



## A Study of Relevance of Mother Tongue in Education as per NEP 2020

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### Abstract:

*After a long debate and controversies on Mother Tongue (MT) usage, The Ministry of Education has finally approved its NEP 2020 last year that emphasizes students' mother tongue as the medium of instruction even as it sticks to 'three-language formula'. It also ensured that no language would be imposed on any state. The NEP document states that "The medium of instruction, wherever reckon, until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the MT or native or home language, or the regional language. Subsequently, the MT or local language shall continue to be taught as a language wherever possible. This will be followed by both public and private schools." It also mentions that since children acquire and grasp substantial and vital concepts more rapidly in their native language, which is often the MT, it should preferably be the medium of instruction in teaching.*

*This article addresses the controversy that revolves around the pedagogical appropriateness of teacher usage of students' mother tongue in classroom teaching. It voyages through the mother tongue definition, its learning, importance, development, provisions given in NEP 2020, and a few recommendations before it reaches its destination.*

**Keywords:** NEP 2020, Mother Tongue, Classroom Teaching.

### Introduction:

We are living in a time of exceptional situations where the world passes through a very hard phase in the outbreak of a pandemic. The infinite technological advances, businesses, travels, and globalization enable people to think and act across regions, states, countries, and cultures that are not their own. We have seen the proliferation of international schools in the last thirty years enforcing the English language as a lingua franca and medium of instruction. In fact, the concept still gains momentum keeping the underprivileged, local, and poor people beyond reach for their children. Consequently, the students attain language proficiency and get opportunities to access higher education abroad and work in multinational companies. We firmly believe that a robust building foundation leads to a long survival of buildings; similarly, a stout Mother Tongue (henceforth, MT) foundation also leads to a better understanding of the concepts, methods and curriculum with more interest and motivation. As well as a more positive attitude towards school, so it's vital that children maintain their first language when they begin schooling in a different language. This widens the gap between the privileged and the marginalized people. The students usually get ostracized from the mainstream

leading to anxiety, frustration, depression, and social evils. New education Policy 2020 (henceforth, NEP) states that the children learn and grasp vibrant and significant concepts more quickly in their native language (usually the MT), it should preferably be the medium of instruction. This enforces and affirms the fundamental perception that when a child develops his MT, the child is instantaneously inculcating and develops several essential skills, which include critical thinking and literacy skills. The child carries these learned skills into formal education, which would assist him to comprehend the curriculum easily. The teacher also saves time, and energy not to re-teach the concepts and topics already gained in the native language.

### **Mother Tongue (MT):**

The term ‘mother tongue’ usually denotes the child’s first or native language (L1), which a child learns in the lap of his mother since birth, family and speak at home and later society. This belief in acquiring linguistic skills of a child also called the main or primary language, develops with time becomes his social and cultural identity before joining the school curriculum. There are instances where parents reside in another country having a different language and the child acquires the first language at home and then tries to embrace the second language (L2) spoken in his interactions with friends and classmates. Therefore, the child attains two languages to include his personal, social, and cultural identity. The alphabets, sounds, and expressions are quite different across regions, cultures, and societies that make both distressing and meddlesome. The child thinks well before he communicates in the second language.

### **Mother Tongue in Education:**

As Irina Bokova, UNESCO Director-General on ‘*International Mother Tongue Day*’ said, “Mother languages in a multilingual approach are essential components of quality education, which is itself the foundation for empowering women and men and their societies.”

This denotes the use of mother tongue in schools, colleges, and universities’ classroom teaching and learning process. There is a longstanding demand to teach students in MT to enhance understanding, motivation, and attitude towards school. The mentioned studies show that children if imparted education in their MT develops and masters their critical skills, infers concepts better, enhance curiosity to learn new things and accomplish literacy skills. The students can easily transfer their L1 skills, knowledge, and abilities to comprehend complex topics better and in less time. Since we live in a complex and dynamic world full of uncertainties, innovations, technical advances that looms over the entire population. It has surpassed boundaries to make it more competitive and harder to sustain and survive for all age groups. The students need to boost their knowledge, skills, and expertise in the specific field to excel, which can be well accepted and acknowledge by incorporating MT from elementary to higher-level education institutions. The MT facilitates students to learn more languages by applying their prior knowledge and understanding of the L1 structure and related aspects. The child learns, comprehends, and develops basic grammar easily in MT and can utilize it to adopt and immerse in bilingual or multilingual environment prevailing in all kinds of businesses. Employers seek aspirants with multilingual functional knowledge, which is paramount to adapt easily to a global, multilingual, and multicultural eco-friendly environment. This would certainly inculcate good values, a spirit of cooperation, coordination and collaboration to ensure well-being, cordial atmosphere resulting constructive results, professional and academic achievement.

### **Status of Mother Tongue (MT) in Classroom Teaching:**

Since independence or post-colonial, the predominant attitude in the Indian classroom teaching has been anti-MT and hostile of the use of students’ MT in routine teaching. The main principle of teaching has been either monolingual (English) rather than multi-lingual. The teacher uses the direct method of instruction and

leaves little or no space to use learned skills and applying MT and the new concepts and curriculum. The colonial system using English as a medium of instruction still dictates and parents equally feel proud to see English- lessons as “insignia of worthiness.” Grammar-translation is discontinued to adopt MT and is replaced by English in international school education. The avoidance and disapproval of MT becomes a colossal challenge for the students to adapt and pursue education in second language (henceforth, L2). It sometimes leads to dropouts or failures. MT use has no limit and can bring positive and worthy outcomes if exercised meticulously in any curriculum or subjects’ teaching. Cook (2001) exercised MT in language acquisition and resolved that translation provides an easy avenue to enhance linguistic awareness. Students feel proud learning in MT and capable to compare and analyze between the MT and the target language. Adequate freedom should be given to learners to their linguistic interdependence as hypothesized in many studies (Butzkamm& Caldwell, 2009; Cummins, 2007), which found a teacher’s openhearted and affirmative attitude to the practice of students’ MT in teaching. Despite these studies favoring MT, using MT in teaching and learning in India remained a contentious and debated issue that needed to be addressed on priority. Turnbull (2001) feels the use of MT as judicious and principled. This doesn’t go against teachers because the system doesn’t allow them to use MT in teaching. Teachers found helpless, hopeless and feel embarrassed for teaching using only the L2 and observe the use of the MT is professionally inappropriate (Littlewood& Yu, 2011; Swain, Kirkpatrick, & Cummins, 2011). Researches have shown that MT if exercised in the proportionate, appropriate and judicious way can turn tables in students’ favor and has brought in attitude changes over time in the English Curriculum for all classes (Spolsky, et.al, 2001), which discusses MT usage as an integral part of English language education. The usage of MT indubitably worked well to enhance the language abilities and knowledge, social interaction, access to information, presentation, and appreciation of literature, culture, and language. Notwithstanding results in usage of MT in teaching and changes in attitude, the studies couldn’t bring a tangible revolution with regard to what level and extent a teacher may authorize the use of students’ MT in the classroom. Suffering for a long period, NEP has brought a ray of hope that grants enough space to use MT in the formal teaching and learning, learning other languages across states, regions, cultures, and fields.

### **New Education Policy 2020 on Mother Tongue Usage as Medium of Instruction:**

After a long debate and controversies on MT usage, The Ministry of Education has finally approved its NEP 2020 last year that emphasizes students’ mother tongue as the medium of instruction even as it sticks to ‘three-language formula’. It also ensured that no language would be imposed on any state. The NEP document states that “The medium of instruction, wherever reckon, until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the MT or native or home language, or the regional language. Subsequently, the MT or local language shall continue to be taught as a language wherever possible. This will be followed by both public and private schools.” It also mentions that since children acquire and grasp substantial and vital concepts more rapidly in their native language, which is often the MT, it should preferably be the medium of instruction in teaching.

Although MT has been advised as the medium of instruction in schools, it doesn’t impose or enforce on English-medium schools. We find many prominent International schools across the country imparting high-quality education and the policy does not intend to endorse any language at anyone. However, the state governments are at liberty to make decisions on implementing MT assessing to their students’ requirements. Besides, the policy acclaims high-quality textbooks, including in science, to be made available in MT or local languages. Teachers are expected to practice a bilingual approach, including bilingual teaching-learning materials, with those students whose home language may be different from the MT.

Furthermore, the policy recommends that states across different regions of the country may enter into bilateral agreements to employ teachers in large numbers from each other, to fulfill the three-language

formula in their respective states, and also to embolden the study of different Indian languages in different states. NEP appreciates that the three-language formula will continue to be executed according to the Constitutional provisions, desire and ambitions of the people, regions, and the Union. There is dire need to encourage multilingualism and to uphold national unity. Conversely, it endorses a better flexibility in the three-language formula, and no language will be imposed on any State. The students, regions, and states can choose three languages learned by children, whilst at least two of the three languages are native to India.

While deciding upon MT implementation, the national language Hindi was given due attention and focus as a medium of instruction, suggested in the draft policy submitted by the panel headed by former ISRO chief K. Kasturirangan to the HRD ministry. Since the language is a delicate and complex part of any state education policy, this very idea had generated a disagreement with condemnation driving in from southern states of India. It was anticipated that non-Hindi speaking states would resist and oppose the three-language formula disseminated in the policy, which leads to Hindi being forced upon them as non-Hindi speakers. Later, the ministry of HRD had put out the grievances and resentment underlining that no language would be thrust upon anyone.

The noteworthy point in NEP is setting great prominence on Sanskrit, calling it an essential modern language stated in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India. Therefore, it suggests offering Sanskrit at all levels of school and higher education as a key inspiring option for students, plus an option in the three-language formula. Moreover, the policy document work plan also offers other traditional including classical Malayalam, Odia, Kannada, Tamil, and Telugu for teaching. These classical languages are further added by Pali, Persian, and Prakrit; with an aim to preserve its works of literature for their fullness and for the pleasure and fortification of successors.

The prime minister, Narendra Modi always stresses making the country *Aatmanirbhar* and aiming to achieve a five trillion Indian economy. It needs concerted efforts and a youth workforce ready to fight head-on against future challenges to reach sustainable development. MT usage in the document is one of the ways that focus on quality education and lifelong learning for each student to acquire the requisite skills, knowledge, and values to become a good citizen to contribute to its community. This will benefit the marginalized and underprivileged, minorities, and rural populations to fetch more opportunities. The framework for MT execution, a road-map to implement MT, encouraging full respect for the use of mother language in teaching and learning, and the elevation and protection of linguistic diversity across the country.

## **Conclusion:**

With the aforesaid explanation, it is well understood that academia sees a ray of hope in the ongoing pandemic. But the implementation of New Education Policy in letter and spirit is hard not to crack. It needs a strong will, grit, committeemen, and determination from all stakeholders across India to see it happen. We have seen that bilingual or multilingual education systems are growing in popularity around the world and many reputed international schools are converging their assets on formulating resilient mother tongue programs. The states and education institutions should conduct teacher professional development programs, parent workshops, and MT awareness campaigns for communities to underscore the exuberance of the mother tongue to clarify or remove any misconceptions on the school's language of instruction. These programs are required to boost their confidence in MT and ensure that the children would gain complete fluency in both MT and the second language. The experts should underscore the finding of research showing how children learn languages, converse the school's teaching methodology for subject learning, and, essentially, educate the prominence of a sturdy mother tongue foundation and the vital role that students, parents, and communities play in implementing, developing, evolving and maintaining mother tongue as medium of instruction in teaching and learning process. Therefore, it is high time for teachers to realize their

mission and vision by introducing the MT into their classes because it's a significant asset to enhance confidence, critical thinking, creativity, and interest. MT usage will help students demonstrate a greater understanding of non-trivial concepts, advanced reading skills, along with building pride in their own culture, inculcating values, and developing respect for all cultures within the school. Furthermore, teachers should believe the introduction of MT will certainly justify this decision on MT usage in teaching.

The person responsible for MT implementation should take cognizance of students' basic needs and teachers may be informed for its effective execution. The policymakers should prepare ground to improve conducive conditions for the most ostracized to perceive that MT usage will not radically improve academic performance. The process needs substantial time and resources for teacher training and course or textbooks and study material development. Get all stakeholders involved in the decision-making on the implementation of MT schooling and other regional or local languages and how they will be developed gradually. It also needs decentralization of decision making and allocation of resources through specific guidelines to ensure top guns and grassroots commitment and local population backing. Finally, the selection of apposite bilingual or multilingual models is crucial to scholastic quality. There is a dire need to ensure gradual transitional than speedy to take remedial measures for problems that may creep in during execution to develop new models that capitalize on MT development and consequently, empower with huge potential to improve other subjects' knowledge and learning.

The chapter proceedings support the stance that the amalgamation of prior positive attitudes of students, teachers, parents, and stakeholders united with flawless strategies and explicit instructions by policy-makers will indubitably lead to an efficient, systematic and effective “play on-front foot” rather than the former “play on – back foot” of the MT in teaching and learning process across state and central education all levels institutions.

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