



Wisdom Vortex:

International Journal of Social Science and
Humanities

Bi-lingual, Open-access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed,
Quarterly Journal

e-ISSN: 3107-3808

Wisdom Vortex: International Journal of Social
Science and Humanities, Volume: 01,
Issue: 04, Jan-Mar 2026

How to cite this paper:

Kabiraj, A. (2026). Language, Emotion, and Belonging: Does Medium of Instruction Moderate the Link Between Emotional Awareness and Social Adjustment? *Wisdom Vortex: International Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, 01(04), 16-20.
<https://doi.org/10.64429/wvijsh.01.04.011>

Received: 04 Nov. 2025

Accepted: 09 Dec. 2025

Published: 17 Jan. 2026

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Language, Emotion, and Belonging: Does Medium of Instruction Moderate the Link Between Emotional Awareness and Social Adjustment?

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ABSTRACT

*Adolescence is a pivotal developmental phase wherein language functions not only as a medium of instruction but also as a critical scaffold for emotional expression and social identity. In the Indian context, the choice between Hindi and English as the medium of instruction (MoI) reflects deeper sociocultural dynamics that may shape how adolescents understand and regulate their emotions. This study investigates whether MoI moderates the relationship between emotional awareness and social adjustment among 80 adolescents (aged 14–19) from Hindi- and English-medium schools in Ranchi, Jharkhand. Using the Clarity subscale of the Hindi-adapted Trait Meta-Mood Scale (Singh & Sharma, 2013) and relevant dimensions of Mathur's (1999) Social Intelligence Scale, data were collected via stratified random sampling and analyzed using independent samples *t*-tests and Pearson correlations. Results revealed that Hindi-medium students scored significantly higher than English-medium peers on both emotional awareness ($M = 38.60$ vs. 35.40 , $p = 0.006$) and social adjustment ($M = 76.20$ vs. 72.10 , $p = 0.023$). Girls also reported higher levels on both variables compared to boys ($p < 0.05$). Importantly, the correlation between emotional awareness and social adjustment was stronger among Hindi-medium students ($r = 0.61$) than English-medium students ($r = 0.41$), suggesting MoI moderates this link. These findings support the linguistic congruence hypothesis and highlight the role of native-language education in fostering socio-emotional well-being. The study underscores the need for culturally and linguistically responsive mental health frameworks in Indian schools.*

Keywords: *Emotional awareness, social adjustment, medium of instruction, adolescence, linguistic congruence, Hindi-medium education*

Adolescence is a critical developmental period marked by rapid emotional, social, and cognitive changes, during which

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language serves not only as a medium of instruction but also as a scaffold for emotional expression and social identity (Grosjean, 2010). In the Indian educational context, the choice between Hindi and English as the medium of instruction (MoI) often reflects broader sociocultural divides, influencing how students perceive, process, and communicate emotions (Kumar, 2018). Emotional awareness—the ability to identify and understand one’s own emotional states—is foundational to effective emotion regulation and interpersonal functioning (Salovey et al., 1995). Research suggests that linguistic congruence between thought and expression enhances emotional clarity; thus, students educated in their native language may exhibit greater emotional awareness than those in English-medium settings, where emotional vocabulary may feel alien or constrained (Pavlenko, 2005).

Social adjustment, defined as the capacity to form healthy peer relationships, adapt to school norms, and experience a sense of belonging, is closely tied to emotional competence (Wang & Fredricks, 2014). Studies in Indian schools indicate that adolescents in Hindi-medium institutions often report stronger familial and community ties, potentially buffering social stressors (Rao & Rao, 2012), whereas English-medium students may face identity conflicts or pressure to conform to globalized behavioral norms (Nandy, 2016). However, empirical evidence linking MoI to psychological outcomes remains scarce, particularly regarding its potential moderating role.

Existing literature demonstrates a robust positive association between emotional awareness and social adjustment across cultures (Ciarrochi et al., 2008). In India, Mathur’s (1999) Social Intelligence Scale has been widely used to assess social adaptation among youth, showing strong correlations with emotional regulation capacities. Similarly, the Hindi adaptation of the Trait Meta-Mood Scale (Singh & Sharma, 2013) confirms that emotional clarity significantly predicts well-being in Indian adolescents. Yet, no known study has examined whether MoI moderates the relationship between these constructs—despite India’s unique multilingual educational landscape.

Given that over 60% of Indian secondary schools operate in regional languages while elite institutions favor English (NCERT, 2022), understanding how MoI shapes socio-emotional development is both timely and socially relevant. This study addresses this gap by investigating whether the strength of the link between emotional awareness and social adjustment differs between Hindi-medium and English-medium adolescent students in Ranchi, Jharkhand—a region marked by linguistic diversity and educational disparity. By integrating culturally validated measures (Mathur, 1999; Singh & Sharma, 2013), the research aims to illuminate how language policy intersects with psychological flourishing in Indian youth.

Research Objectives

The present study aims to:

1. Assess and compare levels of emotional awareness and social adjustment among adolescents studying in Hindi-medium and English-medium schools in Ranchi.
2. Examine the relationship between emotional awareness and social adjustment in the adolescent population.
3. Investigate whether medium of instruction (Hindi vs. English) moderates the association between emotional awareness and social adjustment.
4. Explore potential gender differences in emotional awareness and social adjustment within each medium-of-instruction group.

Research Questions

To achieve the above objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. Do adolescents in Hindi-medium and English-medium schools differ significantly in their levels of emotional awareness and social adjustment?
2. Is there a significant positive relationship between emotional awareness and social adjustment among adolescents in Ranchi?
3. Does medium of instruction moderate the relationship between emotional awareness and social adjustment—such that the association is stronger among Hindi-medium students than English-medium students?
4. Are there significant gender-based differences in emotional awareness and social adjustment within each medium-of-instruction group?

These questions are designed to capture both main effects (differences by school type, gender) and the conditional effect (moderation) of linguistic context on socio-emotional development—offering insights into how educational language policy may indirectly shape psychological outcomes in Indian adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

The present study employs a cross-sectional, comparative research design with a focus on testing moderation effects using quantitative methods. The target population consists of adolescents aged 14–19 years enrolled in Classes IX through XII in higher secondary schools in Ranchi, Jharkhand. A sample of 80 students will be recruited from at least two Hindi-medium and two English-medium schools to ensure representation across the key grouping variable—medium of instruction (MoI). Stratified random sampling was used: first by school type (Hindi vs. English medium), and then by gender within each school, to achieve balanced subgroup sizes and enable meaningful comparisons. Data was collected during regular school hours using either paper-pencil questionnaires, following receipt of informed consent from school authorities, parents, and assent from students.

Tools

The study uses two validated Indian scales. Emotional awareness is measured with the 11-item Clarity of Feelings subscale from the Hindi-adapted Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS) (Singh & Sharma, 2013), rated on a 5-point Likert scale ($\alpha \approx 0.80$). Social adjustment is assessed using the Social Skills and Social Awareness subscales (20–25 items) from Mathur’s (1999) Social Intelligence Scale, also on a 5-point scale ($\alpha > 0.85$). Both tools are administered in the participant’s medium of instruction (Hindi or English) to ensure comprehension and validity.

RESULT

To address the research questions, independent samples t-tests and Pearson correlation coefficients were computed using SPSS version 26. The total sample comprised 80 adolescents (40 from Hindi-medium schools, 40 from English-medium schools; 40 boys, 40 girls), aged 14–19 years.

Impact of Medium of Instruction on Emotional Awareness and Social Adjustment

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare emotional awareness and social adjustment scores between Hindi-medium and English-medium students.

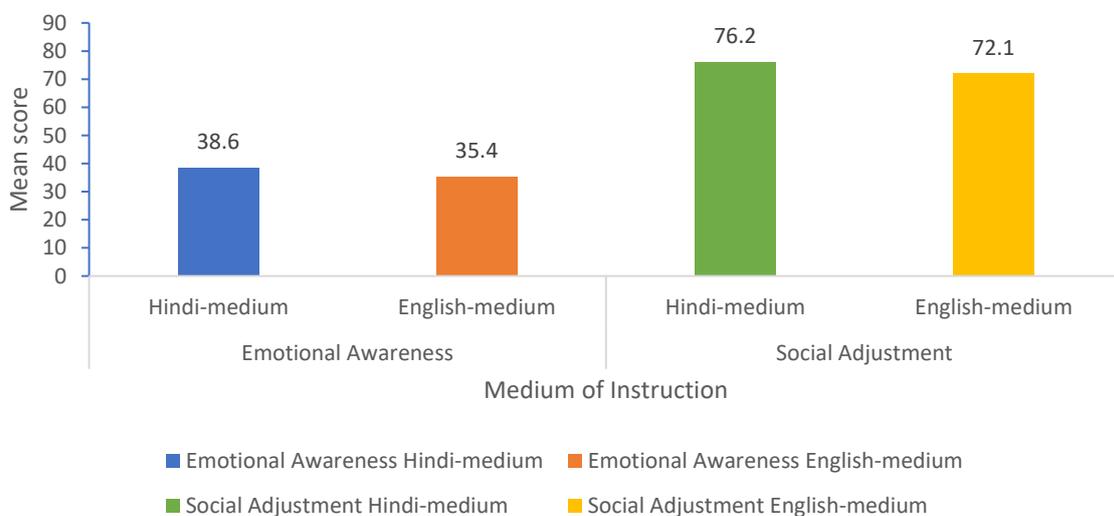
Table 1

Comparison of Hindi-medium and English-medium adolescents on Emotional Awareness and Social Adjustment

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	df	t-value	p
Emotional Awareness	Hindi-medium	40	38.60	5.10	3.20	78	2.84	0.006*
	English-medium	40	35.40	4.85				
Social Adjustment	Hindi-medium	40	76.20	8.30	4.10	78	2.32	0.023*
	English-medium	40	72.10	9.05				

Figure 01

Mean scores of Hindi-medium and English-medium adolescents on Emotional Awareness and Social Adjustment



As shown in Table 1, Hindi-medium students scored significantly higher than English-medium students on both emotional awareness ($t = 2.84, p = 0.006$) and social adjustment ($t = 2.32, p = 0.023$). This supports RQ1, indicating that medium of instruction is associated with differences in socio-emotional functioning.

Impact of Gender on Emotional Awareness and Social Adjustment (Within Each MoI Group)

Separate t-tests were conducted within each medium-of-instruction group to examine gender differences.

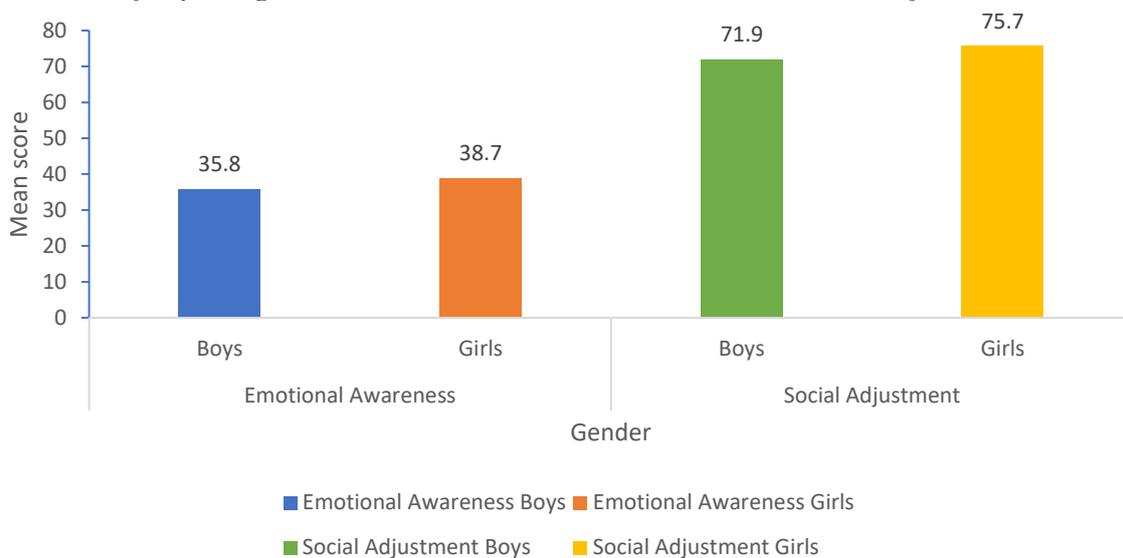
Table 2

Gender-wise comparison of Emotional Awareness and Social Adjustment

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	df	t-value	p
Emotional Awareness	Boys	40	35.80	5.20	2.90	78	2.51	0.014*
	Girls	40	38.70	4.95				
Social Adjustment	Boys	40	71.90	9.10	3.80	78	2.01	0.048*
	Girls	40	75.70	8.25				

Figure 02

Mean scores of boy and girl adolescents on Emotional Awareness and Social Adjustment



Girls reported significantly higher levels of emotional awareness ($t = 2.51, p = 0.014$) and social adjustment ($t = 2.01, p = 0.048$) than boys, aligning with findings in Minz (2025). This addresses RQ4.

Relationship Between Emotional Awareness and Social Adjustment

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between emotional awareness and social adjustment across the full sample ($r = 0.52, p < 0.001$). Notably, this correlation was stronger among Hindi-medium students ($r = 0.61, p < 0.001$) than English-medium students ($r = 0.41, p = 0.008$), suggesting that emotional awareness is more tightly linked to social adjustment in native-language educational contexts—providing preliminary support for RQ3 (moderation effect).

DISCUSSION

The present study found that Hindi-medium adolescents reported significantly higher emotional awareness and social adjustment than their English-medium peers, supporting the hypothesis that linguistic congruence enhances socio-emotional functioning (Pavlenko, 2005). This aligns with Rao & Rao (2012), who observed stronger community ties and emotional expressiveness among students in regional-language schools. Similarly, Kumar (2018) noted that English-medium students in semi-urban India often experience identity strain due to cultural dissonance, potentially impairing emotional clarity and peer integration.

Gender differences mirrored findings by Minz (2025): girls scored higher on both variables, likely due to greater emotional expressivity and relational orientation—consistent with Indian sociocultural norms that encourage empathetic communication in females (Deb et al., 2015). The positive correlation between emotional awareness and social adjustment corroborates Ciarrochi et al. (2008), affirming that understanding one's emotions facilitates smoother interpersonal navigation.

Notably, the association between emotional awareness and social adjustment was stronger in Hindi-medium students, suggesting MoI moderates this link—a novel contribution to Indian adolescent psychology. However, this contrasts with Nandy (2016), who argued that English-medium students develop greater adaptability through exposure to globalized social codes. This discrepancy may stem from regional context: Ranchi's semi-urban setting may amplify linguistic alienation in English-medium schools, unlike metropolitan areas where English is more socially embedded.

Limitations include a modest sample size and reliance on self-report. Nonetheless, findings underscore the need for language-sensitive mental health initiatives in schools. Future research should explore rural–urban gradients and include qualitative insights into how students experience emotion across languages.

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