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**MULTILINGUALISM AND THE POWER OF LANGUAGE IN THE  
SPECIAL PERSPECTIVE OF NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020**

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DOI: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijarp.3957>**ABSTRACT:**

Multilingualism has been recognized as a powerful pedagogical and cognitive tool in the National Education Policy 2020, particularly in paragraphs 4.11 to 4.22, which emphasize the role of language in promoting equitable, inclusive, and holistic education. This article examines the concept of multilingualism and the power of language in the special perspective of National Education Policy 2020, highlighting its implications for teaching-learning processes, cognitive development, cultural preservation, and national integration. The policy underscores that language is not merely a means of communication but a fundamental instrument of thought, identity formation, and knowledge construction. It advocates the use of the mother tongue, home language or regional language as the medium of instruction at least until Grade 5 and preferably until Grade 8 and beyond, recognizing that children learn best in familiar linguistic environments.

The article analyses how multilingual education enhances conceptual understanding, strengthens cognitive abilities, and reduces learning barriers, especially in early childhood and foundational stages. National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes flexible implementation of the three-language formula, ensuring that at least two of the three languages are Indian languages while allowing states and learners freedom of choice. The policy also recommends the development of bilingual teaching-learning materials, particularly in subjects such as science and mathematics to facilitate conceptual clarity and academic proficiency. Furthermore, the introduction of the “Languages of India” project promotes experiential learning by encouraging students to explore the linguistic diversity of the country. The article also highlights the promotion of classical Indian languages, including Sanskrit and the

availability of foreign languages at the secondary level to develop both cultural rootedness and global competence. Innovative pedagogical approaches such as storytelling, theatre, music, and digital tools are emphasized to make language learning engaging and meaningful. Additionally, the policy recognizes Indian Sign Language as a standardized language and recommends curriculum development to ensure inclusive education for children with hearing impairments.

The discussion further explores the educational significance of multilingualism, including its role in promoting inclusive education, preserving linguistic diversity, strengthening cultural identity, encouraging creativity, and fostering national unity. Multilingual classrooms support collaborative learning, peer interaction, and democratic participation, thereby enhancing communication skills and social harmony. However, the article also addresses challenges in implementing multilingual education, such as shortage of multilingual teachers, limited availability of regional language textbooks, need for teacher training, administrative coordination, and multilingual assessment practices. To overcome these challenges, the article suggests strategies including teacher training in multilingual pedagogy, development of bilingual resources, use of technology-based translation tools, community participation, establishment of language resource centers and promotion of Indian languages in higher education. The article concludes that multilingualism, as envisioned in National Education Policy 2020, serves as a transformative approach to education that values linguistic diversity while promoting unity and global readiness. Effective implementation of these provisions can lead to improved learning outcomes, inclusive classrooms, and culturally responsive education aligned with the goals of the National Education Policy 2020.

**KEYWORDS:** Multilingualism, Mother Tongue-Based Education, Language Policy, Linguistic Diversity, Three-Language Formula, Inclusive Education, National Education Policy 2020.

## INTRODUCTION

Language is not merely a medium of communication; it is the foundation of thinking, learning, identity, and cultural continuity. In a multilingual country like India, language plays a vital role in ensuring inclusive and meaningful education. Recognizing this reality, the National Education Policy 2020 places strong emphasis on multilingualism and the power of language, particularly in paragraphs 4.11 to 4.22 under the theme “Multilingualism and the Power of Language.” These provisions highlight the importance of mother tongue-based

education, multilingual pedagogy, preservation of Indian languages, flexibility in language learning and the inclusion of sign language. The policy acknowledges that language is deeply linked to cognition, culture and national integration and therefore advocates a holistic language approach in school education. The policy marks a shift from monolingual education practices toward multilingual learning environments. It emphasizes that students learn best in familiar languages and that multilingualism enhances cognitive flexibility, creativity and social understanding. By integrating Indian languages, classical languages, foreign languages and Indian Sign Language, National Education Policy 2020 aims to strengthen linguistic diversity while promoting national unity and global competence.

### **Multilingualism as a Cognitive and Pedagogical Tool**

Paragraph 4.11 highlights that young children grasp complex concepts more effectively when taught in their home language or mother tongue. The policy therefore recommends that the medium of instruction should be the home language, mother tongue, local language, or regional language at least until Grade 5, and preferably until Grade 8 and beyond. This provision applies to both government and private schools. The policy also emphasizes bridging the gap between the child's home language and the language of instruction to ensure conceptual clarity and better learning outcomes. This approach is rooted in research that shows that children think naturally in their first language and conceptual understanding develops more effectively when learning begins in a familiar linguistic environment. Teaching in an unfamiliar language at an early stage often leads to rote learning rather than meaningful comprehension. By promoting multilingual classrooms, National Education Policy 2020 aims to reduce learning barriers and improve foundational literacy and numeracy. Paragraph 4.12 further stresses that exposure to multiple languages from an early age enhances cognitive development. Multilingual learners tend to demonstrate better problem-solving skills, creativity and metalinguistic awareness. The policy promotes play-based, interactive and bilingual approaches in early schooling to encourage language acquisition naturally. It also suggests that language learning should not be limited to memorization but should be integrated with activities, stories, songs and cultural contexts. Thus, multilingualism is not seen merely as learning many languages but as a pedagogical strategy that improves thinking skills and conceptual understanding.

### **Three-Language Formula and Flexibility**

Paragraph 4.13 reiterates the continuation of the three-language formula with greater flexibility. The policy states that students will learn three languages, but no language will be imposed on any state or learner. At least two of the three languages must be Indian languages. States, regions, and students will have the freedom to choose languages according to local needs and aspirations. Students may also change languages in Grades 6 or 7, provided they demonstrate proficiency in three languages by the end of secondary school. This provision reflects a balanced approach between linguistic diversity and national integration. The three-language formula promotes multilingual competence while respecting regional linguistic identities. It encourages students to learn both local and national languages, thereby strengthening unity in diversity. The flexibility in language choice ensures that linguistic diversity is preserved while avoiding the imposition of any specific language. This provision also supports mobility of students across states and promotes intercultural understanding.

### **Bilingual Teaching-Learning Materials**

Paragraph 4.14 emphasizes the preparation of high-quality bilingual textbooks and teaching-learning materials, particularly in subjects such as science and mathematics. These materials will be available in home languages along with English so that students can think and express concepts in both languages. This approach aims to reduce language barriers in learning technical subjects. Many students struggle with scientific concepts not because of difficulty in content but due to unfamiliar language. Bilingual textbooks allow students to understand concepts in their own language while gradually developing academic language proficiency in English. This provision also promotes knowledge creation in Indian languages and strengthens their academic relevance. It encourages translation, terminology development and creation of educational resources in multiple languages.

### **Language, Culture, and Identity**

Paragraph 4.15 recognizes the deep connection between language and culture. Mastery of one's own language strengthens intellectual development and cultural identity. The policy emphasizes that India's linguistic diversity is a source of pride and must be preserved through education. Students will be encouraged to explore linguistic traditions, literature and cultural heritage through language learning. Language education thus becomes a means of cultural transmission. Through storytelling, poetry, folklore, and regional literature, students develop

respect for diversity and appreciation for their heritage. This also promotes emotional bonding with learning and enhances creativity.

### **“Languages of India” Project**

Paragraph 4.16 introduces a project-based learning approach called “Languages of India.” Students in Grades 6 to 8 will undertake activities exploring the linguistic diversity of India. This may include comparing scripts, vocabulary, cultural expressions, and linguistic similarities across languages. Such activities promote national integration and understanding of India’s unity in diversity. Students develop curiosity about other languages and cultures. This experiential approach transforms language learning from memorization to exploration.

### **Promotion of Classical Languages**

Paragraphs 4.17 to 4.19 emphasize the importance of classical languages such as Sanskrit and other classical Indian languages. The policy states that Sanskrit will be offered at all levels of school education as an optional language. Other classical languages and literatures of India will also be available as choices. Students may study classical languages for at least two years to develop an understanding of India’s intellectual traditions. These provisions aim to preserve India’s ancient knowledge systems and literary heritage. Classical languages provide access to philosophy, science, mathematics, literature, and cultural texts of historical significance. By promoting classical languages, NEP 2020 seeks to connect modern education with traditional knowledge systems and cultural continuity.

### **Foreign Languages for Global Competence**

Paragraph 4.20 expands language learning beyond Indian languages by introducing foreign languages at the secondary level. Languages such as Korean, Japanese, Thai, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian will be offered as options. Students may choose these languages based on their interests and career aspirations. This provision reflects the global perspective of National Education Policy 2020. Learning foreign languages enhances cross-cultural understanding and global mobility. It also improves employment opportunities and international collaboration. Thus, the policy balances local identity with global competence.

### **Innovative and Experiential Language Teaching**

Paragraph 4.21 emphasizes innovative and experiential methods for teaching languages. These include storytelling, theatre, films, poetry, music, and digital tools. Language learning

will be integrated with cultural experiences and real-life contexts. Gamification and technology-based learning will also be used. This approach aligns with competency-based learning. Students learn languages through meaningful communication rather than rote memorization. Experiential pedagogy makes language learning engaging and enjoyable.

### **Indian Sign Language and Inclusion**

Paragraph 4.22 highlights the standardization of Indian Sign Language (ISL). National and state curriculum materials will be developed for students with hearing impairment. Local sign languages will also be respected and promoted. This provision promotes inclusive education. It ensures equal learning opportunities for students with disabilities. By recognizing sign language, National Education Policy 2020 expands the concept of multilingualism to include visual languages.

### **Educational Significance of Multilingualism in National Education Policy 2020**

The National Education Policy 2020 strongly emphasizes multilingualism as a powerful pedagogical tool for improving the quality of education. According to the policy, language is not only a means of communication but also a medium for thinking, understanding, and constructing knowledge. The multilingual approach recommended in National Education Policy 2020 enhances learning experiences and supports holistic development of learners. The educational significance of multilingualism can be understood in the following ways.

- 1. Enhances Conceptual Understanding-** Multilingual education helps students understand concepts more clearly, especially when teaching begins in the mother tongue or home language. Children naturally think in their first language, and when new ideas are explained in a familiar language, comprehension becomes easier. Students are able to relate new knowledge with their prior experiences and everyday life. This reduces rote memorization and promotes meaningful learning. National Education Policy 2020 highlights that foundational concepts in subjects like mathematics, science and environmental studies become easier to grasp when taught in a language the child understands well.
- 2. Strengthens Cognitive Development-** Learning multiple languages strengthens brain development and improves cognitive flexibility. Multilingual learners develop better problem-solving skills, memory, and analytical thinking. They become capable of switching between languages, which enhances mental agility. Research also suggests that multilingual children show improved attention control, creativity, and logical reasoning. National

Education Policy 2020 recognizes multilingualism as a tool for promoting higher-order thinking skills and intellectual growth.

**3. Promotes Inclusive Education-** Multilingual education supports inclusion by ensuring that children from diverse linguistic backgrounds are not excluded from learning. In India, many students come from rural, tribal, and minority language communities. If education is provided only in a dominant language, these learners may face difficulties. By allowing instruction in home languages, National Education Policy 2020 ensures equitable access to education. This approach respects linguistic diversity and creates a sense of belonging among learners.

**4. Reduces Learning Barriers-** Language barriers are one of the major causes of learning difficulties, especially in early grades. When children are taught in an unfamiliar language, they struggle to understand instructions, concepts, and classroom interactions. Multilingual education removes this barrier by using familiar languages. Students participate more actively, ask questions freely and express their ideas confidently. This improves classroom engagement and reduces dropout rates.

**5. Preserves Linguistic Diversity-** India is a linguistically rich country with hundreds of languages and dialects. National Education Policy 2020 recognizes multilingualism as a means to preserve this diversity. When schools include local and regional languages, they help protect linguistic heritage. Students learn to value different languages and appreciate cultural diversity. This also prevents the decline of lesser-known languages and strengthens cultural continuity.

**6. Supports Cultural Identity-** Language is closely linked with culture, traditions, and social values. Learning in one's mother tongue strengthens emotional connection with family and community. Multilingual education helps students understand local traditions, folklore, literature, and cultural practices. This builds self-confidence and a positive identity. National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes that education should not disconnect learners from their roots, and multilingualism helps maintain this connection.

**7. Encourages Creativity-** Multilingual learners are exposed to different linguistic structures, expressions, and perspectives. This exposure enhances creativity and imagination. Students learn to express ideas in multiple ways and become flexible thinkers. Activities such as storytelling, poetry, theatre, and multilingual discussions encourage creative expression. National Education Policy 2020 promotes such innovative pedagogies that use multiple languages to foster creativity.

**8. Improves Communication Skills-** Learning multiple languages improves communication abilities. Students become capable of interacting with people from diverse backgrounds. They develop listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills across languages. This strengthens both interpersonal and academic communication. Multilingual learners also develop confidence in public speaking and collaborative discussions.

**9. Promotes National Integration-** India's unity lies in its diversity. Multilingual education promotes respect for different languages and cultures. When students learn languages from different regions, they develop understanding and empathy. This reduces linguistic prejudice and promotes harmony. National Education Policy 2020's three-language formula encourages learning Indian languages, which strengthens national integration and mutual respect.

**10. Develops Global Competence-** Multilingualism also prepares students for global opportunities. Learning foreign languages enhances cross-cultural understanding and international communication. Students gain access to global knowledge resources, higher education opportunities, and employment prospects. National Education Policy 2020 supports learning of foreign languages at secondary level, helping students become global citizens.

Multilingual classrooms create opportunities for collaborative learning. Students from different linguistic backgrounds share ideas and learn from each other. Peer interaction helps in language development and conceptual understanding. Group activities such as discussions, role plays, and projects allow students to use multiple languages naturally. Such classrooms promote democratic values where every language is respected. Students feel valued regardless of their linguistic background. Teachers also use translanguaging strategies, allowing students to move between languages for better understanding. This inclusive environment fosters cooperation, empathy, and mutual respect.

Thus, multilingualism in National Education Policy 2020 is not only about language learning but about creating equitable, inclusive and meaningful education. It enhances cognitive development, improves communication, strengthens cultural identity and promotes national unity. By encouraging multilingual classrooms, National Education Policy 2020 aims to transform education into a more inclusive and learner-centered process.

### **CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING MULTILINGUALISM**

Although multilingualism has significant educational benefits, its implementation in schools requires careful planning and strong institutional support. The National Education Policy

2020 recognizes that introducing multilingual education in a linguistically diverse country like India involves practical and pedagogical challenges. These challenges must be addressed through systemic reforms, teacher preparation, and development of appropriate learning resources. The major challenges are explained below:

**1. Shortage of Teachers Proficient in Multiple Languages-** One of the biggest challenges in implementing multilingual education is the shortage of teachers who are proficient in multiple languages. Many schools, especially in urban areas, employ teachers who may not be familiar with the local or regional language spoken by students. Similarly, in rural and tribal areas, teachers may not know the children's home language or dialect. This creates communication gaps and affects teaching-learning processes. For example, if students speak a tribal language at home but instruction is given in another language, teachers may find it difficult to explain concepts effectively. The situation becomes more complex in multilingual classrooms where students come from different linguistic backgrounds. Therefore, recruiting multilingual teachers and training existing teachers in local languages becomes essential.

**2. Limited Availability of Textbooks in Regional Languages-** Another challenge is the limited availability of quality textbooks and teaching-learning materials in regional and local languages. Most academic content, especially in subjects such as science and mathematics, is available mainly in English or a few dominant languages. Translating these materials into multiple Indian languages requires time, expertise, and resources. In addition, regional dialects often lack standardized written forms, making it difficult to develop textbooks. Without adequate materials, teachers may struggle to implement multilingual pedagogy effectively. Students may also face difficulty in accessing learning resources in their home language. Therefore, large-scale translation, content creation, and digital resource development are necessary.

**3. Training Requirements for Multilingual Pedagogy-** Multilingual education requires teachers to adopt new teaching strategies such as bilingual instruction, translanguaging, and language bridging. However, many teachers are trained in monolingual teaching methods. They may not know how to integrate multiple languages effectively in the classroom. Teachers need professional development programs that focus on multilingual pedagogy. They must learn how to use students' home languages as learning resources, how to encourage peer learning across languages, and how to develop bilingual teaching aids. Without proper training, multilingual education may not achieve its intended outcomes. Thus, capacity building of teachers is a crucial requirement.

**4. Administrative Coordination Across States-** India's linguistic diversity varies across states and regions. Implementing multilingual education requires coordination among different states, boards, and institutions. For example, student mobility across states creates challenges when learners move from one language medium to another. Schools must provide support systems to help such students adapt. Additionally, curriculum development, textbook preparation, and teacher recruitment need collaboration between central and state authorities. Differences in language policies across states may also create administrative complexities. Therefore, effective coordination mechanisms are required to ensure smooth implementation of multilingual education.

**5. Standardization of Terminology in Technical Subjects-** Developing technical vocabulary in Indian languages is another major challenge. Subjects such as mathematics, science and technology involve specialized terminology. Many Indian languages may not have widely accepted equivalents for technical terms. Even when translations exist, they may differ across regions. This lack of standardization may confuse both teachers and students. For example, scientific terms may be translated differently in different textbooks. Teachers may switch between English and local languages, leading to inconsistency. To address this issue, standardized glossaries and bilingual dictionaries need to be developed for all major subjects.

**6. Assessment in Multilingual Contexts-** Assessment in multilingual classrooms presents another challenge. Traditional examinations are usually conducted in a single language. Students who learn in multiple languages may face difficulty expressing their knowledge in one specific language. This may not accurately reflect their conceptual understanding. Developing multilingual assessment tools is therefore essential. Question papers should be available in multiple languages, and students should be allowed to respond in languages they are comfortable with. Teachers also need training in evaluating responses written in different languages. Without appropriate assessment practices, multilingual education may not be fully effective.

### **Need for Systemic Planning and Resource Development**

These challenges highlight the need for comprehensive planning. Implementation of multilingual education requires:

- a. Recruitment of multilingual teachers.
- b. Teacher training programs in multilingual pedagogy.
- c. Development of bilingual and multilingual textbooks.

- d. Translation of digital learning resources.
- e. Standardization of technical terminology.
- f. Flexible and inclusive assessment practices.
- g. Collaboration between central and state authorities.

With proper planning, infrastructure and professional development, these challenges can be addressed effectively. Multilingual education, as envisioned in National Education Policy 2020 can then become a powerful tool for inclusive, equitable and meaningful learning.

### **Strategies for Effective Implementation of Multilingualism**

To successfully implement multilingual education as envisioned in the National Education Policy 2020, systematic planning and well-defined strategies are required. Multilingualism cannot be achieved merely by introducing multiple languages in the curriculum; it requires teacher preparation, learning resources, institutional support and community involvement. The following strategies can help ensure effective implementation of multilingual education.

**1. Teacher Training in Multilingual Pedagogy-** Teachers play a central role in implementing multilingual education. Therefore, they must be trained in multilingual pedagogy. Traditional teacher training programs often focus on monolingual instruction, whereas multilingual classrooms require flexible teaching approaches. Teachers should be trained to use students' home languages as learning resources rather than viewing them as barriers. Training programs should include strategies such as bilingual teaching, translanguaging, code-switching, and language bridging. Teachers must learn how to explain concepts in multiple languages, encourage peer learning, and promote language-rich classroom environments. They should also be trained to design multilingual activities such as storytelling, group discussions, role play, and project work. Continuous professional development workshops and in-service training programs will help teachers effectively manage multilingual classrooms.

**2. Development of Bilingual Textbooks-** The availability of bilingual and multilingual textbooks is essential for successful implementation. Students understand concepts better when content is presented in both familiar language and an additional academic language. Bilingual textbooks help students connect their home language with school language. Textbooks in subjects like mathematics, science and social science should include explanations in regional languages along with English or another link language. Glossaries, illustrations and examples should be culturally relevant and linguistically accessible. Digital

versions of bilingual textbooks should also be developed for wider accessibility. This approach will reduce language barriers and promote conceptual clarity.

**3. Use of Technology-Based Translation Tools-** Technology can play an important role in promoting multilingual education. Translation software, multilingual digital platforms and language learning applications can help teachers and students access content in different languages. Educational technology can also support real-time translation, subtitles in videos, and multilingual e-content. Digital libraries and online repositories can provide resources in multiple Indian languages. Artificial intelligence-based tools can assist in converting content from one language to another. Teachers can also use multimedia resources such as videos, audio recordings and interactive modules in local languages. The use of technology thus makes multilingual education more accessible and scalable.

**4. Community Participation in Language Learning-** Community involvement is an important strategy for multilingual education. Parents, local language speakers, and community members can support schools in preserving and promoting local languages. Many indigenous and tribal languages may not have formal teaching materials, but community knowledge can help bridge this gap. Schools can invite community members for storytelling sessions, folk songs, cultural activities, and local history discussions. Such interactions enrich classroom learning and create a strong connection between school and society. Community participation also helps in validating students' home languages and strengthens their cultural identity.

**5. Local Language Resource Centers-** Establishing local language resource centers can support multilingual education. These centers can develop teaching-learning materials, dictionaries, glossaries, and reading resources in regional languages. They can also provide support for translation and terminology development. Such centers may function at district or state level and assist teachers in preparing multilingual content. They can organize workshops, training programs, and research activities related to language education. Resource centers can also create repositories of stories, poems and cultural materials in local languages. This will strengthen language preservation and classroom implementation.

**6. Inclusion of Multilingual Assessment Methods-** Assessment practices must align with multilingual teaching. Traditional assessments often restrict students to one language, which may not reflect their true understanding. Multilingual assessment allows students to demonstrate learning in languages they are comfortable with. Question papers may be provided in multiple languages and students should be allowed to answer in different languages. Teachers can also use alternative assessment methods such as oral presentations,

projects, portfolios, and peer assessment. These flexible approaches capture students' conceptual understanding more effectively. Multilingual assessment promotes fairness and reduces linguistic disadvantage.

**7. Promotion of Indian Languages in Higher Education-** For multilingual education to succeed, Indian languages must also be promoted beyond school level. If higher education is available only in English, students may hesitate to learn in their mother tongue at school. Therefore, National Education Policy 2020 recommends offering higher education programs in Indian languages.

a. Universities and colleges should develop textbooks, lectures, and research materials in Indian languages. Technical subjects such as engineering, medicine, and law should also be available in regional languages. This will strengthen the status of Indian languages and ensure continuity of multilingual education. It will also expand access to higher education for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

b. These strategies collectively support the effective implementation of multilingual education. Teacher training, bilingual resources, technology integration, community involvement, language resource centers, multilingual assessment and promotion of Indian languages in higher education create a strong foundation for multilingual learning.

By adopting these measures, the education system can remove language barriers, promote inclusion and enhance conceptual understanding. These strategies help realize the vision of National Education Policy 2020, which recognizes multilingualism as a powerful tool for equitable, culturally rooted, and holistic education.

## CONCLUSION

The provisions of paragraphs 4.11 to 4.22 of National Education Policy 2020 represent a transformative approach to language education. By emphasizing mother tongue instruction, multilingual pedagogy, flexible language choices, bilingual materials, classical and foreign languages, and sign language inclusion, the policy recognizes language as a powerful tool for learning and identity. Multilingualism in National Education Policy 2020 is not merely about learning many languages; it is about empowering learners cognitively, culturally, and socially. It strengthens conceptual understanding, promotes inclusion and fosters national unity while preparing students for global engagement. The policy acknowledges India's linguistic diversity as an asset and seeks to integrate it into the education system. Thus, multilingualism and the power of language, as envisioned in National Education Policy 2020,

provide a strong foundation for equitable, inclusive, and holistic education. By implementing these provisions effectively, India can build an education system that respects diversity, enhances learning outcomes and prepares learners for the multilingual world of the 21st century. Educational Significance of Multilingualism in National Education Policy 2020 The multilingual approach of National Education Policy 2020 has several educational benefits: Enhances conceptual understanding, Strengthens cognitive development, Promotes inclusive education, Reduces learning barriers, Preserves linguistic diversity, Supports cultural identity, Encourages creativity, Improves communication skills, Promotes national integration, Develops global competence, Encourage collaborative learning and peer interaction. Students learn from each other's linguistic backgrounds. This creates a democratic and inclusive learning environment.

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