

# Role of Languages in National Education System of India

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## Abstract

Languages are important in the life of any nation. There are several language families in India including Indo-European and the Dravidian languages. There is no National language in India. However, the official language is Hindi. The language is always believed to play a central role in learning. National Education System of India is very effective and found better than many developed countries. Learning different or another language also provides many other benefits including greater academic achievement, greater cognitive development, and more positive attitudes towards other languages and cultures. As India has several mother tongues and classrooms might have children with more than one spoken language, it might not be possible for all languages to become the medium of instruction. Still the efforts to preserve and promote all Indian languages including classical, tribal and endangered languages will be taken on with new vigor.

## Key words

Languages, NEP-2020, National Education Policy, Arts, Culture, Mother Tongue, Hindi, Marathi, Indian education system

## Introduction

Language allows us to connect with the rest of the world, identify our identity, express our history and culture, study, defend our human rights, and participate in all parts of society. Languages are important in the life of any nation. The members of a social group need language to communicate with each other, for all social purposes, for public administration, for commerce and industry, for education and so on. The role of languages including rural or tribal languages have a important role mentioned in NEP-2020.

## Languages in India

There are several language families in India. The Indo-European languages spoken by 78.05% of Indians and the Dravidian languages spoken by 19.64% of Indians. Languages spoken by the remaining 2.31% of the population belong to the Austroasiatic, Sino-Tibetan, Tai-Kadai and a few other minor language families.

India has the world's fourth highest number of languages. The number is near about 447. As per the Constitution of India the official language of the Union is Hindi in Devanagari script. Later, a constitutional amendment, The official languages act 1963 allowed for the continuation of English alongside Hindi in the Indian government indefinitely until legislation decides to change it. The Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution lists 22 languages, which have been referred to as scheduled languages and given recognition, status and official encouragement. In addition, the Government of India has awarded the distinction of classical language to Kannada, Malayalam, Odia, Sanskrit, Tamil and Telugu. Classical language status is given to languages which have a rich heritage and independent nature.

According to 2011 Census India, Hindi is the first language as per largest number of Speakers. See the chart showing first four languages.

Language	First language speakers	Total speakers (millions)
Hindi	528,347,193	692
English	259,678	129
Bengali	97,237,669	107
Marathi	83,026,680	99

## National language in India

There is no National language in India. However, article 343(1) of the Indian constitution specifically mentions that, the official language of the Union shall be Hindi in Devanagari script.

## Role of language in education

The language enables students to be active in different learning communities both inside and outside the classroom. As students speak, write, and represent, they also listen to, read, and view the ideas and experiences of others. The language is always believed to play a central role in learning. Regardless of the subject, students acquire new concepts by listening, speaking, reading and writing what they have learned. Speaking and writing reflect the thought process taking place.

## NEP and Languages

National Education System of India is very effective and found better than many developed countries in the world. The National Education Policy (NEP) approved by the Union Cabinet on July 29, 2020. The National Education Policy, 2020 has advocated, that "wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language" for both public and private schools. Under chapter 'Promotion of Indian Languages, Arts and Culture' of NEP, states that higher education institutions will use mother tongue/local language as medium of instruction and/or offer bilingually.

English had a strong influence on Indians as it remained the main language of India even after independence. Today, English has become an integral part of our education system from literature to science and technology. NEP states that there will be greater flexibility in the three-language formula. But no language will be imposed on any State. To learn three languages will be the choice of States, regions, and students themselves, as long as at least two of the three languages are native to India.

## Importance of learning different languages

Learning different languages or another language also provides many other benefits including greater academic achievement, greater cognitive development, and more positive attitudes towards other languages and cultures. In short, language skills are essential for students to succeed in today's global economy.

## Few facts

### Use of mother tongue in education is an old idea

The idea of using the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in primary school is not new to the Indian education system. Constitution states that every state and local authority should endeavor to provide "adequate facilities for instruction in the mother-tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups".

The Kothari Commission report on education and national development (1964-66) suggested that in tribal areas, for the first two years of school, the medium of instruction and books should be in the local tribal language. The regional language should be taught separately and should become the medium of instruction by the third year. The Rights to Education Act of 2009 also stated that the language of instruction in schools should be the native language of the child as much as possible.

### **Though mother tongue is effective but hard to implement**

Early schooling in a child's mother tongue, as recommended in the National Education Policy, can improve learning, increase student participation and reduce the number of dropouts. However, this would need new books, fresh teacher training and more funding. Also, given the multiplicity of languages and dialects in India, it is difficult to home in on the one that can be used as the medium of instruction in an area. Using the language the child is most comfortable with in the early school years improves attendance and learning outcomes, and the ability to learn new languages. Studies from around the world also show that it increases classroom participation, reduces the number of dropouts and grade repetition.

Parents tend to send their kids to English-medium schools, regardless of the level of education they provide, because they believe that having a good grasp of the English language will help them succeed in life. The NEP does not detail a plan to change the medium of instruction. For multilingual education (MLE) to be successful, it has to be accompanied by pedagogical changes and trained teachers who can deal with several languages in the classroom and teach in the child's mother tongue.

### **Implementation policy not clear**

Implementation policy is not clearly stated. Lack of an action plan in the NEP it is slightly difficult to implement the change.

For instance, a qualitative study on the implementation of MLE in Sundargarh, Odisha, found that schools would not prioritise hiring MLE teachers and children were still reluctant to accept that they spoke a different language at home, perhaps because of the perception that Odia was the superior language.

As per the NEP, the aim of using regional languages is not just to improve a child's learning outcomes, but also for "instilling knowledge of India". This "is considered critical for purposes of national pride, self-confidence, self-knowledge, cooperation, and integration".

Further, there is no clear path to implement this change and it is up to local governments and individual institutions whether they want to implement these changes as it is not a mandatory policy.

The policy does suggest technological interventions to "serve as aids to teachers", and developing or translating "enjoyable" books into local languages and making these available in school and digital libraries. It also suggests incentives for teachers who know local languages especially in areas with high dropout rates and an overhaul of the curriculum to make it more engaging and useful.

### **Challenge of many mother-tongues**

India has a variety of mother tongues, therefore there may be students in a school speaking more than one language. It might not be possible for all languages to become the medium of instruction and it will be difficult for large parts of the country to implement this. The child's language would not be the medium of instruction but the government would formally mandate that the mother tongue be used in the classroom by teachers and students. This would allow children to talk, debate and express themselves in their language while also learning the regional language or English.

### **Lack of sufficient funds**

Nowhere is mentioned in NEP that how this change in the medium of instruction is to be funded. The initial investment in bilingual programmes can be high because of the additional cost of developing new learning material especially for languages that have not been standardized or do not have a script. It would also require teachers trained to teach in a multilingual classroom and new teachers fluent in these languages.

### **Importance of teaching-learning process in mother tongue**

The priority that Indian languages should have in the school education as well as higher education system has never been given. This policy focused on the use of the mother tongue or regional language as a medium of instruction in education. The discussion on the use of the mother tongue in education goes back to the time of Lord Macaulay. This debate continued in post-independent India with the release of the Radhakrishnan Committee report of 1948-49, known as the Report of the University

Education Commission. It recommended that English be replaced by an Indian language as the medium of instruction for higher education as early as practicable. This was followed by the Official Language Commission, Emotional Integration Committee, NEP (1968), NEP (1986/1992) and NEP 2020.

NEP-2020 recommends that higher education institutions should use the mother tongue/local language as a medium of instruction, and/or offer bilingual programmes. This will help provide quality teaching to more students and thus increase Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education. It will also promote the strength, usage, and vibrancy of all Indian languages. Private institutions too will be motivated to use Indian languages as a medium of instruction and/or offer bilingual programmes. This will ensure that there is no difference between government and private institutions.

The teachers' training programme will also be bilingual. This will facilitate the training of cadres of teachers across subjects. Science and math teachers will also adopt the bilingual approach to teaching. To translate recommendations into action, high-quality learning and print material in Indian languages, including textbooks, workbooks, videos, plays, poems, novels and magazines, will be developed. To this end, an Indian Institute of Translation and Interpretation (IITI) will be established. This will employ numerous scholars in Indian languages, subject experts as well as experts in translation and interpretation. Technology will be used to aid in these translation and interpretation efforts.

Teaching in the mother tongue/ regional language will help in building an equitable education system. The Ministry of Education will strive to create a fair and inclusive education system. In order for the system to function fairly, we should make sure that students' personal and social backgrounds do not impede them from achieving their highest academic standards. To ensure inclusion through the use of the mother tongue or regional language, we should set up a basic minimum standard of education which eliminates all disparity.

While strengthening the Indian languages as the medium of instruction and improving the principle of equal education to raise the educational standard, it is also essential for students to master the English language as they are global citizens in 21st century, but this cannot be done at the expense of the Indian languages. Indian languages need to be complemented by English.

## **Need to promote Indian Languages, Arts, and Culture**

India is a treasure trove of culture developed over thousands of years, manifested in art, literature, customs, traditions, linguistic expressions, artefacts, heritage and many other forms. The promotion of Indian arts and culture is important not only for the nation but also for the individual. Cultural awareness and expression are the most important skills that are considered important to develop in children so that they develop an identity, a sense of belonging and appreciate other cultures and identities. Children can build a positive cultural identity and self-esteem by developing a strong sense and knowledge of their cultural history, arts, languages and traditions. Art is an important means of transmitting culture. In addition to strengthening cultural identity, enhancing consciousness and uplifting societies, the arts are well known to enhance the cognitive and creative abilities of individuals and enhance individual happiness. Language is inextricably linked to art and culture. The tone, perception of experience, and familiarity inherent in conversations among speakers of a common language are a reflection and record of a culture. Culture is, thus, encased in our languages. Art, in the form of literature, plays, music, film, etc. cannot be fully appreciated without language.

There has been a severe scarcity of skilled language teachers in India, despite various measures being taken. Language-teaching too must be improved to be more experiential and to focus on the ability to converse and interact in the language and not just on the literature, vocabulary, and grammar of the language. Languages must be used more extensively for conversation and for teaching-learning.

The use of the mother tongue/local language as a medium of instruction, and/or offer programmes bilingually, in order to increase access and GER and also to promote the strength, usage, and vibrancy of all Indian languages. Efforts to preserve and promote all Indian languages including classical, tribal and endangered languages will be taken on with new vigor. Technology and crowdsourcing, where people are widely involved, play a critical role in these efforts.

Scholarships for people of all ages to study Indian Languages, Arts, and Culture with local masters and/or within the higher education system will be established. In fact, the promotion of Indian languages is possible only if they are used regularly and if they are used for teaching and learning. Incentives like awards for outstanding poetry and prose in Indian languages in various categories will

be created to ensure vibrant poetry, novels, non-fiction, textbooks, journalism and other works in all Indian languages. Proficiency in Indian languages will be included in the eligibility parameters for employment opportunities.

## **Conclusion**

The National Education Policy, 2020 has advocated, that "wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language" for both public and private schools. English had a strong influence on Indians as it remained the main language of India. Parents tend to send their kids to English-medium schools, regardless of the level of education they provide, because they believe that having a good grasp of the English language will help them succeed in life. India has a variety of mother tongues, therefore there may be students in a school speaking more than one language. It might not be possible for all languages to become the medium of instruction and it will be difficult for large parts of the country to implement this. The priority that Indian languages should have in the school education as well as higher education system has never been given. Now the National Education Policy has a focus on Indian languages. It will promote the strength, usage, and vibrancy of all Indian languages. Teaching in the mother tongue/ regional language will help in building an equitable education system. The promotion of Indian arts and culture is important not only for the nation but also for the individual. The use the mother tongue/local language as a medium of instruction, and/or offer programmes bilingually, in order to increase access and GER and also to promote the strength, usage, and vibrancy of all Indian languages. In fact, the promotion of Indian languages is possible only if they are used regularly and if they are used for teaching and learning.

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