



SCOPE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020

Gayathri Paliath, Research Scholar, Hindustan Institute of Technology and Science, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India
Dr.RajiDhinakar, Associate Professor, Hindustan Institute of Technology and Science, Chennai ,Tamil Nadu,India

ABSTRACT- The National Education Policy 2020 has raised a lot of concerns, especially with reference to the section on languages. This article discusses the background of this policy, the relevant aspects on languages, and addresses the criticisms raised with regard to the teaching of English Language and the regional languages, as well as the teaching of other subjects using English or regional languages. It argues that much of the criticism arises from an incomplete understanding of the policy and the ability of a child to learn languages and other subjects at different ages. The advantage of learning multiple languages is highlighted. ELT professionals have to develop new teaching techniques to adapt to the changes introduced by the NEP 2020.

Key Words: English Language, Teaching, National Education Policy

I. INTRODUCTION

There have been a lot of discussions recently on how the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) would force the existing English Medium Schools to shift their medium of instruction to local or regional languages.

The NEP 2020 is the third education policy formulated by the Indian Government in its efforts to raise the education standards in India after a gap of 34 years. The stated aim of the policy is to instil a “deep-rooted pride” in being an Indian, not only in thought, but also in spirit, intellect and deeds.¹

The National Policy on Education 1986 was modified in 1992 as Program of Action; it was further tweaked by the T.R. Subramanian Committee in its Report in 2016. The NEP 2020 is based on the Dr. K.Kasturirangan Committee report submitted in 2019. This committee of nine eminent academics and scientists was headed by Dr. Kasturirangan, who headed ISRO for nearly a decade, is the Chancellor of the Central University of Rajasthan and NIIT University². Thus, there can be little doubt about the credentials of this committee or the work put in to evolve the Policy.

II. CRITICISM OF NEP 2020

Although the NEP 2020 has been formulated to enable children to get full advantage in the field of education, many varied viewpoints, concerns and criticism have come up on various aspects of the policy^{3, 4, and 5}. These include

- a) *Increasing disparity between sections of the society:*The students in Government Schools who are instructed in regional languages till class 5 or 8 will definitely be at a disadvantage as compared to the students learning in Private Schools, where the medium of instruction will continue to be in English. Downloadable and printable text books made available online in different regional languages may not be a real time possibility with less than 30 percent of our students having smart phones or internet access. Also having a computer becomes a necessity for students from Class 6 onwards for them to learn coding. This may not be a possibility among the weaker sections of the society.
- b) *Four year graduation program:* The new graduation program allows the students to dropout after 2 years with a Diploma Certificate. Many students of the lower – income group may be forced to drop out so as to find employment and support the family.
- c) *Language:*Schools introducing mother tongue or regional language as a medium of instruction will face practical difficulties like availability of qualified teachers proficient in these languages, bringing

out text books in about 22 languages which are active in different parts of the country and objection from states like Tamil Nadu on implementing Hindi as part of the three- language –formula.

III. NEP 2020 AND ELT

In the section – “multi-lingualism and power of language”, the NEP states that “wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be home language / mother tongue / local language / regional language. Thereafter, the home/local language shall continue to be taught as a language wherever possible”.

While, at a glance, it looks as if NEP 2020 has ignored the importance of English Language Teaching, a thorough understanding of the Policy Guidelines will make it explicitly clear that English will still stand out as an important language in school education. NEP 2020 has given the schools the flexibility of deciding on the medium of instruction. It does not prevent the students from learning in English, whether from the beginning itself or later.

Now is the time to make reforms in the English Language Teaching methodology, for English language education is at a sub-standard level in many of the so-called English medium schools across the country. The NEP 2020 poses a thrilling challenge to all the language teachers to develop innovative methods to make the students acquire speaking and writing skills in the languages they learn. Especially so in the case of English Language since it is a foreign language and the students choosing to learn English aspire for interaction with the western world in future.

It is well understood that young children learn and grasp non-trivial concepts more quickly in their home language/mother tongue. 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. All languages will be taught with high quality to all students; a language does not need to be the medium of instruction for it to be taught and learned well.

These factors will be really useful for students of the Economically Weaker Sections admitted into Englishmedium schools, who will now understand their lessons better when taught in their local language. At present, there are many teachers who switch to the local language so as to include such children, and it is accepted by others also. Further it is also clearly stated that “The three languages learned by children will be the choices of States, regions and of the students, so long as at least two of the three languages are native to India”¹.

According to a myriad of studies conducted worldwide⁶, children learn languages very well from the age of 2 to 8 years. Also young kids learn languages through sight, play, touch, feel and interactions in families and with other kids. It has also been proved scientifically that the best time to learn languages is before the age of 10. With all these factors in view, it would be in the best interests of the younger generation to introduce the three-language system in NEP 2020 in the pre-school itself.

English will be taught as a subject. This will be an efficient way to learn English, for children who do not speak English at home. This helps in relating the new words in English to the concepts they already know from home. This will also ensure a smooth transition to English after the primary school.

There is a lot of concern and confusion, especially among the parents who believe that expertise in handling English language is of prime importance for their wards to interact with the western world. It may be kept in mind that the NEP 2020 does not eliminate the use of English as a medium of instruction in schools. In fact, NEP has recommended that the students will learn in higher grades, science and mathematics in two languages – mother tongue as well as English, which will help the students to understand the complex topics better. Thus, teaching of English Language has equal importance as teaching of other native languages, according to the NEP 2020.

IV. EDUCATION IN ENGLISH

India is globally recognised as a giant in multi-disciplinary areas because of the good foundation in India’s higher education system. Our nation has produced a line of top performers - SundarPichai (Google), Satya Nadella (Microsoft), IndiraNooyi (PepsiCo), Shantanu Narayan (Adobe), Sanjay Mehrotra (Micron Technology), and Ajay Singh Banga (Master Card) – to name a few. Their excellence in their chosen fields

can be attributed to many factors of which quality higher education in English medium played a pivotal role.

V. EDUCATION IN REGIONAL LANGUAGE OR MOTHER TONGUE

There are around 22 officially recognised languages in India. The people of India use their respective mother tongues, state languages, Hindi and of course the international language – English in their daily life. Any instruction in the language of their region will definitely reduce dropouts and ensure education to every child across different sections of the society. Main advantages of choosing Regional Language or Mother Tongue as a medium of instruction in schools are:

- Helps the toddlers to understand better and improves learning in the early ages of childhood.
- Ensures increased student participation.
- Provides a positive and fearless classroom environment.
- Enhances the child's level of confidence and self-esteem.

VI. ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING ENTERS A NEW PHASE

The importance of English as a medium of instruction in higher grades is brought out clearly in the NEP 2020. Hence, it is definitely better to teach English as a second subject or the medium of instruction from pre-school itself since grasping languages is easier at a smaller age. English being a foreign language may require special techniques of teaching as compared to the already familiar regional languages or mother tongue. Also at the lower grades, students can be allotted more time to develop reading and writing skills in different languages, whereas it may be difficult to learn English Language in the middle grades, where more attention needs to be given for other subjects. At this point, it will be helpful to keep in mind that children attain fifty percent capacity in terms of language learning skills by the age of four and another thirty percent by the age of eight.

Whether English is taught as a subject or used as a medium of instruction, the fact remains that English is a foreign language in our country. Hence teaching English right from pre-school will be the optimal option, since the students are better adapted to learning languages at a younger age than in their teens. The methodology of English Language teaching will now enter a new phase by making it simpler and easily understandable for the students, right from the pre-schoolers. Ideally, more importance should be given to comprehension and communication skills in English as this would enable the students to switch over to English in higher grades.

VII. CONCLUSION

Although there may be a few drawbacks in the NEP 2020, it is indeed a revolutionary policy, which when implemented after plugging the loopholes, will surely see a transformed India in the field of Education. In general, NEP 2020 is flexible, creative and more productive. The policy has envisaged the possibility of bringing the whole community of children of India under the education system. The freedom given to the states to educate students in Regional Languages or Mother Tongue will go a long way in reaching out to every section of the society.

At the same time, NEP 2020 gives the individual schools the freedom to choose the medium of instruction from pre-school, which will satisfy those aiming for higher global education in future.

Developing innovative teaching techniques for English Language would indeed be a challenging task to adapt to the major changes in brought forth in the Languages section of the NEP 2020.

REFERENCES

1. https://www.mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf
2. <https://www.businessinsider.in/thelife/personalities/news/who-is-dr-kasturirangan-and-what-is-his-role-new-education-policy/slidelist/77412899.cms>
3. "National Education Policy evokes mixed reactions among academicians". *Outlook India*. PTI. 29 July 2020. Retrieved 30 July 2020.

4. Shukla, Ashish (30 July 2020). "Netizens irked with Modi government's 3-language formula in NEP 2020". *International Business Times*. India. Retrieved 9 August 2020.
5. Prasad, Madhu (19 July 2019). "NEP 2019: The devil in the detail". *Frontline*. Retrieved 31 July 2020.
6. Gander, Kashmira. 1 May, 2018. <https://www.newsweek.com/scientists-pinpoint-best-age-learn-second-language-907505#:~:text=Updated%20%7C%20Children%20must%20start%20to,as%20we%20progress%20through%20adulthood>.