
MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION UNDER NEP 2020: BRIDGING LANGUAGE BARRIERS IN INDIA

***Dr. P. Sankavi**

Assistant Professor of English Gobi Arts & Science College Gobichettipalayam.

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***Corresponding Author: Dr. P. Sankavi**

Assistant Professor of English Gobi Arts & Science College Gobichettipalayam.

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ABSTRACT

One of India's greatest assets is its multilingualism, yet the educational system faces difficulties as a result. A multilingual approach that honors children's mother tongues, particularly in the early years of school, is supported by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. It seeks to improve education's inclusivity, significance, and cultural ties to India. This study examines how language is crucial to the effective implementation of NEP 2020. Additionally, it looks at the infrastructure, pedagogical, psychological, and cultural aspects of multilingual education. The study also looks at how equitable opportunities, cultural identity, and access to high-quality education in India are impacted by the persistent preference for English.

KEYWORDS: Multilingualism, Implementation, Infrastructure, Pedagogical, Psychological.

India's greatest cultural asset and one of its biggest educational challenges is its linguistic diversity. Through a multilingual, inclusive, and culturally grounded framework that acknowledges the value of mother tongue-based instruction, especially in the foundational years, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aims to transform Indian education. This study analyzes the cultural, psychological, pedagogical, and infrastructure aspects of multilingual education in order to critically examine the crucial role that language plays in the effective implementation of NEP 2020. It examines how persistent linguistic hierarchies—particularly the predominance of English—continue to influence issues of equity, identity, and access in the Indian educational system.

It therefore dreams of India becoming a global leader in education, that is inclusive, equitable and authentically Indian, truly becoming a Vishwaguru in the fullest sense of the word India

is set to become a major world hub for research and education. It has produced many famous scientists, technologists, business leaders, artists and social reformers. Indian professionals have earned a reputation as leaders in technology and science, business, health care and the arts in a range of venues from Silicon Valley to CERN, the World Health Organization and corporate boards of Fortune 500 companies. The Ministry of Education 2023 report puts the country in the top five for research and publications.

India has **22 scheduled languages and hundreds of dialects**, making its linguistic diversity very rich and unique. The **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** encourages a flexible multilingual approach where children learn in their **mother tongue**, especially during the early years. This helps students understand concepts better and makes education more inclusive. However, putting this idea into practice is not easy. Many schools lack proper infrastructure, trained multilingual teachers, and good learning materials in regional languages. In many parts of the country, English is still seen as a symbol of status and better opportunities, which creates a gap between the policy and what actually happens in classrooms, especially in rural and underserved areas. Therefore, language plays a very important role in the successful implementation of NEP 2020. If India's languages are used thoughtfully, they can improve learning, increase cultural confidence, and support the country's goals of equality and global development. In this way, India is not only following global education trends but also creating its own path.

The **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** is considered a major step towards improving the Indian education system. It aims to remove the colonial mindset from education and promote national unity by creating an education system that is inclusive, culturally connected, and prepared for future needs. The policy was developed after more than five years of discussions, research, and consultations with teachers, students, experts, and other stakeholders across the country. It is designed not just to make small changes but to completely transform the education system. If implemented properly, NEP 2020 can bring many positive changes in Indian education. At the same time, it is important to understand the real purpose of the policy and implement it according to the needs of different regions.

One of the biggest changes introduced by NEP 2020 is the **5+3+3+4** school structure, which includes **Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)** as an important part of formal education.

Young children will receive early learning through **Anganwadis, Balvatikas, and pre-primary schools**, helping them build a strong educational foundation from the beginning. The policy also gives high importance to **Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN)**,

development of **21st-century skills**, and **vocational education** to prepare students for future careers. It is also aligned with the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** by promoting equal access to quality education for every child.

Some other important features of NEP 2020 include:

- Formation of **school complexes** so that nearby schools can share resources, teachers, and facilities more effectively.

Some other important changes introduced by NEP 2020 are:

- Moving from rote learning to **competency-based assessments**, where students are tested on their understanding and practical skills.
- Bringing **common standards** for both government and private schools.
- Providing **regular teacher training and professional development** so that teachers can improve their teaching methods.
- Introducing policies to reduce **language barriers** and make education more inclusive for all students.

The success of any education policy mainly depends on how well it is implemented. For this, everyone involved—teachers, school leaders, policymakers, administrators, parents, and the community—should clearly understand the goals of the policy. A balanced approach is needed where guidance comes from the top, but everyone also gets involved in the process. Teachers play the most important role because they directly work with students every day. So, they need proper training, updated knowledge, and continuous support. However, this is still difficult because schools across India have different levels of infrastructure, resources, and awareness.

Bringing such a big reform into the education system cannot happen overnight. It needs time, careful planning, and flexibility according to the local social, cultural, political, and financial conditions. Every region has different needs, so the implementation should happen step by step instead of all at once. Although the goals of NEP 2020 are very ambitious, they can be achieved with proper planning and gradual implementation. As Dale Carnegie said, *"Nothing is particularly hard if you divide it into small parts."* Following this idea, this study focuses on developing a practical, step-by-step strategy to support the successful implementation of NEP 2020, especially in reducing language barriers that often affect quality education.

India's multilingual nature is one of its biggest strengths. But people, especially young students, should first learn to respect and value this diversity. At the same time, there is also a

need to move away from the colonial mindset that still gives more importance to English than Indian languages. Education gives people confidence and opportunities, but this benefit is not equal across the country. Because of this, important questions arise. How can language become a bridge instead of a barrier in education? How can multilingualism become an advantage instead of a challenge? These are the questions this discussion tries to answer.

Multilingualism is a valuable part of Indian culture, but it also creates many challenges while making a common education policy. Almost every major education commission, from the Radhakrishnan Commission to NEP 2020, has tried to solve this issue. Even today, there is no single solution that satisfies everyone. Over the years, English has become deeply connected with education, jobs, and communication in India. Many people see it as the language of success and better career opportunities. This thinking is not limited to cities; even families in villages prefer English-medium schools because they believe it offers a brighter future for their children.

Language is not only a way of communication but also an important part of culture and identity. To truly understand and appreciate a language, people need regular exposure and practice. Even many teachers and researchers find it difficult to imagine studying or doing research without English. This is especially true in science, technology, and social sciences, where most books, journals, and research papers are written in English. At the same time, there are very few high-quality academic resources available in Indian languages. There is also a shortage of skilled translators, proper research infrastructure, and simple technical words in regional languages. Because of these problems, even those who support Indian languages often continue using English in their academic work.

The impact of this situation goes beyond education. It also affects people's identity, confidence, and cultural pride. When English dominates every field, India's rich linguistic heritage does not receive the attention it deserves. It has also influenced the growing trend of educated Indians moving to English-speaking countries for better opportunities. Solving this issue requires much more than making policies. It needs long-term investment, public support, and a change in the way we think about education and language.

Many studies have shown that children learn better in their mother tongue, and NEP 2020 strongly supports this idea. But making it successful will require changing old habits, improving the education system, and building confidence in Indian languages as languages of modern knowledge. Real change always takes time, patience, and continuous effort. If implemented properly, NEP 2020 can turn India's linguistic diversity into one of its greatest strengths.

Today, India faces an important question. Can the country create a language policy that supports global communication while also protecting and promoting Indian languages? A practical solution would be to continue using English where necessary while gradually expanding the use of Indian languages in education, administration, research, and other important fields. This approach can balance both global needs and cultural identity.

Education mainly depends on four important pillars: **students, teachers, curriculum, and infrastructure**. NEP 2020 aims to strengthen all these areas through proper planning, regular evaluation, and continuous improvements. Financial rewards are important, but teachers and institutions also need recognition and appreciation for their work. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also emphasized that the language barrier in education should be removed by promoting learning in local languages.

Although English came to India during British rule, today it works as an associate language and an important link language. More than **35 million Indians** speak English, making India one of the largest English-speaking countries in the world. At the same time, India is home to many different languages, and there is no single language that everyone accepts equally. Hindi is the official language of the Union Government, but it has not been accepted everywhere, especially in many southern states.

Some people worry that reducing the importance of English may affect higher education, research, and international communication because English is widely used across the world. These concerns are understandable. However, India's language policy should find a balance between global communication and promoting Indian languages. In some fields, such as law, many English legal terms still do not have exact Hindi or regional language equivalents, making translation difficult.

India has a long history of linguistic diversity. Before English became common, languages like **Sanskrit, Prakrit, Persian, and Urdu** played important roles in administration, literature, and education. During British rule, English became the main administrative language and later became a symbol of education, social status, and economic progress. At the same time, it also increased cultural distance and educational inequality. Therefore, India needs a balanced language policy that respects its own languages while accepting the practical importance of English. Instead of removing English suddenly, Indian languages should be promoted gradually in education, administration, science, technology, and law so that both national identity and global opportunities can grow together.

A gradual or phased change is very important. If English is removed suddenly from education and administration, it can create many problems because many systems still depend on it.

India is a multilingual country, and every state has the freedom to use its own regional language under the Constitution. At the same time, English continues to be useful for international communication and higher education. Until enough professionals are trained in regional languages, English will still remain necessary, especially in technical, scientific, and academic fields. So, India needs a balanced language policy that respects Indian languages while also recognizing the practical importance of English.

India's linguistic diversity is one of its greatest strengths, but it also makes language policy and education more challenging. Both the Constitution of India and NEP 2020 support multilingual education and encourage teaching children in their mother tongue during the early years. However, in colleges, universities, and professional education, English is still the main language used for teaching and administration. This creates a gap between the policy's vision and the present reality.

Regional languages will become stronger in higher education only when there are enough qualified teachers, researchers, and professionals who can work in those languages. At present, most official documents, planning, and administrative work are done in English. Although translations are available, they are often used only for formal purposes and not in everyday academic work. This problem is even bigger in fields like engineering, medicine, law, and technology, where most textbooks and research materials are available only in English. Because of this, many people who support regional languages still depend on English while discussing technical subjects.

There is also a continuous debate between promoting Indian languages and meeting the demands of modernization. Many attempts have been made to promote Hindi as a national language, but several states have opposed it because they want to protect their own regional languages. In areas like law, science, and technology, finding exact translations for technical English words is often difficult. This makes the use of English necessary in many situations.

India has an amazing linguistic diversity. According to the Linguistic Survey of India, there are **179 languages and more than 500 dialects**, belonging to four major language families—Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Austroasiatic, and Tibeto-Burman. The Constitution recognizes **22 scheduled languages**, while English continues to act as a link language between Hindi-speaking and non-Hindi-speaking states. Although Hindi is the most widely spoken language, it is spoken by only around 40% of the population. This clearly shows that no single language is spoken by all Indians. Because of this diversity, creating a language policy that satisfies everyone is a very difficult task.

Even with these challenges, NEP 2020 presents a modern and thoughtful vision for education. It encourages learning that is practical, student-centered, inquiry-based, flexible, and enjoyable instead of depending only on memorization. The policy believes that education should help students develop knowledge, creativity, critical thinking, compassion, ethics, and respect for India's cultural heritage. It also supports the goals of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4, which promotes quality and inclusive education for everyone.

The main aim of NEP 2020 is not only to prepare students for jobs but also to develop responsible citizens who can think logically, solve problems, respect others, and contribute positively to society.

Multilingualism is one of the main features of NEP 2020. The policy clearly says that **no language will be forced on any student**. From the age of three, children are encouraged to learn three languages naturally. It also recommends that, as much as possible, children should study in their **mother tongue or local language** until at least Grade 5, and preferably up to Grade 8. This idea is supported by Mahatma Gandhi, who believed that the mother tongue is the best medium for teaching young children.

UNESCO has also stated that mother tongue-based multilingual education helps improve learning and makes education more inclusive. Many education experts believe that learning in the mother tongue is especially helpful for children from disadvantaged and marginalized communities.

The three-language approach helps students become skilled not only in their mother tongue but also in two additional languages. Subjects like science and mathematics can be taught using bilingual methods so that students understand concepts more clearly. Research also shows that multilingual children often develop better creativity, problem-solving skills, and cognitive abilities.

Some people have criticized the three-language policy because they think it may increase the learning burden or lead to language dominance. However, NEP 2020 tries to solve these concerns by promoting activity-based, interactive, and skill-oriented language learning instead of rote memorization. This makes learning languages easier and more interesting.

The policy also promises to recruit more multilingual teachers, encourage teacher exchange programs between states, and use technology to improve access to education in different languages. Although English is useful for global communication, only a small number of Indians actually need it for studying or working abroad. Most people work in agriculture, industry, and services within India, where regional languages are more commonly used.

Therefore, English should be seen as both an opportunity and a challenge—it connects India with the world but can also create barriers for those who do not know it well.

Many scholars believe that if a country ignores its own languages, it slowly loses its traditional knowledge and cultural identity. India's rich contributions in areas like Ayurveda, yoga, mathematics, philosophy, literature, and classical arts were created in languages such as Sanskrit, Tamil, Pali, Persian, and many others long before English became common. Therefore, India needs to maintain a healthy balance between English and regional languages so that development becomes more inclusive.

Article 350A of the Indian Constitution also says that every state should provide facilities for children belonging to linguistic minority groups to study in their mother tongue at the primary level. However, in reality, this has not been implemented equally everywhere, and many minority languages still face difficulties.

NEP 2020 wants education to remain connected to India's culture and values while preparing students for the future. To achieve this goal, India should stop thinking that English alone brings success and instead build confidence in its own languages. By promoting multilingual education in a balanced way, India can create an education system that is more inclusive, equal, and culturally meaningful, helping the country move closer to becoming a true

Vishwaguru.

Reimagining Action: Language-Inclusive Strategies for NEP 2020

To make NEP 2020 successful in real classrooms, practical steps are needed. A good language policy should include everyone instead of creating new barriers. Some useful strategies are:

1. Establish Knowledge Translation Centres

Universities should create special centres where important books, research papers, and educational materials from around the world are translated into Indian languages. These centres should not simply translate words but also explain ideas in a way that matches local culture and understanding. This will make quality knowledge available to students who are more comfortable learning in their own language.

2. Create Multilingual Teaching Labs

Instead of providing only traditional teacher training, special multilingual teaching labs should be established. These centres can train teachers to teach effectively using two or more languages in the same classroom. Teachers can learn new methods of bilingual and multilingual teaching, use local knowledge in their lessons, and help students see language

diversity as a strength instead of a problem. This will improve both learning and classroom participation.

3. Design Entrance Exams that Treat All Languages Equally

National-level entrance examinations should be prepared in a way that gives equal importance to every language. Instead of simply translating the question paper into different languages, the exam should be designed from the beginning so that all language versions carry the same meaning and difficulty level. Difficult words, confusing expressions, and language bias should be avoided. This will help students from different language backgrounds compete fairly without feeling disadvantaged.

4. Start a National Language Vocabulary Mission

India should encourage universities, language experts, teachers, and students to work together to develop modern academic and technical words in regional languages. New terms should be tested, improved, and made easy for everyone to understand. Activities like competitions, workshops, and collaborative projects can encourage young people to take part and feel proud of using their own languages for higher education and research.

5. Introduce Language Equity Fellowships

The government can provide special fellowships and scholarships for researchers, writers, and educators who create quality educational materials in Indian languages. This is especially important in subjects like science, engineering, technology, and social sciences where English dominates. Along with financial support, these scholars should receive guidance on publishing and sharing their work with a larger audience.

6. Make Language Accessibility a Part of Every Education Program

Before introducing any new education scheme, there should be a review to check whether students from different language backgrounds can easily understand and access it. Learning materials, digital platforms, websites, and teaching methods should support multiple Indian languages instead of depending mainly on English. Language inclusion should become a basic requirement rather than an optional feature.

India's multilingual culture is one of its greatest strengths. Instead of treating it as a problem, it should be used as an advantage for national development. If India wants to become a global leader in education, innovation, and knowledge, it must first ensure that every language receives equal respect within the country. NEP 2020 provides a strong opportunity to make

this possible by promoting multilingual education and equal learning opportunities for all students. With proper planning and commitment, India can become an example for other countries in building an education system that is both inclusive and future-ready.

CONCLUSION

India's many languages should not be seen as a challenge but as one of its biggest strengths. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 provides a good opportunity to use this diversity for improving education, promoting equality, and strengthening national unity. But having a good policy alone is not enough. It also needs proper implementation, long-term planning, and support from teachers, educational institutions, governments, and society.

To make this vision successful, India should establish **Knowledge Translation Hubs** to translate important research into Indian languages. **Multilingual Pedagogy Labs** should be created to train teachers for multilingual classrooms. Entrance examinations should be designed in a way that gives equal importance to all languages. New academic and technical vocabulary should be developed in regional languages through a National Lexicon Initiative. Fellowships should encourage research and writing in Indian languages, while every education program should be checked to ensure language accessibility for all students.

Technology can also play a major role by making learning materials available in different Indian languages and improving access to quality education. At the same time, society should change its mindset. People should stop believing that only English leads to success. Every Indian language carries knowledge, culture, and history, and all of them deserve equal respect. When students feel proud of learning in their own language, their confidence and understanding also improves.

Today, India is standing at an important stage in its educational journey. If multilingualism is accepted as a strength instead of a problem, the country can build an education system that is more inclusive, fair, and connected to its culture. By balancing the importance of English with the promotion of Indian languages, India can prepare students for global opportunities while preserving its rich heritage.

In the end, India's future will not depend on how many languages its people speak, but on how well every language is respected, promoted, and used for learning, innovation, and national development. If NEP 2020 is implemented with sincerity and proper planning, it can help India become a true **Vishwaguru**, where education is accessible, meaningful, and beneficial for every learner.

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