



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MOTHER TONGUE IN EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** *Mother tongue-based education supports children's cognitive development, cultural identity, and social inclusion. This article highlights its importance through insights from educational research and India's NEP 2020. It also addresses implementation challenges and the need for teacher training, resources, and public awareness.*

**Аннотация:** *Образование на родном языке способствует когнитивному развитию детей, сохранению культурной идентичности и социальной интеграции. В статье раскрывается его значение на основе исследований и политики NEP 2020, а также поднимаются вопросы реализации и необходимость подготовки кадров и ресурсов.*

**Keywords:** *Mother Tongue, Education, Cognitive Development, Linguistic Diversity, Cultural Identity, Inclusive Education, NEP 2020, Language Policy, Language Preservation, Bilingual Pedagogy*

**Ключевые слова:** *Родной язык, образование, когнитивное развитие, языковое разнообразие, культурная идентичность, инклюзивное образование, Национальная образовательная политика 2020 (NEP 2020), языковая политика, сохранение языка, билингвальная педагогика*

Language is not only a medium of communication; it is also an essential instrument for the development of thought, emotion, and social identity. The mother tongue — the first language a child acquires — serves as the foundation for future learning and personal development.

In linguistically diverse countries like India, where more than 19,500 dialects and over 120 major languages are spoken (Census of India, 2011), the NEP 2020 emphasizes the use of mother tongue or regional languages as the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, and preferably up to Grade 8, to improve learning outcomes and ensure inclusivity [1, p. 3].

**Cognitive and Academic Benefits**

Research shows that children understand concepts better when taught in their first language. Learning in the mother tongue helps build a strong cognitive foundation by allowing children to link new ideas with what they already know linguistically.

According to UNESCO, mother tongue instruction enhances comprehension, literacy, and numeracy skills in the early years of education [3, p. 9]. It also contributes to long-term academic success, as students gain confidence and critical thinking skills when learning in a familiar language.





The NEP 2020 reinforces this evidence by encouraging native-language instruction during the formative years to boost creativity, analytical skills, and classroom participation [1, p. 4].

#### Cultural Identity and Emotional Security

Language carries the history, traditions, and worldview of a community. Children who learn in their mother tongue tend to develop a stronger sense of self and cultural pride. This emotional grounding enhances their overall engagement in school and improves their social well-being [4, p. 87].

A report in the Sikkim Express emphasizes that NEP 2020 is designed to reconnect communities with their linguistic and cultural heritage through education in local languages.

#### Social Equity and Access

Mother tongue education is particularly vital for marginalized groups — including tribal and rural children — who may struggle with dominant-language instruction. Teaching in a language they understand improves access to education and bridges the equity gap.

NEP 2020 addresses this challenge by supporting technological tools like Anuvadini, which enables translation of content into multiple Indian languages, and by promoting local-language content creation at the foundational stage [6].

In higher education, institutions like IGNOU are setting examples by launching programs in Hindi and Odia, in alignment with NEP's vision for inclusive and accessible learning.

#### Challenges in Implementation

Despite its benefits, mother tongue education faces several challenges:

- Lack of materials in many minority languages
- Insufficient teacher training in bilingual/multilingual pedagogy [2, p. 5]
- Multilingual classrooms with students from different linguistic backgrounds
- Social bias favoring English-medium education, often seen as a path to success

Parental aspirations, globalization, and the dominance of English-language media can undermine community support for local language education [8, p. 12].

#### Opportunities and Way Forward

Several strategies can address these challenges:

- Investing in content development for local languages, including textbooks and digital media
- Strengthening teacher education with a focus on bilingual methods
- Using technology to develop interactive learning tools in native languages [7]
- Raising awareness through community campaigns that highlight the value of linguistic and cultural diversity





### **Conclusion**

Mother tongue-based education is crucial for equitable, effective, and inclusive learning. It strengthens cognitive development, nurtures emotional well-being, and supports cultural preservation.

Policies like NEP 2020 mark a progressive shift in recognizing linguistic rights in education. However, successful implementation depends on sustained investments in resources, teacher development, and public engagement. With coordinated efforts, mother tongue education can become a transformative force for generations to come.

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