 139–152.

³² M. Hendrix, *Language and the Resilience of Knowledge* (2025).

³³ C. E. C. Ogwudile, "An Exploratory Study of Mother Tongue and Language Endangerment Process," *Journal of Modern European Languages and Literatures* 18, no. 2 (2024): 26–36.

³⁴ Tatsuya Amano et al., "Global Distribution and Drivers of Language Extinction Risk," *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 281, no. 1793 (2014): 20141574.

³⁵ M. T. Khan, A. A. Humayun, M. Sajjad, and N. A. Khan, "Languages in Danger of Death and Their Relation with Globalization, Business and Economy," *International Journal of Information, Business and Management* 7, no. 2 (2015): 239.

the role of parents being particularly significant in the process of socialization^{26,7}. Furthermore, the home environment plays a crucial role in encouraging the use of the mother tongue¹⁴.

Theoretical Framework

This study employed the social identity theory³⁶ to analyses the relationship between the endangered Kashmiri language and the perceived threat to Kashmiri identity. Social Identity Theory posits that individuals derive a significant part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups, with language serving as a primary marker of group belonging. The Kashmiri language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a symbol of cultural distinctiveness, shared history, and collective identity. The youth having less interest in use of language weakened the community cohesion that is important to sustain the cultural pride, stability, and solidarity. Like other dominated languages gained prestige and utility while Kashmiri language is becoming marginalized by ever passing day. This marginalization may lead to the identity as well as cultural loss. Thus, language endangerment in Kashmir is best understood as a process that threatens both individual and collective identity.

Conceptual Framework

The following conceptual framework was developed to understand the factors contributing to the endangerment of the Kashmiri

³⁶ Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict," in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. William G. Austin and Stephen Worchel (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1979), 33–47.

language. A hypothesis was formulated and tested to explore the following factors given in the table.

Hypothesis

There is an association between speaking the Kashmiri language and downfall, curricula, modernization, globalization, children’s reaction, public places, the role of elders, community, and youth.

Dependent variable	Independent variables
Speaking Kashmiri Language	Down fall
	Curricula
	Modernization
	Globalization
	Children’s reaction
	Native people’s role
	Role of youth
	Role of elderly people
	Public places

Methodology

We conducted this study while using epistemological cannons within the positivist tradition. We adopted a quantitative research design and employed a cross-sectional research method. The primary objective of the study was to identify the key factors responsible for the endangerment of the Kashmiri language among native speakers in Muzaffarabad. We conducted this study in Khawaja Mohalla due to the predominance of the Kashmiri-speaking community, who speak the Kashmiri language for generations. This Mohalla is expanded over three wards comprising a total approximate population of N=41000. We determined a sample of n=400 respondents from the

total population by using the Taro Yamane formula, with purposive sampling employed to collect the data. The respondents were selected at household level, i.e. parents or guardian [mother, father, and uncle]. A well-structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. Cronbach Alpha was employed to check the reliability of the questionnaire which ranged from 0.74 to 0.91, and mean reliability coefficient was 0.86. A hypothesis was developed and tested to determine the association of the variables in identifying the contributing factors of language endangerment. We analysed the data by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). We employed Chi-square test and examined the association among variables.

Key Findings

The results from the analysis are presented and discussed in the following sections. In section one, demographic characteristics of the respondents are tabulated and presented, while the main factors of language endangerment are also tabulated. In the second section, results of hypothesis testing are tabulated and interpreted.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents.

Variables	f (%)	Variables	f (%)
Gender		Qualification	
Male	182 (45.5)	Illiterate	020 (5)
Female	218 (54.5)	Up to Matric	95 (24)
Age		Intermediate	085 (22)
20-30 Years	079 (19.7)	Bachelor and Masters	200 (50)
31-41 Years	140 (35.1)	Profession	

>42 Years	181 (45.2)	Teachers	081 (20.3)
Language Spoken		Doctor	016 (04.0)
Fluently	260 (65.0)	Businessman	124 (31.1)
Partially	140 (35.0)	Govt. Employee	026 (06.5)
		Housewives	153 (38.3)

Table I presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The gender distribution was determined at the household level, with 45.5 percent of the respondents being men and 54.5 percent women. The age distribution varied, with 19.7 percent of respondents aged between 20-30 years, 35 percent between 31-40 years, and a larger proportion, 45.2 percent, aged 41 years and above. Regarding language proficiency, 65 percent of respondents reported speaking Kashmiri fluently, while 35 percent spoke it partially. The educational qualifications of the respondents were as follows: 5 percent were illiterate, 24 percent had completed matriculation, 22 percent had completed intermediate education, and 50 percent had 14 years of education or more. In terms of occupation, 20.3 percent were teachers (including school, college, and university teachers), 4 percent were doctors, 31 percent were businessmen, 6.5 percent were government employees, and 38.3 percent were housewives (among the female respondents).

Table 2

Main Factors of Language Endangerment.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Speak Kashmiri	259	64.8
Family speaks Kashmiri	201	50.0
Parents speak with children	235	58.8
Children's response	225	56.3

Children speak Kashmiri	175	43.7
Parents encourage children	272	68.0
Speak Kashmiri in public places	226	56.5
Speak Kashmiri at home	361	90.3
Speak Kashmiri with the new generation	286	71.5
Children's response to mother tongue	152	38.0
Attitude of children towards language	135	33.7
Effects of modernization	214	53.5
Effects of globalization	277	69.3
Unavailability of literature	288	72.0
Curricula	176	44.0
Elders are responsible for the downfall	180	45.0

Table 2 presents the responses of the participants regarding the use of their mother tongue. Among the 400 respondents, 64.8 percent reported speaking the Kashmiri language with their children at home, indicating that approximately 50 percent of family members either speak or attempt to speak Kashmiri. Furthermore, 58.8 percent of parents communicate with their children in their mother tongue, although 56.3 percent of children respond partially, and 43.7 percent attempt to speak the language fluently. Additionally, 68 percent of parents actively encourage their children to speak Kashmiri. The study also found that 56.5 percent of parents speak Kashmiri in public places with their family members, while 90 percent do so within the home. About 71 percent of parents frequently engage with the younger generation in their native language. Regarding parental emphasis, 55.8 percent of parents encourage their children to speak

their mother tongue, though only 38 percent of children respond, and that response is typically partial. This suggests that 33.7 percent of children have a positive response towards learning their mother tongue, while 53.5 percent consider the effect of modernization. In addition, the impact of globalization on the Kashmiri language is 69.3 percent, where parents identified modernization as a key factor contributing to the younger generation’s neglect of their mother tongue. The lack of available literature for children was also cited as a contributing factor, with 72 percent of parents agreeing on this issue. In response, 44 percent of parents recommended incorporating Kashmiri literature into the school and college curriculum to help preserve the language. Moreover, 45 percent of parents believe that the elderly play a crucial role in the decline of the language, as it is not sufficiently reinforced at home.

Hypothesis Testing: The following hypothesis was tested by employing the chi-square test.

There is an association between speaking the Kashmiri language and downfall, curricula, modernization, globalization, children’s reaction, public places, the role of elders, community, and youth.

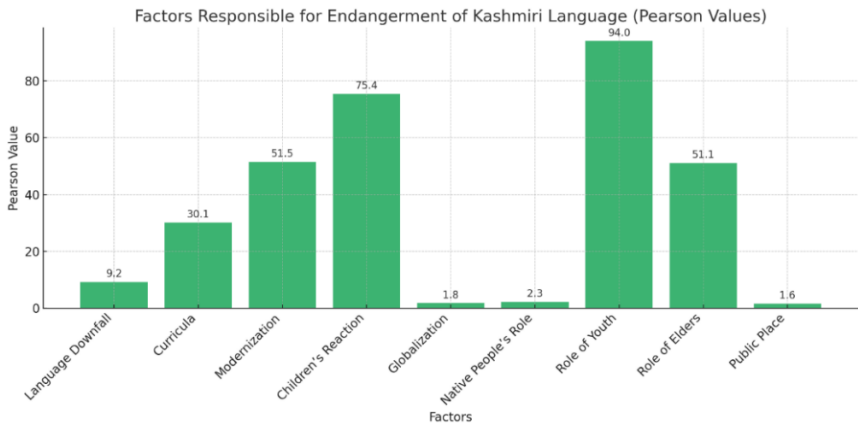
Table 3
Chi-Square distribution of factors responsible for endangerment of the Kashmiri language.

Speaking Kashmiri	Pearson Value	df	P-Value
Language downfall	9.241	1	0.002
Curricula	30.143	1	0.000

Modernization	51.501	1	0.000
Children’s reaction	75.420	3	0.000
Globalization	1.796	1	0.000
Native people’s role	2.251	1	0.000
Role of youth	93.984	1	0.000
Role of Elders	51.056	1	0.000
Public place	1.640	1	0.000

Table 3 shows the Chi-square results examining whether various sociocultural factors are significantly associated with speaking the Kashmiri language. The findings indicate that all factors have p-values below 0.05, demonstrating statistically significant relationships. This means that each factor meaningfully contributes to the endangerment of the Kashmiri language. Factors such as curricula (p = 0.000), modernization (p = 0.000), children’s reactions (p = 0.000), role of youth (p = 0.000), and role of elders (p = 0.000) show very strong significance, suggesting that educational policies, generational shifts, and social attitudes play a major role in reduced Kashmiri language use. Even factors with smaller Pearson values such as globalization (p = 0.000), native people’s role (p = 0.000), and public place usage (p = 0.000) are still statistically significant, highlighting that broader global and community-level dynamics also influence language decline. Overall, the consistent significance across all factors indicates that the endangerment of Kashmiri is driven by a combination of educational, cultural, generational, and societal

pressures.



Discussion

Past studies have shed light on the various factors of language endangerment across societies^{19,20,21}. These studies included factors of native's failure to speak mother tongue by either both or one of them, that reduced the probability of children's learning and speaking of their mother tongue⁸. We found similar findings identified by the several researchers that parents do not intend to speak their mother tongue with their children. This shows that family members take less interest to speak their language with their young ones-reduce the chances of the learning language by the children. While we also found, although parents and elders try to speak language to their children, but they either partially respond or show no intention towards it. This further worsen the situation where children find no interest towards seeking their mother tongue. Thus, we argue that such negligence of children is one of the major factors that contribute to the endangerment of language²². Resultantly, this language is

confined to the few communities in the region where it is also spoken with some other local languages²³. Here we assert that the Kashmiri language is restricted to certain area due to the negligence of youth who are more interested in speaking other local language which affect the cultural values as well as the identity of the language.

Research also spotlighted the important role of elderly people in transmission of language to younger generations^{25,26}. Although elders significantly contributed to the transformation of cultural values and preservation of language heritage. However, youth has been found inclined towards the other language spoken in the region. This may be due to the influence of globalization. By the same token, we found that elders try to put their efforts to socialize their younger generations in speaking their mother tongue and they also try to realize them as a responsibility. Nonetheless, we found the youth is under the great influence of globalization that lessens their interest in learning and hence speaking their mother tongue despite efforts of older generation²⁷. Moreover, due to modernization, youth is under the heavy influence of external cultures⁷.

Cultural diversity is also one of the key factors that affects the attitudes of the youth. Research shows that as due to modernization, youth is under the influence of dominant cultures that further shape their attitudes towards their own culture and language^{26,27}. Similarly, we also found tendency of youth towards the dominant cultures which affect the cultural heritage of their own culture and language. We also identified another important dimension that lack of literature in

Kashmiri language further exacerbates the situation while community member and educational institutions do not take their responsibility to ensure the inclusion of literature at any stage of school, college, and university.

It is asserted that language has a key role in forming, protecting, and expressing cultural and ethnic identities³². It is a main source to transmit socio-cultural values and preserve cultural heritage²⁴. It is also argued that languages although evolve over centuries, however, endanger or die more rapidly²⁸. We observed shift in intergenerational communication where dominant languages replace mother tongues, Likewise, we found similar challenges faced by Kashmiri language. This may be due to several reasons including negligence of speakers and authorities to contribute and keep alive the language.

Social Identity Theory³⁶ gives insight into understanding the causes of the endangerment of the Kashmiri language and its implications of identity. It emphasized the individuals must sense their belongings towards the language and culture because that is their identity. This also serves their ingroup insignia and marker of their group identity. We also agree that youth must realise their responsibilities towards their ingroup to protect and preserve their cultural heritage. While parents and elders need to play an effective role to develop a sense of responsibility among youth to respond their mother tongue and keep alive their identity. It is argued that disengaging from being part of the cultural and language transmission pose great threat to the identity of group. This will further weaken the bond of youth with their

culture and language and distance them from symbolic boundaries of cultural identity.

The group cohesion requires the effective role of elders to promote their language and motivate the youth to hold their cultural and language heritage strongly. However, youth under the influence of globalization and modernization are leaned towards the dominant and popular cultures that directly affect their cultural identity and weaken their language bonding. According to Social Identity Theory, we believe in line with the findings of this study that youth is highly influenced by the dominant culture to hold higher standards of prestige and status through the language dominance as a major source. While lack of literature further worsens the use of language diminishing its symbolic capital and weakens its role in shaping identity.

Conclusion

We found that the Kashmiri language faced significant threats of endangerment owing to the several factors. These include weak socialization patterns, where parents and elders failed to pass down the language patterns to youth, is a primary contributor. Similarly, parents although make their efforts to speak with youth at home and in other settings, however influence of modernization led towards lack of seriousness by youth regarding their mother tongue. Additionally, the absence of Kashmiri literature in educational institutions, further contributed to its endangerment. We consider that

the role of parents and elders is also crucial while their engagement is vital for preserving the language heritage. We substantiate the social identity theory that the Kashmiri language becomes marginalized, leading to identity endangerment. This is best understood as a process that threatens both individual and collective identity. To combat these issues, authorities must take necessary steps to integrate Kashmiri language literature into school curricula, starting from an early stage in education. We recommend that a dedicated Kashmiri language subject be introduced in the syllabus from grades 1 to 8 to help preserve this linguistic heritage and ensure the continued survival of the Kashmiri language.
