



Exploring the Rendition of English Language in NEP 2020: A Qualitative Study

Mrittika Das

Assistant Professor, Arya Bharat Siksha Pratisthan, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal

ORCID: [0009-0008-3523-3214](https://orcid.org/0009-0008-3523-3214) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70798/TGJCT/01020003>

Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP 2020) of India marks a paradigm shift in overall education system, especially in language education, particularly analyzing the pedagogy of English as a medium of instruction. This study explores how NEP 2020 renders the English Language through qualitative analysis of various policy documents. The objectives of this present study are to understand the critical changes in the nature of the Language Education in India through NEP 2020. This study also focuses briefly on the approaches and methods as envisioned by NCF for Language Education at different stages of school as well. The study objectives consists of the possible problems of Language Education in NEP 2020 with special reference to English associated with the probable solutions of those problems. With the help of Content Analysis & Document Analysis Methods the study is conducted by analyzing primarily the New Education Policy 2020 & National Curriculum Framework 2022 & 2023. The secondary data is collected by reviewing different journals. After study, five themes emerged in language education & it is also being concluded that the primary aim of NEP 2020 is the preservation of Classical Culture maintaining the theme Unity in Diversity in a multilingual landscape like India. This analysis also results that though the use of native vernacular medium in school level may create a better learning environment but at the same time attention should be given in the use of English especially in the Government medium schools so that the teaching learning of English can be more equally effective for a brighter future in global perspective.

Keywords: NEP 2020, English Language Teaching, Multilingualism, Policy Analysis

Introduction

Language has always been a significant marker of identity, power and opportunity in postcolonial India. India is a land full of incredible linguistic diversity with hundreds of languages spoken all over the country. Though Hindi is the most common language, but many regional languages like Bengali, Tamil, Telegu are widely spoken also. The Constitution of India recognizes 22 languages in the eighth schedule with Hindi as the Official Language & English as the Associate Official Language of the country.^{2,5,6} Though many languages are in endanger position because of globalization & social changes, Government of India is taking steps to preserve the endangered languages through educational initiatives like National Education Policy 2020 very recently by giving efforts to ensure the survival of those language minorities.^{7, 13,19} In India, there are almost 1600 languages and dialects spoken by the citizens acknowledging the country as one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world. Each language reflects its own unique history, traditions and customs of the people, making India a melting pot of linguistic and cultural diversity.^{14,17} The use of Hindi as an Official Language & English as an Associate Official Language could become a unifying factor for national solidarity with the theme Unity in Diversity in a

multilingual landscape like India. It enables easy coordination between Governments and in communication with citizens. The Census 2011 lists 121 major languages in India with 1599 other languages. India is ranked 14th on the Linguistic Diversity Index which indicates that there is a large diversity in the use of mother tongue of the people of the country.^{17,18,19,20} Though learning multiple languages help in cognitive development like improved problem solving skills, better memory & greater mental flexibility but multiple languages pose challenges in determining the language of instruction to impart education as well. The National Education Policy (NEP 2020) recently has suggested the integration of native languages into formal education. The policy redefines educational priorities with a vision to create a holistic, inclusive and flexible learning system. The policy has stated, “As young children learn and grasp non trivial concepts more quickly in their home language/mother tongue, the medium of instruction at least up to grade 5 (but preferably till grade 8 and beyond) will be the home language/ mother tongue/ local language/ regional language of the child.”^{7(4.11)}

The language policy always significantly shapes not only the educational trajectories but the social outcomes as well. Within this framework of NEP 2020 in India, the English has been rearticulated, not as an imposition, but as a language of opportunity which must coexist with indigenous languages. In India, English has always been considered as a tool for social upward mobility, higher education and communication in global perspective. In particular, English occupies a unique sociolinguistic position functioning as global lingua franca. Though NEP 2020 repositions language within a multilingual framework, emphasizing mother tongue instruction at the basic level, and considering English as a medium for later stages in global competence.

Review of Related Literature

The presence of English in India’s educational and sociopolitical life has been widely debated in educational sector. Scholars such as Annamalai (2005) and Kumaravadivelu (2008) have noted the complex duality of English in India- as a tool for empowerment and as a gatekeeper of privilege. According to Graddol (2010), the expansion of English in India reflects the country’s growing participation in the global economy, where language becomes both a commodity and a skill. NEP 2020’s approach to English needs to be read against the backdrop of earlier education policies. The Kothari Commission (1964-1966) and the National Policy on Education (1986) recommended the “Three-language formula” to ensure a balance between national & international languages but often resulted in unequal implementation. Because, in practice, English has often dominated as the preferred medium of instruction, particularly in private and urban schools (Mohanty, 2010). Post-liberalization India witnessed a surge in English medium private schools, creating new forms of linguistic capital (Bernstein,2003) Contemporary studies argue that English should be taught as a skill for communication and critical thinking rather than as a status symbol (Krishnaswamy & Burde , 2018). Recent Indian scholarship examining NEP 2020 highlights its progressive yet ambiguous stance on English (Choudhury, 2021; Kumar, 2022; Pandey & Patra, 2023). While the policy emphasizes mother-tongue instruction, it recognizes English as a global language essential for 21st century skills. International comparative studies (Snow 2017; Coleman, 2011) show that bilingual and multilingual approaches can enhance learning outcomes if pedagogically supported.

English is widely recognized as a global lingua franca that transcends geographical, cultural and national boundaries (Crystal, 2012). Its dominance in academia and technology positions it as a key instrument of globalization (Graddol, 2006). Pennycook (2017) argue that English operates as both a medium of empowerment and a tool of linguistic imperialism. Internationally, education systems have grappled with balancing local language preservation and global English competency, as seen in China’s bilingual education reforms (Hu & Lei, 2014) and Japan’s English proficiency programs (Kubota,2020). Both South Africa & Singapore bilingual education model treat English as a bridge language connecting multiple ethnic groups while preserving mother tongues (Pakir, 1999). These highlight that English, when situated strategically can coexist with linguistic diversity rather than erode it. Furthermore, Canagarajah (2013) introduced the notion of “translingual practice”, suggesting that English

in postcolonial societies does not exist as a monolithic system but interacts dynamically with local languages. This concept provides a useful framework to interpret NEP 2020's flexible and inclusive language ideology.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the representation of Language with special reference to English in NEP 2020
2. To discuss the approach of NCF adopted for Language learning for different school levels in association with NEP 2020
3. To analyze the stance of the policy on multilingualism with special reference to English
4. To distinguish the potential challenges in implementing Language learning of NEP 2020 with special reference to English
5. To offer possible solutions to above problems with special reference to English in Language learning.

Research Questions

1. How the languages especially English are represented and redefined in India's New Education Policy (NEP 2020)?
2. How do the approaches & methods envisioned by NCF 2022 & 2023 align with the visions for language education in NEP 2020?
3. In what ways does NEP 2020 promote multilingualism while maintaining the importance of English as a second language?
4. What are the major challenges in implementing the language learning provisions of NEP 2020 particularly concerning English language teaching?
5. What potential pedagogical strategies can strengthen English Language learning within multilingual framework proposed by NEP 2020?

Research Methodology

The study is a Qualitative Study following primarily the Document Analysis method which is primarily done by analyzing the National Education Policy 2020 and as well as the approaches & method adopted in National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2023 to examine the rendition of the English Language within NEP 2020. Secondary data is also collected from various journals, articles, education policies etc. The approach follows systematic coding and thematic development derived from the primary document analysis and selected secondary sources.

Result and Discussion

Recommendations of NEP 2020 for the promotion of Indian Native Languages

The New Education Policy 2020, recently given the green light by the Union Cabinet, is the new horizon in the vast landscape of education in the country. The policy emphasizes several groundbreaking reforms that would make Indian education more wholesome, flexible, and attuned to the demands of the 21st century. Among those reforms one major part is native language learning through multilingualism. NEP 2020 has adopted again The Three Language Formula. Three-Language Formula (National Policy on Education, 1968)³:

- First language: It will be the mother tongue or regional language.
- Second language: In Hindi speaking states, it will be other modern Indian languages or English. In non-Hindi speaking states, it will be Hindi or English.
- Third Language: In Hindi speaking states, it will be English or a modern Indian language. In the non-Hindi speaking state, it will be English or a modern Indian language.

Language Learning in National Education Policy 2020 (NEP Page 13-14)

- The NEP 2020 continues to implement the three language formula of Kothari Commission and states that there will be greater flexibility in the three-language formula and no language will be imposed on any State. Learning three languages will be the choice of States, regions, and students themselves, as long as at least two of the three languages are native to India. Wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond it will be the home language/mother-tongue/local language/regional language to be followed by both public and private schools. (4.11)
- The Policy promotes a constructivist perspective to learn English language. As a result, the learners will be competent to interact and to formulate their ideas in English. The teaching of English language has to be enhanced as well, with a greater priority placed on interaction and conversational skills. Grammar and vocabulary of English language must be exalted. NEP 2020 gives importance on multilingualism. (4.11.)
- Teachers will be encouraged to use a bilingual approach in their teaching-learning process including bilingual materials. (4.11)
- Both the Central & State Governments will make an effort to promote all language teachers in all regional languages specially mentioned in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India. (4.12.)
- High-quality textbooks, including science, will be made available in home languages/mother tongue along with extensive use of technology for teaching and learning of different languages and to popularize language learning. All efforts will be made early on to ensure that any gaps that exist between the language spoken by the child and the medium of teaching are bridged. (4.14.)
- Every student in the country will participate in a fun project/activity on 'The Languages of India', sometime in Grades 6-8, under the 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' initiative to learn about the major Indian languages. Through the 'The Languages of India' project, students will highlight the remarkable unity shared amongst the major Indian languages. Alongside this, they will gain an understanding of the rich inter-influences and variations between languages. By learning about the geographical distribution of languages in India, students can gain knowledge about tribal languages. This immersive and educational activity aims to cultivate a sense of unity and an appreciation for the diverse cultural heritage of India. (4.16.)
- To encourage the native languages, all students in both public and private schools will get the option of learning a classical language of India and its literature for at least two years through innovative approaches in Grades 6-12. (4.19.)
- Options for learning Indian Sign language and some foreign languages will also be available at the secondary level across India whereas Indian Sign Language (ISL) will be standardized and local sign languages will be taught and used where relevant and possible for the use by students with hearing impairment. NCERT has signed a MoU with Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC) for developing text books based videos in Indian Sign Language. ISLRTC has prepared and launched 10,000 words ISL Dictionary in video format which is available on Diksha Portal for wider access among stakeholders. (4.22.)

Approaches to Language Education in NCF

The major aims to achieve in Language education in schools include the capacity of effective communication skill, creativity & engagement of culture. To fulfill the visions of NEP 2020 regarding the use of native languages as well as the ability of multilingualism NCF has recommended certain major adoption of approaches to Language Education in different school levels which are discussed below:

Foundational Stage

- In Foundational Stage, children must be introduced to at least two spoken languages (referred as L1 or R1 & L2 or R2 respectively) regularly from the Foundational Stage. At the end of this stage, they are expected to read with full comprehension and start to express through writing in L1 or R1. (Sec 2.4, NCFFS)
- NCF has suggested the use of picture and story books drawing labelling and other forms of guided writing for the initial development of reading and writing skill through L1 medium. They are expecting to gain some familiarity with reading and writing skill in L2 or R2 as well. (Sec 2.4, NCFFS)

Preparatory Stage:

- First Students can communicate their ideas through speaking skill and later they develop reading proficiency in both L1 & L2 by reading unfamiliar narratives. (Sec 2.4, NCFSE)
- Students will express their understanding in written format with the help of a comprehensive vocabulary both in L1 & L2 in various contexts. (Sec 2.4, NCFSE)

The Middle Stage:

- A new third language referred as L3 or R3 is introduced in this stage where students are expected to be familiar with the spoken form along with the basics of both reading and writing. (Sec 2.4, NCFSE)
- Students are expected to be engaged in collaborative discussions, debates as well as to write independently with appropriate grammar and vocabulary in both R1 and R2. (Sec 2.4, NCFSE)

The Secondary Stage:

(Upto Grade 10)

- The use of R1 & R2 for reasoning and argumentation with effective presentations are expected to be achieved for the use of creative linguistic proficiency like essays, articles, public speeches etc. (Sec 2.4, NCFSE)
- In R3 students engage with various forms and types of literature and learn to apply the basics of linguistic rules in speech and writing. (Sec 2.4, NCFSE)

(Grade 11-12)

- Two languages out of which one native language of India should be studied. (Sec 2.4, NCFSE)
- The vast pool of languages for choices to be studied include Sanskrit, and other modern or classical languages and literatures of India, including classical Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Odia, Pali, Persian and Prakrit. In addition to this, foreign languages, such as French, German, Japanese and Korean would also be offered. [As per NEP 2020, opportunities to study languages, such as, those mentioned in the paragraph, will also be given to students in the Middle Stage and in Grades 9 and 10 as optional additional courses, wherever it becomes feasible.] (Sec 2.4, NCFSE)

Stance on multilingualism:

- 1) NEP 2020 articulates multilingualism as a “natural human capacity”. The children should begin education in their home language to develop conceptual understanding before gradually introducing other languages including English. English is rendered not as an early medium but as a progressive addition to multilingual competence. Without diminishing its utility, the policy creates space for contextualized English respecting linguistic diversity.
- 2) In NEP 2020 English is considered as a “language of opportunity”. This represents a discursive shift from colonial hierarchies to a more egalitarian multilingual ethos as the stance of the policy seeks to harmonize national integration with global competitiveness.
- 3) NEP 2020 emphasizes activity & competency based experiential learning. In case of ELT, this requires a shift from rote memorization toward Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Teacher education

institutions are tasked with developing pre-service & in-service modules to train teachers in multilingual pedagogy.

- 4) NEP 2020 advocates the need to provide equal access to quality English instruction. Studies show that rural and marginalized students often lack qualified proper English resources. The policy's success will depend on bridging urban –rural divides in English education.
- 5) NEP 2020 recognizes English as a socio-economic resource to access higher education and better employment opportunities everywhere. However, NEP 2020 warns against allowing English proficiency to become a benchmark and calls for justice in curriculum valuing all languages equally.

Challenges

After going through the whole approaches adopted by NCF keeping in mind the visions of NEP 2020 recommendations though we have identified some **positive impacts**. Out of which the most important is that the Vernacular medium of language can create a homely joyful environment for the students in schools. It also aims to enhance the students' cognitive and academic development by starting their early education in their native languages. And also, the use of native languages will try to teach the students the culture and classical values of India. The study of Native Language Education is indicating an important role to prevail multilingualism in India. This could foster better bilingual competence. But in detailed study we can have some major **drawbacks** for Language Education with special reference to English as a second language which are listed below:

- 1) The NEP 2020, though has adopted the Three Language Formula but in a more flexible manner. But still Language learning is listed as a negative factor because of finding a competent teacher as well as study materials in native languages for each subject can become a major problem. A typical Government school teacher teaches not just a multi grade classroom but also has a classroom full of children with multilingual as well as underprivileged backgrounds. The NEP 2020 itself acknowledges that "There has been a severe scarcity of skilled language teachers in India, despite various measures being taken." It will be difficult also to find competent translators and educators especially for lesser spoken languages.
- 2) National education policy 2020 states that the students of the private schools who have English as their first language will be introduced to English at a much earlier age than the students of the Government & Government - aided schools as the syllabus will be taught in the regional languages to the Government & Government-aided school students. This is one of the major drawbacks because this will promote the number of students who are using English as their second language uncomfortable in communicating in English and thus widening the gap between sections of the societies further. This discrepancy will also pose a threat to the Government School system as well as for the underprivileged section because people will try to get admissions in private school for their children. After the independence, English has remained the language of formal education, competitive exams and also even the economy, gaining the status of **Associate Official Language** of multilingual India over the years. The formalization of the English language has continued also in parallel connection with the attempts to maintain the multilingual status of India. Higher Education is still a naïve dream if a person does not have the ability to write good English. With the status of global and 'professional' language English language learning will help marginalized children to do better in terms of employment and higher education. So, English as a medium of instruction in Government run schools also is the need of the hour. Imposing regional languages in government schools while letting private schools teach in English is bizarre. Because the reduced scope of early exposure to English must hamper ESL acquisition which will affect fluency & confidence in future. More so, the idea of teaching courses in regional languages in technical education is very much absurd. It does more harm to the good students belonging to underprivileged sections of society. This will create a greater class divide based simply on language in higher education. So it is better to bring innovation in English pedagogy in

Government and Government aided schools to attract students from every part of society – not just those who are compelled by low income circumstances.

Suggestions

- There is a need for strong political will to change the medium of instruction in Government run schools. This would benefit the underprivileged students by uplifting them with “those who know English” and giving them much needed self-esteem.
- NEP advocates for interactive & skill based learning and denies the approach of rote memorization. ESL teaching demands nowadays a major shift in pedagogy incorporating innovative CLT, storytelling method which demands more interaction.
- Technology can also play a significant role using various modern AI apps & Audio Visual recordings in the pedagogy simultaneously with the flow of mother tongue in these efforts to make English as a second language easily accessible in Government run schools from Foundational Stage. Teachers should concentrate on adopting multilingual strategies while scaffolding English learning through real life activities focusing on digital pedagogy & CLT.
- Government Schools should also incorporate English Language as a second language (both for Hindi & Non Hindi speaking states) at an early stage in comparison with the English medium students to avert the Government medium students lag behind. This would also benefit low income students by putting them at par with ‘those who know English’, uplift them and also give them so much needed self-esteem. English is the global and ‘professional’ language and learning it will help marginalized children do better in terms of employment & higher education. English as a medium of instruction in government run schools is the need of the hour.
- As briefly outlined in NEP 2020, it is of utmost importance that teachers should have a deep understanding of students’ languages and cultures. So, it is necessary to appoint educators from communities who share similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds as those of students. However, this may not always be possible due to the lack of available trained teachers with required qualifications. In such instances, it is crucial for the Government to provide short time courses in teaching the mother tongue or home language of the students. These language training programs should also incorporate giving instructions on those particular local cultures associated with the language to enhance the learning experience in a more holistic manner. The short time program course can also be done to input bilingual approach in pedagogy.
- NEP emphasizes Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for teachers. So there is a need for better ESL curriculum design to align with a training in modern teaching methods which have the access to some linguistic concepts.
- In order to celebrate and protect India’s linguistic diversity, the Central and State Governments must act sincerely, in order to adhere to the three-language formula in a flexible way and to encourage the acquisition of Indian languages as well as English as a second language.

Conclusion

The steps recommended by NEP-2020 will not only promote the Languages of India but will also help in the preservation of rich cultural and traditional values. Before imparting education in each subject through the native language of a kid, proper guidelines, resource materials and training should be provided to the teachers so that they won’t face any difficulty during the teaching-learning process. Besides, autonomy should be provided to the States for the implementation of Language policy in the schools. The new education policy in 2020 came after 30 years and is all set to change the existing academic system of India with the purpose of making it at par with the international standard of academic. While the NEP 2020 is a forward thinking and progressive document, its success will largely depend on addressing the above mentioned challenges in implementation and equity. The

policy lays a foundation for transforming Indian Education, but there is a need for greater clarity, strategic planning and resources to overcome the drawbacks and make its vision a reality. By integrating English teaching within a multilingual framework, India can foster an education system that is both locally rooted and globally relevant. Future research should include comparative case studies across states and longitudinal studies on learning outcomes in English medium settings.

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