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BRINGING MULTILINGUALISM TO SCHOOL EDUCATION WITH NEP 2020

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Abstract: The National Education Policy (2020), as transformative as it is, has been trying to revamp the education system of our country while catering to all the aspects of teaching and learning at all levels. The policy considers language an important aspect in the transaction of teaching-learning process and have suggested certain measures to promote multilingual approach to education, where learners learn in their mother tongue or local/home/regional language alongside other languages. National Education Policy 2020 (NEP-2020) has laid numerous recommendations for the promotion and preservation of Indian languages, aiming to preserve rich cultural and traditional values while integrating local languages in early learning stages. The purpose of this study is to better comprehend NEP-2020's role in promoting multilingual education and Indian languages, for which the provisions given under NEP 2020 for 'Multilingualism and the Power of Language' are highlighted in the paper. Thus, through comprehensive analysis of NEP 2020's key provisions for multilingualism and power of language and reviewing relevant researches this paper highlights the positive aspects in the blue print and mechanism employed by the Government of India for bringing multilingualism to Indian classrooms. The paper finally focuses on the limitations which the implementers or stakeholders may face when employing the multilingual approach in school education.

Index Terms - Language, mother tongue, multilingualism, nep 2020, school education.

I. INTRODUCTION

India, being a multicultural country, is not only rich in being diverse with respect to multiple cultures but is equally rich in lingual diversity. The country with its 28 states and 08 union territories represents uniqueness in cultural heritage, language and dialects and the same has been treasured in the National Education Policy (NEP 2020). With each region having differences in the language and dialects, it is not possible for every learner to learn in a classroom having a monolingual environment as it may obstruct with the learners' holistic development. Even though the 8th Schedule of our Constitution approves of 22 official languages, still, English is the most prevalent medium of instruction used in our schools to educate the learners, thus, hampering their learning to their fullest potential. Even in past, this issue was very much prevalent when the language policies were being framed for the school education system, that is why many policies in the past advocated about mother tongue, regional languages. Even the three-language formula proposed by the Kothari Commission advocated about the concept of making the learner learn in the language which s/he is comfortably able to decipher and understand. The same concept, in the present time has been named as 'Multilingualism'.

The term multilingualism is derived from two Latin words namely "multi" that means many and "lingua" that means language. Multilingualism, as the name states, is the ability of a speaker to express him-/herself in several languages with equal and native-like proficiency. (Bussmann, 1996). Multilingualism is understood as the ability of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage, on a regular basis, with more than one language in their day-to-day lives. In this context, a language is defined neutrally as a variant which a group ascribes to itself for use as its habitual code of communication. This includes regional languages, dialects, and sign languages. In addition, the term multilingualism is used for referring to the co-existence of different language communities in one geographical or geo-political area or political entity. (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (European Commission), 2007).

Owing to the aforementioned explanations of multilingualism, even the NEP 2020 have given importance to bringing this concept to the school education and have kept multilingualism as one of its fundamental principles while stating as “promoting multilingualism and the power of language in teaching and learning”. (Government of India, 2020). The policy further stated that it is well understood that young children learn and grasp nontrivial concepts more quickly in their home language/mother tongue. (Government of India, 2020, NEP 2020, Part-I, Section 4.11). Thus, to include the concept of multilingualism in school education for better learning and understanding of the learners, the policy has included a section “Multilingualism and the Power of Language” under Part-I, Section 4.11 to 4.22, highlighting the actions taken to promote language diversity in the school education system. The purpose of this study is to better comprehend NEP-2020's role in promoting multilingual education and Indian languages.

II. OBJECTIVES

The study has been conducted with the following objectives:

- (1) To highlight the initiatives undertaken in NEP 2020 for strengthening multilingual approach in school education.
- (2) To study the positive and negative aspects of promoting multilingualism in classrooms.

III. METHODS AND PROCEDURE

The methodology used for data gathering and analysis was reviewing the NEP 2020 document and analysing the findings of various reliable studies conducted in the similar area. In doing so, the authors critically examined the following section of the chapter of the NEP 2020 document released by Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India:

- Part I. School Education: Chapter 4 “Curriculum and Pedagogy in Schools: Learning Should be Holistic, Integrated, Enjoyable, and Engaging” (Section: 4.11 to 4.22)

IV. FINDINGS FROM NEP 2020 AND MULTILINGUALISM

The Part I. School Education: Chapter 4 “Curriculum and Pedagogy in Schools: Learning Should be Holistic, Integrated, Enjoyable, and Engaging” (Section: 4.11 to 4.22) focuses on the integration of multilingual approach in school education while promoting the importance of using vernacular languages in classrooms. The following provisions in the NEP 2020 reflect the government's commitment to promote multilingualism and create an inclusive and holistic learning environment in the Indian classrooms:

- **Mother Tongue/Home/Local/Regional Language as Medium of Instruction:** Young children learn more quickly in their home language/mother tongue/ local community language. In multi-lingual families, there may be a different home language spoken by other family members. The medium of instruction until Grade 5 is the home language, preferably until Grade 8 and beyond. Home languages will continue to be taught as a language in both public and private schools. High-quality textbooks, including science, will be made available in-home languages. Gaps between the child's language and the medium of teaching will be bridged early on. Teachers will use a bilingual approach and teaching-learning materials, for learners whose home language may differ from the medium of instruction. (Government of India, 2020, NEP 2020, Part- I, Section 4.11)
- **Exposing Children to Different Languages at Early Age:** Research indicates that children quickly learn languages between the ages of 2 and 8, and multilingualism has significant cognitive benefits. To promote this, children will be exposed to different languages, with a focus on their mother tongue, from the Foundational Stage. All languages will be taught in an interactive style, with ample conversation and early reading and writing in the mother tongue. Skills for reading and writing in other languages will be developed in Grade 3 and beyond. Both Central and State governments will invest in language teachers for all regional languages, particularly those mentioned in the 8th Schedule of our Constitution. Bilateral agreements will be made between states to hire teachers and encourage the study of Indian languages. Technology will be extensively used for language teaching and learning. (Government of India, 2020, NEP 2020, Part- I, Section 4.12)
- **Continuation of 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)

- **Bilingual Textbooks and Teaching Materials:** The policy aims to create high-quality bilingual textbooks and teaching materials for science and mathematics, enabling students to learn and think about these subjects in their native language and English. (Government of India, 2020, NEP 2020, Part- I, Section 4.14)
- **Promoting Indian Languages:** Education in one's language, culture, and traditions benefit educational, social, and technological advancements. With rich lingual heritage, these languages form India's national identity and wealth. To promote cultural enrichment and national integration, young Indians should be aware of their country's diverse languages and the treasures they contain in literature and prose. (Government of India, 2020, NEP 2020, Part- I, Section 4.15)
- **Participation of Students in Projects Promoting Indian Languages:** Middle stage students India will participate in a project called 'The Languages of India' under the 'Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat' initiative which aims to teach students about the unity of major Indian languages, their alphabets, scripts, grammatical structures, origins, and sources of vocabularies. Students will also learn about the languages spoken in different geographical areas, tribal languages, common phrases and sentences, and the literature of each language. This activity will provide students with a sense of unity and cultural heritage, as well as an opportunity to meet people from other parts of India. The project is a joyful activity without any form of assessment. (Government of India, 2020, NEP 2020, Part- I, Section 4.16)
- **Focus on Sanskrit and Other Classical Languages:** India's classical languages and literature, including Sanskrit, are valuable and rich in various fields such as mathematics, philosophy, grammar, music, politics, medicine, architecture, metallurgy, drama, poetry, and storytelling. Written by diverse individuals, Sanskrit is an enriching option for students at all levels of education. Simple Standard Sanskrit (SSS) textbooks at foundational and middle school level make studying Sanskrit enjoyable. India's rich classical literature, including Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Odia, Pali, Persian, and Prakrit, must be preserved for posterity's enjoyment. As India becomes a fully developed country, the next generation will want to partake in and be enriched by India's extensive and beautiful classical literature. Schools will make these languages and literatures available as options, possibly as online modules, through experiential and innovative approaches while applying similar efforts for all Indian Languages. (Government of India, 2020, NEP 2020, Part- I, Section 4.17 and 4.18)
- **Option of Learning Classical and Foreign Language:** All students in all schools, public or private, will have the opportunity to learn at least two years of a classical Indian language and its associated literature through experiential and innovative approaches in Grades 6-12, with the option to continue from the middle stage through secondary education. Secondary level education will provide students with access to high-quality education in Indian and English languages, as well as foreign languages like Korean, Japanese, Thai, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian, allowing them to enrich their global knowledge and mobility. (Government of India, 2020, NEP 2020, Part- I, Section 4.19 and 4.20)
- **Innovative Methods of Language Learning:** The teaching of all languages will be enhanced through innovative methods, such as gamification and apps, incorporating cultural aspects like films, theatre, storytelling, poetry, and music, and connecting them with relevant subjects and real-life experiences, thus forming an experiential-learning pedagogy. (Government of India, 2020, NEP 2020, Part- I, Section 4.21)
- **Standardization of Indian Sign Language (ISL)** Indian Sign Language (ISL) will be standardized across the country, with national and state curriculum materials developed for hearing impaired students, while local sign languages will be respected and taught where relevant. (Government of India, 2020, NEP 2020, Part- I, Section 4.22)

v. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For transforming our classrooms and making the learners feel more related to the content being delivered in the class and the learning that is happening inside the school walls, the policy not only acknowledges the importance of regional/home/local languages and the use of mother tongue for instruction delivery but also promoted the use of multiple languages for making the learners more proficient and future ready. (Kour, 2022; Mandal & Mete, 2023).

Even though NEP 2020 is a pioneer policy but still policy is not completely effective, as while studying the specific chapter of multilingualism and power of language, the policy had many positive aspects but at the same time was restricted due to certain limitations. While reviewing the findings of Sanikop & Nayak (2022) and the particular section of multilingualism of NEP 2020 we could understand the positive aspects of NEP 2020 promoting multilingualism and regional and classical languages in the Indian classrooms but at the same

time on their contrary we could understand the loopholes in the implementation of this concept in the classrooms which aligned with the findings of Dhokare et al. (2023) who highlighted both positive and negative aspects and have raised their concern as to whether the Indian government will be able to implement the multilingual approach as effectively as it has been stated in the NEP 2020 due to the numerous challenges which will be faced by the implementers on field.

In consonance with the aspects of NEP 2020 highlighted in many research findings (Kour, 2022; Sanikop & Nayak, 2022; Dhokare et al., 2023) we agree to the following positive aspects:

- **Better Cognitive Development:** Multilingualism enhances cognitive flexibility, adaptability, problem-solving, and critical thinking abilities in students by requiring them to switch between languages. This mental agility extends to other areas, such as attention control and working memory, which can support academic success. (Dhokare et al., 2023)
- **Mother Tongue and Multilingual Proficiency:** A multilingual approach exposes pupils to several languages, which improves their skill and knowledge of linguistic systems. Learning in their native tongue or regional language provides a strong basis for learning new languages. This setting also encourages metalinguistic awareness, allowing students to reflect on language structures and patterns, ultimately leading to more complex language usage and analysis. Further, introducing mother tongue in the primary level provides a solid foundation for learning other languages at the secondary level. It might assist to foster multilingualism and keep the country united. (Kour, 2022; Dhokare et al., 2023)
- **Promotion & Preservation of National Languages and Ancient Culture:** Along with Sanskrit, the Indian government is aiming to make other classical languages and literatures, such as Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Odia, Pali, Persian, and Prakrit, are being promoted by the Indian government as being widely available in schools and possibly as online courses. This is consistent with attempts to preserve and revitalise all Indian languages' rich oral and written literatures, cultural traditions, and knowledge. Not only this, but, the NEP 2020 helps conserve historical knowledge systems and cultural practices by embracing classical languages like as Sanskrit and local dialects, strengthening the country's cultural history. (Sanikop & Nayak, 2022; Dhokare et al., 2023)
- **Preparing Students for Global Competency:** At secondary level, the instructions in other languages such as Korean, Japanese, Thai, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian is available, allowing pupils to learn about diverse cultures and broaden their global understanding. (Sanikop & Nayak, 2022)
- **Inclusion of Students from Varied Linguistic Diversity:** A multilingual approach assures that students from every culture and language origins have equal access to education. It fosters diversity and decreases inequities based on language. The policy, further, emphasizes the importance of offering inclusive, multilingual education that caters to the unique linguistic needs of differently-abled students. (Dhokare et al., 2023)

The following limitations, which align with that stated by Dhokare et al., 2023, may obstruct the effective implementation of multilingual approach in the schools under NEP 2020:

- **Issues with Curriculum Design:** Developing a multilingual curriculum that effectively integrates regional languages, mother tongues, and other languages while maintaining academic standards can be challenging and time-consuming, especially when balancing teaching multiple languages within limited school hours. (Dhokare et al., 2023)
- **Issues with Teacher Preparedness:** Teachers often lack fluency in multiple languages, necessitating specialized training in multilingual teaching methods. This can be resource-intensive and challenging to provide in schools with diverse linguistic backgrounds, as teachers must be fluent in multiple languages to effectively provide multilingual education. (Dhokare et al., 2023)
- **Lack of Proper Infrastructural Support:** Adequate infrastructure and resources, such as language-specific textbooks and instructional materials, may be missing, particularly in communities with limited resources. Furthermore, providing technology and digital materials in many languages might be difficult, resulting in inequitable access to educational resources. (Dhokare et al., 2023)
- **Difficulty in Policy Implementation and Community Acceptance:** The adaptation of multilingual education policy at the state level requires effective collaboration and coordination across government departments and educational institutions. Successful implementation requires local population support and participation, but resistance from stakeholders who support a monolingual approach or are concerned about the feasibility of multilingual education may be an obstacle. (Dhokare et al., 2023)

VI. CONCLUSION

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. But like any other policy, NEP 2020, too needs further improvements to cater to the limitations which will be faced while implementing the multilingual approach on field. Still, by adopting a multilingual approach within the framework of NEP 2020, India may leverage its linguistic variety as a great asset, equipping students for success in a globalized world while conserving the country's rich cultural history.

VII. REFERENCES

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