

Language Policy of India and Schooling: Theorizing Multilingualism

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ABSTRACT

Multilingualism in India's educational landscape reflects the nation's unique identity and underlines the need for inclusive language policies that honor linguistic diversity. Multilingualism talks about the inclusion of parents and the community in planning the curriculum, syllabuses, and teaching learning materials in an active and innovative way. It also suggests that language classes should creatively exploit the different languages available in a given classroom, focusing on the interaction of different linguistic discourses. This article aims to critically assess the multilingual provisions mentioned in India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and attempts to shed light on its implementation and implications.

Keywords: Policy, Multilingualism, Language, Acquisition, Learning, Three language formula.

Introduction

This article aims to critically assess the multilingual provisions of Indian National Education Policy (2020) and attempts to shed light on its implementation and implications. It explores the complexities and challenges of multilingualism in the linguistically diverse environment of India, considering policy implications for education and society. Through a rigorous analysis of language policies and language practices, the document aims to identify voices that are often not heard in policy and debate, highlighting the need for inclusive and fair language policies that respect linguistic diversity while promoting the quality of education and social coherence in the society and classroom. Further in this article, we will first understand language and its nature and then try to define multilingualism in that light. After this, we will highlight the recommendations of the NEP (2020) related to multilingualism and will analyse the recommendations on the basis of the language development and its related theoretical aspect. In the end we theorize our position.

What is language?

Jean Aitchison (1998) in his book entitled '*The Articulate Mammal: An Introduction to Psycholinguistics*' Actually, Language is the specialized sound signaling system which seems to be genetically programmed to develop in humans. (Aitchison, 1998), this system is unique to human creatures and appears to be inborn, or genetically programmed, as it evolves naturally in individuals. Language aids humans to express

thoughts, ideas, emotions, and intentions through the production and comprehension of sounds, words, and sentences. It pertains as a tool for social interaction, allowing individuals to communicate with one another effectively. Aitchison's definition highlights the complex nature of language and emphasizes its fundamental role in human communication and cognition. Once the fundamental idea of language is laid out, there emerges a characteristic interest to investigate what separates human language from different types of correspondence. This interest drives us to dig into the particular features and mechanisms that recognize human language from creature correspondence. (Hockett, 1960). Hockett highlights the unique traits of human language compared to animal communication. Firstly, humans mainly talk and listen, but also use sign language. Secondly, our messages go everywhere but seem to come from one spot for listeners. Thirdly, our words disappear fast, so we need to understand them right away. Fourthly, we can both send and receive the same message, which helps in conversations. Also, we can hear ourselves speaking, letting us check how we sound. Plus, language is only for talking, unlike other things we do. We can talk about things not here, and we can say new stuff all the time. We learn language from our culture, not alone. Lastly, we can mix sounds to make words, and words to make sentences. These features make human language special and show how amazing our ability to talk really is. By looking at these design features, we gain bits of knowledge into the perplexing functions of human language, like its flexibility in various modalities, its bidirectional nature, and its combinatorial limit with regards to making new articulations. After knowing about the designing features of language it is also crucial to know how knowledge information is acquired with the help of various modes. Let's know the procedure of language acquisition among living beings.

Language and its Acquisition

Acquiring knowledge involves various methods, notably through language and communication. Language, unique to humans, allows for the expression of complex ideas, facilitating the exchange of information among individuals (Hockett and Charles, 1960). Cultural transmission further enhances knowledge acquisition as languages and cultural norms are passed down through generations, intertwining language with cultural understanding. Cognitive adaptations play a crucial role, enabling individuals to process and grasp new information. The systematic structure of language aids in organizing and conveying intricate concepts, while its specialization for communication ensures effective knowledge transfer. Additionally, total feedback allows individuals to continually refine their communication skills and acquire knowledge through interaction. Cultural learning expands beyond language, encompassing the transmission of skills and beliefs within societies. The duality of patterning in language—where discrete sounds form meaningful units—enables the expression and comprehension of knowledge through words and sentences. These elements collectively contribute to the rich tapestry of knowledge acquisition in human societies. If we talk about acquisition from human societies then we must not forget the most renowned psychologist, educationist and socialist i.e Vygotsky who emphasized that society plays an important role in acquisition of knowledge, language and culture etc. Vygotsky's theory (1960) of language acquisition emphasizes the social context of learning. He proposed that language development is deeply intertwined with social interaction, suggesting that children learn language through communication with more knowledgeable others, such as parents and peers. This process, known as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), highlights the importance of scaffolding—supporting learners just beyond their current capabilities. Vygotsky believed that through collaborative dialogue, children internalize language and cognitive skills, enabling them to think and reason independently. Thus, language is not only a tool for communication but also a means of cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1960). On the other hand in cognitive paradigm Jean Piaget's (2001) theory of language acquisition is rooted in his broader theory of cognitive development. He posited that language emerges as children progress through stages of cognitive growth, primarily the preoperational stage (ages 2-7). According to Piaget, children actively construct knowledge through interactions with their environment, and language reflects their cognitive structures. He believed that language development occurs alongside cognitive development; as children understand concepts, they acquire the words and structures to express those ideas. Piaget emphasized that language is a product of cognitive maturity, with children using it to symbolize and communicate their thoughts about the world (Piaget, 2001). Not only Jean Piaget even Nativist Theorist Noam Chomsky's (2000) theory of language acquisition centers on the idea of an innate biological capacity for language, known as the Universal Grammar. He argued that all humans are born with a set of

grammatical structures common to all languages, allowing them to learn any language they are exposed to. Chomsky challenged behaviorist views that language is learned solely through imitation and reinforcement, proposing instead that children rapidly acquire complex grammatical rules without explicit instruction. He introduced the concept of the Language Acquisition Device (LAD), a hypothetical mental structure that facilitates the understanding and production of language, highlighting the uniqueness of human linguistic ability (Chomsky, 2000).

Language, Literacy and Society

Vygotsky (1974) emphasizes the crucial role of language in shaping cognitive development within a society. *Vygotsky in his sociocultural theory* believed that thought and language are initially separate systems, merging around the age of three to produce verbal thought. This merging of thought and language results in inner speech, which is used for mental reasoning. Vygotsky (1962) argued that as language helps children to think about and control their behavior, it is an important foundation for complex cognitive skills. He also highlighted the importance of social interaction in the development of mental abilities, such as speech and reasoning in children. Vygotsky's (1974) theory suggests that cognitive development is influenced by cultural and social factors, and that children acquire cultural values, beliefs, and problem-solving strategies through collaborative dialogues with more knowledgeable members of society. In summary, Vygotsky's (1962) theory posits that language plays a central role in shaping cognitive development within a society, as it is through language and social interaction that children acquire the tools for thinking and reasoning (Vygotsky, 1962)

On the other hand, Noam Chomsky's (2000) perspective on language and society emphasizes the innate structures of the human mind that facilitate language acquisition, known as Universal Grammar. He argues that language is a cognitive ability shaped by biology, rather than solely a social construct. While Chomsky acknowledges that social contexts influence language use, he posits that the capacity for language is universal across cultures. His work highlights the importance of linguistic competence—understanding the underlying rules of language—over performance, which is influenced by social factors. This distinction underscores the complexity of language as both a cognitive function and a tool for social interaction.

Basil Bernstein's (2003) theory of language explores the intricate relationship between language, social class, and education. Bernstein identified two distinct speech codes: the elaborated code and the restricted code. The elaborated code is characterized by complex syntax and vocabulary, allowing for detailed expression and reasoning. It is commonly used in formal educational settings and is often associated with middle-class backgrounds. In contrast, the restricted code features simpler language and relies heavily on context and shared experiences within specific social groups, typically found in working-class environments. Bernstein argued that these codes influence children's educational experiences and outcomes. Children raised in environments that primarily use the restricted code may struggle in formal educational settings where the elaborated code is favored. This discrepancy can create barriers to academic achievement, reinforcing social inequalities. Moreover, Bernstein emphasized that language is not just a communication tool; it shapes thought processes and cognitive development. He posited that the different ways of using language reflect broader social structures and power dynamics. Thus, his theory underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing linguistic diversity in education to promote equity and enhance learning opportunities for all children, regardless of their social background. Although, Critics argue that Bernstein's theory oversimplifies the relationship between language and social class, ignoring the fluidity of language use across contexts. They contend it may underrepresent the abilities of working-class individuals to navigate multiple codes and fail to account for cultural variations and individual differences in communication styles. In this context, we need to pedagogical intervention to understand the linguistic ethos. Shobha Sinha's (2019) work on acquiring literacy in schools focuses on the multifaceted process of literacy development. She emphasizes the role of social context, pedagogical approaches, and cultural backgrounds in shaping literacy experiences. Sinha (2019) advocates for inclusive and engaging literacy practices that recognize diverse linguistic and cultural identities. Her research highlights the importance of meaningful interactions in the classroom, encouraging collaboration among students and integrating their lived experiences into literacy instruction. By fostering a supportive learning environment,

Sinha argues that educators can enhance students' reading and writing skills, promoting critical thinking and comprehension. Ultimately, Sinha's work underscores the need for dynamic literacy instruction that not only develops technical skills but also empowers students as active participants in their learning journeys. In similar way, Ramakant Agnihotri's (1955) work on multilingual intervention in language development highlights the significance of leveraging multiple languages in educational settings. He advocates for recognizing the linguistic diversity of students as a resource rather than a barrier. Agnihotri emphasizes that multilingualism can enhance cognitive development, promote better understanding, and foster inclusivity in the classroom. His approach encourages the integration of students' home languages alongside the dominant language of instruction, facilitating a more holistic language development process. Agnihotri argues that multilingual interventions can support language acquisition, improve literacy skills, and build cultural awareness. By creating a learning environment that values all languages, educators can empower students and enhance their overall academic performance. His work underscores the need for pedagogical strategies that embrace linguistic diversity to foster effective communication and learning. The Census of India (2011) plays a crucial role in documenting and understanding this linguistic diversity. It collects data on the languages spoken by people across the country, providing valuable insights into the distribution and prevalence of different languages and dialects. Diverse India has a so-called multifarious dialect, language and culture which provide strength to multilingualism. On the other hand Agnihotri and Rajesh Kumar have rightly talked in one of their papers entitled Applied Linguistics-Language Teaching that the significance of multilingual pedagogy in diverse sociolinguistic environments like India lies in its ability to ensure space for each child's language while also promoting high proficiency in the languages of home, region, and the nation. This approach not only supports the preservation of linguistic diversity but also enhances scholastic achievement, social tolerance, and cognitive abilities. Multilingual pedagogy is particularly crucial in a country like India, which is home to a vast array of languages and where the use of multiple mother tongues in educational settings is common. Emphasizing multilingual pedagogy can help in leveraging the natural exposure to multilingual environments, promoting linguistic diversity, and ensuring that children have the opportunity to develop high proficiency in multiple languages, including English.

National Education Policy-2020

The National Education Policy (2020) recommends the continuation of the three-language formula while allowing flexibility and avoiding the imposition of any language on any state. The three languages learned by children will be the choices of states, regions, and the students themselves, as long as at least two of the three languages are native to India. Students are allowed to change one or more of the three languages they are studying in Grade 6 or 7, provided they can demonstrate basic proficiency in three languages (including one language of India at the literature level) by the end of secondary school. policy also talks to prepare high-quality bilingual textbooks and teaching-learning materials for science and mathematics, enabling students to think and speak about these subjects in their home language/mother tongue and in English. The policy emphasizes the benefits of being well educated in one's language, culture, and traditions, and recognizes the richness and importance of India's languages. On the other hand there are no practical implementation strategies that have been discussed in the policy to address the multilingual proficiency challenges.

Multilingualism and Its Need

The establishment of multilingualism involves a shift in language teaching methodologies and materials. It emphasizes the recognition of multilingualism as a norm and an asset, rather than a deviation from a standard norm. Multilingualism advocates for the involvement of parents and the community in planning the curriculum, syllabuses, and teaching materials in an active and creative way. It also suggests that language classes should creatively exploit the different languages available in a given classroom, focusing on the interaction of different linguistic discourses. Additionally, Multilingualism proposes a shift in teacher training programs to capitalize on the rich experience of multilingual teachers and to demonstrate how multilingualism in the classroom can be used as a resource. Overall, the establishment of multilingualism involves a fundamental rethinking of language education to embrace and leverage the multilingual nature of societies (Agnihotri, 1995).

Multilingualism refers to the ability of an individual or a community to use multiple languages for communication. (Agnihotri, Kumar, n.d). Multilingualism is needed for several reasons:

- **Cultural Preservation:** Multilingualism helps in preserving and promoting diverse cultural identities and traditions associated with different languages.
- **Cognitive Benefits:** Research has shown that multilingualism is associated with cognitive growth, including enhanced problem-solving skills, multitasking abilities, and improved memory.
- **Social Tolerance:** Multilingualism fosters social tolerance by promoting understanding and respect for different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.
- **Educational Advantages:** Multilingual individuals have access to a wider range of educational and professional opportunities, as they can engage with a broader array of knowledge and perspectives.
- **Linguistic Diversity:** Multilingualism contributes to the richness of linguistic diversity, which is essential for maintaining a vibrant and inclusive society.
- **Communication:** In a multilingual society, multilingualism facilitates effective communication and interaction among individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Overall, multilingualism is essential for preserving cultural heritage, promoting cognitive development, fostering social harmony, and embracing linguistic diversity. Multilingualism in India's educational landscape reflects the nation's unique identity and underlines the need for inclusive language policies that honor linguistic diversity. The multilingual nature of Indian society enlarges beyond mere communication, encapsulating a profound reflection of societal values and heritage. Therefore, advocating for multilingualism in educational institutions becomes crucial for promoting democratic values among students, teachers, and parents alike. Agnihotri's discourse on multilingualism highlights its significance as a natural phenomenon, indicating linked with cognitive development and social coherence. Multilingualism nurtures cognitive flexibility, enhancing academic performance and fostering social harmony. It is not simply about speaking multiple languages; rather, it represents a fundamental aspect of human existence that enriches societal development and promotes inclusivity. In educational contexts, multilingualism offers numerous benefits, serving as a source of creativity and meaningful learning. Diverse linguistic backgrounds provide unique perspectives, nurturing collaborative learning environments where students can engage with various cultural viewpoints. However, effectively integrating multilingualism into classrooms requires a concerted effort to adapt teaching methodologies and materials to accommodate linguistic diversity. Educators must recognize the inherent multilingual nature of classrooms and adopt inclusive pedagogical approaches that value and leverage linguistic diversity. Moreover, active involvement of parents and communities in curriculum planning and syllabus development is essential to ensure that educational practices resonate with diverse learner experiences. By embracing multilingualism in education, we empower students to navigate a globalized world while preserving their cultural identities and promoting social cohesion. Expanding multilingual education initiatives can further enhance its impact on student learning outcomes and societal cohesion. Collaborative projects between schools and local communities can leverage indigenous knowledge and language resources to enrich the curriculum and promote cultural understanding. For example, community-based language revitalization programs can empower marginalized linguistic groups by preserving and promoting their heritage languages. Similarly, partnerships with cultural institutions and NGOs can provide additional support for multilingual education initiatives, offering resources and expertise to enhance teacher training and curriculum development efforts.

Furthermore, integrating technology into multilingual education can facilitate access to educational resources and promote language learning outside the classroom. Digital platforms and mobile applications tailored to diverse linguistic contexts can supplement traditional teaching methods, providing interactive learning experiences in multiple languages. Additionally, online collaboration tools can connect students from different linguistic backgrounds, fostering peer learning and cross-cultural exchange. Incorporating multilingualism into standardized assessments and examinations can also validate students' linguistic

Competencies and promote equity in educational outcomes. By acknowledging and valuing linguistic diversity in assessment practices, educational institutions can create more inclusive evaluation frameworks that accommodate students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Moreover, multilingualism can serve as a catalyst for innovation and economic development in India. As the country continues to globalize and engage with international markets, proficiency in multiple languages becomes increasingly valuable. Multilingual individuals possess the skills needed to communicate effectively in diverse cultural contexts, facilitating international trade, diplomacy, and collaboration. By investing in multilingual education, India can empower its workforce to compete in the global marketplace and contribute to sustainable economic growth.

Additionally, multilingualism fosters social cohesion and national unity by bridging linguistic divides and promoting intercultural understanding. In a country as linguistically diverse as India, multilingual education promotes respect for cultural differences and strengthens social bonds. By embracing linguistic diversity as a source of strength rather than a barrier, educational institutions can cultivate a sense of belonging and solidarity among students from different linguistic backgrounds. Furthermore, multilingualism plays a pivotal role in shaping inclusive societies and promoting social justice. In India, where linguistic diversity is a defining feature, embracing multilingual education can contribute to breaking down barriers and fostering a sense of belonging among diverse communities. By valuing and celebrating linguistic diversity, educational institutions can create inclusive environments where every student feels respected and represented.

One way to promote multilingualism in education is through the implementation of a comprehensive

Language policy that recognizes the importance of both mother tongue instruction and proficiency in additional languages. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India emphasizes the importance of multilingualism and advocates for the promotion of regional languages alongside the national language. However, the effective implementation of such policies requires careful planning, adequate resources, and support from all stakeholders involved. Decentralization of education governance can also play a crucial role in promoting multilingualism and ensuring that language policies are effectively implemented at the grassroots level. By empowering local communities to make decisions about language instruction and curriculum development, decentralization can help address the diverse linguistic needs of students across different regions of the country. Moreover, it is essential to recognize and address the challenges and barriers that may hinder the effective implementation of multilingual education initiatives. These challenges may include a lack of trained teachers proficient in multiple languages, inadequate teaching materials and resources in regional languages, and resistance from certain segments of society to the promotion of multilingualism. To overcome these challenges, investments must be made in teacher training programs, curriculum development, and the creation of high-quality teaching materials in multiple languages. Additionally, awareness-raising campaigns can help change attitudes and perceptions towards multilingualism, emphasizing its benefits for individual students, communities, and society as a whole.

At last, multilingualism stands as a cornerstone of India's rich cultural heritage and linguistic diversity, serving as a vital asset for educational excellence, social cohesion, and economic prosperity. Embracing multilingual education is essential for promoting inclusive societies and unlocking the full potential of every student. By recognizing the importance of multilingualism in education policy and practice, India can build a more equitable and inclusive education system that prepares students to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and diverse world. Through the expansion of multilingual education initiatives, leveraging technology and community partnerships, and promoting inclusive assessment practices, we can ensure that all students have access to quality education that respects their linguistic and cultural identities. This holistic approach to embracing multilingualism not only enriches educational experiences but also strengthens social bonds and fosters a more inclusive and equitable society for future generations

Policy Recommendations on multilingualism

The National Education Policy (2020) recommends the following key points for multilingualism at different education levels:

1. Foundational, Preparatory, and Middle School Levels:

- Focus on the essential skills of foundational literacy and numeracy, which encompass reading, writing, speaking, counting, arithmetic, and mathematical reasoning.
- By utilizing ongoing formative and adaptive assessments, educators can effectively observe and adjust to the unique learning needs of each student.
- Exposure to different languages early on, with a particular emphasis on the mother tongue.
- Promotion of a bilingual approach, incorporating bilingual teaching and learning resources, is essential for students whose home language differs from the medium of instruction.
- High-quality teaching of all languages to all students, with an enjoyable and interactive style.

2. Secondary and Higher Education Levels:

- All students across all schools will be able to choose to learn a classical Indian language and its related literature for at least two years.
- Secondary education will include the option to learn foreign languages such as Korean, Japanese, Thai, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian, fostering students' international knowledge and mobility.
- Greater flexibility in the three-language formula, allowing students to choose their language learning trajectories based on their interests and aspirations.

These recommendations in the NEP 2020 Policy aim to promote multilingualism, preserve rich languages and their artistic treasures, and provide students with a well-rounded linguistic and cultural education.

Policy Provisions on multilingualism: Critical Appraisal

1. Primary, Preparatory and High School:

- Although there is a need to emphasize basic literacy and numeracy, NEP's focus on these skills can overshadow the importance of language development, life skills especially in multilingual contexts. Agnihotri suggests that language development should receive equal attention in addition to basic skills to ensure a well-rounded education. On the other hand if we see Sweden, Finland and Britain's primary schooling then we find that it provides admission from the age of 6-7 years. Which creates a positive space for kids to acquire life skills such as empathy, ethics, aesthetics, moral values and so on. Hence, it is missing from the NEP 2020 policy.
- Continuous formative/adaptive assessment is commendable, but it may inadvertently contribute to a narrow focus on standardized testing and study abroad. Agnihotri has rightly emphasized that assessments must be culturally and linguistically sensitive to accurately reflect students' abilities and learning progress.
- While the NEP recommends early exposure to a variety of languages, it must ensure adequate support for minority and indigenous languages. As in the policy it has not been mentioned how marginalized linguistics should be given impetus to overcome the problem of language stigmatization which could lead to the danger of marginalization of these languages if they are not given equal opportunities for development and teaching.
- Mere Promoting a bilingual approach is not enough, because our country India is filled with multifarious language and cultural diversity that's why the availability and quality of multilingual teaching and learning materials must be ensured. One of the renowned linguists Agnihotri also emphasizes that these materials must reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of students to effectively support their learning.

2. Levels of Higher Education:

- The recommendation of NEP to offer classical and foreign languages is useful to expand students' language learning, language skills and cultural horizons. However, policy has not emphasized the

practicality and resources required such as funding, adequate infrastructure for teaching and the learning process.

- The flexibility of the trilingual formula must be increased, but there must be mechanisms to avoid consolidation for linguistic hierarchies. Here students must have the right to choose their own language learning, without societal or institutional pressure to favor certain languages over others.

To conclude, while the NEP 2020 has recommended theoretical perspectives on multilingualism, it has not given any concrete practical solution and infrastructure to smooth propagation of cultural and linguistic diversity at the grassroots level.

Suggestions

- Decentralization of education must be adopted.
- Mother tongue and three language formulas must be defined exactly to sort out the mother tongue issues.
- Multilingualism must be the basis of our education instead of confining within three language formulas.
- We must provide space to the marginalized linguistics students in the classroom.
- Standard Pedagogical paradigms must be there to enrich multilingualism in the classroom.
- We must discourage language stigmatization, established norms and standards.
- We must avoid privatization of education to ensure universalization of education and equity among students and society as well.

Conclusion: Theorizing Multilingualism

To foster a more inclusive and effective educational system, multilingual education must be adopted. This shift allows for a more responsive approach that considers the unique linguistic and cultural needs of different communities. A foundational step in this process is the precise definition of the concepts of mother tongue and the three-language formula. Clarity on these terms is essential to address existing issues surrounding mother tongue education, ensuring that all students can engage with their first language in a meaningful way. Incorporating multilingualism as the cornerstone of our education system is vital. Rather than confining language learning to a rigid three-language framework, embracing a multilingual approach acknowledges and celebrates the linguistic diversity of our students. This approach not only enriches the learning experience but also prepares students for a globalized world where multiple languages coexist and interact. It encourages cognitive flexibility and cultural awareness, essential skills in today's interconnected society. To ensure the success of this multilingual framework, it is crucial to provide space for marginalized linguistic students within the classroom. These students often face significant challenges due to the dominance of certain languages in educational settings. By actively including and valuing their languages and cultural backgrounds, we create a more equitable learning environment that empowers all students. This inclusion not only enriches the classroom experience but also fosters a sense of belonging and self-worth among marginalized students. Moreover, standard pedagogical paradigms must be established to enrich multilingualism in the classroom. These paradigms should be adaptable, allowing educators to implement strategies that effectively integrate multiple languages into their teaching practices. Training teachers to utilize these pedagogical frameworks can enhance their ability to engage all students, facilitating better language.

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