



Medium of Instruction in Higher Education in the Context of National Education Policy 2020

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Abstract

Mother tongue forms the foundation to many a walk of life - development of mind, self, identity, culture, communication, socialization, original thinking, creativity, critical thinking, second language learning and learning of other languages. We know that there is a deep developmental relationship between cognition and language development, especially mother tongue. Since mother tongue is the first language we learn from our parents, its continuity in formal education play a vital role in education besides all that mentioned in the previous sentence. Due to historical reasons (such as foreign invasions and colonialism; multilingual nature of Indian society besides ideological and political reasons) English is taught as a second language and slowly penetrated in to our educations system as a mode of instruction – all this is contributing to replace mother tongue with English all levels of education besides being a critical issue since independence. When, where, how and how long it is to be taught is still being debated due to divergent views among the sections of academia and policy makers may be due to ideological differences rather than addressing the issue with a holistic approach. The present study, in the context of the National Education Policy-2020 (NEP2020) attempts to conduct an online and offline survey with educated adults using convenience and snowball sampling technique to elicit the views or attitudes on their choice of medium of instruction at all levels of education, the reasons for the same. The gaps in the perceptions of the respondents that may be due to the prestige of English, mother tongue, local and foreign languages are analyzed besides the position taken for medium of instruction in the framework for higher education institutions in NEP-2020 report. Accordingly, suitable gap fillers (availability of materials in Indian languages, bilingual texts, teacher training, translations, readiness of higher education institutions, awareness creation among parents and learners about their mother tongue, English, local and foreign languages other related issues) are suggested for the effective implementation of the policy document to make India Vikasith Bharath by 2047. Based on the analysis of

these, the respective components of NEP2020 document such as three language formula, medium of instruction at various levels are evaluated critically and made recommendations for the successful implementation of the policy.

Key words: mother tongue, medium of instruction, language policy, higher education

Full Paper

Besides the experience from the earlier educations policies, the government of India formulated a framework called National Education Policy 2020 (here onwards NEP-2020) for education at all levels in line with the UNESCO High-Level Steering Committee's (HLSC) global education development agenda reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG4). Its mission is "equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030. Such a lofty goal will require the entire education system to be reconfigured to support and foster learning, so that all of the critical targets and goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can be achieved. In this direction, the Government of India approved the NEP2020 report in 2021.

As per the official website of the Ministry of Education, National Education Policy, 2020 envisions "an education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India, i.e., Bharat, sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high quality education to all, thereby making India a global knowledge superpower." It prepares Indian youth to meet the diverse national and global challenges of the present and the future.

In school education, the National Education Policy 2020 stresses on the core values and principle that education must develop not only the cognitive skills, that is, – both 'foundational skills' of literacy and numeracy and 'higher-order' skills such as critical thinking and problem solving – but also, social and emotional skills - also referred to as 'soft skills' -including cultural awareness and empathy, perseverance and grit, teamwork, leadership, communication, among others. of schools, transformation of the curriculum including pedagogy with 5+3+3+4 design covering children in the age group 3-18 years, reform in the current exams and assessment system, strengthening of teacher training, and restructuring the education regulatory framework.

The Focal Points of NEP2020 for Higher Education Institutions

The focal points relating to language issues when it comes to higher education in NEP-2020 are (NEP2020, pg.5): emphasis on conceptual understanding rather than rote learning and learning-for-exams; creativity and critical thinking to encourage logical decision-making and innovation; promoting Multilingualism and the power of language in teaching and learning; full equity and inclusion as the cornerstone of all educational decisions to ensure that all students are able to thrive in the education system; and outstanding research as a co-requisite for outstanding education and development.

Linguistic Landscape, the Historical Context and the Experience of Independent India

We know India is a labyrinth of hundreds of languages and dialects as it is a multilingual society. However, there are many a language died in just hundred years and some are on the verge of endangerment due to historical and various other socio, political and ideological and policy planning and practice related reasons besides historical reasons such as foreign invasions, colonialism, McCauley's Modern Education System. We may say that there are fallacies in addressing the language issue with a holistic approach.

The Role of Mother Tongue

Mother tongue forms the foundational role to many a walk of life such as development of mind, communication, socialization, self, identity, culture, original thinking, creativity, critical thinking, second language learning and learning of other languages. We know that there is a deep developmental relationship between cognition and language development, especially mother tongue. Since mother tongue is the first language we learn from our parents, its continuity in formal education play a vital role in education besides all that mentioned in the previous sentence.

The place of English

Due to the above said socio, political and historical reasons and the multilingual nature of the society, it was considered to continue English as the associate official language of India for the purpose of convenience in pan-national communication and also as a second language in education. As the time passed over seventy-five years, English slowly penetrated it deep into our educations system as a mode of instruction, as a subject and especially as a language of technical, professional and higher education in India. The position of English further consolidated with India's entry into market economy and WTO agreement in 1990. The technological advancements in communication networks such as internet and globalization brought a massive change in the way we do trade and commerce. In a way, at least for the general understanding, English contributed to have a global reach it all spheres of life such as education, employment, entrepreneurship, trade and commerce as

developing country like India has no other option (unlike Russia, Japan, France and other developed countries built all their systems and society in their own language) to reap the benefits from the new developments across the globe.

All the above-said contributed to the creation of a perception or attitude among general public, politicians and policy makers towards mother tongue, English, Hindi and other native and foreign languages. Here comes the issue of 'language of prestige'. Due to its wide acceptability, functional use in the society especially in higher education, employment, access to global audience besides trade and commerce, slowly English seems to have been replacing mother tongue in almost all spheres of life, especially education, employment and business. Hence medium of instruction all levels has become a contentious and critical issue since independence. When, where, how and how long it is to be taught is still being debated due to divergent views among the sections of parents, academia and policy makers may be due to ideological differences rather than addressing the issue with a holistic approach.

Problems Faced by the Higher Education System in India

NEP-2020 identifies a couple of problems that arose over the years in higher education system in India (NEP 2020, pg. 33) - less emphasis on the development of cognitive skills and learning outcomes; a rigid separation of disciplines, with early specialization and streaming of students into narrow areas of study; limited access particularly in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, with few HEIs that teach in local languages; and limited teacher and institutional autonomy.

The Mission as part of Institutional Restructuring and Consolidation

The key changes that NEP-2020 (pg.35, para 10.8) wants to bring about to the current system include "Steps shall be taken towards developing high-quality higher education institutions both public and private that have medium of instruction in local/Indian languages or bilingually. The aim will be to increase the *Gross Enrolment Ratio* in higher education including vocational education from 26.3% (2018) to 50% by 2035."

Mother Tongue Medium Education and Multilingualism

With the advent of NEP2020, there are major changes in the policy of the government. Its major thrust areas include mother tongue medium education and multilingualism.

"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. Thereafter, the home/local language shall continue to be taught as a language wherever possible." (NEP 2020, pg.13)

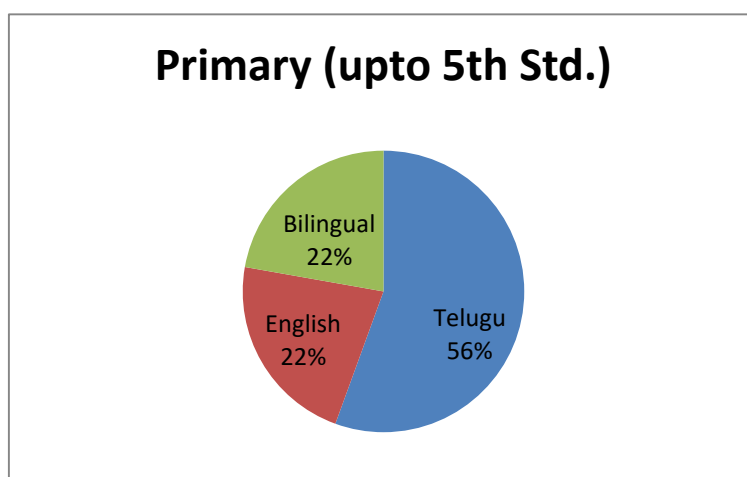
Mission as part of Institutional Restructuring and Consolidation in Higher Education

As per NEP-2020 report (pg.35, para 10.8), By 2030, “steps shall be taken towards developing high-quality higher education institutions both public and private that have medium of instruction in local/Indian languages or bilingually. The aim will be to increase the *Gross Enrolment Ratio* in higher education including vocational education from 26.3% (2018) to 50% by 2035.”

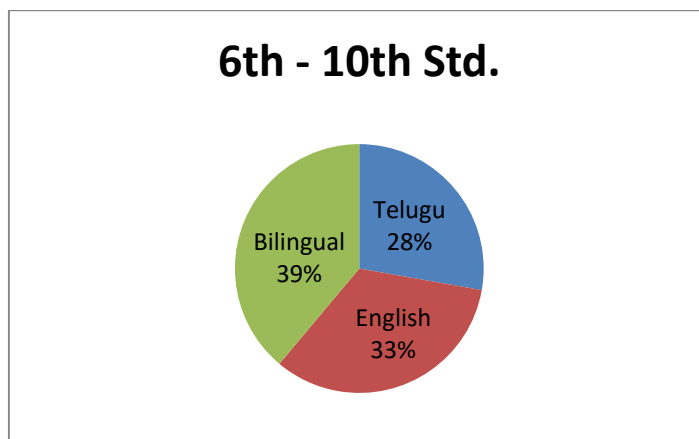
Sample Survey

An online survey is conducted using Google form in Andhra Pradesh to elicit the responses of educated adults from across the professions such as teachers, home makers, research scholars, businessmen, students etc on their preference of medium of education at different levels of education. Convenience and snowball sampling procedures are followed for sample collection. A total of 18 people have responded with their choices and expressed their views for their choices. The data is tabulated and visual representation in pie charts as follows:

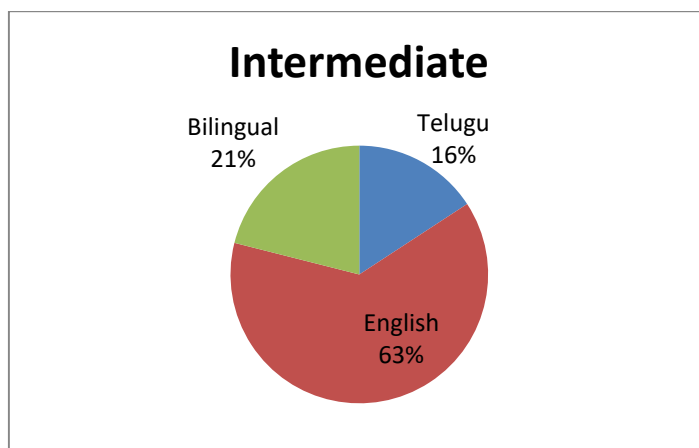
Respondent Preference of Medium of Instruction at Various Levels of Education			
Level of Education	Telugu	English	Bilingual
Primary (up to 5th Std.)	10	4	4
6th - 10th Std.	5	6	7
Intermediate	3	12	4
Graduation/ Professional Courses	1	13	4



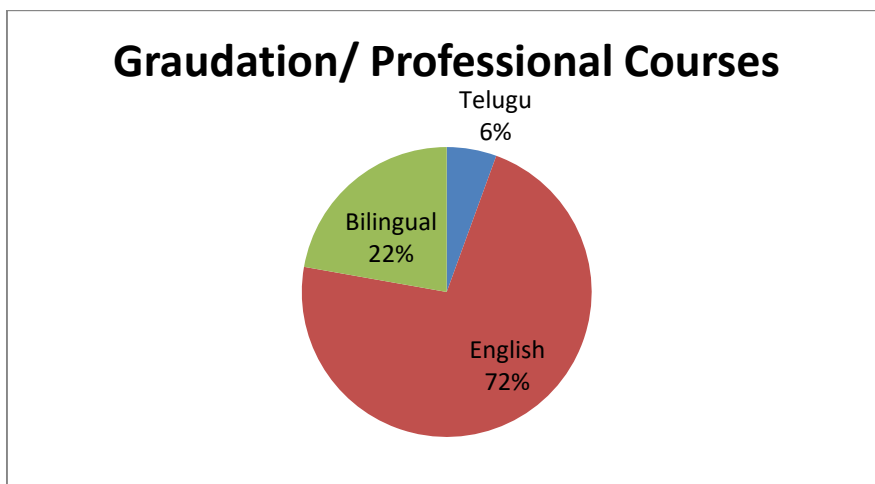
Out of the 18 respondents, 56% opted for Telugu, 22% opted for English and 22% opted for Telugu-English bilingual as medium of instruction at primary level. We see a more than half of the respondents opted for mother tongue instruction at primary level.



Out of the 18 respondents, 28% opted for Telugu, 33% opted for English and 39% opted for Telugu-English bilingual as medium of instruction from 6th to 10th standard. It can be observed that the response to Telugu medium instruction has fallen down to half and the fall is almost equally distributed to English and slightly tilting towards bilingual medium of instruction.



Out of the 18 respondents, 16% opted for Telugu, 63% opted for English and 21% opted for Telugu-English bilingual as medium of instruction at intermediate level. Here, we see a fall in both bilingual and Telugu medium instruction and a step increase in English medium. This shows that the respondents feel the importance of English at secondary level of education.



Out of the 18 respondents, only 6% opted for Telugu, 72% opted for English and 22% opted for Telugu-English bilingual as medium of instruction at graduation and professional courses level. Here, we see a further fall in Telugu medium instruction, but a slight rise in bilingual and a steep increase in English medium. This shows that the respondents feel the importance of English at graduation or professional courses level of education. The slight increase in bilingual medium also indicate that some of the respondents are conscious of importance of mother tongue in understanding the conceptual knowledge and the importance of mother tongue education for original thinking, creative thinking, and innovations. The same is visible from their open responses to the reasons for their choices of medium of instruction.

Gaps Fillers to meet the requirements of NEP2020 for Higher Education

- Preparation of materials in local languages and bilingual
- Translations
- Training the teachers
- Awareness programs to parents and students about their mother tongue, the place of English and about other national and foreign languages
- Addressing the “may” and “wherever possible” in more definite terms as stated in NEP-2020 report in terms of implementation of mother tongue or local language as medium of instruction.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that, as mentioned above, by filling the possible gaps in the implementation of higher education system as designed in the NEP-2020, the ultimate objective of *Vikasith Bharath by 2047*.

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