Oray's Publications
Impact Factor: 7.613(SJIF) Research Journal Of English (RJOE)Vol-6, Issue-1, 2021
www.rjoe.org.in An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal ISSN: 2456-2696
Indexed in: International Citation Indexing (ICI), Cite factor, International Scientific Indexing (ISI), Directory of Research Journal Indexing (DRJI) Google Scholar, Cosmos and Internet Archives.

Beyond Textbook Teaching: Exploring Multilingual Pedagogy and Learner-Centered Approaches to Improve English Language Learning in Secondary Schools as per NEP- 2020

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**Paper Received on 10-01-2021, Accepted on 25-03-2021,
Published on 28-03-2021; DOI: 10.36993/ RJOE.2021.6.1.337**

Abstract

English language learning in Indian secondary schools continues to face challenges associated with textbook-oriented instruction, limited opportunities for communication, linguistic diversity, and differences in learners' educational backgrounds. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 advocates multilingualism, experiential learning, flexibility, and learner-centred pedagogical practices to transform the teaching-learning process. Against this background, the present study explores the potential of multilingual pedagogy and learner-centred approaches to improve English language learning among secondary school students. The study adopts a conceptual and descriptive approach based on an examination of NEP 2020, the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (2023), and relevant literature on multilingual education and language pedagogy. It examines how home languages, collaborative learning, communicative activities, project-based instruction, and formative assessment can support English language development. The paper argues that students' existing linguistic resources should be considered valuable learning assets rather than obstacles to English acquisition. It proposes an integrated pedagogical framework that connects multilingual classroom practices with meaningful communication and active learner participation. The study concludes that moving beyond conventional textbook teaching requires supportive teachers, inclusive learning environments, contextualised instructional materials, and continuous assessment.

Keywords: NEP 2020, multilingual pedagogy, learner-centered learning, English language teaching, secondary education, communicative competence.

1. Introduction

English occupies an important position in Indian education because of its relevance to higher education, employment, technology, communication, and global interaction. Despite its importance, English language teaching in many secondary schools continues to depend considerably on prescribed textbooks, grammar exercises, memorisation, and teacher-centred classroom practices. Such approaches may help students acquire knowledge of grammatical rules but do not necessarily develop their ability to communicate confidently in real-life situations.

India's multilingual educational environment presents both challenges and opportunities for English language teaching. Students enter classrooms with different linguistic backgrounds, including regional languages, mother tongues, and varieties of English. These existing language resources can support the acquisition of additional languages when teachers use appropriate instructional strategies.

The National Education Policy 2020 recognizes the importance of multilingualism and recommends flexible language education without imposing any particular language on students. It also emphasizes experiential, participatory, and competency-based learning (Ministry of Education, 2020). The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023 further highlights multilingual capacities, meaningful language use, and the development of speaking, reading, and writing competencies (National Council of Educational Research and Training [NCERT], 2023).

In this context, English language teaching needs to move beyond the conventional textbook-centered classroom towards approaches that recognize students' linguistic identities, encourage active participation, and create opportunities for authentic communication.

2. Objectives of the Study

The major objectives are:

1. To examine the significance of multilingual pedagogy in secondary-level English language teaching.
2. To explore learner-centered approaches for improving students' English language competencies.
3. To analyze the relevance of NEP 2020 to innovative English language teaching practices.
4. To identify practical classroom strategies that encourage communication, collaboration, and independent learning.
5. To propose an integrated pedagogical framework for effective English language learning in secondary schools.

3. Research Questions

1. How can multilingual pedagogy contribute to effective English language learning?
2. What learner-centred strategies can improve students' communication skills?
3. How can English teachers implement the pedagogical recommendations of NEP 2020?

4. What institutional and classroom-level challenges affect the implementation of these approaches?

4. Review of Related Literature

Multilingual education recognizes that learners' existing languages contribute to the development of additional language competencies. Cummins (2000) explains the relationship between first-language development and second-language acquisition, suggesting that knowledge and skills developed in one language can support learning in another.

García and Wei (2014) introduced the concept of translanguaging to explain how multilingual individuals use their complete linguistic resources to communicate and construct meaning. In educational settings, this perspective encourages teachers to create opportunities for students to connect familiar languages with English learning.

Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the importance of social interaction in cognitive development. His sociocultural perspective supports collaborative activities, peer learning, and teacher guidance as important elements of classroom learning. These ideas are particularly relevant to language education, where interaction provides opportunities to practice communication.

Black and Wiliam (1998) highlighted the importance of formative assessment in improving teaching and learning. Regular feedback enables teachers to identify learning difficulties and provide appropriate support.

Together, these perspectives indicate that effective English language teaching should integrate linguistic diversity, social interaction, meaningful communication, and continuous assessment.

5. Research Methodology

The present study adopts a conceptual and descriptive research design. It is based on a thematic examination of NEP 2020, NCF-SE 2023, and selected scholarly literature relating to multilingualism, learner-centred pedagogy, and English language education.

The discussion is organized around four themes: multilingual classroom practices, learner-centered teaching strategies, communicative competence, and assessment for learning. The study develops an integrated pedagogical framework by connecting policy recommendations with established educational perspectives.

No primary field-survey data or experimental findings are claimed. The proposed framework requires further validation through empirical research in secondary schools.

6. Multilingual Pedagogy in English Language Learning

Multilingual pedagogy involves the meaningful use of students' existing languages to facilitate the learning of English. Instead of treating the mother tongue or regional language as a barrier, teachers can use it as a resource for explaining unfamiliar vocabulary, understanding difficult concepts, and developing confidence.

For example, when introducing an unfamiliar English word, a teacher may encourage students to identify its equivalent or meaning in their home language. Students can then construct English sentences using the newly acquired vocabulary. Similarly, bilingual discussions, translation exercises, comparative reading, and multilingual storytelling can strengthen understanding.

The following practices can be incorporated into secondary classrooms:

- **Bilingual explanations:** Teachers can briefly explain difficult concepts using familiar languages before encouraging students to express the same ideas in English.
- **Comparative vocabulary activities:** Students can compare words, expressions, and sentence structures across languages.
- **Multilingual storytelling:** Learners can narrate familiar stories in their home language and subsequently retell them in English.
- **Peer-supported learning:** Students with different language strengths can work together to complete speaking and writing activities.
- **Contextual learning:** Local events, cultural practices, and community experiences can become resources for English communication.

Such practices can make language learning more meaningful and inclusive. However, multilingual support should facilitate increasing English proficiency rather than replace opportunities to practice English.

7. Learner-Centered Approaches to English Language Teaching

Learner-centered pedagogy shifts the emphasis from the teacher's explanation to students' active participation. Students are encouraged to explore, communicate, question, collaborate, and construct knowledge through meaningful experiences.

7.1 Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) focuses on developing the ability to use English in practical situations. Classroom activities may include role-play, interviews, group discussions, dialogues, and information-gap exercises. These activities encourage students to use English for meaningful communication instead of merely memorizing grammatical structures.

7.2 Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning enables students to develop language skills through purposeful tasks. For example, students can prepare a school magazine, conduct interviews with community members, create posters, or produce short presentations on environmental issues. Such activities integrate reading, writing, speaking, listening, and critical thinking.

7.3 Collaborative Learning

Group activities and peer interaction create opportunities for students to learn from one another. Teachers can organize pair discussions, storytelling groups, reading circles, and peer-

editing exercises. These approaches are particularly useful for students who hesitate to communicate in English before the entire class.

7.4 Experiential and Activity-Based Learning

Language learning becomes meaningful when connected with everyday experiences. Classroom debates, classroom newspapers, language games, school announcements, and community-based activities help students apply English in authentic contexts.

7.5 Digital and Multimedia Learning

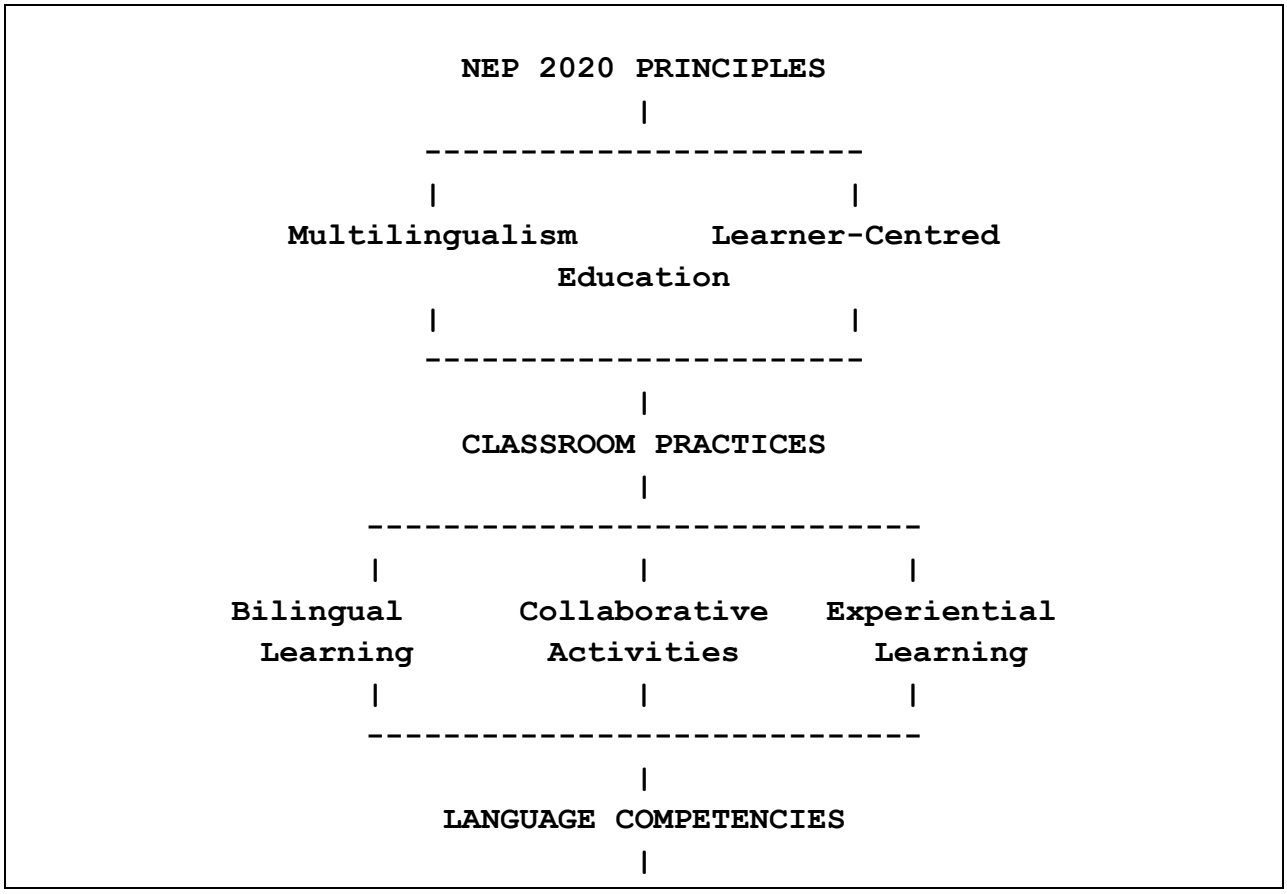
Digital resources, educational videos, recorded conversations, digital dictionaries, and language-learning applications can provide additional exposure to English. Teachers should select age-appropriate resources and ensure that students without reliable digital access are not disadvantaged.

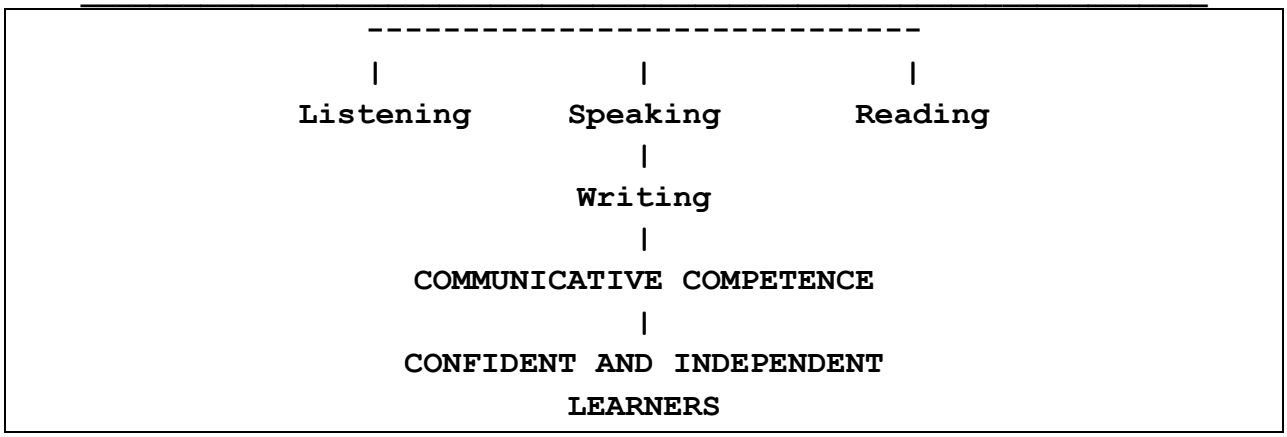
8. Proposed Integrated Pedagogical Framework

The study proposes an integrated approach combining multilingual support, learner-centered activities, teacher facilitation, and continuous assessment.

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed relationship among the major elements.

Figure 1 *Integrated Framework for English Language Learning under NEP 2020*





9. Role of the English Language Teacher

The teacher plays a significant role in implementing multilingual and learner-centred pedagogy. Rather than functioning exclusively as a source of information, the teacher becomes a facilitator, guide, and learning-resource organizer.

Teachers should identify students' linguistic backgrounds, encourage participation, provide appropriate learning materials, and create a classroom atmosphere in which mistakes are accepted as part of language development. They should also design activities that accommodate different proficiency levels.

Professional development programmes are essential for enabling teachers to use multilingual strategies, communicative methods, digital resources, and formative assessment effectively.

10. Assessment and Evaluation

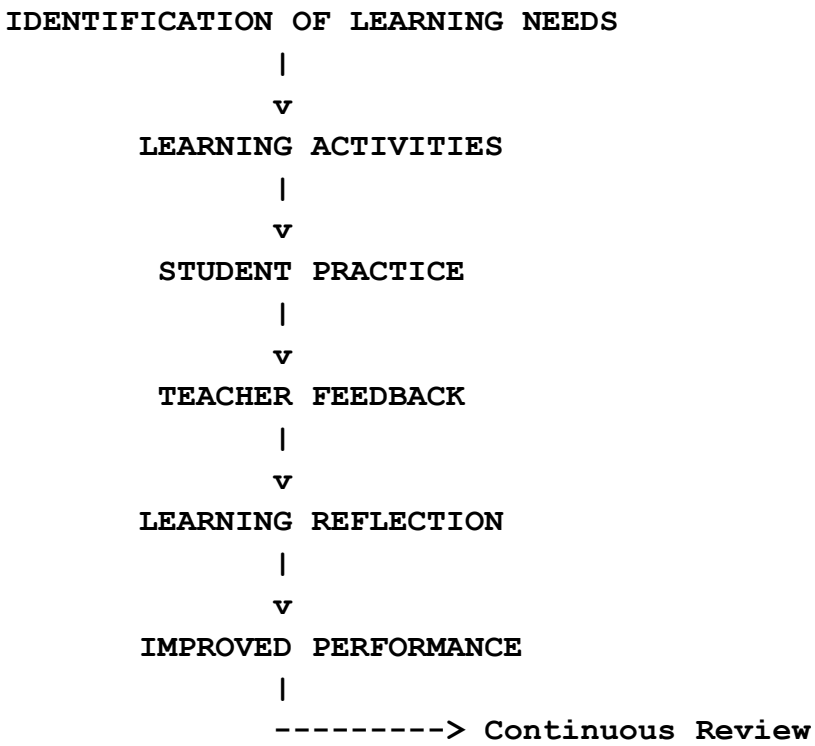
Assessment should measure students' ability to use English rather than focus exclusively on memorised content. NEP 2020 encourages competency-based assessment and the development of higher-order thinking skills (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Teachers can employ:

- Oral presentations and individual speaking activities.
- Reading comprehension and interpretation tasks.
- Creative writing and paragraph development.
- Group projects and classroom discussions.
- Portfolios containing students' written work.
- Self-assessment and peer feedback.

Figure 2 presents a proposed continuous assessment cycle.

Figure 2 *Continuous Assessment Cycle for English Language Development*



11. Challenges and Recommendations

Implementation of multilingual and learner-centred approaches may encounter several challenges. These include large classroom sizes, limited teaching resources, insufficient teacher training, examination-oriented instruction, and differences in students' English proficiency.

To address these challenges, the following measures are recommended:

1. Organise teacher training programmes focusing on multilingual and communicative pedagogy.
2. Develop locally relevant bilingual and multilingual teaching-learning materials.
3. Provide opportunities for regular English communication through classroom activities.
4. Encourage school libraries, reading clubs, language laboratories, and digital learning resources.
5. Introduce continuous formative assessment alongside conventional examinations.
6. Promote inclusive classroom practices that respect students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

School leadership and educational authorities should support teachers through appropriate resources, professional development, and flexible classroom practices.

12. Conclusion

English language learning in Indian secondary schools requires a pedagogical transformation that extends beyond textbook-based instruction and memorization. NEP 2020 provides an important policy foundation for promoting multilingualism, experiential learning, flexibility, and learner-centered education.

The present conceptual study highlights the potential of multilingual pedagogy, collaborative learning, communicative activities, project-based instruction, and formative assessment to create meaningful English language learning experiences. Recognizing students' home languages as learning resources can improve classroom participation and support the development of English communication skills.

However, successful implementation requires trained teachers, inclusive learning environments, appropriate educational resources, and institutional support. English should be taught not merely as an examination subject but as a language for communication, creativity, knowledge acquisition, and personal development.

Ultimately, moving beyond textbook teaching involves creating classrooms in which students actively participate, communicate confidently, respect linguistic diversity, and become independent language learners in accordance with the educational vision of NEP 2020.

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