

Kashmiri as the Medium of Instruction in the Light of National Education Policy 2020: Planning and Implementation

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The National Education Policy of India 2020 (NEP-2020) was approved by the Govt of India on 29th of July 2020. It came with many innovative ideas and proposed many changes in the existing Education Policy of India in order to transform the education system of India. The new education policy has proposed changes in almost all the domains of primary to higher education levels like the foundational stage of learning, curriculum, pedagogy, teacher education, inclusive education, professional education and language policy. The language policy proposed by the new educational policy as far as mother tongue is concerned is a visionary framework in which the mother tongue/ home language has been proposed to be the medium of instruction wherever possible up to grade 5th and preferably up to grade 8th as research is also supporting this idea that young children learn and grasp concepts more clearly in their mother tongue as compared to any other language. Kashmiri is the mother tongue of the majority of the people of Kashmir Valley and the way young people are shifting towards Urdu and English languages is a matter of concern because this language is not only the language for the Kashmiris but their cultural and linguistic identity is imbibed in this language as well. The new policy on education is an important move for the preservation of the cultural and linguistic diversity of India in general and for the protection of cultural and linguistic identity of Kashmiris in particular. In this backdrop the present paper is an attempt to visualise Kashmiri language as the medium of instruction in the schools of Kashmir Valley as proposed by NEP 2020 and the planning and constraints it may face during its implementation.

Keywords: Kashmiri Language, National Education Policy, Mother Tongue, Planning, Implementation

Introduction

The National Education Policy 2020 is a comprehensive framework passed by the Government of India under the Ministry of Human Resource Development on 29th July 2020 in order to transform the education system of India. The policy framework is divided into four

parts: school education, higher education, vocational education, and strengthening the central advisory board of education. The policy talks right from the primary education to higher education including the vocational education and has given some visionary guidelines regarding the medium of instruction.

The policy document in its Part I under the title “School Education” talks about the foundations of learning, teachers, curriculum, pedagogy, and inclusive education, and also talks about the policy of language under the subheading “Multilingualism and the Power of Language”. Section 4.11 of Part I of this policy proposes that “wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade V, but preferably till Grade VIII and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language. Thereafter, the home/local language shall continue to be taught as a language wherever possible. This will be followed by both public and private schools”. Soon after the circulation of this policy the mother tongue as the medium of instruction up to grade 5th became a debatable topic and many scholars viewed this proposal as an important step in transforming the education system of India and to preserve the cultural and linguistic diversity of India, and yet there are scholars who criticised this policy on its planning and implementational levels.

The proposal to introduce mother tongue/ home language as the medium of instruction has many benefits, as the research is also supporting this view that children learn and grasp the concepts more clearly in their mother tongue as compared to any other language. India has a rich cultural and linguistic heritage and by introducing mother tongue as the medium of instruction, this rich heritage will be preserved and protected. India is a multilingual country where people speak different languages and to preserve and protect this linguistic diversity the NEP 2020 is an important milestone.

Kashmiri is the mother tongue of the majority of the people of Kashmir region. It is the language of the people of Kashmir, and it helps retain their identity. Kashmiri language has a rich cultural heritage, but the way young generation is shifting towards Urdu and English languages is a matter of concern. By implementing the National Education Policy 2020, the linguistic heritage of India in general and the Kashmiri language in particular can be preserved and protected. But it needs to be implemented by all the state governments and the government of Jammu and Kashmir as well because education being in the concurrent list gives the States the freedom to implement this policy or not.

But this is not a simple task for the state governments to implement the language policy as recommended by the NEP 2020 because it needs systematic planning, infrastructure, funds and may face many challenges in its implementation phase.

The aim of this paper is to visualise Kashmiri language as the medium of instruction at the primary stage and the planning and challenges it may face during its implementation phase.

Background of Mother Tongue Instruction

Imparting education in the child's mother tongue in the foundational years is not the novel concept. The Constitution of India in Article 350 A states that every state and local authority should provide adequate facilities in imparting the education of the linguistic minority groups in their mother tongue. Kothari Commission (1964-66) also suggested that medium of instruction and the books for the tribal areas should be in the local tribal language for the first two years. Similarly, the Right to Education Act 2009 also supports the view to impart mother tongue instruction at the school level. UNESCO also supports the mother tongue instruction in the early years of schooling. In addition to that many research studies supports this view that mother tongue instruction is more beneficial for the child in the foundational years of schooling as compared to any other language.

Planning and Implementation

In order to implement any policy a sound planning is very important step towards its success. National Education Policy 2020 is a broader guideline/framework which cannot be implemented without the systematic planning. Likewise, the Government of Jammu and Kashmir needs proper planning and research in order to implement the National Education Policy 2020 especially for implementing the Kashmiri language as the medium of instruction up to the grade 5th. It will take many years to get ready for the implementation of Kashmiri as the medium of instruction because it needs revised curriculum, textbooks, infrastructure, technological changes, proficient teachers, funds, and many other changes in the school education system. The most important domains on which the school education department has to work in order to become successful in its implementation are discussed below.

Curriculum Design

“Curriculum design is largely concerned with issues such as what to include in the curriculum and how to present it in such a way that the curriculum can be implemented with understanding and success” (Barlow et al., 1984). To design the curriculum for Kashmiri language as the medium of instruction various issues need to be addressed like what should be included in the curriculum, syllabus, instructional material, technological support etc.

Textbooks

To implement Kashmiri as the medium of instruction means the textbooks should be written in Kashmiri language. So, the school education department has also this responsibility to appoint a committee which will be given the responsibility of preparing the textbooks for the students up to grade V. One of the objectives of this policy is also to preserve the cultural and linguistic diversity of India and as such the textbooks should include the local taste in the textbooks like Kashmiri stories, history, culture, songs, folktales, etc. This process also demands the authors who have the full command on all the skills of Kashmiri language.

Translation of Textbooks

Students are not supposed to learn only the local cultural component but to learn other subjects as well like logic, science, mathematics, and history and as such it is a big challenge for the government to provide these textbooks in Kashmiri language. So, before implementing this policy at the ground level, the existing textbooks need to be translated into Kashmiri language.

Translation is not a simple process. It is a complex academic activity, and the translator needs to be proficient in both the target and the source language. Translating the academic textbooks also needs the subject knowledge. So, in order to translate the textbooks of science, maths and other books into Kashmiri, the translator should be proficient in both the languages and should have the subject knowledge as well.

Recruitment of Teachers

Teachers are the role models for the students and in order to make the teaching and learning process successful teachers need to be highly knowledgeable and skilled in the subject he/she teaches. Kashmiri as the medium of instruction means the teachers should be proficient in all the four skills of Kashmiri language and for that Government needs to frame a separate recruitment policy to recruit the teachers who can teach all the four skills in Kashmiri language as the medium of instruction. But again, here the question arises where the thousands of teachers will go who are already teaching at the primary level in Kashmir and who have been recruited as the general line teachers.

The one solution to this problem is the professional development of these already existing teachers. Crash courses can be arranged for all such teachers by the different teacher training institutes of Kashmir Valley like District Institutes of Education and Training and State Council of Educational Research and Training in order to develop all the four skills in Kashmiri language. But here again it is not a simple task for these professional development institutes; it will take years to equip them with the working competency of Kashmiri language.

Funding

In the present competitive world, nothing is possible without the financial support and every project of the government as well as private needs to have financial planning before it will be executed successfully. The National Education Policy 2020 needs hundreds of crores of financial support from the government in order to implement it successfully. Implementing Kashmiri as the medium of instruction at the primary level in Kashmir needs full support and patronage from the Government of Jammu and Kashmir because it is a big project which needs huge financial support for its successful implementation. Kashmiri language has not received full support and patronage from the government till now and it is the duty of the people of Kashmir to convince the government to work on the implementation of Kashmiri as the

medium of instruction at the primary level and to provide full support and patronage for its Corpus, status and acquisition planning.

Acceptance by the Government and Private Schools

If we see the current status of the Kashmiri language in the Kashmir Valley, the younger generation is rapidly shifting towards Urdu and English languages and there are some private schools in the Valley who do not allow their students to talk in Kashmiri language. It will be a big challenge for the government to convince such schools to impart education through Kashmiri as the medium of instruction.

Parents' Approval

There are three important stakeholders in the teaching and learning process, viz., schools, parents, and students and all the three are important in the smooth functioning of teaching and learning process. Majority of the parents in Kashmir encourage their wards to speak English from the grade 1st and prefer the English medium schools in place of Government schools so that their wards may acquire full proficiency in all the four skills of English language. Taking these things into consideration it will also be a challenge for the government to encourage the parents and students to get the education in their mother tongue Kashmiri in the place of English language. It will be the duty of government and other social and cultural organisations to organise seminars, workshops, conferences, and cultural events and to develop interactive games and apps in Kashmiri to educate the schools, students and parents about the importance of their mother tongue and to develop in them the positive attitude towards their mother tongue Kashmiri language.

Mother Tongue Instruction vs English Language

We cannot deny the importance of English language in this revolutionised world. English opens new avenues for the people of India in general and for the people of Kashmir in particular. But to learn English and to forget one's cultural roots is a matter of concern because the mother tongue is one's identity and it transmits one's culture from one generation to the other. NEP 2020 has also clarified this thing: "Multilingualism has great cognitive benefits for the young children." Students will be exposed to other languages also but the main thrust will be given to the mother tongue in the foundational years of schooling.

Conclusion

Soon after the circulation of the NEP 2020 policy, the Government of India clarified that it is not mandatory for the states, institutes and schools to implement the mother tongue instruction proposed by NEP 2020, rather it is a broader guideline/ framework which is advisory in nature. Using the mother tongue as the medium of instruction has many benefits like the cultural and linguistic identity of the particular language can be preserved and protected and also the other benefits of the mother tongue instruction. Research is also supporting this view that students learn the novel concepts more clearly and have many other cognitive benefits

for the children. Kashmiri, being the mother tongue of the majority of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, can be used as the medium of instruction up to the grade V as recommended by the NEP 2020. By implementing this policy, the cultural and linguistic identity of Kashmiris will be preserved and protected. But it will take many years for the Jammu and Kashmir administration to implement this policy because it needs many changes and challenges in the school education department like designing the new curriculum, arranging the new textbooks, translating the books into Kashmiri, availability of subject specific teachers who can teach Kashmiri, professional development of teachers, government patronage, finance, approval of government and private schools, changing the attitude of parents and students towards the Kashmiri language and many other challenges. But, definitely even if it will take years for the Government of Jammu and Kashmir to implement this policy, the mother tongue instruction will have many benefits for the Kashmiri students in general and for the preservation and protection of Kashmiri language in particular.

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