

Decoding the 'Language Question': Policies, Practices, and Transformative Trajectories in Indian Education (1947-2022)

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Abstract

The paper critically explores the 'language question' in Indian education, analysing its evolution from 1947 to 2022 within the broader context of language, identity, and education. It interrogates the enduring effects of colonial language policies, particularly the institutionalisation of English, which disrupted indigenous linguistic traditions and entrenched hierarchies. Post-independence, the multilingual framework of India sought to balance regional languages with the dominance of English, reflecting persistent sociopolitical tensions between linguistic diversity and global imperatives. The study interrogates key historical milestones, including the 1813 Charter Act and Macaulay's Minutes, to reveal their lasting influence on educational and language policies of India. It situates the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 within this historical continuum, critically analysing its provisions in light of India's colonial past and contemporary linguistic challenges. Employing a qualitative methodology, the research engages in a rigorous document analysis of historical records, policy documents, and scholarly literature to provide a nuanced understanding of language policy evolution in post-independence India. Aligning with transformative educational philosophies, the research critiques utilitarian and competitive frameworks in education, advocating for an inclusive, collaborative model that nurtures intercultural understanding and social justice. It accentuates the need for decolonising curricula and reimagining education as a vehicle for sustainability and equity. By tracing the continuities and changes in India's language policies, this study contributes to ongoing scholarly debates on the role of linguistic diversity in education and its larger implications for shaping just and sustainable futures. The research provides a comprehensive and critical examination of the linguistic outlook of India, addressing both historical legacies and the transformative potential of education.

Keywords: Language Question, Linguistic Dynamics, Multilingual Approach, Colonial Language Policies, Regional Languages, Pre- and Post-Independence Language Policies in India, Global Sustainability.

Introduction

Language, as a varied medium of communication, elaborately blends into the cultural structure of human society, shaping identities, traditions, and societal norms. In India, the 'language question' has been a central issue, strongly influencing educational policies and national identity since Independence. The paper undertakes a layered exploration of this sophisticated issue, scrutinising the historical and contemporary policy initiatives that have shaped linguistic movement in Indian education from 1947 to 2022. Through examining the connections between language, identity, and

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education, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and possibilities inherent in the 'language question'. The study contributes to comparative education by situating linguistic policies of India within global debates on multilingualism, decolonisation, and sustainability, providing insights applicable to diverse educational contexts.

The linguistic structure of India is a fusion of diverse languages, where language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a carrier of culture, history, and identity. The colonial period demonstrated a considerable alteration in this scenario, as English was established as the dominant language of administration and education, relegating indigenous languages to secondary status. The 1813 Charter Act and Macaulay's Minutes of 1835 are vital in understanding the colonial language policy, which favoured English for its perceived utility in governance and commerce, thereby marginalising vernacular languages (Kumar, 1991; Viswanathan, 1998). Post-independence, the Indian government faced the formidable task of reconciling the colonial legacy of English with the need to promote and preserve regional languages. The Constitution of India, adopted in 1950, recognised the importance of linguistic diversity and included provisions for the protection and promotion of regional languages. Article 343 declared Hindi as the official language of the Union, while allowing the continued use of English for official purposes for a period of fifteen years, which was later extended indefinitely (Annamalai, 2005).

The multilingual structure of India necessitated policies that could balance regional linguistic aspirations with the practical advantages of English proficiency. The three-language formula, introduced by the National Policy on Education in 1968, aimed to address this balance by promoting the learning of Hindi, English, and a regional language. However, the implementation of this policy varied significantly across states, often reflecting local linguistic politics and societal attitudes towards different languages (Pattanayak, 1981). The 'language question' in India is thoroughly knitted with issues of identity and power. Regional languages are seen as markers of cultural identity and pride, while English is often associated with socio-economic mobility and modernity. Such dynamics creates difficult interaction between language and identity, where language policies not only affect educational outcomes but also influence social hierarchies and power structures (Mohanty, 2010). In recent years, the debate on the medium of instruction has been reignited with the introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The NEP 2020 advocates for mother-tongue or regional language instruction at least until Grade 5, and preferably until Grade 8. The policy aims to improve cognitive development and learning outcomes by teaching children in their home language, while also ensuring that they are proficient in both Hindi and English by the end of secondary school (GOI, 2020).

The research is driven by four central questions, each addressing key aspects of language policy in Indian education. First, *what are the historical roots and transformative trajectories of language policies in Indian education from colonial times to the present?* This question at large, tries to explore the evolution of language policies, including colonial influences and post-independence developments. It aims to understand how historical events and policies have shaped the current linguistic scenario in Indian education. By examining the colonial imposition of English and subsequent changes in post-independence, the research tries to uncover the routes that have led to present-day linguistic scenarios. Second, *how have constitutional provisions, policies, and committees addressed the 'language question' in post-independence India?* This question examines the role of constitutional and policy frameworks in balancing regional languages with English proficiency. It analyses the effectiveness of these measures in promoting linguistic diversity while preparing students for global engagement. The study looks into various constitutional articles, national policies, and committee recommendations that have aimed to create a multilingual educational environment. Third, *what are the implications of the National Education Policy 2020 on language education and how does it relate to historical and contemporary language policies?* This question tries to explore the impact

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of NEP 2020 on language education, particularly its recommendations for multilingualism and mother-tongue instruction. It aims to contextualise NEP 2020 within the historical trajectory of language policies and assess its potential for transformative change. By placing NEP 2020 within the broader continuum of language policies, the study evaluates its alignment with past and present educational goals. Finally, the last research question tries to explore, *how can educational and research practices be transformed to better address the challenges of linguistic diversity and promote global sustainability?* This question explores how educational, and research practices can be reoriented to support linguistic diversity and contribute to global sustainability. It examines the potential for transformative approaches that align with the principles of inclusivity, collaboration, and ecological awareness. The research aims to propose strategies that not only enhance language education but also stimulate a more sustainable and equitable educational framework.

To address these research questions, the study has set forth several objectives. The first and foremost objective is to *analyse the historical evolution of language policies in India, including colonial influences and post-independence developments*. The objective is to provide a comprehensive understanding of how language policies have evolved over time and their impact on education and society. It involves a detailed examination of key historical milestones and policy shifts that have influenced linguistic practices in Indian education. The second objective is to *evaluate the effectiveness of constitutional provisions, policies, and committees in addressing the 'language question' in post-independence India*. It involves assessing how well these measures have balanced the promotion of regional languages with the necessity of English proficiency. The study critically evaluates the successes and shortcomings of various legislative and policy initiatives in creating a balanced multilingual educational system. The third objective focusses to *assess the implications of NEP 2020 on language education, and its alignment with historical and contemporary language policies*. The objective is to understand how NEP 2020's recommendations fit into the larger context of language policy and their potential for transformative impact. The assessment will consider the historical context of language policies and how NEP 2020 builds upon or diverges from past approaches. The fourth objective tries to *propose recommendations for transforming educational and research practices to better address linguistic diversity and support global sustainability*. It includes suggesting strategies for improving language education, decolonising curricula, and cultivating a more inclusive and sustainable educational framework. Through this paper we aim to provide practical recommendations that align educational practices with the goals of linguistic diversity and global sustainability, promoting a holistic approach to education and research. By addressing these research questions and objectives, the paper pursues to contribute to an in depth understanding of the 'language question' in Indian education and provide insights for shaping just, inclusive, and sustainable educational policies and practices.

To address these research questions, the paper is organised as follows: The *'Historical Context'* section explores the colonial roots of language policies in India, addressing the *first research question*. The *'Post-Independence Multilingual Approach'* section focuses on constitutional provisions and policies, aligning with the *second question*. The implications of the NEP 2020 are critically examined in the *'Contemporary Policy Initiatives'* section, addressing the *third question*. Finally, the *'Findings and Discussion'* section proposes transformative strategies for education, fulfilling the *fourth research question*. The above structure provides a cohesive exploration of the 'language question' in Indian education.

The research employs a qualitative approach, conducting an in-depth document analysis of diverse sources ranging from historical records to contemporary policy documents. By situating the findings within historical and socio-cultural context, the study aims to provide a holistic understanding of language dynamics in post-independence India. The analysis will focus on key policy documents, such as the Official Languages Act of 1963, various National Education Policies, and reports of

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language commissions and committees, to trace the evolution of language policies and their impact on the education system (Sarangi, 2009).

The study also largely focusses upon transforming education and research which is painstakingly threaded into the fabric of this research. It prompts a critical reflection on utilitarian approaches that perpetuate competition, individualism, and narrow knowledge silos. The study advocates for a redirection of educational purposes, content, and methods towards global sustainability, fostering cooperation, solidarity, ecological awareness, and intercultural understanding (Tilak, 2018). By deconstructing the historical layers of the 'language question' and analysing policy responses, we try to contribute to a nuanced understanding of linguistic dynamics in Indian education. It provides insights into the constancies and changes in policy responses, situating NEP 2020 within a historic context and paving the way for future possibilities.

In a nutshell, the research paves its way on a transdisciplinary journey, not only by unfolding the complications of the 'language question' but also aligning with transformative educational principles to advocate for a more inclusive, just, and sustainable future. By recognising the intertwined nature of language, identity, and societal structures, it also makes a subtle attempt to inform future policy considerations that honour linguistic diversity while preparing students for an interconnected world.

Historical Context and Evolution of Language Policies

Ancient and Colonial Influences

The linguistic panorama of India has evolved over millennia, shaped by its diverse cultural heritage. The section addresses the first research question by exploring the historical roots of language policies of India, focusing on key colonial milestones like the 1813 Charter Act and Macaulay's Minute, which established the foundation of linguistic hierarchies in Indian education. In ancient times, Sanskrit was the predominant classical language, serving as a medium for scholarly and religious discourse. The role of Sanskrit in Indian society cannot be overstated, as it symbolised intellectual and cultural superiority. Ancient texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, and epics like the Mahabharata and Ramayana were composed in Sanskrit, solidifying its status as the language of the learned and the elite. However, this linguistic dominance also created a societal stratification where knowledge was monopolised by a select few, mostly linked to the upper castes. The section establishes the historical foundations of linguistic challenges of the country, addressing the first research question by unfolding *how colonial policies entrenched linguistic hierarchies that persist in contemporary education.*

Pre-Independence Language Policies

The advent of colonial rule brought substantial changes to this linguistic phenomenon. The British, recognising the administrative and economic benefits of a unified linguistic policy, implemented English as the medium of instruction. The 1813 Charter Act and Macaulay's Minutes of 1835 were essential in this transformation, advocating for English education and systematically marginalising indigenous languages (Sharp, 1920). The Act allocated funds for education, signifying a move towards formalised educational policies under British rule, using education as a tool for colonial consolidation.

Thomas Babington Macaulay's Minute on Indian Education in 1835 was a crucial document advocating for 'English' as the 'medium of instruction'. Macaulay argued that English education would create a class of individuals who *were "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect"* (Macaulay, 1835). The policy aimed to produce a cadre of English-educated Indians to assist in administering the colony. Macaulay's emphasis on English education systematically marginalised indigenous languages, promoting English as the superior

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language for administration, education, and social mobility (Kumar, 1991). His rationale was steeped in the belief that English education would serve as a civilising mission, spreading Western knowledge and values.

Wood's Despatch of 1854, often regarded as the Magna Carta of English education in India, further entrenched the use of English in the educational system. The Despatch recommended establishing universities in major cities, expanding government schools, and promoting English alongside vernacular languages. However, in practice, English continued to dominate higher education, reinforcing the linguistic hierarchy established by earlier policies (Nurullah & Naik, 1951). The Despatch laid the groundwork for a structured educational system that prioritised English for higher education while apparently promoting vernacular languages at the primary level.

The Hunter Commission of 1882, officially known as the Indian Education Commission, addressed the educational needs of the country with a focus on primary and secondary education. The Commission emphasised the importance of vernacular languages in primary education while endorsing English for higher education. The dual approach shows the British strategy to maintain control over administrative functions while providing basic education in local languages (Basu, 2011). Despite the Commission's recommendations, implementation skewed heavily towards English, particularly in urban and elite institutions, maintaining the linguistic divide.

The Government of India Act of 1919 introduced dyarchy, allowing greater Indian participation in governance, including education. The Act recognised the significance of local languages in education and administration. However, English remained the preferred language for higher education and official communication, perpetuating its dominance in the Indian educational scenario (Aggarwal, 2009). The Act represented a partial devolution of educational policy to Indian control, though real power remained with the colonial administration, ensuring that English retained its privileged position.

During the pre-Independence era, nationalist leaders and thinkers began to critique colonial language policies and advocate for promoting indigenous languages. Mahatma Gandhi, in his seminal work "Hind Swaraj" (1937), criticised the alienating effect of English education on the Indian populace and championed the cause of mother-tongue instruction. He argued that true education should be grounded in one's culture and language, cultivating a 'sense of identity' and 'self-respect among Indians' (Gandhi, 1937). Nationalist movements increasingly saw language as a crucial element of cultural identity and resistance against colonial domination. Leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Rabindranath Tagore also focussed upon the importance of education in the mother tongue, viewing it as essential for genuine national development and self-reliance. This period saw a growing awareness and articulation of the need to decolonize the educational system and reclaim indigenous languages and cultural heritage.

The debates around language policies during the pre-Independence period were pronounced by a tension between colonial objectives and nationalist aspirations. While the British aimed to use English to consolidate their control, Indian leaders and intellectuals sought to reclaim linguistic and cultural autonomy through the promotion of indigenous languages. The pre-Independence language policies, commissions, and official documents reveal the compounded interaction between these conflicting goals. Policies like the Charter Act of 1813, Macaulay's Minute of 1835, Wood's Despatch of 1854, the Hunter Commission of 1882, and the Government of India Act of 1919 played indispensable roles in shaping the linguistic and educational panorama. This section addresses the second research question by exhibiting the complexities and tensions inherent in post-independence language policies, which sought to reconcile regional aspirations with national unity and global engagement.

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As India moved towards independence, the debates around language policies accentuated the need to balance the benefits of English proficiency with the imperative of linguistic justice and cultural preservation. The historical experiences of pre-Independence language policies continue to inform contemporary discussions on language and education in India, stressing the importance of crafting policies that respect and promote the country's rich linguistic diversity. Building on the colonial foundations analysed earlier, the post-independence period reveals efforts to reconcile these legacies with the aspirations of a multilingual and democratic nation.

Post-Independence Multilingual Approach

Following Independence, India faced the monumental task of integrating a linguistically diverse population while nurturing national unity. Aligned with the second research question, this section evaluates *how post-independence constitutional provisions and policies sought to balance regional linguistic diversity with national unity*, focusing on key frameworks like the Three-Language Formula. The framers of the Indian Constitution adopted a multilingual approach, recognising the country's linguistic diversity as both a strength and a challenge. The Eighth Schedule of the Constitution initially listed 14 languages, which has since expanded to 22, show India's commitment to preserving its linguistic heritage (Khushchandani, 1997). The recognition was essential not only for cultural preservation but also for promoting inclusive governance and social harmony. This section addresses the second research question by showcasing the problems and tensions inherent in post-independence language policies, which sought to reconcile regional aspirations with national unity and global engagement.

The University Education Commission, also known as the Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-1949), played an essential part in shaping higher education in India. It recommended the use of regional languages in universities while also stressing the importance of English for higher education and international communication (GOI, 1950). The approach aimed to balance regional linguistic pride with the practical needs of a globalising world. However, the Commission's recommendations, while progressive, were not without their shortcomings. The stress on English unintentionally reinforced its status as a superior language, creating a linguistic hierarchy that marginalised regional languages. The practical challenges of implementing regional languages in higher education were important, given the lack of standardisation and resources for many Indian languages.

The Secondary Education Commission, chaired by Dr. A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar from 1952 to 1953, was instrumental in shaping educational policies in India by stressing upon the integration of regional languages into secondary education alongside English and Hindi. The Commission's recommendations aimed to enhance linguistic diversity and reinforce regional identity within the educational framework (GOI, 1953). By advocating for a curriculum that included regional languages, the Commission sought to accommodate India's multilingual reality and support national as well as local linguistic needs. Despite these well-intentioned recommendations, the implementation faced substantial resistance, particularly in Tamil Nadu. The introduction of Hindi as a mandatory subject was met with serious opposition, reflecting '*regional anxieties*' about linguistic and cultural identity. The resistance was prominently displayed during the anti-Hindi agitations of the 1960s, led by the *Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)* party under C.N. Annadurai. These agitations were driven by fears that Hindi promotion would marginalise Tamil and impair regional autonomy (Subramanian, 2000).

Many litterateurs provide a detailed account of how the *anti-Hindi agitation* was fuelled by concerns over preserving Tamil's cultural significance and political autonomy. This resistance was not merely a reaction to a language policy but also a struggle for cultural preservation and regional rights (Guha,

2009; Ranganathan, 1965). The *anti-Hindi movement* spotlighted the difficulties involved in implementing a language policy that respects national as well as regional identities.

Among all the disputes of language and its policies and position, Gajendrakar, emphasizes upon the vital question of suspicion, while the *proponents (educationists, and the public men)* argue for the medium of instruction to be in 'regional languages'. At the same point of time, they would be not happy with 'Hindi' taking up the place of 'English' in their respective areas. Interestingly, it is often not realised by *advocates of Hindi* that a *feeling of distrust against Hindi* is more widespread than is generally believed. If the proponents of Hindi ever, raise the battle cry: "*Banish English immediately,*" it will provoke a militant response from the south counter-battle cry: "*English forever; Hindi Never*". (Gajendrakar, 1968, p. 262). However, Ganjendrakar also warns, to not commit such a mistake that would lead to unprecedented emergence of state tensions. Where not only Madras as a state, which is resistant but also "*Andhra, Mysore and Kerala as well. Bengal would probably take the attitude; Assam and Kashmir maybe; and Nagaland has already subscribed to the fact that English would be its official language*". All these 'language tensions' seems to be frightening, where the potential threat lies with the choice and hierarchy of languages. (ibid, p. 263).

The larger implications of this resistance emphasise the challenges of reconciling national language policies with regional aspirations. The Mudaliar Commission's recommendations were intended to address linguistic diversity, yet the difficulties encountered in Tamil Nadu illustrate the difficulties of aligning national policies with local contexts. Effective language policies must be sensitive to regional linguistic and cultural identities to avoid conflicts and ensure inclusive implementation. The Education Commission (1964-1966), chaired by Dr. D. S. Kothari, introduced the *Three-Language Formula*, which became a cornerstone of language policy in India. The formula was designed to promote the learning of regional languages, Hindi, and English, thereby encouraging national integration and linguistic harmony (GOI, 1966). However, the implementation of this policy faced major challenges, particularly in non-Hindi-speaking states where it was perceived as an imposition of Hindi (Annamalai, 2001). The Commission's idealistic vision failed to account for the deep-seated '*regional linguistic pride*' and the '*logistical difficulties*' of implementing a *trilingual education system* across diverse linguistic scenarios.

Meanwhile, there was an important event in connection with all these '*language chaos*', "*Roses in December: An Autobiography,*" initially published in 1973, chronicles the life of Mahommedali Currim Chagla, who held the position of Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court from 1948 to 1958. In his resignation letter as the Minister of External Affairs, M.C. Chagla cites his unyielding commitment to maintaining the country's unity as the fundamental basis of his political philosophy. He expresses grave concern that the government's proposed educational policy, involving a hurried transition from English to regional languages, poses a grave danger to this unity. Chagla, however did supported the eventual replacement of English with Hindi for unification but emphasises the need for a gradual transition to avoid compromising educational standards. Although, he at the same time also criticises the impractical timeline set for this transition, accentuating disparities among languages' development, lack of literature, and inadequate teacher preparation. In addition, the stress was also upon the potential damage to educational quality, exclusion of students and professors not familiar with regional languages, and adverse effects on science and technology education due to the sudden shift. Meanwhile, points out the threat to unity of India by replacing English, which has served as a unifying factor, with regional languages and stresses the importance of collective responsibility. His resignation stems from the conviction that the irreversible consequences of the policy, affecting millions and future generations, necessitate his freedom to express his disagreement. (Chagla, 1978) In essence, M.C. Chagla resigns due to his conviction, as he believed that the steps being taken are irreversible, and unlike most government policies that can be rectified if they prove to be flawed that the proposed educational policy, specifically the rushed transition to regional languages, would

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threaten unity, compromise educational standards, and have far-reaching negative consequences, particularly in terms of quality of education, unity, and India's position on the global stage. The resignation also sheds lights and aggravates upon the contentious nature of language policy in India. Chagla, a staunch advocate of Hindi as a national language, faced resistance from non-Hindi-speaking states, highlighting the regional sensitivities and political challenges surrounding language policy (Chagla, 1978). His resignation was a crucial moment, reflecting intense divisions and resistance that any language policy would need to steer.

Thereby, the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1968 was a major milestone, reaffirming the Three-Language Formula and emphasising the need to develop regional languages. It aimed to balance the promotion of Hindi and English with the preservation of regional languages, recognising the linguistic diversity of the country (Ministry of Education, 1968). However, the policy's effectiveness was limited by regional resistance and practical challenges. The lack of trained teachers proficient in multiple languages and the absence of adequate teaching materials in regional languages hindered its successful implementation.

The NPE 1986 and its revised Programme of Action (POA) 1992 further built on these principles, advocating for the use of regional languages in primary education while promoting Hindi and English for national and international communication. The 1986 policy and its revisions features the need for a balanced approach that respected linguistic diversity while preparing students for a globalised world (MHRD, 1986; POA, 1992). Despite these well-intentioned policies, their implementation remained inconsistent across states. In many regions, English continued to be perceived as the language of opportunity, leading to a de-facto preference for English-medium education at the expense of regional languages.

Meanwhile, the National Curriculum Frameworks (NCFs) have played a crucial part in shaping language education in India. The NCF 1975 laid the groundwork for a child-centred approach to education, emphasising the importance of mother tongue instruction in the early years. The NCF 1988 and NCF 2000 continued to promote this approach, integrating regional languages into the curriculum and highlighting the cognitive and cultural benefits of multilingual education (NCERT 1975, 1988, 2000). However, the effectiveness of these frameworks was mostly compromised by a lack of resources and training for teachers, as well as resistance from parents who preferred English education for its perceived economic benefits. The NCF 2005 demonstrated a considerable transition for a more inclusive and flexible educational framework, emphasising the role of language in cognitive development and cultural identity. It advocated for the Three-Language Formula, recognising the need for multilingual proficiency in a diverse and interconnected world (NCERT, 2005). The NCF for Foundational Stage 2022 further reinforced the importance of mother tongue education, aligning with contemporary research on early childhood education and language development (NCERT, 2022). Despite these progressive policies, their practical implementation remains a challenge, with regional disparities in educational resources and political will affecting their success.

Position papers by the National Focus Groups on Teaching of Indian Languages and Teaching of English have provided invaluable insights into the challenges and opportunities of language education in India. These documents stress upon the need for contextualised and culturally relevant language teaching strategies that cater to the diverse linguistic scenario of the country (National Focus Group on Teaching of Indian Languages, 2006; National Focus Group on Teaching of English, 2006). However, the gap between policy recommendations and on-the-ground realities often leads to suboptimal outcomes.

The NEP 2020 introduces major changes to language policy, advocating for the mother tongue or regional language as the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and

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beyond (MoE, 2020). The policy aligns with global research on the cognitive and pedagogical benefits of mother tongue education. It also reaffirms the Three-Language Formula, encouraging students to learn three languages, ensuring at least two of them are native to India. The NEP 2020 aims to balance regional linguistic pride with the practicalities of a globalised world, where proficiency in English is mostly seen as essential for socio-economic mobility. By situating NEP 2020 within a historical continuum, this section addresses the third research question, stressing upon the policy's potential to transform India's multilingual education framework while steering persistent challenges.

The implications of NEP 2020 on language education are profound, as it pursues to integrate the principles of inclusivity, collaboration, and ecological awareness into the educational structure. By promoting mother tongue education, the policy aims to enhance cognitive development and cultural identity among students. However, the challenges of implementing a multilingual education system remain, including the availability of qualified teachers and appropriate educational materials in multiple languages. To address the challenges of linguistic diversity and promote global sustainability, educational and research practices must be transformed. It involves adopting strategies that align with principles of inclusivity, collaboration, and ecological awareness. For example, teacher training programs should focus on multilingual education, equipping educators with the skills and knowledge to effectively teach in diverse linguistic settings. Additionally, educational materials should be developed in multiple languages, ensuring that all students have access to high-quality learning resources in their mother tongue. Research practices should also prioritise the study of linguistic diversity and its implications for education. It includes investigating the cognitive and cultural benefits of multilingual education, as well as exploring innovative teaching strategies that promote linguistic inclusion and sustainability. Collaborative research initiatives, involving educators, policymakers, and linguistic experts, can help develop contextually relevant solutions that address the unique challenges of linguistic panorama of India.

The historical roots and transformative trajectories of language policies in Indian education emphasise upon the difficult reciprocation of colonial influences, post-independence developments, and contemporary challenges. From the Radhakrishnan Commission to the NEP 2020, various committees, commissions, and policies have sought to traverse linguistic diversity of India, promoting regional languages while recognising the importance of Hindi and English. The NEP 2020 represents an important step towards a more inclusive and sustainable approach to language education, emphasising the role of mother tongue instruction and multilingual proficiency. However, the successful implementation of these policies requires ongoing efforts to address the practical challenges of multilingual education and promote a culture of linguistic inclusivity and collaboration.

Intersectionality of Language, Identity, and Education

Language is intrinsically linked to identity and education, influencing access, equity, and social mobility. In post-independence India, the emphasis on English proficiency created a dichotomy between vernacular and English-medium education. English became a symbol of modernity and upward mobility, while regional languages were often viewed as inferior (deSouza, 2023). This dichotomy perpetuated social stratification, as proficiency in English became a prerequisite for economic and social advancement (Jhingran, 2009).

Accessibility and Equity in Education

The accessibility of education in classical languages like Sanskrit and the impact of colonial language policies on indigenous languages have had lasting repercussions. Sanskrit, once accessible to a select few, has seen efforts to democratise its learning post-independence. However, these efforts have

mostly been met with limited success due to the dominance of English and regional languages in the educational sphere (Ramaswamy, 1999).

Colonial language policies, which prioritised English, contributed to the erosion of indigenous languages and literatures. Post-independence policies attempted to rectify this imbalance by promoting regional languages, but the global dominance of English continued to exert pressure on the linguistic situations (Ramanathan, 2005). The emphasis on English has led to a situation where fluency in the language is mostly equated with educational success and social mobility. This has created disparities in educational access and quality, particularly for students from rural and economically disadvantaged backgrounds who may not have the same opportunities to learn English as their urban and affluent counterparts. The privileging of English in higher education and professional sectors further aggravates these inequalities, limiting the social and economic mobility of non-English speakers.

Policy Responses and Transformative Trajectories

Constitutional Provisions and Policy Frameworks

The Constitution of India, through Articles 343-351, laid the foundation for linguistic policies, recognising Hindi as the official language while allowing the use of English for official purposes. The Official Languages Act of 1963 further solidified this bilingual approach. Various committees and commissions, such as the National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1968 and 1986, sought to balance the promotion of regional languages with the necessity of English proficiency (Agnihotri, 2010).

The constitutional provisions and policy frameworks reflect an ongoing attempt to balance the promotion of regional languages with the practical necessity of English for global engagement. The Official Languages Act of 1963, for instance, allowed for the continued use of English for official purposes alongside Hindi, acknowledging the practical realities of India's linguistic diversity and the global importance of English. Subsequent education policies, such as the NPE of 1968 and 1986, further emphasised the need for a balanced approach, promoting regional languages while ensuring proficiency in English for higher education and professional opportunities.

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

The NEP 2020 represents a significant milestone in educational scenario, emphasising multilingualism and the importance of mother-tongue instruction in early education. It advocates for a flexible, holistic, and multidisciplinary approach, aligning with global best practices while respecting India's linguistic diversity (GoI, 2020). The policy's recommendations are rooted in the historical context of language question, aiming to strike a balance between local languages and global competencies. The NEP 2020's emphasis on mother-tongue instruction in the early years of education demonstrates a recognition of the cognitive and cultural benefits of learning in one's native language. Research has shown that children learn best when instructed in their mother tongue, as it enhances comprehension, cognitive development, and cultural identity (UNESCO, 2016). By promoting mother-tongue instruction, the NEP 2020 aims to create a more inclusive and equitable education system, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed academically and socially.

However, the implementation of the NEP 2020 faces several challenges, including the availability of trained teachers, the development of appropriate teaching materials, and the practical difficulties of managing multilingual classrooms. These challenges must be addressed to ensure the successful implementation of the policy and the realisation of its goals.

Transforming Education and Research for Sustainable Futures

Critique of Utilitarian Approaches

The study also aligns with “*Transforming Education and Research*,” challenging utilitarian models based on competition, individualism, and meritocracy. Aligned with the *fourth research question*, this section proposes actionable strategies to address linguistic diversity in education while promoting global sustainability and equity. These models often perpetuate inequities and narrow knowledge silos, sabotaging the broader goals of education (Biesta, 2010). By advocating for a redirection of educational purposes, content, and methods, this research emphasises the need for education that promotes global sustainability, cooperation, and intercultural understanding (Sterling, 2011).

The critique of utilitarian approaches in education stresses upon the limitations of models that prioritise individual achievement and competition. These approaches often fail to address the social and environmental challenges facing the world today, perpetuating inequalities and promoting a narrow focus on academic and economic success. In contrast, transformative education emphasises the development of skills and values necessary for sustainable living, including cooperation, empathy, and ecological awareness. The approach pursues to create a more just and equitable world by cultivating a sense of global citizenship and responsibility.

Education as a Catalyst for Social Change

Education has the potential to serve as a catalyst for social change, promoting solidarity, ecological awareness, and intercultural understanding. The decolonisation of curricula, embracing diverse ecologies of knowledge, is crucial for creating inclusive and equitable educational environments (Mignolo, 2011). The study envisions education as a transformative tool, preparing students for a dynamic, interconnected world.

Decolonising education involves challenging the dominance of Western epistemologies and embracing diverse ways of knowing and understanding the world. The approach recognises the *value of indigenous knowledge systems*, promoting cultural diversity and intercultural understanding. By nurturing an inclusive and equitable education system, decolonising education can help address historical injustices and create a more just and sustainable future. *Education for sustainability* emphasises the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental systems, promoting a holistic understanding of global challenges. This approach pursues to empower students to become active participants in creating sustainable solutions, promoting a sense of responsibility and agency. By integrating sustainability into the curriculum, education can play an essential role in shaping a more just and equitable world.

Findings and Discussion

Historical Layers of the ‘Language Question’

The analysis of historical documents shows the layered and complicated nature of the ‘language question’. Colonial language policies, particularly the emphasis on English education, had a intense impact on the linguistic and educational scenario. The 1813 Charter Act and Macaulay's Minutes not only marginalised indigenous languages but also created a socio-economic divide, privileging English-educated individuals (Gazzola, et.al., 2023)

Post-independence policies sought to address these imbalances by promoting regional languages and adopting a multilingual approach. The Three-Language Formula and constitutional provisions aimed to balance *regional pride* with *national unity*. However, the implementation of these policies has been uneven, often reflecting regional linguistic politics and practical challenges. The findings feature the ongoing struggle to balance the promotion of regional languages with the practical necessity of English for global engagement. The struggle is evident in the various policy shifts and debates that have characterised the post-independence period. The analysis highlights the need for a more nuanced and context-specific approach to language policy, recognising the diversity and complexity of the linguistic panorama in India.

Contemporary Policy Initiatives and Multilingualism

The NEP 2020 marks a vital change in India's language policy, emphasising multilingualism and mother-tongue instruction in early education. This section addresses the *third research question* by deconstructing as well as analysing the NEP 2020's provisions on language education, situating it within the historical trajectory of Indian language policies and assessing its transformative potential. The policy aligns with global best practices, recognising the cognitive and cultural benefits of learning in one's native language (UNESCO, 2016). The emphasis on mother-tongue instruction aims to create a more inclusive and equitable education system, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed academically and socially.

However, the implementation of the NEP 2020 faces several challenges, including the availability of trained teachers, the development of appropriate teaching materials, and the practical difficulties of managing multilingual classrooms. Addressing these challenges is crucial for the successful implementation of the policy and the realisation of its goals. The findings suggest that the NEP 2020 represents a promising but difficult shift in India's language policy. The policy's emphasis on multilingualism and mother-tongue instruction aligns with global best practices and the cognitive and cultural benefits of learning in one's native language. However, the practical challenges of implementation must be addressed to ensure the policy's success and its potential to create a more inclusive and equitable education system.

Impact on Identity and Social Mobility

The emphasis on English proficiency in post-independence India has created a dichotomy between vernacular and English-medium education. English has become a symbol of modernity and upward mobility, often marginalising regional languages and perpetuating social stratification (Ricento, 2013). This dichotomy has significant implications for identity and social mobility, particularly for students from rural and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

The findings emphasise the ongoing impact of language policies on identity and social mobility. The privileging of English in education and professional sectors has created disparities in educational access and quality, limiting the social and economic mobility of non-English speakers. It highlights the need for a more balanced and inclusive approach to language policy, recognising the value of regional languages while ensuring proficiency in English for global engagement. The balanced approach is crucial for creating an inclusive and equitable education system that cultivates social mobility and addresses the historical and contemporary challenges of the 'language question'.

Decolonisation of Education and Linguistic Diversity

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The decolonisation of education is essential for addressing the historical injustices and imbalances created by colonial language policies. The imposition of English by colonial powers not only marginalised indigenous languages but also created a socio-economic divide. This divide continues to influence educational outcomes and social mobility in post-independence India. Decolonising education involves recognising and validating the diversity of India's linguistic heritage and incorporating indigenous knowledge systems into the curriculum (Mignolo, 2011).

Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Integrating indigenous knowledge systems into the educational framework can help in the decolonisation process. Indigenous languages and knowledge systems provide unique perspectives and methodologies that can enrich the educational experience. For instance, traditional ecological knowledge, often transmitted through indigenous languages, provides valuable insights into sustainable living and environmental stewardship (Berkes, 2018). By incorporating these knowledge systems into the curriculum, education can become a tool for preserving and promoting linguistic and cultural diversity.

Language and Cognitive Development

Research indicates that learning in one's mother tongue enhances cognitive development and educational outcomes. Children who receive early education in their mother tongue exhibit better comprehension, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills (Cummins, 2001). The NEP 2020's emphasis on mother-tongue instruction in early education aligns with these findings, aiming to create a more inclusive and equitable education system. The cognitive benefits of mother-tongue instruction are well-documented. For example, a study conducted in Ethiopia found that students who received instruction in their mother tongue performed better academically compared to those who were taught in a second language (Heugh, 2006). Similar findings have been reported in other multilingual contexts, highlighting the importance of mother-tongue instruction for educational equity and quality.

Balancing Regional Languages and English

Regional Languages in Education

Promoting regional languages in education is crucial for preserving linguistic diversity and promoting cultural identity. However, the implementation of regional language policies must consider practical challenges such as the availability of teaching resources and trained educators. Successful implementation requires comprehensive teacher training programs, the development of high-quality teaching materials, and community engagement (Annamalai, 2001). Regional languages are indispensable in shaping '*cultural identity*' and '*social cohesion*'. For instance, Tamil Nadu's emphasis on Tamil in education and public life reflects the state's commitment to preserving its linguistic heritage. Similar efforts can be seen in states like West Bengal, Maharashtra, and Karnataka, where regional languages are promoted through educational policies and cultural initiatives.

The Role of English

While promoting regional languages is important, proficiency in English remains a key factor for global engagement and economic mobility. The challenge lies in balancing the promotion of regional languages with the practical necessity of English. English serves as a link language, facilitating communication and collaboration across linguistic boundaries within India and internationally. The NEP 2020 recognises this dual need, advocating for multilingualism that includes proficiency in both regional languages and English (Government of India, 2020).

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English has become a global lingua franca, playing a crucial role in international diplomacy, trade, science, and technology. In India, English proficiency is often associated with better job prospects, higher education opportunities, and social mobility. Therefore, language policies must strike a balance between promoting regional languages and ensuring English proficiency to prepare students for a globalised world.

Policy Implementation Challenges

Teacher Training and Professional Development

Effective implementation of language policies requires robust teacher training and professional development programs. Teachers must be equipped with the skills and resources to teach in multiple languages and adapt to diverse linguistic environments. Continuous professional development and support are essential for teachers to effectively implement multilingual education policies (Menken & García, 2010). Teacher training programs should focus on bilingual and multilingual education methodologies, intercultural competence, and inclusive teaching practices. For example, the Language Teacher Education Program in South Africa provides comprehensive training for teachers to handle multilingual classrooms, promoting linguistic diversity and inclusion (Heugh et al., 1995). Similar programs can be developed in India to support the implementation of the NEP 2020.

Development of Teaching Materials

The development of high-quality, culturally relevant teaching materials in multiple languages is critical for the success of multilingual education policies. Educational materials must reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of India, promoting inclusivity and equity. Collaboration with local communities, educators, and linguistic experts can ensure that teaching materials are relevant and effective (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009). Developing teaching materials in multiple languages requires a collaborative approach involving educators, linguists, and community members. For instance, the Multilingual Education Project in Nepal has successfully developed teaching materials in several indigenous languages through community participation and government support (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2015). Similar initiatives can be implemented in India to support the NEP 2020's goals

Multilingual Classrooms

Managing multilingual classrooms shows practical challenges, including language barriers and varying levels of language proficiency among students. Teachers must be equipped with strategies to manage these challenges, such as differentiated instruction and the use of translanguaging techniques. Translanguaging involves the use of multiple languages in the classroom to facilitate learning, allowing students to draw on their full linguistic repertoire (García & Wei, 2014). Translanguaging can be an effective pedagogical approach in multilingual classrooms, enabling students to use their home languages alongside the medium of instruction. This approach has been successfully implemented in various educational contexts, promoting linguistic diversity and enhancing learning outcomes. For example, the New York City Department of Education's Dual Language Programs utilize translanguaging to support bilingualism and biliteracy among students (García & Wei, 2014). Similar strategies can be adopted in India to support multilingual education.

Multilingualism in a Global Context

India's experience with multilingualism resonates strongly with challenges faced by other linguistically diverse countries, such as South Africa, Nepal, and Switzerland. Each of these nations

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confronts the complicated task of balancing linguistic diversity with national unity, socio-economic development, and access to quality education. In India, the promotion of regional languages alongside Hindi and English reflects the nation's unique cultural fusion. However, this effort replicates struggles faced by countries like South Africa, where the multilingual nature of society poses similar challenges in maintaining equitable educational access across different language groups. Similarly, Nepal's approach to incorporating multiple languages into its educational policies reverberates India's attempts to create inclusive systems that respect linguistic diversity while ensuring effective communication and academic success.

An important parallel can be drawn between these countries' attempts to formulate policies that strike a balance between linguistic diversity and socio-economic development. As nations continue to prioritise global competitiveness and technological advancements, ensuring that language policies do not aggravate socio-economic divides becomes increasingly important. The implications of these shared experiences highlight the need for policies that are flexible, context-sensitive, and informed by local socio-cultural realities, while drawing from successful practices in other countries.

These global parallels suggest that multilingual education should not only be seen as a national challenge but as a collective concern across countries facing similar issues. By engaging in mutual learning, countries can exchange insights into how they manage the intersection of language, identity, and education. This could pave the way for policies that support not only linguistic equity but also socio-economic and educational advancement on a global scale.

Conclusion

Education possesses profound transformative potential, influencing individual lives and broader global interactions. The paper shows, how education can act as a catalyst for global sustainability, cooperation, and intercultural understanding. By moving past the traditional utilitarian models and advocating for a redefined educational approach—one that emphasises *purpose, content, and methods*—education can drive potential social change (Sterling, 2011). Integrating diverse knowledge systems and decolonising curricula are essential steps toward creating inclusive and equitable educational environments, thus nurturing global citizenship and responsibility.

The exploration of India's historical and contemporary language policies sheds light on the complicated aspects of the 'language question', shaped by colonial legacies, post-independence developments, and current challenges. The NEP 2020 represents a notable change towards a more inclusive and sustainable approach to language education, focusing on multilingualism and mother-tongue instruction. However, for this policy to fully realise its potential, it must overcome practical challenges associated with multilingual education and nurture a culture of linguistic inclusivity and collaboration. This research tries to make a significant contribution to the discourse on linguistic diversity and educational equity by tracing the evolution of language policies in Indian education. It accentuates the necessity of balancing regional languages with English to maintain linguistic diversity while equipping students for global engagement. Emphasising the decolonisation of education and the incorporation of diverse knowledge systems aligning with the principles of Transforming Education and Research, thereby, advocating for a more just and sustainable future.

All things considered, promoting mother-tongue instruction, balancing regional languages with English, advancing multilingual education, and actively engaging communities are essential strategies for achieving educational equity and sustainability. Addressing these dimensions enables future policies to not only preserve linguistic diversity but also establish an inclusive and equitable educational framework. By situating India's linguistic policies within a global context, this paper illuminates shared challenges in multilingual education and identifies transformative pathways for

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promoting equity and intercultural understanding. These insights potentially contribute to the discourse on comparative education, providing a foundation for global collaboration and sustainable educational practices in diverse contexts.

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