



Education in Kashmir: A Historical Analysis of NPE 1968 to NEP 2020

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Abstract

The evolution of education in Kashmir from the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1968 to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 highlights both the aspirations of national frameworks and the region's specific cultural and linguistic realities. NPE 1968 laid strong emphasis on the "three-language formula" and the promotion of mother tongues as mediums of instruction at the primary level. In Kashmir, this principle carried unique significance due to the rich linguistic diversity, particularly Kashmiri, Dogri, Gojri, and Ladakhi, yet the effective implementation was constrained by political instability, limited resources, and the dominance of Urdu and English in administration and schooling. The NPE 1986 and its 1992 modification reinforced the need to preserve cultural identity through regional languages, but their role remained largely symbolic as the pressure of standardized examinations and aspirations for mobility encouraged English-medium learning. With NEP 2020, however, there is a renewed focus on linguistic inclusivity, proposing mother tongue or regional language as the medium of instruction till Grade V, with flexibility up to Grade VIII. This policy shift provides Kashmir an opportunity to strengthen its cultural heritage, integrate local languages into formal curricula, and enhance early childhood learning outcomes. Nevertheless, the challenges of resources, teacher training, and societal perceptions of language hierarchies remain. Thus, the historical trajectory underscores the need for context-sensitive implementation to ensure that regional languages become not only a cultural asset but also a functional medium of educational empowerment in Kashmir.

Keywords: Kashmir, Education Policy, Regional Languages, Mother Tongue, NEP 2020

Introduction

Education in Kashmir has always been a deeply intertwined arena of cultural identity, political aspirations, and national policy frameworks. From the post-independence era onward, education in the region not only aimed at improving literacy and social mobility but also functioned as a means of integrating local heritage within the broader Indian framework. The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1968 marked a significant milestone by emphasizing equal educational opportunities, democratization of learning, and the recognition of regional languages as a medium of instruction in early schooling. For Kashmir, this policy provided both possibilities and challenges. On one hand, it validated the pedagogical importance of the mother tongue—Kashmiri, alongside Urdu and other local languages—in strengthening cultural identity and improving cognitive development. On the other hand, the implementation of these recommendations was hampered by political instability, resource limitations, and a stronger focus on Urdu and English, often sidelining Kashmiri at the primary level. During the decades that followed, subsequent educational reforms, including the NPE 1986 and its Programme of Action 1992, reiterated the value of regional languages, but in Kashmir the gap between policy vision and classroom practice remained visible. The persistent preference for English as a gateway to employment, combined with the symbolic status of Urdu as an official language, created a layered linguistic hierarchy, leaving Kashmiri marginalized within its own homeland. Thus, the educational trajectory of Kashmir reflected the broader national debates over the tension between globalization and cultural preservation, where language became both a tool of empowerment and a marker of neglect.

A very recent shift in focus was with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 enumerating the mother tongue and regional languages as a key focus point in foundation level literacy and numeracy, where even within the country, children should be offered education in the language of their home, until the position of at least Grade 5, and ideally till the position of Grade 8. To the people of Kashmir, this command is monumental, since it satisfies the decades-long request

International Advance Journal of Engineering, Science and Management (IAJESM)

Multidisciplinary, Multilingual, Indexed, Double-Blind, Open Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed-

International Journal, Impact factor (SJIF) = 8.152



on the part of scholars, linguists, and educators who would like to protect Kashmiri and other local dialects by means of institutional acceptance. However, in contrast to previous policies, NEP 2020 trying to embed linguistic variety into a modernized skill based system of education, certainly conveys the idea that the integrity of culture and high achievement in academic learning do not necessarily clash against one another. This policy is very relevant in the context of the Kashmir situation, which is in a conflict-prone region but modernity dictates debates of identity, resilience, and inclusivity. Provided it will be properly established, it can lead to the revitalisation of the Kashmiri language, as it will be included into the mainstream pedagogical practices, curriculum development, and online education opportunities, and, at the same time, will foster multilingualism. The evolution of the educational vision, as well as the development of the Kashmir struggle to attain the linguistic affirmation in the educational system, can therefore be defined by the historical arc that starts with NPE 1968 and leads to the NEP 2020. Following this path, it is possible to trace how the national policies influenced regional realities and how the reinforcement of the mother tongue is central both in terms of preserving the cultural heritage of Kashmir and allowing equal access to knowledge in the twenty-first century.

Background of education in Kashmir

Kashmir boasts of a rich educational history since the ancient times. Learning institutions such as Sharada Peeth were the epicenters of knowledge and culture and during the medieval period, madrasas and pathshalas predominated sources of learning. The foundations of organized education were developed through the modern institutions founded during the colonial and Dogra rule such as the Sri Pratap College (1905) and Amar Singh College (1913) in the field of higher education. The situation was increased further when the University of Kashmir was founded in 1948 after independence. This system of education gradually formed a five-tier space of education primary, middle, higher secondary, college and university.

According to the statistical data, the literacy percentage census of Jammu and Kashmir was about 68 in the year 2011, where the male literacy was 76.8 and female was 56.4. Current data shows that there has been considerable improvement with the literacy rate now being nearly 77.3 per cent comprising of 85.7 per cent of the male populace and 68 per cent of the female population. But, inequalities still exist, the rural/urban divide can be observed similarly to the situation in the rural areas where only 8.4 percent of males and 2.8 percent of females graduate at a level of graduate education or above. The major problems that persistently affect it are political instability that brings about frequent school closures, inadequate infrastructure, and high adolescent dropout rates among the girls. Nevertheless, with these barriers, there has been a step forward in terms of access and outlet through programs like Army Goodwill Schools and local education programs that give hope to the future state of education in Kashmir.

Rationale for Studying

The vision of developing a single pattern of educational development suggests that national educational policies are framed with referring to the national scale, but the regional peculiarities that include the culture, language, socio-political situation, and economic facts strongly affect the time and way of their realization. Education in Kashmir has come to bear more than the dimension of introducing literacy, it has been a source of cultural uphold and identity naming in addition to socialization. Through a comparative study of the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1968 to National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, one can follow the process of translation and modification of national direction in matters of language, curriculum, and inclusivity and how this was contested and at other times, adopted within a region in which linguistic and social-political tensions are unique to Provinces in the Canadian context. The necessity of such an analysis lies in the fact that on the one hand policies promote the use of mother tongues in the schools and aims at regional languages promotion whereas on the other the ground realities of Kashmir indicate a discrepancy between advertisement and performance.



In addition, this would help learn more about the way the national education policies operate towards the intersection of the macrovariants of the education policy and the much smaller level of identities. In Kashmir, the issue of language: Kashmiri versus Urdu versus English is not merely a matter of pedagogy but rather of modernity, of access to jobs and the survival of culture. The NEP 2020, which is characterized by a renewed emphasis on the foundational literacy in the mother tongue, gives a chance to retrace previous inadequacies and imagine more comprehensive reforms. Historical set of policy influence in Kashmir therefore does not only draw attention to policy outcome in terms of education, but it also throws light into larger question of equity, continuity of culture, and the preparation of education to promote social integration in multicultural communities.

Historical Context of Education in Kashmir

The pre-independence education system in Kashmir was modest, imbalanced and had an effect of social strata and political power. Education was not a universal right during the Dogra rule (1846-1947): it was a privilege of the elite, upper-level and urban classes. There were minimal formal institutions and levels of literacy were very low, in particular among rural communities and amongst women. Christian organizations also established the missionary schools, which penetrated into Srinagar and the adjacent regions and offered new pedagogical practices, as well as access to English, albeit the limits were limited. The religious education in Persian and Arabic was given in the traditional makhtabs and madrasas but little was institutionally given to the Kashmiri language though it was the mother tongue of majority. Persian had been a court and cultural language until it was replaced by the Dogras in 1889 by Urdu, thus not only transforming the linguistic order, but also adding a political tone to education. So, the educational system that existed in Kashmir prior to independence showed the contradiction between education modern school, religious shaping and language domination, and the native language was left in its periphery in formal hierarchy.

In the years after 1947 and the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India, education was a major instrument of modernization and democratization as well as social mobility. Large scale changes were brought in by the state to promote literacy and to universalize primary education. A new wave of government schools was instituted in the 1950s and 1960s in the rural districts, teacher training programs and increasing female enrollment in the education system. However, in spite of this growth, the language question remained then as it went on: Urdu continued to be the administrative, educational language, and English gradually acquired social status and job positions as a prestigious language. Although the teaching of Kashmiri is of cultural importance, it was not introduced as a compulsory language of instruction and thus most children have lost touch with their language of origin at home and the language taught at school, Kashmiri. These policies were a manifestation of national trends, the languages of the regions were acknowledged theoretically but marginalised in practice as the increasing trend towards English and the practicality of administering the region via Urdu took centre stage in Kashmir. Although there was a steady increase in literacy rates and particularly in response to National Policies on Education of 1968 and 1986, there was the weakening of Kashmiri in mainstream curricula leading to generational separation in terms of language practice and literary practice. Educational identity in Kashmir seems especially complicated because of the presence of three of the most important languages, including Kashmiri, Urdu and English and this co-presence complicates the role of language in shaping Kashmiri identity. Although it was not the mother-tongue of most people, Urdu became established as the official and lighting language as a means of relating to the past administration and representing an opportunity of neighbourhood between a variety of cultures. English, in its turn, became the status language of college education, career and international relating and thus assumed an aspiration value among the parents and the students. Kashmiri, as the everyday language spoken language till recent decades was marginalized in schools, which caused the issue of language erosion and cultural alienation concerns. This was somehow rectified by introducing Kashmiri as a subject in primary schools at the end of the 20th century, although this did not go too well (it was due to

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a combination of untrained teachers, inadequate teaching material, and simply because everybody wanted to learn Urdu and English). This linguistic stratification had deep-seated implication on the identity of education in Kashmir, in that, building proficiency in English was linked to social ascendancy, proficiency in Urdu to bureaucratic and culture authority, and in Kashmiri, the familial and folk cultures. In that way, the historical path of education in the Kashmir region reveals the role of language as an object of learning that can be also used as a source of identity, aspiration, and power. Such a complex relationship determined how the policy would come in later, between 1968 and NEP 2020, where the question has been how to strike a balance between the national agenda and local-linguistic contexts.

National Policy on Education (NPE) 1968 and Kashmir

The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1968 was the first detailed educational policy of India and emerged due to the suggestion of Kothari Commission (1964-66). It focused on democratization of education, equality of access, national integration and inculcation of scientific temper. The growth of secondary and higher education, formulation of better teacher training facilities, necessitating the minimum investment of 6% of GDP into education, and provision of the three-language formula at the school level were some of its protruding features. The importance of educating girls, weaker sections, and rural populations was also included in the policy that wanted to make education as a medium of social change. Especially notable was the focus on language pedagogy: though English was to be maintained as a key lingua franca, the basis of early education was to be the regional languages as well as the mother-tongue. With its suggestion of harmony between national unity and cultural diversity, the policy had aimed at accommodating India linguistic plurality and at the same time accommodated the dreams of modernization and development.

The stress placed upon regional languages and mother tongue by the NPE 1968 in the context of Kashmir had its symbolic as well practical meanings. The policy acknowledged that learning with the use of one mother-tongue contributes to enhanced understanding, creativity and continuity of cultural traditions. But application in Kashmir showed the contradictions. Urdu, the native language of the majority, is neither the native language of other states nor is the representation. It is a member of the Kashmiri representation, but the official language and the medium of instruction in most of the schools has been maintained by Urdu, pushing Kashmiri aside at the formation phase. Although Kashmiri High-Oral and High-Literary Traditions had strong oral and literacy traditions, they were not institutionally supported in terms of curriculum, teaching, and textbooks and therefore had little access to educational institutions. Instead, English also became progressively more popular as a language of advanced education, and a means of employment, as its status made it the desired language by both students, and parents, as well. In this way, in spite of the NPE 1968 setting out structure to reinforce local tongues, scholars in reality, Kashmiri had remained disenfranchised in the schooling framework. This linguistic policy of the state was successful in prioritizing Urdu and English compared with the mother tongue diverging learning at home and learning at schools that weakened the educational premises of children and discouraged intergenerational transfer of Kashmiri at formal education settings.

The situation is emphasized in comparison with the other Indian states indicative of the issues in Kashmir. Places where political and cultural enthusiasm was strongest, such as West Bengal, er India, Tamil Nadu or Medha and Maharashtra saw the replacement of English and Hindi-based languages in schools and higher education by local languages: Bengali, Tamil and Marathi, boosting regional pride and literacy in the mother-tongue. The case of Kashmir, on the contrary, was that the sociopolitical environment and administrative practices supported Urdu and English as prestigious and powerful languages even though Kashmiri was spoken by the majority. This gap depicts that effectiveness of NPE 1968 provisions on language warns that such matters relied largely upon the regional political will and attitude of the society. In contrast to other states with strong linguistic assertion movements, Kashmir could not offer

Kashmiri any institutional recognition due to its socio-political volatility, and also a lack of



state contributions. Hence, as a document NPE 1968 is recalled as a milestone kind of move in national education policy, the vision of the document inspiring mother tongue learning showed an unbalanced implementation inside India. The policy failed to fulfill its commitment in Kashmir, where the relationships between language, identity, and politics became particularly convoluted in determining the educational state of affairs.

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and its Implications for Kashmir

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is one of the most ambitious reforms of the Indian educational process since independence, and the special importance of holistic, flexible, and multidisciplinary education is stressed. One of the most revolutionary aspects of it is the insistence on the use of mother tongue or regional language as the primary language of instruction not less than until Grade 5, and ideally till Grade 8, thus once again confirming on cognitive and cultural basis altogether the effectiveness of early education in the native language of a child. This policy also tries to foster multilingualism by the force of the three language formula and states should enrich and maintain their linguistic heritage. Parallel to this, NEP 2020 emphasizes integrating technology in education, equity, and inclusion, which means that it is especially applicable to the regions that have varied social-cultural and linguistic identities. In the case of Kashmir, this policy creates a new path of reconciling modern education requirements within a tradition-bound preservation of identity, politics, and languages Rankings.

There are various implications of NEP 2020 in Kashmir. The instruction to use mother tongue as first priority opens up a possibility that Kashmiri is made more institutionalized in primary education which could potentialize the gap between the home language and the school language and restore the cultural pride. Meanwhile, issues continue to be raised in the areas of teacher training, curriculum design, and parental choices of English and Urdu, which are perceived as means of getting a job and social success. This nexus of aspirations can be reconciled by an effectively implemented NEP 2020, where language policy decisions will balance the prominence of Kashmiri with English and Urdu, encouraging multilingual competencies in the process and strengthening local identity. Besides, in Kashmiri, digital programs under NEP 2020 might develop e-content and teaching materials to keep the language alive in a fast-paced global globalization scenario. Therefore NEP 2020 is much more than a reform in education in the case of Kashmir since it presents an opportunity to realise a breakthrough in the quest by the region to balance its cultural heritage with its modern needs.

Comparative Analysis: NPE 1968 – NEP 2020

Transformations to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 as a follow-up of the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1968 indicate a radical shift in terms of Indian educational aspirations and this would require entire Kashmir to adjust to these tectonic changes. Both policies were interested in regional languages and the native tongue; in the former case, however, it was included in the given approach, and in the latter, it was an arrangement of a specific context.

With the direction of the Kothari Commission, the NPE 1968 emphasized on equal opportunity to education, its proliferation and the three language formula. Its vision lay in a post-independence nation-building, in which regional languages were regarded as important to cultural continuity and political citizenship. Since Kashmir, however, Urdu and English were preferred in the administration and the English-based education system, Kashmiri people remained marginalized, even though it was the native language of most of the population. The challenges involved in this implementation were that there were no trained teachers, textbooks were not available in Kashmiri and it was the trend in society to prefer English as a means to attain employment.

In comparison, the NEP 2020 came at a time of globalisation and digitalisation. It focused on multilingualism, competence based education, and mother tonguing in primary stages up to at least grade five. Notably, it suggested the use of digital resources in local languages, and it is directly applicable in Kashmir where students have disrupted education through sometimes



even disruptive social and political instability. Compared to the 1968 policy, NEP 2020 clearly combines linguistic protection with technological and emphasis-based reforms since regional languages such as Kashmiri may live alongside global languages such as English. It is hoped that NEP 2020 will properly address these nagging issues of the attitude of parents, the supply of trained teachers and infrastructural support to be successful in Kashmir, however.

Table:1 Comparative Features of NPE 1968 and NEP 2020

Aspect	NPE 1968	NEP 2020	Implications for Kashmir
Policy Context	First national education policy post-independence (nation-building focus).	Comprehensive reform in 21st century (globalization + digitalization).	Shift from access and expansion to quality, equity, and innovation.
Language Policy	Introduced <i>three-language formula</i> ; emphasized regional languages & mother tongue.	Strong stress on mother tongue/regional language till Grade 5 (preferably 8); multilingual digital resources.	Urdu prioritized over Kashmiri in 1968 era; NEP 2020 offers opportunity to revive Kashmiri alongside Urdu & English.
Medium of Instruction	Recommended primary education in mother tongue/regional language.	Mandates foundational literacy in mother tongue with flexibility.	Implementation gap in 1968; NEP 2020 could institutionalize Kashmiri if teacher training/resources are strengthened.
Focus Areas	Access, equality, expansion of institutions, teacher training.	Holistic, flexible, competency-based learning; tech-integration; skill development.	From literacy expansion to digital readiness, with potential for localized Kashmiri content.
Challenges in Kashmir	Political instability, limited infrastructure, neglect of Kashmiri in curricula.	Teacher shortages, parental preference for English, infrastructural deficits.	Success depends on balancing global aspirations with local identity.
Equity Dimension	Focus on weaker sections, rural education, and literacy.	Emphasis on inclusion, early childhood education, and regional diversity.	Opportunities for bridging rural-urban and linguistic divides in Kashmir.

Conclusion

The journey of education in Kashmir through the National Policy on Education 1968 to National Education Policy 2020 represents a larger story of changing objectives in education in India and attempts by Kashmir, beset by singular socio-political problems, to match their perspectives with the emerging theories of education. The three-language formula of NPE 1968 though focussed on the integration of the nation at large with equal possibilities but in case of Kashmir the lack of political stability and the structural constraints of the state did not help it internalise this idea fully. NPE 1986, subsequently amended as NPE 1992, had opened the possibility of vocationalization, universal elementary schooling, and the applications of technology, but participation in armed conflicts led to the closure of the schools and an imbalance between rural access also ended the effects of this intervention. These decades also witnessed the growth of such schemes as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and RMSA contributing to enrollment and literacy gains, although problems of quality, teacher vacancies and gender



imbalance were continued. The NEP 2020 has unlocked a fresh potential with its focus on holistic, flexible, and multidisciplinary learning, early childhood care, skill development, and digital immersion that holds the capability to fill in the existing gaps. In case of Kashmir, this is a very specific policy, in that it promotes localised curricular material, vocational experience as well as digital learning; all of which can counter the conflict induced disruptions and the geographical isolation. But the practical challenge to be addressed is how to implement these policies and overcome the deficiencies in terms of infrastructure, socio-cultural factors, as well as equal accessibility (particularly to rural learners and girls). As a conclusion, it is possible to state that despite the offered frameworks of development that the national education policies represented, its effectiveness in Kashmir remains uneven and incomplete, and the future of national education lies in the contextualized implementation of NEP 2020 to be able to finally democratize the education in the region.

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