Challenges of Transitioning to Multilingual Education Under NEP 2020: Perspectives from Primary School Administrators in U.P.

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ABSTRACT:
The adoption of the mother tongue/ local regional language as the medium of instruction up to grade 5 bring a radical transformation to the Indian education system. This paper examines the challenges, practical barriers, and cultural issues arising from the implementation of this multilingual transition at primary level education within Uttar Pradesh (U.P). Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection approaches, we conducted a survey and interviews with 200 primary school administrators and teachers from rural and urban areas in U.P. There is a clear division of geographic differences between the two areas. In rural blocks, 82% of the respondents indicated a critical lack of instructional materials in their local tongue such as Awadhi and Bhojpuri. This forces teachers to come up with ad hoc solutions because there are no books available in the local languages of the learners. On the other hand, the challenge in urban areas is entirely opposite. There is strong resistance among parents towards the local language education due to the importance of English-medium institutions. In addition to this, centralized policies for teacher recruitment also result in new teachers who do not understand the local language of the area to which they have been posted. In order to implement the language requirements laid out in the NEP 2020 policy, the state government would need to adopt a more flexible approach based on dual language use and local teacher placement..

Keywords: recruitment, NEP, administrators, quantitative

INTRODUCTION

Lifelong skills of learning and thinking develop during early childhood education. In fact, researchers and linguists around the world have been emphasizing for years that children learn complicated concepts of math or social sciences much faster when they are explained to them in the same language they use at home. This is the basic principle of India's National Education

Policy (NEP) 2020, which mandates that all elementary school students should be educated in their mother tongue or local language at least till Grade 5, and preferably till Grade 8. Making a grand policy into an everyday practice, however, proves to be a challenging process in a state such as Uttar Pradesh (U.P.). Although there is the formal standardized form of Hindi that functions as the official language of U.P., the truth remains otherwise for millions of rural children whose native language is any of the local dialects of that region, such as Bundeli in southern U.P., Awadhi in Central, Braj in Western U.P., and Bhojpuri in Eastern Purvanchal. It poses difficult decisions for the primary schools' headmasters, Basic Shiksha Adhikaris (BSA), and block education officers. The difficulty is caused by having to reconcile the state-prescribed Hindi language books, which students comprehend in an everyday spoken form of dialect, with the public's strong desire for English language-based teaching. This paper explores such real-life issues as well as problems arising from them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1.The Pedagogical Case for Mother Tongue Instruction

The pedagogical advantage of mother-tongue instruction in the foundational years of learning is solidly established by extensive worldwide research, which is led by organizations like UNESCO. A cognitive mismatch happens when kids are taught in a foreign or second language, which for many rural U.P. kids includes both English and conventional Sanskritized Hindi. The focus of cognitive resources is shifted from comprehending the subject matter to simply interpreting the language. Research conducted by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has consistently shown that using the mother tongue's cognitive bridge maximizes early conceptual clarity, reading comprehension, and numerical logic.

2. The Socio-Economic Prestige of English in India

In spite of all the scientific arguments about the benefits of native-language instruction, culture in India takes the complete opposite course. English in India has come to mean not just an instrument of communication; it has become a status signifier and an unambiguous indicator of social class, intelligence, and future employment. Scholars such as Faust and Nagar (2001) have pointed out the great enthusiasm that exists among parents in both rural and urban India for the provision of English instruction to their children. Parents from disadvantaged groups, in particular, have realized the power of English, which alone gives their children access to professional, educational, and global opportunities. For this reason, localized linguistic requirements tend to be looked upon with suspicion as attempts by the government to restrict the future opportunities of the children.

3. Administrative Bottlenecks in Previous Policies

The history of education in India is replete with examples of language policies that appear well thought through but fail due to poor implementation. The Three Language Formula has proven to be difficult to implement due to implementation problems. In the case of a state like Uttar Pradesh, local languages do not always have a standardized script and specialized vocabulary to help students understand science or mathematics classes. In the absence of any kind of support, implementation of the "local language" policy becomes a responsibility of the school head or individual teachers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of understanding the realistic administrative challenges of Uttar Pradesh, the study was done by adopting an exploratory research design. In order to provide quantitative data based on survey and qualitative data based on face-to-face interview method, we adopted a mixed-method approach.

1. Sample and Demographics

For research, we conducted a survey of 200 administrators and teachers from the primary schools. In order to have an unbiased opinion, we ensured that half of them were from deep rural blocks and the other half was from urban or semi-urban locations. The geographical coverage of the study was such that we included all the five cultural and linguistic regions of Uttar Pradesh, namely Purvanchal (Bhojpuri), Awadh (Awadhi), Braj (Brajbhasha), Bundelkhand (Bundeli) and Western U.P. (Khari Boli).

2. Data Collection Instruments

The key instrument used for quantifying responses was the "Institutional Readiness Index" survey. This tool rated the perceptions of administrators on five core dimensions, namely: teachers' professional development; examination paper setting; parental response; staff coherence; and resource availability. In order to add depth to the quantitative data, we supplemented our research with semi-structured interviews with 20 purposively selected administrators, including principal and BSA respondents.

ANALYSIS OF DATA AND IMPORTANT RESULTS

From these 200 administrators, it is clear that there are very large systematic gaps in the implementation of policies, as well as an absolute mismatch between urban and rural schools

1. Categorical Bottlenecks: Rural vs. Urban Divides

Administrators were required to determine which aspects of the NEP 2020 multilingual requirement posed a "Severe Challenge" to their day-to-day operations. The findings, as shown in Figure 1, show that administrators in rural and metropolitan areas confront essentially different but equally crippling obstacles.

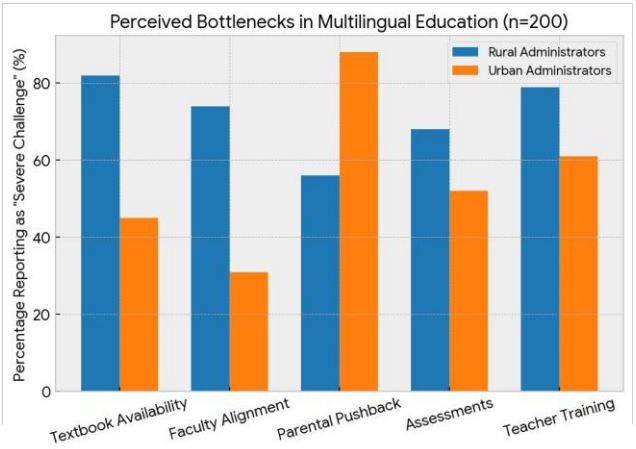

Figure 1: Administrator Perception of "Severe Challenges" in Multilingual Transition (n=200)

The biggest challenges in the rural setting are resource-based and structural challenges. "Textbook & Resource Availability" was highlighted as the biggest challenge faced by a surprising number of 82% of rural administrators. SCERT provides standard Hindi textbooks to these institutes; however, it is seen that for a child that speaks only Bhojpuri or Bundeli at home, it becomes hard for them to comprehend the formal terms of Hindi language. The teachers then have to translate the content right away, which eats into valuable teaching time.On the other hand, the biggest challenge faced by urban or semi-urban administrators is sociocultural in nature. "Parental Pushback" was cited by an unbelievable 88% of urban administrators as the biggest challenge faced by them. "English Medium" private schools are in

competition with urban public schools. When there is the implementation of the mother-tongue policy in such regions, the parents become aggressive and threaten to withdraw their children from the public schools.

2. The Threat to Public School Enrolment

Deep administrative concerns about student retention were brought to light by the qualitative interviews. When urban administrators attempted to truly transition to regional language instruction in foundational grades, the market response was fast and harsh.

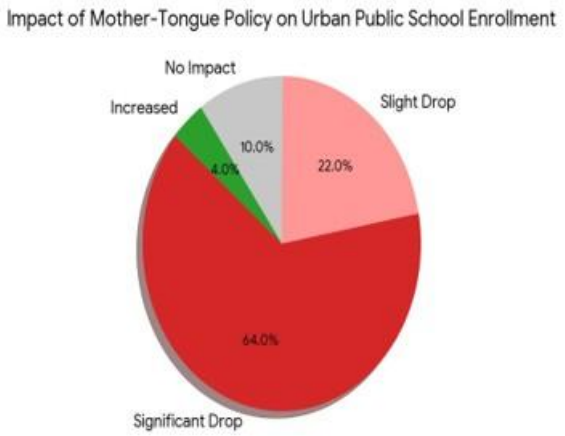

Figure 2: Influence of the Mother Tongue Policy on Enrolment in Urban Public Schools

Figure 2 shows that as many as 64% of urban authorities experienced "Significant Drop" in enrollment after implementing policy integration measures. Parents sending their children to private but inexpensive schools highlighted lack of instruction in English. Authorities stressed that strictly following the NEP 2020 language directive is virtually unfeasible without spoiling enrollment records at public schools due to lack of state-led information campaigns aimed at changing parents' perceptions.

3. Faculty Linguistic Alignment

The state's system for hiring and deploying teachers is a crucial, but often disregarded, structural weakness in the implementation of localised education. In Uttar Pradesh, teacher recruitment is centralised through tests such as the UPTET. Candidates are often sent to districts hundreds of kilometers away from their home regions as a result of merit-based placements.

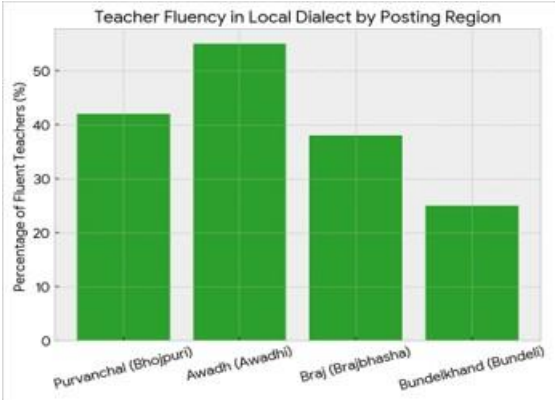

Figure 3: Teacher Fluency in Local Dialect by Posting Region

The harsh reality of this misalignment is evident from Figure 3 below. Only one fourth of the newly appointed primary teachers in Bundelkhand were fluent in the local dialect of Bundeli, according to the officials. "A teacher from Western UP, speaking Khari Boli and posted in a rural primary school of Gorakhpur [Bhojpuri] district, faces a very early communication problem when dealing with first graders," says another. Lack of local authority to appoint and move faculty as per required dialect skills is a common source of frustration.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

1. The Mother Tongue versus Language Dilemma

The data reveals one fundamental difference that exists between demography and theory of policy. The "Mother Tongue" concept is portrayed as packaged in a standard manner in NEP 2020. While the language of government in Uttar Pradesh is Hindi, most rural children in schools have an unstandardized spoken dialect as their mother tongue. There is no escape for the officials as they cannot print their localized books because of the lack of standard orthography for scientific and mathematical terms in these dialects. It is up to the individual teacher to bridge this language gap due to lack of multilingual training.

2. Assessment and Standardization Inequality

Assessment standardization was observed as another major issue. It emerged as a key issue for 68 percent of the rural administrators. Assessment would become very subjective if the teacher is able to use translanguaging successfully to ensure conceptual understanding in all classes. The students who understand the concept but can articulate it only through Awadhi and Bhojpuri will face a setback when state board examinations are conducted in standard Hindi.

Strategic Policy Recommendations

On the basis of the above-mentioned findings, the following actions are recommended to be taken by the Uttar Pradesh Basic Shiksha Department.

1.Adoption of Dual-Language Teaching Approach (Translanguaging)

Rather than imposing an inflexible "local language policy" on the schools, the government ought to endorse a more accommodating and versatile "Translanguaging" policy framework, which altogether avoids the problem of un-scripted languages and calms the parents' nerves simultaneously. The texts used in the school should have a dual format, whereby the essential terminology continues to be presented in formal Hindi or English, but the actual descriptions, glossaries, and marginal notes should be in the local language of the region.

2. Decentralization and Localization of Teacher Cadres

The primary process by which the state deploys its teachers has to be thoroughly restructured. Linguistic mapping should be considered during the deployment stage despite the standardized tests that preserve academic standards (UPTET). Fluency in the specific regional language spoken in the block where they will teach is necessary for prospective teachers. Another solution would be creating regional sub-cadres, ensuring that the teachers of young children are automatically versed in their language.

3. Standardized Bridge Primers

The SCERT must finance and produce "Bridge Primers" that are meant for first and second graders in the local language, using the written form of the Devanagari script. These primers would have to affirm the mother tongue of the child from the very beginning and gradually teach academic Hindi words so that they can move to standard state texts by the third grade.

4. Aggressive Parental Advocacy Campaigns

English's social class cannot be countered singlehandedly by School Management Committees (SMCs). There is an urgent need for

the State Government to start awareness campaigns that can highlight empirical evidence about how proficiency in one's regional language aids learning English in the future. "Regional Language vs. English" must now shift its focus towards "Regional Language as the Basis for International Success."

CONCLUSION

The concept of bilingual education in the National Education Policy 2020 is indeed an innovative and pedagogically sound idea which could be used to democratize education for millions of children. Nonetheless, an empirical analysis of the primary school administrators in Uttar Pradesh reveals that there are many hurdles that prevent the adoption of the idea. The perception that the standard Hindi language serves the purpose of a universal mother tongue for rural areas of the state is misleading as regards linguistic variety in rural settings while the obsession with English makes it difficult to control the student enrolment in urban schools. It is imperative for the state authorities to move from rigid guidelines to flexible systems that are adapted to the regional realities.

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