

Recasting Methodologies in English Language Classrooms: Teachers' Roles and Challenges in the Context of NEP 2020

Sumanta Rajbanshi

Assistant Professor, Tyagbir Hem Baruah College, Jamugurihat

Email: sumantarajbanshi@gmail.com

Abstract

Introduction of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) is a remarkable EVENT IN THE FIELD of Indian education with its special focus on multilingualism and all-round development of the learners. As a result , role of English language teachers at government schools is undergoing profound changes. Attempt has been made here to assess how this policy is reimagining English language pedagogy and reshaping the responsibilities, expectations, and challenges of government school teachers. Drawing upon qualitative documentary analysis of policy documents, scholarly literature, and recent field reports, the paper examines the pedagogical shifts proposed under NEP 2020 and their implications for classroom practice, teacher training, assessment strategies, and learner engagement. The discussion critically engages with the evolving teacher identity—from knowledge transmitter to facilitator, mentor, and reflective practitioner. The paper concludes by highlighting the urgent need for systemic support, capacity building, and a contextualized understanding of the NEP's vision to realize meaningful pedagogical reform in English language teaching (ELT).

Keywords- NEP 2020, English Language Teaching (ELT), Government Schools, Pedagogical Reform, Teacher Roles, Multilingualism, Education Policy

1. Introduction

The formulation and adoption of NEP 2020 marked significant development in the realm of Indian education, replacing the previous NEP 1986. Designed to equip learners for the twenty first century, the new education policy emphasizes “flexibility”, “creativity”, “critical thinking”, and multilingual competence. In addition to other important recommendations, language education occupies here a central place, particularly the introduction of a multilingual approach during the foundational and middle stages of education.

English, which continues to hold a vital place in India's socio-economic landscape, is treated with a nuanced approach in the NEP 2020. While the policy promotes mother tongue-based instruction in the early years, it also recognizes English as a global language that facilitates access to knowledge, communication, and opportunities.

In this shifting paradigm, English language teachers in government schools, especially at the middle stage, find themselves at a critical juncture. They are no longer mere transmitters of grammar rules or textbook content but are now expected to play the roles of facilitators of communicative competence, multilingual mediators, and agents of learner-centered pedagogy. This reimagining of the teacher's role calls for a deep understanding of pedagogical theory, contextual challenges, and institutional reform.

This paper investigates how NEP 2020 is redefining the role of English language teachers in Indian government schools and what it means for classroom practices, teacher development, and language learning outcomes.

2. Objectives

The central aim of this paper is to examine the changing role of English language teachers at government schools within the framework of NEP 2020. This paper aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the pedagogical orientation for English language teaching as envisioned in NEP 2020.
2. To investigate the emerging roles and responsibilities assigned to English teachers in government schools.
3. To propose strategies for enabling teachers to adjust to these evolving expectations through professional training, adequate resources, and institutional support.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative documentary research method, focusing on the critical review and analysis of diverse secondary sources. These include official policy documents such as the NEP 2020; reports from government bodies like NCERT, SCERTs, and the Ministry of Education; and scholarly literature on language pedagogy, teacher education, and educational reform. It also examines research papers, field studies, and expert commentaries related to English Language Teaching (ELT) in Indian schools. This approach facilitates a comprehensive examination of the policy's objectives, theoretical foundations, and practical problems and realities of English pedagogy and the changing role of teachers.

4. Teachers in Transition: Insights from NEP 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 redefines teachers as key agents of change, moving beyond their traditional role as knowledge transmitters. It envisions them as facilitators, mentors, and leaders who shape well-rounded individuals prepared for 21st-century challenges. Central to this shift is a move from memorization towards hands-on, exploratory, and cross-disciplinary education. Teachers are encouraged to create engaging, real-world learning environments through project-based activities and group discussions, fostering curiosity, critical thinking, and holistic understanding.

NEP 2020 promotes a comprehensive vision of education, where teachers support not just academics but also students' emotional well-being, ethical awareness, and life skills. This student-centric approach demands sensitivity to diverse needs and a commitment to inclusivity and overall development.

A major innovation is the focus on continuous professional growth of the teachers. The National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) aims to ensure quality through formal training, peer learning, and pedagogical research. Teachers are expected to engage in lifelong learning to remain effective and adaptable in changing educational contexts.

Technology integration is another priority. Teachers must become digitally competent, able to design online content and manage blended classrooms, while also promoting digital literacy and addressing the digital divide. Technology is seen as an enabler to enrich pedagogy.

Finally, NEP 2020 views teachers as mentors and institutional leaders who collaborate, innovate, and contribute to systemic change. By nurturing personal, academic, and career growth in students, they offer significant service in fulfilling the policy's recommendation for attainment of inclusive and transformative education.

5. Reframing English Pedagogy under NEP 2020: Emerging Perspectives

NEP 2020 brings forth a path-breaking and innovative vision to be achieved through education for the learners in India, with language pedagogy, especially English Language Teaching (ELT), at the center of its reform agenda. The policy redefines school education into four developmental stages- “Foundational (ages 3–8)”, “Preparatory (8–11)”, “Middle (11–14)”, and “Secondary (14–18)” – where each stage has its specific pedagogical goals. Of these, the Middle Stage (Grades 6 to 8) is very important for language learning and cognitive development. NEP 2020 proposes a pedagogical framework that emphasizes experiential learning, contextualization, and multilingualism, thereby reshaping the way English is taught and learned in Indian classrooms, particularly in government schools.

5.1 Multilingualism with Pedagogical Flexibility

A central tenet of NEP 2020 is its strong advocacy for multilingualism, grounded in the belief that early acquaintance with diverse languages improves intellectual abilities and academic achievement. This policy recommends a flexible tri-language framework, that encourages children to learn three languages during their school years, at least two of which should be native to India. While the first language or vernacular regional language is to be adopted for instruction till at least Grade 5, and ideally continuing till Grade 8, English continues to be an important component of the curriculum. Thus the policy reaffirms the “Three-Language Formula”, stating:

“The three-language formula will continue to be implemented while keeping in mind the Constitutional provisions, aspirations of the people, regions, and the Union, and the need to promote multilingualism as well as promote national unity. However, there will be a greater flexibility in the three-language formula, and no language will be imposed on any State. The three languages learned by children will be the choices of States, regions, and of course the students themselves, so long as at least two of the three languages are native to India.” (NEP 2020, p. 14)

It lays stress on “promotion of multilingualism and the power of language in teaching and learning”, asserting that “children learn and grasp non-trivial concepts more quickly in their home language/mother tongue” (p. 13). The policy considers the capacity of the child to learn at a time different languages:

“As research clearly shows that children pick up languages extremely quickly between the ages of 2 and 8 and that multilingualism has great cognitive benefits to young students, children will be exposed to different languages early on (but with a

particular emphasis on the mother tongue), starting from the Foundational Stage onwards.” (NEP 2020, p. 13)

For English language pedagogy, this implies that teaching should no longer isolate English from the learners’ linguistic backgrounds. Instead, teachers are expected to build bridges between languages, using students’ home languages as resources for learning English. Strategies such as translanguaging, bilingual scaffolding, and comparative language analysis are encouraged to enhance understanding and retention. Teachers are encouraged to draw on the learners’ linguistic resources to make English more accessible and meaningful, thereby promoting a richer and more inclusive language learning environment. This also fosters respect for linguistic diversity while building proficiency in English as a link and global language.

5.2 Contextualized Pedagogies for Effective English Communication”

Another significant shift proposed by NEP 2020 is the transition from rote-based grammar instruction toward contextualized and communicative English teaching. Traditional English teaching in many Indian schools, especially government schools, has often focused on grammar drills, memorization, and translation exercises that limit students’ ability to use the language for real-life communication. NEP 2020 advocates for an approach that prioritizes meaning-making, fluency, and comprehension, using everyday situations, stories, dialogues, and activities relevant to students’ lives. This new approach is based on the basic principles proposed in the policy for bringing about important changes into pedagogy: “Pedagogy must evolve to make education more experiential, holistic, integrated, inquiry-driven, discovery-oriented, learner-centred, discussion-based, flexible, and, of course, enjoyable.” (NEP 2020, p. 3)

So far as teaching of English is concerned, this means moving away from grammar drills and textbook memorization towards communicative, real-world language use. Students should be able to express themselves meaningfully in English and understand the language in context.

Teachers are thus required to implement communicative language teaching (CLT) methods, using dialogues, role-plays, stories, and project work to make English relevant and practical. Teaching materials and classroom interactions must, therefore, reflect the socio-cultural realities of students and promote functional language use. By connecting English learning to local contexts, teachers can bridge the gap between students’ lived experiences and the language they are learning, thus making it more engaging and effective.

5.3 Activity-Driven, Student-Centric Teaching

NEP 2020 proposes a decisive move away from textbook-driven instruction to activity-based, learner-centered pedagogies. In this approach, functions of the teacher transforms from that of a dispenser of information to one who facilitates learning, guiding students through meaningful activities, games, projects, and group work that foster interaction and participation.

In English language classrooms, it may imply use of poems, plays, real-life conversations, group reading, and writing journals etc. The emphasis is on active engagement, where students learn by doing and through interaction, rather than passively absorbing content. This pedagogy supports differentiated instruction, catering to diverse learners with varied language backgrounds and abilities—a reality in most government schools.

5.4 Fostering Inquiry, Innovation, and Teamwork

NEP 2020 clearly states:

Curriculum content will be reduced in each subject to its core essentials, to make space for critical thinking and more holistic, inquiry-based, discovery-based, discussion-based, and analysis-based learning. The mandated content will focus on key concepts, ideas, applications, and problem-solving. Teaching and learning will be conducted in a more interactive manner; questions will be encouraged, and classroom sessions will regularly contain more fun, creative, collaborative, and exploratory activities for students for deeper and more experiential learning. (NEP 2020, p. 12)

English language teachers are expected to design tasks that not only improve linguistic ability but also stimulate higher-order thinking. For instance, a lesson on a short story might include discussions on ethical dilemmas, personal reflection essays, or debates. Collaborative projects—like writing a class magazine or staging a play—nurture creativity and teamwork while improving language use in authentic situations. This broader skill-based approach to ELT aligns well with the holistic vision of education promoted by the NEP.

5.5 Rethinking Assessment through Formative Approaches

Recommendations for modification of the existing practices of evaluation constitute another important dimension of the new policy. The policy calls for the replacement of high-stakes, rote-based examinations with formative, competency-based assessments that measure conceptual understanding, application, and skills. As the Policy recommends,

The aim of assessment in the culture of our schooling system will shift from one that is summative and primarily tests rote memorization skills to one that is more regular and formative, is more competency-based, promotes learning and development for our students, and tests higher-order skills, such as analysis, critical thinking, and conceptual clarity. (NEP 2020, p. 17)

In English language education, this means moving beyond standardized tests and grammar-based question papers to continuous, classroom-based evaluation methods. Teachers may use observation checklists, peer reviews, oral presentations, and project evaluations to assess learners' progress. This type of assessment not only provides real-time feedback to students and teachers but also helps track individual learning trajectories, making the process more supportive and diagnostic rather than punitive. The policy encourages a shift from annual exams focused on grammar and textbook recall, and toward continuous, classroom-based assessments that measure language skills in context. Teachers may consider use of projects, oral presentations, peer feedback, and observation checklists to monitor progress and support learning. Such formative assessments are diagnostic and help teachers tailor instruction to individual learners' needs.

Conclusion

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 introduces a drastic shift in the teaching of English within Indian schools, where the teacher is expected to play a very critical role in bringing changes into the educational scenario of India. It advocates a departure from conventional teacher-dominated instruction towards learner-centered approaches that reflect the multilingual fabric of classrooms. Educators are urged to adopt creative methodologies, integrate regional languages, and foster interactive, expressive learning spaces. Realizing this vision, however, demands robust institutional backing through continuous training, adaptable curricula, adequate resources, and sustained mentoring. Although the policy lays out a progressive framework, its effectiveness will ultimately rest on how well it is executed, particularly in government schools. NEP 2020 reimagines English not as a marker of elitism but as a functional medium for communication, imagination, and intercultural dialogue. By

encouraging multilingual practices, enhancing student participation, and strengthening teacher capacity, the policy aspires to establish an inclusive, dynamic model of English education aligned with India's cultural and linguistic plurality.

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