

Multilingualism: An Insight into the Relevance and Implementation of NEP 2020 Recommendations

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ABSTRACT

The crucial role of language in shaping individuals and societies cannot be overstated. It not only influences personal growth but also contributes to the development of well-rounded individuals and responsible citizens. In our country, the practice of learning multiple languages is not only widespread but also ingrained in our education system. The National Education Policy NEP 2020 acknowledges the value of multilingualism and places it at the center of school education. Titled “Multilingualism and the Power of Language”, the language education section of the NEP 2020 strives to promote and embrace linguistic diversity in educational settings. This policy recognizes the power of language as a means of effective communication, cognitive development, and cultural understanding among students. It encourages the use of technology to facilitate learning and teaching of languages, and the creation of educational materials in different languages. In line with this, the researcher analysed the recommendations of the National Education Policy 2020 on Multilingualism to delve into its intricacies and its relevance in contemporary society. The study highlights the challenges in the implementation of the NEP 2020's recommendations on multilingualism, such as a shortage of textbooks and lack of skilled language teachers. To effectively realize the goals of the NEP 2020 and harness the potential of language education in shaping young minds, steps such as promoting language diversity in schools, investing in language education programs, and creating a supportive environment for language learners must be carefully planned and executed. The study is an attempt to contribute to the discourse on multilingualism and offer valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and society as a whole. Ultimately, the goal is to further the development of multilingualism and its benefits in shaping individuals and societies.

Keywords: NEP-2020, Multilingualism, Power of Language, Challenges

Objectives of the study

- To analyze the recommendations of National Education Policy 2020 with regard to multilingualism.
- To identify the challenges and offer possible solutions in promotion of multilingualism.

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METHODOLOGY

The meticulous research work is the product of extensive analytical and descriptive techniques, all based on primary and secondary sources. The primary source was the Policy Document of the NEP-2020, provided by the MHRD of the Government of India, which acted as a strong foundation for my findings. In addition, I have also leaned on various published research works, serving as secondary sources, to further enrich my work. This combination of sources has allowed me to delve deep into the nuances of the NEP-2020 and truly understand its impact.

Multilingualism

Multilingualism is a phenomenon that encompasses the coexistence of multiple languages in a specific geographical area, regardless of their formal recognition. These languages, often referred to as "varieties of language", are the mode of communication for different social groups within the region. Despite the presence of these diverse linguistic varieties, some individuals may demonstrate monolingualism, solely speaking the language of their own social group. The concept of multilingualism has become increasingly prevalent in today's globalized society, where intercultural communication and diversity are encouraged. It not only serves as a means of facilitating communication and understanding among various groups but also highlights the importance of cultural preservation and representation. Multilingualism has the potential to strengthen connections and bridge gaps between different communities, leading to a more inclusive and interconnected world.

NEP 2020 and Multilingualism

Language is a tool children use to comprehend and connect the world to their personal experiences (Bashir & Jan, 2023). The role of language in shaping individuals and societies cannot be overstated. Proficiency in languages is a crucial aspect of any democratic society, as it allows individuals to actively engage in and contribute to the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres. The ability to communicate in multiple languages, including regional and home languages, fosters a society that values and honours both one's own culture and that of others. The Indian government, to revamp the country's education system and propel it to new heights, has taken the significant step of drafting a New Education Policy (Dar and Pujju, 2021). The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recognizes the value of multilingualism and places it at the center of school education. Titled "Multilingualism and the power of language", the language education section of the NEP 2020 strives to promote and embrace linguistic diversity in the educational landscape. The policy acknowledges the importance of language as a powerful tool for effective communication, cognitive development, and cultural understanding among students. It says, "As ... multilingualism has great cognitive benefits to young students, children will be exposed to different languages early on (but with a particular emphasis on the mother tongue), starting from the Foundational Stage onwards..." (NEP, 2020, p. 13). The three-language formula will continue to be applied with a more flexible approach because language plays a crucial role in India's rich culture and heritage. According to the three-language formula of NEP-2020, students must acquire three languages during their school years, with the state and individual students having some flexibility in choosing which languages to study. It is necessary, however, that two of the languages be native to the nation; the local or regional language is probably the most likely option. All languages will be taught in a fun and engaging way, with lots of opportunities for interactive conversation, early reading and writing in the mother tongue, and the development of skills necessary for reading and writing in other languages starting in Grade 3. The NEP-2020 also highlights

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how crucial it is to teach in the student's mother tongue, home language, or local language until at least Class 5, and preferably until Class 8 and beyond, if at all possible. The Constitution's provisions, the goals of the people, the regions, and the Union, as well as the necessity of fostering multilingualism and maintaining national unity, shall all be taken into account throughout implementation. Notably, each State will be free to select the languages that best reflect their identity; no language will be forced upon them. Additionally, the students will choose which three languages they want to study, provided that at least two of them are indigenous to India. In addition to fostering linguistic and cultural variety, this action instills a sense of pride and belonging in students. It is worth highlighting that, if students show basic proficiency in three languages by the end of secondary school, including one Indian language at the literature level, they will be able to switch the languages they are learning in Grades 6 or 7. This feature guarantees that students have a solid foundation in at least one Indian native language while also giving them the flexibility to explore and select the languages with which they feel most comfortable. To achieve this, more funding must be allocated to language instructors nationwide, especially for regional languages listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

With the goal of fostering a steady flow of knowledge between diverse cultures and uniting young minds under the banner of Indianness, this policy recognizes the need to expand translation and interpretation efforts. A new institution, the Indian Institute of Translation and Interpretation (IITI), will be established to provide high-quality learning materials in various Indian and foreign languages, providing a crucial service to the country while creating job opportunities for multilingual language and subject experts (NEP, 2020, p. 55). Technology will also play a significant role in these efforts. The NEP-2020 also recommends the availability of high-quality textbooks in home languages, including science. In order to celebrate and protect the nation's linguistic diversity, the Central and State governments must act proactively. Establishing bilateral agreements for the recruitment of a significant number of teachers from each other is necessary for States, especially those from diverse regions of India, in order to adhere to the three-language formula and encourage the acquisition of Indian languages.

The policy acknowledges that through the implementation of the 'Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat' initiative, all students in grades 6-8 throughout the country will engage in a stimulating and enjoyable project or activity centered on 'The Languages of India'. This project will highlight the remarkable unity shared amongst the major Indian languages, starting with their common phonetic and scientifically arranged alphabets and scripts. Furthermore, students will delve into the common grammatical structures and origins of vocabulary, which draw largely from Sanskrit and other classical languages. Alongside this, they will gain an understanding of the rich inter-influences and variations between languages. By learning about the geographical distribution of languages in India, students will not only gain knowledge about tribal languages but also become familiar with commonly spoken phrases and sentences in each of the major languages. Additionally, students will be exposed to the captivating literature of each language through suitable translations as necessary. This immersive and educational activity aims to cultivate a sense of unity and an appreciation for the diverse cultural heritage of India. Above all, this project will serve as an icebreaker for students throughout their lives as they encounter individuals from various regions of the country. It is worth highlighting that this project will not involve any form of assessment, making it an enjoyable and fulfilling experience for all students. The goal of the new three-

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language formula is to respect the diversity of Indian languages while promoting a fair and inclusive approach to language learning.

Breaking Barriers: Overcoming Challenges in Multilingualism

The state of language learning in Indian schools is currently facing several pressing challenges that require immediate intervention. The first and perhaps most crucial issue is the low levels of literacy among students in elementary schools. This crisis of learning has resulted in a lack of foundational skills in literacy among a large proportion of students, hindering their ability to read and comprehend basic text. Furthermore, the insufficient amount of time allocated for language learning in the weekly timetable of many schools is not enough to address the current literacy crisis, let alone achieve the broader goals of language learning. Additionally, the learning materials used for language teaching across all stages are of uneven quality, with a substantial amount being of low quality. This, coupled with the inadequate preparation of teachers who often lack the necessary training and time to adequately plan lessons, leads to underachievement in language learning and dull, unengaging classes (NCF, 2023, p. 137 and Varthana, 2023). The NEP 2020 acknowledges that “There has been a severe scarcity of skilled language teachers in India, despite various measures being taken. Language-teaching too must be improved to be more experiential and to focus on the ability to converse and interact in each language and not just on the literature, vocabulary, and grammar of the language. Languages must be used more extensively for conversation and for teaching-learning” (NEP, 2020, p. 54). There is a pressing need to reassess pedagogic strategies commonly used in language classrooms. Many practices adopted by teachers are not based on a thorough understanding of language acquisition and learner psychology, resulting in ineffective and unenjoyable learning experiences. It is imperative that educators critically examine their current strategies and shift towards more competency-based teaching methods. By solely focusing on completing content in textbooks, language classrooms have become a place for mechanical learning rather than fostering the development of skills and competencies. Language learning should ultimately result in proficiency, effective communication, and appreciation of literature, but the emphasis on memory in assessments fails to accurately measure these outcomes. It is vital for language education to prioritize the assessment of language abilities rather than rote memorization of textbook material. Ultimately, to improve the effectiveness of language learning, it is crucial to carefully select relevant and age-appropriate materials that are both engaging and informative for students. Thus, the urgent addressing of these challenges is imperative to enhance language learning in Indian schools.

In light of the recent educational policy, teachers are recognized as the primary influencers in promoting multilingualism in classrooms as they play a crucial role in shaping the student experience. Possessing the right balance of training, passion, and experience, a language teacher can make all the difference in how students engage with the subject. It takes a special skillset to effectively convey the intricacies of a new language in a way that is not only meaningful, but also enjoyable. A skilled language teacher understands the nuances of not only the language itself, but also the culture and customs that surround it. With this knowledge, they can create a dynamic learning environment that not only teaches the mechanics of the language, but also immerses students in the rich and diverse world that it represents. As outlined in NEP 2020, it is of utmost importance that teachers possess a deep understanding of their students’ languages. It would be ideal to recruit educators from communities that share similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds as their students. However, this may not always be feasible due to the lack of available teachers with such

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qualifications. In such instances, it is crucial for the government to provide crash courses in teaching the mother tongue or home language of the students in question. These language training programs should also incorporate instruction on local cultures to enhance the child's learning experience in a more holistic manner. By investing in these initiatives, the government can ensure that teachers are adequately equipped to cultivate a multilingual environment in classrooms and foster a deeper understanding of their students' backgrounds and identities.

CONCLUSION

Children must have access to quality education to ensure their intellectual and personal growth. The language used as the medium of instruction plays a pivotal role in stimulating the comprehensive growth of a child. In a country like India, with its diverse and multilingual society, choosing a specific language for this purpose presents a challenge. Multilingualism is a crucial aspect of the country's composite culture, with hundreds of languages being spoken, and 22 of them being officially recognized by the Constitution. In light of this, the National Education Policy, 2020 by the K Kasturirangan Committee, has taken into consideration such complexities and has put forth some innovative ideas when it comes to teaching languages. The primary goal of this new policy is to introduce learners to the rich cultural heritage of the nation and promote multilingualism. This move has been celebrated by many as a step towards preserving the linguistic diversity of India and fostering a sense of inclusivity. By encouraging the use of regional and international languages in education, NEP 2020 aims to create a more holistic and well-rounded learning experience for students. This not only leads to a more profound comprehension of varying cultures and traditions but also strengthens the connection between individuals from different linguistic backgrounds. Additionally, the advantages of being multilingual include improved cognitive abilities like better problem-solving abilities and heightened creativity, making it a valuable asset in education. However, the implementation of these proposals may face certain challenges, such as a scarcity of textbooks and a lack of experienced and skilled language teachers. It will require careful planning and execution to effectively realize the goals of the NEP 2020 and harness the potential of language education in shaping young minds. With NEP 2020, India is taking a bold step towards creating a truly inclusive and diverse learning environment, paving the way for a more interconnected and tolerant society. This push towards multilingualism is a testament to the country's rich linguistic heritage and its commitment to promoting cultural pluralism. By embracing multilingualism in education, NEP 2020 is not only laying the foundation for a more knowledgeable and adaptable generation but also shaping a future where language is not a barrier, but a bridge to connect individuals from all walks of life.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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