

Macaulay's Minute (1835): Its Long-Term Impact on Language Barriers And Dropout In School Education

Arpita Mondal

M. Ed. Student, Baba Saheb Ambedkar Education University, Kolkata, West Bengal, India, Email: mondalarpita46196@gmail.com

Abstract: *Language is a medium of communication. Mother tongue is a means of exchanging information and expressing opinions freely. However the main purpose behind conducting this study is to investigate reasons related to language barriers and dropout in school education, to examine the long term impact of Macaulay's Minute(1835) in school education, to find out how much priority was given to the recommendations of the Macaulay's Minute (1835) regarding school education in the New Education Policy (NEP). The researcher has relied on primary and secondary sources to complete the research paper. The researcher has used Qualitative method to complete the research paper in question. So in this case the researcher has done historical and content analysis. As a result of interaction in English medium, language barriers are being created in school education and gradually the possibility of dropout is emerging. This can be considered as the long term impact of "Macaulays Minute". In that case, according to NEP-2020 recommendations, English has been shown as an International Language. So, NEP -2020 has introduced "three language formula" in the field of school education. In this "three language formula" more importance has been given to regional language/ local language/ mother tongue. English language has been given importance as the third language in the field of school education.*

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 30 April 2026

Received in revised form
10 May 2026

Accepted 15 May 2026

Citation: Mondal. A., (2026)
"Macaulay's Minute (1835): Its Long-Term Impact on Language Barriers And Dropout In School Education", *Pen and Prosperity*, Vol. 3, Issue. 2(1), May 2026.

Keywords: *Macaulay's Minute, Language Barriers, Dropout, School Education, NEP-2020.*

Introduction: Language is the medium of communication. It is the sole means of exchanging information. From birth, human beings gradually begin to acquire language. Language serves as the primary vehicle for human connection. Emotions such as sorrow, distress, anger, and hurt are all expressed through language. India has 22 official languages (listed in the Eighth Schedule) These are: Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Manipuri (Meitei), Marathi, Nepali, Odia, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu. In the realm of school education, the use of one's mother tongue broadens the path to learning. The sole means of acquiring an education free from obstacles is to receive instruction in one's mother tongue. According to data from the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), 20–30% of students drop out because they are unable to pursue their studies in their mother tongue.

The British historian and politician Thomas Babington Macaulay denied the importance of the mother tongue within the education system and, in 1835, introduced "Macaulay's Minute on Education." In 1837,

English was recognized as the official court language. In 1844, high-ranking government positions were opened to all Indians. In 1854, Wood's Despatch paved the way for the dominance of the English language in India. The far-reaching impact of Macaulay's 'Minute' is clearly evident in the education system. Consequently, problems such as linguistic barriers and a rising dropout rate from educational institutions have reared their heads. In accordance with the recommendations of the NEP 2020, English has been recognized as an international language. The researcher's primary objective in conducting this study is to examine how the long-term effects of Macaulay's Minute are influencing school education.

Review of Literature: Mundhra (2024) conducted a study to assess "Impact of Macaulay's Education Policy on India's Traditional Gurukul System". The primary objective of this paper is to demonstrate that, through Macaulay's education policy, the British exerted a long-term impact on India's traditional Gurukul system. This study suggests that revitalizing traditional educational values and integrating them with modern systems can help bridge the existing gaps in India's education sector and foster a more inclusive and holistic approach to education.

Chhina (2024) examined "Importance of English Language in NEP 2020". The objective of the present study is to determine the role of the NEP 2020 in the advancement of Indian languages, and simultaneously to identify the strategies and methodologies proposed by the NCF for language education across various levels of schooling. In this research paper, the researcher portrays the English language as a global language. In India, a significant number of people speak English. In the realm of school education specifically for grades 5 through 8 priority is accorded to the mother tongue and regional languages, in accordance with the recommendations of the NEP 2020. The concept of the 'Three-Language Formula' is also addressed in this research paper.

Objectives:

1. To investigate reasons related to language barriers and dropout in school education.
2. To examine the long term impact of Macaulay's Minute(1835) in school education.
3. To find out how much priority was given to the recommendations of the Maccualy's Minute (1835) regarding school education in the New Education Policy(NEP).

Research Questions:

1. What are the reasons for language barriers and dropout in school education?
2. How did Macaulay's Minute (1835) have a long-term impact on school education?
3. How much importance did the New Education Policy give to the recommendations of the Maccualy's Minute (1835) regarding school education?

Methodology of the Study: To complete this research paper, the researcher employed qualitative research methods. This paper discusses issues such as language barriers and school dropouts, examining them as long-term consequences of Macaulay's Minute (1835). In this context, extensive use was made of secondary sources, including research articles, e-journals, magazines, and books. The content of each document was thoroughly examined by the researcher.

Result and Discussion:

Reasons related to language barriers and dropout in school education: Linguistic barriers and school dropout are not attributable to any single, inevitable cause; rather, they stem from one or more underlying factors. This phenomenon has a profound impact on school education.

Causes of Language Barriers in School Education:

Less priority Mother tongue: In the context of school education, English-medium instruction serves as the primary cause of language barriers. Students enter the classroom from diverse backgrounds, varying across caste, creed, and religion. Since each student possesses a distinct linguistic background, they face difficulties in adapting to the classroom environment. Furthermore, the diminished prominence accorded to students' mother tongues is observed to be a significant factor in the emergence of these linguistic barriers.

Lack of confidence: Modern parents view the English language as more prestigious—and as a vehicle of modern culture—than their own mother tongue. Consequently, students who are not fluent in English often exhibit a lack of confidence.

Academic under performance: The long-term impact of the English language is evident in the realm of school education. Linguistic weaknesses in the classroom lead to difficulties in comprehension and academic underperformance.

Student Absenteeism: Linguistic anxiety—specifically the fear of being unable to comprehend what is read—often serves as a cause of student absenteeism. In this context, the language barrier is considered the primary factor.

Family and individual issue: The families of many students view English as a prestigious language. Consequently, often at the expense of their mother tongue, many families place a strong emphasis on English education right from the foundational stages; as a result, linguistic anxiety takes on a severe form within the students. Gradually, language barriers begin to emerge.

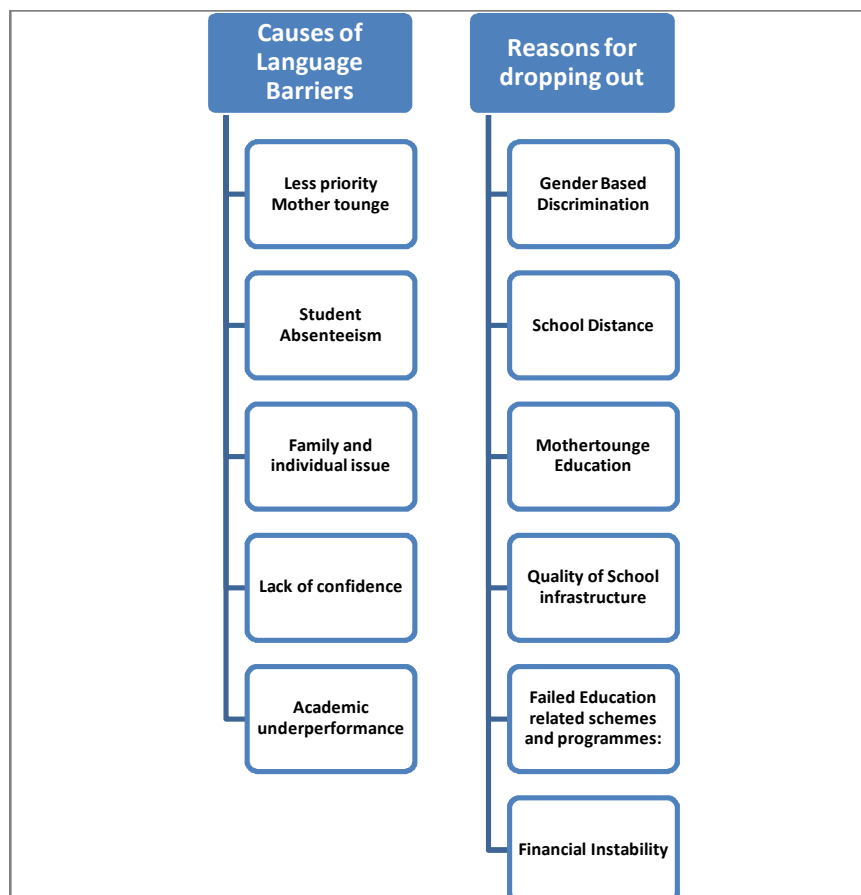


Figure 1: Causes of Language Barriers and reasons for dropping out

There are multiple reasons for dropping out of school

Gender Based Discrimination: In the field of education, the dropout rate is higher among girls than among boys. The primary reason for this is gender-based discrimination. In most cases, girls are assigned household chores, and while significant importance is attached to boys' education, the education of girls is often neglected—thereby manifesting gender inequality.

School Distance: Often, the distance to school becomes a cause for dropping out. In accordance with RTE norms, the NEP 2020 recommendations state that a primary school must be located within 1 km of a student's home, and an upper primary school within 3 km.

Mother tongue Education: The primary cause of school dropouts is language barriers. The NEP 2020 extends full support to the “Three-Language Formula” to address these language barriers.

Quality of School infrastructure: Currently, government schools are in a dilapidated state. Consequently, students are afraid to attend school, fearing for their safety. Furthermore, sanitation facilities and restrooms are integral components of school infrastructure quality. The lack of adequate provisions in these areas leads to high dropout rates among students.

Financial Instability: Students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are often observed dropping out of school. To provide financial assistance to these students, the government offers scholarships.

Failed Education related schemes and programmes: Quite often, the failure to receive various government schemes in a timely manner gives rise to concerns regarding student dropouts.

The long term impact of Macaulay's Minute(1835) in school education: Thomas Babington Macaulay was a British colonial administrator and a member of the Governor-General's Council in India. Breaking with established tradition, Macaulay rejected Arabic, Greek, and Sanskrit, designating English as the medium of instruction. The “Macaulay Minute” exerted a profound and lasting influence on Indian culture. The people of India were significantly impacted by the “Downward Filtration Theory” propounded by the British administrator Macaulay. In the realm of education, he disparaged the mother tongue while portraying English as a modern and scientific language. Arguing in favor of the English language for Indians, Macaulay stated: “Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.”

The long-term effects of Macaulay's philosophy are still evident among Indians today. In contemporary times, many Indians regard the English language as modern and prestigious, and—prioritizing it above their mother tongues—place greater emphasis on interacting through the medium of English.

In 1837, Governor-General Lord Auckland declared English as the official language, replacing Persian. He asserted that Indian scriptures were useless and merely superstitious; consequently, he proposed discontinuing government grants to Sanskrit and Arabic colleges in favor of providing funding for English education. Based on Macaulay's system of English-based education, the Universities of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras were established in 1857. The English language is crucial for international trade. One is likely to find studying English more engaging than studying Sanskrit or Arabic. Given that English is comparatively easier, it should serve as the medium of instruction. During the colonial era, Macaulay's English-based education system served as the language of the educated elite; consequently, this created a significant communication gap between them and the common people. In the present era, the long-term effects of the English education policy—introduced through Macaulay's Minutes—are clearly evident in school education and among the Indian populace. A significant number of Indians regard the English language as highly modern. With the aim of having their children learn English from an early age, many parents opt for English-medium schools; indeed, they prioritize the English language over their own mother tongue. The

adoption of such approaches by parents is often observed to instill fear among students. Furthermore, a lack of self-confidence is frequently noticed among them—a phenomenon that exerts a negative influence on children. Many parents persistently pressure their children from an early age to converse in English. Consequently, students often encounter a “language barrier” due to difficulties in comprehending the new language; over time, this leads to a growing disinterest in their studies, eventually resulting in issues such as dropping out of school. Macaulay’s Minute on Education paved the way for the dissemination of Western knowledge, philosophy, and the English language in India, which, in turn, brought about the erosion of India’s ancient languages and culture.

Find out how much priority was given to the recommendations of the Macaulay’s Minute (1835) regarding school education in the New Education Policy (NEP)

In accordance with the recommendations of the NEP 2020, the English language has been recognized as an international language. Advocating for Indians to acquire an English education, Macaulay argued: “Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellects.”

On the other hand, the NEP 2020 clearly states: “English is a language; it is not a test of your intelligence. English is an international language that everyone should learn for convenience.” The National Education Policy 2020 fully supported the “Three-Language Policy” included in the National Education Policy of 1968.

Under the “Three-Language Policy” of the NEP 2020:

Mother Tongue/Regional Language: Students will pursue their studies in the local or regional language from Grade 5 through Grade 8.

Hindi or English: Emphasis has been placed on the Indian language (Hindi) as a primary medium for global communication; English is to be prioritized as a language for both national and international connectivity.

Modern Indian Language: The third language is designated as either a classical Indian language (such as Sanskrit or Tamil) or a foreign language.

The recommendations of the NEP 2020 have not overlooked the importance of the English language. It has been proposed that English be taught as a foreign language, a second language, or an additional language. The advantage of using regional languages or one’s mother tongue is that it helps reduce dropout rates. Furthermore, it ensures access to education for students hailing from diverse backgrounds.

Conclusion: Language is a medium of communication. The language that every student speaks since birth is called mother tongue. The long-term impact of “Macaulay’s Minute”(1835) on Indian culture through English medium education has affected the education in Indian mother tongue. Students from different castes, creeds, religions have difficulty in understanding English language. As a result of interaction in English medium, language barriers are being created in school education and gradually the possibility of dropout is emerging. This can be considered as the long term impact of “Macaulay’s Minute”. In that case, according to NEP-2020 recommendations, English has been shown as an International Language. It is clear in NEP-2020 that, “ English is a Language, it is not a test of your intelligence. English is an International Language that everyone should learn for convenience.” So, NEP -2020 has introduced “three language formula” in the field of school education. In this “three language formula” more importance has been given to regional language/ local language/ mother tongue. English language has been given importance as the third language in the field of school education.

References

- Ali, M., Naz, M. & Malook, S. (2025). arrival of modern language to indian subcontinent through macaulay's minute on education (1839). *journal of applied linguistic and tesol (JALT)*, 8(4), 1634-1645. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/400504392_arrival_of_modern_english_language_to_indian_subcontinent_through_macaulay's_minute_on_education_1839
- Chhina, B.K.(2024). importance of english language in nep 2020. *international journal of creative research thoughts (IJCRT)*, 12(9), a854-a856. <https://www.ijert.org/papers/IJCRT2409097.pdf>
- Chakraborty, R.(2025). Reimagining English Education:NEP 2020 and Its Impact on Higher Secondary in India.*Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*.51(5), 786-794. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/391704001_Reimagining_English_Education_NEP_2020_and_Its_Impact_on_Higher_Secondary_Pedagogy_in_India
- Desouza, R. P. (2023). Macaulay's Ghost: The Unimportance and Importance of English. *THE INDIA FORUM*.<https://incarnateword.in/other-authors/kireet-joshi/philosophy-of-value-oriented-education-theory-and-practice/macaulays-minutes-english-education-and-its-impact-r-c-tripathi#p1>
- *Lingaya's Vidyapeeth*.(2025). Understanding the three language Policy Under NEP 2020. <https://www.lingayasvidyapeeth.edu.in/three-language-policy-under-nep-2020/>
- Mitra, S. (2023). Place of English Language in New Education Policy 2020. *International Journal Language in New Education Policy 2020*, 11(9), 1510-1512. https://www.ijaresm.com/uploaded_files/document_file/Dr._Suporna_Mitra_KS9i.pdf
- Peralta.M.G.(2024). The Effect Of Language Barriers On Educational Achievement Among Indigenous Students In Honduras And Strategies To Improve Their Learning Outcomes.*International Education & Research Journal [IERJ]*, 10(11), 36-38. <https://share.google/DEnVUdkpy8pi2hfG2>
- Rao. Shristi.(2020). National Education Policy 2020: How is it going to reduce high dropout numbers?. *The CSR Universe*. <https://thecsruniverse.com/articles/national-education-policy-2020-how-is-it-going-to-reduce-high-drop-out-numbers>
- Shahidul, S. M. & Zehadul Karim, A.H.M. (2015). Factors Contributing To School Dropout Among The Girls: A Review Of Literature. *European Journal of Research and Reflection in Educational sciences*, 3(2), 25 -36 <https://www.idpublications.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/factors-contributing-to-school-dropout-among-the-girls.pdf>
- Vishishta, B. P. & Jain, B.(2020). Inefficient Education and High Dropout Rates of School Children in Indian Slums. *International Journal of Policy Science and Law*, 1(1), 147-168 <https://ijpsl.in/index.php/volume-1-issue-1/>
- <https://home.iitk.ac.in/~hcverma/Article/Macaulay-Minutes.pdf>
- <https://www.lawyered.in/legal-disrupt/articles/three-language-policy-under-national-education-policy-2020/>
- <https://incarnateword.in/other-authors/kireet-joshi/philosophy-of-value-oriented-education-theory-and-practice/macaulays-minutes-english-education-and-its-impact-r-c-tripathi#p1>

