

THE POLICY PERSPECTIVE ON LANGUAGE TEACHING: ECHOES OF THREE LANGUAGE FORMULA

Puneet Narang

Associate Professor
Guru Nanak Dev Engineering College, Ludhiana

ABSTRACT

The task of formulation of educational policies is regularly undertaken in every nation to make education more responsive to the individual and societal needs. To continuously secure individual growth of citizens, produce trained workforce and above all to achieve national goals, educational policies are revived from time to time. Due to India's multilingual and multicultural identity, the issue of language is of paramount importance. After India's independence, considering its global worth, English was retained in our education system. Consequently, it had continuously been shaping the direction of our educational policy making. In this context, 'Three language Formula' has been a prominent recommendation of Kothari commission(1964-66) which has found echoes in recommendations of almost all subsequently formed education commissions including the recent NEP(2020). Besides, mother tongue as medium of instruction has been emphatically proposed as most befitting choice for students' academic growth and competence development. Viewing the education scenario in the current era of globalization, these policy recommendations do not stand in consonance with parental aspirations which align more with EMI based private education. The educational goals delineated through various education policies and NCFs demand broader practical reforms in the context of choice of suitable teaching pedagogies and implementation of academic and professional rigour in classrooms.

Key Words: Policy, Medium of Instruction, Three Language Formula, English language

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE OF STUDY

As far as language teaching and learning is concerned, three crucial questions have confronted various commissions and committees set up from time to time. First, it is the question of choice of medium of instruction for school and college education. Secondly, where to position English language in relation to teaching of mother tongue and other native languages. Third, the major concern is preservation and promotion of indigenous languages for sustenance of the multicultural and multilingual character of our country. Due to economic liberalization of 1990s and resultant trend of privatisation of education, English medium based instruction came to be equated with quality education and almost replaced mother tongue based education system being run in state run govt. schools. In today's globalised world too, English has almost become default medium of both professional and non-professional education. Recently, NEP (2020), the recent education policy has, again reiterated the need for mother tongue based education. In the light of prevailing significance of English, it has also become a matter of concern to preserve and promote our own indigenous languages. In this scenario, it is pertinent to critical analyse the recommendations of various educational policies regarding teaching of languages including English and indigenous languages.

Objective of Study: The objective of study is to critically analyse various policy documents to evaluate their recommendations regarding teaching of languages in general and more specifically for the implementation of 'Three language formula'.

Language Issue and Educational Policy Making in Post-Independence Period

After independence, India adopted the Constitution in 1950. Education became responsibility of both state and central governments. The Constitution makers recognized that the stability and progress of the country was dependent to a large extent upon well-educated citizens. The Constitution emphasised the principle of 'equality of educational opportunities' along with the achievement of social justice.

After gaining independence, one of the major areas of concern was to rebuild the education system keeping in view the fast occurring developments in the field of science and technology at the global level. Secondly, there was a need to evolve an education system which could assist in achieving constitutional goals such as cultural development, equalising educational opportunities and creation of egalitarian society. The Government established education commissions in order to address these challenges and recommend comprehensive policies for educational problems. A number of problems and challenges surfaced in the country because of the sheer diverse character of Indian society. In this context, evolving suitable language policy received adequate attention of educationists who were associated with various commissions and committees.

Education Commission or Kothari Commission (1964-66): Evolving Three Language Formula

The appointment of Education Commission (1964-66) under the chairmanship of D. S. Kothari was a great milestone in educational policy making in the Independent India. The major purpose of setting up this commission was development of national system of education. As far as language policy is concerned, it emphasised the development of Indian languages. It stated:

The energetic development of Indian languages and literature is a sine qua non for educational and cultural development. Unless this is done, the creative energies of the people will not be released, standards of education will not improve, knowledge will not spread to the people, and the gulf between the intelligentsia and the masses will remain, if not widen further. (xiii)

Therefore, the Commission recommended adoption of regional languages as medium of instruction at primary, secondary and senior secondary levels. In this regard it recommended:

Learning through a foreign medium compels the students to concentrate on cramming instead of mastering the subject-matter. Moreover, as a matter of sound educational policy, the medium of education in school and higher education should generally be the same. Prior to 1937, the position was at least consistent. English was the medium both in the upper stages of school and college education. As we have rightly adopted the regional languages as the media of education at the school stage, it follows that we should adopt them increasingly at the higher stage also. (19-20)

The Commission was of the view that adoption of a foreign language as medium of instruction would lead to academic loss as it would promote cramming on the part of students. As far as choice of medium of instruction is concerned, synchronization between upper stages of school education and higher education had to be ensured for optimum academic output.

The Commission visualised the role of regional language in providing quality education as it stated, "We are convinced of the advantages of education through the regional languages. We regard the development of regional languages as vital to the general progress of the country, and as an important step towards the improvement of quality in education" (20).

It was foreseen that promotion of regional language would lead to spread of education and would also reduce the gap between 'intelligentsia and the masses'. Standard of education would also increase due to growth of regional languages and would enable people to express them creatively. Stating the utilitarian aspect of developing Indian languages, Kothari commission stated:

It is hardly necessary to emphasize that the development of the Indian languages is both urgent and essential for the development of the Indian people and as a way of bringing together the elite and the masses. It can make scientific and technical knowledge more easily accessible to the people in their own languages and thus help not only in the progress of industrialization but also in the wider dissemination of science and the scientific outlook. (18)

The recommendation of 'three language formula.' was a major recommendation of the Kothari commission. It suggested teaching of a modern Indian language along with Hindi and English in Hindi speaking areas and teaching of Hindi along with regional language and English in non-Hindi areas. In its view, Hindi as a link language required due promotion specifically for the purpose of propagation of India's cultural unity. The Commission also proposed the establishment of Hindi medium schools in non-Hindi states.

Besides Indian languages, Kothari Commission also paid attention towards the study of English language. It was for seen that knowledge was increasing at the global level, specifically in the field of science and technology. In order to keep pace with global developments as well as to ensure India's contribution to it, English language must be studied. Elaborating on the language policy the Commission recommended:

The introduction of the regional languages as media of education should not be interpreted to mean underrating the importance of English in the university. For a successful completion of the first degree course, a student should possess an adequate command over English, be able to express himself in it with reasonable ease and felicity, understand lectures in it and avail himself of its literature. Therefore, adequate emphasis will have to be laid on its study as a language right from the school stage. English should be the most useful 'library language' in higher education and our most significant window on the world. (22)

Therefore, though development of regional languages received prime importance, at the same time, importance of teaching of English language was recognised to create India's access to world knowledge. Whereas regional languages would prove instrumental in spreading education among masses, the English language was found to be the most important source for keeping pace with global developments in the field of science and technology.

National Policy on Education (1968): Implementation of Three Language Formula

Based on the recommendations of the Education Commission (1964–1966), the first National Policy on Education was announced in 1968. This policy called for equalizing educational opportunities, in order to achieve national integration and greater cultural and economic development. The NPE (1968) emphasised the propagation of regional languages to achieve the goal of harmony and integration. In this regard, this policy outlined the implementation of the "three language formula" in school education, in which a student at the secondary level should know Hindi, English and the regional language of his state. With its implementation, English occupied its place along with regional languages and national language in curriculum at various stages of school education.

National Policy on Education (1986): Effectiveness in the Implementation of Three Language Formula

With respect to languages, The National Policy on Education (1986) reiterated the policy elaborated in the National Policy on Education (1968). The NPE (1986) found that the three-language formula had not been satisfactorily implemented in various states. Therefore, NPE (1986) proposed many initiatives to be taken for effective implementation of it.

Further, this policy proposed the adoption of modern Indian languages as the media of instruction at the university stage. As modern Indian languages were already being used as media of instruction at the school stage, there is a need for their progressive adoption as media at the university stage.

National Knowledge Commission (2005-2008)

National Knowledge Commission (NKC) was constituted in 2005 in the era of globalization and resultant proliferation of English language. As compared to earlier policy recommendations, a clear shift of focus is perceptible in its recommendations. The underlying mission of this commission was to achieve excellence in education system to create knowledge society by providing equal opportunities of access to knowledge. In order to ensure access to knowledge in the face of emergence of global knowledge society, the commission acknowledged the significance of English language, not only as a medium of instruction or a means of communication, but also as a determinant of access. In its view, “an understanding and command over the English language is a most important determinant of access to higher education, employment possibilities and social opportunities” (37). This is because of the fact that lack of command over English language hindered the process of smooth transition of students to higher education. Such students were facing difficulty in getting admission in certain reputed institutions of higher education. Besides, the same disadvantage further got carried forward to the world of work.

Therefore, NKC recommended that English language, along with the first language, should be introduced, from First class in schools. Both languages must be used side by side to provide “meaningful learning experiences to the child. Early action in this sphere would help us build an inclusive society and transform India into a knowledge society” (42).

The Commission further recommended that, instead of teaching English as a stand-alone subject, it should be integrated to the school curriculum. To achieve this goal it was proposed that English should also be utilised for teaching some content subjects beginning with class III which would reduce the gulf between English medium schools and schools offering regional language as medium of instruction.

National Curriculum Framework (2005): Continuing with Three Language Formula

The National Curriculum Framework (2005) has been a milestone in the history of education policy making. It focuses more on the creativity and the overall development of children, rather than filling their brains with information. The mother tongue received critical attention and emphasis was laid on social, economic and ethical background of students. According to NCF, it is important to connect knowledge to life outside the school, discourage rote learning and enrich curriculum for the overall development of children. NCF places great importance on multilingual character of India. A child develops adequate command over the language/languages of his environment even before the onset of schooling. As language is medium of knowledge construction and self-expression, it can lead to identity crisis if mother tongue is removed from the learning experiences of a child. Multilingualism is a characterising feature of Indian landscape which can be utilised as an advantage for making

effective pedagogical choices in Indian classroom. Giving acceptance to every language in classroom will generate positive sense of identity on the part of each student. In this regard, NCF (2005) says, "Several studies have shown that bilingual proficiency raises the levels of cognitive growth, social tolerance, divergent thinking and scholastic achievement, societal or national-level multilingualism is a resource that can be favourably compared to any other national resource" (76).

In this context, NCF has also emphasised the need to implement the three-language formula, with mother tongue, as the medium of instruction. India, being a multi-lingual country, the curriculum should be such that it promotes multilingual proficiency in every child, including proficiency in English, which will become possible if efficient language pedagogy of the mother tongue is introduced. It focuses on language, as an inseparable part of every subject.

As far as language learning is concerned, NCF has given the following recommendations:

- Multilingual approach needs to be adopted for language teaching. Multilingual command of students should be used as resource.
- Mother tongue should be medium of instruction at least at the primary level.
- To provide multilingual experience, the three language formula must be implemented, in its spirit, to develop command over more than one language by the students.
- Hindi is to be introduced in non-Hindi speaking areas, whereas students learn a language not spoken in their area. Sanskrit can also be introduced.
- Classical and foreign languages may be introduced at next stage of learning.

With regard to English language, NCF (2005) maintains that English has a status of global language in India. In this regard, the Position Paper of National Focus Group for Teaching of English states that English is, in India today, a symbol of people's aspirations for quality in education and a fuller participation in national and international life. The visible impact of this presence of English is that, it is today being demanded by everyone at the very initial stage of schooling. (1)

According to NCF (2005), "The level of introduction of English is now a matter of political response to people's aspirations rather than an academic or feasibility issue, and people's choices about the level of its introduction in the curriculum will have to be respected" (38).

In the vision of NCF, English does not stand alone. The aim of English teaching is the creation of multilingual who can enrich all our languages; this has been an abiding national vision. English needs to find its place along with other Indian languages in different states, where children's other languages strengthen English teaching and learning; and in "English-medium" schools, where other Indian languages need to be valorised to reduce the perceived hegemony of English. (39)

Further, the NCF asserts that the relative success of "English medium" schools shows that language is learnt when it is not being taught as language, rather through exposure in meaningful context. Thus English must be seen in relation to other subjects; a language across the curriculum is of particular relevance to primary education, and later all teaching is in a sense language teaching. This perspective will bridge the gap between "English as subject" and "English as medium". "We should in this way move towards a common school system that does not make a distinction between "teaching a language" and "using a language as a medium of instruction"(39).

Besides promoting English language, NCF has also emphasised growth and development of indigenous languages. In its view, English must be introduced along with our own languages so that it does not have adverse effect on the development of indigenous languages. “A multilingual approach to schooling from the very outset will counter possible ill effects such as loss of one's own languages and the burden of sheer incomprehension” (98).

National Education Policy (2020)

National Education Policy (2020) is the most recent development in educational policy making. The major policy concern is promotion of indigenous languages and utilizing it as a resource in the classroom. It also stresses the importance of three language formula. It affirms that, keeping in mind the constitutional provisions, the three-language formula will continue to be implemented because there is need to promote multilingualism and national unity. (12)

In this context the policy document strongly proposes that the medium of instruction in public and private schools, until at least Grade V and preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, shall be the home language/mother-tongue/local language/regional language. However, students whose medium of instruction is the local/home language will begin to learn science and mathematics, bilingually in Grade VI so that, by the end of Grade 9, they can speak about science and other subjects, both in their home language and English. In this regard, all efforts will be made in preparing high-quality bilingual textbooks and teaching-learning materials. (12-13)

The teachers are supposed to adopt multilingual approach where home language of children is different from medium of instruction. If a language has to be taught, it is not necessarily be made the medium of instruction. Multilingualism can be used advantageously at foundation stage. In this regard NEP (2020) states:

Children pick up languages extremely quickly between the ages of 2 and 8 and that multilingualism has great cognitive benefits to young students, children will be exposed to different languages early on (but with a particular emphasis on the mother tongue), starting from the Foundational Stage onwards. All languages will be taught in an enjoyable and interactive style, with plenty of interactive conversation, and with early reading and subsequently writing in the mother tongue in the early years, and with skills developed for reading and writing in other languages in Grade 3 and beyond. (13)

Moreover, the NEP (2020) has proposed that both the Central and State governments will take initiative to invest in large numbers of language teachers of various regional languages around the country, and in particular of all Schedule 8 languages. States, especially states from different regions of India, may enter bilateral agreements to hire teachers in large numbers from each other, to satisfy the three-language formula in their respective states, and also to encourage the study of Indian languages across the country.

Further, the policy document affirms that the teaching of all languages will be enhanced through innovative and experiential methods, such as gamification and apps, and by weaving in the cultural aspects of the languages. For this, the teaching-learning of various subjects need to be linked up with real-life experiences through films, theatre and storytelling, art and music, local literature, etc. Thus, the teaching of languages will also be based on experiential learning pedagogy. (15)

National Curriculum Framework for School Education (2023)

The National Education Policy (2020) states:

This National Education Policy envisions an education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India, that is Bharat, sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high-quality education to all, and thereby making India a global knowledge superpower. (qtd. in NCF 2023 : 21)

The Pre-Draft of ‘The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (2023)’ has come into existence with the intent to realise the vision of National Education Policy (2020) by undertaking ‘Curricular and Pedagogical restructuring’ across all the four stages of school education (11).

The NCF has extracted its goals for the formulation of curriculum framework from the aims outlined by NEP (2020). One of the broader aims of NEP (2020), that education must be deeply rooted in India, has got reflected in NCF(2023) through “content and learning of languages, in the pedagogical approaches including tools and resources, and most importantly in the philosophical basis – in the aims and in the epistemic approach”(11). Thus, implementation of multilingualism with emphasis on mother tongue, and due recognition of diverse languages of India in education system appear to be quite explicit concerns of NCF (2023).

In line with this understanding, NCF (2023) has assigned prime importance to language learning, across all stages, from Foundational to Secondary, driven by commitment of NEP (2020) to multilingualism. According to it, developing multilingual capacities of learners is the leading goal of language teaching. Teaching of diverse languages will enable the learners to appreciate India’s language diversity and ensuing cultural multiplicity. “As ... multilingualism has great cognitive benefits to young students, children will be exposed to different languages early on (but with a particular emphasis on the mother tongue), starting from the Foundational Stage onwards...” (qtd. in NCF 2023:135).

Following the guidelines of NEP (2020), three- language-formula as the central approach to language teaching in schools has been proposed by NCF (2023). The three languages have been referred to as R1, R2 and R3.

The proposal of teaching these three languages is as follow:

R1: This is the language used as medium of instruction (MoI), and in which literacy is first attained. Preferably, it should be the most familiar language of the students, which is usually the mother tongue/home language. With India’s linguistic diversity, even within a classroom, it may not be possible to have the home language as the R1 for all students; in such circumstances a language which is familiar to the students should be chosen as R1 – which is often the most commonly used local language.

R2: This could be any other language, including English.

R3: This is any other language that is not R1 or R2.

The state or the relevant bodies need to decide upon R1, R2, or R3. (NCF 138)

So, very clear guidelines emerge regarding the selection of medium of instruction which will be the home language of the child and this will be the language in which the learners must gain proficiency at the first place. It is suggested that if any discrepancy exists between child’s spoken language and medium of teaching, it has to be addressed on priority basis. Even in case of non-availability of learning material and text books in mother tongue of the child, the medium of interaction in classroom will remain mother tongue.

It has also been proposed that the learners must be given opportunity to study in depth literature of any one language of their choice out of R1, R2 and R3. For this, it has to be included as a compulsory component of curriculum at secondary stage.

NCF (2023) has given very clear guidelines for setting learning outcomes and assessment procedures. The classroom work must be driven by the aim of achieving various language competencies instead of completion of certain language based tasks. The present system of evaluation, more or less, judges the capability for memorisation of specific content. Rather, it must assess level of students' functional command over language and ability for appreciation of literature.

In nutshell, growth of indigenous languages through their incorporation in education system emerges to be a dominant goal of language teaching.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, it can be understood that Indian educational policies remained focused on the recognition and promotion of indigenous languages. The three language formula has maintained its significance till date. Mother tongue as medium of instruction was continuously proposed by various NCF which will facilitate spread of education. The introduction of English language will enable to keep pace with global developments. It was only at the turn of century in 1990s, which is generally termed as era of globalisation, that English language as medium of instruction gained currency. NCF (2005) and Knowledge Commission (2007) are the documents which varied from the earlier policy documents with respect to the amount of significance to be assigned to English language. These policy documents proposed across the curriculum approach for teaching English language. The global prevalence of English led Indian education policy makers to adapt education system to the national and international employment market trends. As a result English has gained a place of supremacy at different levels of education as a subject as well as medium of instruction. But NEP (2020) has again laid emphasis on supremacy of learning of indigenous languages and adoption of bilingualism in classroom which promotes better comprehension and competence development. The 'Three Language Formula' has received acceptance and relevance even in contemporary educational context. The major concern is to what extent these recommendations translate in real classroom setting because that is where actual positive change will be visible in the light of broader policy goals.

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