



## NEP 2020 and Promotion of Indian Languages – Educational Reforms and Linguistic Empowerment

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**Abstract:** *The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a transformative step in India's educational landscape by emphasizing the promotion and preservation of Indian languages. The policy recognizes multilingualism as a tool for cognitive development, cultural preservation, and inclusive education. By advocating mother tongue or regional language as the medium of instruction at the foundational stage, NEP 2020 seeks to enhance learning outcomes and linguistic empowerment. This study explores the educational reforms introduced through NEP 2020 concerning Indian languages, their implications for linguistic diversity, cultural identity, and educational equity. The paper also examines implementation challenges, policy implications, and future prospects for multilingual education in India.*

**Keywords:** *NEP 2020; Indian Languages; Multilingualism; Linguistic Empowerment; Educational Reforms.*

**Introduction:** Language is not merely a medium of communication; it is the foundation of cultural identity, knowledge transmission, and social integration. India is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, with hundreds of languages and dialects representing rich cultural traditions and intellectual heritage. However, colonial educational practices and the growing dominance of English gradually marginalized many Indian languages in formal education.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 seeks to reverse this trend by promoting multilingual education and strengthening Indian languages within the educational system. The policy emphasizes that children learn best in their mother tongue or regional language during the foundational years. Consequently, NEP 2020 recommends that wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, and preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, should be the home language, mother tongue, local language, or regional language.

The policy also proposes the development of high-quality educational materials in Indian languages, establishment of language institutes, translation initiatives, and encouragement of classical and regional languages. NEP 2020 views linguistic diversity as a national asset and promotes the idea of “unity in diversity” through education. The policy thus represents both an educational reform and a sociocultural movement aimed at democratizing learning and empowering linguistic communities.

This paper critically examines the role of NEP 2020 in promoting Indian languages and analyzes its contribution toward linguistic empowerment and educational transformation.

**Significance of the Study:** The significance of this study lies in understanding the educational and sociocultural implications of NEP 2020 regarding language policy. The study is important for several reasons.

First, language plays a crucial role in cognitive development and academic achievement. Research indicates that children understand concepts better when taught in their mother tongue during the early years of education.

Second, the study highlights how NEP 2020 attempts to preserve India's linguistic heritage. Many regional and indigenous languages are facing gradual decline due to globalization and the dominance of English. The policy attempts to revitalize these languages through institutional support.

Third, the study is significant because language is closely linked with social justice and educational equity. Students from rural and marginalized backgrounds often face disadvantages in English-dominated educational systems. By promoting local languages, NEP 2020 seeks to create inclusive and equitable learning opportunities.

Fourth, the study contributes to discussions on multilingualism and national integration. India's linguistic diversity can become a source of strength when supported through educational policies that value all languages equally.

Finally, the study helps policymakers, educators, and researchers understand the practical challenges and opportunities associated with implementing multilingual education under NEP 2020.

**Brief Review of Literature:** Several scholars and educational commissions have emphasized the importance of mother tongue education and multilingualism in India.

According to UNESCO (1953), children learn most effectively in their mother tongue, especially during the foundational years of education. UNESCO strongly advocated the use of local languages for improving comprehension and cognitive development.

Kothari Commission (1964–66) recommended the Three-Language Formula to promote national integration and linguistic harmony. The commission emphasized the balanced development of regional languages, Hindi, and English.

Mohanty (2009) argued that multilingual education is essential for social justice and democratic participation in multilingual societies like India. He highlighted the marginalization faced by tribal and minority language speakers in mainstream education.

Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) emphasized that linguistic human rights are essential for educational equality. She argued that denial of mother tongue education can lead to cultural alienation and poor learning outcomes.

According to Cummins (2001), bilingual and multilingual education positively influence cognitive flexibility, creativity, and academic performance. He suggested that children benefit intellectually when their home language is respected in schools.

Benson (2004) observed that mother tongue-based multilingual education reduces dropout rates and improves classroom participation among disadvantaged learners.

The NEP Draft Committee chaired by Dr. K. Kasturirangan (2019) stressed the importance of Indian languages in preserving India's cultural identity and enhancing educational accessibility.

Recent studies by Kumar and Srivastava (2021) indicate that NEP 2020 has renewed discussions on linguistic inclusivity and educational democratization in India. However, they also point out implementation barriers such as lack of trained teachers and instructional materials.

Thus, literature reveals broad consensus regarding the educational and cultural benefits of multilingualism while also identifying challenges in policy implementation.

### **Objectives of the Study:**

1. To examine the provisions of NEP 2020 related to the promotion of Indian languages.
2. To analyze the role of multilingual education in linguistic empowerment and inclusive learning.
3. To study the educational reforms introduced through NEP 2020 concerning language policy.
4. To identify the challenges and prospects of implementing multilingual education in India.

**Methodology:** The present study is qualitative and descriptive in nature. It is primarily based on secondary sources of data.

Data were collected from:

- National Education Policy 2020 documents
- Books on language and education
- Research journals
- Government reports
- UNESCO publications
- Scholarly articles and online academic databases

The collected data were analyzed through thematic and interpretative methods to understand the relationship between educational reforms and linguistic empowerment under NEP 2020.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

**NEP 2020 and the Philosophy of Multilingualism:** One of the central features of NEP 2020 is its strong advocacy for multilingualism. The policy recognizes India's linguistic diversity as a cultural and intellectual resource rather than a barrier to national unity. NEP 2020 states that multilingualism enhances cognitive abilities, communication skills, and cultural understanding.

The policy reflects constructivist educational philosophy, according to which children learn more effectively when new knowledge is connected with familiar linguistic and cultural experiences. Learning through the mother tongue creates emotional comfort, confidence, and active classroom participation.

The emphasis on multilingualism also aligns with global educational trends supported by UNESCO and international educational researchers who advocate mother tongue-based education for improving learning outcomes.

**Mother Tongue as Medium of Instruction:** One of the most debated reforms in NEP 2020 is the recommendation that the medium of instruction until Grade 5, preferably Grade 8, should be the mother tongue or regional language.

Research consistently shows that children grasp concepts faster in familiar languages. When students are taught in an unfamiliar language, they often memorize mechanically without conceptual understanding. NEP 2020 attempts to solve this problem by strengthening foundational literacy through local languages.

The policy particularly benefits children from rural and marginalized communities who may not have exposure to English at home. Mother tongue instruction reduces fear and inferiority among learners and helps bridge educational inequalities.

Furthermore, early education in home language contributes to better emotional development and stronger parent-child educational interaction. Parents can participate more effectively in their children's learning process when education is conducted in local languages.

However, critics argue that excessive emphasis on regional languages may reduce English proficiency and global competitiveness. Nevertheless, NEP 2020 does not oppose English learning; rather, it supports multilingual competence where Indian languages and English coexist.

**Linguistic Empowerment and Cultural Preservation:** Language is deeply connected to identity and culture. NEP 2020 recognizes that the decline of Indian languages threatens cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge systems.

The policy proposes several measures to preserve and promote Indian languages:

- Establishment of Indian Institute of Translation and Interpretation (IITI)
- Promotion of classical languages such as Sanskrit, Tamil, Pali, Persian, and Prakrit
- Development of bilingual educational materials
- Digitization and preservation of regional literature
- Support for tribal and endangered languages

These initiatives promote linguistic empowerment by giving social legitimacy and institutional recognition to Indian languages.

Linguistic empowerment means enabling communities to use their languages confidently in education, administration, and intellectual discourse. Historically, English dominance created linguistic hierarchies where local language speakers often felt socially disadvantaged. NEP 2020 challenges this hierarchy by asserting the value of Indian languages in knowledge production.

The policy also strengthens cultural nationalism by encouraging students to connect with India's literary traditions, folklore, philosophy, and indigenous knowledge systems through language education.

**Educational Equity and Social Inclusion:** Language policy is closely connected with educational equality. Students from economically weaker sections and rural areas often struggle in English-medium systems due to linguistic disadvantages.

NEP 2020 attempts to democratize education by reducing language barriers. When children learn in familiar languages, classroom participation increases, dropout rates decline, and confidence improves.

The policy is particularly significant for tribal communities and minority language groups whose languages were historically neglected in formal education. The promotion of multilingual education can foster dignity, inclusion, and representation.

Moreover, the policy promotes inclusive classrooms where linguistic diversity is respected rather than suppressed. Such educational environments encourage mutual respect among students from different linguistic backgrounds.

However, implementation remains uneven across states because India's linguistic diversity is highly complex. Many classrooms contain students speaking multiple mother tongues, creating practical challenges for language-based instruction.

**Teacher Education and Curriculum Reform:** Successful implementation of multilingual education requires major reforms in teacher training and curriculum design.

NEP 2020 recognizes the shortage of teachers proficient in regional languages and multilingual pedagogy. Therefore, the policy recommends:

- Recruitment of local teachers
- Development of bilingual teacher education programs
- Preparation of multilingual teaching-learning materials
- Use of technology for translation and digital content creation

Curriculum reforms under NEP 2020 also emphasize experiential learning, local culture, and contextual knowledge. Indian languages are expected to play a central role in delivering culturally relevant education.

Teacher preparedness is crucial because multilingual classrooms require specialized pedagogical skills. Teachers must know how to transition students from home language to additional languages without creating confusion or linguistic inferiority.

**Challenges in Implementation:** Despite its progressive vision, NEP 2020 faces several implementation challenges.

**Lack of Trained Teachers:** India currently lacks sufficient teachers trained in multilingual pedagogy. Many teachers themselves are products of monolingual or English-dominated education systems.

**Shortage of Educational Materials:** There is inadequate availability of textbooks, digital resources, and scientific materials in many regional and tribal languages.

**Linguistic Diversity in Classrooms:** Urban classrooms often contain children from multiple linguistic backgrounds, making mother tongue instruction difficult.

**Social Preference for English:** Many parents perceive English-medium education as essential for social mobility and employment opportunities. As a result, regional language education is sometimes associated with lower status.

**Administrative and Financial Constraints:** Developing multilingual educational infrastructure requires significant investment in translation, curriculum development, teacher training, and technology.

These challenges indicate that policy success depends on careful planning, cooperation between states and central government, and long-term commitment.

**Technology and the Future of Indian Languages:** NEP 2020 recognizes technology as a tool for promoting Indian languages. Digital platforms can help create multilingual educational content, translation software, online dictionaries, and language learning applications.

Artificial Intelligence and machine translation technologies can reduce linguistic barriers and increase accessibility of educational resources in regional languages.

Digital preservation initiatives can also help document endangered languages and oral traditions. Thus, technology can become a powerful instrument for linguistic revitalization.

**Globalization and Multilingual Competence:** In the era of globalization, multilingual competence has become increasingly important. NEP 2020 does not reject English; rather, it promotes additive multilingualism where students learn multiple languages simultaneously.

Students educated under multilingual systems may develop better intercultural communication skills and cognitive flexibility. Therefore, the policy aims to create globally competent yet culturally rooted citizens.

This balanced approach reflects the idea that national development and global engagement can coexist without sacrificing linguistic diversity.

#### **Limitations of the Study:**

1. The study is based only on secondary data sources.
2. The research does not include field surveys or empirical investigation.
3. Since NEP 2020 is relatively new, long-term impacts of its implementation cannot yet be fully evaluated.
4. The study mainly focuses on educational aspects and does not extensively analyze political dimensions of language policy.

#### **Policy Suggestions**

1. The government should increase investment in multilingual teacher training programs.
2. High-quality textbooks and digital educational resources should be developed in all major Indian languages.
3. Greater support should be provided for tribal and endangered languages.
4. Awareness programs should be conducted to remove social stigma associated with regional language education.
5. Translation and interpretation institutions should be strengthened.
6. Technology-based language learning platforms should be expanded.
7. Coordination between central and state governments is essential for effective implementation.
8. Continuous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be established for multilingual education programs.

**Conclusion:** NEP 2020 represents a landmark educational reform that seeks to restore the importance of Indian languages within the educational system. By promoting mother tongue instruction, multilingualism, and linguistic inclusivity, the policy attempts to democratize education and preserve India's cultural diversity.

The policy recognizes language not merely as a communication tool but as a medium of cognitive growth, identity formation, and social empowerment. NEP 2020 challenges historical linguistic inequalities and seeks to provide equitable educational opportunities to learners from diverse backgrounds.

Although significant implementation challenges remain, including shortage of trained teachers, lack of resources, and societal preference for English, the policy provides a visionary framework for linguistic empowerment.

If effectively implemented, NEP 2020 can strengthen educational quality, cultural preservation, national integration, and social inclusion while preparing students for global participation in a multilingual world.

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