



FOSTERING LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY: MULTILINGUALISM AND INDIA’S NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020

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Abstract:

Language is a medium through which one gains knowledge and education. It helps to express our thoughts and views and thoughts to others. Language acts as a preserver of the culture and tradition through oral or written forms of language. India being a multicultural society has a great variety of people speaking different languages and dialects. Multilingualism offers various cognitive, social, and economic benefits, including enhanced communication skills, cultural understanding, and career opportunities in our increasingly interconnected world thus fostering inclusivity and appreciation for linguistic diversity. The 8th schedule of the constitution has recognized 22 languages as the official languages of India. The New Education Policy 2020 has proposed several recommendations for the promotion and widespread of Indian Languages and Language education. The recommendations put forth by the NEP 2020 will not only help in promoting the Languages of India but will also help strengthen and preserve the rich cultural and traditional values. The integration of vernacular languages in the Early stages of learning, up to class 5 will help enable learners to acknowledge and respect the diversity of India. This paper is focused to understand the role of NEP -2020 in the promotion of Indian Languages through language education at the school level and to and to verify a few pros and cons of imparting education in vernacular language.

Keywords: *Linguistic diversity, cognitive development, Multilingualism, NEP 2020*

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Introduction:

India is a plural society characterized by its unity and diversity. According to the census of 2001, India has 122 main languages and 1599 other languages. It has deep cultural roots that have been enhanced through languages, heritage sites etc. Indian culture is deeply embedded in language, as language reflects the values, beliefs, customs of the society. India is a prime example of multilingualism, with a rich linguistic diversity stemming from its vast and varied history, geography, and cultural heritage. Multilingualism can be referred to the ability of an individual or a community to speak or understand multiple languages. It has been found that children find it easier to understand conceptual information in their local language. As stated by our Honorable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi “*Language is the medium of education, not the entire education itself. People caught in too much bookish knowledge fail to grasp this distinction. Whatever language the child can learn easily in, should be the medium of instruction.*” The NEP 2020 aims at promoting multilingualism, as well as highlighting the



importance of languages of India through teaching and learning. This policy is of the opinion that every effort would be made to teach all languages across the country with the highest quality. Approved by the Union Cabinet on 29th July 2020 the National Education Policy is supposed to introduce a set of changes in the Indian education system. It clearly stated that language is to be used as a potential tool for furthering the multiculturalism of India and familiarizing the learners with our cultural diversity. Unfortunately, Indian languages have not received their due attention and the drafting committee expresses concern over the extinction of over 220 Indian languages and dialects in the last 50 years, while UNESCO has declared another 197 Indian languages as endangered.

Multilingualism and Childhood Development:

Multilingualism helps in stimulating the brain development as it enables the learners to think and express about their ideas in two (or more languages). It is found that learner capable of understanding in more than one language have better cognitive development as compared to others. Learning more than two languages should be celebrated, promoted, and supported. At a very early age a child learns to distinguish and understand the differences between languages used with them and around them. The formative years of the child's growth are a critical time for language development, and exposing kids to a variety of languages at this age has several advantages for their general development, cognitive functioning, and educational attainment. It is essential for families to communicate with children in their home language, talking to their child from the earliest age onwards. This is central for the child's communication, social, and emotional development. Teachers and professionals who are involved in teaching learners whose first language is not English should develop a good understanding of the child's linguistic and cultural background as they enter a nursery or school and therefore work in collaboration with the parents and families.

The Three Language Formula:

The Three Language Formula emphasizes that every student in India should learn three languages: two of which should be native Indian languages, including one regional language, and the third should be English. This formula is applicable to both government and private schools, and the medium of instruction could be any of the three languages. A comprehensive foundation for the implementation of Three Language Formula in Indian schools is briefly provided under NEP 2020. The following are the policy's key points:

Early Childhood Education:

The policy places a strong focus on the importance of early childhood education in helping children to learn languages. It suggests that kids between the ages of 3 and 8 should be encouraged to study in their native language or a regional tongue.

Flexibility in learning:

The policy permits the provision of a wide range of language options thus allowing the learners with flexibility. The third language can be English or any other language of the student's choice, while the first two languages must be native Indian languages from their state or region. In non-Hindi-speaking states, where there has been a dilemma about the imposition of Hindi, this clause is anticipated to lessen opposition to the formula.

Teachers' Training and Induction: The policy identifies the need for trained educators to successfully

apply the Three Language Formula. It suggests that teachers should be given multilingualism training and that attempts be made to find teachers fluent in the local tongues.

Evaluation System:

According to the policy, students should be evaluated on their understanding and ability of all three languages, including English.

Creating Online Resources:

To enable students to learn in their native languages, the policy encourages the creation of online resources and instructional materials in native Indian languages.

The home language, mother tongue, local language, or regional language will be whenever possible, considered the medium of instruction up until at least Grade 5, but preferably up to Grade 8 and beyond. The three-language formula will still be used, but it will be done so while promoting both national unity and multilingualism. This system is foreseen to have more freedom, according to NEP, and there will be no forceful implication on any state to use a certain language. So long as at least two of the three languages are indigenous to India, states, or regions, and the students themselves will choose the three languages that will be taught to them.

Role of NEP-2020 in the promotion of Indian Languages

NEP 2020 appreciates the power of Language and Multilingualism in the preservation of the rich heritage of India and thus has made a few recommendations for its promotion. The recommendations given by NEP are highlighted below:

The medium of instruction at least up to Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/ mother tongue/ local language/ regional language and shall continue to be taught wherever possible. This will be followed by both public and private schools.

Teachers will be encouraged to use bilingual approach including bilingual teaching-learning materials, with those students whose home language may be different from the medium of instruction.

Both the central and state government shall make efforts to invest in the induction, training and development of language teachers in all regional languages around the country and particularly, for all the languages that have been mentioned in the Eighth Schedule of the constitution of India.

To enable students to think and speak both in their home language/ mother-tongue and in English, efforts will be made in preparing high-quality bilingual textbooks and teaching-learning materials for science and mathematics

Every student in the country will be encouraged to participate in a fun project/ activity on “The Languages of India in Grades 6-8, such as, under the “Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat” initiative, where they can learn about the amazing unity of most of the major Indian languages.

For the preservation of the rich languages, all students in all schools, public or private, will have the option of learning at least two years of a classical language of India and its associated literature, through experiential and innovative approaches in Grade 6-12 and beyond.

Advantages and disadvantages of imparting education in vernacular language:

NEP 2020 thus will play an influential role in the promotion of the diversity of Indian languages and acquaint the future generation with the rich culture and traditions of India alongside its preservation.

Advantages:

The language policy of NEP 2020 can play an important role in sustaining multilingualism in India. It will focus on the promotion of Indian languages and mother tongues irrespective of their status. It will help in the preservation of the culture, tradition and heritage of India. Basic education in vernacular language will provide a homely environment to the children in schools. Students will be able to grasp ideas and express themselves more freely through their native languages.

Disadvantages:

Too much emphasis on the native language can create barriers in the learning of other languages (English, Hindi, etc). State-wise variation of the native language can create confusion among students and might hamper their learning in higher stages. Teaching-learning in bilingual and trilingual formats could create problems for teachers.

Conclusion:

The steps recommended by NEP 2020 will not only promote the Languages of India but will also help in the preservation of rich cultural and traditional values. Through the integration of vernacular languages in the early stages of learning, up to class 5, students will be able to learn and respect the diversity of India. But attention should be paid so that these will not hinder the learning of other languages in higher classes. Before imparting education in the native language, proper guidelines, resource materials and training should be provided to the teachers so that they do not face any difficulty during the teaching-learning process. Besides, autonomy should be provided to the states for the implementation of Language policy in the schools. As we navigate an increasingly interconnected world, celebrating linguistic diversity and supporting multilingual education and policies can contribute to a more inclusive, tolerant and prosperous future for all.

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