



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor: 8.4
IJAR 2023; 9(1): 404-406
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 26-11-2022
Accepted: 29-12-2022

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English language teaching and new education policy 2020

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Abstract

New education policy has been introduced with a vision to instill among the learners a deep-rooted pride in being Indian, not only in thought, but also in spirit, intellect, and deeds, as well as to develop knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions that support responsible commitment to human rights, sustainable development and living, and global well-being, thereby reflecting a truly global citizen (NEP2020). One of the key features of the policy is to provide education in all the Indian regional languages so that students can connect to the real essence of their learning. The natural question arises- will this policy overlook the importance of English language which has now become a global language? This paper attempts to find the logic, implementation, and practical aspects of this NEP 2020 highlighting the role of ELT in education at both elementary and higher secondary levels.

Keywords: NEP 2020, ELT, EFL, three language formula and, critical period hypothesis

Introduction

The first education policy in India was implemented in the year 1986, later it was revised in 1992. After a long time of thirty-four years, a new policy for the emerging global power has been introduced in the year 2020 with a vision to bring the future of India on the front foot giving each individual the right to equal education. Attempts have been made to set milestones in the Indian Education System that will further attract foreign universities towards higher education in India.

The school education has been modified. A new pedagogy and structure is proposed restructuring the 5+3+3+4 formula which will cover the children of 3-18 years of age, replacing the earlier 10+2 formula. It emphasizes covering the children of the 3-6 years age groups who were completely overlooked in the previous 10+2 structure.

The format for Higher Education has also been modified and all the undergraduate courses will be of 3-4 years with multiple entries and exit options. After completion of one year, students will be awarded a basic certificate, after two years a diploma and after completing the whole course they will be awarded a graduation certificate. This will result in the benefit of the students if they leave after a year or two they will have a certificate or diploma in hand and their precious years will not be wasted and they will be able to continue from wherever they had left.

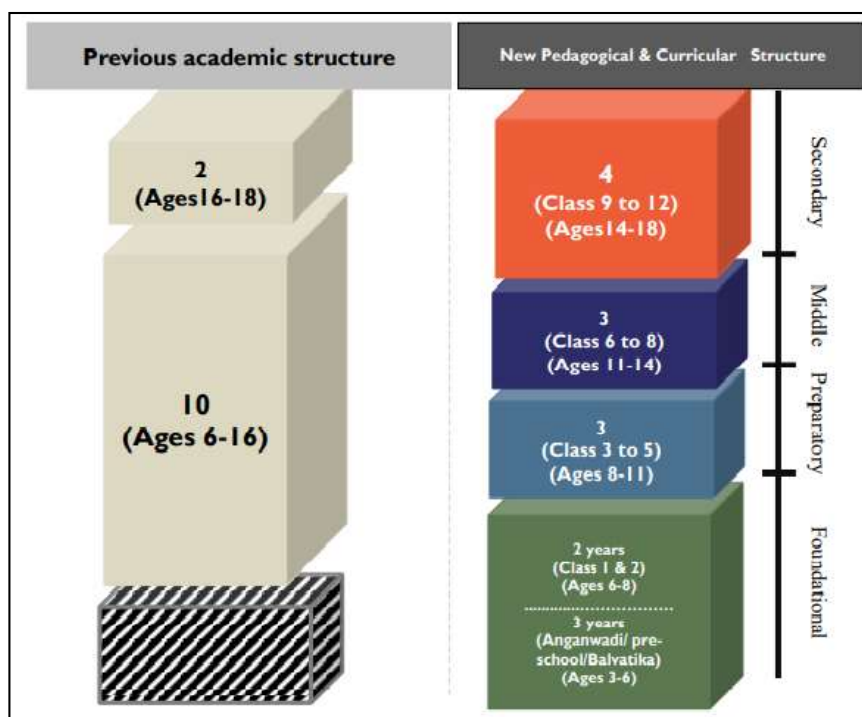
The Three Language Formula

The new Education Policy proposes the use of three languages at the elementary level at least two of which have to be Indian languages. It is proposed that students should be taught in their home language or mother tongue at least till grade 5 and preferably extends it to grade 8. The logic behind this is that students generally pick things up with ease in their mother language rather than in a second language or foreign language. Furthermore, teaching in mother language should be continued till wherever possible. However, keeping the critical period hypothesis and benefits of multilingualism into consideration it is proposed that children will be exposed to different languages from an early age, as it will also help develop cognitive abilities, but the special focus will be laid on mother language. It is to be noted here that no language will be imposed on states or learners. They will be free to choose their desired language but it is mandatory to choose at least an Indian language with one regional and one foreign language.

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For example, A student studying in Maharashtra has to choose any Indian language that can be Hindi, Sanskrit,

Gujarati, or any other language along with Marathi and English.



Source- <https://currentupdater.com/structure-of-education-policy/>

Fig 1: Structure of education policy

As Rukmani Benrji (founder Pratham Education) rightly stated in a talk on the 'News Today' talk-show that "Students should be taught in their playground language." While on the playground when a child is full of excitement, pressure, enthusiasm, and competition, in that state of mind we tend to use a language we are most comfortable with. Therefore, using that natural language will enhance the grasping power.

Undoubtedly, it will also help to foster the nation's art, literature, traditions, artifacts, heritage sites, linguistic expressions, and many more. People around the nation when understanding each other's language and expression, they get a sense of belonging and unity, resulting in brotherhood and patriotism. Especially in a nation like India where there are 22 major languages, many religions, and huge diversities of people, it is necessary to bind people together so that they realize that they belong to the same mother- Bharat Mata.

Theoretically, the reason is very valid to apply three languages at an early stage as it will also enhance cognitive abilities in learners. Being a polyglot opens and activates numerous circuits in the brain resulting in better cognitive skills and cognitive development. However, in Indian families the child is already exposed to at least three languages; the first mother-tongue, the second language of the state a family lives in, and the third the language of formal education. So, multilingualism is already in the veins of Indian societies. India is full of language diversities and we beautifully clung to this diversity. On the contrary, one should also consider the fact that the memory span of a child is limited. For example, a four years old child can have a vocabulary of 1000 words maximum. If they are given multiple languages, they will have to remember the vocabulary of all the languages resulting in a good storehouse of words but of different languages, making a child a jack of all but master of none.

Challenges

However, on practical grounds, there are many challenges that this approach might face. The question arises- will language teaching be as effective as it is proposed? For acquiring any language, it is necessary to give exposure to learners from early childhood. Following the three languages formula, will it be possible to focus and practice all three languages? Or it will again be just a matter of formality to follow the guidelines and pursue the course? Further, what will happen to the students whose parents have been transferred to other states? Making arrangements for teaching in their mother tongue or regional language will be a task for any state. For example, it will be challenging to find a Tamil speaking teacher in the interiors of Madhya Pradesh.

Further, we have to understand here that English as a "foreign" language in India is just not realistic any more. It is difficult to accept for many but is the truth that English has become a part and parcel of our routine life. It is much more than merely an official language. And if the reason behind the three languages formula is the unity of the country, then no language can play the role as efficiently as English can. Further, it is a global language. It will open doors for a career in international markets.

The critical period hypothesis focuses on the fact that children can acquire a language at a specific time. Once the critical age is passed it becomes very difficult to learn a language. There are examples in history that advocate the basis of CPH theory. Therefore, offering language after grade 5 or 8 might not be as easy to learn as the one offered since early childhood.

One of the major challenges that we will face in teaching in a regional language is the availability of quality material in regional languages. Translating the material in the same spirit as the original text will be a task. The policy proposes

the setting up of an Indian Institute of Translation and Interpretation (IITI) which will facilitate the translation process.

The availability of qualified and competent teachers is another challenge in implementing the aforesaid three languages formula. Especially in the rural and interior areas where there is already a huge scarcity of skilled workforce. It is a real challenge to manage competent and skillful teachers in far corners.

The other major challenge we face is employment generation. The majority of IT professionals join MNCs. Soon after graduation, the job is ready if a candidate possesses sound communication skills in English. Many institutes appoint trainers for developing English communication skills in candidates. If we focus on education in Hindi or regional languages the candidate, even after having sound knowledge of the subject, will have to rely on the government for the job. The international market will be very limited because of the language construct. If we promote education in local languages we must ensure the availability of employment at the local levels only then this vision will be a successful reality.

All in all, the policy makers have minutely observed all the possible areas but even after this close study, the implementation is to be watched. If we could be able to meet these challenges, the policy offered will be a grand success. And the aim behind it (of making one nation one language) will surely be attained.

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