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## **Provisions and Significance of Multilingualism in National Education Policy 2020**

Girija Suri

Amity School of Liberal Arts

Amity University Haryana

gsuri1@ggn.amity.edu

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the various provisions made in NEP 2020 to promote native Indian languages and its focus on pushing forth multiculturalism through multilingualism. It also delves into the various ways in which multilingualism will enact as a potential instrument to enhance the professional capabilities of people so that they become equipped with strong linguistic skills in diverse languages in order to be job-ready in multicultural and globalized contexts. Furthermore, the paper will also attempt to study the highlights and challenges of imparting education in home language/mother tongue/local language/regional languages with a view to make recommendations ensuring its successful implementation. Finally, the paper takes cognizance of the policy's objective to push forth for a linguistically vibrant, pluralistic, value-based society that is firmly rooted in the linguistic competencies and traditions of Indian languages.

**Keywords:** linguistic, languages, multilingual, multiculturalism, NEP 2020, diversity

### **INTRODUCTION**

Languages are the life and breath of any nation that are essential to its identity as manifested in its various cultures, people, regions, and traditions. India is recognized as one of the most diverse nations of the world exhibiting tremendous variety in its food, costumes, geographical terrains, religions, as well as languages. There are hundreds of languages in India, including several dialects, out of which 22 languages are constitutionally recognized. This makes multilingualism a natural characteristic of the Indian linguistic landscape.

Preserving native languages are imperative to the cultural heritage of a nation ensuring that the vibrancy of linguistic traditions is retained for generations to come. The Indian government has routinely made efforts to preserve the native Indian languages. National Policy on Education 1968 (NPE 1986) states that "the energetic development of Indian languages and

literature is prerequisite for educational and cultural development. Unless this is done, the creative energies of people will not be released, standards of education will not improve, knowledge will not spread to people and the gulf between intelligentsia and masses will remain same” (4.3a). It further specifies that “The Education Policy of 1968 had examined the question of the development of languages in great detail; its essential provisions can hardly be improved upon and are as relevant today as before. The Policy will be implemented more energetically and purposefully” (8.7). Following the same trend, the new National Education Policy 2020 approved by the Union Cabinet on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2020 endeavors to protect and provide impetus to native languages of India by incorporating it within the framework of formal education. The policy stipulates that “As young children learn and grasp nontrivial 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” (4.11).

In this context, this paper examines the various provisions made in NEP 2020 to promote native Indian languages and its focus on pushing forth multiculturalism through multilingualism. It also delves into the various ways in which multilingualism will enact as a potential instrument to enhance the professional capabilities of people so that they become equipped with strong linguistic skills in diverse languages in order to be job-ready in multicultural and globalized contexts. Furthermore, the paper will also attempt to study the highlights and challenges of imparting education in home language/mother tongue/local language/regional languages with a view to make recommendations ensuring its successful implementation. Finally, the paper takes cognizance of the policy’s objective to push forth for a linguistically vibrant and pluralistic society that is firmly rooted in the linguistic competencies and traditions of Indian languages.

### **Objectives of the Study:**

The objectives of this research paper are as follows:

- To outline the various provisions in NEP 2020 to promote native Indian languages.
- To delineate the ways in which multilingualism can foster multiculturalism.
- To probe multilingualism as an instrument of enhancing professional capabilities of people.
- To analyze the highlights and challenges of imparting education in vernacular languages.

### **Provisions in National Education Policy 2020 for Multilingualism:**

NEP 2020 makes a case for the promotion of multilingualism and recognizes the power of language in making learning, especially during the formative years of a student, holistic, integrated, engaging, and enjoyable. The policy

document dedicates Chapter 4 and Chapter 22 respectively titled as “Curriculum and Pedagogy in Schools: Learning Should be Holistic, Integrated, Enjoyable and Engaging” (11-19) and “Promotion of Indian Languages, Arts and Culture” (53-55) towards making several important provisions for the incorporation of home language/mother tongue, investment in regional language teachers, fun-learning projects to learn about Indian languages, impetus to Simple Standard Sanskrit as well as foreign languages and standardization of Indian Sign Language. Some of these provisions are enumerated as below:

- It is argued that young children learn and grasp more quickly in their home language/mother tongue. Therefore, wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother-tongue/local language. Thereafter, the home/local language shall continue to be taught as a language wherever possible. Both public and private schools will follow this.
- High-quality textbooks, including science, will be made available in home languages. In cases where home-language textbook material is not available, the language of the transaction between teachers and students will still remain the home language wherever possible. Teachers will be encouraged to use a bilingual approach, including bilingual teaching-learning materials with those students whose home language may be different from the medium of instruction.
- Research has shown that children pick up languages extremely quickly between the ages of 2 and 8 and that multilingualism has great cognitive benefits to young students. In this context, children will be exposed to languages early on (but with a particular emphasis on the mother tongue), starting from the Foundational Stage. All languages will be taught in an enjoyable and interactive style, with plenty of interactive conversation and reading and writing in the mother tongue in the early years – with skills developed for reading and writing in the other two languages in Grade 3 and beyond. All language learning will aim to be experiential and enhanced through art, such as music, poetry, and theatre. Both the Central and State governments will make concerted efforts to invest in large numbers of language teachers in all regional languages around the country.
- The three-language formula will continue to be implemented while keeping in mind the constitutional provisions, the need to promote multilingualism and national unity while providing for greater flexibility.
- Every student in the country will participate in a fun project/activity on ‘The Languages of India’ under “Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat” initiative, in Grades 6-8. In this project/activity, students will learn about the remarkable unity of most of the major Indian languages, starting with their common phonetic and scientifically-arranged alphabets and scripts, their common grammatical structures, their origins and sources of vocabularies from Sanskrit and other classical languages, as well as their rich inter-influences and differences. They

will also gain a sense of the nature and structure of tribal languages and will learn about the unity, cultural heritage and diversity of India. This project/activity would be a joyful activity and would not involve any form of assessment.

- It is important to recognize the importance, relevance, and beauty of the classical languages and literature of India. In comparison to classical languages like Latin and Greek, Sanskrit boasts of copious classical literature that must be studied thoroughly. It contains vast treasures of mathematics, philosophy, grammar, music, politics, medicine, architecture, metallurgy, drama, poetry, and storytelling, and has been written by people who were religious non-believers as also those belonging to various religions and socio-economic backgrounds. Sanskrit will thus be offered at all levels of school and higher education as an important, enriching option for students. It will be taught in ways that are interesting and experiential as well as contemporarily relevant. Sanskrit textbooks at the foundational and middle school level may be rewritten in Simple Standard Sanskrit (SSS) to teach Sanskrit through Sanskrit (STS) and make its study enjoyable.
- India also has an extremely rich literature in other classical languages, including classical Tamil, as well as classical Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, and Odia, in addition to Pali, Persian, and Prakrit; these classical languages and their works of literature too must be preserved for their richness and for the pleasure and enrichment of posterity.
- In addition to Sanskrit, the teaching of all other classical languages and literature of India, including Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Odia, Pali, Persian, and Prakrit, will also be widely available in schools as options (possibly as online modules), through experiential and innovative approaches, including by integration of technology, to ensure that these languages and literature stay alive and vibrant.
- For the enrichment of our children, and for the preservation of these rich languages and their artistic treasures, all students in all schools, public or private, may have the option of learning at least two years of a classical language of India and its associated literature, through experiential and innovative approaches including by integration of technology, in Grades 6-12, with the option to continue from middle level through secondary education and university.
- In addition to Indian languages and English, foreign languages like Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Thai, French, German, Spanish, or Russian will also be widely offered at the secondary level for students to learn about the cultures of the world and to increase their global knowledge and mobility according to their own interests and aspirations.
- The teaching of all languages will be enhanced through innovative and experiential methods, such as gratification and apps, and by integrating teaching-learning of various subjects with real-life experiences through films, theatre and storytelling, art and music,

local literature, etc. Thus, the teaching of languages will also be based on experiential learning pedagogy.

- Indian Sign Language (ISL) will be standardized across the country and national and state-wise curriculum materials will be developed for the use of students with hearing impairment. Local sign languages will be respected and taught as well, where possible and relevant.

### **Highlights of Education in Indian Regional Languages:**

It can be safely argued that the National Education Policy 2020 will play an extremely pivotal role in the revival, popularization, and preservation of the many Indian regional languages and hence contribute to the overall cultural diversity inherent in the ethos of “Indianness”. The minutely detailed provisions and rationale for the same as explicated in NEP 2020 make it amply clear that the vision for education in India, henceforth, is geared towards cultural preservation, the amalgamation of traditional wisdom and knowledge with modern pedagogical approaches, and the deployment of the former to tackle the challenges of the present. This vision gains its legitimacy from the firm belief in the value of multiculturalism wherein diverse languages, cultures, traditions, and literatures of India can thrive together highlighting at once the vibrancy as well as the interconnected nature of India. The following are some of the key highlights of imparting education in Indian regional languages as per NEP 2020.

- The language policy of NEP 2020 will play a crucial role in sustaining and fostering multilingualism in India.
- Irrespective of their current status or popularity, all Indian languages and mother tongues will gain an impetus through education in regional languages.
- Since language is an indispensable carrier of cultural richness, imparting education in various vernacular languages in India will significantly contribute towards the preservation of tradition and cultural values.
- Education, especially in the formative years, in vernacular languages will make students feel at home with the languages they are familiar with in their domestic environments.
- As Indian regional languages become more institutionalized, students will take greater pride and interest in them.
- Putting Indian regional languages at par with English and other foreign languages in schools will ensure that their use is no longer stigmatized or associated with “lesser value” or backwardness”.
- Students will feel more confident of expressing themselves in their native languages.
- A proliferation of multiple languages in the school education, including English and foreign languages, will promote a healthy dialogue between languages, including realizing the importance of translation in exchange of words and ideas.

## **Challenges of Education in Indian Regional Languages:**

While the highlights of imparting education in Indian regional languages surely outweigh some of its challenges, they must be discussed nevertheless to ensure the smooth implementation of NEP 2020 and delivering of its outcomes. Some of these are enumerated as below:

- Streamlining and capacity-building of stakeholders to ensure a uniform and smooth transformation of school education.
- Inclusion and adoption of arts in language teaching has to be adequate and in accordance with the competencies of different levels of school education.
- Adequate number of facilities and avenues for publishing high-level bilingual, trilingual and multilingual study material required.
- Creation, promotion and participation of teachers in pedagogical programmes, workshops, and modules meant to train them in multilingual, innovative, and technology-based pedagogical methods.
- Orientation of parents towards their greater role in education, especially being the first source of native language learning for children.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based upon the assessment of provisions and significance of multilingualism in National Education Policy 2020, it can be concluded that these steps are geared towards a much-needed transformation of the Indian education system, in tandem with the sustainable development goals outlined by the United Nations. Even more significantly, they push forth a vision of education that is holistic, inclusive, interactive and innovative. Multilingualism will play a significant role in the preservation of rich cultural heritage and traditional values while empowering the youth with skills that will make them competent for careers in a globalized world. In addition to the positive dimensions of imparting education in regional languages, care, however, must also be taken to ensure implementation of these provisions through adequate capacity-building of teachers, orientation of parents, timely and high-quality publication of study material as well as availability and integration of technology in pedagogical practices. Above all, relative autonomy to states will go a long way in implementation of language policy in accordance with NEP 2020 and to achieve the goals that are set out to make education inclusive, diverse and holistic.

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