

Importance of Mother Tongue and Regional Languages in Foundational Learning: A Madhya Pradesh Perspective under NEP 2020

Dr. Nutan Shukla¹

Abstract

Language is one of the most important tools for learning and communication. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 strongly emphasizes on the use of mother tongue and regional languages in foundational education. Foundational learning refers to the early stage of education where children develop basic literacy, numeracy, and communication skills. Research shows that children learn concepts more effectively in a language familiar to them. This paper examines the importance of mother tongue and regional languages in foundational learning with special reference to Madhya Pradesh under NEP 2020. It also discusses the benefits, challenges, and suggestions for effective implementation of multilingual education in the state.

Keywords: language, NEP, Education, dialect, cultural identity, emotional development, mother tongue

Introduction

India is a multilingual country with rich linguistic diversity. Children across different regions grow up speaking various local languages and dialects at home. However, for decades, formal education in many schools has heavily relied on English or other dominant languages, often creating disconnect between the child's home environment and school environment. This linguistic gap has adversely affected comprehension, confidence, classroom participation, and foundational literacy among young learners, especially in rural and tribal areas. NEP 2020 seeks to bridge this gap by promoting education in the language most familiar to the child during the early years of schooling, when cognitive and emotional development is at its peak. Every region has its own language, dialect, and cultural identity. Language is not merely a means of communication; it also represents culture, emotions, traditions, and social values. Children naturally learn and communicate first in their mother tongue, which makes it the most suitable medium for foundational learning.

The National Education Policy 2020 recognizes the importance of mother tongue and regional languages in education. The policy recommends that the medium of instruction should preferably be the home language, mother tongue, or regional language at least till Grade 5 and preferably till Grade 8.

Foundational learning forms the base upon which all future education depends. The foundational stage, covering ages 3 to 8 years, is considered the most crucial period for the development of literacy, numeracy, communication skills, curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking. Research in psychology, linguistics, and pedagogy consistently indicates that children learn concepts faster and more effectively in their mother tongue because it reduces

cognitive burden and allows natural understanding. When children receive education in a familiar language, they can easily connect new knowledge with their lived experiences, cultural environment, and prior understanding. This not only strengthens comprehension but also enhances classroom interaction, self-confidence, and long-term academic achievement.

In Madhya Pradesh, Hindi is widely spoken along with regional and tribal languages such as Bundeli, Bagheli, Malvi, Nimadi, and Gondi. A large section of children in rural and tribal communities begin their lives speaking these local languages at home. However, when such children enter schools where the medium of instruction is unfamiliar or linguistically distant, they often face difficulties in understanding lessons, expressing themselves, and adjusting to the educational environment. This frequently results in low learning outcomes, reduced participation, poor retention, and increased dropout rates at the primary level. Therefore, multilingual education becomes highly significant for improving educational outcomes in the state.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the importance of mother tongue and regional languages in foundational learning.
2. To analyse the language provisions of NEP 2020.
3. To examine the relevance of multilingual education in Madhya Pradesh.
4. To identify challenges in implementing mother tongue-based education.
5. To suggest measures for effective implementation.

Concept of Foundational Learning

Foundational learning refers to the development of basic skills in reading, writing, speaking, comprehension, and numeracy during early childhood and primary education. It forms the base for all future learning.

NEP 2020 gives special importance to Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) because children who fail to acquire these skills at an early stage often face difficulties in higher education.

Importance of Mother Tongue in Foundational Learning

- 1. Better Understanding of Concepts:** Children understand concepts more easily when they are taught in their mother tongue. Learning in a familiar language reduces confusion and cognitive burden. It helps students grasp ideas quickly and improves classroom participation.
- 2. Development of Cognitive Skills:** Mother tongue education promotes critical thinking, creativity, reasoning, and problem-solving abilities. Children can connect new information with their real-life experiences more effectively in their own language.
- 3. Emotional and Psychological Comfort:** Young children feel emotionally secure when learning takes place in a familiar language. It increases confidence, self-expression, and active participation in classroom activities.
- 4. Improvement in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy:** Research suggests that children achieve better literacy and numeracy outcomes when education begins in the mother tongue. Foundational learning becomes stronger because children understand instructions and educational materials easily.
- 5. Reduction in Dropout Rates:** Students from rural and tribal backgrounds often struggle in schools where the medium of instruction is unfamiliar. Mother tongue-based learning helps reduce fear and learning gaps, thereby decreasing dropout rates.

Role of Regional Languages in Education

1. Preservation of Cultural Heritage: Regional languages preserve folk traditions, stories, literature, songs, and local knowledge systems. Education through regional languages strengthens cultural identity and social values.

2. Promotion of Inclusive Education: Regional language education ensures equal opportunities for students belonging to different social and economic backgrounds. It creates an inclusive and learner-friendly environment.

3. Strengthening Communication Skills: Students communicate more confidently in their own language. It enhances speaking, reading, and writing abilities during the foundational stage.

4. Development of Multilingual Competence: NEP 2020 promotes multilingualism, where students first gain mastery in their mother tongue and gradually learn additional languages like Hindi and English.

NEP 2020 and Language Policy

The National Education Policy 2020 strongly supports multilingual education. Important provisions include:

- Medium of instruction in mother tongue/local language till Grade 5 and preferably till Grade 8.
- Promotion of Indian languages and multilingualism.
- Development of teaching-learning materials in regional languages.
- Focus on foundational literacy and numeracy.
- Inclusion of local culture and traditions in curriculum.

The policy believes that no child should suffer in education due to language barriers.

Madhya Pradesh Perspective

Madhya Pradesh is linguistically diverse. Along with Hindi, many regional and tribal languages are spoken in different regions. In tribal districts especially, children often face difficulties when education is provided only in Hindi or English.

Mother tongue-based education can play an important role in improving educational quality in the state. Regional languages like Bundeli, Bagheli, Malvi, Nimadi, and Gondi can help children understand lessons more effectively during the foundational stage.

The state government has also promoted Hindi-medium education and Indian languages in higher education institutions. The implementation of multilingual education in primary schools can improve literacy levels and classroom participation among rural and tribal children.

Conclusion

Mother tongue and regional languages play a vital role in foundational learning. They help children understand concepts better, improve literacy skills, strengthen cultural identity, and create confidence in learners. NEP 2020 has provided a strong framework for multilingual education in India.

Overall, the emphasis on mother tongue and regional languages in foundational learning under NEP 2020 represents a progressive and scientifically grounded educational reform. It seeks to place the child at the centre of the learning process by respecting the linguistic and cultural realities of learners. In the context of Madhya Pradesh, this approach has the

potential to improve foundational literacy and numeracy, reduce educational inequalities, strengthen cultural identity, and create a more inclusive and effective education system.

Thus, the integration of mother tongue and regional languages into foundational learning is not merely an educational strategy but a powerful step toward building an empowered, confident, culturally aware, and intellectually capable generation. If implemented sincerely and systematically, the vision of NEP 2020 can transform the educational landscape of Madhya Pradesh and contribute significantly to the creation of a knowledge-based, inclusive, and self-reliant India.

In Madhya Pradesh, effective implementation of mother tongue-based education can improve foundational literacy, especially among rural and tribal students. However, success depends on proper teacher training, development of educational materials, and awareness among parents and educators. A balanced multilingual approach can create an inclusive, culturally rich, and learner-centred education system.

References

1. National Education Policy 2020, Ministry of Education, Government of India.
2. UNESCO Report on Mother Tongue and Multilingual Education.
3. "Language Education in NCF: The Vision of NEP-2020."
4. "Empowering Learning Through Language: NEP 2020's Vision for Multilingual and Mother Tongue Education."
5. "NEP 2020: Why Learning in Mother Tongue is Effective but Hard to Implement."
6. "Indian Languages Become Central to Learning in NEP 2020."

