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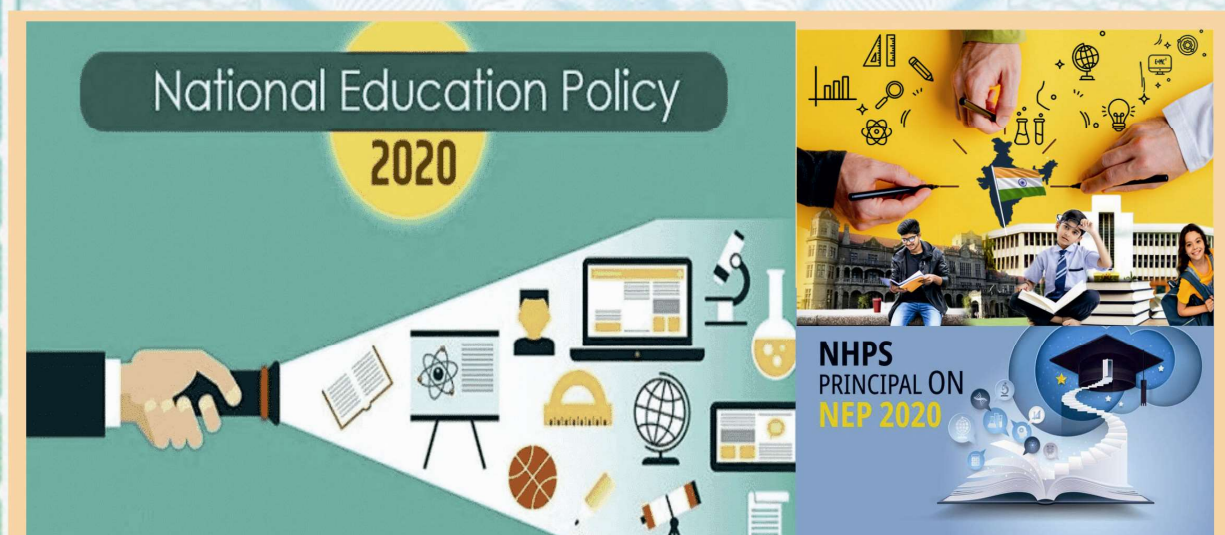
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NEP IN HIGHER EDUCATION : ISSUES & CHALLENGES

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“Analysing Relevance of English Language in NEP-2020”

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Abstract

The present sincere endeavour analyses the relevance of English Language in context to NEP-2020. The NEP talks of a three-language formula and I would love to see how Hindi-belt states deal with this. A class divided system of education has played a central role in moulding the processes and patterns of uneven development and dis/enfranchisement in postcolonial India. In much of urban India, there prevail two systems of education—English-medium and vernacular-medium. On an individual level, English-medium education has been a ticket to vertical mobility in Indian society. At the societal level, English-medium education has played a critical role in producing what Kothari (1993) calls a modernized techno managerial elite that continues to have disproportionate influence in shaping the discursive terrain of development, and thereby policies and programmes that affect the social fabric of the country. Less visibly, English-medium education widens social fractures in Indian society by creating and reinforcing a social, cultural, economic, and discursive divide between the English-educated and the majority. The dominance of the English language has flourished the Indian beliefs and practices, much under its own pedagogy that is further spreading ICT enabled knowledge in the masses. In present paper, I have focused my camera on how English Language has nurtured and fostered our traditions and culture and still will enhance and enrich our perspective in global view.

Keywords: NEP, language, English, education, curriculum, self-respect.

Introduction

The National Education Policy (NEP) proclaims that “curriculum and pedagogy will be transformed by 2022 in order to minimise rote learning and instead encourage holistic development and 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, scientific temper, communication, collaboration, multilingualism, problem-solving, ethics, social responsibility, and digital literacy.” These attributes in a policy are most welcome; though, for me, there is no perfect policy for education. There is nothing on the intent front to fault the NEP. Among all the policy interventions made, one that binds all skills is communication and, hence, the language formula proffered needs scrutiny.

Historically, English has been the preserve of the elite and privileged in India. It is a well-known fact that the first people to benefit from English education in India were the privileged and elites, who could send their children to English-medium schools and accumulate cultural capital over time. One needs to note that it is not only English as a language of instruction but the way it is spoken (accent) that creates a hierarchy in the society and allows the privileged to garner immense cultural capital to be used for social mobility. While English is not the official language of India, it has become the language of the ruling elite. Fluency in English is extremely sought after and brings with it the potential for social mobility to the underprivileged sections of society. But is an English-medium education the solution?

Status of English Language

The United Nations celebrates English Language Day on 23 April, the date traditionally observed as both the birthday and date of death of William Shakespeare. Celebrating “language days” for each of its six official languages, the organisation’s stated purpose in doing so is to “celebrate multilingualism and cultural diversity.”

In the Indian context, the English language had been recognised for official purposes in the Constitution for a period of 15 years and continues to enjoy such recognition under the Official Languages Act, 1963. While the “national language” issue was contentious during the Constituent Assembly debates and continues to remain unsettled even today; the use of English remains prevalent,



not just for official purposes but also in education and public discourse. An estimated 10% of India's population can speak English language.

But in a country with 22 scheduled languages (those that are listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution) and 99 other non-scheduled languages (as per the 2011 Census), what role does English play? Why is English becoming increasingly sought after as a medium of instruction? And what impact does the English medium have on education in the country?

English as the Language of the Ruling Elite

English is often understood in India as the language of colonial British rule, but does its use in postcolonial India bear the legacy of colonialism? Tejaswini Niranjana (1990) expressed as:

"The introduction of English education in India is inextricable from the process of subjection/subjectification under colonialism. The colonial "subject"; constructed through practices or technologies of power/knowledge, participates willingly ... in his/her insertion into the dominant order." As the historian Ranajit Guha suggests, English did not owe its importance as "an emblem of power" within the education system to official sponsorship alone. English becomes a mark of status through a complex production of the colonial subject within multiple discourses and on multiple sites."

This association of the English language with power and status has continued in postcolonial India. Gyanendra Pandey (2016) observed:

"In the South Asian subcontinent ... the English language has an unusual aura and power, simply as a medium of speech and writing—since it was, and to a great extent continues to be, the language of the rulers."

Further, there is resistance to the mainstreaming of English language education by the ruling Brahmanical elite in the country in the name of protection of regional languages. Yet, the hypocrisy in such resistance is self-evident. Placing the onus of protecting the mother tongue on the marginalised groups is another tool of marginalisation in the hands of the dominant groups.

Emancipatory Potential of English

While the reliance of the ruling elite classes on English is not in question, its "official status" is tenuous. It does not find a place in the scheduled languages list. Instead, Hindi is recognised as the official language of the nation and Article 343 of the Constitution and Sanskrit is given primacy when it comes to providing the vocabulary for Hindi. The mention of English in this constitutional scheme is characterised by its temporary nature since Article 343 provides for its continuance in use for only 15 years.

Placing English outside what he termed the "chaturvarna (four-tier order) of languages" in India (with Sanskrit, Hindi, the scheduled, and the non-scheduled languages occupying various rungs of the ladder), Hany Babu M T (2017) wrote:

"While officially, English is treated as an invisible or untouchable language, it continues to dominate the public sphere and having no access to good English is often the determinants of social mobility, wherefore the underprivileged find it impossible to catch up as the state has no obligation to provide education in English for them. But it is in this placement of English outside the "official" language system of the state that Babu also situated its emancipatory potential for the marginalised."

S Anand (1999) explained the unique position of English in Indian society, as compared to a language like Sanskrit, which has been historically inaccessible to Dalits.

"Unlike Sanskrit, there are no scriptural injunctions against the learning of English; English is theoretically as accessible to dalits and women as it is to the 'dwijas'. However, the brahmanical classes have monopolised the use of English (as also other symbols of western modernity) and have justified the denial of the same to the dalits."

... Orsini (1995) rightly puts it: *"Hindi cannot be considered a 'popular national language' versus the 'elite national language' English. Rather, they represent two different elites."*

English Language as Promotor of Socio-Economic Opportunities

The cultural capital of English translates into social and economic benefits due to the predominance of "networks" in accessing career opportunities in India. The same has also been true in a global set-up since the advent of liberalisation in the 1990s. Faust and Nagar (2001) explained:



As English increasingly becomes “*the language of social advantage and exciting economic opportunities*,” those educated in state-run vernacular schools face “*a chronically unfair compulsion to participate in the mainstream market economy from a weak position*” (Kumar 1996:71).

The National Education Policy, 2020 put emphasis on the “functionality and fluency” for teaching English language in schools. The need to address common people’s aspirations to use English fluently in their daily communication while teaching English has been emphasised in earlier policy documents (NCERT 2006). However, the ground situation presents a contrast. A study conducted in government schools at the primary level in seven Indian states found that Classes 1 and 2 textbooks focus less on listening and speaking skills, and more on developing reading and writing skills (NCERT 2012).

English as a Medium of Instruction

The mass departure of the elite from government schools is often attributed to the fact that these were not able to offer English-medium education, and this, many believe, has led to the deterioration of government schools. As the elite deserted government schools in favour of expensive private English-medium schools, government schools have ended up as the only option for the poor. With the falling educational standards in government schools and a consequent rise in aspirational levels of the poor, poorly-equipped private and unrecognised English-medium schools have begun to mushroom across the country. Therefore, there has been an increase in the migration of students from government to private English-medium schools at the elementary level in the last two decades after the 1990s.

Problem Faced by Middle-class Indian Children in English Language

Despite similarities between foreign children and middle-class Indian children at the beginning, a major difference between them is that the foreign children later end up bilingual. Their home language is stable, and they are expected to maintain it alongside English and ultimately do essentially the same things in both languages. The middle-class Indian children, in contrast, become diglossic. Once they learn English, it is used for all non-trivial activity, and their first language will soon fall by the wayside. Diglossia is concerned not so much with the acquisition of a duplicate code for expression as with the transformation of a child’s basic identity. With the right textbooks, simple sentences, and natural prose to allow the children to get comfortable with the language, and scope for proper explanation in the home language, the bilingual education model could be a success.

Problems for Teaching of English

Unfortunately, the educational institutions are acutely facing the problem of scarcity of English Language teachers on one hand and, it is taught by untrained, unprofessional and biased teachers in schools and colleges on the other hand. There are various factors which are affecting teaching-learning process. To begin with, English are most affected by the environment. In teaching English, most English teachers are faced with environmental difficulties. Teachers are distracted and unable to teach English effectively when the classroom environment is discouraging. Moreover, they are not provided with the material necessary to deliver effective English language lectures to the students. Students in large classrooms can be disruptive and stressful to teachers, as teaching large numbers of students requires more effort and hard work. In addition to, the syllabus plays a vital role and it is experiencing that English Language curriculum is not framed in such a way that its environment proves crucial in learning the language. Further more, teachers are unlikely to be able to cover all the topics in a lecture in less time, which is not sufficient. Fifthly, sometimes lessons are hijacked by students and other activities are conducted, defeating the purpose of learning English. Sixthly, students often get bored in lectures and try to do other activities, which can interrupt the teachers when they are trying to teach English. Seventhly, the students are disturbing the teachers by trying to speak to each other during the lectures. Students sometimes arrive late for lectures and as a result, the teacher is disturbed by students who arrive late for lectures. Eighthly, the most noticeable difficulty English teachers face, in place of the English language, it’s very easy for the students to speak their native language or another language they are comfortable with. Ninthly, boredom and lack of interest on the part of students in learning English are also problems that teachers face. In this situation, they would talk to each other and do other non-sense activities during lectures sometimes, which would disrupt the teachers. Last but not least, the majority of the students in the English classes in English learning academies come from a



variety of backgrounds. English learning classes are primarily for students from rural areas and these areas have little opportunity to acquire language skills in English.

Possible Solution for Teaching of English

In order to successfully teach the English language, a positive and comfortable classroom environment is necessary. A computer system, a microphone, speakers, and even some digital devices are included in the teaching resources. Organizing the syllabus to teach the course step-by-step assists teachers in preparing the major points for the course. English language learning is greatly influenced by competitions. Through debates, declamation, quizzes, etc., the students are forced to learn the English language. Competitions between students of different levels make learning English interesting and motivate them to compete. Students whose native language is not English can often benefit from teachers who are able to teach them the English language. In addition, the newest gadgets and devices intended for educational use can be of great help in teaching English. Lessons in the classroom should make use of multimedia devices which are more engaging and help students in learn English language. As opposed to reading through books, students can understand and learn from visual images, videos, and sounds. Learning English requires a lot of speaking and conversation. Classes must be held in which students converse with each other. The majority of the students are engaged in games as games stimulate the students' creativity and encourage them to make fun of themselves. In addition to playing games, learning also benefits from them. With the children in the classroom you can play a lot of different educational games. Building vocabulary through games is very helpful. Using different kinds of sentences, the missing word is placed. Vocabulary is greatly enhanced. Student distractions can sometimes undermine the goal-achieving process. In such cases, motivational speeches and other motivational activities can help them get back on track. Motivational sessions must be conducted once a month by the teachers to keep students on track to learn the English language.

A syllabus should always be designed well to make sure the students are learning the English language. This document is a sort of content planner for the courses that will be taught and learned over the period of the course. It is the design of the syllabus that shows the quality of the course to be studied, whereas a poorly designed syllabus will have negative effects on the English learners. For the purpose of learning English in an organized and easy manner, the organization and the teachers need to design a curriculum that is complete and easy to comprehend.

Conclusion:

The National Education Policy (NEP)-2020 particularly aims to transform India into a vibrant knowledge society and generally **global knowledge superpower** by making both school and college education more holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary that suited to 21st century needs and aimed at **bringing out the unique capabilities of each student**. The policy has emphasized three-language formula i.e. mother tongue/local language/regional language as the medium of instruction at least till Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond. Sanskrit to be offered at all levels of school and higher education as an option for students, including in the three-language formula. English Language—whether you call it official or whatever you please, it does not matter whether you mention it in the legislation or not—but English must continue to be a most important language in India which large numbers of people learn and perhaps learn compulsorily.

I analyse, apart from a local language and a regional language, English must include as a medium of instructions. English language is among the significant languages in the world that have phonetics and that specially reads with stress and intonation. English phonetics help to train the throat, the palate, the tongue, the teeth and the lips. Unfortunately, schools and colleges are facing scarcity of trained, professional and English Language skilled teachers who can guide and inspire students more appropriately in a globalised world now.

I sincerely analyse that at least higher education in basic and applied sciences must be taught in English, since we do not have either good translated material or adequate employment opportunities. It is high time for contemplation that Western learning of Science and Technology is need of the hour and can only be taught through the medium of English. On the other hand, if promoting teaching in local languages at higher level, it encourages ghettoisation. There are several states that have no employment opportunities. If the education is imparted in a local language at higher level, the students



will never be able to leave their boundaries and mental set up. This is not to say that such students are any less intelligent, though it manifests in the way we think and perceive. Far from uniting, a long-term malice could be the distress this results to the social fabric.

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