

**LANGUAGE IN INDIA**  
**Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow**  
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**KANNADA BE:KA? ENGLISH BE:KA? YERADU: BE:KU!**  
**DESIRE KANNADA? DESIRE ENGLISH? WANT BOTH!**

**Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.**

# **Kannada Be:ka? English Beka? Yeradu: Beku!** **Desire Kannada? Desire English? Want Both!**

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## **1. Introduction**

Language is the voice for the expression of our thoughts. The languages we speak, read, or write place us on the power structure of our social standing.

The reason for this presentation is to share the mind-set of people at the grass-roots, who regret not having achieved enough in school, for reasons commonly known to us: for most of who we interviewed, it is the phenomenon of 'hand-to-mouth' existence; their children are sent to work rather than to school, so as to add to the family income. Change, however, is happening.

Deep in their being, there is the burning desire for progress, to be a little more educated, to earn a little more money, for a little more comfort, if nothing else, at least, a few steps ahead of what their parents have them achieve, their children need to take just a few more steps ahead...

The socio-political and linguistic scenario, in addition to radio and television, has made these people worldly-wise that language is the vehicle for socio-economic mobility. They perceive what they lack, and they are determined to take into their hands what the system is yet to facilitate.

## 2. The study

Language in education, as medium and as subject, continues to be the topic of contention. In the Indian context, the situation is marked by the tussle between the regional languages and English.

In order to get a bird's eye view of the people who really matter, a field survey was carried out in December, 2006.

## 3. Questions

- a. Is learning English important?
- b. Why is it important?
- c. Will learning English be a hindrance to learning Kannada?
- d. At which level in school should English be introduced?

Our target group was from the low socio-economic strata living in urban, semi-urban and rural areas, and spread across professions such as

- Flower vendors
- Vegetable vendors
- Bangle vendors
- Fruit vendors
- Buyers in the market who were willing to share their views
- Workers in a Hardboard Factory and Agarbathi Packing outlet
- Stone cutters
- Construction workers
- Utility service manpower in a Factory in Mysore
- School teachers
- School children
- College children
- People in villages within a radius of 35 kms. from Mysore (a large city in the state of Karnataka), who are farmers, tailors, daily wagers, small shopkeepers, and mothers and grandmothers at home.

#### **4. Beyond Karnataka**

We also took advantage of the socio-cultural setting in urban Mysore and interviewed people from different states, who are either undergoing training in organization, or were in Mysore for the annual Theatre Festival conducted by Rangayana, the local Theatre Repertory.

- Teacher trainees at the Southern Regional Language Centre, from Orissa, Assam, and UP
- Artisans from Gujarat, West Bengal, Orissa who participated at the recently concluded Theatre Festival – “Bahoroopi” at Rangayana, Mysore

#### **5. Method**

- a. We video-interviewed 268 such people, and we have ten hours of rushes. Of these 268 persons, 126 are rural based and 142 urban based. The edited version has 75 people who represent the core ideas put forth by the 268 people. These include school children, parents and grandparents
- b. In addition to the videotaped interviews, we collected similar information through a questionnaire. We have 257 responses.

Social variables included were as follows:

- a. Gender
- b. Rural-Urban spread
- c. Age

## **6. Analysis – Videotaped Materials**

### **Language for socio-economic mobility**

Peoples' perceptions and field observations have been quite enlightening – we were at a Kannada medium Government school, seven kilometers from Mysore.

The teachers made a very perceptive statement. They said, "Parents, who send their children to Kannada medium schools, have now taken their own decision to have their children learn English – through private tuitions." Learning of English is introduced in Standard V.

For example, when a teacher is on leave – and in the absence of a substitute – children are given a written assignment on a topic of their choice – and do you know what most of them opt to write in? English! "Can we write in English, Madam" is their usual question. They write their names in English, names of their siblings, parents and friends, " 'a' for apple," " 'b' for ball," and the numerals in words in English.

In a conversation with teachers in a slum in Nehru Nagar, on the outskirts of Mysore, from two schools, run by the Government – separated by the toilets – one a Kannada medium school and the other an Urdu medium school, we were told that 80% of children in the Kannada medium are Urdu mother tongue speakers. Their perception is that they need more of Kannada in their daily lives – Urdu they learn at home anyway.

There is a hierarchy, while regional language speakers learn the language as part of their culture, their need is the global language; while

for the economically poor minority speakers in slums, the regional language is the avenue for economic mobility.

We also noticed that people at the grass roots speak in metaphors.

Commenting on the level at which language is introduced in school one person said, "We serve them rice, which is Kannada, at Standard one (Grade 1), and *Sambar* (curry), which is English, at Standard five (Grade 5). How can we expect the two to meet, be eaten, digested and expect one to grow healthy."

"If introduced simultaneously, Kannada and English are like brothers, they gel along well."

"Learning language is like 'sprouting grain' – roots are strong, foundation well set, and thereby upward mobility is balanced."

"Kannada is their heart and soul, their identity that integrates them. English, for instrumental purpose, for their children, is also important."

## **7. Analysis - Questionnaire**

In addition to the videotaped interviews, we collected similar information through a questionnaire. We have 257 responses.

Social variables are as follows:

- a. Gender
- b. Rural-Urban spread
- c. Age

Statistical analysis is as follows:

**Slide 1: Breakup of respondents is shown in this slide.**

Survey Summary							
		Medium of Instruction			English as subject from		
		Eng	Kan	Total	1st Std	3rd Std +	Total
Gender	Male	92	74	166	137	29	166
	Female	41	50	91	79	12	91
	Total	133	124	257	216	41	257
Area	Rural	83	86	169	147	22	169
	Urban	50	38	88	69	19	88
	Total	133	124	257	216	41	257
Age - Yrs	9 - 15	8	15	23	23	0	23
	16 - 30	68	48	116	96	20	116
	31 +	57	61	118	97	21	118
	Total	133	124	257	216	41	257
Education - Yrs	0	18	24	42	35	7	42
	1 - 7	20	25	45	32	13	45
	8 - 12	44	43	87	80	7	87
	13 +	51	32	83	69	14	83
	Total	133	124	257	216	41	257

**Slide 2: Summary of Survey broken down in different categories**

**Total surveyed: 257**

**Males: 166 (65 %) Females: 91 (35 %)**

**Rural: 169 (66%) Urban: 88 (34 %)**

**Age 9 - 15 Years: 23 (9 %)**

**Age 16 - 30 Years: 116 (45 %)**

**Age 31 + Years: 118 (46 %)**

**Education 0 Years: 42 (16 %)**

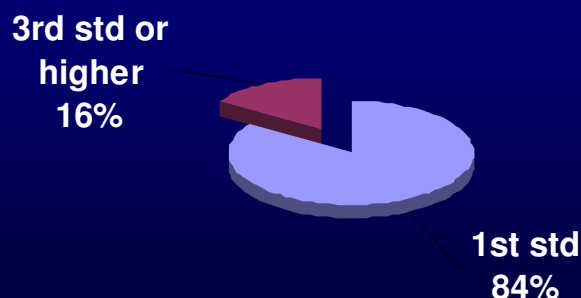
**Education 1 - 7 Years: 45 (18 %)**

**Education 8 - 12 Years: 87 (34 %)**

**Education 13 + Years: 83 (32 %)**

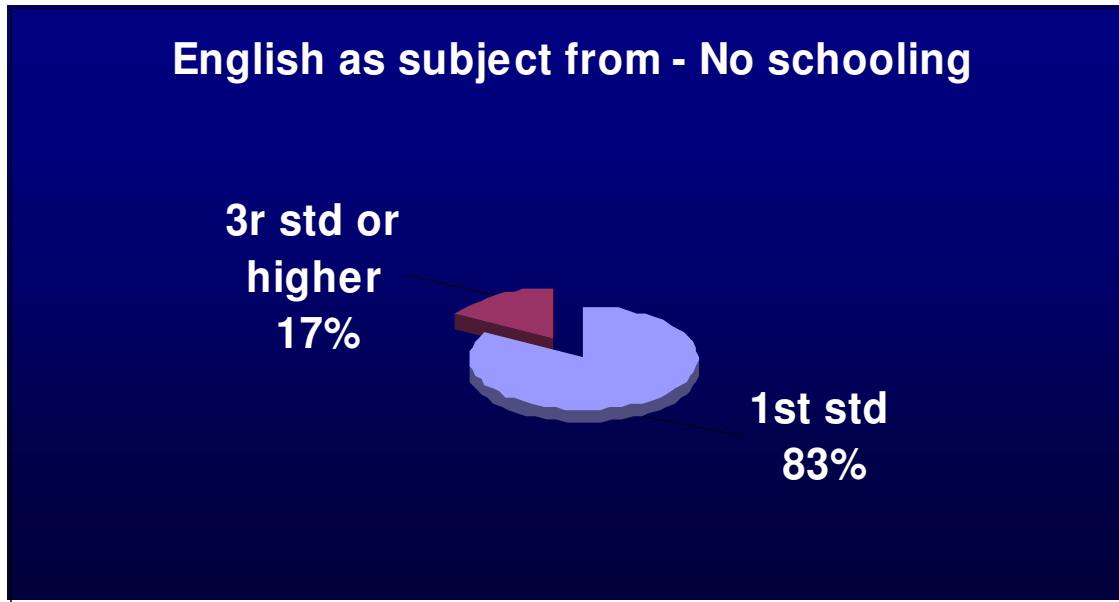
- Slide 3: Overall 84% of respondents want English from Standard I

**English as Subject from - Overall**

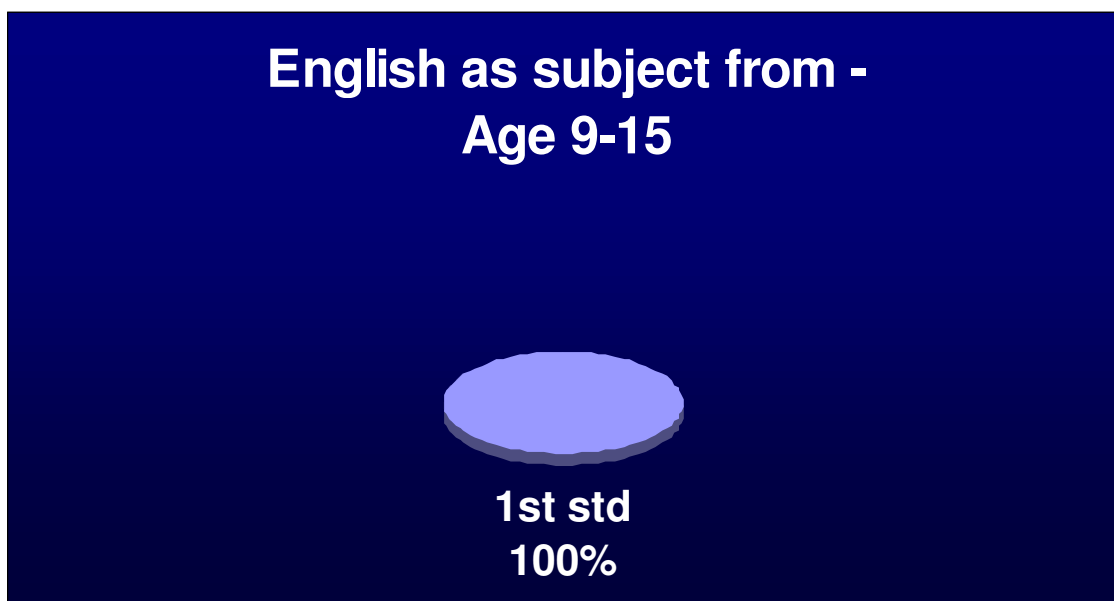




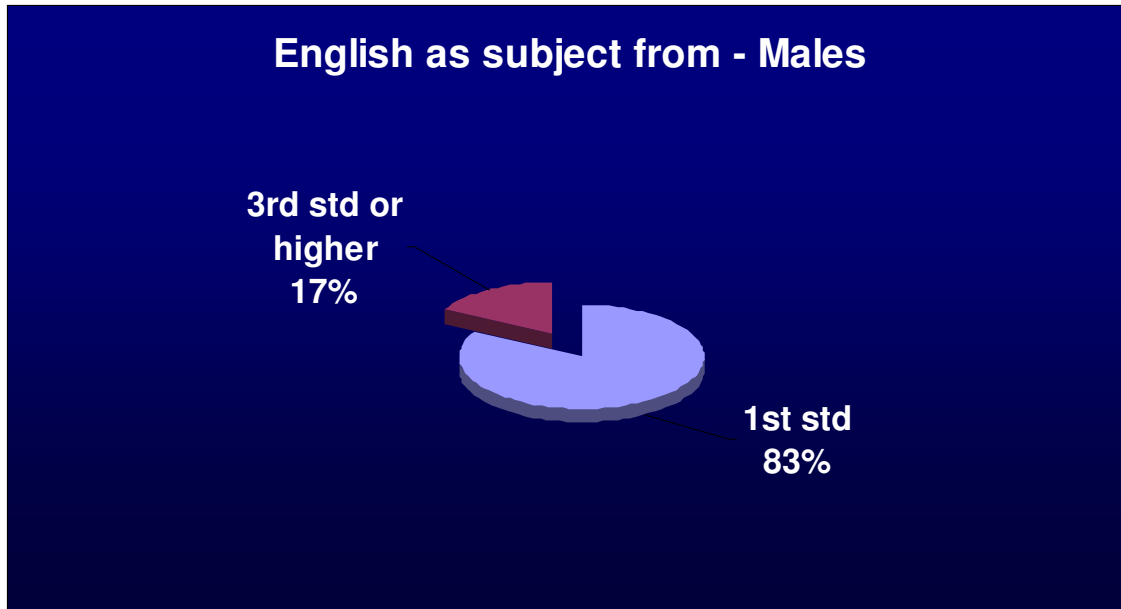
- Slide 4: Interestingly 83% respondents who have not had school education favour English from Standard I



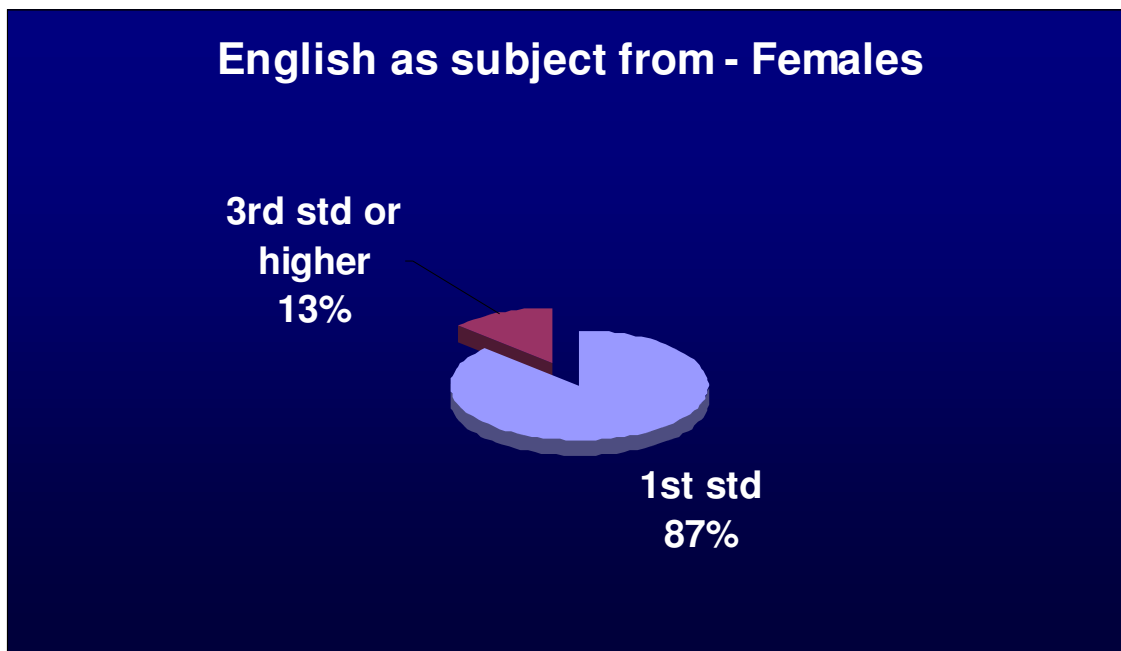
- Slide 5: Youngsters in the age group of 9-15 years 100% of the 23 surveyed want English from Standard I



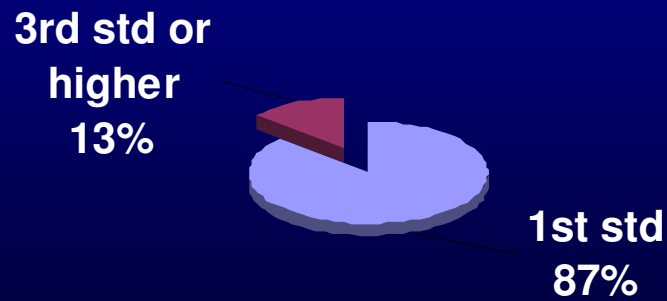
- **Slide 6: 83% Males – Standard I**



- **Slide 7: 87% Females – Standard I**

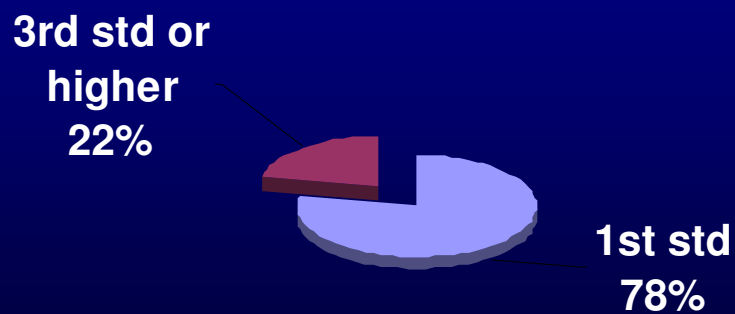


## English as a subject from - Rural

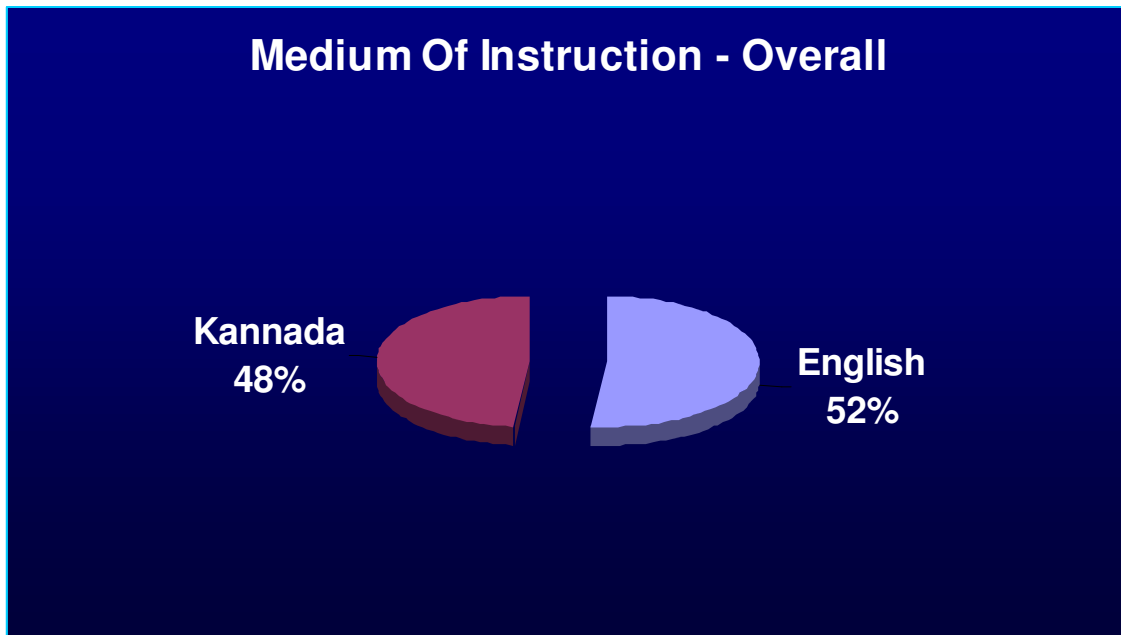


- Slide 9: 78% from Urban – Standard I

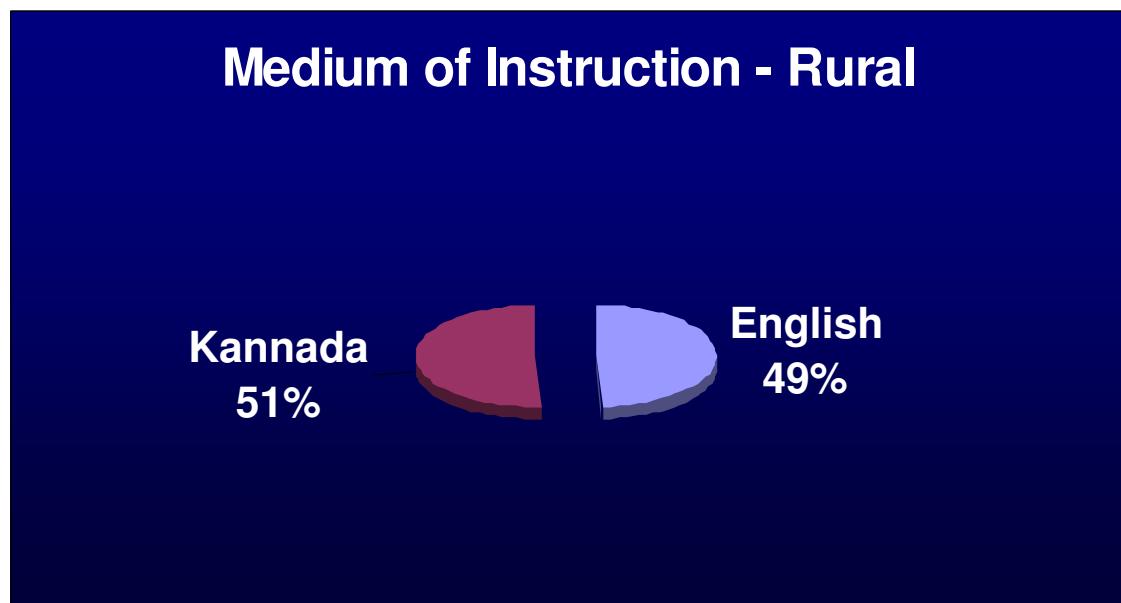
## English as subject from - Urban



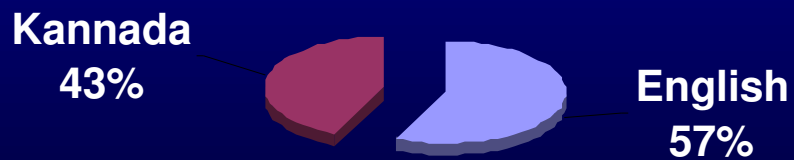
- Slide 10: Interestingly 52% of the overall respondents' desire education itself in English medium



- Slide 11: Rural at 49%

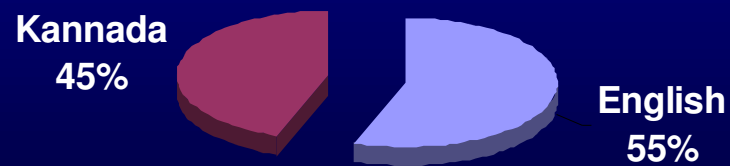


## Medium of Instruction - Urban

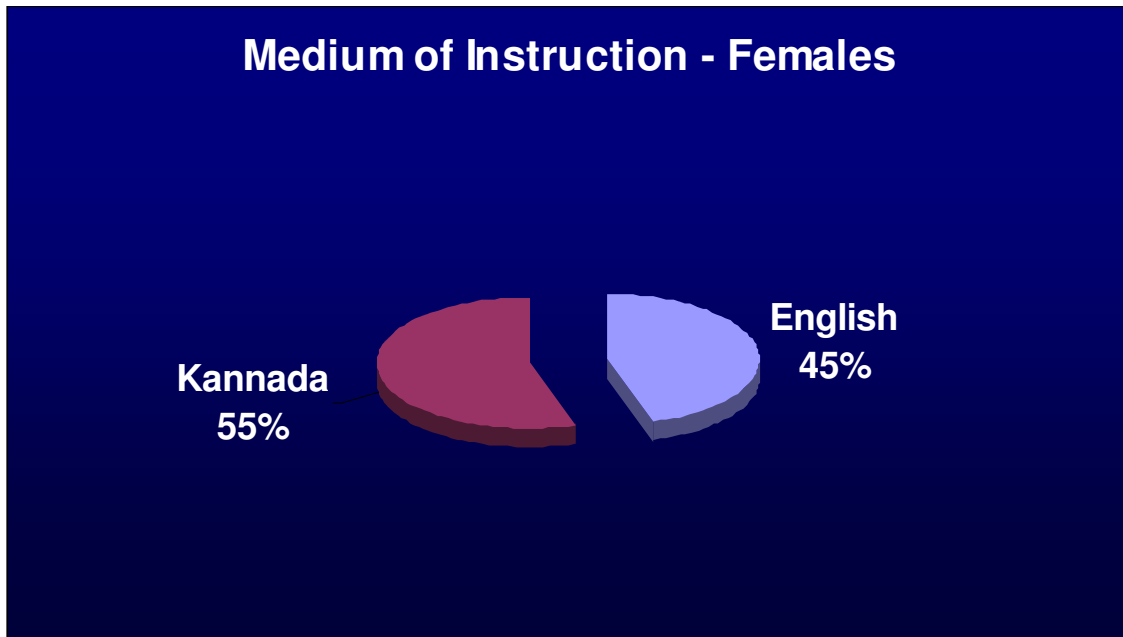


- Slide 13: Males at 55%

## Medium of Instruction - Males



- Slide 14: Females at 45%



## 8. Reasons for learning English

People across age groups and gender gave various reasons for learning English. Interesting ones are as follows:

1. 'If we don't know English, how can we get jobs? I studied in Kannada Medium till 10<sup>th</sup> standard. From PUC, I joined English, taking PCMB combination. I felt so difficult to understand the terminologies, I started feeling inferiority complex. So, I feel by learning English from childhood, we can come up in our career and come out of inferiority complex.'
2. 'If not provided in the villages, the village people move out to cities for a better education in English.'
3. 'To do business. To get a job.'
4. 'In this time of globalization, it is necessary.'
5. 'To study further, to help my villagers and I can understand better.'
6. 'I can do better business.'

7. 'Should bring about teaching in all languages including English. It is good for their future.'
8. 'Should learn both Kannada and English languages. It provides good knowledge for higher education, business and improves communication with all people.'
9. 'If we don't know English, many people cheat us. So we should learn English.'
10. 'If we learn English from 1<sup>st</sup> std, we will get a good foundation. We can converse well with all.'
11. 'English is very essential in the present day to get jobs in good companies.'
12. 'To do research in science-related disciplines.'
13. 'Don't want English.'
14. 'We want to be in that world. We did not study in English Medium. At least let our children study in English medium.'
15. 'ABCD & Kannada script should be learnt the same time. We can progress and function in society.'
16. 'We need it for business, for example, we print our business card in English as well as Kannada.'
17. 'It is good to start English teaching from 1<sup>st</sup> Std., with the provision of good English teachers. It is not a burden, learning English along with other languages.'
18. 'English should be taught from 1<sup>st</sup> Std. So children will not face any difficulty in future. They will develop a good personality.'
19. 'To get prepared well for further education. First prominence to Kannada. But English learning is also very useful'
20. To face interviews. To get jobs in companies like Infosys, etc (Multinational Companies)
21. 'Happy about the government decision. In today's world, English is imperative. Learning English does not condemn mother tongue.'

22. 'To learn computers. To be able to write letters.'
23. 'The people at the bank abuse her in English.'
24. 'With the help of English, pupils know the new techniques, methods and the ideas of the world.'
25. 'Because English is an International Language and, if we go out of state, it is a compulsory language we have to use and also in all the jobs, it is a much needed language. I am a teacher in a slum area here; people are much interested to teach their children Kannada and English for a better future of their children even though they are Muslims.'
26. 'If they learn English from the basic (stage) properly, our children need not do coolie work like us. So, please introduce English learning to our children as early as possible.'
27. 'To read sign boards, to make any enquiries, if we go to any office to do business with non-Kannada speakers, we should have a sound knowledge of English.'
28. 'Priority should be given to both the languages. But it is better if English is taught from 1<sup>st</sup> std., otherwise children will feel English as a big burden. To prepare for competitive exam, English is a must language.'
29. 'If our children know English, they can survive in any part of the world. If the government starts English from 1<sup>st</sup> std., they can develop conversation skills.'
30. 'For poor people, it is difficult to send their children to private schools to learn English. If government introduces English language from 1<sup>st</sup> std., for village people, especially poor people, it will be highly useful.'
31. 'Learning English from 5<sup>th</sup> std. will make the language difficult to the children.'
32. 'All the offices have English. The educationists and their children go to English medium schools while they speak about Kannada. If started for 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> std., they will not be able to understand.'
33. 'It is good if they do it from 1<sup>st</sup> std., but slow learners will not be able to pick it up. Therefore, introducing English from 5<sup>th</sup> std. is good.'
34. 'Weak students will not be able to pick it up. In this generation we need English. I wanted to study science but, could not study science.'



35. 'Starting English along with other subjects from 1<sup>st</sup> std., is very good. Children will not face any difficulties, but it will be hard to pick up from the 5<sup>th</sup> std.'

36. 'Teach English & Kannada from 1<sup>st</sup> std. If English is taught from 5<sup>th</sup> std, children must be given a lot of extra guidance.'

37. 'Since English is a global language, we should have a good knowledge of it. Also since Kannada is a regional language, we should give priority to Kannada. Both should be balanced.'

38. 'There should be a balancing of Kannada as well as English.'

39. 'To be able to read sign boards.'

40. 'If English is taught to rural children from 1<sup>st</sup> std., they can compete with the English medium students.'

## 9. Conclusion

To conclude, both surveys (videotaped and questionnaire) strongly and clearly bring out the fact that 100% responses are rooted in the Kannada language and culture, and therefore, studying it is a must, and, in addition, well over 85% consistently indicate that English is also required, and therefore they need both Kannada and English in the present age of globalization.

Anxious with optimism in their hearts for a chance to prove themselves, to pulsate and spring forth, and join in the forward looking processes of dynamic India, they are set to dust themselves, and canter forth, towards a brighter bilingual self. The clear blue sky is attracting them to fly.

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An earlier version of this paper was presented at the seminar on **Role of English in School Education: Dialogue and Debate**, Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore, January 4-6, 2007.

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