

Transforming English Language Teaching: A Study of the National Education Policy 2020

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ABSTRACT

The recommendations of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 towards shaping the general curriculum and dynamics of classroom learning present many takeaways for ELT practitioners. It is necessary to clearly understand the principles underlying the objectives of the new policy that will also guide practices in the ESL classroom. For instance, the ESL classroom will require to be more activity and task-based as NEP 2020 aims to make education more realistic, practical, and rewarding to the learners. This paper aims to discuss the major principles enumerated in NEP 2020 and their implications for the teaching of English.

Keywords: NEP 2020, English, Language, Teaching, Learning

Introduction

The National Education Policy 2020 aims to revolutionise the Indian education system as it emphasises on learners' holistic development and creating individuals equipped with 21st-century skills. The new policy envisions making education more realistic, practical, and rewarding to the learners. In terms of language education, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 requires that all students acquire three languages as part of the "Three Language Formula." For example, if a student in Assam is learning Assamese and English, he/she is required to choose another Indian language. The policy assures that there will be no impositions on any State, and more flexibility will be provided for choosing the languages within the three-language formula. The three languages to be taught to school students will be alternatives chosen by states, regions, and the learners themselves, but at least two of them have to be native languages of India (one of which is expected to be the local/regional

language). The NEP 2020 also states 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" (p.13). This recommendation is based on various studies (e.g. Awopetu, 2016), which have indicated that the mother tongue or the language used by learners at home is the best medium for explaining concepts and ideas to young learners. However, teachers may use the bilingual approach to explain things to young children as and when required. In addition, the policy also recommends the teaching of foreign languages (e.g. Japanese, German, Spanish, etc.) at the secondary level as per the learner's interests and aspirations.

The three-language formula, reintroduced in the NEP 2020, has been a part of India's language education policy in schools for more than five decades. While the three-language formula aims to promote multilingualism and linguistic diversity, critics have raised significant concerns regarding

the implementation and impact of the policy (e.g. Mallikarjun, 2011). They have highlighted its lack of flexibility and focus on the quantity rather than the quality of language education (e.g. Mallikarjun, 2008), emphasizing the need for a more inclusive and contextually sensitive approach that values linguistic diversity and promotes language proficiency. It appears that the three-language formula proposed in the NEP 2020 addresses these needs as the policy assures no imposition and more flexibility to the states in choosing the languages within the three-language formula and also proposes more interaction and exchange between the different regional languages of India through school-based projects/activities under the '*Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat*' initiative (p. 14).

English Language Teaching under the NEP 2020

The NEP 2020 has led to many speculations and concerns regarding the continuation of English in the language education curriculum of schools. Such confusion is unjustified as there is no recommendation in the policy for discontinuing the teaching of English. The policy has only emphasised the importance of promoting multilingualism which is supposed to aid better cognitive development in young children. The NEP 2020 states: "Teaching and learning of Indian languages need to be integrated with school and higher education at every level. For languages to remain relevant and vibrant, there must be a steady stream of high-quality learning and print materials in these languages including textbooks, workbooks, videos, plays, poems, novels, magazines, etc." (p.53). It is a timely step in the right direction as many "Indian languages have not received their due attention and ... are particularly in danger of becoming extinct" (p.53). Even though the new policy is tacit regarding English language education, there need

not be any uncertainty regarding the teaching of English. As it can be inferred from the following excerpts from the NEP 2020, the English language will undoubtedly continue to be a part of the curriculum at all levels:

"...students are enabled to think and speak about the two subjects both in their home language/ mother tongue and **in English**." (p. 14)

"In addition to high quality offerings in Indian languages and **English**, foreign languages... will also be offered at the secondary level." (p. 15)

Implications for English Language Teaching

The NEP 2020 recommends certain principles to shape the general curriculum of education and the dynamics of classroom learning which will have significant implications for the teaching of English. For instance, it recommends the development of conceptual understanding, creativity, critical thinking, "communication, cooperation, teamwork and resilience" and other life skills in the learners, (p.5), which implies that English language teachers must ensure that their classroom activities are learner-centred, task-based, communicative, and cooperative so that they lead to the development of language as well as other life skills. Thus, it is necessary to understand the principles underlying the objectives of the new policy as they will also guide practices in the ESL classroom. The following section highlights the major recommendations of the NEP 2020 and their implications for the teaching of English.

A. Value-based Education

The NEP 2020 highlights that the mission of education is to nurture individuals capable of "rational thought and action, possessing compassion and empathy, courage and resilience, scientific temper and creative imagination, with

sound ethical moorings and values” (pp. 4-5). This value-based system of education will build the social capacity of the learners by equipping them with social skills, intelligence and attitudes to excel throughout their lives. The policy emphasises the need to instill pride in students by exposing them to India’s ancient, rich, and diversified culture and knowledge systems. From a young age, students will be taught the importance of ‘doing what’s right,’ so that they can make ethical decisions. The value-based framework of education will incorporate “basic ethical reasoning, traditional Indian values and all basic human and Constitutional values (such as *seva*, *ahimsa*, *swachhhata*, *satya*, *nishkam karma*, *shanti*, sacrifice, tolerance, diversity, pluralism, righteous conduct, gender sensitivity, respect for elders, respect for all people and their inherent capabilities regardless of background, respect for environment, helpfulness, courtesy, patience, forgiveness, empathy, compassion, patriotism, democratic outlook, integrity, responsibility, justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity)” (p.16). Therefore, it needs to be ensured that the resources and the activities used in the English language classroom, especially the texts selected for reading, instil the desired values in the learners. The learners must get opportunities to learn to respect themselves, their home and culture and that of the other learners through their classroom experiences.

B. Experiential Learning

The policy emphasises the importance of learning ‘how to learn’ and argues for a shift from the existing rote-learning approach to a more activity-based, experiential learning technique. The philosophy of experiential learning is built on the ideals of active and reflective learning, which is grounded or based on past learning experiences and requires the learner’s personal involvement in the learning process (Kolb, 1984, 2015).

Learning by doing, action-based learning, and learning through discovery and exploration are all examples of learning through experience. Several language teaching techniques or approaches are compatible with the experiential learning method. In the ESL classroom, task-based and project-based learning become experiential when elements of reflection and support are added. Instead of learning distinct components of the target language, the experiential approach in the ESL classroom enables learners to acquire target language abilities/skills through the experience of working together on a specific assignment or task. The experiential technique also has much potential for the English language classroom in terms of motivation for learning. Thus, the teaching of English needs to be effectively aligned with the experiential learning pedagogy.

C. Multilingualism

The National Education Policy in its attempt to promote inclusive language education, has stressed the need of instilling in young learners a sense of curiosity, appreciation and respect for the languages of India and beyond. The promotion of mother tongue education will reconnect the learners to their languages and gradually make them recognize the potential productivity of each language. The choice of a language from a list of home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language for academic transaction across curriculum in a multilingual classroom may facilitate learning for the majority. However, there may naturally exist a section of learners who do not communicate in the language for academic or non-academic exchanges in the classroom. A continuous exposure to the language in use will enhance the learners’ learning of the language, ensuring better communication. If these learners have a certain proficiency in English, they may

use English to develop the required proficiency in the unfamiliar language of the classroom transaction. English, the language of global education, will act as the language of communication among the learners. In the bilingual mode of teaching, which attains the prime focus in NEP, English may be the common choice which will negotiate with any Indian language as a target switch destination. The NEP envisages a proficient multilingual with high competence in English and in two more Indian languages to respond to the call of the twenty-first century.

D. Holistic and Competency-Driven Learning

The NEP 2020 focuses on building higher-order cognitive and social skills required for critical-thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, cooperation, etc. Therefore, ESL teachers must plan activities and use resources that promote personal, emotional and social development. Along with developing the learners' English language competency, the English language teacher also needs to create opportunities for the holistic development of other competencies in the learners. Group work and pair work are excellent strategies for building confidence and a positive attitude in the learners; simultaneously, they also form relationships and friendships and develop an enthusiastic approach to learning. In group/pair activities and tasks, students communicate and work with each other and thereby value each other's efforts and collaborate, learn from, and assist one another. Thus, an emphasis on working together not only develops their language skills but also the life skills required for the 21st century

E. Extensive Use of Technology

The NEP 2020 states that technological interventions in education will aim at "improving

teaching-learning and evaluation processes, supporting teacher preparation and professional development, and enhancing educational access..." (p. 57). The policy recommends the extensive use of technology, including games and apps, in the teaching-learning of different languages. Moreover, the use of computers, smart-boards, multimedia software, mobile phones, and apps in facilitating language learning is not a new phenomenon. CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning, MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning), and computer-based assessment have shown significant impact on language learning and assessment. They make the learning process more interactive and engaging and capture the interest of even the most reluctant learner. However, integrating technology in the classroom effectively has its challenges which teachers must tackle. Providing the necessary support in the form of proper infrastructure and adequate training of teachers will go a long way in using technology effectively in teaching-learning.

F. Textbooks with Local Content and Flavour

The NEP 2020 recommends developing textbooks with local content and flavour, which will lead to respect for diversity and understanding of the local context. Moreover, culturally familiar content in the second language classroom is essential because the learners' experiences and environment influence their perceptions. Instead of the target culture, the learners' culture should be a significant part of the learning component in the foundational stages of learning a language. Familiar and local content in English language teaching would facilitate the learning process, enhance comprehension, and better understanding. Nemetz-Robinson (1985) states that "the way students think about things, i.e.,

the mental operations they perform, is influenced by their own familiarity with the content. Therefore, culturally familiar content is an essential ingredient in introducing the learner to new concept, linguistic and otherwise, in the second language, foreign language and bilingual classroom” (p.16). Further, the NEP 2020 gives autonomy to the States to prepare textbooks incorporating local content and state flavour (such as folk tales, folk songs, local festivals, etc.), keeping the core of the NCERT textbook intact. The NEP 2020 recommends that children should get opportunities to read “stories from the Panchatantra, Jataka, Hitopadesh, and other enjoyable fables and inspiring tales from Indian culture...extracts from the Indian Constitution” (p). Therefore, these also need to be included in the ESL textbooks.

G. Assessment for Learning

One of the key focuses of the NEP 2020 is to move away from summative assessment to continuous and formative assessment practices. The policy acknowledges that testing and assessment are less about providing scores or grades and more about practically using them to “continuously revise teaching-learning processes to optimize learning” (p.17). Instead of testing rote memorization skills, assessment needs to test “higher-order skills, such as, analysis, critical thinking, and conceptual clarity” (p.17). This should be the guiding premise for assessment at different educational levels. Therefore, assessment needs to be considered as an ongoing process of collecting information on the learners’ abilities, difficulties and progress. Ongoing/continuous assessment will be carried out on a day-to-day basis to determine the learners’ progress and the challenges they face. The teacher must use different alternative forms of assessment to focus on a holistic evaluation of

the learners’ overall performance or progress, including critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Alternative forms of assessment include role plays, projects, portfolios, self-assessment, peer assessment, etc., along with teacher observation and other classroom-based assessments. Further, these alternatives will integrate assessment with classroom learning tasks and activities to bridge the learning and testing environment gap.

H. Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

The NEP 2020 considers “teachers and faculty as the heart of the learning process” and therefore puts considerable emphasis on “their recruitment, continuous professional development, positive working environments and service conditions;” (p.5). The policy highlights that teachers would be provided with regular opportunities for self-development and learning about the most recent innovations and breakthroughs in their disciplines. These will be made available in various formats, including local and global seminars and online teacher development programmes. Teachers will be able to share their knowledge through multiple platforms (particularly online platforms). The NEP 2020 mandates that each teacher will “participate in at least 50 hours of CPD opportunities every year for their own professional development, driven by their own interests” (P.22). These CPD (Continuous Professional Development) opportunities will emphasise the latest pedagogies, formative assessment, competency-based learning, experiential learning, storytelling-based approaches, etc. Gaining new professional knowledge and updating one’s skills is mandatory for all professionals, and the teacher is no exception. Therefore, the English language

teachers too must actively engage in continuous professional development (CPD) for themselves. Though different frameworks for continuous professional development of English language teachers are available, a new framework based on the specific needs of ESL teachers in the Indian context needs to be developed ensuring that the necessary system, institutions, processes, programmes and resources are also in place.

Thus, the NEP 2020 brings forth a significant transformation in the teaching and learning of English in India. Based on the above discussion on the major recommendations of the NEP 2020, the implications for the teaching of English can be summarized as follows:

- ❖ The texts, resources and activities utilized in the English language classroom must aim to inculcate the desired values in the learners.
- ❖ In the ESL classroom, the learners must be provided with opportunities to learn to respect themselves, their homes and cultures and those of their peers.
- ❖ Teachers of English will need to design activities and tasks that promote experiential learning, such as role-playing, group discussions and language games.
- ❖ ESL learners need to be encouraged to engage in interactive classroom discussions, debates, and presentations, enabling them to express their thoughts and ideas in English with confidence.
- ❖ The goal of NEP is to develop proficient multilingual individuals with advanced competence in English and at least two Indian languages to respond to the needs of the twenty-first century. Therefore, ESL teachers need to teach the language in an inclusive way

that respects India's diversity.

- ❖ English language teachers will need to design activities that promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills. They need to encourage collaboration and facilitate group work among learners to enhance their language skills and cultivate 21st-century life skills.
- ❖ The policy strongly advocates for the widespread use of technology, including games and apps, in the teaching-learning of different languages. Essential support, such as proper infrastructure and sufficient training of teachers, would be needed to effectively integrate technology in teaching and learning English.
- ❖ As the NEP 2020 grants autonomy to the States to develop their textbooks, ESL textbooks must incorporate local content and state-specific elements such as folk tales, folk songs, local festivals, and other culturally relevant material.
- ❖ Ongoing/continuous assessment needs to be carried out on a day-to-day basis to determine the learners' progress and identify their challenges. ESL teachers must use various alternative assessment methods that provide a holistic picture of learners' capabilities.
- ❖ English language teachers must actively engage in continuous professional development (CPD). While various frameworks of CPD for English language teachers exist, a new framework tailored to the specific context and needs of ESL teachers in India needs to be developed.

Conclusion

The National Education Policy 2020 strives to improve education, keeping the holistic

development of the learners at the centre. Regarding English language education, the policy is implicit; however, it certainly indicates that the English language would continue to be a significant curricular component. Therefore, the recommendations of the policy towards shaping the general curriculum will have significant implications and impact on the practices in the English language classroom. Bringing the policy into practice will enrich the English language learning experience of the learners and develop their competencies. Moreover, the fundamental principles of the NEP 2020, such as promoting conceptual understanding, creativity, critical thinking, and other life skills, will become a significant part of English language teaching. The expositions presented in this paper clearly show that implementing the policy would require an overhaul of how English is being taught in the classroom. It is anticipated that a comprehensive curriculum framework would be available soon for a better understanding of the vision of the new policy and the necessary guidelines required for its successful implementation.

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