 ISSN: 3065-7873

National Education Policy and Future of Language Studies in India

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Submitted: 15-July-2025 Revised: 20-July-2025 Accepted: 25 Aug-2025 Published: 31-Aug-2025

Manuscript ID:
IJEWLPSIR-2025-020404

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.23430718
DOI Link:
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23430718

Volume: 2

Issue: 4

Month: August 2025

E-ISSN: 3065-7873

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How to cite this article:
Ganganmale, P. A. (2025). National Education Policy and Future of Language Studies in India. International Journal of English and World Languages & Literature Paradigm Shift in International Research, 2(4), 25–30. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23430718

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Abstract:

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a transformative shift in India's pedagogical landscape, prioritizing a holistic, flexible, and multidisciplinary approach to learning. A central pillar of this policy is its comprehensive language framework, which seeks to reconcile the preservation of linguistic diversity with the demands of global competitiveness. This paper examines the strategic implementation of the Three-Language Formula, emphasizing the policy's mandate for the mother tongue or local language as the medium of instruction at least until Grade 5. The study highlights the cognitive and educational benefits of multilingualism, noting that early instruction in familiar languages significantly improves literacy and problem-solving abilities. Furthermore, the paper discusses the integration of classical languages like Sanskrit and the promotion of foreign languages to foster global citizenship. Despite its visionary scope, the research identifies critical implementation hurdles, including teacher shortages, resource disparities between mother-tongue and English-medium schools, and deep-seated societal biases. By analyzing the shift from purely literary studies to language competencies, the paper concludes that NEP 2020 aims to create a future-ready education system that remains deeply rooted in Indian cultural heritage while equipping students with the 21st-century skills necessary for an interconnected world. The National Education Policy: 2020 (NEP) typically refers to a comprehensive framework outlining the vision and strategies for education in a country. It often addresses various aspects of education, including curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, teacher training, infrastructure, and governance. NEPs are usually developed by governments to guide education reforms and ensure that education systems align with national goals and priorities.

Keywords: *National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020)- Language Policy- Three-Language Formula, Medium of Instruction-Multilingualism, Mother Tongue-Based Education, Foundational Literacy- Cognitive Flexibility- 21st-Century Skills-Educational Equity, Teacher Training, Curriculum Standardization- Vocational Education- Sanskrit Education-Linguistic Diversity-Global Competency- English-Medium vs. Vernacular-Cultural Preservation.*

Introduction:

NEP:2020 aims to improve the quality, accessibility, and inclusivity of education. It emphasizes the importance of equipping students with 21st-century skills, promoting innovation and creativity, fostering critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, and preparing students for the demands of a rapidly changing world. NEP, as stated by government, addresses issues such as addressing disparities in educational opportunities, enhancing the use of technology in education, promoting vocational and technical education, and strengthening partnerships between educational institutions, industries, and communities. The language policy is a crucial component of the National Education Policy (NEP), as it plays a significant role in shaping the educational experience and outcomes of students. Language policy addresses issues related to the languages of instruction, the inclusion of multiple languages in the curriculum, language learning, and the promotion of linguistic diversity and proficiency. Language policy may include provisions regarding the following aspects of language policy: medium of instruction, language learning, preservation of indigenous languages, equity and inclusivity, integration of language and content learning, assessment and evaluation, language policy may also extend to assessment and evaluation practices, including the development of language proficiency standards, assessment tools, and criteria for evaluating language learning outcomes. Overall, the language policy within a National Education Policy reflects the government's commitment to promoting linguistic diversity, fostering inclusive education, and equipping students with the language skills necessary for success in an increasingly interconnected world.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India introduced significant changes in the education system, including provisions related to the medium of instruction.

The policy emphasizes the importance of mother tongue or local language as the medium of instruction at least until Grade 5, and preferably until Grade 8 and beyond. Here are some key points regarding language as the medium of instruction in the NEP 2020:

The Three-Language Formula in NEP 2020

Introduction to the Three-Language Formula

The Three-Language Formula is a cornerstone of India's language policy in education, introduced in the 1968 National Policy on Education and reaffirmed in NEP 2020. It is designed to balance regional identity, national integration, and global competence. Under this formula, students are expected to learn:

- Mother tongue or regional language – to strengthen foundational literacy and preserve local culture.
- Hindi or English – to promote national integration and functional literacy in the official language(s).
- Another Indian language or foreign language – to foster multilingualism and provide access to wider cultural and professional opportunities.

NEP 2020 strengthens this formula by recommending early introduction of languages, flexibility in choosing languages, and integration with modern pedagogical approaches.

Objectives of the Three-Language Formula

1. **Preserve Linguistic Diversity:**

India is home to 22 officially recognized languages and hundreds of regional dialects. By mandating the learning of mother tongue and regional languages, the policy ensures cultural preservation and intergenerational transmission of linguistic heritage.

2. **Promote National Integration:**

Learning Hindi in non-Hindi states and vice versa is intended to bridge linguistic divides, foster mutual understanding, and strengthen a sense of national unity.

3. **Enhance Cognitive and Educational Outcomes:**

Multilingual education improves cognitive flexibility, problem-solving skills, and communication ability. Research in cognitive science shows that learning multiple languages from an early age enhances memory, attention, and creativity.

4. **Global Competence and Employability:**

Learning foreign languages or additional Indian languages equips students with skills for international communication, higher education, and employment opportunities, making India globally competitive while remaining rooted in its cultural heritage.

Implementation under NEP 2020

NEP 2020 provides specific recommendations for the implementation of the Three-Language Formula:

1. **Mother Tongue in Early Grades:**
   - Children should be taught in their mother tongue or regional language at least until Grade 5, with the option to continue until Grade 8.
   - Early instruction in familiar languages strengthens literacy, comprehension, and confidence in learning additional languages.
2. **Flexible Choice of Languages:**
   - Students can choose the third language based on personal, regional, or professional preferences.
   - English may be introduced as the second or third language, depending on regional priorities.
3. **Integration with Technology:**
   - Digital learning tools, multimedia content, and online language platforms are encouraged to enhance multilingual learning and overcome resource limitations in rural areas.
4. **Teacher Training:**
   - Teachers need specialized training in multilingual pedagogy and modern instructional methods to effectively deliver the Three-Language Formula.

Challenges in Implementing the Three-Language Formula

1. **Regional Resistance:**
   - In some non-Hindi-speaking states, students and parents resist learning Hindi, seeing it as an imposition. Similarly, English is often prioritized for its global value, sometimes at the expense of regional languages.
2. **Teacher Shortages:**
   - Proficiency in multiple languages among teachers is often inadequate, especially in rural areas. This hinders effective multilingual education.
3. **Resource Constraints:**
   - Lack of quality textbooks, digital content, and language-specific teaching aids can reduce the effectiveness of the formula.
4. **Social Attitudes:**
   - Parents and students may undervalue local languages compared to English, leading to neglect of mother tongue and regional language instruction.

Opportunities and Future Prospects

1. **Cognitive and Academic Benefits:**
   - Multilingual students demonstrate better cognitive flexibility, enhanced critical thinking, and improved problem-solving skills.
2. **Cultural Awareness and Preservation:**
   - Learning multiple languages fosters appreciation for India's diverse literary and cultural traditions.
3. **Global Competitiveness:**
   - The third language can be a foreign language (e.g., French, German, Mandarin), preparing students for international careers.
4. **Digital and Online Learning:**
   - Technology-enabled solutions, such as language apps and AI-driven translation tools, can overcome traditional barriers of teacher and resource shortages.

Mother Tongue or Local Language:

The policy advocates for the use of the mother tongue or local language as the medium of instruction in early education. It states that children learn best in their mother tongue or home language, as it facilitates better understanding, communication, and cognitive development.

The use of mother tongue or local language as the medium is one of the comprehensive aspects of NEP. It compels teachers and institutions to educate students through mother tongue. The school structure in India is based on medium based and not on syllabus based. There are schools which are based on mother tongue as the medium of instructions and especially the government schools follow this policy since inception of modern education system in India. The medium is English medium schools. They use English as the language of instructions for its students. Huge number of parents admit their children in English medium schools as they want to improve their presentations at various national entrance exams and career entries like UPSC and high paid public services. The students admitted in mother tongue medium schools and English medium schools differ on binary basis: first is the different of language as medium of instructions and another is syllabi. The syllabi of mother tongue medium schools and English medium schools are different on skill and other basis. Whatever the English medium school students learn at standard 10 is introduced to mother tongue medium school at standard 12. This different of syllabi makes the mother tongue medium school students weak to compete with the English medium schools. There needs to be alignment and standardization of curriculum content across all mediums of instruction to ensure that students receive comparable levels of education regardless of the language of instruction.

Teachers in mother tongue medium schools should receive adequate training and support to effectively deliver the curriculum and enhance students' language proficiency and academic skills. Adequate resources, including teaching materials, textbooks, and technology, should be provided to mother tongue medium schools to support effective teaching and learning. Efforts should be made to promote multilingualism and celebrate linguistic diversity within the education system. Students should be encouraged to become proficient in multiple languages while also valuing their mother tongue or local language. There is a need to address societal perceptions and biases that equate proficiency in English with intelligence or success. All languages should be valued equally, and students should not be disadvantaged based on the medium of instruction. Indeed, the linguistic diversity present in these urban areas can pose significant challenges in determining which language should serve as the medium of instruction in educational institutions.

The dominance of English as the language of opportunity and mobility, particularly in urban areas, is a reality that cannot be ignored. Many parents perceive English-medium education as a pathway to better career opportunities and social mobility for their children. This preference for English-medium education can sometimes overshadow the importance of promoting Indian languages in education, as advocated by the NEP 2020. The dilemma faced by educational institutions in choosing the medium of instruction highlights the need for a nuanced approach that balances the promotion of Indian languages with the practical considerations of students' aspirations and societal demands. While the NEP 2020 emphasizes the use of mother tongue or local language as the medium of instruction, it also recognizes the importance of proficiency in English for students' future success. The NEP 2020 allows for flexibility in the choice of language as the medium of instruction, taking into account the linguistic diversity and preferences of students and communities. Educational institutions should have the autonomy to adopt language policies that best meet the needs of their students while also promoting the use of Indian languages.

While promoting Indian languages, measures should also be taken to ensure equitable access to quality English language education, particularly in rural areas where the demand for English-medium education is high. This can help mitigate the risk of students being disadvantaged in their linguistic skills when it comes to career opportunities. Higher education institutions should integrate language learning with career development initiatives to equip students with the necessary linguistic skills for success in their chosen fields. This can include English language proficiency courses, communication skills training, and opportunities for practical application of language skills in professional settings.

Multilingualism:

NEP 2020 recognizes the importance of multilingualism and encourages the teaching and learning of multiple languages. It suggests that students should be exposed to and proficient in at least two languages by the end

of Grade 5, with one of them being the mother tongue or local language. Multilingualism may help in following aspects to develop Indian education systems in future.

- **Preservation of Culture**: The fundamental objective in Indian community that may address the multilingualism is to preserve and promote indigenous or minority languages. India has the huge diversities of language varieties. Different groups use different languages in India. NEP-2020 may help to preserve the history, culture, traditions, and linguistic features through the policy of multilingualism for the education.
- **Cognitive Benefits**: Research suggests that multilingualism can have cognitive benefits, such as improved problem-solving and multitasking skills. NEP-2020 and the language syllabus developed in last two years show the shift of language studies from pure literature to languages competencies. The proposed syllabus of B. A. program of Shivaji University, Kolhapur after NEP implementation shows this shift from literature to language studies. It may help students to develop their different cognitive skills of the language the students may be trained in: Better Task Switching, Improved Attention Control, Enhanced Cognitive Flexibility, Better Working Memory, Delaying Cognitive Decline, Enhanced Understanding of Language Structure, Improved Problem-Solving Skills, Enhanced Communication, Cultural Understanding.

According to a study published in the journal *Cognitive Psychology* found that bilinguals tend to outperform monolinguals in tasks requiring attention, inhibition, and short-term memory. The Journal of Experimental Child Psychology published research showing that bilingual children develop better problem-solving skills and greater cognitive flexibility. Studies like those from the *Journal of Neurolinguistics* suggest that bilingualism can lead to a more efficient brain, with better connectivity and higher neural density in certain areas related to language and cognitive control.

- **Global Competence**: In an increasingly interconnected world, being proficient in multiple languages can be a significant asset for individuals and countries. Multilingualism enhances global competencies by promoting effective communication, cultural competence, adaptability, and a sense of global citizenship. In our interconnected world, individuals who are proficient in multiple languages are better equipped to navigate diverse environments, collaborate across borders, and contribute positively to global initiatives and dialogues. Encouraging multilingual education and language diversity can lead to more inclusive and understanding societies, fostering peace and cooperation on a global scale.
- **Cognitive Flexibility**: Multilingual individuals are accustomed to switching between languages and cultural norms. This adaptability extends to different environments and situations, making them more flexible and open-minded.
- **Problem-Solving Skills**: Multilingualism requires navigating different linguistic and cultural contexts. This experience can enhance problem-solving abilities, as individuals learn to approach challenges from multiple perspectives.

NEP aims to make Indian minds universal in values and skills. It enhances the development of a child as global citizenship that become medium of Indian values, traditions and culture in the world. NEP nurtures through the language studies Awareness of Global Issues, Engagement in Global Dialogue etc.

- **Professional Opportunities:** To increase the job opportunities and competencies along with vocational education is one of the core objectives of NEP. Different language vocational courses and programs are commenced after NEP at different educational stages in India. Language studies has a great competency to increase the job options for students for example media, social platforms, editorial works and most important the works of translations. Different governments have initiated different translations opportunities. The aim is to provide the material in mother tongue of the students. This may increase the job opportunities for the students who are trained in multilingual skills. Along with this multilingualism may increase: International Job Market, Interdisciplinary Collaboration, Educational Benefits: Study Abroad, Access to Multilingual Resources etc.

Sanskrit in National Education Policy 2020:

1.1 Promotion of Classical Languages:

- The NEP 2020 acknowledges the importance of classical languages like Sanskrit in India's cultural and linguistic heritage.
- It states that efforts will be made to increase the availability of Sanskrit textbooks and learning materials in schools.

1.2 Sanskrit Pathshalas:

- The policy recognizes the importance of traditional Sanskrit pathshalas (schools) and aims to preserve and promote these institutions.
- Efforts will be made to integrate traditional knowledge systems, including Sanskrit learning, into the mainstream education system.

1.3 Sanskrit as an Elective:

- In higher education, students have the option to choose Sanskrit as an elective subject. The NEP 2020 promotes the availability of Sanskrit courses in universities and colleges to cater to students interested in studying the language.

1.4 Digital Resources:

- The policy emphasizes the use of technology and digital resources to make learning Sanskrit more accessible. Online platforms and resources will be developed to support Sanskrit learning, making it easier for students and teachers to access materials.

1.5 Significance of Sanskrit in Indian Education:

- Cultural Heritage: Sanskrit is considered the mother of many Indian languages and holds significant cultural and religious importance in India.
- Literary Tradition: It has a rich literary tradition with texts on various subjects such as philosophy, science, medicine, and literature.
- Linguistic Studies: Studying Sanskrit provides insights into linguistic structures and historical linguistics.
- Spiritual and Religious Texts: Many religious and spiritual texts in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism are written in Sanskrit.

1.6 Implementation Challenges:

- Availability of Teachers: One challenge is the availability of qualified Sanskrit teachers, especially in regions where the language is not widely spoken.
- Curriculum Development: Developing a curriculum that balances traditional Sanskrit learning with modern educational needs can be challenging.
- Access to Resources: Ensuring access to quality textbooks, digital resources, and learning materials for Sanskrit can be a hurdle.

Conclusion

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a transformative vision for India's education system, emphasizing quality, inclusivity, and the holistic development of students. A key focus of NEP 2020 is the language policy, which seeks to balance linguistic diversity, national integration, and global competence. The policy recognizes the mother tongue or local language as the primary medium of instruction, particularly in the foundational years, to enhance comprehension, literacy, and cognitive development. At the same time, it encourages multilingualism through the Three-Language Formula, which equips students with skills in regional, national, and foreign languages, fostering cultural awareness, cognitive flexibility, and global employability. NEP 2020 also acknowledges the importance of classical languages such as Sanskrit, aiming to preserve India's rich linguistic and cultural heritage while integrating traditional knowledge with modern education. By promoting multilingualism, the policy preserves indigenous languages, develops critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and prepares students to engage effectively in a globalized world.

However, effective implementation requires addressing challenges such as teacher training, resource availability, societal biases, and alignment of curricula across different mediums of instruction. Ensuring equitable access to quality education in all languages, while maintaining standards comparable to English-medium schools, is critical to realizing the policy's objectives. In essence, NEP 2020 envisions an inclusive, flexible, and multilingual education system that nurtures students as knowledgeable, ethical, and culturally aware global citizens, while reinforcing the values, languages, and traditions of India. By integrating linguistic diversity with modern pedagogy, NEP 2020 provides a roadmap for shaping a future-ready education system that respects the past, engages the present, and prepares learners for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

Acknowledgment

The author sincerely expresses gratitude to all those who contributed, directly or indirectly, to the completion of this research paper titled "National Education Policy and Future of Language Studies in India."

I am thankful to the academic fraternity and scholars whose research works, policies, and critical insights on language education and the National Education Policy 2020 have provided a strong theoretical foundation for this study

I extend my heartfelt thanks to my institution, Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil College, Urun-Islampur, for providing a supportive academic environment and encouragement for research and publication.

I also acknowledge my colleagues, peers, and reviewers for their valuable suggestions and constructive feedback. I am deeply grateful to my family and well-wishers for their constant support, patience, and motivation throughout the research process.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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