



MOTHER LANGUAGE

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Significance of Cultural and Linguistic Diversity for Sustainable Development.

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Article Info	Abstract
<p><i>Article History</i></p> <p>Date of Submission 30-09-2025</p> <p>Date of Acceptance 03-11-2025</p> <p>Date of Publication 30-12-2025</p>	<p>This paper explores and discusses the significance of cultural and linguistic diversity for sustainable societies. The question of preserving cultural diversity is straightforward: it maintains the variety of historical and modern human experiences and capabilities, strengthening society. This diversity is a vital resource in eradicating poverty and achieving Sustainable Development Goals. Cultural diversity ensures that both majority and minority groups in society have opportunities for inclusion and enhances respect and recognition for other cultures. Linguistic and cultural diversity promotes respect, tolerance, and empathy among individuals, forming the foundation for building sustainable societies. The deep ecological knowledge possessed by indigenous communities is an essential aspect of cultural diversity and is crucial in addressing environmental challenges. This study has employed a qualitative research design grounded exclusively in secondary data sources. These sources have offered a robust historical and Cultural diversity is regarded as an asset that contributes to poverty elimination and the achievement of sustainable development goals. Preserving linguistic diversity also helps maintain a community's rich cultural heritage and social values, which are vital for sustainable development.</p>
<p><i>Keywords</i></p> <p>Mother Language, Sustainable Development, Linguistic Diversity, Cultural Diversity.</p>	

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Introduction

Language and culture are related, but not the same thing. Cultural diversity refers to the combination of different cultures. It refers to the diversity of languages, religions, customs, clothing, food, art, literature, and traditions. The interaction and combination of different cultures create cultural diversity. Throughout the history of the world, cultural diversity has made our world colorful. Language, customs, clothing, food, religion, art - these are the unique characteristics of different cultures. People can expand their thinking by coming into contact with new ideas, customs, and lifestyles (Rahman, 2024).

Languages have a vital role in both sustainable development and education of education they can shape the way people learning, communicate, and engage with society. Nowadays, the world is increasingly aware of rich cultural, communication, information, linguistic, and biological diversity and interconnections. There is growing recognition of the need to protect and preserve this diversity in the face of its gradual decline (UNESCO, 2025).

After the separation of the Indian sub-continent in 1952, on February 21, brave Bengali, basically, students, political and other activists, and students' associations at the University of Dhaka were demonstrating. There was a ruckus in Dhaka over Yahya's speech. He had said that Urdu would be the state language of the entire Pakistan. The students and youth of the country poured their blood on the streets, demanding the establishment of the mother tongue, Bengali, as one of the state languages of Pakistan. Police opened fire on the protesters protesting to protect their mother tongue, killing Rafiq Uddin, Abdul Jabbar, and Barkat. Salam died in the hospital two months later from his injuries. The Shaheed Minar, built in front of the Dhaka Medical College in memory of those killed in the language movement, is a symbol of a mother and her children. It is still the focus of protests in Bangladesh - a protest for the rights (including language rights) of the indigenous hill tribes of Chittagong (Smith, 2018). UNESCO has approved and chosen to observe February 21 as International Mother Language Day, which has been internationally celebrated since 2000.

There is more to it than just emotion. For example, proficiency in the mother tongue develops the brain's thinking and imagination, enhances creativity, and contributes to the socio-economic development of a nation. UNESCO has recently conducted an ethno-linguistic research survey for the vulnerable language of Bangladesh, and found that, even in Bangladesh overwhelmingly monolingual country where about 150 million people have Bengali as their mother tongue, there are 41 other languages in existence, and about 15 of the country's languages are vulnerable, as only from about 50 to 3,000 people speak in that language. The most vulnerable languages are Soura, Koda, Mundari, Kol, Malto, Kondo, Khumi, Pangkhuya, Chak, Kiyang, Rengmicha, Lusai, Kahria, Deshwali and Laleng/Patra (Vize, 2024). The most vulnerable languages need to be accelerated and deepened to create a comprehensive archive of the languages of Bangladesh by Transmission of these languages should be further supported, particularly by promoting storytelling and enhancing educational initiatives. One of the mediums of education in Bangladesh should be in the mother tongue; because it should also be an opportunity to learn other languages. If we receive education through their mother tongue, then it will be much easier to receive that education, to know that education and to understand that education. In multilingual education, if the student is instructed in his mother tongue, then his learning outcomes are very good. This creates a solid foundation for education, skill transfer, and knowledge acquisition. Multilingual education also contributes immensely to intergenerational learning of people, cultural preservation, and language revitalization.

Sustainable development encompasses economic, environmental, and social dimensions. It places greater emphasis on environmental, social, and economic growth while neglecting the cultural, social, and even socio-cultural dimensions of language and communication. UNGA has called for equal levels of conceptualization, planning, and implementation of three dimensions of inclusive growth, namely, inclusive growth in all these dimensions (UNGA, 2022). Sustainable development is considered as development, and meets the required needs of the present without compromising the ability of

future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 1987). Defining the qualified development has led people to consider sustainable development broadly, like intergenerational equity (Kates, Paris, and Lissnerowitz, 2005). Human communication and interaction, developed through the medium of the mother tongue, are essential to achieving the desired development. As a means of communication, language makes it possible for people across a culturally diverse world to discuss multiple issues and to be tolerant and considerate of different opinions. The structural potential of language facilitates its sustainability, social development, cultural evolution, and resilience. The Children who are proficient in their mother languages or tongues can easily access the world's knowledge. It is easy to learning a foreign language, as they gain the advantage of mastering everything in modern knowledge and science. Scientists have found in their research that the mother tongue teaches people to think easily. People can imagine and dream most easily in their mother tongue. Imagination and dreams inspire people to do great things. When we are not even a month old, we are introduced to the mother's smile in our mother's lap. Mother holds many picture books in front of our eyes and tells us fairy tales. In this way, we go into the world of imagination. All for the benefit of the mother tongue.

Identification of Research Problem

The study solely aims at finding the planetary risks and loss of cultural and linguistic various forces by diversity and leading to the disappearance of languages. The extinction of languages results in the irreversible loss of traditional knowledge, ecological wisdom, and cultural heritage, which are vital for sustainable living, posing significant threats to social cohesion, the transmission of traditional knowledge, and the ability to address complex global challenges. Lack of access to education in languages they understand, leading to marginalization and limited opportunities for socio-economic advancement. Advocacy for national and international policies to protect language rights and integrate linguistic and cultural diversity into sustainable development frameworks.

Objectives of the research

This study aims to trace the significance of cultural and linguistic diversity for sustainable societies, and underscore why the issue demands urgent attention from scholars, policymakers, and civil society advocates committed to the aims to promote multilingualism, cultural diversity, and inclusion, to maintain social cohesion and enhance communication, preserve cultural heritage, improve education, and accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Key goals include increasing access to mother tongue education, developing inclusive language policies, and integrating linguistic and cultural considerations into national and international strategies to ensure a just, equitable, and sustainable future where all can thrive.

Literature review

Through the development of culture, a country preserves its heritage and awakens cultural consciousness in the new generation. It creates unity, harmony, and national identity within the society. Cultural development refers to the development of a nation's history, tradition, culture, language, and social values. Philosopher Edward Said discusses in his book 'Orientalism' how cultural identity is formed and how colonialism hinders cultural development. In addition, Pierre Bourdieu, in his theory of 'Cultural Capital', explained that culture is part of the power structure of a society. Those who acquire culture and knowledge sit in leadership positions in society.

Cultural and linguistic diversity is essential for building sustainable societies in the contemporary world. It preserves unique worldviews, traditional knowledge, and practices, thereby enhancing social cohesion and resilience. Language is articulated as a vehicle for transmitting cultural heritage and shared values within societies, at home and abroad, making language revitalization essential for our cultural preservation. Of course, by concurring cultural and linguistic diversity, societies can promote inclusiveness, improve decision-making through a broader perspective, and recognize the inherent link between cultural heritage and environmental conservation, as UNESCO has noted in its list of issues.

Linguistic diversity refers to the variation and specificity of languages within a given context and plays a crucial role in the formation, development, and preservation of cultural identity. (Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson, 2008) argue that linguistic diversity is the basis of cultural identity, as language serves as a repository of collective memory, cultural knowledge, and values. In any community, language is a primary means of identifying identity, encompassing worldviews, historical experiences, and social practices that define a people (Edwards, 2009). When linguistic diversity is reduced due to globalization, dominant language policies, or cultural assimilation, it often leads to the erosion of cultural identity, as languages embody unique ways of understanding the world and relating to others (Sinha, 2025). Language loss is closely linked to cultural loss, especially in indigenous communities where cultural heritage is transmitted through oral tradition. He concurs that language revitalization efforts are crucial to maintaining cultural identity, as languages express and serve as a focal point for the preservation of a group's values, beliefs, and historical memories. For example, in Native American communities, efforts to revive languages such as Cherokee and Navajo are seen as part of a larger cultural preservation initiative, as these languages carry knowledge of tribal customs, myths, and practices that are unique to that culture (Reyhner et al, 2025).

Research Rational

Cultural and linguistic diversity is crucial for building sustainable societies. This is because it preserves invaluable traditional knowledge, fosters intellectual, cultural, social, moral, and spiritual development, and acts as a vital “glue” that connects the environmental, social, and economic pillars of sustainable development. These languages transmit important local knowledge, such as environmental management, while fostering diverse cultural perspectives through inclusive societies and innovative approaches to common challenges. Promoting our linguistic diversity is therefore an essential element in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, which will ensure prosperity for present and future generations.

Research Questions

What are the most essential governance models for incorporating diverse linguistic and cultural values and practices into national and local sustainable development policies?

Research theoretical framework

Linguistic diversity reflects people's cultural richness and development and is a vital part of education, life, and societal inclusion. The significance of multilingual education in fostering peaceful and stable societies, combating intolerance, and ensuring inclusive quality education systems is essential. Linguistic diversity embodies the cultural wealth of people, offering various knowledge and perspectives to adapt to environmental changes, strengthen social cohesion, transmit cultural heritage, and boost economic growth. Theoretical frameworks such as linguistic ecology highlight the interconnectedness of language, culture, and the environment. As a cultural asset, linguistic diversity means that the loss of one language threatens others. Supporting linguistic diversity is crucial for sustainability, as it helps protect ecological knowledge and promotes inclusive societies capable of achieving long-term objectives.

Research Methodology

This study has employed a qualitative research design grounded exclusively in secondary data sources. Data were systematically collected from peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, official reports, and reputable print archives. These sources have offered a robust historical and theoretical foundation for the study, significantly contributing to understanding contextual depth and analytical rigor. The use of diverse documentary materials has added to the collection, facilitated data triangulation, thereby strengthening the credibility of the findings. To ensure methodological rigor, the study has applied a comprehensive content analysis. This involved the systematic coding, categorization, and interpretation of textual data to identify recurring themes, patterns, and theoretical constructs relevant to the research

objectives. Content analysis has facilitated an in-depth examination of both explicit and implicit meanings embedded within the selected texts. Additionally, a systematic literature review (SLR, henceforth) was conducted following established review protocols to ensure transparency, replicability, and comprehensiveness. The SLR involved clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, structured database searches, and critical appraisal of the selected studies. This process enabled the synthesis of existing scholarly evidence, identification of research gaps, and consolidation of theoretical and empirical insights pertinent to the study. Validity and reliability have been enhanced through methodological triangulation, rigorous source selection, and consistency in analytical procedures. By integrating content analysis with a systematic literature review, the study strengthens analytical coherence and ensures the credibility of the study findings.

Discussion

According to UNESCO, more than half of the languages will not survive this century. One language is disappearing from the world every 14 days. In the last century, small populations in various African countries have become extinct due to genocide. Their languages have also gradually disappeared. Languages have also become extinct as the existence of certain language-speaking populations is endangered due to natural disasters or cultural invasion (Biswas, 2022). Although the state language is Bengali, the language of small ethnic groups and millions of refugees in this country is not Bengali. As a result, it has become the responsibility of the state to establish equal rights for the languages spoken in the country. Because just as the Bengali nation has its own culture, those different speakers also have cultural traditions.

Cultural Diversity Day was declared in 2001 by UNESCO through the Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity. In 2002, the UNGA designated May 21 as the 'World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development,' initiating their resolutions with 57/249 of the United Nations General Assembly. This significant day remains overlooked in our country. The United Nations proclaimed the period

from 2013 to 2022 as the ‘Decade for the Harmony of Cultures,’ emphasizing the importance of developing mutual understanding and promoting diversity in knowledge, information, culture, ethnography, linguistics, religion, and lifestyles. Three-quarters of the world’s major conflicts stem from cultural disagreements. Resolving cultural gaps quickly is crucial for peace, stability, and development. Cultural diversity drives progress. It is connected not only to economic growth but also to our spiritual, mental, moral, and intellectual development. Our cultural diversity is a vital asset essential for eradicating poverty and achieving sustainable development goals (Drong, 2022). Celebrating and embracing cultural diversity is necessary not only for recognition but also to foster mutual respect within society. Our country is rich in linguistic, cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity. Discussions on gender diversity and disability also take place today. The UNESCO Convention outlines four goals for understanding cultural diversity: supporting sustainable cultural formation, ensuring a balanced flow of cultural goods and services, integrating culture into sustainable development frameworks, and promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms. Identity, diversity, and pluralism are humanity’s shared heritage. Recognizing this common heritage is vital, and it’s our responsibility to safeguard it for the well-being of present and future generations. Therefore, the moment calls for progressing from merely recognizing cultural diversity to embracing cultural pluralism—an ongoing process. Everyone should accept cultural diversity as a foundation for beautiful and diverse development. We have many rivers—Padma, Meghna, Matamuhuri, Jamuna, Surma, Sangu, Maini, Someshwari, Simsang, and Chengi. Historically, people from various nationalities—including Garo, Hajong, Santal, Khasia, Manipuri, Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Munda, Koch, and Lushai—have come here. In March 2019, the Ministry of Culture officially recognized 50 indigenous ethnic groups. In Bangladesh, about 41 languages are spoken; besides Bengali and Urdu, 39 minority languages are spoken by ethnic groups. The government reports that at least 14 of these languages are endangered. Bangladesh is a nation of many nations, a tapestry of languages and cultures—this diversity amplifies the beauty

of our country. The phrase ‘beauty in diversity and harmony’ truly applies to us. Our world is filled with numerous nations, languages, colors, and cultures. Preserving human dignity is crucial to celebrate and safeguard cultural diversity. Ensuring cultural rights fosters an environment for cultural preservation. Freedoms of speech, press, linguistic pluralism, and equal rights in arts, technology, and science education all support this goal. Respecting cultural diversity promotes meaningful dialogue and sparks creativity. It also plays an essential role in strengthening social bonds, cooperation, communication, development, peace, and good relations between government, NGOs, and civil society. Accepting and celebrating differences and diversity as strengths is vital. Our diversity isn’t a threat but a message of beauty for all to see. We must foster a culture of respect within the nation—no one should be oppressed or marginalized because of religion, language, or culture. We envision a beautiful, inclusive Bangladesh where people of all religions and cultures participated in the liberation war and sacrificed voluntarily. Rex Nettleford once said, “you look at the surface of the earth, you will see many different types of trees, but it is a uniform surface.” This mindset should guide how we see humanity. We must increase awareness and cultivate this perspective about our society and culture. For development and peace, respecting and honoring each other is essential. Humanity’s survival depends on accepting these differences, embracing cultural diversity and truth. The government must lead this effort. Promoting tolerance and compassion is essential. If we foster dialogue and discussion, we can build an inclusive, sensitive society. Unfortunately, Cultural Diversity Day was observed quietly here, which is not ideal. We need to take this matter seriously moving forward.

In the early ages (Idris et al, 2018), children do not know the language, talk to their mother, or exchange ideas. Seeing his mother’s smile, the child learns to laugh. He learns everything by associating the social relationships of those words with the expressions, emotions, and feelings of his mother. Therefore, the mother tongue makes a special contribution to the social and psychological development of a person. The mother tongue can be learned easily; for this, there is no need to

learn grammar. Through the mother tongue, a child gains a holistic understanding of the world around him. Extensive research has shown that children who are raised in contact with books and through reading books to them later learn languages easily and achieve great success in school. A research paper published in August 2015 in the journal *Pediatrics* found that the left side of the brain becomes significantly more active in children who have more books at home and are read to more books. This part of the brain, called the parietal-temporal-occipital association cortex, combines sounds and visual sensations. This part of the brain is stimulated when older children read aloud. Pediatricians have observed that this part of the brain is stimulated in the same way when very young children read stories from books. While listening to stories from their mothers, children weave a web of imagination in their minds. In this way, their creativity increases. Then, when they enter adolescence, they can easily gain an idea of their talent, creativity, proficiency in foreign languages, and the latest achievements of the modern world. They enter their working life with enormous potential. They can make a significant contribution to socio-economic life.

Results and Findings of the research

This research has identified that languages are the key building blocks of sustainable societies. In this research, cultural and linguistic diversity play a crucial role in sustaining sustainable societies, as consistently illustrated in this paper. The research findings demonstrate the transformative role of language for sustainability by shaping our cultural identity, shaping socio-cultural interfaces, raising environmental awareness, and adhering to fair trade business ethics. The main findings and impacts of this are delineated below:

Cultural and linguistic diversity promotes inclusion and tolerance

When a society embraces diverse languages and cultures, it fosters greater understanding, respect, adaptation, and improved communication among groups. This is essential for creating just, mutually beneficial, and peaceful societies.

Preservation heritage of languages and culture

Languages are the carriers of cultural heritage, knowledge, society, and history. The loss of linguistic diversity results in a huge loss of valuable cultural heritage.

Improved innovation and problem-solving

The different perspectives, innovations, and approaches created by different languages and cultures can lead to more creative solutions, knowledge, and innovation in various fields.

Ecological awareness and environmental benefits

Research suggests a link between cultural and biological diversity. Different communities often have unique knowledge about their local environment, which can be important for sustainable resource management, supply, and conservation.

Social cohesion and well-being

Cultural and linguistic diversity contributes to a sense of community, belonging, and identity, which are essential for individual and societal well-being.

Threats to diversity

Globalization, urbanization, and language dominance can threaten linguistic and cultural diversity.

Significance of multilingual education and policy interventions

Providing opportunities for multilingual education can promote linguistic and cultural preservation by supporting language revitalization programs, and promoting cultural awareness are crucial to maintaining diversity.

Recommendation

1. The use of Bengali must be ensured at all levels of education and administration. To achieve that goal, it is necessary to ensure

the mandatory use of Bengali at every level of education and in administrative activities at the state level. This step will be the first step in establishing the dignity of the language. The effective use of Bengali in the judiciary should be further strengthened so that all aspects of the law and judiciary are more acceptable and understandable to the common man.

2. Legislation should be formulated and implemented at all levels of the country for the use of the Bengali language. Strict legal measures should be taken to ensure the use of Bengali. For this purpose, a special law can be formulated, which will make the use of Bengali mandatory in education, administration, business and commerce, judicial proceedings, and other fields. This law will not be limited to guidelines only; rather, a separate body can be formed to monitor its effective implementation.
3. Language-centric cultural identity should be revived at the national and international levels. Along with the geographical and political identity of Bangladeshi nationality, it is very important to revive the uniqueness of the cultural identity of Bengalis. Planned initiatives should be taken to increase the use of Bengali in media, literature, music, and films. Policy support should be increased to encourage the creative use of Bengali, especially on social media and digital platforms.
4. The use of Bengali in research and technology should be widely encouraged so that the language can be enriched with the advancement of knowledge and science. Special initiatives should be taken to increase the use of research and technology for the widespread use and development of the Bengali language. It is important to increase the opportunities for research in Bengali in higher education, which will not only help in acquiring knowledge but also in the deeper spread of the language. Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning technology can be used to ensure the technological enrichment of the Bengali language. And for that purpose, it is necessary to formulate and implement a national plan for the language institutes of the universities of the country,

including the International Mother Language Institute, to work in a coordinated manner.

5. The UNESCO adopted the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity in 2001, and the following year, the UNGA, circulated by Resolution 57/249, declared May 21 as the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development. This important day remains neglected in our country. Many educated people are not aware of this.
6. UNESCO initiates the Convention states that ‘identity, diversity and pluralism’ are the common heritage of humanity. This common heritage of humanity must be recognized and ensured for the benefit of present and future generations. In this way, we must move from cultural diversity to cultural pluralism. Not only that, but cultural diversity must be accepted as one of the factors for development.

Conclusion

The findings of the study demonstrate in the context of Bangladesh, language policy is truly essential to ensure the development and preservation of the mother tongue. But the primacy of the Bengali language has not yet been properly established in our education system, judicial communication, and government offices. The limited use of Bengali in higher education is not only narrowing our knowledge base, but it is also creating a kind of cultural isolation for future generations. Rabindranath Tagore’s theory teaches us an important lesson—a nation that can develop an education policy based on its mother tongue can only move forward on the path of sustainable development. Nevertheless, establishing Bengali as a language more strongly through education and at the administrative level is the demand of the hour. In the current context, some clear proposals are presented here on the steps that the state should take for the maximum use, development, and preservation of the Bengali language. Cultural diversity will make the world richer and more beautiful if people want to cherish this diversity and enjoy its benefits.

Through the collective efforts of everyone, a beautiful, peaceful, and prosperous world will be built where all cultures of the world will be equally appreciated.

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