

Rethinking Language Education in NEP-2020 Era: Exploring the Convergence of Language, Knowledge and Culture in Harmony

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Abstract

Education in India faces several historical and contemporary challenges despite being one of the world's richest intellectual and cultural traditions. The National Education Policy (NEP-2020) strives to address the challenges by advocating a transformative educational framework that is rooted in Indian knowledge systems, promoting multilingual, experiential and holistic education integrating the local content in curriculum and pedagogy. The paper highlights both the curricular and pedagogical shifts in language education revolving around Indian Knowledge System. The paper critically reviews the role of mother tongue, multilingual education and how NEP-2020 provides platform to connect the ancient wisdom with modern educational models by promoting multilingual education, teacher training for holistic, experiential learning. This paper further contends the scopes of innovative pedagogical practices such as oral traditions, storytelling, debate, discussion, dialogues in language learning reminding the Guru-Shishay Parampara of Gurukul system, the cultural scaffolding, community-based pedagogy. The study is basically a qualitative review study that focuses on the educational policy, alignments of Indian Knowledge System (IKS) with Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), Three-Language Formula (TLF) in language education. The paper concludes that meaningful incorporation of IKS in language education can nurture cultural rootedness, contextual learning, value education, ecological consciousness and inclusive learning to realise the goals of NEP20, suitable for the needs of new millennium learners. As a larger part of decolonisation, the multilingual approach with the involvement of teacher's cultural scaffolding and translanguaging, as a tool in language curriculum and classroom interaction, broadens the scopes of Indian epistemology. As a policy review, the study concludes that successful orientation of the pre-service and in-service teacher with the IKS-integrated curriculum, can develop grounded, holistic and culturally relevant teaching learning experience.

Keywords: NEP2020, Indian Knowledge System, Decolonisation, Multilingualism, Three-Language Formula, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy.

1. Introduction

A significant dimension of NEP 2020 is its emphasis on Language education. Language in a diverse country like India is not a mere medium of communication, rather a bearer of culture, identity, and

knowledge repository. Indigenous language in India are more than communication tools; they are vital repositories of traditional knowledge in areas such as agriculture, medicine, environmental practices, traditional values and cultural practices (UN ESCO,2022). The new education policy advocates three language formula and encourages learning in the mother tongue, particularly during the early childhood education within a content rich and culture sensitive curricular framework. This approach resonates with Indian knowledge System, where knowledge has historically transmitted through diverse linguistic traditions from Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit to different regional languages. Learning in one's home languages enhance comprehensions, cognitive development and emotional connection to knowledge (Cummins,2000). It also enables learners to engage more profoundly with local histories, cultural practices, folklore, and indigenous knowledge traditions. "Wherever possible, the medium of instruction at least Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language /mother tongue/regional language" (NEP-2020, govt. of India). Dastidar et al. (2025) underline that indigenous languages encapsulate local belief, customs, and histories, serving as a vital component of social identity and cultural expression. Verma (2025) discuss how nep2020s emphasis on mother tongue instruction aligns with cognitive theories, particularly Cummins Interdependence Hypothesis, which postulates that strong proficiency in mother tongue provides a foundation for learning additional languages paving the base for multilingual learning model. The policy's integration of Indian knowledge system (IKS) into curricula and pedagogy seeks to ground education in indigenous epistemologies, promoting what Verma describes as 'epistemological pluralism' - an approach that recognizes and values multiple ways of knowing.

In a volatile and highly competitive world, India as a rising economy from Global South, needs its own knowledge base that comes with a strong thrust upon the Indian knowledge System. India is a diverse plural democracy that believes in multipolar world, needs alternative way of knowing and perceiving the world and reality. Apart from this, India must overcome its long colonial past. Therefore, the opening gambit of decolonisation starts with its educational model that is New Education Policy (2020) which takes a paradigm shifts in educational landscapes by advocating flexibility, multidisciplinary and holistic learning, rooted in the Indian civilization ethos. Additionally, the contemporary educational landscapes are witnessing a rapid shift from content centric and examination-based model to holistic, learner- centred and value-based meaningful and experiential learning that promotes interconnectedness, sustainability, ethics and self- realization. Thus, the emphasis on experiential and meaningful learning constitutes another area of convergence between IKS and NEP. Consequently, integration of IKS in curriculum and pedagogy promotes indigenous languages education to preserve the diverse cultural and linguistic identity and heritage of India -is multilingual and culturally rich and diverse. Indian knowledge System (IKS), in terms of definition, is the systematic transfer of knowledge from one generation to the next, is a structured system rather than a mere tradition (Nayak & Padhi,2026). In case of the pedagogy of IKS, learning is being delivered through observation, dialogue, reflection, apprenticeship, and direct engagement with nature and the learning community. Similarly, NEP-2020 advocates experiential learning, project-based activities, fieldwork, internships and inquiry-based education. Meaningful learning occurs when students perceive connections between the content and their personal experiences, community connection, and future aspirations. Following the new policy recommendations for mother tongue-based school education, integrating the culture and local content, will not only enhances the academic achievement but also nurture creativity, ethical and cultural awareness, environmental responsibility, and dispositions for lifelong learning.

The inclusion of local content, particularly, in language curriculum further strengthens the relevance of education. India's immense diversity in languages, cultures, ecosystems, and knowledge traditions necessitate such an educational practice that are connected to learners' immediate environments. When students engage with materials that reflect their communities, learning becomes more relatable, empowering, and transformative (Kisku, 2025). This integration of local knowledge systems alongside global perspective enables education to cultivate culturally grounded yet globally competent citizens capable of addressing contemporary challenges. While the platform for the integration is the New Policy (2020), the pedagogical tools, for language education, are multilingual, additive bilingualism, translanguaging that promotes cultural diversity, preserves the indigenous languages, provides learners autonomy and cognitive development.

2. Objectives

1. To review the significance of multilingualism and Three Language Formula (TLF) in achieving the language educational goals endorsed in NEP-2020.
2. To examine how Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and Indigenous Epistemologies can contribute to culturally responsive and contextually pertinent language pedagogy.
3. To analyse the pedagogical and teacher-education implications of integrating IKS, TLF and CRP within the NEP framework.

3. Relevance of the study

The study is relevant as it addresses the long-pending issues of our educational systems, including its heavily westernised curriculum, teacher training, following NEP-2020 recommendations in area of language education. India, with its rich diverse civilisational heritage, is among the few ancient living civilizations that have endured through centuries of social, political and cultural transformations (Sen, 2021)). However, During the foreign invasion and colonial rule its rich glory and heritage was fading fast. With the establishment of British rule in India, Western education was introduced. Thomas Babington Macaulay Introduced the “Downward Filtration Theory” or “Minutes on Indian Education” to promote the English education based on western epistemologies and value systems (Macaulay, 1835; Kumar, 2005). Even after the Independence the overall scenario of education policy was the continuation of the colonial approach that was not grounded to the roots of the nation and global needs. NEP2020 attempts to address the numerous expanding developmental needs of our nations (Govt of India, 2020; Joshi. 2021).

Large Number of existing studies focus on the policy review, language acquisition, or the philosophical dimension of IKS, paying insufficient attention to how indigenous epistemologies can be integrated into language education through culturally responsive and relevant pedagogical practices. The new education policy has a very systematic recommendations of three language formula and mother tongue based elementary education. This very policy suggests to integrating the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) into all level of the Education, intending to promote Holistic development, cultural heritage, vocational competencies, and linguistic diversity (Govt of India, 2020; Subramanyam, k.2022). Further, the issue of language education, particularly the three language Formula (TLF), remains one of the most sensitive and debated aspects of educational policy in post-independent India (Mohanty, 2019). Since language covers the large part of the school curriculum, this study becomes significant that highlights the importance of multilingualism, region specific curriculum development, and culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), naturally aligning with Nep 2020. It also critically evaluates the areas and possibilities of Indian

knowledge System as well as the indigenous epistemology promoting rational outlook in Knowledge dissemination from policy framework to curriculum integration for the 21st century learners. The integration of indigenous knowledge into curriculum expedites culturally relevant learning experiences and exposing learners with India's rich intellectual traditions (Lasdon-Billings,1995; Gay,2018).

4. Indigenous Epistemology in Global World

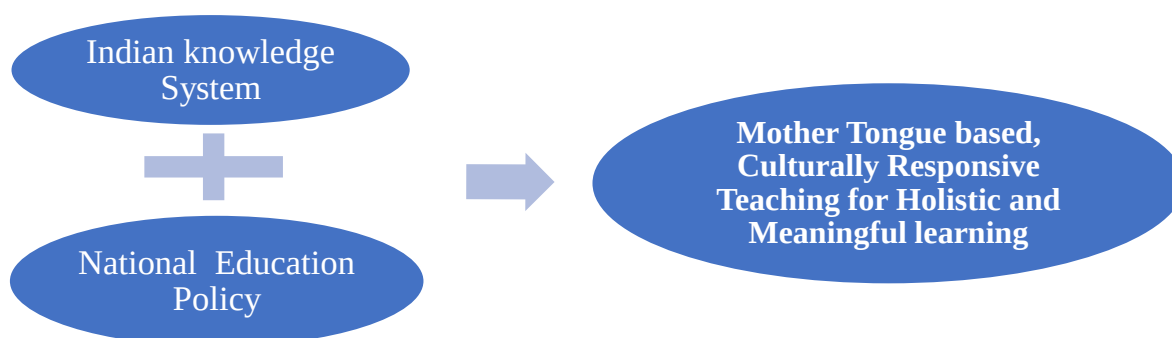
"Indigenous epistemology is a term that is used internationally to denote any knowledge traditionally held by indigenous peoples and communities" (Wang,2024). It denotes the knowledge, beliefs, and practices cultivated by indigenous populations over millennia, embedded within their cultural, spiritual and environmental framework (Govender & Mutendera,2020). Today, international organizations and scholars increasingly recognise the significance of indigenous knowledge in addressing the global challenges such as climate change, ecological imbalance, linguistic and cultural preservation. Therefore, cognitive justice requires the validation of the epistemological diversity of the world, the admission of the existence of different way of knowing (de Sousa Santos, 2014). In global context, Indigenous epistemology and ontology challenge the dominant western perspectives that often emphasize individualism, scientific reductionism, and the separation of human from the environment.

Incorporating the IKS into modern education goes beyond the goal of cultural preservation; it represents a deliberate strategy to overcome certain limitations of the existing educational model. By embedding the holistic, experiential, and value-based learning approaches inherent in IKS, modern education can cultivate more balanced individuals who are better prepared to navigate the challenges of 21st century(kumar,2021). Indian, including Indigenous Knowledge System embody cumulative wisdom, practices, and belief systems developed by indigenous communities over generations. These systems span various domains, including environmental management, cultural practices, and community governance. With the ongoing global educational transformation, there is growing need to integrate into modern curricula (Meitei,2024). The indigenous epistemology takes the upper level of holistic and inclusive model of education and forms the philosophical basis heightening the rational knowledge, continuity of culture and ecological interconnectedness(kisku,2026).

4.1. Indigenous Epistemology and Indian knowledge system

The Indian knowledge system (IKS) is a broader framework that encompasses India's ancient scientific, philosophical, cultural and social traditions of knowledge in a structured format. The connection between indigenous knowledge (IK) and the Indian knowledge System (IKS) lies in their shared emphasis on sustainability, holistic living, and experiential learning that bind the family, community and the society. Grey (2024) contends that indigenous epistemologies pre-empt relational accountability, where the process of knowledge acquisition is connected with ethical responsibility to the community and environment. Native philosophies do not promote the atomistic approach to knowledge dissemination; rather it subscribes integrative and contextual learning. Same way, Indian traditions, based on Upanishad, views human beings as inseparable from society, nature and the cosmos. Concepts such as Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam ('the world is one family') and Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah ('may all beings be happy') reflect a collective orientation that prioritizes social harmony and mutual responsibility. IKS historically, emphasized the interconnectedness of the material and the spiritual, the empirical and the ethical, the individual and the collective. This system emphasised holistic development-intellectual, physical, moral and spiritual-rooted in the philosophical framework of the Purusharthas: Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha (Saxena,2024)). Collective learning, in the Gurukul system, cooperative decision making and

shared resource management, historically practiced by the local communities from India show the continuity of its civilizational ethos. The term “Indian Knowledge System (IKS)” mentioned in the new education policy is different from that of the indigenous epistemology in general. According to NEP2020 document “Knowledge of India” will not hesitate to look backward for wisdom and insight to address the modern challenges of India, if possible, in a structured, curriculum and educational framework.



5. NEP-2020 and Language Education

Though the country got freedom in 1947, the governance, policy and education system was still struggling the immediate effect of British colonialism. It was undoubtedly the impact of long colonial, westernised policy in governance and education system that ignores the cultural rejuvenation, self-esteem, creativity of the learners, by promoting the rote memorisation and exam centric education. This model privileges the English education, ignores the rationality of mother tongue-based education, even in the elementary level. NEP-2020 challenges this model by permitting the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) in a formal setup, that challenges the hegemony of colonial epistemologies and offers a sense of pride and ownership among the marginalised students (Verma, et.al,2025). Decolonisation is gradual process in all segments from policy, governance, historiography to education and pedagogy. Now it is more or less accepted that 21st century belongs to Asia, particularly to China and India. While China has successfully overcome the western dominance and its ‘Century of Humiliation’(Kaufman,2011); India is still struggling at least in terms of innovation and knowledge-based economy. For the last three decades the decolonisation of education has emerged as a critical concern within the postcolonial scholarships (Swaminathan,1989), seeking the challenge the epistemic dominance (Spivak, 2023), of colonial knowledge system and restore the legitimacy of indigenous languages, cultures, and intellectual tradition (Smith,2012; Nigugi wa Thingo,1986). Against this backdrop National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 promises a new hope in language education- ‘Indian languages are not only a powerful medium of communication but also repositories of culture, knowledge, and tradition’. NEP-20 unambiguously welcomes the IKS integration into every facet of education including language learning (Verma,2025).

5.1. Multilingualism as a Way forward

From the 2026-27 academic session, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) will implement a core recommendation of the NEP-20 and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) 2023: the introduction of a third language in class 6, at least two of the third languages must be Indian. The change appears administrative, yet it carries symbolic and structural weight (Rviya,2026). Multilingualism will thus move from policy aspiration to examination reality. Now the sole question is whether it is scientifically rational and nationally viable in India, – seeks the critical attention. Multilingual

education, starting with mother tongue, is strongly supported by decades of psycholinguistics and educational research. Learning through the first language (L1) during early childhood leads to better cognitive development (Cummins2000) and improve academic achievement (Benson,2025). The intersection of multilingual education and decolonisation lies in history of the English education in India. The history of English education in India remains paradoxical. The colonial education system gave birth linguistics hierarchies, resulting the marginalization of native Languages. As a result, this hierarchies were institutionalised, where English medium education becomes synonymous with quality education, terming the other medium intellectually inferior (Annamalai,2005; Verma,2025). The well established fact is that English in India is no longer a foreign residue, but a lingua-franca. So, the debate, then, concerns more about hierarchy than exclusion. The New Policy seeks recalibration rather than removal| -English remains but no longer as the symbol of intellectual superiority and elitism.

5.2. Three Language Formula (TLF) and NEP20

NEP20 advocates holistic and multidisciplinary education urging flexibility and dismantling rigid silos. The Three-Language Formula (TLF) aligns with this broader educational philosophy. Education, the policy contends, must cultivate cognitive ability alongside cultural sensibility (Ravva, Economic Times,2026). The policy tries to address the long pending issues of three language formula in school education by providing autonomy to the state and regional authority, reducing political and community resistance. The original formula faced strong political opposition, especially in non-Hindi speaking states (Mohanty,2006). Bilingual scaffolding-where English education is supported by the use of mother tongue or regional language -is central to NEP2020s multilingual framework (Verma,2025). Mahapatra et al. (2023) present a comprehensive framework - implementing India's language -in-education policy, prioritising that effective multilingual education requires systematic changes in curriculum design, teacher preparation, assessment practice and resource development (, Kumari,2026). The policy framework distinguishes between additive and subtractive bilingualism. The NEP-2020 aims for additive bilingualism, where students learn multiple languages maintaining and strengthening their mother tongue(singh,2025). The policy recommends the language competency in all the three languages and proficiency at least in two languages. By flexibility on policy level, providing regional autonomy, through the recommendations of teacher training on innovative pedagogy like translanguaging, additive bilingual framework, and technology integration the recalibration of TLF becomes a viable option in Indian scenario. By implementing the TLF, the policy can achieve its multiples goals. One of the prominent ones is the integration of Indian Knowledge System.

5.3 NEP and TLF for IKS Integration

NEP 2020 advocates the integration of Indian Knowledge System into curricula across all disciplinary level of education. This provision has important implications for language policy, as large part of traditional knowledge is embedded in indigenous languages and cultural practices (Verma,2025 and Kumari, 2026).One of the foremost challenges in dealing with IKS today is the question of authenticity and sanctity. Many IKS revivalists tend to focus heavily on Sanskrit texts, and elite canonical literary traditions, often overlooking the vernacular, tribal, and folk knowledge systems. This process, sometimes referred to as Sanskritization, giving privileges to certain canonical forms marginalising others (Chakrabarty, 2000). For instance, while Vedic and Upanishad traditions are celebrated, there are equally rich knowledge repositories found in regional practices-like vakti poetry, siddha medicine, and oral epics. Access to formal learning was historically restricted and often uneven by caste, gender and social status, excluding large sections of the society from institutional education (Chakrabarty, 2018, Saxsena,2024).

Hence, the relevance of traditional education practices rooted in IKS not in their blind replication but in their conceptual and pedagogical insights (Cahkrabarty,2026).

On this ground, NEP 2020 safeguards the controversial aspects of Indian Knowledge System, introducing three language formula (TLF) that seeks to foster multilingual proficiency. While TLF remains a long-standing challenge in Indian education, there is an immediacy to rework the aesthetics and pedagogy of language use (Pandey,2024). The Indian Knowledge System complements multilingual education, while Nep-2020 paves the structured way for both the TLF and IKS. Drawing upon indigenous knowledge and local contexts, IKS promotes experiential learning, ethical awareness, and environmental awareness. Indeed, NEP 2020 acts as a bridging platform for IKS and TLF. Together, TLF and IKS create a framework for holistic and contextual learning. They support the learners who are linguistically proficient, culturally grounded, intellectually capable and socially responsible. For the Intellectual capacity, ethical integrity and social responsibility –experiential as well as multilingual education which is comparatively attractive and feasible.

6. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Effective culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) requires the deliberate incorporation of student's cultural identities and perspective within the educational framework. It is an educational methodology that acknowledges and utilises students varied cultural origins, languages, and experiences to improve learning outcomes (Gay,2002: Ladson-Billings,995). For the successful integration of CRP, educators must critically reflect on their own biases and assumptions. Teacher preparation programmes must address this challenge's incorporating IKs in curriculum and pre-service teacher training programme. Drawing on the international best practices and contemporary educational research, NEP-20 also aligns with culturally responsive pedagogy. NCF-2023, clearly mentioned about the localization of curriculum and materials for holistic education through the CRP with the use of "local resources for learning, including language, practice , experts, histories, environment and more, as rich source of illustrations or case studies; the involvement of parents and the communities; educational contents, such as stories, art, games, examples and problems, chosen as much as possible to be rooted in the Indian and local geographic content"(NCF-2023,pg.143). Culturally Responsive pedagogy is conditional to the Curriculum intervention of the class teacher and utterly depends on the curriculum and pedagogical knowledge of the teacher. Therefore, sensitising the teacher regarding the learner's local language, culture and community practice is essential to implement the IKS and CRP.

7. Training the Teacher for IKS, CRP and TLF

Teacher training is the foundation that enables the effective integration of three language formula (TLF), culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), and Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), thereby realizing the NEP2020s vision of learners who are culturally rooted, nationally connected and globally competitive. Researchers highlight the importance need to engage with Indigenous perspectives, reflective practice, ecological and community-oriented pedagogies to successfully embed IKS within educational framework (Batra,2021; Kumar,2021). NEP2020 advocates for drastic shifts from rigid disciplinary boundaries, proposing instead a model of knowledge integration that reflects the holistic approach in life inherent in Indian philosophical tradition (Ram et al.2024). Training the teacher with new curriculum framework further drives the NEP policy one step ahead towards holistic education, rooted in Indian tradition. Considering such model, teacher becomes the single most important component of new education

framework. The teacher education occupies the central mediating space in translating the IKS-based educational principles into classroom realities (Lawati,2025). Place based curriculum design, additive bilingual pedagogical practices, cultural scaffolding, use of local language – are some of the areas where new education framework, based on multilingual and culturally responsive pedagogy, can impact the teacher education. Teacher with awareness on the relevancy of IKS, and with competency of cultural scaffolding- promotes the national integrity, maintains regional diversity and strives for global opportunity for the new generation learners.

The successful implementation, therefore, of the National Education Policy (NEP) depends remarkably on the quality and preparedness of teachers. Among its major priorities, are the Multilingualism modelled on Three Language Formula, the Indian Knowledge System and the adoption of culturally responsive Pedagogy. The convergence of these dimensions is only possible through the professional development of both pre-service and in-service teachers with the redesigned curriculum. The effective implementation of multilingual education requires teachers who possess multilingual competence and ability to use translanguaging strategies. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) complements multilingual education, validating learners cultural background and lived experiences of the learners -making classroom a space for diversity and inclusiveness. The Integration of IKS and IK further strengthens this approach. A future-ready teacher workforce, equipped with competencies in experiential, place-based, and culturally responsive pedagogy, has the potent power to create an interactive, culturally grounded, and transformative learning environments.

7.1. Alignment of IKS, TLF and CRP with NEP Goals

Dimension/NEP Goals	Indian Knowledge System (IKS)	Three-Language Formula (TLF)	Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP)	Outcome for language education
1.Multilingualism	Promotes vernacular and classical languages as repositories of knowledges	Encourages proficiency in mother tongue, regional and global languages	Values learners home languages as learning tool	Enhances language proficiency, cultural identity, and cognitive development
2.Holistic and integrated Learning	Integrates language with culture, values, history and local knowledge	Facilitates trans-linguistic and inter-disciplinary learning	Connects language learning with students lived experience	Develops well rounded and meaningful learning experiences
3.Experiential and Contextual learning	Uses storytelling, oral traditions, and community knowledge	Encourages language use in authentic social context in phase wise	Relates curriculum to local realities and cultural contexts	Makes language learning relevant, engaging and practical
4.Equity and Inclusion	Recognises diverse cultural	Accommodates learners from	Ensures re-presentations	Creates inclusive and equitable language classroom

	and epistemic tradition	varied linguistic backgrounds	diverse cultures and voices in classroom	
5.Decolonisation and Knowledge reclamation	Revives indigenous epistemologies and appropriate the colonial knowledge hierarchy	Reduces over-dependence on a single dominant language	Challenges cultural and linguistic marginalization	Foster epistemic justice, and decolonised language education
6.National Integration and Global citizenship	Cultivates appreciation of native epistemology, maintains the modern curriculum	Bridges linguistic communities across regions	Promotes respect for cultural diversity and democratic values	Develops culturally rooted, globally competent citizens

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 explicitly calls for embedding IKS in every facet of education, including language learning. It promotes the cultural preservation, experiential learning and holistic development-while cultural preservation, linguistic plurality only can be achieved by curricular inclusion and pedagogical intervention. The Policy, therefore marks a significant shift in India's educational discourse by foregrounding multilingualism, three language formula (TLF) And culturally responsive pedagogy (CLT). If handled sensible and executed judiciously it becomes a foundational platform where the young learner does not struggle in language acquisition, nor they experience cultural alienation. Recognising the Indigenous Epistemology, Mother tongue-based education, -historical inequalities acknowledge that linguistic diversity is a national asset rather than a problem (Verma, 2025, Mahapatra, et.al.2023). The findings from the review suggests that multilingual pedagogies, translanguaging practices, dialogic methods, and community-based learning resonate strongly with indigenous educational philosophies and pedagogy such as Guru-Shishya Parampara (Saxena,2025). Furthermore, the integration of IKS into language education provides opportunities to connect traditional wisdom with contemporary practice, thereby, promoting critical thinking, value education and environmental consciousness, and cultural continuity (Sangeetha et al.,2022)

To find the goals of NEP2020 out, several measures are recommended. First, teacher education institutions should introduce IKS-oriented and multilingual pedagogical training, especially for the pre-service teacher. Second, systematic development of multilingual curricular materials, including digital resources in regional and tribal languages, should be prioritised, through collaborative effort, with the involvement of linguists, educators and local communities (Hamid, 2024: Behera et al.,2025) to scaffold the cognitive growth and cultural identity among the school learners . Third, language curriculum must integrate contextual examples from Indian knowledge traditions that encourage interdisciplinary learning. Fourth, innovative pedagogical practices such as project based, task-based learning, storytelling, translanguaging should be institutionalised to promote meaningful learning experiences. Fifth, government institutions can collaborate with other privately run institutions where IKS and NEP20 is being successfully integrated.

Finally, assessment systems must be redesigned to reflect multilingual competencies and diverse way of Knowing, rather than privileging language hierarchy and standardised approach.

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