



Understanding Multilingualism in the Light of National Education Policy-2020

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DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20623920>

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Accepted: 21-05-2026

Published: 10-06-2026

Keywords:

*NEP-2020, Languages,
Indian Linguistic Diversity,
Multilingualism,
Experiential Learning
Pedagogy.*

ABSTRACT

Language is not just a medium of communication but a significant marker of an individual's socio-cultural identity. It plays a pivotal role in enhancing educational processes and identity formation. It influences learners' cognitive and affective domains that result in their holistic development. Being an important source of transmitting knowledge and building positive teacher-taught relationship, languages become potent tool of promoting inclusion and equality, and respecting pluralism and diversity. Various educational policies and commissions have highlighted pertinent role of language in identity formation and personality development along with the recommendations to use multilingualism as a resource in teaching and learning. The first education policy of 21st century, National Education Policy-2020 also known as NEP-2020, lays strong emphasis on promotion of multilingualism. It gives more emphasis on using mother tongue or home language of children as medium of instruction to make them learn and understand the concepts quickly and effectively. "Promoting multilingualism and the power of language in teaching and learning" is one of the fundamental principles of the National Education Policy-2020. When learners' home languages are used in teaching and learning, diversity and local context are promoted and respected. In the light of these views, this conceptual paper focuses on the main highlights of NEP-2020 regarding promotion of multilingualism and use of languages



in teaching-learning process. It explores and suggests innovative and experiential learning pedagogy to teach languages at different levels of school education.

Introduction:

“For purposes of cultural enrichment as well as national integration, all young Indians should be aware of the rich and vast array of languages of their country, and the treasures that they and their literatures contain.”

-NEP-2020

This statement of NEP-2020 reminds educationists, policy makers, curriculum planners, teachers and administrators about the importance of using mother tongue and native languages of India for promoting national integration and cultural enrichment in educational settings. Education is the best way to understand and respect diversity and promote equality, inclusion, and unity. Undoubtedly, education is a potent tool to change individuals' mindsets and society's existing structure. Many educational policies, including the National Policy on Education 1986 and its Programme of Action, 1992, focused on the issues of educational accessibility and equality. The latest education policy, National Education Policy 2020, was introduced in July 2020 after a gap of almost three decades from the last Policy or program of action. It is the first education policy of the 21st century, and its main aim is to focus on developing 21st-century skills, knowledge, and pedagogy. The major highlights of this policy include

- *revamping of the current structure of education,*
- *changing the structure of teacher preparation and teacher education,*
- *integrating technology in the field of education,*
- *focusing on the Indian Knowledge System (IKS),*
- *fostering Constitutional values, and*
- *making education multidisciplinary and holistic across the stages and levels.*

It adds “this National Education Policy envisions an education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India, that is Bharat, sustainably into an equitable and vibrant



knowledge society, by providing high-quality education to all, and thereby making India a global knowledge superpower” (p-6).

In addition to the above highlights, the NEP-2020 does not fail to recognize the importance of mother tongue and the use of native languages in all spheres of human life. Language is a rule-governed system that evolves constantly and is an integral part of culture. It must be remembered that language is not just a medium of communication but also a significant marker of an individual's socio-cultural identity. In education, language is influential in enriching learning experiences and enhancing teaching learning process. It influences learners' cognitive and affective abilities positively, resulting in their holistic development. Being a source of transmitting knowledge and building positive teacher-taught relationships, language becomes a potent tool for promotion of inclusion and equity by respecting pluralism and diversity. The National Education Policy 2020 envisions the promotion of the values of inclusivity, plurality, equality and diversity.

Multilingualism and National Education Policy-2020:

“Multilingualism is constitutive of Indian identity.”

-NCERT (2006)

The National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes on promotion of multilingualism. It advocates using children's mother tongue or home language as a medium of instruction to make them learn and understand the concepts efficiently and effectively. When learners' own languages are used in teaching and learning, diversity and local contexts are promoted and respected. Students feel safer interacting and more connected to the content and teacher if their mother tongues are used in teaching-learning process. It is a well-researched fact that children learn concepts quickly when taught in their first language. Use of mother tongue at the initial stages of learning promotes students' involvement and encourages them to participate in the teaching-learning process without fear and anxiety. By using languages of the child, teacher creates conducive learning environment where child can thrive to the fullest and make a smooth and successful transition from home to school.

- ***Linguistic Diversity and Multilingualism:*** "Promoting multilingualism and the power of language in teaching and learning" (p-5) is one of the fundamental principles of the National Education Policy-2020, which recognizes the presence of the unique linguistic diversity of India. Its heterogeneity of languages makes India unique. It is rich in its linguistic diversity where more than 1600 languages or dialects, belonging to five different families, are spoken but a few are given the status of standard



language and are part of education system. In the words of Annamalai (2001), India “is functionally multilingual with forty-seven languages used in education as medium, eighty-seven in press, seventy-one in radio, thirteen in cinema and thirteen in state-level administration” (p-35).

Students whose mother tongues are minority languages or dialects feel neglected and get overburdened by the new content and incomprehensible language. Neglecting or demeaning child’s mother tongue or home language discourages their participation in teaching-learning process and demotivates them to continue their education. When linguistic diversity remains unrecognized inside the classrooms, it makes students feel more marginalized and discriminated. Based on linguistic identity, or home culture, if a child is discriminated, it adversely affects his/her self-esteem, confidence to learn, identity formation and school performances (Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development & CARE India, 2013). If language gap exists between students and teachers, it negatively affects teacher-taught relationship resulting in lack of comprehensibility and motivation.

To ensure every child’s inclusion in classroom, it is imperative to respect and appreciate the languages of every child sitting in the classroom irrespective of their backgrounds. Considering the importance of mother tongue or home language of every child, National Education Policy-2020 advocates the usage of home language or local language, mother tongue or regional language as the medium of instruction "until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond" (p-13). This is not only for public schools but private schools as well. Using mother tongue as medium of instruction will reduce the burden of learning and will make learning meaningful for all.

1. ***Three-Language Formula for Promoting Multilingualism:*** The three-language formula was initiated to promote multilingualism in India by making students learn three languages while completing their secondary school education. It was emphasized and highlighted by the Kothari Commission (1964-1966) and the Education Policy of 1968. The National Education Policy- 2020 also stresses on the role of three-language formula and states, "The three-language formula will continue to be implemented while keeping in mind the Constitutional provisions, aspirations of the people, regions, and the Union, and the need to promote multilingualism as well as promote national unity" (p-14).

NEP-2020 provides flexibility in choosing languages and discourages the imposition of this formula on any state. It adds that "the three languages learned by children will be the choices of States, regions, and of course the students themselves, so long as at least two of the three languages are native to India" (p-14). It is also suggested by the policy that "States from different regions of India



may enter into bilateral agreements to hire teachers in large numbers from each other, to satisfy the three-language formula in their respective States" (p-13). If applied in true spirit, this will bring remarkable change in promotion of multilingualism.

2. ***Importance of Indian and Foreign Languages:*** NEP-2020 emphasizes on the relevance and importance of Indian languages. It promotes Sanskrit and other classical languages, including classical Tamil, Kannada, Odia, Malayalam, Telugu, Pali, Persian, and Prakrit. To ensure the vibrant nature and life of these classical languages stay alive, these will be made available for students as an option to study through online modules. The Policy also encourages the study of Indian languages across the country. It states that "India's languages are among the richest, the most scientific, most beautiful, and most expressive in the world, with a huge body of ancient as well as modern literature (both prose and poetry), film, and music written in these languages that help form India's national identity and wealth" (p-14).

Along with Indian languages, foreign languages such as Korean, Japanese, Thai, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian will also be offered at the secondary level. Learning foreign languages will help students better view the world's cultures and develop their global knowledge and understanding. National integration, global awareness and knowledge are emphasized in NEP-2020 for better future of students.

Materials and Methods to Promote Multilingualism:

Materials or resources are those things that are used to facilitate teaching and learning. The major challenge in promoting multilingualism lies in the unavailability of resources or materials in different regional languages. It is suggested that the children's mother tongue be used at different stages of school education, especially till Grade 8. If resources are available in their mother tongue, it becomes easier for teachers and students.

National Education Policy 2020 ensures the availability of high-quality textbooks in children's home languages or mother tongues. It also urges teachers to use bilingual approach in teaching content to the students. If materials are unavailable in the child's home language, at least the interaction and delivery of content shall be in their home language. It also encourages the use of bilingual teaching-learning materials (GOI, 2020; Mahapatra & Anderson, 2022). Its main aim is to bridge the gap between the language spoken at home and the medium of instruction used in the school. Widening this language gap may lead to the problem of incomprehensibility of the content being taught to the students. It may



adversely affect students' interest and motivation in learning that may result in poor academic performance and drop out.

Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat (EBSB) is an initiative of the Ministry of Education, Government of India which aims to celebrate India's unique culture and the diversity of our nation. Under this Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat initiative, students from Grades 6 to 8 can be encouraged to participate in a fun-filled project activity on 'The Languages of India.' By involving in this project, students will learn about the major Indian languages, their common phonetics and alphabets, scripts, structures, vocabularies, and so on. They will explore and learn to produce familiar sounds and to say everyday words or phrases in those languages. They will learn how to greet people, say goodbye, and ask simple questions.

Understanding the languages of different States makes students appreciate diverse languages and develop a sense of unity and belongingness. Languages make them learn the culture of different states too. NEP-2020 has mentioned that this project must be a fun-filled activity that should not be part of any evaluation or assessment. Students should be made to enjoy this joyful activity. There are many other pedagogical practices that can be utilized to promote multilingualism in classrooms. Translanguaging, code-switching and code-mixing should also be utilized as pedagogical tools for multilingual education.

Innovative and Experiential Learning Pedagogy for Teaching Languages:

Policies promote the use of languages and their proper development, but their effectiveness is dependent upon proper implementation. There are several ways to promote multilingualism as given in the following manner:

- ***Creating Conducive Environment:*** To promote multilingualism, NEP-2020 suggests various pedagogical practices to be adopted by teachers across subject domains. Languages can be learned easily and quickly if a conducive environment is provided to the students. Teachers should ensure the provision of anxiety-free and stress-free situations for students to practice languages.
- ***Participative Learning of Languages:*** Languages should be taught in "an enjoyable and interactive style, with plenty of interactive conversation..." (p-13). NEP-2020 promotes conversation-based teaching-learning where students learn through interaction and active involvement. If students enjoy learning, they start participating in the teaching-learning process. This participation will boost their self-confidence and develop a positive attitude among them.
- ***Using Technology to Promote Multilingualism:*** To popularize language learning, NEP-2020 aims to utilize technology extensively for teaching and learning different languages. Integrating technology



can improve educational processes and products at a considerable level. SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds), DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing), and NISHTHA educational platforms can be integrated into education for the enhancement of language learning. These platforms give high accessibility, flexibility, and opportunity to learn different topics and subjects, including languages which can be utilized by students and teachers. The application of Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Reality, Machine Learning, and Augmented Reality should also be maximized in language learning and teaching to enrich learning experiences of students.

- ***Experiential Learning Pedagogy to Teach Languages:*** At different stages; foundational, preparatory, middle, and secondary stages (5+3+3+4), language teaching methods and materials need to be changed. In this regard, NEP-2020 promotes innovative and experiential methods to teach languages at different levels of school education. It says that "the teaching of languages will also be based on experiential-learning pedagogy."

Experiential learning pedagogy involves using crafts, puppets, storytelling, arts-integrated, sports-integrated pedagogy, and hands-on learning. These pedagogies discourage rote memorization and help in encouraging children's participation and motivate them to learn new concepts meaningfully in varied contexts. It also suggests exploring and utilizing different gamifications and apps to teach languages joyfully and interactively. Films, theatre, shows, storytelling, poetry, and music can also be utilized for teaching languages. Most of these pedagogical exercises must be connected to the real-life experiences of learners and correlated with various subjects or content areas. This pedagogical approach will help in increasing students' interests and motivate them to learn languages and content areas in an integrated manner.

Conclusion:

India is a country with diverse languages, and its multilingualism is the reflection of its cultural diversity (Saraf, 2014). Indian classrooms are multilingual in nature where students come from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Keeping this diversity in mind, it is imperative to promote and use multilingualism as a resource in education which is reflected in NEP-2020. Multilingualism is associated with developing better emotional capabilities, refined cognitive abilities, and vibrant social skills. It gives advantages such as better metalinguistic awareness, problem solving abilities, creativity adaptability, and social tolerance. Multilinguals are multi-competent people who are more aware of socio-linguistic functions and variables. They build better social relationships. Multilingualism is positively related to cognitive growth,



flexibility, social tolerance, and scholastic achievement. Multilingualism must be used as a resource in promotion of national integration.

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