

Multilingual Vision of the NEP 2020: Analyzing Linguistic Tensions in the Implementation of the Three-Language Formula in Non-Hindi-Speaking States

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Abstract: *This research paper examines the linguistic tensions that arise in the non-Hindi-speaking states of India while implementing the Three-Language Formula (TLF) under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Even though policymakers claim that it develops rational thinking, strengthens cultural diversity and enhances multilingual proficiency, the directions of this policy have produced grave concerns in non-Hindi-speaking states. The policy has been perceived as a threat to regional languages because it tends to prioritize Hindi and Sanskrit, leading to linguistic tensions between the National Education Policy and the Regional Linguistic Identities. This policy expects children to learn three languages from their early years of education. Besides advocating mother-tongue or regional language instruction, it mandates the learning of two additional languages. Accordingly, two of these languages must be native Indian languages, while the third one may be a in tribal and socio-economically backward regions where students struggle to cope up with its foreign language. Several educational experts visualize practical difficulties in its implementation at schools. They argue that the TLF may increase academic burden and dropout rates, especially demands. The present study employs a survey method to explore these burning issues by collecting responses from teachers and students in higher education across selected institutions in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. This study aims to address sensitive strategies that give respect to regional linguistic autonomy while promoting multilingual education.*

Keywords: Linguistic Tension, Multilingual proficiency, National Education Policy, Regional Linguistic Autonomy, and Three-Language-Formula

1.Introduction

Linguistic identity of a country has always been entangled with political confrontations and cultural assertions of the land. The Three-Language Formula has triggered grave concern in the non-Hindi-speaking states of India. Critics believe that the NEP 2020 indirectly imposing Hindi as the national language of India despite having the claim of flexibility. They assert that multilingual vision of the NEP 2020 threatens linguistic sovereignty of the southern states of India. The tension between multilingual proficiency and its practical repercussions emphasizes the need for a critical enquiry into the language policy of the NEP 2020. The policymakers state that it intends to reform the educational background of the country with the socio-cultural and linguistic diversity of India and its global aspirations. They further claim that it envisages an educational system that must be holistic, flexible, and multidisciplinary and specifically rooted in Indian knowledge system. Multilingualism has been projected as a means to develop rational thinking, cultural veracity, and national unity.

In 1968, linguistic tensions arose in South India-predominantly in Tamil Nadu-from the implementation of the TLF under the National Policy on Education, that required to endorse national integration through multilingual education. Linguistic tensions in Tamil Nadu were obvious, politically organized, and confrontational. It was perceived as an indirect imposition of Hindi on non-Hindi-speaking people. Consequently, anti-Hindi

agitations arose in Tamil Nadu to resist the NPE 1968 and the people of the state strongly opposed compulsory Hindi learning. They observed it as a threat to Tamil Language, culture, and federal linguistic rights. Subsequently, the state embraced a two-language formula-Tamil and English-as their language policy, by denying the TLF of the NPE 1968. In Kerala, feeble confrontations had been witnessed against the policy but it prudently safeguarded the supremacy of Malayalam language in education.

The NEP 2020 intensely supports the use of mother tongue or regional language as the medium of instruction during the early stages of education. The policy argues that children can easily understand concepts in their home-based language and it further supports that multilingual education which is placed not only as a communicative device but also as a knowledgeable source that reinforces rationality and intelligibility. Accordingly, the policy asserts that students have to learn three languages during their schooling period and at least two of the three languages must be Indian native languages. The third language may be a foreign language and English language is not mandatory. The policy renews the TLF as a tool to operate its multilingual vision for promoting national integration and conserving the linguistic heritage of India. Even though it pronounces multilingual vision to foster unity in diversity, it implements contradictions between national integration and regional linguistic rights. This perception sets the stage for analyzing the emerging linguistic tensions in South India from the application of TLF.

The NPE 1968 introduced the TLF as a mechanism to promote national integration and linguistic accommodation in post-independent India whereas NEP 2020 revitalizes the TLF as a tool for promoting critical thinking, cultural restoration and international competence. Even if the NEP 2020 recommends ideological and pedagogical changes, the core concern remains the same. The protection of regional linguistic autonomy within a centralized vision of national integration stands as a critical standpoint of the non-Hindi-speaking states. The NPE 1968 focused on language learning as a subject but the NEP 2020 encourages language learning as a medium of instruction. However, it is realized that the impact of the policies is to include Hindi or Sanskrit in everyday classroom practices. While the first official policy included Hindi, English and regional languages as functional tools, the NEP 2020 emphasizes Indian Classical languages, specifically Sanskrit. In 1968 linguistic tension in South India was driven by Hindi imposition and cultural demotion. In 2020 the tension arises from ideological and practical restraints rooted in the policy frameworks.

Scholarly perspectives on this policy underscores significant incoherence between its affirmed assurances to multilingualism and its supposed favoring of Hindi and Sanskrit, specifically in non-Hindi-speaking states. Mohanty (2021) believes that the TLF under the NPE 1968 recommended Hindi as the Indian language in non-Hindi-speaking states but the TLF under the NEP 2020 promotes Sanskrit along with Hindi. Sanskrit is unduly recognized as a scientifically designed classical language and Hindi is repeatedly referred as a National Language. Scholars like Ramanathan (2021) and Kumar (2022) argue that this symbolic privileging to Sanskrit and Hindi will make a linguistic hierarchy that challenges the flexibility of the policy. In Tamil Nadu, the NEP 2020 has been perceived as an ideological push of Hindi and Sanskrit under the guise of multilingualism. Annamalai, (2020) and Ramaswamy (2022) believe that federalism of India will be diluted and Dravidian languages will be marginalized under this policy. Menon (2023) opines that the language policy of the NEP 2020 challenges the linguistic federalism of India by giving priorities to Hindi and Sanskrit. As a result, it increases resistance movements in

Tamil Nadu and generates complication in understanding the aims of multilingual education.

There is inadequate research focused on the practical difficulties to implement the multilingual policy in non-Hindi-Speaking states like Tamil Nadu. Most of the research works concentrate on the national-level policy analysis and the state-level analysis remain insufficient. For example, responses of the stakeholders of the states, concerns of regional languages and the practical challenges of implementing the TLF. In addition, there is lack of comparative analysis that explore linguistic federalism of states. This research paper addresses this gap by examining the linguistic tensions arising from the implementation of NEP 2020 in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

The main objective of this study is to critically analyze the vision of the policy that whether it is multilingual or preoccupied with the thought of imposing Hindi and Sanskrit. It intends to study how the preference of Hindi and Sanskrit affects the status of regional languages. Thus, it aims to examine the responses of students and teachers of higher education level in connection with the above. Several studies and debate have been conducted to discuss the NEP 2020 and its multilingual vision. Unlike the other studies, this paper focuses on the responses of the stakeholders of higher education classes in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, as the snags reported from these two states are comparatively high. Since early-stage learners are not able to respond properly to policy-oriented questionnaires, the respondents are taken from higher education level. The questionnaire has the following questions to analyze the perceptions of the stakeholders. They are:

1. Does the NEP 2020 strongly promote multilingualism in higher education?
2. Does the NEP 2020 prioritise regional languages over English?
3. Is the language policy practical to implement in classrooms?
4. Does the NEP 2020 reflect the real educational needs of students?
5. Has the shift towards multilingualism created challenges in teaching or learning?

2. Analysis of the Survey

1. The NEP 2020 strongly promotes multilingualism in higher education

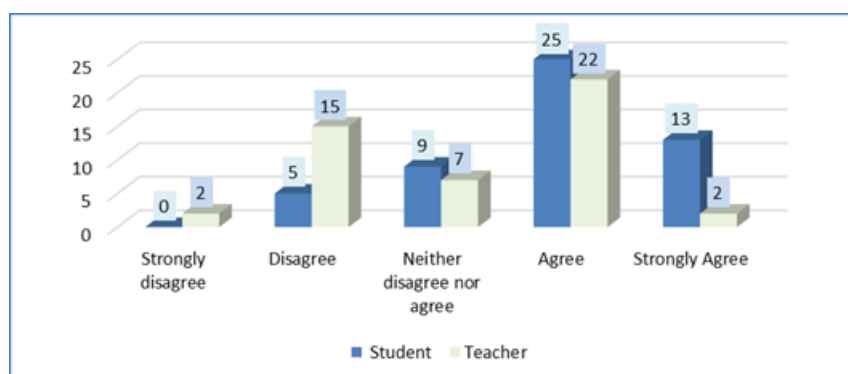


Figure 1

Students generally perceive NEP 2020 as a strong promoter of multilingualism in higher education, with high levels of agreement and minimal opposition. Teachers are

more cautious or critical, with nearly equal proportions agreeing and disagreeing.

2. The NEP 2020 prioritises regional languages over English

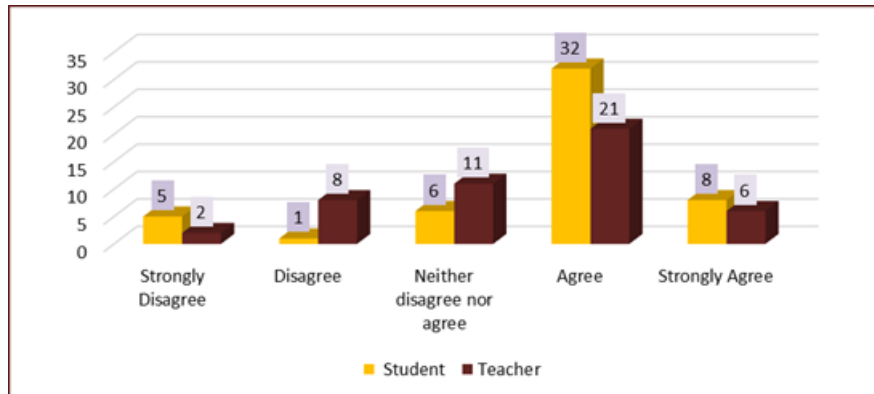


Figure 2

Students largely perceive NEP 2020 as favoring regional languages over English, indicating a strong alignment with the policy's multilingual emphasis. Teachers exhibit more

skepticism and ambivalence with higher rates of disagreement and neutrality.

3. The language policy is practical to implement in classrooms

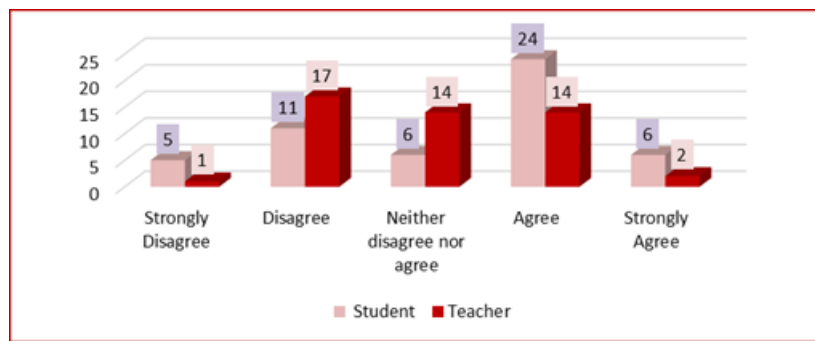


Figure 3

Students lean toward viewing the language policy as feasible for classroom implementation, though not

overwhelmingly. Teachers are more critical, with a substantial portion expressing doubt or indecision.

4. The NEP 2020 reflects the real educational needs of students

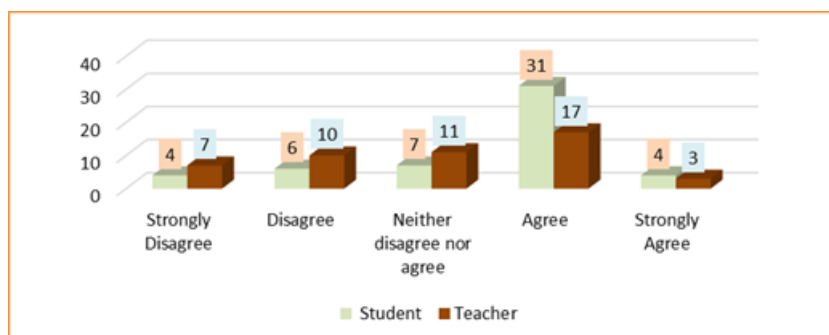


Figure 4

Students generally perceive NEP 2020 as aligned with their educational needs, suggesting that the policy resonates with their expectations or aspirations. Teachers

are more divided, with a substantial proportion expressing doubt or neutrality-possibly reflecting concerns about feasibility, inclusivity, or implementation gaps.

5. The shift towards multilingualism has created challenges in teaching/learning

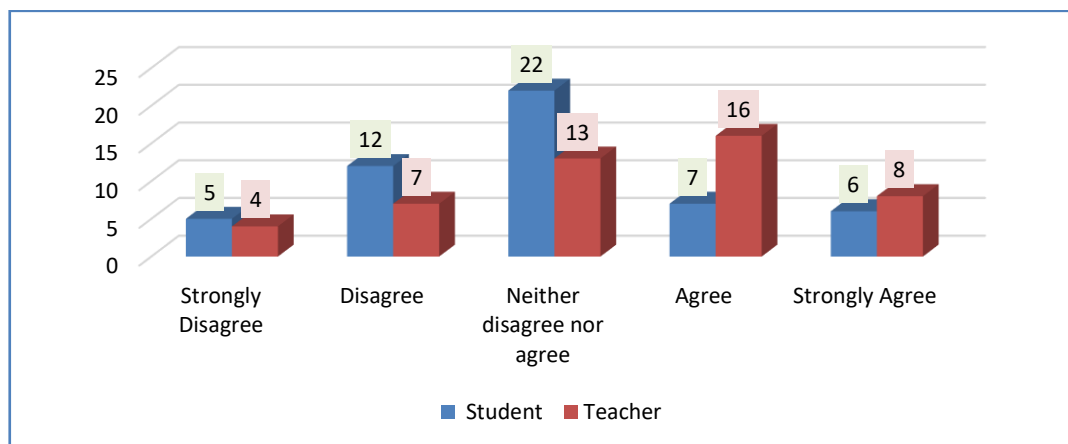


Figure 5

Students are relatively ambivalent or unconcerned about the challenges posed by multilingualism in education. Teachers, in contrast, express significant concern, likely reflecting their first-hand experience with instructional, curricular, and resource-related complexities.

Exploring and Identifying the Gap between the policy's multilingual vision and its implementation

To find the level of perceptions, the respondents are asked 5 questions on five-point Likert scale. The responses are scored as 1 for 'Strongly disagree', 2 for 'Disagree', 3 for 'Neutral', 4 for 'Agree' and 5 for 'Strongly agree'. The

total score of the 5 questions for all 100 respondents is found out, based on which we calculate the mean % score of level of perceptions of Multilingual Prioritization in NEP 2020 $[MPS = \frac{MeanScore \times 100}{Maximumpossible score}]$. This score is classified into one of the four groups as poor or low if the mean % score is less than 35%, average if the mean % score is between 35 to 50 per cent, good or medium if the mean % score lies in the interval 50 to 75% and excellent or high if the mean % score is above 75%. A one sample Z test is carried out to test the significance. The following table gives the Mean, SD, Mean % Score and Z value of the variable considered.

Mean, Standard Deviation and z value for Classroom Practice & Resources

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean % score	CV	z	p value
Classroom Practice & Resources	100	16.99	4.15	67.96	24.45	10.807	<0.001

3. Interpretations

- The mean score of 16.99 and 67.96% mean percentage suggests that while there is some alignment with NEP's multilingual goals, implementation is not yet optimal.
- A CV of 24.45% indicates noticeable variability, implying that some institutions or classrooms are better equipped or more proactive than others.
- The high z-value (10.807) and $p < 0.001$ confirm that the observed perceptions are statistically significant, reinforcing the presence of a real, measurable gap.

4. Recommendations

- Resource Equity: Ensure equitable distribution of multilingual teaching materials and digital tools across regions and institutions.
- Teacher Training: Invest in multilingual pedagogy training to empower educators to implement the policy effectively.

- Monitoring & Feedback: Establish mechanisms to regularly assess classroom-level implementation and gather feedback from teachers and students.
- Localized Support: Adapt support strategies based on regional linguistic diversity and institutional capacity.

There is a noticeable gap persists between NEP 2020's multilingual vision and its practical execution in classrooms. While the policy is acknowledged and partially implemented, inconsistencies in classroom practices and resource availability point to implementation challenges that need to be addressed. In Tamil Nadu, this policy has not been implemented since it imposes linguistic bias and fail to respect linguistic federalism. In addition, TLF of NEP 2020 has been perceived as imposing a disproportionate curricular and cognitive burden on learners at primary levels. Multilingual policy can be included in higher education level as the learners of this stage expressed their readiness in learning different languages. This may safeguard better learner autonomy, institutional preparedness and positioning of regional linguistic realities as the students of higher education level

are capable of learning multiple languages with strong cognitive capacity.

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