

RESEARCH REPORTS

English Language in the Maldives: Implications for Maldivian Identity and Local Language Policy

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ABSTRACT *This study explores the influence of English on Maldivian identity and local language policy, particularly in light of historical, educational, and sociocultural shifts since the introduction of English-medium education in 1960. While Dhivehi remains a key marker of national identity and patriotism, English has gained significant dominance across domains, including education, media, technology, and public signage. This linguistic shift raises concerns about the erosion of the local language and its implications for national identity. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, using three strategies: a national survey (n=302) covering seven key sectors (religion, technology, education, health, media, law, and security); linguistic landscape observation (data from 1,004 public signs from Greater Malé Area); and focus group discussions with stakeholders (n=26). Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were thematically examined. Findings indicate that a majority foresee English becoming even more integrated into daily life. Stakeholders expressed concern that diminished prominence of Dhivehi in the education system has weakened national identity and local language development. Survey responses highlighted early education as a critical stage for strengthening Dhivehi language skills and fostering patriotism. Furthermore, 499 of the 1,004 observed signs were exclusively in English, with many others using English names even if printed in Thaana script, and others mixing English and Dhivehi in inconsistent ways, often contrary to the 9/2011 Maldives National Language Policy Act. The study concludes that without urgent policy reinforcement, the marginalisation of Dhivehi may intensify. It recommends strengthening the implementation of the Maldives national language policy, expanding Dhivehi use in public life and education, and ensuring equitable status for the local language alongside English. These actions are necessary to preserve national identity and promote linguistic balance in the face of global English dominance.*

Keywords: *Dhivehi Language, National Identity, Language Policy, Nationalism, Linguistic Imperialism*

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جَرَسُورٍ اِجْرَسُوهُ سَمَ{. لَأَنَّهُ كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّى. تَوَسَّوْا رَسْمَ تَرْسٍ جَرَسُورٍ. {Omar}.

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