

Impact of Multilingualism in New Education Policy: A Review of Research

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Abstract

Multilingualism in higher education can have a profound impact on accessibility, inclusivity, global collaboration, and knowledge dissemination. While it presents challenges, the potential benefits of cultural enrichment, improved communication, and enhanced global partnerships make it an essential consideration for universities operating in the present scenario. Multilingualism enables universities to collaborate with institutions from different parts of the world more effectively. Researchers and academics can work together across linguistic barriers, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and promoting a cognitive approach to cross-cultural understanding. The varied cultural and linguistic contexts existing in contemporary societies around the globe pose complex challenges for policymakers in many areas. The centrality of language to education means that policies concerning the choice of which language(s) to use as the medium of instruction are essential, even if the need is not always overtly acknowledged. In addition, the need for teaching additional languages as subjects is widely recognized as having a critical role to play in providing the bi- and multilingual skills that have become increasingly necessary in the modern world. This paper provides a review of research on the incorporation of multilingualism in the New Education Policy and its implications for educational practices in diverse linguistic contexts. The New Education Policy (NEP) in India, places a significant emphasis on multilingualism which has several potential impacts and implications, both positive and challenging, for the education landscape in India. The specific provisions and strategies related to multilingualism in education can vary significantly from one country or region to another, depending on linguistic diversity, cultural context, and educational goals

Introduction

Multilingualism, the ability to speak and understand multiple languages, holds significant importance in various aspects of individual and societal life. It can be individual or societal, depending on whether a person or a community uses multiple languages. Multilingualism can also be classified into different types, such as additive or subtractive, balanced or dominant, sequential or simultaneous, depending on how languages are acquired, used, and valued. Language is a powerful tool for communication, learning, and cultural expression. It is also a key aspect of human development and identity. However, in a diverse and multilingual country like India, language can also pose significant

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challenges for education. One of the primary goals of multilingualism in the new education policy is to preserve and promote India's rich linguistic diversity. By encouraging the use of multiple languages in education, the policy recognizes and values the country's numerous languages and dialects. It enriches individuals' lives, promotes cross-cultural understanding, and has practical benefits in education, career, and personal development. Multilingual education, according to UNICEF, UNESCO, and the European Commission, may play a vital role in engaging a diverse range of learners. Multilingual classrooms are a growing phenomenon around the world as a result of the rapid increase in global mobility and migration. Within these classrooms, students may have different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, may speak one language at home and another language at school, or be learning the language of instruction as an additional language. Classrooms that promote multilingualism help create positive identities connected with their home cultures in addition to boosting academic performance. In the present scenario, the ability to communicate in multiple languages is a valuable asset with numerous advantages.

Important aspects of multilingualism in education policy:

- One of the primary goals of multilingualism in the NEP is to preserve and promote India's rich linguistic diversity. By encouraging the use of multiple languages in education, the policy recognizes and values the country's numerous languages and dialects. However, achieving this goal can be challenging due to the vast linguistic diversity in India. Ensuring equitable access to education in different languages and maintaining a balance between languages can be complex. Thus promoting inclusive education, advocate for mother tongue-based multilingual education. This approach involves using a child's mother tongue as the language of instruction in the early years of schooling. It acknowledges that children typically learn best when instruction is in a language they understand well.
- Multilingualism is associated with cognitive benefits, such as improved problem-solving skills, enhanced creativity, and better overall cognitive development. Children who learn in multiple languages may have an intellectual advantage. Educators and policymakers must ensure that language switching does not become a barrier to learning. Effective pedagogical strategies are needed to harness the cognitive benefits of multilingualism.
- Multilingualism can facilitate better communication and understanding among people from different linguistic backgrounds, promoting national unity and social cohesion. Multilingual individuals can communicate with a more diverse range of people, breaking down language barriers. This skill is particularly valuable in a globalized world where cross-cultural communication is essential for personal and professional relationships.
- Education policies may emphasize the importance of developing multilingual competence among students. This means that students are encouraged to become proficient in not only their mother tongue but also the official or national language(s) and potentially other languages, depending on regional and cultural diversity. Learning multiple languages allows individuals to access different cultures, traditions, and perspectives. This fosters a deeper

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understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity, promoting tolerance and global awareness. When people are fluent in their native languages and pass them down to future generations, it helps protect linguistic diversity and heritage.

- Multilingualism in education can be an essential component of inclusive education policies. Multilingualism can improve access to a broader range of knowledge, as students can access educational resources and information in multiple languages. Ensuring that quality educational materials are available in various languages and that students have equal access to these resources is essential.
- Proficiency in multiple languages can enhance employability in a globalized world, as it facilitates communication with international partners and markets. The curriculum and teaching methods need to be aligned with the development of language skills that are relevant in a global context. In many professions and industries, being multilingual is a valuable asset. It can open doors to job opportunities in international business, diplomacy, translation, interpretation, tourism, and more. Bilingual or multilingual employees are often in high demand. Employers often value language skills, especially when dealing with diverse customer bases or international clients.
- Education policies may recognize the role of multilingualism in preserving and promoting cultural heritage. Learning and preserving indigenous languages through education can contribute to the preservation of cultural identities and traditions.
- In a globalized world, education policies may also emphasize the importance of multilingualism in preparing students to be globally competent. Proficiency in multiple languages can facilitate international communication, cross-cultural understanding, and participation in the global workforce.
- Education policies should address the challenges associated with multilingualism, such as the need for qualified multilingual teachers, appropriate learning materials in multiple languages, and equitable access to educational resources.
- Designing assessments and evaluation methods that accommodate multilingualism and accurately measure students' learning can be complex.
- Multilingual individuals may have better academic performance in certain subjects, as they tend to develop stronger analytical and linguistic skills. They can also access a wider range of educational resources and research in multiple languages.

Thus learning multiple languages allows individuals to access different cultures, traditions and perspectives. This fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity, promoting tolerance and global awareness. Implementing multilingualism in education requires well-prepared teachers who can teach in multiple languages. Training and professional development for teachers are crucial but can be resource-intensive. Some of the challenges to be overcome are:

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- One of the primary challenges in implementing multilingual education is the lack of resources, including qualified teachers proficient in local languages, appropriate teaching materials, and funding for program development and maintenance.
- Developing standardized curricula and educational materials in multiple languages can be complex and time-consuming. Ensuring that the content is culturally relevant and linguistically accurate requires significant effort.
- Teachers need training and support to effectively teach in multilingual classrooms. This includes not only language proficiency but also pedagogical skills to teach students from diverse linguistic backgrounds.
- In some cases, there may be a hierarchy of languages, with some languages considered more prestigious than others. This can affect the perception of the value of local languages in education and may result in resistance to their inclusion.
- In countries where there is a significant gap between local languages and the official or national language, transitioning from local language instruction to instruction in the official language can be challenging and may lead to a drop in student performance.
- Developing appropriate assessment methods and standardized tests in multiple languages can be a challenge. Ensuring that assessments are fair and accurate for students from various linguistic backgrounds is essential.
- Engaging parents and communities in multilingual education programs is crucial for their success. However, overcoming language barriers and building trust can be challenging.
- Multilingual education often requires strong political will and support at the policy level. Changes in government or shifting priorities can impact the continuity of multilingual education programs.
- Ensuring that all students, regardless of their linguistic background, have equal access to quality education can be challenging. Some students may face discrimination or marginalization due to their language.
- Sustainability is a long-term challenge. Maintaining and expanding multilingual education programs over time requires ongoing commitment, funding, and support.

Regularly assessing the effectiveness of multilingual education programs and making necessary adjustments based on data can be challenging but is essential for improvement. This traditional language policy has quite explicit political and economic objectives, for example in the domains of trade, diplomacy and employment. More recently language policy has also been associated with ideas of modernisation and is expressed in terms of democratic values such as human equality, the rule of law, human rights, equality of access to education. Whatever the underpinning rationale, however, such goals, at least as far as education is concerned, have been based on a concept of individuals'

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acquisition over time of one or perhaps two other languages, usually classified as 'foreign'. It would not be an exaggeration to say that this has in many ways been the driving force and the core of explicit and implicit language policy.

Such change already indicates that in actual practice a broader concept of language policy is being created than the current models contained in official policy documentation. Policies in various countries (such as France and the UK) have been linked, for example, to wider issues of cohesion and cognitive development. Language policy can thus be viewed not only as a means of improving competence in one or two languages but as an important way of solving nonlinguistic aims or problems associated with other political, social, economic and cultural challenges. These are mostly related to the challenges of social cohesion, the integration of migrants, citizenship issues and governance.

The NEP 2020 ardently promotes multilingualism and the influence of local languages. According to NEP 2020, young learners have a much better chance to comprehend ideas in their native languages as such the medium of teaching till Grade 5, and if possible, Grade 8 should be in local languages. The notion that a learner can attain fundamental skills better in their mother tongue is generally accepted across the world. At the same time, one cannot deny the fact that English is regarded as the Lingua Franca in India and most part of the world. Proficiency in English is considered an essential skill required for success in contemporary times all over the world. Multilingual Education can play an important part in appealing to diverse learners. Experts believe that Multilingualism can be beneficial for the learners' overall growth in the long run but only if it is implemented properly. Integrating a multilingual approach into education can have an everlasting impact on young learners hence a proper study is very much essential.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the impact of multilingualism in the New Education Policy can be substantial, with the potential to preserve linguistic diversity, enhance cognitive development, promote national unity, and improve access to knowledge. However, it also presents challenges related to teacher preparedness, curriculum development, assessment methods, and language-based tensions. The successful implementation of multilingualism in the education system requires careful planning, investment, and ongoing evaluation to maximize its benefits while addressing these challenges. This linguistic flexibility can be advantageous for personal growth and adaptability in a changing world.

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