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Language Policy and Multilingualism: Assessing NEP 2020's Approach to Language Education

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Abstract

A child's whole development is greatly influenced by the language that is used as the medium of education. The choice of a particular language for this purpose is difficult in a nation like India, where the population is multilingual and heterogeneous. Speaking hundreds of languages, 22 of which are recognised by the Constitution, multilingualism is an essential part of the nation's composite culture. From the study of various research's, who study on Language Policy and Multilingualism in NEP 2020 it concluded that the multilingual learners benefit from improved problem-solving skills, creativity, and a deeper understanding of different cultures, making them more globally competent. NEP 2020's emphasis on multilingual education not only preserves India's rich linguistic heritage but also promotes inclusivity and cultural pluralism. By integrating local languages into education while nurturing proficiency in multiple languages, the policy fosters national unity while preparing students for global opportunities.

Keywords: National Education Policy (NEP 2020), Language Policy, Multilingualism, Three Language Formulas, etc.

1 Introduction

According to India's 'National Education Policy (NEP) 2020', the three-language formula will remain in place with the goal of fostering multilingualism and national unity while providing for more freedom, since no state or kid would be forced to speak a particular language. As long as at least two of the three languages are indigenous to India, the choice of language will mostly be made by the state and the

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students [1]. According to NEP 2020, the three-language formula will have more autonomy than it had under the two earlier education programmes, which were implemented in 1968 and 1986. States, regions, and students themselves will have total autonomy in selecting the three languages they choose to study in school, which is a significant departure from the previous two programmes. According to the policy, until class five, and ideally until class eight, education will be conducted in the home language [2]. Maths and Science are examples of ‘nontrivial concepts’ that may be understood more rapidly in the native tongue. Experts have agreed that teaching children in their native tongues throughout their early school years would be very beneficial, particularly in rural and tribal communities where school dropout rates are greatest. Since over 5 crore pupils lack basic literacy, the nation is experiencing a ‘learning crisis,’ which makes it imperative that the government take immediate action. The nation should be ready for the widespread involvement of the local community in order to accomplish this aim [3].

Along with additional difficulties including a dearth of textbooks in the child’s mother tongue, teacher preparation, and other related concerns, the policy recognises the significant disconnect between the child’s mother tongue and the language of instruction in the school [4]. Additionally, it emphasises that in situations where textbooks are unavailable, the teacher-student language in the classroom should be the child’s mother tongue. Teachers will be motivated to employ the bilingual approach, especially in areas where the children’s languages and the medium of instruction are different [5]. The goal of all these initiatives is to guarantee the ‘great cognitive benefits’ of multilingualism, exposing young infants to a variety of languages at an early age. This demonstrates unequivocally the new national education policy’s commitment to a literacy programme and education for everyone (Samagra Siksha Abhiyan), which aims to promote minor languages and dialects in a multilingual society like India in addition to achieving a 100% literacy programme [6].

A. Multilingualism in NEP 2020

1. Language Policy and Objectives

NEP 2020 will encourage multilingual education, with the mother tongue or home language serving as the primary medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but ideally until Grade 8 and beyond. Teachers will be encouraged to use a multilingual approach, and top-notch textbooks will be made accessible in mother tongues and home languages. Children learn languages rapidly between the ages of two and eight, according to research, and multilingualism greatly enhances young kids’ cognitive abilities [7]. Both the federal and State governments will make significant efforts to employ a large number of language instructors who speak all regional languages and to utilise technology to teach and learn many languages. With no language forced on any State, the three-language formula will be used to encourage multilingualism and national cohesion. India has some of the world’s most beautiful, expressive, scientific, and rich languages, and NEP 2020 will make sure that all young Indians are aware of this [8].

2. Role of Hindi in multilingual education

The function of Hindi in multilingual education is contingent upon the particular educational framework and linguistic regulations of a particular nation or area. The Indian government recognises Hindi as an

official language, and it is one of the most commonly spoken languages in the country [9]. While exposing children to Hindi and English, multilingual education in India seeks to provide them access to instruction in their native tongue or regional language. The 2020 approval of India's National Education Policy (NEP) highlights the value of multilingualism and promotes the use of a student's mother tongue or regional language as the primary language of instruction in the early years of schooling. The policy acknowledges that children learn best in the language they are most comfortable with, which is often their mother tongue [10]. It encourages a flexible and inclusive method of teaching languages, guaranteeing that learners are fluent in a minimum of two languages, such as Hindi, English, and other regionally appropriate languages. The NEP 2020 also promotes the inclusion of Indian languages, such as Hindi, in the curriculum and instructional resources in order to foster a greater awareness and respect for the nation's linguistic diversity. It acknowledges the benefits of multilingual education for promoting effective communication, cultural awareness, and cognitive growth [8] [11].

3. Regional languages and their preservation

Regional languages and their preservation are important, according to India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. In addition to promoting multilingualism, NEP 2020 seeks to preserve and advance all Indian languages, especially regional ones. These are some important details about regional languages and how the NEP 2020 plans to preserve them [8]:

- **Mother Tongue as Medium of Instruction:** The strategy prioritises teaching elementary school students in their home tongue or the local language. It stipulates that the mother tongue or regional language shall be used as the primary language of teaching up to at least Grade 5.
- **Multilingualism and Language Learning:** Early exposure to a variety of languages, especially regional languages, is encouraged by NEP 2020. In order to protect linguistic variety and cultural legacy, it encourages the teaching of regional languages in schools.
- **Sanskrit and Classical Languages:** The strategy acknowledges the value of Sanskrit and other ancient languages in maintaining India's rich linguistic and cultural heritage. It promotes the study and instruction of Sanskrit and other ancient languages in educational institutions.
- **Technology and Language Preservation:** The use of technology for language promotion and preservation is highlighted in NEP 2020. It recommends producing and sharing information in regional languages via the use of digital resources, internet platforms, and other technical instruments.
- **National Institute for Pali, Persian, and Prakrit:** To develop and conserve Pali, Persian, and Prakrit—languages of great historical and cultural significance in India - the strategy suggests establishing a National Institute for these languages.
- **Translation Initiatives:** The creation of translation projects and programmes to make literature and information available in regional languages is encouraged under NEP 2020. It seeks to facilitate cross-linguistic communication and close the gap between various languages.

In general, the NEP 2020 acknowledges that regional languages are important and that their preservation is a crucial component of India's linguistic and cultural diversity. In educational institutions and society at large, the strategy seeks to promote multilingualism and guarantee that regional languages coexist peacefully with the national language or languages.

2 Literature Review

(Ray et al., 2023) [6] Examines India's NEP 2020 language policy's potential consequences. In addition to classroom observations, the researchers interviewed a prominent Odisha language specialist and questioned teachers and parents. Mother tongue education is important in early childhood learning, and maths and science are easier to understand in the mother language. In tribal areas of the state, Three Language Formulas implementation was difficult, according to the report. Teacher inadequacies and lack of training may hinder NEP 2020's language policy implementation. The survey also examined the situation of English in Indian education, since most parents wanted their children to learn English as a third or second language.

(Bashir & Jan, 2024) [12] Multiple language learning is prevalent and embedded in our school system. Multilingualism is valued and prioritised in 'the National Education Policy NEP 2020'. Language is essential for student communication, cognitive growth, and cultural understanding, as this policy acknowledges. Technology to aid language learning and teaching and multilingual educational resources are encouraged. Lack of textbooks and trained language instructors hinders the NEP 2020's multilingualism goals, according to the report. Promotion of language diversity in schools, investment in language education programmes, and support for language learners must be carefully planned and executed to achieve NEP 2020 goals and harness the power of language education to shape young minds.

(Mishra & Mishra, 2024) [13] The analysis shows that this strategy prioritises mother-tongue-based multilingual education in early education. It promotes English and other languages. The '3-language formula', the mother tongue as the medium of education, and the development of classical and regional languages are among the NEP 2020 multilingualism highlights. The literature review examines multilingual education's pros and cons. Examine the NEP 2020's potential effects on India's linguistic variety, education, and social cohesion. The paper concludes by emphasising the implementation and follow-up procedures to guarantee NEP 2020's multilingual approach's success.

(Kour, 2022) [14] India's goal for the coming century is laid out in the 2020 National Education Policy. Its objective is to provide all people with access to high-quality education, which is consistent with Agenda 2030's SDG 4. In both public and private elementary schools, the NEP places a strong focus on teaching in the home language. The language-in-education policy of NEP 2020 is examined in this essay. While it actively privatises public education and does not provide funding for it, it also aspires to accommodate historically marginalised populations.

(Mandal & Mete, 2023) [15] Understanding the role of NEP-2020 in promoting Indian languages as well as the strategies and tactics suggested by NCF for language instruction at various school levels are the study's goals. The analysis comes to the conclusion that the actions suggested by NEP-2020 would undoubtedly aid in the preservation of India's traditional and cultural values. Students would be able to understand and appreciate India's diversity by including vernacular languages into their education from the very beginning up till class five. This would also contribute to the development of a stronger educational foundation and an improved learning environment. However, care should be taken to ensure

that instructors won't encounter difficulties and that the blending of local languages won't impede the teaching-learning process.

(Acharya, 2023) [16] Being multilingual is a significant aspect of our mixed culture. Twenty-two of the nation's hundreds of languages are recognised under the constitution. The K Kasturirangan Committee's 'National Education Policy of India 2020 (NEP 2020)' seems to have taken these concerns seriously and realistically, and it offers some innovative suggestions for teaching languages. Making students aware of the country's rich cultural legacy and encouraging multilingualism and national cohesion are key goals of the new programme. However, there may be difficulties putting such ideas into practice since there aren't many textbooks and there aren't enough qualified and experienced language instructors, among other issues. The study emphasises NEP 2020's significance in multilingual education and the power of language.

(Srivastava et al., 2024) [17] NEP-2020's provisions on 'Multilingualism and the Power of Language' are emphasised in the paper in order to better understand the programme's role in advancing multilingual education and Indian languages. Therefore, by thoroughly examining the main provisions of NEP 2020 for multilingualism and language power and reviewing pertinent literature, this paper emphasises the advantages of the strategy and framework used by the Indian government to introduce multilingualism into Indian classrooms. Lastly, the difficulties that implementers or stakeholders may have while using the multilingual method in school instruction are the main topic of the study.

(Kaur, 2023) [8] The Government of India unveiled 'the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020', a historic educational reform programme designed to revolutionise the nation's educational system. The NEP 2020 places a strong emphasis on multilingualism and the development and maintenance of regional languages in addition to Hindi. The purpose of this research study is to examine how NEP 2020 will affect Hindi in the context of encouraging multilingualism. It looks at the objectives, tactics, and difficulties of putting the NEP 2020 into practice as well as how it could affect Hindi's standing and significance as a communication and teaching language in India's educational system.

(Suri, 2023) [18] This study discusses NEP 2020's multilingualism and native Indian language promotion measures. It also examines how multilingualism might improve people's professional skills so they can be job-ready in multicultural and globalised situations. The article will also examine the pros and cons of teaching in home/mother/local/regional languages and give suggestions for its effective implementation. Finally, the article considers the policy's goal of creating a linguistically lively, diverse, value-based society built on Indian language skills and traditions.

(Mahapatra & Anderson, 2022) [19] This study critiques India's National Education Policy 2020 and suggests a paradigm for multilingual language-in-education policy implementation. It promotes egalitarianism, first language assistance, and cognitive independence. After critically reviewing NEP 2020's multilingual policy guidance, we lay out a theoretical foundation for the LFL framework based on current translanguaging theory and discuss India's much-maligned three-language formula (TLF), which underpins language policy. The paradigm is offered with regard to unique contextual issues in

India, which may imply its applicability for other multilingual environments worldwide. Thus, the LFL framework offers a more multilingual alternative to the reductive ‘Medium of Instruction’, which comes from the monolingual habitus of old language-in-education policy theory. Our framework should be critically assessed for India and other multilingual environments.

3 Conclusion

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 presents a transformative vision for language education in India by promoting multilingualism and fostering linguistic diversity. By allowing students flexibility in language choices, with an emphasis on Indian languages, the policy aims to enhance cognitive abilities, critical thinking, and cultural appreciation. Multilingual learners benefit from improved problem-solving skills, creativity, and a deeper understanding of different cultures, making them more globally competent. However, despite these advantages, the implementation of NEP 2020’s language policy faces significant challenges, including a shortage of textbooks, limited availability of skilled language teachers, and inadequate school infrastructure to support language diversity. To effectively implement the multilingual approach, India must invest in language education programmes, develop comprehensive learning materials, and create a supportive environment for language acquisition. While NEP 2020 provides autonomy for students to choose languages, potential issues such as absenteeism, online learning constraints, and connectivity challenges must be addressed. States must ensure that chosen languages are supported by available teachers to facilitate effective learning. NEP 2020’s emphasis on multilingual education not only preserves India’s rich linguistic heritage but also promotes inclusivity and cultural pluralism. By integrating local languages into education while nurturing proficiency in multiple languages, the policy fosters national unity while preparing students for global opportunities. If successfully implemented, NEP 2020 will create an education system where language becomes a bridge rather than a barrier, paving the way for an interconnected and culturally enriched society.

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