PROMOTING INDIAN LANGUAGES IN SCHOOL EDUCATION WITH REFERENCE TO NEP-2020

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Introduction

Language could be a powerful tool. Post-Independence, a variety of languages are a unit on the verge of extinction. Since Language is crucial for conserving the heritage and culture of a society, many communities lie at the danger of losing their identity. So as to retain the cultural heritage of the varied Indian communities, it's necessary to introduce courses on Indian Languages within the teaching System. NEP 2020 is about aside from standard education policies within the sense that it aims at the effective preparation of policies in academic establishments. It involves prestigious NGOs and organizations at the grass-root level that are willing to participate within the implementation of NEP 2020. Language is coupled to art and culture. Completely different languages 'see' the planet otherwise. Languages influence the manner folks of a given culture speak with others. Culture is, thus, sheathed in our languages. Art, within the kind of literature, plays, music, film, etc. cannot be absolutely appreciated while not language. So as to preserve and promote culture, one should preserve and promote a culture's languages. For functions of cultural enrichment still as national integration, all young Indians ought to bear in mind the wealthy and immense array of languages of their country, and therefore the treasures that they and their literatures contain. The issue of language, each as a medium of instruction, still as a freelance discipline has been controlled in nice detail each at college and better education level within the new policy. (Wadekkar, B., Phulari, S. and Vishwkarma, B. 2022)

India is a land of linguistic diversity, with over 1,600 languages spoken across the country. The promotion of Indian languages, therefore, holds cultural, social, and pedagogical significance. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, a transformative policy framework, seeks to address the gap between this rich linguistic heritage and its inclusion in the Indian education system. A key emphasis of the NEP-2020 is the promotion of mother tongues, regional languages, and Indian classical languages in schools, thereby reinforcing the multilingual fabric

of India while ensuring that every child has access to quality education in their language of comfort.

To understand the importance of promoting Indian languages in education, it is essential to trace the historical context. Before colonization, India had a tradition of multilingualism, where various regional languages flourished. The classical languages of Sanskrit, Tamil, and Pali were central to the intellectual and cultural traditions. However, British colonial education policies led to the dominance of English as the medium of instruction, marginalizing Indian languages in formal education.

Post-independence India took measures to revive Indian languages, but the imposition of English-medium education remained significant, particularly in urban and elite sections of society. The Constitution of India, through Articles 343 to 351, attempted to safeguard linguistic diversity by recognizing Hindi as the official language and giving official status to other regional languages. However, language policies have often sparked debates on linguistic hegemony and regional autonomy, further complicating their implementation.

The adoption of multilingual approach at school level and promotion of local/regional languages by NEP 2020 is a positive step which has been taken by the Government of India to foster the learning environment and catering the learning needs of learners from an early age. The policy not only works towards bridging the gap between local language and its applicability in instructing the learners but also works towards making them feel a sense of pride in using their mother tongue while at the same time nurturing proficiency in multiple languages, thus, making the learners future ready at global level. The policy is transformative in the sense that it works towards promoting linguistic diversity by being inclusive for learners from multiple strata and diverse language background while preserving the cultural heritage of the knowledge domain of our country. (Srivastava, R.K., Aleem Mohd and Tomar Surbhi (2024).

The Vision of NEP-2020 on Language Promotion

The NEP-2020 aims to revamp the Indian education system by introducing a student-centric, inclusive, and flexible curriculum. One of its main pillars is the promotion of Indian languages, and its significance can be viewed in three distinct aspects:

1. **Multilingualism in Early Education**: NEP-2020 encourages the use of mother tongue or regional language as the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, and preferably till Grade 8 and beyond. This reflects a commitment to making foundational education accessible, relatable, and culturally embedded for children. Research indicates that

learning in one's native language fosters cognitive development and lays a strong foundation for future learning.

2. **Three-Language Formula**: NEP-2020 revises the old Three-Language Formula, emphasizing that students should be exposed to three languages at the school level—two of which must be native Indian languages. This approach ensures not only the promotion of regional and national languages but also introduces children to the linguistic diversity of India.

3. **Focus on Classical and Tribal Languages**: The policy also underlines the importance of learning classical languages such as Sanskrit, Tamil, and Pali, alongside tribal languages, many of which are at risk of extinction. By promoting these languages, the policy seeks to preserve India's intangible cultural heritage and foster inclusivity in the curriculum.

The NEP 2020 has also proposed education in the mother tongue or first language up to a minimum of Class V level to help achieve 2030 goals, namely, "inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (NEP-2020, p. 3). Creating such education is challenging in many ways. The condition of government primary schools in the country is pathetic. The student-teacher ratio, infrastructure, inadequate laboratory facilities, lack of library, sporting goods, etc. make the situation unsatisfactory. Simultaneously a large part of the managerial skill and energy of the teachers goes into the arrangement of midday meals and other additional duties assigned to them by the government from time to time. Identifying a language as a mother tongue in a particular setup and managing a multilingual classroom is also a challenge, for instance, in the states like Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim or Nagaland. Emphasis has been laid on the three-language formula and multilingualism in the local education system. It is also essential to have a pool of well-trained language teachers with the ability to translate and interpret. All these must eventually lead to high-quality programmes in the conservation and development of art, literature, music, crafts, archaeology, and graphic and web design. When early childhood education is connected to these programmes, it helps build children's capacities. (Tirupathy, A.K., 2022)

Advantages of Mother Tongue-Based Education

New Education Policy 2020 is the decision to make mother tongue as the medium of instruction up to 5 class. The objective is to create a long-term impact on nation building. It may also create a profound effect on the ongoing process of human resource development and to help

students establish social and cultural relationships with the environment they are living in. (Drishti)

Research on mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) offers strong evidence in favor of using children's home language as the medium of instruction in early education:

- **Cognitive Development**: Children tend to grasp concepts better when taught in a language they understand. Studies have shown that students who begin education in their mother tongue show improved cognitive abilities and are better equipped to acquire additional languages.

- **Cultural Relevance**: Language is intricately tied to culture. Learning in one's mother tongue allows children to connect education with their everyday experiences, making the learning process more meaningful. This connection helps in the holistic development of the child, where language, culture, and education are intertwined.

- **Reduction in Dropout Rates**: Many children, especially in rural areas, struggle with learning when introduced to an unfamiliar language early on. By making mother tongue the medium of instruction, NEP-2020 aims to reduce the dropout rates by making learning more accessible and less alienating for these students.

- **Foundation for Multilingualism**: Children who are proficient in their mother tongue can more easily learn additional languages. NEP-2020's focus on teaching multiple languages ensures that children are not only grounded in their linguistic and cultural heritage but are also prepared for global engagement by acquiring English and other languages.

  Thus, the best way to achieve the aims of making mother tongue as a medium of instruction in primary school is efficient implementation. It encompasses

- Setting up institutions in states to publish standard books in the regional languages.

- Appointing teachers adept in their mother tongue.

- Initiating pedagogy based on vernacular languages in teachers training programs.

- Involving parents in the teaching and learning process because they are the source of first language learning experience for the child.

- Use of technology to create learning tools in vernacular languages.

The Implementation of the Three-Language Formula

The three-language formula will continue to be implemented in India, considering constitutional provisions, aspirations of people, regions, and the Union, and the need for multilingualism and national unity. But with greater flexibility, with no language imposed on

any state. The three languages learned by children will be the choices of States, regions, and students, provided at least two are native to India. Students can change one or more languages in Grade 6 or 7, provided they demonstrate basic proficiency in three languages by the end of secondary school. (Government of India, 2020, NEP 2020, Part- I, Section 4.13). The Three-Language Formula, although well-intentioned, has been a subject of debate and differing interpretations. The primary objective is to promote national integration through linguistic inclusivity. Under NEP-2020:

- **Flexibility**: States are free to choose the three languages based on local needs. For example, a student in Tamil Nadu might learn Tamil, Hindi, and English, while a student in Gujarat could study Gujarati, Hindi, and Sanskrit.

- **National Integration**: The formula seeks to promote national unity by encouraging the learning of Hindi in non-Hindi speaking states, while ensuring that students from Hindi-speaking states also learn a regional language.

- **Challenges in Implementation**: While NEP-2020 reiterates the formula, its effective implementation poses challenges. In some states, there is resistance to learning Hindi, seen as an imposition on local linguistic identities. Additionally, there are infrastructural challenges in training teachers and developing materials in multiple languages.

Revival and Promotion of Classical and Indigenous Languages

A significant aspect of NEP-2020 is its commitment to reviving classical and indigenous languages that are at risk of vanishing. These languages are treasure troves of historical knowledge, literary wealth, and scientific heritage:

- **Sanskrit**: Sanskrit has been given a special status in NEP-2020. The policy emphasizes the promotion of Sanskrit at all levels of school education. Sanskrit is not only viewed as a classical language but as a living language with a vast repository of knowledge in fields such as science, medicine, and philosophy.

- **Other Classical Languages**: NEP-2020 also recognizes Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, and Odia as classical languages and calls for the creation of opportunities for students to learn them at all levels.

- **Indigenous and Tribal Languages**: The policy is particularly concerned about the survival of India's tribal languages, many of which have very few speakers. By promoting the use of these languages in schools, NEP-2020 aims to preserve the cultural identities of indigenous communities while providing them with the tools for inclusive education.

Teacher Training and Pedagogical Support

Effective implementation of NEP-2020's language policy requires a robust infrastructure, particularly in terms of teacher training and the availability of teaching materials. The key areas include:

- **Multilingual Teachers**: A significant challenge is the shortage of trained teachers proficient in multiple languages. The policy emphasizes the need for teacher education programs to incorporate multilingual pedagogy and train teachers to handle a variety of linguistic environments.

- **Language Laboratories and Digital Resources**: To support the teaching of various languages, NEP-2020 proposes the establishment of language laboratories and digital resources that can supplement classroom teaching. This would be particularly helpful in rural and remote areas where resources are limited.

- **Developing Teaching-Learning Materials**: There is a pressing need for high-quality textbooks, storybooks, and other learning materials in multiple Indian languages. These materials should reflect cultural diversity, be pedagogically sound, and be easily accessible to teachers and students.

Challenges in Implementation

Although the NEP-2020 has a visionary framework for promoting Indian languages, several challenges stand in the way of successful implementation:

1. **Diverse Linguistic Landscape**: India's immense linguistic diversity, while a strength, also makes it difficult to implement a uniform language policy. The balance between promoting regional languages and ensuring access to global languages like English presents a dilemma.

2. **Resistance from States**: The imposition of any language, especially Hindi, has often met with political resistance. States like Tamil Nadu have historically opposed the Three-Language Formula, viewing it as an infringement on their linguistic autonomy.

3. **Infrastructural Gaps**: Many schools, particularly in rural areas, lack the basic infrastructure for implementing multilingual education. The shortage of multilingual teachers, learning materials, and linguistic resources are major hurdles.

4. **Societal Attitudes**: English continues to be seen as a language of upward mobility and global success. Parents and communities might resist policies that prioritize regional languages over English, perceiving it as a threat to their children's prospects.

   The Role of Technology in Promoting Indian Languages

NEP-2020 recognizes the role of technology in facilitating language education. Technology can help bridge the gap in resources and provide access to quality learning materials in Indian languages. Initiatives such as *e-pathshalas*, online language courses, and mobile apps for language learning can significantly enhance the teaching and learning of Indian languages.

Additionally, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning can play a role in developing language translation tools, making content in different languages more accessible. Virtual classrooms and digital content can also promote language learning in areas with limited resources.

Case Studies of Language Promotion in Indian States

Several states in India have successfully implemented policies to promote regional languages in education:

- **Tamil Nadu**: Tamil Nadu has consistently resisted the imposition of Hindi, promoting Tamil as the primary medium of instruction in schools. The state has developed a rich body of literature and educational content in Tamil, ensuring that students have access to high-quality education in their mother tongue.

- **West Bengal**: Bengali has been promoted as the medium of instruction in schools, with significant success in improving literacy rates and educational outcomes.

- **Karnataka**: Karnataka has implemented policies to promote Kannada while also ensuring that students learn English and Hindi, offering a balanced approach to multilingual education.

Way Forward and Conclusion

The promotion of Indian languages in school education, as envisioned by NEP-2020, holds great potential to bridge the gap between India's rich linguistic diversity and its education system. By emphasizing the use of mother tongues, regional languages, and classical languages, the policy ensures that education becomes more inclusive, culturally relevant, and accessible to all.

However, successful implementation requires overcoming challenges related to infrastructure, teacher training, and societal attitudes. A collaborative effort between the government, educational institutions, teachers, and communities will be crucial to making this vision a reality.

The future of Indian education lies in its ability to embrace its linguistic diversity while preparing students for a globalized world. NEP-2020, with its focus on language promotion,

offers a roadmap for achieving this balance, ensuring that no child is left behind due to linguistic barriers, and that India's rich linguistic heritage is preserved for future generations.

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