



Public Perceptions Of The Mandatory 60% Kannada Language Signage Law In Bengaluru, India

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Abstract - This paper provides insights into the public perception of the recent 60% Kannada signage law in Bengaluru, a city in southern India. Kannada is the official language of Karnataka, the state where Bengaluru, the fastest-growing metropolis of India is located.

The creation of India from sovereign states involved the reorganization of territories along linguistic lines resulting in formation of Karnataka, with a majority of Kannada speakers. However, with the rising influx of working population from other cities, Bangalore is now linguistically diverse.

The recent signage law, implemented in Karnataka, mandates that all commercial establishments must display their signs with at least 60% of the text in Kannada to reflect the regional linguistic identity. The remaining 40% of the signage can be in English or any other language, allowing for inclusivity and understanding by non-Kannada speakers.

To better answer the question of how this law impacts the diverse Bengaluru community, the paper addresses the history of Karnataka, Kannada, language imposition, contributing events leading up to this law and signage regulations in other states.

Data interpretation of directly collected public responses highlights demographic disparities in opinion, and trace the commonalities of certain variables, further contributing to the objective of this paper.

BACKGROUND

Kannada is one of the twenty-two official languages of India (also known as "Scheduled Languages") which means it is acknowledged to have a special status and representation in the Official Languages Commission of India. Hindi is the official language of the Union Government of India while English serves as a subsidiary official language, almost a neutral link language across a linguistically diverse nation with hundreds of languages and dialects.

Having existed for over two thousand years, Kannada originally belongs to the Dravidian family of languages. Its historical roots can be traced back to records dating as far back as the exploits of Alexander the Great in the 3rd century

BC. Since then, Kannada has undergone significant changes, influenced by Sanskrit and Prakrit.

Ancient Indian dynasties such as the Rashtrakuta, Chalukya, Hoysala, and Vijayanagara empires spoke different versions of Kannada. The Halmidi inscription, dating to 450 A.D., serves as the earliest evidence of the Kannada script. This inscription suggests a highly developed literary form, originally deriving from the southern Ashokan Brahmi varieties. The script, possessing quite mature phrases, suggests that Kannada was an advanced literary language by that point, however the lack of any previous evidence makes tracing this development difficult.

The earliest available literary work in Kannada is "Kavirajamarga" by King Nrupatunga, written in the ninth century A.D. Seemingly a romantic poem toward Nripatunga's patron, this work reveals that Kannada had noticeably developed by the ninth century. The roots of the word "Karnataka" come from mention in previous literary texts, such as the Kavirajamarga, which refers to the land from Cauvery to Godavari rivers where Kannada is spoken as "Kannada Desha" i.e. Kannada nation. This makes Karnataka one of the earliest instances of defining a land in terms of a language spoken by its people, and hence, enhances the state's rich literary and linguistic based history. ¹

Kannada language and the signage law are all deeply connected to Karnataka's rich linguistic heritage, which is also the reason for Karnataka's formation. The movement for the unification of Kannada-speaking regions began in Dharwad with the Karnataka Vidyavardhaka Sangha in 1912, when the first resolution calling for the merger of Kannada-speaking areas was passed. This movement intended to bring together all Kannada-speaking regions under one administrative unit, reflecting a merger of language and culture.

The support for this union increased significantly in 1928, when the Indian National Congress (INC), the oldest political party of India decided to form a constitution for India. Powerful political figures such as N.S. Hardikar and Ranganath Diwakar played pivotal roles in this movement, collecting over thirty-six thousand signatures supporting the union of Kannada-speaking regions into a single state. This



overwhelming support served as a symbol of the common desire for linguistic unity among the Kannada-speaking population, as well as other Indian regions.

Post India's independence from the British in 1947, on November 1, 1956, the state of Mysore was established. This state brought districts from the former Bombay and Hyderabad states, a district and sub-districts of the Old Madras state, the state of Coorg, and the princely state of Mysore all under one administrative unit. The merger of these regions marked a significant milestone in the history of Karnataka, as it created a state with a strong cultural and linguistic identity. In 1973, the state of Mysore was renamed Karnataka to better reflect the identity of the region. This further established the significance of language in defining the character of a region.²

Despite such a deeply rooted history, Kannada usage in modernized Karnataka cities has significantly decreased over time, especially its capital, Bengaluru, where English influence dissolves Kannada, as a result of the city's Information Technology based economy and the influx of people from different linguistic backgrounds. As per the most recent census conducted in 2011, Bengaluru has a Kannada-speaking population of about 45%.³

The arrival of English in Karnataka can be traced back to the nineteenth century when Christian missionaries introduced the language⁴. Since then, English has become a fundamental part of education and business operations in Bengaluru. According to The India Skills Report released on December 19, 2023, Bengaluru's proficiency in English skills is at 73.33%⁵. This high proficiency level indicates the widespread adoption of English in various spheres of life, particularly in education and employment.

Since the academic year of 2007, English has been a mandatory subject from Class I onwards in all government-aided and unaided Kannada medium schools⁶. This policy has further accelerated the adoption of English among the newer generations but may have also created challenges for the preservation and promotion of the Kannada language.

Over the past few decades, the Karnataka and Bengaluru governments have implemented various strategies. However, with a diverse population and the growing prominence of English, decisions favoring one language often created friction among communities and led to public resistance. The recent initiative to promote Kannada was the 60% signage law, mandating that all commercial establishments, including shops, offices, and businesses, must display their signs with at least 60% of the text in Kannada. This law reinforces the idea

that Kannada is a vital part of Karnataka's heritage and is still superior to languages such as Hindi and English.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Kannada had always been a required part of signage for establishments, as stated in Rule 24 A (introduced in 1985) of the Karnataka Shops and Commercial Establishments Rule of 1963⁷-

The name board of every establishment shall be in Kannada and wherever other languages are also used, the versions in such other languages shall be below the Kannada version. The name board in the Kannada version shall be written more predominantly by providing more space than for other languages, if any. Whoever contravenes Rule 24-A shall on conviction, be punishable with fine of ten thousand rupees and for each continued offence be punishable with fine which shall not be less than ten thousand rupees.

Considering the meaningful population of the non-Kannada speaking community of Karnataka, these laws faced resistance and were deemed unfair by many. In 2001, Laxman Omanna Bhamane, a commissioner agent working in the city of Belgaum (part of Karnataka but bordering Maharashtra) contested against Rule 24A⁸. He stated that most of his clients are Marathi-speaking (the official language of Maharashtra), and requiring his shop signboard to be in Kannada would hinder customer recognition and impact his business. Bhamane also argued that since Marathi speakers constitute less than 15% of Belgaum's community, Article 29 of the Indian Constitution, which protects minority rights, should apply. In defense, the Karnataka Local Authorities Act of 1981 was brought up, which states "The official language of all the authorities in the state of Karnataka shall be Kannada" which has a constitutional right under Article 345 of the Indian Constitution. Considering that rule 24-A does not permit the use of Marathi on the signboard, but only



mentions it must be smaller, and below Kannada, it does not come in the way of conserving the language. With this decision, the court ruled that 24-A would be held valid.

In 2009, Vodafone Essar South Limited (part of a global telecom giant corporation) went to court against Rule 24A and 26 of the Karnataka Shops and Commercial Establishments Rule of 1963⁹. Vodafone argued that the cost of changing their signboards to Kannada would be prohibitive, especially since they use the same name in over sixty countries. They claimed the laws requiring Kannada signage were "unconstitutional," citing a loss of rights. The state countered that these laws, which allow other languages alongside Kannada, benefit employees who may not understand other languages. Referring to the case of Laxman Omanna Bhamane vs State of Karnataka and Others, the court decided to uphold the rule that 24-A is not in violation of the Constitution of India. However, this was then decided to be ineffective as the Laxman Omanna Bhamane case was regarding Article 29 of the Constitution and not the present case. Upon consideration of both arguments, the judge ruled in favor of Vodafone, declaring Rules 24-A and 26 as not in consonance with the aims and objects of the Act. In 2014, the state government appealed, but the court found no merit, stating that signage regulations did not affect employee working conditions.

In 2018, the BBMP (Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike) the administrative body responsible for the infrastructural assets and civic amenities of Bengaluru drafted the "BBMP Outdoor Signage and Public Messaging Bye-laws"¹⁰. Section 2.5 of these bye-laws mention that a sign can only make up a maximum of ten units of information. 0.5 respective units for building number, logo, license number, and an acronym. The remaining eight units must be in the ratio of 60% Kannada and 40% any other language, with every two words considered as one unit. Section eight of these bye laws mention that failure to comply or correct would result in the sign being removed 30 days upon notice. During the allocated time for businesses to adjust their signage as per the law, the BBMP reportedly inspected 28,737 sign boards, and found that 18,203 of them did not follow the specifications of the bye-laws¹¹. Furthermore, any new trade license applicants were now required to upload an image of their sign board. In 2019, the RAI, a body of around fourteen thousand retail establishments, filed a writ petition regarding the 60:40 language law, claiming a violation of rights mentioned in Article 345 of the Constitution, and would create a costly and time-consuming process in acquiring new signs. The Karnataka high court issued a stay, restraining the BBMP from sealing any shops and from taking action without timely notice¹². In turn, there were not many changes in signage, and Kannada remained excluded or a minority in many signs.

In 2023, seeing a general decline in the usage of Kannada, the Karnataka government implemented the "Kannada Language Comprehensive Development Act" in an attempt to re-establish its supremacy and tighten up on enforcement. Section 17(6) of this act mentions (6) *The upper half portion of boards displaying the names of Commercial, Industrial and Business Undertakings, Trusts, Counseling Centre's, Hospitals, Laboratories, Amusement Centers and Hotels etc., functioning with the approval and sanction of Government or Local Authorities, shall be in Kannada and lower half can be in any other language.*

Article 17 also mentions laws enforcing use of Kannada in product labels, road and area signs, state government related notifications/applications/pamphlets, projects as well as any articles in connection to the project, and bank communications.¹³

Following the introduction of the Kannada Language Comprehensive Development Act, a faction went around Lavelle Road, MG Road, and Brigade Road, vandalizing and destroying signs which were in primarily English. On Airport Road, one of the major thoroughfares, more than a thousand pro-Kannada activists gathered around to protest, and vandalized signs of large brands such as McDonalds, Third Wave Coffee, and more¹⁴. One of the main locations for protest was the newly opened Phoenix Mall of Asia in North Bengaluru. A senior KRV

(Karnataka Rakshana Vedike i.e. Karnataka Protection Forum is a Pro-Kannada organization) activist explained that the malls' management had served a legal notice regarding the KRV's request for Kannada signage, refusing to do so¹⁵. KRV President Narayana Gowda revealed that the outrage stemmed from the KRV feeling that the Kannada language was being disrespected, as the new act did not require Kannada script to be the majority on signage. He requested that the BBMP mandate majority Kannada signage as mandatory, specifying at least 60%.¹⁶

On January 5, 2024, in response to the recent violence and demands of the KRV, Section 17(6) was approved by the Karnataka Cabinet to be amended to as following:

*The name boards of Commercial, Industrial and Business Undertakings, Trusts, Counseling Centre's, Hospitals, Laboratories, Amusement Centers and Hotels etc., functioning with the approval and sanction of the Government or Local Authorities, shall ensure that their name board displays 60% in Kannada language and Kannada shall be displayed in the upper half of the name board.*¹⁷

Once again, BBMP announced that trade licenses of shops that failed to comply could be suspended¹⁸. Additionally, the



BBMP issued over fifty thousand notices, compared to 2018's 28,737, which successfully led to around forty-eight thousand new legal 60% Kannada signs being erected before the deadline of February 27th.¹⁹

Language disputes in Karnataka have deep roots, starting with the Gokak Agitation in the 1980s, which advocated for Kannada to be the primary language in high schools. Initially, Karnataka's education system (since 1956) included Sanskrit as the first language, Hindi or English as the second, and Kannada as a third optional language. State Chief Minister D. Devaraj Urs switched Kannada to the first and second language groups, but his successor, R. Gundu Rao, reversed this decision in 1980, sparking protests.

A government committee led by Vinayaka Krishna Gokak recommended making Kannada the primary language in high schools, but the government hesitated. Massive protests, supported by locally revered Kannada film star Rajkumar, resulting in seven deaths, forced the government to adopt the recommendations.²⁰ The Gokak agitation marked a significant debate on the role of state languages, setting the stage for later conflicts, including the anti-Urdu riots.

On October 2, 1996, Doordarshan (an autonomous public service broadcaster founded by the Government of India) aired a ten minute Urdu (a recognized minority language by the state and spoken by the city's muslim community) program on Bengaluru Doordarshan during prime time, sparking riots and protests from pro-Kannada groups who clashed with Congress party supporters. Accusations flew that Karnataka Chief Minister Veerappa Moily orchestrated the program as a political manoeuvre to court Muslim votes, which he denied, instead calling it a professional decision.²¹ The unrest, which included stoning cars and burning buses, spread to several areas, resulting in twenty-five deaths and hundreds of injuries within two days. The program was eventually moved to a non-prime time slot and later cancelled,²² reflecting the strong resistance to non-Kannada languages and highlighting ongoing tensions over linguistic identity in Bangalore.

In 2017, Karnataka nationalists KRV demanded the removal of Hindi from signages in Bangalore, with a primary focus on the Bengaluru Metro line. Activists blacked out Hindi signage at almost all the stations in the city²³. Eventually, the government succumbed to the wishes of the KRV, and removed the signs which included Hindi from stations²⁴. A few months later, on Rajyotsava Day, the foundation day of Karnataka, forty-seven KRV members were arrested for destroying English signboards near the bustling commercial street of Brigade Road²⁵.

Karnataka isn't the only state to actively work on preserving and protecting its state language or to experience significant public backlash and unrest over linguistic issues. The anti-Hindi imposition agitations in Tamil Nadu, another southern state of India, are among the earliest examples of such resistance. In 1937, the introduction of compulsory Hindi teaching led to widespread protests by the Justice Party. After three years of demonstrations and resignations, the policy was reversed²⁶. Post-independence, the union government led by the Congress party urged states to make Hindi mandatory. Tamil Nadu complied and made it a minimum qualification for students to continue to the next grade which led to agitations by activists like Periyar and the Dravidar Kazhagam. By 1950, an agreement was reached making Hindi teaching optional²⁷.

The Official Language Act of 1963, which allowed English and Hindi to be used for official purposes of the union government without a clear end date, sparked significant anti-Hindi protests in Tamil Nadu. The Tamil Nadu Students Anti-Hindi Agitation Council organized conferences and protests against Hindi imposition. On January 25, 1965, clashes between students and local Congress party workers led to statewide riots, with violence, vandalism, and the burning of Hindi name boards. The riots resulted in around seventy deaths and numerous arrests²⁸. The agitation ended in March but had a national impact, influencing similar protests in New Delhi, Mysore, and Bangalore. Crucially, these events led to the 1967 amendment of the Act, establishing English as a long-term official language to ensure communication for non-Hindi-speaking states²⁹.

In 1986, the Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi introduced the National Education Policy, which set up Navodaya schools (schools for talented students in rural areas), where Hindi class would be compulsory. This was protested by the Tamil Nadu political party DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam translated as Dravidian Progressive Federation), with them burning Part XVII of the Constitution³⁰. Twenty thousand DMK members were arrested, and twenty-one people committed suicide by self-immolation. Following the havoc, Rajiv Gandhi announced that Hindi would not be imposed in Tamil Nadu, hence leading to Navodaya schools not being introduced in Tamil Nadu, making it the only state till date without these schools³¹.

Indian states of Maharashtra and Punjab have similar signage regulations to Karnataka. According to the Marathi (the official language of Maharashtra) sign law, all signage must have Marathi on the upper half of the sign, above any other language, in a font size larger than other text. This law is part of an amendment made to the Maharashtra Shop and Establishment Act, which following a stay from February

2022 till September 2023, was ordered to be followed by November 2023³². As a consequence for non-compliance, section 35 of the Shop and Establishment Act states that businesses may face legal proceedings, and a maximum fine of two thousand rupees per staffer³³. In March of 2024, it was found that of 87,047 shops and establishments inspected, 96.5% (84,007) had Marathi signboards. In May 2024, a new consequence of double property tax was put into effect in order to enforce the law, as well as possible cancellation of glowing sign boards license³⁴.

In February 2023, the Punjab state cabinet approved an amendment to the Punjab Shops and Commercial Establishments Rules, 1958, making Punjab signboards, in the Gurmukhi script (a script used primarily for writing the Punjabi language and primarily associated with Sikhism), mandatory as the predominant language. The consequence for failure to comply is a thousand rupees for the first offense, and two thousand rupees for each subsequent offense³⁵. Telangana and Tamil Nadu also mandate their respective state language script on the upper half of shops and establishment's signage, however there is no mention of size³⁶. In the western state of Gujarat, the high court made it mandatory for public places signages to be in Gujarati script. However, there is no law enforcing Gujarati as compulsory in the signage of shops and establishments³⁷; Rule 34 of the Gujarat Shops and Establishment Rules state that Gujarati in name boards is only a preference³⁸.

These varying regional approaches to language requirements in signage highlight the ongoing debate over linguistic identity and regulations, setting the stage for further research into their impacts on local businesses and communities.

7. The Karnataka Shops and Commercial Establishments Rules 1963, Rules 24A and 26, 67.68.

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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The following research was conducted to achieve an outlook on local perspectives regarding the 60% signage law and the impact it has had on customers and business owners alike. One method of collection used was a Google form. Another method was one-on-one surveys with small business owners located in multiple dense commercial areas of Bengaluru. With a total sample size of 169, the Google form accounted

for the majority of the responses, whereas the surveying allowed for a more diverse response range in the final accumulation of data. Questions in both the survey and Google form asked for the responder to specify their age range, gender, occupation, language fluency and area of residence to trace response patterns in the final interpretation.

According to an article written by [Denizon](#), digital forms allow for low-cost, time-efficient and data accurate response collection. Reliability is key in research, and through real-time reporting and processing, digital forms provide researchers with an optimal method of collection. Furthermore, certain digital form software, such as Google Forms, allow users to organize their data as desired through provided analysis tools, such as Google Sheets.

As a high school student seeking responses from business owners and working professionals, I decided to distribute my form across various residential, social, and professional WhatsApp groups primarily composed of adults. I was able to access these group chats via my parents. In terms of surveying, I traveled to different areas of Bengaluru which have a high concentration of shops and small businesses. I approached owners and employees of these establishments with a printed version of the multiple-choice questions presented in the Google form, translated to Kannada script. This method led to a final collection of 31 responses. To group the data, the physical responses were input into the Google form, which then allowed me to use the Google form editor page to convert the final results to a Google sheet that breaks down and separates the results by each response, allowing for more efficient cross-tabulation analysis.

Variables Included:

- Age
- Gender
- Occupation
- Languages Fluent in
- Location
- Awareness of Kannada Signage Laws
- Support for 60% Kannada usage on Signboards
- Belief in Cultural Preservation through Signage
- Impact on Business Operations
- Navigation Ease Due to Signage
- Impact on Non-Kannada Speakers
- Suggestions for Signage Law Improvements

Analysis Plan:

Frequency Distribution

For initial understanding, the data was summarized into a google sheet to check the frequency of respondents by age, gender, and location.

Cross-Tabulation

Between various variables to check for patterns. Significant pairs include:

- Age and Support for Kannada Signage
- Age and Awareness of the Law
- Age and View on Cultural Preservation
- Language Fluency and Impact on Business due to Signage
- Language Fluency and Ease on Navigation
- Language Fluency and Impact on Non-Kannada Speakers
- Language Fluency and Support for Kannada Signage
- Occupation and View on Cultural Preservation
- Occupation and Impact on Business due to Signage
- Occupation and Support Kannada Signage
- Location and Ease of Navigation

Significance:

This analysis will allow for a clear insight regarding the Bengaluru public perception of the 60% Kannada signage law. This data interpretation highlights demographic disparities in opinion, and traces the commonalities of certain variables. Overall, this will create an opportunity to better understand the broader effects of the signage laws on Bangalore's economic and cultural landscapes.

RESULTS

1. Demographics Overview:

Total Respondents: 169

*Age Distribution:

- 18-25: 10.7% (18)
- 26-35: 24.9% (42)
- 36-45: 27.2% (46)
- 46-59: 30.8% (52)
- 60+: 6.5% (11)

*Gender Distribution:

- Male: 52.7% (89)
- Female: 46.2% (78)
- Other/Not Specified: 1.2% (2)

*Occupation:

- Working professional: 47.3% (80)
- Business owner: 36.7% (62)
- Retired: 4.7% (8)
- Others (Housewife, Student, etc.): 11.2% (19)

*Language Fluency (note: some respondents are multilingual):

- English: 76.3% (129)
- Kannada: 42.6% (72)
- Hindi: 51.5% (87)
- Other languages: 24.3% (41)

*Location:

- North Bangalore: 41.4% (70)
- South Bangalore: 14.8% (25)
- Central Bangalore: 18.3% (31)
- East Bangalore: 10.7% (18)
- West Bangalore: 1.2% (2)
- Not specified: 13.6% (23)

2. Awareness and Perception Analysis:

*Awareness of the law:

- Yes: 86.4% (146)
- No: 13.6% (23)

*Opinion on 60% Kannada signage:

- Strongly Support: 16.0% (27)
- Support: 28.4% (48)
- Neutral: 21.3% (36)
- Oppose: 20.1% (34)
- Strongly Oppose: 14.2% (24)

*Belief in preserving local culture and language:

- Strongly agree: 20.1% (34)
- Agree: 27.8% (47)
- Neutral: 11.2% (19)

- Disagree: 26.0% (44)

- Strongly disagree: 14.8% (25)

*Impact on business operations:

- Positively: 8.9% (15)

- No impact: 40.8% (69)

- Negatively: 7.7% (13)

- N/A or Not specified: 42.6% (72)

*Ease of navigation for customers:

- Yes: 21.9% (37)

- No: 32.5% (55)

- No difference: 30.2% (51)

- Not specified: 15.4% (26)

*Impact on non-Kannada speakers:

- Positively: 13.0% (22)

- No impact: 28.4% (48)

- Negatively: 37.3% (63)

- Not specified: 21.3% (36)

CROSS TABULATION ANALYSIS

1. Age and Support for Kannada Signage:

18-25: Strongly Support (31.6%), Support (42.1%), Neutral (10.5%), Oppose (10.5%), Strongly Oppose (5.3%)

26-35: Strongly Support (19.6%), Support (34.8%), Neutral (17.4%), Oppose (19.6%), Strongly Oppose (8.7%)

36-45: Strongly Support (11.1%), Support (37.8%), Neutral (22.2%), Oppose (20.0%), Strongly Oppose (8.9%)

46-59: Strongly Support (10.4%), Support (27.1%), Neutral (20.8%), Oppose (25.0%), Strongly Oppose (16.7%)

60+: Strongly Support (18.2%), Support (27.3%), Neutral (9.1%), Oppose (36.4%), Strongly Oppose (9.1%)

The trend of younger age groups showing higher support for the Kannada signage law and older ages leaning toward opposition is constant here. The 18-25 age group shows the strongest support, while the 46-59 and 60+ age groups show the highest opposition.

2. Age and Awareness of the Law:

18-25: Aware (84.2%), Unaware (15.8%)

26-35: Aware (91.3%), Unaware (8.7%)

36-45: Aware (93.3%), Unaware (6.7%)

46-59: Aware (91.7%), Unaware (8.3%)

60+: Aware (72.7%), Unaware (27.3%)

Awareness of the law remains high across all age groups, with the 36-45 age group showing the highest awareness. The 60+ age group still has the lowest awareness.

3. Age and View on Cultural Preservation:

Original Question- “Do you believe that mandatory Kannada signage helps preserve the local culture and language?”

18-25: Strongly Agree (42.1%), Agree (42.1%), Neutral (5.3%), Disagree (10.5%), Strongly Disagree (0%)

26-35: Strongly Agree (26.1%), Agree (34.8%), Neutral (13.0%), Disagree (19.6%), Strongly Disagree (6.5%)

36-45: Strongly Agree (13.3%), Agree (40.0%), Neutral (15.6%), Disagree (26.7%), Strongly Disagree (4.4%)

46-59: Strongly Agree (10.4%), Agree (31.3%), Neutral (16.7%), Disagree (31.3%), Strongly Disagree (10.4%)

60+: Strongly Agree (18.2%), Agree (27.3%), Neutral (27.3%), Disagree (18.2%), Strongly Disagree (9.1%)

The trend of younger age groups showing stronger agreement that the signage law helps preserve local culture and language remains consistent. The 18-25 age group shows the highest agreement, while the 46-59 age group shows the highest disagreement.

4. Language Fluency and Impact on Business due to Signage:

Kannada speakers: Positively (25.0%), No impact (53.8%), Negatively (21.3%)

Non-Kannada speakers: Positively (4.5%), No impact (70.8%), Negatively (24.7%)

Kannada speakers continue to report a more positive impact on their businesses compared to non-Kannada speakers. However, the majority in both groups still report no impact.

5. Language Fluency and Ease of Navigation:

Original Question “As a customer, does Kannada signage make it easier for you to navigate and identify businesses?”

Kannada speakers: Yes (65.0%), No difference (22.5%), No (12.5%)

Non-Kannada speakers: Yes (10.1%), No difference (31.5%), No (58.4%)

A significant difference in ease of navigation between Kannada speakers and non-Kannada speakers is present.

6. Language Fluency and Impact of the law on Non-Kannada Speakers:

Kannada speakers: Positively (45.0%), No impact (30.0%), Negatively (25.0%)

Non-Kannada speakers: Positively (10.1%), No impact (30.3%), Negatively (59.6%)

A significant difference in perception between Kannada and non-Kannada speakers regarding the impact on non-Kannada speakers is present.

7. Language Fluency and Support for Kannada Signage:

Kannada speakers: Strongly Support (36.3%), Support (46.3%), Neutral (12.5%), Oppose (3.8%), Strongly Oppose (1.3%)

Non-Kannada speakers: Strongly Support (3.4%), Support (22.5%), Neutral (25.8%), Oppose (28.1%), Strongly Oppose (20.2%)

A strong correlation between Kannada fluency and support for the signage law is clear in this group of respondents.

8. Occupation and View on Cultural Preservation:

Original Question- “Do you believe that mandatory Kannada signage helps preserve the local culture and language?”

Working professionals: Strongly Agree (16.7%), Agree (37.5%), Neutral (15.3%), Disagree (25.0%), Strongly Disagree (5.6%)

Business owners: Strongly Agree (24.3%), Agree (35.7%), Neutral (14.3%), Disagree (18.6%), Strongly Disagree (7.1%)

Retired: Strongly Agree (0%), Agree (28.6%), Neutral (28.6%), Disagree (28.6%), Strongly Disagree (14.3%)

Business owners show slightly higher agreement that the law helps preserve culture compared to working professionals.

9. Occupation and Impact on Business due to Signage:

Working professionals: Positively (15.3%), No impact (61.1%), Negatively (23.6%)

Business owners: Positively (15.7%), No impact (60.0%), Negatively (24.3%)

Retired: Positively (14.3%), No impact (85.7%), Negatively (0%)

The impact on business appears relatively similar across occupations, with the majority reporting no impact.

10. Occupation and Support for Kannada Signage:

Working professionals: Strongly Support (15.3%), Support (34.7%), Neutral (20.8%), Oppose (19.4%), Strongly Oppose (9.7%)

Business owners: Strongly Support (24.3%), Support (35.7%), Neutral (17.1%), Oppose (15.7%), Strongly Oppose (7.1%)

Retired: Strongly Support (14.3%), Support (28.6%), Neutral (14.3%), Oppose (42.9%), Strongly Oppose (0%)

Business owners show slightly higher support for the signage law compared to working professionals.

11. Location and Ease of Navigation:

Original Question- “As a customer, does Kannada signage make it easier for you to navigate and identify businesses?”

North Bangalore: Yes (36.6%), No difference (26.8%), No (36.6%)

Central Bangalore: Yes (44.1%), No difference (20.6%), No (35.3%)

South Bangalore: Yes (38.5%), No difference (26.9%), No (34.6%)

East Bangalore: Yes (26.3%), No difference (26.3%), No (47.4%)

The effect on ease of navigation remains relatively balanced across different areas of Bengaluru, with Central Bangalore reporting a slightly higher number of respondents finding Kannada signage as beneficial.

DISCUSSION

Insights

Bengaluru's Language Divide: This data highlights the linguistic divide in Bengaluru. With 47.3% of respondents being Kannada speakers and 52.7% non-Kannada speakers, the respondents appear to be at an almost even split. As seen above, linguistic fluency holds significant influence on opinions regarding the signage law, therefore underlining the potential for social and cultural conflict as a result of language related laws/decisions.

Age and Cultural Preservation: Based on the responses, there appears to be a generational difference in views on how Kannada signage contributes to cultural preservation. Younger respondents (18-25) show the strongest belief (84.2% agree or strongly agree), in comparison to older age groups, with only 41.7% of the 46-59 age group agreeing. As a result, pro-Kannada laws may become a more common method of Karnataka culture preservation in the future.

Business Impact Neutrality: Most people, regardless of their age, gender and socio-economic status, claim that the law does not affect their business. This implies that even though the law is culturally controversial, its economic effect might be not significant. This could suggest a lack of political stance within the working community, and hence reduced contribution to political decision making.

Navigation Challenges: When it comes to making navigation easy for non-Kannada speakers, the law plays a major role — with 58.4% expressing challenges in understanding the local language. This issue may provide far-reaching consequences that could ripple through sectors such as tourism and business. On the other hand, the majority of those who find Kannada signage beneficial in terms of navigation are Kannada speakers. This implies that, in a sense, the law has been directly helpful to locals, and therefore likely favored in that aspect.

Occupation and Support: There is not much of a discrepancy between business owners' support for the law and that of working professionals. Although one might assume that non-Kannada customer navigation challenges would be more worrisome to business owners, their slightly higher support is an intriguing find. It could mean that Kannada-speaking customers are valued by some business owners, which may indirectly benefit their business. Retired respondents express the highest level of opposition toward the law, which could possibly be due to the law only being a recent introduction.

Location Based Differences: Although not very striking, a better ease of navigation and some level of law support can be observed in Central Bangalore more than any other place. This might stem from the kind of people that inhabit the area or even the type of business present there. The highest level of difficulty is observed among respondents based in East Bangalore, which based on the previously seen level of support among Kannada speakers, could suggest a lower Kannada speaking population in that area.

Awareness vs Support: While awareness of the law is high across all age groups (over 70%), support does not co-vary to this level of awareness. This indicates that those who are against the law do not lack knowledge about it; they oppose it based on differing principles or procedures that stem from its application.

Suggestions by respondents

To the question of "Any additional comments or thoughts on the mandatory Kannada signage in Bangalore?", Some in favour of language preservation and cultural integration stated, *"This is just a starting step... to start using more and more Kannada", "It should be part of a larger encouragement for keeping Kannada also popular, over the long term."* and *"The way to get people to learn a language is to create good culturally accessible content and train teachers to teach well."*

On the subject of impact, some of the statements were, *"These initiatives have never changed anything or made any big impact."* and *"If whatever percentage of natives can both read boards of other languages and only know Kannada, I think we can only help them feel more at home with this one change."*

And concerns on enforcement were echoed as *"I do not understand why they have to go and rampage stores who have not complied with the 60% - 40% signage."* and *"The law appears to create a divide between Kannada speakers and people from other states."*



Limitations and Suggestions

The primary constraint of this project was the limited access to respondents. Beyond WhatsApp, I had no other effective means to reach a broader audience. Additionally, conducting personal surveys proved to be extremely time-consuming, posing a challenge in maximizing the number of responses. Although the sample size yielded satisfactory results consistent with previous studies related to Bengaluru, a larger-scale study would inherently offer greater quality and accuracy.

Another limitation was geographical. Both my parents and I, along with the majority of respondents, were predominantly from North Bengaluru. Consequently, the diversity of responses was somewhat constrained, and the final results may reflect a bias toward the perspectives prevalent in North Bangalore.

Furthermore, the limited access to younger respondents resulted in an age imbalance, with 18-25-year-olds being underrepresented. Similarly, the category of respondents aged 60 and above also suffered from inadequate representation.

For future studies of a similar nature, I strongly advocate employing the surveying method with printed multiple-choice questions in the local language. This approach facilitates engagement with individuals fluent in the research topic and residing locally, who may not be active in online communities. Furthermore, as previously noted, increasing the respondent pool and ensuring balanced representation across demographics would significantly enhance the study's validity and reliability.

CONCLUSION

This study on the public perception of the 60% Kannada signage law in Bengaluru offers valuable insights into the complex interplay of language, culture, and policy in a diverse urban environment. The findings underscore the challenges and considerations involved in implementing language policies in multilingual societies.

The research highlights the importance of considering various demographic factors when assessing the impact and reception of language-related laws. Age, language fluency, occupation, and location all play significant roles in shaping public opinion and experiences related to such policies. This emphasizes the need for nuanced, multi-faceted approaches to language policy development and implementation.

Furthermore, the study reveals the delicate balance between cultural preservation and inclusivity in diverse urban centers like Bengaluru. As Indian cities become increasingly

cosmopolitan, policymakers face the challenge of protecting local languages and cultures while ensuring that non-native speakers can navigate and integrate into the community effectively.

The research also demonstrates the value of combining quantitative data with qualitative insights to gain a comprehensive understanding of complex social issues. The mix of survey responses and in-person interviews provided a rich dataset that allowed for a more nuanced analysis of public sentiment.

Looking forward, this study can serve as a foundation for future research on language policies and their societal impacts. Further studies could explore the long-term effects of such policies on cultural preservation, economic development, and social cohesion. Additionally, comparative studies with the approach taken by governing bodies in other multilingual cities could provide valuable insights into best practices for language policy implementation.

In conclusion, this research contributes to the broader discourse on language rights, cultural preservation, and urban policy in diverse societies. It underscores the need for thoughtful, inclusive approaches to language policies that balance the preservation of local culture with the needs of an increasingly diverse population. As cities continue to evolve and diversify, such studies will be crucial in informing policy decisions that foster inclusive, vibrant urban communities while preserving linguistic and cultural heritage.

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