

Promoting Multilingualism in Educational Systems: A Pathway to Inclusivity and Equity for Linguistically Diverse Populations

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ABSTRACT

Multilingualism, inclusivity, and equity in education are essential concepts in today's globalized world. Multilingualism enhances cognitive abilities, cultural enrichment, economic opportunities, and language preservation. Inclusivity in education ensures all students have the right to quality education and identifies barriers that hinder access. Inclusive education promotes social cohesion by breaking down barriers between different groups and helps educational institutions comply with legal and ethical obligations.

In India, the National Education Policy of 2020 guarantees everyone the right to education, regardless of caste, class, language, ethnicity, or gender. This policy encourages the growth of language and promotes equality in political, economic, and social life. The paper discusses the benefits of embracing multilingualism, challenges, and barriers to its implementation, as well as successful case studies from diverse regions. Multilingualism involves using multiple languages for communication and learning, recognizing the value of linguistic diversity as a resource for personal and societal growth. Benefits include enhanced cognitive abilities, improved academic outcomes, cross-cultural understanding, and reduced prejudices. However, implementing effective multilingual education programs requires adequate resource allocation, teacher training, and addressing societal attitudes and biases.

In a world characterized by diversity and globalization, the importance of multilingualism, inclusivity, and equity in language use cannot be overstated. To address challenges, a multifaceted approach is needed, including policy changes, teacher development, and community involvement. Governments must recognize the value of linguistic diversity and implement policies that support multilingual education programs.

Keywords: New Education Policy, Language, Diversity, Education, Equity, Schemes, Culture, Pandemic, Nations, Student Learning, Communities.

INTRODUCTION

India, known as the "land of languages," has a rich history and cultural tapestry, with linguistic diversity reflecting its historical, cultural, and geographical complexity. The word "linguistic" comes

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from Latin "Lingua," which means to communicate thoughts and sentiments. Its linguistic diversity has been enriched by foreign invasions and migrations, as well as regional kingdoms promoting local languages for administration, literature, and religious texts. Each linguistic community has produced its own literature, music, dance forms, and folklore, contributing to the rich tapestry of Indian culture. The Vedic period, around 1500–500 BCE, marked the emergence of Sanskrit, an ancient Indo-Aryan language that laid the foundation for many modern languages in India. The Dravidian language family, which includes Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam, showcases a distinct linguistic diversity. India's diverse linguistic and cultural heritage is celebrated through various festivals and events, each with its own cultural and linguistic significance. Gurukul, an ancient Indian education system, emphasized holistic education, personalized learning, teacher-student relationships, experiential learning, and oral tradition. It remains relevant in modern education, emphasizing moral and ethical values, mentorship, and cultural preservation. With technology, personalized learning is more feasible, and mentorship is crucial for academic, personal, and career development. To preserve and promote linguistic diversity, India must focus on revitalizing endangered languages, promoting multilingual education, balancing national cohesion with respecting linguistic diversity, and harnessing digital platforms and technology to create digital content in a wide range of languages.

During India's independence, Hindi was the only official language, with less than 1% of the population knowing English. The government introduced Article 343, making Hindi the only official language, but this led to protests against its inclusion in public administration. Article 343(2) added English as an official language after 15 years of delay, maintaining its permanent place at all levels. Article 120 allowed the use of Hindi or English in parliamentary debates, and Article 346 allowed English to be used as an official language for both center-state relations and communications. Articles 29 and 30 extended linguistic minorities to minority languages. The 8th Schedule includes 22 official languages for communication between states and the Union Government, including Hindi, Dogri, Kashmiri, Punjabi, Gujarati, Odia, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Sanskrit, Marathi, Nepali, Manipuri, Konkani, Assamese, Bengali, Malayalam, Santali, Sindhi, Bodo, Kannada, and Maithili. As Mohanty said "Apart from English and the 22 scheduled official languages, very few figures as languages of education" (Mohanty, 2019).

Multilingualism, the ability to speak and understand multiple languages, is a vital aspect of education worldwide. It offers cognitive and socio-cultural benefits, such as improved academic performance, better communication skills, and cultural sensitivity. However, implementing multilingual education can be resource-intensive, with significant investments required for curricula, teacher training, and creating appropriate learning materials. Language hierarchies can pose challenges, and teacher preparedness is essential. Strategies for harnessing multilingualism in education include bilingual and multilingual education programs, support for heritage languages, culturally responsive pedagogy, teacher training and professional development, collaborative learning and peer support, and the use of technological resources. These strategies help students develop proficiency in multiple languages

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while mastering academic content. By embracing multilingualism, inclusive and equitable educational systems can be achieved, celebrating linguistic diversity.

Research Methodology

The methodology of this paper is of both Qualitative and Quantitative type. The data is purely descriptive, exploratory and explanatory. The data is extracted from many sources and required information collected from different secondary sources like Newspapers, magazines, Social media platforms and book. The paper involves some statistical and numerical analysis of data. The methodology also focuses and influences the future generation.

Data from the official site of -

NTM (National Translation Mission)

National Education Policy 2020, Ministry of Education

Some valuable data from The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, The Voice of Truth, Navjivan publishing House

India of my Dreams Book compiled by R.K. Prabhu and foreword by Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Navjivan Publishing House

Some evidences extracted from the articles written by Ajit K. Mohanty (2019) and Ganesh (Devy, 2020)

Online quantitative data from the official site of World Economic Forum and Language survey reveals diversity by Shiv Sahay Singh.

Some relevant data extracted from the online published articles by British Council on India's New Education Policy 2020: Highlights and Opportunities

By Falak Fathima, educational blog – Implementation of New Education Policy in India.

By Smriti Swarup on Inclusion and Equity: Learning for all NEP 2020

India's New Education Policy and Multilingualism

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a significant shift in India's educational philosophy, aiming to promote inclusivity and equity in the education system. It focuses on language-related provisions, addressing issues related to language of instruction, multilingualism, and linguistic diversity. Key provisions include promoting multilingualism and mother tongue education, the three-language formula, indigenous languages, Sanskrit and classical languages, English as a medium of instruction, flexibility in language choices, Indian Sign Language (ISL), teacher training, the establishment of a National Institute for Pali, Persian, and Prakrit, technology-enabled language learning, assessment in multiple languages, international collaboration, inclusive education for

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diverse learners, and regular reviews and assessments of progress. The policy addresses historical disparities in education, such as access to higher education and quality learning opportunities, and focuses on integrating technology in education. The NEP adopts a comprehensive approach, including early childhood education, school education, higher education, and vocational training. It also emphasizes the importance of multilingualism and cultural diversity, promoting the teaching of mother tongues and local languages and developing high-quality, culturally relevant learning materials. Teacher professional development is also a critical factor in promoting inclusive and equitable education. Key provisions of the NEP Promoting Inclusivity and Equity include Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, Multilingualism, Inclusive Education, Vocational Education, Equity and Access in Higher Education, Multidisciplinary Education, Teacher Education, and Technology Integration. By targeting early disparities, the policy lays a foundation for more equitable educational outcomes. Mahatma Gandhi emphasized education as a tool for individual and societal empowerment, advocating for a decentralized, community-based system, preserving cultural diversity and value-based education, promoting social justice, and eradicating discrimination. He famously said, "Literacy in itself is no education. Literacy is not the end of education, or even the beginning. By education, I mean an all-round drawing of the best in the child and man—in body, mind, and spirit." (Gandhi, 1937)

Mother tongue and regional languages are vital in education, preserving cultural identity, promoting effective learning, bridging the gap between home and school, reducing dropout rates, promoting inclusivity, and enhancing critical thinking. However, implementing these languages faces challenges such as limited resources, standardization, transitioning to global languages, perception and prestige, multilingual contexts, lack of trained teachers, and economic considerations. Recognizing linguistic diversity and promoting bilingual or multilingual education can lead to more equitable and effective educational systems worldwide. In India, 1,369 mother tongues were shortlisted, with 22 receiving official status in the Eight Schedule, while the remaining 99 were described as the 'Non-Scheduled Languages' (Devy, 2020). In 1948, the SK Dhar Commission and JVP Commission investigated the idea of creating states based on language. The SK Dhar Commission rejected the idea, while the JVP Commission studied it, leading to the formation of the first linguistic state of Telugu-speaking people, Andhra Pradesh. India created 14 new states and 6 union territories under the State Reorganization Commission, including Assam, Bihar, Bombay, Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Madras state (later Tamil Nadu), Mysore state (later Karnataka), Orissa, and Punjab. This division created an internal crisis among the people. Internal linguistic controversies began with the partition of the country, leading to disputes over official language. The Official Language Act granted a statutory veto to the status of English as an official language in non-Hindi-speaking states, but the Delhi High Court amended the IAS exam to use English under Article 14, increasing employment opportunities and participation in education.

Multilingual education practices, such as Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), bilingual education, multilingual education, language immersion programs, and translanguaging, aim

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to improve education quality and promote equitable access to learning opportunities. India has implemented multilingual education, focusing on mother tongue instruction in early years. However, the effectiveness of these programs varies across states due to resource allocation and teacher training challenges. Countries like South Africa, Canada, Nigeria, Switzerland, Malaysia, and Belgium have implemented bilingual policies to address linguistic diversity and educational access issues. Educational systems, cultural contexts, socioeconomic conditions, and technological advancements all influence student learning. Inclusive education and globalization emphasize global competencies and intercultural skills.

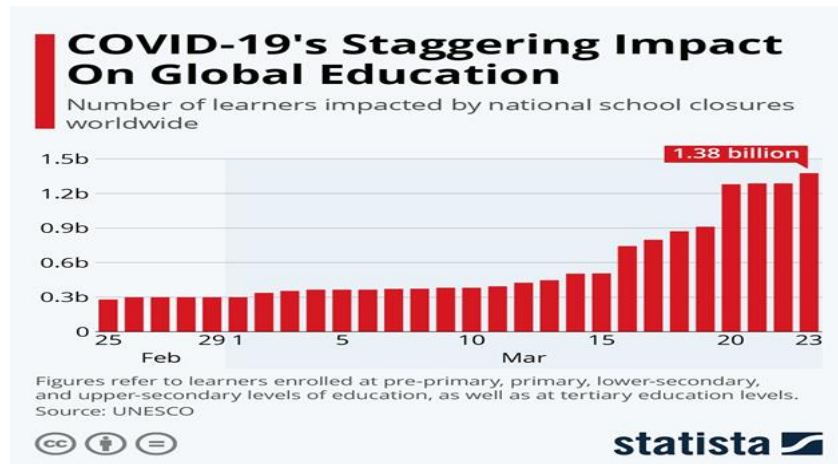
Inclusivity and Equity in the Indian Education System

Inclusivity and equity in the Indian education system are varying across countries and regions, with disparities persisting in conflict-affected regions, remote areas, and marginalized communities. "The 6 E's of Inclusive Education - Equity, Equal Access, Equal opportunity, Equal Dignity, Effective Communism, Embrace Culture and the 5 R's of inclusion - Reach, Right, Responsibility, Relationship, Respect laid emphasis on policy changes, teacher development, and community involvement etc."(Swarup, 2020) Despite curriculum reforms, teacher training, and technology integration, marginalized groups often attend schools with inadequate infrastructure, poorly trained teachers, and outdated materials. Gender equity has improved, but income-based inequalities persist. Ethnic and racial equity has led to greater minority inclusion, but discrimination, language barriers, and unequal access to resources continue. Indigenous peoples have rights to culturally relevant education, but discrimination and harassment persist. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities, requiring concerted efforts from governments, civil society, and international organizations.

The National Education Policy (NEP) of India aims to reduce disparities in the country's education system, focusing on early childhood care and education (ECCE), school infrastructure, multilingual education, inclusive education, digital education, vocational education, and assessment reforms. However, challenges such as resource constraints and varying infrastructure in rural areas remain. Digital and remote learning can significantly enhance education equity by offering equal access to quality resources, customization, overcoming geographical barriers, inclusivity, flexibility, convenience, individualized support, and equity in assessment. India has made significant progress in promoting inclusivity and equity in its education system, with the Right to Education Act of 2009 making elementary education a fundamental right for children aged 6-14. Girls, children with disabilities, and disadvantaged communities still face barriers to entry. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) provides opportunities for children with disabilities.

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Source: World Economic Forum, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted education, causing school closures and a shift to remote learning for 1.6 billion students. The digital divide has worsened, and mental health impacts have been felt. Teacher training, health measures, and learning loss recovery efforts are being prioritized. Post-pandemic, hybrid learning models are being adopted, and digital transformation is being accelerated. Educational institutions are developing contingency plans for future crises and collaborating globally. The pandemic has prompted discussions about resilience and preparedness, and increased global collaboration.

Challenges and Opportunities

The National Education Policy (NEP) in India aims to promote multilingualism, preserve linguistic diversity, and improve education quality. However, its implementation faces challenges such as linguistic diversity, resource constraints, standardization, teacher proficiency, transitions to global languages, economic considerations, socio-cultural perceptions, political factors, resistance to change, lack of public awareness, monitoring and evaluation, cultural sensitivity, and sustainability issues. Addressing these barriers requires a concerted effort from policymakers, educators, communities, and stakeholders. Innovative approaches to multilingual education include recognizing and valuing linguistic diversity, early exposure and immersion, technology and digital resources, teacher training and professional development, cross-curricular integration, community engagement and partnerships, policy and advocacy, and the recognition of linguistic rights. Recognizing and valuing linguistic diversity is crucial for successful multilingual education, and early exposure to multiple languages is essential. Early exposure to multiple languages is essential for successful multilingual education, and innovative approaches focus on dual-language immersion, language playgroups, storytelling, and folklore. Technology and digital resources can make learning languages more

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engaging, accessible, and interactive, while teacher training and professional development are essential. Online language learning platforms, language learning games, virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), and machine translation tools can be used to create immersive language learning experiences. Cross-curricular integration goes beyond language classes and integrates language learning across the curriculum. Policy plays a critical role in shaping multilingual education, with advocacy efforts driving policy changes that promote linguistic diversity and inclusivity. Advocacy campaigns can raise awareness about the benefits of multilingual education, while policy reform can prioritize multilingualism, allocate resources, and ensure equitable language education.

Education disparities are a global issue influenced by socioeconomic, cultural, geographic, and political factors. These inequities lead to unequal access to education, varying educational quality, and varying outcomes. Examples include limited access in sub-Saharan Africa, Afghanistan, Latin America, and India, where poverty, lack of infrastructure, and cultural norms contribute to low enrollment rates. In India, Arunachal Pradesh is the wealthiest state with 90 languages, according to a baseline survey by the People's Linguistic Survey of India (Singh, 2013). The government has initiated measures to improve education quality and inclusivity, such as "the establishment of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)" (Fathima, 2022). The National Education Policy 2023 aims to promote equity and inclusiveness in the education system, addressing issues such as gender and socio-economic disparities. The policy will prioritize the inclusion of disadvantaged groups, such as children with disabilities and those from unobserved communities. "The government is also implementing the Right to Education (RTE) Act, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan, National Curriculum Framework" (Fathima, 2022) and National Translation Mission (NTM, n. d. a) "These policies are based on the pillars of "Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability, Accountability" and will transform India into a vibrant knowledge hub." (British Council, 2020) Rural versus urban disparities exist in China and India, with urban schools generally having better facilities and resources. Educational quality varies across countries, with low-income neighborhoods lacking resources, experienced teachers, and advanced curriculums. Global best practices in multilingualism, inclusivity, and education emphasize the importance of linguistic diversity and ensuring all students have access to quality education. These practices focus on embracing linguistic diversity, fostering inclusive learning environments, engaging communities, and providing quality teacher training and resources. Inclusive education practices prioritize the needs of all students, including those with disabilities or learning differences.

Tailoring educational support to each student's unique needs is crucial for successful education systems. Quality teacher training and professional development are essential for effective multilingual and inclusive education. Curriculum design and materials should be culturally relevant and language-appropriate, aligning with curriculum standards and providing opportunities for language development. Inclusive assessment and evaluation should be fair, inclusive, and designed to measure learning rather than linguistic or cultural bias. Comprehensive policy frameworks and

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adequate funding are essential for successful implementation of multilingual and inclusive education practices. Clear language policies outline the roles of different languages in education and allocate resources equitably to schools serving diverse student populations. Data collection and monitoring are essential for monitoring the effectiveness of multilingual and inclusive education practices, and maintaining transparency in data collection and reporting ensures accountability and informed decision-making at all levels of the education system.

Conclusion

India has made significant progress in promoting inclusivity and equity in its education system, but challenges persist such as access barriers, gender disparities, socio-economic disparities, linguistic and cultural diversity, the digital divide, quality of education, teacher training, and community engagement. Addressing these challenges requires sustained efforts, investment, and policy reforms to ensure equal opportunities for success for all children. The implementation of language policies outlined in the National Education Policy of India faces numerous complex and interconnected barriers, including linguistic diversity, resource constraints, standardization challenges, teacher proficiency, transitions to global languages, economic considerations, socio-cultural perceptions, political factors, resistance to change, lack of public awareness, monitoring and evaluation difficulties, cultural sensitivity concerns, and sustainability issues.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed vulnerabilities and exacerbated inequalities in education, accelerating the adoption of digital technology. Educational systems are evolving to create more resilient, flexible, and inclusive models of learning for the post-pandemic era. Digital and remote learning can be powerful tools in promoting equity in education by expanding access, personalizing learning experiences, and accommodating diverse needs. However, it is imperative to address the digital divide, ensure digital literacy, and maintain quality standards to harness the full potential of digital and remote learning for equitable education.

In nutshell, addressing disparities in education requires concerted efforts from governments, civil society, and international organizations. Policies and initiatives that prioritize marginalized sections, allocate resources equitably, and combat discrimination are essential for advancing inclusive and equitable education worldwide. Multilingualism in education offers cognitive, socio-cultural, and educational benefits, enhancing cognitive functioning, improving academic performance, and equipping students with advanced communication skills.

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