

## Multilingualism: Implications and Challenges

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### Abstract

*Language enables an individual to survive and grow in the society. It is through language that humans are able to co-exist and prosper. Language plays the role of a tool and catalyst in development. It is a set of organised and collected entities that perform specific functions. The contemporary world has become a global village due to scientific and technological advancement. In order to meet the challenges of the modern world, to survive effectively and productively knowledge of more than one language has become need of the hour. Multilingualism is serving as a tool to ease the existence in the contemporary situation. The present paper attempts to highlight the reasons for popularity of multilingualism, barriers in promoting multilingualism in schools, implications of the National Policy on Education 2020 on multilingualism and ways to promote it for national integration. Multilingualism must be taken as an aid and not as a barrier as knowledge of various languages promotes and facilitates cognitive and intellectual development. The paper has plausible implications for students, parents, teachers, educators and policy makers.*

**Keywords:** Role of language, Multilingualism, National Policy on Education 2020


### Article Publication


 Published Online: 17-Aug-2021

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 [10.31305/rrijm.2021.v06.i08.019](https://doi.org/10.31305/rrijm.2021.v06.i08.019)

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### Introduction

In order to survive in the society, humans need an organised and accepted medium to communicate in a particular social setting. This organised medium of communication is generally termed as language. Language is a set of symbols or collection of entities arranged and organised to perform certain specific functions like giving information, establishing and maintaining rapport, expressing feelings and emotions etc.

The term multilingualism is applicable to people as well as to places. When we talk of multilingualism in context of a person, we mean to address someone who is capable of using a number of languages and has got the competence to use multiple languages. The word is also used in context of places where many languages are used. It can be stated that multilingualism can be taken as the characteristics of a place, state, nation and person.

Peter Auer and Li were of the view that monolingualism is actually the exception as multilingualism is the actual norm as most of the language users across the world use or say speak more than one language, i.e. they are either bilingual or in more quantitative terms most of them are multilingual.

Michael Erard opined that multilingualism is celebrated not only in Europe but throughout the world. According to him monolinguals constitute only a very small part of the world's population. The statement made by Oxford linguist Suzanne Romaine stated that multilingualism and bilingualism are inevitable and normal necessity of everyday life in the current global scenario.

### **Multilingualism and Classroom Learning:**

After the recommendations of **UNESCO (2003, 2015)** the Government of India initiated mother tongue based multilingualism projects to protect and preserve the indigenous languages, to bring and promote mother tongue of tribal and minorities and to enhance remote learning by using bringing mother tongue as medium of learning. The two projects started in Andhra Pradesh and Odisha gave fantastic results in which children first learnt in their mother tongue instead of directly moving to state language. This served as a sort of facilitation for the students and stimulated their transition to other languages. It also helped them to excel in basic numeracy and literacy.

Miller (2005) has also studied the impact of medium of instruction on learning outcomes and stated that it is very important for the minority community and tribes to find a place in formal education through introduction of mother tongue. The study further advocated the need of equipping the schools with all the resources needed for multilingual education. This includes availability of relevant content and text books, training of teachers.

Scholey (2015) stated that the problem in India is high dropout rate of students from schools because of extreme socio-cultural and psychological insecurity in the school. Students don't get education in their mother tongue and are forced to learn in English / state language. Due to lack of association and connect with the medium of instruction tribal students/ remote learners' dropout easily.

Kemp (2007) reported that there exists a difference in learning strategies of monolingual and multilingual students. It was found that multilingual learners learn and express themselves more readily than monolingual learners. Studies have proved that inclusion of several languages may be an asset for teaching learning process but if not executed properly it may be difficult for students as they may face various problems related to curricular and pedagogical areas. These difficulties / problems are stated below:

- One of the pedagogical issues with students may be the confusion to understand and learn grammar rules of different languages.
- The environmental issue may be lack of opportunities to use and practice different languages.
- Lack of extra practice or lack of practice at home is another environmental problem.
- Burden to learn different languages and other subjects can be considered as one of the curricular hindrances in multilingualism.
- Lack of skills and proficiency to use suitable pedagogical practice by teachers.
- Lack of planning as per the needs and failure to execute the strategies in actual classroom teaching.

### **Multilingualism and NEP 2020:**

- The National Policy on Education 2020 emphasised the importance of language for education of the child and for holistic development of an individual's personality. The policy stated that young children are capable of understanding and grasping so many concepts more readily through their mother tongue/ home language. According to the document home language is the language which is spoken by the immediate surrounding population / community of the child. But at times it is found that the home language of the child may be different from mother tongue/ local language particularly in multi-lingual families. Just to make the learning process more conducive and effective it is being decided by the concerned stakeholders that the medium of instruction till Grad 8 and preferably till Grade 5 will be the local language/ mother tongue/ regional language. Guidelines have been issued to both public as well as private schools to implement the same. All this is done just to minimise or say bridge the gap that exist just because of difference in medium of instruction and mother tongue of the child. The policy talks of availability of high quality textbooks in mother tongue/ local language , teachers will be trained and motivated to use multilingual approach in classroom transaction, availability of bilingual books and focus on use of mother tongue/ local language for discussion.
- Various research studies have proved that between the age of 2 and 8 the ability to pick up and learn any language is extremely high in children. Multilingualism with focus on mother tongue at an early age has great cognitive benefits as children would be exposed to various languages. The National Policy on Education 2020 states that children need to be exposed to different languages and languages should be

taught to them in very enjoyable and interactive way in the form of interactive conversation subsequently followed by reading, writing and other skill development. The National Policy on Education 2020 emphasised the need to develop linguistic skills of learners and stated that we should make use of the provisions given in the eighth schedule of Indian constitution in which states may go for bilateral agreements to hire teachers from each other to implement the formula of three languages in their respective states. The states are supposed to promote and encourage the study of Indian language. The policy also emphasises the use and application of technology for popularising and promoting the learning of various languages.

- Apart from use to technology in language learning the policy also states that all efforts would be made to prepare and provide good and high-quality bilingual books and teaching learning material for subjects like mathematics and Science. The bilingual study material would enable learners to think and express the concepts in mother tongue as well as in English. The policy stressed that based on constitutional provisions the three-language formula will continue to be implemented as it promotes national integration, aspirations of people, state and nation. However, states will have the autonomy and freedom to choose three languages, flexibility will be there and no language will be imposed on any state. Using one's mother tongue /local language as medium of instruction is an advantage and not a detriment. The policy of three language formula will prove to have huge educational, technological, social and national benefits. It will make the future generation aware of their cultural heritage and national integration.
- The National Policy on Education 2020 states that the importance, beauty and relevance of Indian classical languages cannot be neglected and overlooked. Apart from Sanskrit, the policy makes provisions to promote Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Odia, Malayalam. There is also a mention of enriching the literature in Prakrit, Pali and Persian to enable the future generation with India's beautiful and extensive classical literature. The policy has mention of enhancing students' global perspective and promotes their mobility around the world by offering them foreign languages like French, Korean, Japanese, and Spanish etc. at Secondary level.
- The policy advocates following ways to promote and encourage learning of languages by following ways:
  1. Promoting use of innovative and interactive approaches like games, apps etc.
  2. Making learning of languages interesting online literature would be updated and made vibrant.
  3. By integrating cultural aspects in language learning through drama, films, theatre, storytelling, music etc.
  4. By shifting the focus from teacher centric to learner centric innovative, experiential learning approaches and pedagogy.
  5. By promoting Local Sign Languages wherever possible and relevant. Standardising Indian Sign Language (ISL) and developing National and State curriculum for learners with learning impairment are also mentioned in the policy.
  6. Providing opportunities to teachers to update and improve their professional proficiencies would also make leaning of languages more effective and fruitful.

### **Conclusion:**

Education is the most fundamental element in bringing social and cultural revolution in the society. In this process of evolution of society through education, language is the foremost important factor. It is language through which various social issues like social disparity, growth and distribution of opportunities, social stratification, vertical growth of education as well as elite formation etc. Could be stated, explained and could be dealt intelligently. As we are aware that linguistic landscape of India is extremely complex and it becomes imperative to pay attention to linguistic diversity through education. Language issues and importance to mother tongue is of utmost importance and occupies functional importance in the entire education system. It is needed to adopt and apply a pragmatic approach to apply multiculturalism in the education and take into consideration the ways and mechanism of standardization of linguistic usage in a multilingual society like India. Multilingual education is need of the hour as stated in NEP 2020 but apart for readiness to apply it in schools and formal

education, an adequate and ration degree of planning, efficiency of teachers to impart multilingual education, proficiency to apply pedagogical practices, creation of interest of learners and sustaining that interest. It is important to consider the dialectic relationship between education, language and society along with the understanding and consideration of socio-cultural processes. The contemporary world demands multilingual people to meet the global needs and multilingualism is an effective tool to ease existence in this fast-changing world.

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