

THE INITIATIVES OF NCERT TO PROMOTE MULTILINGUALISM AND MULTICULTURALISM IN INDIA

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Abstract

The aim action of Education is to make an individual to acquire knowledge and skills to build better societies for economic development thereby taking care of personal growth as well. There are national educational centers which provide structured learning through curricula, incorporate social values and provide environments for personal growth and skill development. These centers are essential for individual professional development and national advancement. The "National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)" stands as a leading authority in school education, playing an active role in 'formulating and implementing the nation's educational policies'. It collaborates with various governmental and autonomous bodies at both the central and state levels to ensure a comprehensive and coordinated approach in the field of education. Aligning its practices with the 'National Education Policy (NEP)', the NCERT stresses the significance of 'proficiency in both regional languages and English'. This dual proficiency can be achieved through bilingual education, which integrates both languages for instruction, or by learning them as separate subjects. Balancing language use, it helps individuals thrive by connecting them to their heritage and the global world. It advocates for 'multilingualism in education' as a pedagogical approach that recognizes, respects, and leverages the linguistic diversity of students to foster inclusivity and improve learning outcomes. It builds a strong educational foundation. Enhanced cognitive development, better academic achievement, and greater social and cultural inclusion are its key benefits. It is achieved through a broad spectrum of projects and a varied collection of ventures, such as creating curriculum and textbooks in many languages to aid students from multilingual backgrounds. Furthermore, a detailed plan for developing competency in the three

languages, 'R1, R2, and R3' (earlier L1, L2, and L3), is also outlined in 'NCERT's recent publication,' the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE)'. The organization conducts training programmes for teachers to strengthen their proficiency in managing multilingual classrooms efficiently. The Bhasha Sangam learning resources aim to enable people across India to learn diverse languages of different states of India and connect with their cultural heritage. Kala Utsav fosters the spirit of national integration and cultural exchange on a single platform. Its recent inclusion of multilingual theatre performances and storytelling is another step towards promoting multilingualism. Additionally, it utilizes digital platforms to disseminate educational resources widely. The new PM-eVidya channels (200 now) telecast curriculum-based educational materials created by NCERT and other organizations in Hindi, English, and various regional languages (almost every state has its channel in regional language). English is not considered as a barrier but a resource in the promotion of multilingualism. The goal of creating an 'inclusive learning environment' that respects and nurtures India's 'linguistic diversity' is driving a conscious shift toward 'promoting native varieties of English'.

Keywords: National integration, Multilingualism, English language, National policy, School education

Introduction

India as a nation stands for 'linguistic diversity' and a strong heritage of 'multilingualism'. This is formalized by the 'Indian Constitution', which lists '22 languages' (like Hindi, Bengali, Telugu, Tamil, and Urdu) in its Eighth Schedule. While this diversity nurtures 'cultural richness', it simultaneously creates challenges for governance, education, and communication. Importantly, this 'multilingualism' serves as a national strength, promoting both diversity and unity while preserving its linguistic legacy. English is also significant, functioning as one of the country's link languages, used widely in administration, education, and commerce. 'Multilingualism' refers to an

individual's, community's, or society's capacity to use multiple languages effectively. This capacity manifests at various levels: personal (an individual speaking several languages), societal (a community or nation using multiple languages in daily life), and institutional (governments or organizations officially recognizing and utilizing multiple languages). Multilingualism is beneficial as it enhances 'cognitive abilities', promotes cross-cultural interaction, and facilitates 'global communication'. In societies where multiple languages are present, it is vital for education, governance, and social interaction, helping people to 'bridge linguistic and cultural divides'.

Multilingualism can be classified into different types based on various factors:

- 1. Individual Multilingualism:** It is the ability of an individual to use more than one language. A balanced multilingual approximately has equal proficiency in multiple languages; a dominant multilingual has higher proficiency in one language compared to others; a receptive multilingual understands multiple languages but primarily speaks or writes one or a few languages; and whereas a productive multilingual speaks and writes in multiple languages actively. When an individual learns multiple languages from birth, s/he has simultaneous multilingualism; but when the person learns a second or third language after mastering the first, s/he has sequential multilingualism. Functional multilingualism is the ability of the individual to use different languages for specific purposes, such as speaking one language at home and another at work. (Baker & Wright, 2017; Cenoz, 2013).
- 2. Societal Multilingualism:** It refers to the coexistence of multiple languages within a group, community, region, or a country. For examples in India, there are hundreds of such societies and communities that use one language for communication within their society/religion and the other for communication outside their society/religion. The ability to naturally learn more than one language within a community without formal policy is natural multilingualism. (Romaine, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009).

3. **Institutional Multilingualism:** It refers to the use of multiple languages officially within Organizations, Governments, Institutions and Courts. For example, the Regional Institute of Education (RIE) located at various parts of the country uses the languages of the region for educational purposes (RIE Bhopal uses Gujarati, Marathi, Urdu, Hindi and English). When Governments establish legal recognition of multiple languages (e.g., India's 22 scheduled languages), it is termed as official multilingualism. (Annamalai, 2001; Ricento, 2013).

The National Education Policy on Multilingualism

The National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 stresses on the use of mother tongues as the medium of instruction in the early years of schooling. It says that learners should be taught in their home language, mother tongue, local language, or regional language at least until Grade V considering the benefits of mother tongue education and preferably up to Grade VIII and beyond. After that, the mother tongue or local language will continue to be taught as a subject wherever feasible. It further suggests that high-quality textbooks, including those for science subjects, will be provided in the mother tongue of the learners. Efforts will be made from an early stage to bridge any gaps between the child's spoken language and the language of instruction. (Government of India, Ministry of Education, 2020).

The three-language formula will continue to be implemented while considering constitutional provisions, regional and national aspirations, and the goal of promoting multilingualism and national unity. However, it will offer greater flexibility, and no language will be imposed on any state. The selection of the three languages will be determined by the states, regions, and students, provided that at least two of them are native to India. Additionally, students will have the option to change one or more of the languages they are studying in Grade VI or VII, as long as they achieve basic proficiency in three languages (including one Indian language at the literature level) by the end of secondary school. (Government of India, Ministry of Education, 2020).

The NEP, 2020 encourages teachers to use bilingual approach for students whose home language is different from the medium of instruction. They should use bilingual teaching and learning materials for such classes. In case of other subjects like mathematics, science and social science, the medium of instruction should be the mother tongue of the learners even when the textbook is not available in the regional language of the learners. NCERT, through its Regional Institutes of Education, has been training key resource persons in the use of bi-lingual approach over a long period. Bilingual teaching-learning materials can support students whose home language differs from the medium of instruction of the school. The effort has been intensified after the policy recommendation to smoothly implement the NEP-2020. (Government of India, Ministry of Education, 2020, 4.11).

The NEP, 2020 further adds that all languages will be taught effectively to all students, ensuring high-quality learning. The teachers should inculcate a sense of pride about their mother tongue, local language and regional language. It also emphasizes that the same language may not be the medium of instruction for the teaching of that language, suggesting the flexibility of teaching a language by leveraging the learners' mother tongue. For example, a teacher of Mithilanchal region of Bihar may use Maithili language to teach Sanskrit to the learners of the region. Furthermore, all languages whether used as the medium of instruction or taught as separate subjects should be given equal priority and care to promote genuine multilingual proficiency. (Government of India, Ministry of Education, 2020, 4.11).

Multilingual Learning-Teaching Materials (LTM)

The NEP, 2020 emphasizes the need of developing high-quality bilingual learning-teaching materials including textbooks, teachers' handbooks, reference books etc. for Social Science, Science and Mathematics and other subjects allowing students to understand, discuss, and express concepts in both their home language or mother tongue as well in English. Keeping the recommendation of the policy in mind the NCERT had developed the National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage (NCF-FS), 2021 and

National Curriculum Framework for School Education, 2023 to provide detailed guidelines for the development of curriculum, syllabus and textbook. The curriculum frameworks have been translated into all the 22 languages on Schedule VIII of the constitution making it easier to the states to contextualize and localize the content of the framework for the states.

The textbooks developed by NCERT are well researched high-quality learning-teaching materials that are based on the recommendations of the policy and framework. The textbooks of the subjects other than three languages Hindi, English and Urdu, like Social Science, Science, Mathematics, Art education, Sports education etc. have also been made bilingual by translating them into Hindi which is mostly used in the Central Government supported schools such as Kendriya Vidyalayas, Navodaya Vidyalayas, Eklavya Model Residential Schools etc. This provides the choice to the learners, Schools and Board to choose the instructional language of learning and teaching. Furthermore, NCERT also supports the states (SCERTs) in the adaptation of the textbooks into their regional languages. The states have been given necessary flexibility to remove the topics that are non-regional and add the regional topics on culture, tradition, festivals and the important personalities of the region or state. Currently, 23 states in India have either adopted or adapted the NCERT textbooks and use them. (Times of India, 2022, para. 2)

Regional Institutes of NCERT and their Linguistic Responsibilities:

NCERT located at six different parts of the country, caters to the specific needs and requirements of the entire country through its Regional Institutes of Education (RIEs). RIE Ajmer supports the linguistic diversity of the northern region and actively incorporates Hindi, English, Punjabi, and Urdu in its teacher training programmes and educational materials. RIE Bhopal meets the needs of western region and promotes multilingualism by supporting instruction in Hindi, English, Marathi, Gujarati, and Urdu. RIE Bhubaneswar integrates Odia, Bengali, Hindi and Maithili by catering to the linguistic richness of the eastern region. RIE Mysuru promotes school education Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu for the southern region. RIE Nellore

is a newer addition to the network of NCERT's regional institutes, primarily catering to the Andhra region in Telugu. The North-Eastern Regional Institute of Education (NERIE) in Shillong serves the linguistically rich region of North East which is home to numerous indigenous languages and dialects. It supports Assamese, Bengali, Hindi, English, and several local tribal languages to ensure that education is both culturally responsive and linguistically relevant.

The Regional Institutes of Education (RIEs) play a vital role in promoting and integrating local languages within the educational framework, thereby preserving endangered languages and fostering inclusivity in learning environments across the country. By designing effective curricula, developing language-based resources, and implementing language-sensitive teaching methods, the RIEs enable students to achieve dual language proficiency: learning through their mother tongue while simultaneously developing strong skills in regional and national languages. This critical work helps bridge linguistic divides. By embedding local languages into teaching modules and teacher training practices, the RIEs advance a multilingual approach that enhances student comprehension and nurtures respect for linguistic diversity. In doing so, they ensure that education remains closely synchronized with the linguistic and cultural realities of each region, enabling students to learn more effectively and meaningfully in their home languages (Government of India, Ministry of Education, 2020; NCERT, 2021).

Teacher Training:

NCERT provides teacher training in multiple languages according to regional linguistic needs of the states and agencies. It offers pre-service teacher's training programmes at the RIEs such as Integrated Teacher Education Programmes (ITEP), Bachelor in Education (B.Ed.), Master in Education (M.Ed.) etc. Through its flagship initiative, the *National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement (NISHTHA)*, it has trained over three million teachers across the country in both in person and online modes since 2019. In addition, NCERT organizes a range of need-based professional development programmes focusing on areas such as effective pedagogy,

resource utilization, *Jadui Pitara*, information and communication technology (ICT), and 21st-century skills. Most of these training sessions are delivered in the regional languages of the teachers, ensuring accessibility and meaningful participation (NCERT, 2021).

PM-eVidya Channels

The Central Institute of Educational Technology (CIET), a constituent unit of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), manages the telecast of approximately 200 television channels dedicated to school education in various regional languages across India. Of these, 12 channels operate primarily in English and Hindi to support the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) curriculum, while the remaining channels broadcast in regional languages aligned with respective state board curricula. NCERT also assists state education departments in developing high-quality digital content for these channels in regional languages, thereby promoting equitable access to learning resources in students' mother tongues (NCERT, 2022).

Bhasha Sangam:

The *Bhasha Sangam* initiative, launched under the *Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat* programme of the Ministry of Education (MoE), celebrates India's rich linguistic diversity and promotes multilingualism among school students. Its primary objective is to familiarize learners with all 22 languages listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India, thereby fostering linguistic tolerance, mutual respect, and national integration. The initiative provides short dialogues comprising five simple, commonly used sentences in each of the 22 languages, which can be practiced daily by students of all classes. States and schools are encouraged to use these dialogues for basic exposure to different Indian languages. Additionally, the *Bhasha Sangam* mobile application and website offer digital and audio content in all 22 languages, further supporting language learning and the promotion of multilingual education across the country (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2021).

Primers in Indian Languages:

A *Primer* (also called “*Bhasha Praveshika*” or entry-level primers) serves as an introductory textbook designed to provide learners with foundational exposure to a language. NCERT and the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) have jointly developed the primers to promote linguistic diversity and multilingual education in India. These Primers are available in 22 scheduled languages and 99 other / non-scheduled and tribal / local languages. They aim to develop basic proficiency in Indian languages through the use of visual aids, simple texts, and practical examples, helping learners recognize and use these languages in various real-life contexts. A child's mother tongue is a base for ‘the multilingual primers’. The second language is used through the use of parallel text.. This dual-language structure enables learners to keep their home language connection while smoothly moving toward communicating in regional and national contexts. Consequently, these primers help learners reinforce their identity while simultaneously building the skills to communicate effectively in wider linguistic settings.

Kala Utsav: It is an annual mega-event coordinated and executed by ‘the Ministry of Education’ and ‘the NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training)’. It functions as an active forum that promotes ‘national integration and cultural exchange’ by gathering young participants from all over the states of India and union territories. The students selected from states, UTs, and school bodies showcase diverse cultural heritage through art, music, dance, theatre, and storytelling. This demonstration powerfully illustrates the richness of regional traditions, fostering ‘mutual respect and understanding’. A key element of the event is its focus on utilizing ‘regional languages’ in performances, which strongly reinforces ‘linguistic diversity’ and ‘cultural pride’. The recent addition of ‘multilingual theatre and storytelling’ further cements the commitment to promote multilingualism among youth. By encouraging cultural expression and appreciating varied identities, Kala Utsav cultivates a sense of unity among students, thus playing a critical role in developing a generation that deeply values the nation's diversity. (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Art Resource Centre:

The Art Resource Centre at RIE Bhopal not only functions to preserve and promote regional arts, crafts, music, and dance, but also offers a rich site for multilingual pedagogical practice, allowing teacher-trainees to engage with linguistic and cultural diversity in authentic contexts. While organizing workshops with local artists from Madhya Pradesh and adjacent states, the centre implicitly enacts multilingualism: traditional songs, stories, or folk performances are often embedded in regional languages or dialects, enabling trainees to experience how language, art, and local identity intersect. For instance, the Centre actively documents regional musical instruments and folk dances in its handbook, thereby preserving the associated vernacular terminologies and local narratives. (NCERT, 2022). This linkage encourages future teachers to view language as inseparable from culture, and to treat linguistic diversity as pedagogical resource in the multilingual classrooms envisaged in NEP 2020. By immersing trainees in culturally grounded arts practices that are language-infused, the Centre helps them develop sensitivity and competence to design multilingual learning activities, where local languages, artistic expression, and perhaps English co-exist, rather than compete.

Language Resource Centre:

The Language Resource Centre (Multilingual Lab) has been established at RIE Bhopal with a vision to document, preserve, and promote India's vast linguistic resources, especially endangered languages to implement the multilingual goals of the NEP 2020. The Centre also focuses on teacher training, particularly in helping educators to integrate multilingualism as a pedagogical resource in classrooms. It plays a pivotal role in developing fluency among teachers who may not be proficient in the regional language (R1) of the area where they teach. The Centre supports this policy shift toward inclusive and context-sensitive multilingual education through these initiatives. (NCERT, 2021).

English as a Resource for Multilingual Education:

In the Indian educational context, English is increasingly viewed not as a barrier but as a valuable resource in the promotion of multilingualism. Particularly in multilingual classrooms at the secondary and higher levels, English often serves as a link language, enabling communication among students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Teachers frequently employ code-mixing and code-switching strategies to facilitate comprehension and participation among learners. For foreign languages like French, German, or Japanese, English often serves as the medium of instruction, bridging global and regional languages. (NCERT, 2021). This strategic use of English underscores its evolving role in supporting rather than suppressing India's linguistic diversity.

Promotion of Indian English:

In contemporary India, English is no longer regarded merely as a colonial legacy; rather, it has become an integral component of the country's cultural and linguistic fabric. There is a conscious pedagogical shift toward promoting a native variety of Indian English in school curricula. English textbooks reflect this shift by giving equal representation to Indian authors and contexts alongside global literature. This ensures learners are exposed to world literature while remaining rooted in Indian voices, leading to a more pluralistic and decolonized language learning experience. (NCERT, 2021).

Inclusive and Professional Language Learning Initiatives:

NCERT has taken significant steps to create an inclusive language learning environment that embraces India's linguistic diversity. For instance, the use of Indian Sign Language (ISL) during the telecast of selected educational videos ensures accessibility for learners with hearing impairments. Schools are encouraged to conduct Language Mapping Surveys to understand their students' linguistic needs and guide tailored pedagogy. Furthermore, RIE Bhopal runs language learning courses, four certificate programmes—Certificate in English Language Education (CELE), Certificate in

Communication Skills (CCS), Certificate in English Language Pedagogy (CELP) and Certificate in Continuing Professional Development (CCPD), two diploma programmes - Diploma in English Language Skills (DELS) and Diploma in English Language Pedagogy (DELP), and an Advanced Diploma in Teaching of English (ADTE), for the continuous professional development of language teachers. These programmes aim to develop fluency and effective pedagogy, equipping teachers for India's diverse classrooms (NCERT, 2021).

Conclusion:

The Conclusion is that India's profound 'linguistic diversity' is simultaneously a rich cultural asset. It is also a unique educational challenge. This paper demonstrated the operation of multilingualism across individual, societal, and institutional levels, stressing its benefits for 'cognitive abilities, cultural appreciation, and communication'. Most of the children in India grow up using multiple languages. 'Multilingual education' is crucial for both heritage preservation and promoting equity and inclusion within the learning environment. Knowledge of languages is the doorway to wisdom and it leads to proper communication. Communication in its own way fosters social mobility to drive innovation and to promote critical thinking. It creates an individual to become an all round balanced personality. The research and training centers of our Nation take the initiative to execute the National Policies of the government under the Ministry of Education. A significant shift toward embracing this multilingual reality is represented by the 'National Education Policy (NEP) 2020', which advocates for instruction in the mother tongue, flexible language selection, and the creation of high-quality 'bilingual learning materials'. 'The NCERT', which is a premier body for school education, has taken the initiative to execute the vision of the Ministry of Education through activities like curriculum development, training educators, creating resources, and launching cultural programmes.

Some of the key interventions, such as the development of multilingual learning-teaching materials, support to states in developing localised and contextual curriculum and textbooks, Bhasha Sangam, Multilingual Primers, Kala Utsav, Art and Language Resource Centres at RIEs, demonstrate a growing commitment to making multilingualism a pedagogical strength

rather than a barrier. Furthermore, recognizing English as a resource rather than an imposition enables students to participate in global conversations while maintaining local identities. The promotion of Indian English, the use of regional languages in digital and televised content, and the integration of sign language are all critical initiatives that transform multilingual education into a powerful vehicle, ensuring academic achievement, social cohesion, national integration, and the celebration of India's pluralism.

In conclusion, multilingualism in Indian education must be seen not as a logistical problem to be solved but as a pedagogical resource to be cultivated. As India advances towards educational equity and excellence, the sustained implementation of NEP 2020's multilingual vision will be vital. This requires continued collaboration among policy-makers, educators, institutions, and communities to ensure that all learners, regardless of their linguistic background, have access to meaningful, relevant, and empowering education. Only then can India truly honour its constitutional promise of unity in diversity through its classrooms.

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