



Promotion of the Regional Knowledge Systems (RKS) within NEP through Language, Culture and Identity

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India represents a paradigm shift in the country's educational vision by emphasizing a holistic, inclusive, and multidisciplinary approach to learning. The present study explores the dynamic interconnections among language, culture, and identity, and how these dimensions collectively shape the educational fabric of the nation. It argues that the promotion of native languages and indigenous knowledge systems constitutes a crucial step in decolonizing education, while simultaneously fostering the cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional growth of learners.

Moreover, the study investigates how the integration of local wisdom, regional arts, folk traditions, and cultural practices within the curriculum contributes to a meaningful and sustainable educational transformation. Such integration not only safeguards India's age-old heritage and cultural diversity, but also enhances learners' critical understanding and deep learning. The paper further proposes a conceptual framework for incorporating Regional Knowledge Systems (RKS) into educational practice, outlines pedagogical implications, and charts a feasible pathway for implementation. In doing so, it identifies key challenges and opportunities that accompany this transformative endeavor. Ultimately, the study underscores the potential of NEP 2020 to construct an equitable, contextually relevant, and culturally vibrant educational landscape that reflects the essence of India's intellectual and spiritual traditions.

Keywords: Culture, Identity, Language, RKS, NEP 2020, Decolonisation of Education.

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Introduction

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a significant shift in Indian education system, which highlights how learner can be identified through their respective native language and culture associated with it. It is evident from the history in India that Indian education system has lost its sheen due to colonial impact on its education and how it systematically destroyed the essence of regional languages, culture, heritage in favour of western culture and languages. In the field of Linguistics, the same is referred as "cognitive disconnect." (Cummins, 2000). Cognitive disconnection occurs when teaching instruction is given in a language other than their native tongue. It results in learners grappling understanding of the new concepts in an unfamiliar linguistic channel, which not only limits their understanding but also affects their critical thinking. It also implies that integrating native language into teaching and learning process assists learners better in their linguistic and cognitive process besides improving their confidence in society. One of the major objectives of introducing the NEP 2020 is to address this pertinent issue and it offers a practical solution by adopting multilingualism and teaching instruction in native languages till Grade 5, and beyond if necessary (Ministry of Education, 2020). It promotes preserving local cultures and languages along with individuals ability to connect with their nativity and languages throughout their lives.

The policy's purpose goes beyond a linguistic adjustment and cultural and psychological imperative. Referring to the similar context, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) mentions that language represents culture of a community and its worldview. It is a source of survival of its culture and heritage. By imparting training and encouragement to teachers to employ native/mother-tongue in their teaching practices, one can promote developing proficiency in a language and awareness among its users that the role of language goes beyond channel for communication but also platform culture, values, native knowledge. Through encouraging regional languages, the NEP aim to create an ideal platform where it builds a profound understanding deeper connection between students and their indigenous culture, to reinforce learners identity and intellectual curiosity.

The study builds an argument regarding the significant role of the NEP 2020 in integrating the mainstream curriculum into the regional knowledge systems (RKS). RKS being comprehensive, it includes rich cultural heritage emerged over many generations within a particular community by exploring community's traditional, practical, and philosophical knowledge. This encompasses local agricultural knowledge, traditional healing systems, folklore, artistic expressions, and indigenous scientific epistemologies. By re-centering these knowledge traditions within educational frameworks, we move towards epistemic justice—recognizing and legitimizing local ways of knowing that have long been marginalized by colonial and hegemonic systems of thought. Such an approach renders education contextually relevant and epistemologically inclusive, while simultaneously empowering local communities through the reclamation of their intellectual agency. Moreover, it fosters a deep sense of cultural pride and identity, enabling learners to view their heritage not as peripheral, but as an integral component of global knowledge production.

Review of Literature:

The aspects such as culture, language and identity share an intricate relationship and thus it has long been considered as a worthy subject of scholarly exploration. The paper builds on the basis i.e. internalization of cultural tools through language as its primary medium. To support this view, the study draws core theories of sociocultural learning (Vygotsky, 1978) where it views how language is deeply rooted in its culture. For instance, a native language of a child always remains as an initial bridge to comprehend the society around them. Further, mother tongue of a child shapes his/her cultural schemas as well as cognitive processes. Hence, it can be stated that encouraging native/regional language in the academic institutions, one can augment children's comprehension and importance of culture, nativity, native place and language. Absence of such efforts lead to the gradual decline of native language because of the impact of the languages of commerce, science and technology (English language).

Language as a Carrier of Culture: Every native language of a region plays a dominant role in encoding worldview of communities, values of culture and various historical narratives associated with it. Taking an example of words, idioms and phrases of arts, crafts, farming in a regional dialect represents a region's profound connection to the specific region and its changes in the seasons in addition to the regional moral tales, traditional music, songs. These remain rich resources of passing down cultural memory and moral reasoning to the next generations. Such interdependence speaks volumes about how culture and language remain inseparable.

Language constitutes the very core of individual and collective identity. A child's mother tongue serves as the primary medium of familial communication, community interaction, and early socialization, thereby nurturing a profound sense of belonging, continuity, and psychological security. When the mother tongue is marginalized within formal education, it can generate cultural dissonance, diminish self-esteem, and weaken student engagement (Cummins, 2000). In alignment with this understanding, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 underscores the importance of multilingual education as a means of validating learners' linguistic and cultural backgrounds, thereby fostering confidence, resilience, and cultural pride among students.

A growing body of research substantiates that multilingualism enhances cognitive flexibility, creativity, and problem-solving capacity (Bialystok, 2001; Kroll & Bialystok, 2012). The three-language formula proposed in NEP 2020—comprising the mother tongue or regional language, a modern Indian language, and a foreign language—strategically harnesses these cognitive advantages. Exposure to multiple linguistic systems develops executive control, metalinguistic awareness, and adaptive thinking, equipping learners with the intellectual versatility needed to navigate both local contexts and global environments. Multilingual education thus emerges not merely as a linguistic policy, but as a cognitive and pedagogical innovation that enriches students' intellectual growth.

Language, culture, and identity are mutually constitutive dimensions that cannot be meaningfully separated in educational practice. Language operates as a repository of culture, an emblem of identity, and a medium of cognition and thought. The promotion of multilingualism and Regional Knowledge Systems (RKS) under NEP 2020 reinforces this interconnectedness by nurturing learners who are culturally rooted, cognitively agile, and socially responsive. Through this integrative framework, education becomes not only a process of knowledge acquisition but also a transformative act of cultural preservation and identity affirmation, aligning learning with the lived realities of India's diverse communities.

Research Methodology:

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 places significant emphasis on vocational education beginning from Grade 6, advocating exposure to traditional arts, crafts, and community-based skill systems. This approach serves as a medium for intergenerational knowledge transmission, allowing students to engage with skills and practices deeply embedded in local culture. For instance, a learner from a village renowned for its pottery tradition can explore the science of ceramics—integrating principles from geology and chemistry—through a hands-on, culturally contextualized learning experience. Supporting this perspective, Kumar (2021) asserts that such initiatives foster culturally responsive and academically rigorous learning environments, enriching the scope for experiential pedagogy while preserving indigenous knowledge systems and enhancing students' vocational competence.

Traditional agricultural practices across India embody centuries of accumulated ecological wisdom, reflecting a profound understanding of local soils, climate patterns, and biodiversity. Integrating these practices into science and geography curricula can render learning authentic, place-based, and environmentally conscious. For instance, lessons on biodiversity, soil management, and sustainable agriculture become more meaningful when rooted in indigenous practices observed within the learners' own regions. In a related context, Agarwal (1995) highlighted that terrace farming in the Himalayan region not only facilitated rice cultivation in challenging terrains but also promoted ecological balance and biodiversity. Similarly, traditional farming systems in Bengal have advanced the understanding of climate adaptation and resource conservation, reinforcing the educational value of integrating ecological heritage into formal learning frameworks.

Folklore, Storytelling, and History: Traditional folklore and oral histories are repositories of a community's values and historical memory. Using these as a basis for literature and social studies classes can make history more engaging and relatable, connecting students to their local heritage. While speaking about absence of community values and alternative historical perspectives in the textbooks, Chaudhuri (2010) said that employing folklore, storytelling and history as a means in textbooks, values and nativity can be better imparted.

De-colonization of Knowledge: The promotion of RKS is a powerful step towards decolonizing education. It challenges the notion that knowledge is solely a Western construct, validating the diverse and rich intellectual

traditions of India. Such transformation provides dual advantage to learners by seeking/consuming the awareness and knowledge, and contributing richly to its progress.

Results / Findings:

The study reveals that the integration of Regional Knowledge Systems (RKS) into education necessitates the development of a distinct pedagogical framework that moves beyond rote learning and mechanical memorization. Such a framework must be interdisciplinary, experiential, and learner-centered, fostering inquiry, creativity, and contextual understanding through project-based and community-linked learning approaches.

One of the key findings emphasizes the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in contextualizing local knowledge. Learners can design and execute projects that reflect regional realities and community concerns. For example, a project titled "*My Village's Water Sources*" could integrate multiple disciplines—history (exploring the traditional use of rivers and tanks), science (testing water quality and analyzing pollution levels), and social studies (understanding local governance and water management systems). Such interdisciplinary projects not only enhance critical thinking and problem-solving skills but also instill a sense of ownership and civic responsibility among students.

Findings further suggest that an interdisciplinary curriculum is vital for effective RKS integration. The curriculum should transcend subject boundaries, encouraging students to perceive knowledge as interconnected. For instance, a lesson on local music traditions can simultaneously introduce cultural appreciation (arts), mathematical concepts (rhythm and pattern), physics (sound waves and acoustics), and history (evolution of musical instruments). Such cross-disciplinary learning deepens conceptual understanding while reinforcing the unity of knowledge.

The study also identifies the community as a crucial component in regionalized education. Schools should evolve into collaborative learning hubs that connect students with local artisans, farmers, storytellers, and elders. Inviting community members to share their lived experiences transforms them into co-educators, enriching the curriculum with authentic, place-based knowledge. This model not only revitalizes indigenous wisdom but also strengthens the reciprocal bond between schools and their communities.

Finally, the research underscores the necessity of comprehensive teacher training. Educators must be equipped not only with innovative pedagogical tools but also with a deep appreciation of local culture and indigenous epistemologies. Teachers should evolve as facilitators of cultural exploration and knowledge co-construction, rather than mere transmitters of information. Such professional development ensures that teachers can effectively mediate between traditional wisdom and modern educational paradigms, thereby sustaining the transformative intent of NEP 2020.

Discussion / Analysis:

While the vision of integrating Regional Knowledge Systems (RKS) into the mainstream educational framework is both progressive and transformative, its implementation presents several complex challenges. These challenges are systemic, pedagogical, and infrastructural in nature, demanding context-sensitive strategies and sustained institutional support.

Designing a curriculum that is standardized in structure yet locally relevant in content remains a formidable challenge. It requires collaborative engagement among academicians, curriculum designers, cultural practitioners, and community elders to ensure that regional knowledge is meaningfully embedded within broader educational goals. The process must balance academic rigor with cultural authenticity, ensuring that localized content aligns with national educational standards while preserving indigenous epistemologies.

Another significant challenge lies in teacher preparedness. Many educators have been trained within traditional, exam-oriented pedagogical frameworks and may find it difficult to adopt contextual and experiential modes of teaching. As Zeichner (2010) observes, meaningful integration of culturally responsive practices demands continuous professional development and a reorientation of teacher identity—from transmitters of information to facilitators of inquiry and cultural mediation. Hence, ongoing teacher training programs that emphasize interdisciplinary pedagogy and community engagement are essential.

Conventional assessment systems often prioritize rote memorization and theoretical recall, which are inadequate for evaluating RKS-based learning outcomes. There is a pressing need to develop alternative assessment tools that value practical skills, critical inquiry, innovation, and cultural awareness. Portfolios, community-based projects, and reflective journals can serve as effective measures of learning in RKS-integrated contexts, shifting the focus from standardization to authentic demonstration of understanding.

Resource constraints, particularly in rural and remote areas, pose another obstacle. Implementing project-based learning and field-based activities requires adequate infrastructure, materials, and logistical support. Schools must be equipped not only with physical resources but also with institutional flexibility to accommodate locally-driven learning initiatives.

Addressing these challenges calls for a multi-pronged, collaborative strategy that integrates policy vision with grassroots implementation:

1. **Creation of a Central Repository:** Establish a national digital repository of Regional Knowledge Systems, organized by state, region, and discipline, to serve as a resource hub for educators, researchers, and policymakers.
2. **Pilot Initiatives:** Launch region-specific pilot programs to test diverse models of RKS integration, assess their feasibility, and document best practices for scalable implementation.

3. Public-Private Partnerships: Encourage collaboration with NGOs, educational foundations, and private organizations to mobilize resources, provide training, and support infrastructure development.
4. Community Engagement: Actively involve parents, local leaders, and cultural practitioners in curriculum planning and implementation, transforming education into a shared community enterprise rather than a top-down institutional mandate.

The discussion thus underscores that while the integration of RKS into formal education is an ambitious endeavor, it holds the potential to redefine learning as a culturally rooted, socially meaningful, and intellectually vibrant process—one that harmonizes tradition with innovation and local wisdom with global vision.

Conclusion:

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 presents a transformative framework for reimagining Indian education through the integration of language, culture, and Regional Knowledge Systems (RKS). By prioritizing mother tongue instruction, multilingual education, and community-centered pedagogical approaches, the policy aligns learning with students' cognitive, linguistic, and socio-cultural realities. Embedding local arts, ecological wisdom, and oral traditions within the curriculum not only enhances relevance and inclusivity, but also strengthens identity formation, creativity, and critical consciousness among learners.

Despite its promising vision, the path toward full integration of RKS is not without challenges. Issues such as limited resources, inadequate teacher preparedness, and deep-rooted epistemic hierarchies continue to hinder equitable implementation. However, these barriers can be mitigated through strategic collaboration among policymakers, educators, and local communities, alongside sustained teacher capacity building and the development of context-sensitive learning resources.

The broader implications of this integration extend far beyond classroom learning. A culturally grounded and ecologically responsive education fosters environmental stewardship, social empathy, and innovation rooted in indigenous wisdom. Learners nurtured in such systems evolve as globally competent yet locally grounded citizens, capable of contributing to sustainable development while safeguarding their cultural heritage.

Ultimately, NEP 2020 envisions an equitable, inclusive, and contextually vibrant educational ecosystem—one that harmonizes India's intellectual traditions with contemporary aspirations, ensuring lifelong learning, cultural continuity, and holistic national progress.

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