

## **An Overview of Language Orientation in National Education Policy 2020**

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### **Abstract**

The National Education Policy 2020 envisions India as a self-reliant country in all respects and would evolve as a hub of knowledge superpower. It intends to revamp the present education system in the very constructive way. Due to the process of digitization and technology advancement in every sector; there is a huge demand for skilled people in various fields. As a result NEP incorporated groundings to meet these forthcoming challenges in the most prolific manner. While dealing with all aspects of our current Education system, National Education Policy also gave due attention and importance to language teaching and learning. It highlighted the need of preserving multilingualism to foster dynamic culture associated with every language. There is an apprehension among the language teachers that the mother tongue would be the medium of classroom instruction and English will not have its place in the curriculum; therefore in the present paper an endeavour is made to find out language policy as propagated in NEP 2020.

**KEYWORDS:** National Education Policy 2020, language learning, multilingualism

### **Introduction:**

The new education policy (NEP 2020) was proposed by the ministry of human resource development was released in parliament on 29th July 2020 by our honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This policy talks about every aspect of present education system and took futuristic approach regarding education. It reshuffled the present stages of the education from primary to higher education system. Along with different aspects, NEP 2020 offers the language policy and highlighted the importance of multilingualism. In NEP 2020 the fact is taken into account that 'young children learn and grasp nontrivial concepts more quickly in their home language/mother tongue.'<sup>1</sup> Therefore, in the process of learning, it seems obvious that the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction would be fruitful in initial years. The NEP advocates home language as a medium of instruction until grade 5, but preferably till grade 8 and beyond. In the document it is also made clear that the high quality teaching material in all subjects will be made available in the home language. It will definitely boost the cognitive ability of the students as the language spoken at home and the language of the textbook would remain the same. Therefore education would be able to develop thinking capabilities of pupil more effectively. In this regard Patel K. mentioned that "Education is enlisted as one of the basic human rights of every individual. The education system must contribute to thinking patterns development."<sup>2</sup> (Patel, 2019)

The rationale behind strengthening mother tongue is also stated in the document of NEP- "As so many developed countries around the world have amply demonstrated, being well educated in one's language, culture, and traditions is not a detriment but indeed a huge benefit to educational, social, and technological advancement."<sup>3</sup> The Ministry of Education in November 2021 constituted a high-powered committee, the Bharatiya Bhasha Samiti, for the promotion of Indian languages.

The role of the teacher would also become very important here, because he has to adopt a bilingual approach during classroom instructions. Moreover in NEP it is also specified that ‘a language does not need to be the medium of instruction for it to be taught and learned well.’<sup>4</sup> Though it is true, many scholars believe that the medium of instruction plays an important role in language acquisition. If the language targeted and the medium of instruction is same then learning of that particular language becomes easier for the learner. Listening is an initial skill in language learning. Therefore, if students are exposed to a new language in conducive atmosphere; then language learning becomes easier for a new learner. The dichotomy of the teaching English as a second language is that a student who is studying English as a second language from standard first remains incompetent in Communicative English even after completing graduation, but if the same student does a six months course in spoken English communicates well in English. So is our present pedagogy and content of teaching ESL relevant in today’s world? So this remains a big question.

There is some kind of delusion among the scholars that the primary education would be in the mother tongue and hence students would not have exposure to other languages. Though this is true, but this does not mean students will not be allowed to learn other languages; moreover it is clearly mentioned in NEP that they should be exposed to different languages early. “As research clearly shows that children pick up languages extremely quickly between the ages of 2 and 8 and that 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.”<sup>5</sup> Learning of languages; other than mother tongue should be started from the foundational stage, especially listening and speaking skills, and the other skills i.e. reading and writing should be taught from Grade 3 and beyond.

NEP also accentuated the role of the Central and State governments in investing in a large number of language teachers in all regional languages around the country. For this a bilateral agreement to hire teachers from various states would be in force. Three-language formula will be there and the states are given freedom to choose these three languages. Another challenge is to translate all the books in the local language to adopt bilingual approach in classroom interactions. It would be a colossal task for the teachers across the country. More importantly the objectives of teaching languages should be specific. Here the observation made by Mallikarjun B. in this regard is noteworthy. He tried to identify the multi-lingual situation in India and advocates a multilingual approach towards language learning in schools. He criticized that “the curriculum objectives for the three languages (as per the then National Policy on languages) taught in schools as being same. The educators should specify goals for each language to be taught in schools and methodologies to achieve them.”<sup>6</sup>

As we are living in a digital world, extensive use of technology in language learning is also proposed in National Education Policy. Use of technology to facilitate language learning should be in focus; for that various tools like LMS, MOOCs and other technology driven techniques would be in practice. Language being a skill subject, experiential methods, gamification, would be encouraged.

Human civilization came hitherto through the various developmental phases which proved that language brings and flourishes culture. Every language reflects culture

and therefore to preserve the rich and dynamic culture prevailing in the various regions of India; every language should be given its due importance. In this regard an educationist D. P. Pattanayak, then Director of Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore mentioned that, “In the multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, language often acts as a criterion for ethnic identity, even if it may neither be the only criterion nor the most important.”<sup>7</sup>

For this NEP advocates the importance of preservation of every regional language by different methods. Grade 6 to 8 will have a project or an activity on ‘The languages of India’ under the scheme called “*Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat*” initiative. Students will also be made aware about the unity of most of the major Indian languages, as their source from Sanskrit and other classical languages. It not only helps them to learn more languages but also to know about different geographical areas and its culture. “Such an activity would give them both a sense of the unity and the beautiful cultural heritage and diversity of India and would be a wonderful icebreaker their whole lives as they meet people from other parts of India.”<sup>8</sup> It will be helpful to inculcate a sense of oneness which would lead to national unity.

National Education Policy highlighted Sanskrit as an important modern language. Sanskrit possesses Classical literature which is greater in volume than that of Latin and Greek put together. In Sanskrit we have Mathematics, Philosophy, Grammar, Music, Politics, Medicine, Architecture, Metallurgy, Drama, Poetry, storytelling and more. The specialty of Sanskrit literature as mentioned in NEP is “it is written by people of various religions as well as non-religious people from all walks of life and a middle range of socio-economic backgrounds over thousands of years.”<sup>9</sup> It will enhance the sense of unity and equality among the students. Therefore Sanskrit will be an option at all school levels and even in higher education. There will be provision to place Sanskrit in three language formula adopted by the state. The textbook will be made available in Simple Standard Sanskrit. Here the medium of instruction would be Sanskrit itself to make learning enjoyable.

Another important feature of National Education Policy in relation to language learning is it gives due importance to Classical languages like Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam Odia along with Pali, Persian and Prakrit. It is believed that to preserve and to enrich these languages they must be part of school and college curriculum. In educational institutions these languages will be available as an option for students. Moreover these languages would be available through online mode; through experiential and innovative teaching-learning methods. Students will have an option to study these classical languages at least for two years from grade 6 to 12, and if they want to study further they will be allowed to do so. This facility will be available not only in public schools but in private schools also.

Keeping in mind the global opportunities that are and will be available due to foreign language acquisition, the need to study these languages like Korean, Japanese, Thai, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian is also highlighted. It will open huge opportunities to our students. These foreign languages will be offered from the secondary level. Here, in the list of foreign languages we did not find Mandarin, it might be avoided due to international geopolitical tensions.

**Conclusion:**

In every Educational system teaching a language has always remained crucial. It is the skillset and innovative pedagogical approach on the part of a teacher that assures the language acquisition among the learners. We have a prevailing recruitment system for language teachers. After completing Post Graduation and any diploma or degree in the Faculty of Education a person becomes able to get recruited as a language teacher. But it is hard to believe that the prevailing recruitment system will work to achieve the goals set out by NEP; regarding language teaching and learning in the most effective manner. The teaching of any particular language requires a lot of research and experimentation. The methods that are used to teach subjects other than languages are different. A lot of research needs to be carried out in teaching of languages in general and English in particular. Another challenge in our present education system is lack of coordination among the schools and the higher education institution. In National Education Policy a holistic view has been taken regarding the whole education structure. Therefore the success of NEP is depends upon its rightful implementation. It would be the result of harmonious working of government agencies and teaching fraternity.

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