

## **Native Languages and the Pace of Learning in NEP 2020**

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### **Abstract**

This analysis delves into the pivotal role of native languages in shaping the pace and quality of learning, as emphasized by India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The policy prescribes that the medium of instruction in early education should be the child's mother tongue or regional language, ideally up to Grade 5 and preferably to Grade 8. Drawing upon research in cognitive science, the paper details how instruction in a familiar language accelerates literacy, numeracy, and conceptual understanding, while also fostering socio-emotional growth, confidence, and cultural connection. The review covers NEP 2020's key directives, implementation strategies, benefits, challenges, and real-world implications, highlighting India's unique multilingual context. Ultimately, it argues that native language-based education forms a critical foundation for inclusive, equitable, and high-quality learning, bridging educational gaps and enabling smoother transitions to additional languages and higher-order skills.

### **Keywords:-**

### **Introduction**

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a transformative chapter in India's educational landscape, placing unprecedented emphasis on native languages (mother tongues, home languages, or regional languages) as the foundation for early childhood and primary instruction. This policy direction reflects extensive research in cognitive development, social inclusivity, cultural preservation, and equitable educational outcomes. It also addresses the significant learning gaps that have historically arisen from instructing children in unfamiliar languages.

At its core, NEP 2020 seeks to create an education system rooted in Indian ethos, supporting the holistic development of children and equipping them to become engaged, productive, and contributing citizens. Multilingualism, inclusion, and accessibility are central to this vision.

## **Theoretical Foundations: Why the Mother Tongue Matters?**

### **Cognitive Development and Learning Theories**

Decades of research underscore the profound benefits of mother tongue-based education. Cognitive development theories (such as Piaget’s) emphasize that nearly 85% of brain development occurs before the age of six, highlighting the need for accessible, meaningful early cognitive stimulation through language that children already know well. Learning in one’s mother tongue:

- Reduces the cognitive burden of simultaneously decoding a foreign language while trying to learn new concepts.
- Accelerates literacy and numeracy acquisition.
- Facilitates better understanding, retention, and participation.

Research across the globe, from Ethiopia to China and Japan, reveals that students grounded in strong mother tongue education experience amplified academic and social outcomes and transition more smoothly to additional languages and higher cognitive skills later on.<sup>[1][2]</sup>

## **NEP 2020 and Its Language Policy Framework**

### **Main Policy Provisions**

The NEP 2020 explicitly recommends that the mother tongue or home language be the medium of instruction at least until Grade 5, preferably extending to Grade 8 and beyond wherever feasible.<sup>[2][1]</sup>

- **Three-Language Formula:** The policy strengthens India’s longstanding multilingual approach, allowing states and educational institutions flexibility to offer any three languages, at least two of which must be native to India.
- **Inclusion in Curriculum:** Curricular materials and resources must be available in all major Indian languages.
- **Extension to Higher Education:** The policy encourages development of higher education programs in Indian languages, enabling access across social spectrums.

This approach was motivated by the recognition that nearly 40% of learners globally lack access to education in their own language, severely limiting learning, engagement, and social mobility.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Detailed Benefits of Native Language-Based Education

### a. Academic Achievement and Conceptual Clarity

1. **Faster Comprehension:** Students learn literacy and numeracy more quickly and effectively in a familiar language. Classroom participation, comprehension, and curiosity increase, creating a virtuous cycle of confidence and achievement.<sup>[2]</sup>
2. **Science and Mathematics:** Teaching science in the mother tongue—especially in the foundational years—helps demystify complex phenomena. Children are able to understand experiments, procedures, and abstract concepts without additional language barriers, as evidenced in both Indian and international studies.<sup>[2]</sup>

### b. Emotional and Social Benefits

1. **Boosts Self-Confidence and Identity:** When students use their home language at school, it bridges the gap between school and community life. This enhances self-esteem, communication skills, and willingness to ask questions and participate.<sup>[2]</sup>
2. **Inclusion:** Children from linguistic minorities, rural and marginalized communities, experience greater inclusion and reduced drop-out rates when taught in their mother tongue.

### c. Cultural Continuity and Social Justice

- **Preservation of Heritage:** Language is a carrier of culture, values, local histories, and traditional knowledge. Native language instruction helps in passing these down to future generations and promotes cultural awareness and pride.
- **Equitable Access:** Using the child’s own language as a medium of instruction democratizes education and narrows social and academic divides.<sup>[1][2]</sup>

## Implementation Strategies and Classroom Practices

### a. Curriculum and Resource Development

- Production of high-quality textbooks and digital content in all regional languages.
- Incorporation of local stories, contexts, and examples to link learning material directly to students' lived experiences.

#### **b. Teacher Training and Support**

- Intensive, ongoing teacher training programs to build capacity in multilingual pedagogy.
- Recruitment of teachers fluent in local languages.
- Training teachers in modern, child-centered, and competency-based educational methods.

#### **c. Assessment Approaches**

- Formative, competency-based, and holistic assessments conducted primarily in the learners' home languages, especially in the early years.
- Emphasis on critical thinking, creativity, and application rather than rote memorization.

#### **d. Community and Parental Involvement**

- Engaging families and communities in the educational process through mother tongue ensures better home-school connection, leading to improved learning outcomes and continuous support for children's educational journeys.<sup>[2]</sup>
- Community input in creating locally relevant learning resources sustains the cultural and linguistic relevance of content.

### **Case Studies and Real-World Examples**

#### **a. Successful Outcomes in India and Abroad**

- **States like West Bengal, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu:** Where regional languages have been primary mediums of instruction in government schools, foundational learning outcomes, inclusivity, and engagement rates have been visibly stronger across diverse demographic groups.
- **International Comparisons:** Countries like Japan, China, Korea, and several African nations have demonstrated that mother tongue instruction at least in the primary years is pivotal for foundational learning and transition to other languages.

## **b. Specific Subject Impact: Science & Mathematics**

Research has shown that Grade 1-2 students who receive science instruction in their home language grasp key concepts such as “evaporation” and “condensation” more rapidly than those instructed in English or other foreign languages, where linguistic complexities create additional hurdles.<sup>[2]</sup>

## **Challenges and Roadblocks**

### **a. Resource and Infrastructure Gaps**

- **Teacher Shortage:** Finding and training qualified teachers fluent in all local languages remains a major concern, especially in rural and tribal areas.
- **Materials Development:** Producing quality textbooks, digital resources, and assessments in hundreds of languages and dialects is a daunting mission requiring sustained financial and administrative support.

### **b. Digital Divide**

- The gap in digital connectivity and e-resources, particularly the lack of online content in regional languages, creates inequities in access that policy must address.
- Teachers require training and support to deliver effective online/blended learning in multiple languages.<sup>[2]</sup>

### **c. Social Attitudes and Policy Acceptance**

- Some parents perceive English-medium education as the pathway to upward mobility and global opportunities, sometimes resisting native language education—especially in urban settings.
- Overcoming these attitudes requires solid evidence, community outreach, and success stories to build buy-in for the pedagogical and emotional benefits of home language instruction.

### **d. Multilingual Classroom Dynamics**

- In diverse classrooms, teachers may need to employ translanguaging, code-switching, and differentiated instruction to accommodate students from various linguistic backgrounds without creating hierarchies or exclusions.

## **NEP 2020: Holistic Vision and the Indian Context**

### **Integration with Broader Educational Goals**

NEP 2020 situates native language instruction within its vision for an empathetic, innovative, and equitable education system, aiming to:

- Foster critical thinking, scientific mindset, and creative imagination in students.
- Enable lifelong learning by building strong cognitive grounds early through familiar mediums.
- Advance social justice, national integration, and preservation of India’s pluralistic culture.

### **Flexible Progression and Multilingualism**

- The “three-language formula” ensures gradual and seamless acquisition of new languages while maintaining strong mother tongue roots.
- From Grade 6 onwards, students learn additional languages, making the transition smoother due to cognitive maturity and skills acquired through earlier native-language instruction.

### **Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Considerations**

The Covid-19 pandemic exposed and widened existing inequalities. NEP 2020’s mother tongue emphasis provides a path to greater resilience and adaptability in future emergencies, ensuring education continuity even when digital resources are limited in non-regional languages.<sup>[2]</sup>

## **Looking Ahead: Recommendations and Way Forward**

### **Policy and Governance**

- **Funding:** Persistent government and private sector investment in native language resource development, teacher training, and digital content.
- **Collaboration:** Strong partnerships between state and central spheres, academia, and communities to ensure authenticity and scale.

### **Knowledge Sharing and Innovation**

- **Pilot Programs:** Experimental approaches for mother tongue-based innovations, followed by robust impact evaluations.
- **Technology Integration:** Mobile learning, AI, and digital platforms in regional languages can democratize educational opportunities and create adaptive, personalized learning environments.

### **Continuous Professional Development**

- Equipping teachers with skills to manage multilingual classrooms, leverage technology, and respond sensitively to students' individual linguistic and cultural needs.

### **Community Involvement and Awareness**

- Community leaders, parent-teacher associations, and local organizations must be mobilized as advocates for mother tongue education, countering myths and fostering real-world understanding of its benefits.<sup>[1][2]</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The National Education Policy 2020's focus on native language instruction is grounded in global best practices and local realities, representing a historic opportunity for India to create a truly inclusive, engaging, and future-ready educational system. Home language-based early education supports:

- **Faster foundational learning**
- **Deeper conceptual mastery**
- **Stronger cultural identity and inclusion**
- **Greater equity and social mobility**
- **Smooth transitions to multilingualism and global competitiveness**

However, realizing this vision demands concerted and sustained effort from governments, educators, communities, and families—working together to ensure that every child in India has the right to learn, dream, and thrive in the language of their heart.

*This in-depth analysis synthesizes and elaborates upon insights from authoritative materials and academic research on NEP 2020 and language policy, providing a comprehensive perspective on one of the most crucial educational reforms in modern India.*

## References

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