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Languages for learning: a framework for implementing India's multilingual language-in-education policy

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a framework for multilingual language-in-education policy implementation, offered as a critically constructive response to India's recent *National Education Policy 2020* (GOI, 2020). Rooted in India's existing educational language policy, our linguistically inclusive 'Languages for Learning' (LFL) framework is, we believe, structurally flexible, socioculturally feasible, economically viable and academically relevant. It aims to foster equity and also to ensure first language support and cognitive independence. Before presenting the framework, we critically review the multilingual policy guidance offered in *NEP 2020*, then lay out a theoretical foundation for the LFL framework based primarily on current translanguaging theory, and also discuss the history of India's much maligned three-language formula (TLF), which forms the core of language policy in India. The framework itself is presented with reference to specific contextual challenges in India that may also serve to indicate its relevance for other multilingual contexts around the world. As such, the LFL framework is offered as a more multilingually-appropriate alternative to the reductive construct of 'Medium of Instruction', which itself originates in the monolingual habitus of historically outdated language-in-education policy theory. We invite critical evaluations of the utility of our framework, both for India and other multilingual contexts.

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Introduction: language policy in India's National education policy 2020

The challenge of creating a democratic, socially just and progressive education policy for a sociopolitically complex country like India becomes further complicated by its sheer linguistic diversity. The recently revised Indian *National Education Policy (NEP)* (GOI, 2020), approved by the government in 2020, states a clear, unambiguous and laudable intention to promote multiple languages in education, consistent with what Tollefson (2013) calls a 'democratic reform' (p. 12) in educational language policy-making. This is not the first time that Indian national policy has declared such aspirations, although prior references were less central to the ethos of the policy (see *National Policy on Education 1968*, and subsequent iterations in 1986, and 1992). The *NEP 2020's* aim to

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‘promote multilingualism and the power of language in teaching and learning’ (p. 5) as a fundamental principle guiding the policy is significant in the history of educational policy-making in India because multilingualism was never so openly advocated as a teaching tool across all curricular subjects in national policy documents. The new policy acknowledges that ‘... young children learn and grasp nontrivial concepts more quickly in their home language/mother tongue’ (p. 13) and makes several other proposals to encourage and exploit multilingualism, broadly consistent with what is typically referred to as mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB MLE) in the wider literature (e.g. Benson, 2019; UNESCO, 2018). Firstly, ‘home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language’ (p. 13) is to be used as the medium of instruction (MOI) until grade 5 and preferably until grade 8. Secondly, high quality textbooks are to be made available in local languages. Thirdly, in the absence of textbooks written in students’ mother tongue(s), classroom interaction should happen in the ‘mother tongue’ (MT) wherever possible. Furthermore, the use of bilingual teaching-learning materials and teaching practices is to be encouraged and knowledge of ‘the local language’ (GOI, 2020, p. 9) is to be emphasised for teachers. A similar plan is also recommended for institutions of higher education. The document also mentions that the goal of language teaching ‘must be improved to be more experiential and focus on the ability to converse and interact in the language and not just on the literature, vocabulary, and grammar of the language’ (GOI, 2020, p. 54). The *NEP 2020* also recommends documentation of all Indian languages on a web-based portal, translation of learning materials, use of gamification and apps, providing easy access to digital materials, and development of software in all major Indian languages.

Though the *NEP 2020* espouses admirable intentions and draws upon grassroots stakeholder research to formulate its language-in-education policy, one can foresee several immediate challenges and potential ambiguities when it comes to implementation of the policy. To begin with, the policy-makers do not define terms such as ‘mother tongue’, ‘home language’ or ‘local language’ and often use them synonymously, despite acknowledging that these may not be the same thing in many situations (p. 13). While these terms can be difficult to define, distinctions between the language of the home and local community are important, as these often vary in India (e.g. Pattanayak, 1990), as elsewhere. Further, expecting teachers to have expertise in such languages also raises several questions concerning the status of ‘local’ languages (often determined by the political will of the state government) and how a teacher’s claim to expertise in a local language can be verified, bringing issues of native/proficient speaker status to the fore. Another question concerns exactly what the policy wants to achieve through emphasising teachers’ proficiency in a specific language, rather than their ability to use multilingual approaches in the classroom. Such emphases may be interpreted as attempts to dilute the linguistic identities of millions of people (see Agnihotri, 2014, for an example of this).

A second concern of importance is the absence of any plan of implementation of the multilingual policy. Without a flexible roadmap, even the most well-intended policies are liable to failure, as evident from the recent, largely unsuccessful attempt of the Bihar government to offer education in Maithili, Magahi and Bhojpuri, three main languages spoken in the state. Much like previous education policies, *NEP 2020* seems to gloss over challenging questions regarding how and when the policy will be executed. As it stands, realising the policy goals would require a significant overhaul of the education

system. As acknowledged in previous policy documents (NCERT, 2006a) and empirical studies (Anderson & Lightfoot, 2021; Tsimpli et al., 2020), multilingual/bilingual approaches to teaching are common in classrooms in India, despite varying in their effectiveness (Lightfoot et al., 2021) and often being frowned upon (Anderson & Lightfoot, 2021). To date, there is very little research on how state language policies interact with the national language policy in India. While states such as Andhra Pradesh, Bengal, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan and Telangana have made education in the state language compulsory, a few states such as Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh have made attempts to make local language education available to students in schools. Among these states, Odisha has taken concrete steps by creating and making available tribal language dictionaries and other such resources (SCSTRTI, n.d.). Thus, what *NEP 2020* has actually done could be seen as a formal acknowledgement of such practices and a plan to stop rigid adherence to Western/Northern approaches to teaching multilingual learners, which may be both inappropriate and cognitively alienating for learners, particularly in Southern contexts with high linguistic diversity (Heugh & Stroud, 2020). The new policy also intends to remove hierarchies among languages by advocating the creation of pedagogic materials in multiple languages and the utilisation of learners' multilingual repertoires for facilitating learning. Nevertheless, much clarity is still required as to how such practices will be ensured and realised across different educational levels (primary, secondary, tertiary).

Lastly, the willing suspension of a sense of ground realities could pose another challenge that *NEP 2020* does not address. Factors such as the shortage of well-trained teachers (NCERT, 2020), the low quality of many pre-service training institutions (Research Group, Azim Premji Foundation, 2020), a lack of congruence between pre- and in-service teacher training programmes (Ramachandran et al., 2017), an absence of a clear policy for in-service teacher professional development (GOI, n.d.), and insufficient high quality empirical research on multilingualism in the country (Lightfoot et al., 2021) need immediate attention if aspirations for the future are to be realised. A well-structured blueprint of implementation can alleviate doubts about the possible issues concerning the language-in-education policy of the *NEP 2020*.

In response to these challenges, this paper proposes a potential framework for the implementation of the *NEP 2020*'s multilingual policy in schools. The framework draws on recent theory and research on translanguaging/translingual practice in diverse contexts around the world (Anderson, 2018; Canagarajah, 2013; García & Wei, 2014) and takes into account sociohistorical and geopolitical realities enmeshing school education in India. Before delving into the issues of language politics and languages in classroom instruction, we build a critical theoretical foundation for the framework.

A translanguaging-driven theoretical foundation to the framework

Prior to the emergence of translanguaging and translingual theory in sociolinguistics (García, 2009; Pennycook, 2008), models of multilingualism were primarily 'monolingualist' and 'additive' (Horner et al., 2011). Such models, in their application to pedagogy, as pointed out by Anderson (2019), 'simplistically' compartmentalise languages, recommend 'judicious' use of 'L1' and focus on 'medium of instruction' as their primary

unit of classification in curricular contexts. Many emerged from what Liddicoat (2016, p. 9) calls a ‘monolingual habitus’, typically failing to recognise the ‘fluidity of boundaries’ (Annamalai, 2008) across languages evident in social interactions in communities of historically rich multilingual heritage around the world, as found across India. As argued by Heugh (2017), rather than focusing on one kind of multilingualism, space for ‘multilingualisms’ (Stavans & Hoffmann, 2015) can be created to allow for multilingualism to be played out differently in varying sociocultural and linguistic contexts. Within this climate of increasing awareness of complex multilingual practices, Canagarajah introduces the construct of ‘translingual practice’ (2013), built on an accommodative languaging framework, to capture the dynamic, fluid and complex use of multiple languages in close conjunction, as found in numerous communities worldwide.

Before reviewing the literature on translanguaging, it may be useful to note the nuances of ‘languaging’, as a construct in itself. Theoretically grounded in Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory and Bakhtin’s dialogic theory, languaging is referred to by García and Wei as ‘the simultaneous process of continuous becoming of ourselves and of our language practices, as we interact and make meaning in the world’ (2014, p. 8). The concept of languaging has been defined and viewed from sociolinguistic (Canagarajah, 2007; Juffermans, 2011; Pennycook, 2010), psycholinguistic (Swain, 2006; Wei, 2011); and semiotic (Halliday, 2013; Lin, 2019) perspectives. There is extensive agreement on the fact that ‘human languaging activity is radically heterogeneous and involves the interaction of processes on many different time-scales, including neural, bodily, situational, social, and cultural processes and events’ (Thibault, 2017, p. 76) and there is an increasing recognition of ‘the importance of feeling, experience, history, memory, subjectivity, and culture’ along with ‘ideology and power’ (Wei, 2018, p. 17).

Translanguaging theory moves beyond ‘general language practices’ (Hardigree & Ronan, 2019), rejecting the constructs of code-switching and code-mixing (Lin, 2020), and disproves the code-driven rigid view of language description and use (Lemke, 2016). The prefix ‘trans’ is able to ‘[capture] multilingual language users’ fluid and dynamic practices’ (Wei, 2018, p. 18) across languages, cultures, thoughts, and many social artefacts, helping to overcome the ‘lingual bias’ (Block, 2013) in applied linguistics and curricular contexts, but it is also able to suggest a rejection of language boundaries themselves, thereby ‘transcending traditional understandings of separate languages’, as Anderson (2018, p. 27) points out. The largely unutilised or underutilised ‘plurilingual and sociocultural repertoires of students’ (Lin, 2019, p. 6) are recognised in translanguaging theory. The way these repertoires are brought together to create complex and new practices of meaning-making as part of translanguaging is individual and strategic (García & Otheguy, 2020), and led by ‘socio-cultural demands at hand’ (Kirsch, 2020, p. 2).

Though translanguaging theory is receiving extensive attention in academic literature, its pedagogic potential is less explored, particularly in language-in-education policy and curricula (Omidire & Ayob, 2020). This is likely due to the entrenched, often neocolonial, sociohistory of the monolingual habitus within the typically conservative national education institutions behind such publications; a habitus that is likely embodied in the attitudes of curriculum designers towards maintaining the sanctity and prestige of (usually dominant) named languages that are frequently associated with the nation state and national identity. However, an increasing number of recent studies on the

implementation of translanguaging as a pedagogic principle have been conducted in Singapore (Vaish, 2019), South Africa (Makalela, 2015; Probyn, 2019), Netherlands and Luxembourg (Duarte, 2020), the Basque Country (Leonet et al., 2017), Sweden (Gynne, 2019) and the US (Seltzer & García, 2019). These studies have reported positive impacts on students in the form of development of metalinguistic awareness (Leonet et al., 2017; Vaish, 2019), an increase in vocabulary pool (Makalela, 2015), increased multilingual engagement (Duarte, 2020) and increased motivation among learners to express themselves bilingually (Seltzer & García, 2019). However, despite this recent surge in the research on translanguaging, it is notable that, in India, where classroom practices are naturally translingual (Anderson, 2017; Anderson & Lightfoot, 2021) and students in most states are exposed to at least three languages within the curriculum itself (due to India's TLF, discussed below), translanguaging theory remains largely unexplored, on both theoretical and empirical levels. Given the significant challenges India has faced in trying to implement an effective, cohesive TLF in its education system, it could be argued that a framework that is informed by translanguaging theory and firmly rooted in the linguistic diversity of the country may succeed in offering the social and linguistic inclusivity that the formula has, arguably, aspired towards. The next section of this paper discusses India's TLF in education to provide sufficient background for discussing the framework.

The three-language formula: India's educational language policy

Historically, language politics has always been at the core of languages-in-education policy-making in India. During pre-independence times, colonial policy discourse was dominated by a never-ending debate between 'Anglicists' who pushed for the use of English-medium education and 'Orientalists' who wanted to promote native languages as media of instruction (Zastoupil & Moir, 1999). Much before Macaulay presented his *Minute*, in the early nineteenth century, multiple languages were reported as being used as media of instruction in Indian classrooms (Hunter et al., 1890; Vennela & Smith, 2019). However, the conflict was primarily between English and vernaculars and it was intricately entwined with issues of knowledge and prestige attached to different languages. As pointed out by Kumar (2005), the choice of the MOI could be a reflection of sociopolitical decisions the British had to make, and there is adequate evidence to suggest that the British were unsure about their language-in-education policy (Mahapatra & Mishra, 2019). Their uncertainty in the policies can be traced in the decisions taken through the Charter Act in 1813, the General Committee of Public Instruction in 1823, Wood's Dispatch in 1854 and so on. It is interesting to note that there were few practical/pedagogical proposals for how to implement a multilingual approach in the classroom before Michael West's proposal on bilingualism (West, 1926). West was perhaps the earliest western educationist working in India who emphasised using learners' first language as a resource in the foreign language classroom. However, it is also true that he also discussed how bilingualism can be a serious challenge. West focused on only English and Bengali and he did not have to deal with a national language-in-education policy as post-independence India has had to. With the end of British rule, the nationalist agenda was torn between the choice of rejecting and adopting English as a pan-Indian MOI. Many leaders from the non-southern parts of the country

who led the freedom movement against the British showed much less resistance to accepting Hindi, as ‘the’ alternative to English which was favoured by Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India. However, the socially and educationally prosperous southern states, especially Tamilnadu, and some of the north-eastern states refused to accept the Hindi solution. While it was too much of a challenge to come up with a policy solution at the time, the attempt resulted in a proposed TLF.

In 1949, the University Education Commission recommended the TLF, a language-in-education policy that continues to exist, albeit primarily in theory, less so in practice. The initially proposed idea involved the teaching of the official regional language for each state alongside both Hindi and English. After a decade-long debate, the policy was approved by the Indian parliament in 1968 (GOI, 1968). Surprisingly, the policy ignored the linguistic diversity of the country and was self-contradictory in nature. Firstly, it wrongly assumed that the mother tongue and the regional language are the same (discussed further below). Secondly, it divided India simplistically into two linguistic categories: Hindi-speaking and non-Hindi speaking. In the process of making these assumptions, the policy endangered the existence of many regional languages such as Marwari in Rajasthan, Haryanvi in Haryana, and Bhojpuri in Bihar that were (closely) related to Hindi (see Agnihotri, 2014). The effort to keep Hindi at the centre of the languages-in-education debate was expected to bring linguistic unity and give rise to stronger national identity. However, different states interpreted the TLF in different ways and compulsory Hindi learning was confined to only a few states. Most notably, the south Indian state of Tamilnadu openly protested against the imposition of Hindi in 1965 and forced the central government to withdraw compulsory Hindi education as a policy. Though the Education Commission (GOI, 1966) acknowledged the ‘divorce of the language of education from the language of the pupil’ (p. 19) and discussed the importance of instruction through students’ mother tongue, in subsequent sections, the focus was on the regional language as the MOI. According to Pattanayak (1984), TLF could be an offshoot of confusion created by ‘ignorance or deliberate manipulation’ (p. 127). He asserted that multilingualism is an asset that was completely disregarded in decisions on media of instruction. However, given the politically charged debate around the TLF, it is no surprise that policy documents—with one notable exception (NCERT, 2006b)—have tended to avoid discussing the scope of using multiple languages in the classroom, especially as MOIs. While this may have been a deliberate attempt to balance political ambitions of state and central governments, it has paved the way for a subtle emphasis on dominant languages as MOIs (either the main state language or English) and the neglect of minority language speakers’ linguistic repertoires (Annamalai, 2003).

For some reason, the indifference or lack of effort at the policy level to focus on children’s education in their mother tongue (as mentioned in the Constitution of India, Article 350A) persisted, though several policy documents continued to emphasise mother tongue education along with the TLF. The *Curriculum for the Ten-Year School: A Framework* (NCERT, 1975) kept the discussion of it brief, and the National Policy on Education (GOI, 1986, 1992) restated the need for linguistic minority students to be educated in their mother tongue at the primary stage. However, it also noted that the policy had not been implemented properly, citing administrative and financial reasons. Two subsequent curricula (NCERT, 1988, 2000) reiterated the employment of

mother tongue as the MOI in the first two years of primary education before moving on to instruction in the regional language in subsequent years. Much like the *National Policy on Education* (GOI, 1986), these policy documents do not discuss the utilisation of multiple languages as media of instruction. The *National Curriculum Framework* (NCERT, 2005) was perhaps the first national policy document that highlighted the possibilities of a multilingual classroom where various languages could aid learning across different subjects. It goes beyond the typical MOI discussion and elaborates on something that comes close to translanguaging. A year later, a *Position Paper by the National Focus Group on Teaching of Indian Languages* (NCERT, 2006b) dissects the TLF and clarifies, by citing Pattanayak (1986), that the TLF ‘is only a strategy and not a national language policy’ (p. 12). After noting that several states have implemented the TLF, it goes on to explain how the home language, the school language and other prescribed languages can be used in education in a complementary way.

A number of fundamental problems with India’s TLF can easily be identified. Firstly, in ten of 29 states, over fifty percent of children have different home and school languages (Kalra, 2016), which means special efforts are required to meet the initial literacy learning needs of these children (e.g. in curricular planning, teacher preparation, materials development, etc.). This challenge is augmented by decisions in some states (e.g. Kerala and Karnataka) to mandate the compulsory teaching of majority languages and ignoring minority languages. However, in other states (e.g. Odisha), a multilingual approach to teaching that takes into account minority languages has been officially adopted (Odisha Primary Education Programme Authority, n.d.). Secondly, little attention has been paid to the teaching of other Indian languages in states often framed as ‘Hindi-speaking states’. Speaking in 2014, Shri Kiren Rijiju, the Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs, revealed that since the TLF was left to the states to implement, many had found a way around it, citing a lack of resources as the reason for its non-implementation. Thirdly, the need to establish Hindi as the primary lingua franca for the nation originates ostensibly in the needs of specific political bodies, whose interests may have been inappropriately promoted in the TLF (Laitin, 1989). As a result of these significant problems, language-in-education policy in India today, particularly with regard to the TLF, suffers from a fundamental lack of clarity. To date, few policy researchers/theorists have proposed frameworks for facilitating an inclusive multilingual pedagogy within the scope of the TLF. Even the recent *NEP 2020* implementation plan (GOI, 2021a, 2021b) does not state anything concrete in this regard, although Agnihotri’s (2019) recent proposal offers several useful suggestions.

Thus, if the above characterisation of the complex history and current situation in India is accepted, it can be argued that more flexible approaches to issues of language choice and practice in the classroom—as offered by translanguaging theory—may help not only to facilitate learning (as may already be happening across India; Anderson, 2021; Anderson & Lightfoot, 2021), but also to accommodate the concerns and needs of communities within a loosely defined TLF, in particular by allowing for local affordances and solutions to be accepted. The key point to be emphasised at this stage is that a translingual approach has no need to count languages at all; in this sense, it is a truly multilingual formula, one that reflects social practice in how language (in its wider sense) has always been used across the vast majority, if not all, of India (e.g. Agnihotri, 2007, 2014).

The LFL framework

We would like to begin our discussion of the framework by proposing the term ‘Languages for Learning’ (LFL) as an alternative to the outdated and reductive ‘Medium of Instruction’ (MOI). We consider LFL more suitable to the exploration of affordances in multilingual classrooms, given that it simultaneously invokes multilingual inclusivity while also recognising the learning (rather than ‘instruction’) focus that underpins contemporary ‘learner-centred’ approaches to education (e.g. Bremner, 2021), also referenced in the *NEP, 2020* (GOI, 2020, p. 3). LFL seeks not to be reductive of the complex relationships between learners, teacher, curriculum content and languaging practices typically found in classrooms across India and other multilingual countries. Perhaps most importantly of all, the ‘for’ in LFL enables us to frame languages as facilitative (resources), rather than restrictive (impedances), of learning.

The LFL framework includes four principles and seven potential elements (see [Figure 1](#)). These are envisaged as the core components of the framework. It is recognised that in different contexts, the seven elements would need to be implemented variously, depending on the particular diversity of languages involved and the needs of learners and other stakeholders. However, it is designed to be adaptable to two common community contexts in India, as well as those along a continuum between these. The illustrative examples provided are drawn upon in the discussion below:

Context 1

Communities, often rural, where there is a dominant language, the first language of most learners; smaller numbers of students speak either related dialects or minority first languages, yet also have some (albeit varying) functional ability in the dominant language. For example, a village in rural southern Odisha, where 90% of learners’ L1 is a local variety of Odia, 5% of learners’ L1 is an unrelated tribal language and 5% speak other dialects of Odia, partially intelligible with the local dialect.

Context 2

Communities, often urban or suburban, where there may be one, two, or more languages functioning in the community, also found among learners, and a large number of diverse

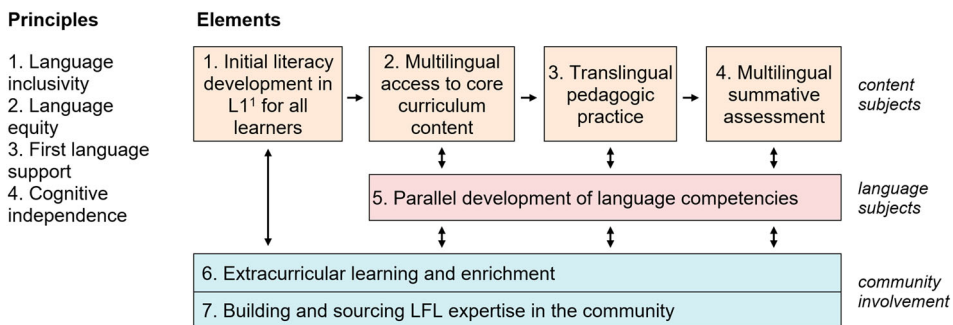


Figure 1. The languages for learning framework.

Note: ‘L1’ in the framework refers to the closest variety possible to the learner’s primary home language.

first languages in the classroom. For example, a school in Hyderabad, where 40% of learners' have Hyderabad Telugu (or similar dialects) as their L1, 30% speak Deccani Urdu at home, and the remaining 30% (who often have limited proficiency in one, or both of these two languages) have other L1s from across India (e.g. Kannada, Tamil, Bangla and Marathi varieties).

In the discussion below, 'content subjects' refers to subjects such as maths, sciences and humanities, involving a focus on content knowledge and skills. 'Language subjects' refers to subjects such as Marathi, Hindi, Tamil or English, where the focus may involve reading and writing literacy, oral/aural communication skills, and study of lexis, grammar and literature depending on the level and the context.

Principles of the LFL framework

The LFL framework is underpinned by four pedagogic principles that can be promoted across the education system from teacher preparation to curriculum and materials development and school management, as follows:

- (1) Language inclusivity: All languages are welcomed and equal in the classroom. While learners may be required to adopt specific languaging practices for assessment and outcomes-oriented purposes (as defined by curricula), a teacher would always seek to prioritise learner participation in classroom discourse over language choice.
- (2) Language equity: Creating a classroom community that neither excludes nor prioritises certain languages reduces the threat that dominant languages may pose to learners' (and their families') identity, self-esteem and rights. The removal of such threat may increase learner motivation to study and learn these languages.
- (3) First language support: Whenever required, learners have access to mediation (through peer, teacher and parental/caregiver support) and resources (e.g. expository texts, bilingual dictionaries/electronic translation, multilingual wall charts, etc.) to facilitate access to curriculum content and skills development, both in class and between lessons.
- (4) Cognitive independence (in content subjects): To ensure that those learners who are less enabled in a dominant classroom language have equal (or as equal as practically possible) access to learning, it is recognised that cognitive development is separable from language proficiency. Whenever possible, learners are offered opportunities to demonstrate their understanding of curriculum content in their preferred languages, including during both formative and summative assessment.

These four principles are offered as an ideological foundation for the elements that follow, and may be promoted in both LFL classrooms and teacher education programmes. In some cases (particularly principles 1 and 2), they may conflict with local social norms and personal beliefs (e.g. of teachers or parents) according to which languages may be (seen to be) far from equal, and certain languages and dialects may be either excluded or prioritised subconsciously (even by learners). Nonetheless, just as classrooms and schools can, and do, serve as institutions/communities through which other negative social practices such as caste prejudice and gender discrimination (Bhagavatheeswaran et al., 2016) are challenged and disrupted, it is envisaged here that

the promotion of such principles through the LFL framework may help to challenge language prejudice (Skutnabb-Kangas et al., 2009).

Elements of the LFL framework

The following elements are discussed here as central to the LFL framework. The first element concerns early (pre-primary and lower primary) grades, the remainder focus on higher primary and secondary grades, when learners from different L1 backgrounds are more likely to be studying together in classroom communities:

Initial literacy development

In line with current guidelines and good practice recommendations in the literature (e.g. Benson, 2019; Heugh et al., 2019; Simpson, 2019; UNESCO, 2018), the LFL framework stresses the need for learners to begin to read and write in their first language in kindergarten and early primary grades. As noted above, while this is current Indian educational policy (GOI, 2020), the reality in many curricular authorities is that this 'L1' frequently defaults to the state official/dominant language, and neglects minority languages and regional dialects. Within the framework, additional emphasis is placed on ensuring the provision, both of teachers who share such languages/dialects (Benson, 2019), and of appropriate curriculum resources to support learning (e.g. early grade storybooks, classroom posters; see UNESCO, 2018). In the case of minority languages, support groups and/or community organisations for such languages would be invited to participate in the development of these resources (discussed further below), and senior high school graduates with knowledge of minority languages would be encouraged (possibly subsidised) to undertake B.Ed. qualifications to become teachers for such learners. In areas of high linguistic diversity, primary schools may offer one or more L1 'sections'¹ for initial literacy.

Multilingual access to core curriculum content

Within MOI approaches to content instruction, core curriculum content (e.g. the curriculum, approved textbooks, supplementary TLMs) is provided in one language only. The LFL framework proposes that core curriculum content for content subjects is offered in all classroom languages (i.e. the L1s of students and teacher). While, in highly linguistically diverse areas, this may be challenging, ongoing improvements in print-on-demand technology and automated translation technology make this more possible today than previously; it may be organised either by the central curriculum authority or minority language support groups (discussed further below). Where this is not possible, each learner would be able to choose which alternative language to receive curriculum content in, rather than the current practice of the school/authority selecting this. Where supplies allow, learners would be offered access to such content in both minority and majority languages to counter the danger of language ghettoisation.

Translingual pedagogic practice

Perhaps the most radical area of the LFL framework concerns pedagogic practice (including all teacher activity, such as planning, teaching and formative assessment). While it is recognised that teachers will need support in developing the skills discussed below, it should be borne in mind that what is proposed here is based in part on practices observed

in the classrooms of expert Indian teachers (see Anderson, 2021) and also indicated to be present to varying degrees in many classrooms across India (see Anderson & Lightfoot, 2021; Bhattacharya, 2013; Meganathan, 2017). In contrast to what might be called 'scaffolded MOI approaches' (e.g. CLIL), within which other languages always play the role of temporary/transitional resources to support the learning of a monolingual-content core (the metaphor of 'stabilisers' on a bicycle may be useful here), within a LFL framework, the classroom languages work together to support all learning (i.e. a tri-cycle or quad-bike). Languages enable learning, learning enables languages, and both of these are enabled by the community and its interactions. As discussed above, teachers offer learners the agency to access curriculum content in whichever languages they prefer during the academic year, and to draw upon supplementary resources if required (e.g. bilingual dictionaries, peer translation/mediation, etc.).

At the core of LFL pedagogy are the spoken 'linguaging practices' of the classroom, which will necessarily vary depending on language composition (both teacher and learner proficiencies in learners' first languages and additional languages, such as state languages or English), intended curricular outcomes, and learner cognitive development. The following are likely to be some of the most common practices, consistent with the four principles of LFL:

- The teacher may present new content monolingually through a dominant language (e.g. through Marathi in Context 1) or bilingually (e.g. in Telugu with additional Deccani Urdu 'mediation' in Context 2), while some learners (e.g. L1-speakers of minority languages in both contexts) simultaneously access supplementary explanation through resources printed in their L1 (e.g. textbooks), if required.
- Learners may work collaboratively in language-differentiated groups, both shared-L1 and mixed-L1, depending on task complexity and stage in a unit of study. For example, shared-L1 groups may be prioritised if content is more challenging to allow for L1-peer mediation, and mixed-L1 in project work where outcomes are to be presented bilingually.
- Learners may work individually (e.g. seatwork exercises focusing on text comprehension or skills practice) using core curriculum content presented in their chosen languages (L1 answer keys could assist in providing feedback when teachers do not share these L1s).
- Learners may give presentations in languages of their choice, including translingually (two or more languages combined). Members of the classroom community (including the teacher) who do not share the presentation languages may seek mediation support from other members who do.
- Learners may engage in activities targeting the development of 'translingual competence' (see Anderson, 2018). For example, in Context 1, a project encouraging learners to access content in one language (e.g. an expository text in English), and respond to it in a different one (e.g. presentations on aspects of the text in Marathi), as used in the original translinguaging approach adopted in Welsh bilingual secondary classrooms (Williams, 1996).
- Classroom community projects oriented around developing multilingual resources (e.g. posters or graphic organisers for specific content areas) to further strengthen multilingual learning and awareness.

In contrast to MOI and CLIL approaches that require either a sudden or gradually scaffolded move to L2-only interaction in the classroom (essentially a form of ‘subtractive bilingualism’ in practice; Cummins, 1986), the languaging practices described here would lead to a gradual, organic expansion of the languaging resources and capacity of the classroom community as a whole, with speakers of minority languages being exposed to, and learning, majority languages, and vice versa (possibly to a lesser extent); practices that largely mirror those in wider Indian society. This includes teachers who do not speak all the languages of the classroom (at least at the start of a year or programme), and may need to recruit support from colleagues, automated translation, or community members (e.g. minority language assistants) at times (e.g. if learners produce texts for formative assessment in languages other than English).

Multilingual summative assessment

The LFL framework would enable curriculum authorities to allow for summative assessment of learning of content subjects in all learners’ L1s, consistent with Benson’s (2019) proposals for MTB MLE. While current practices, particularly in English-medium instruction (EMI) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) programmes, typically promote integrated assessment, in part as a means to facilitate functional proficiency in a ‘target language’, within the LFL framework, the principle of cognitive independence enables stakeholders to make informed decisions in this area. Learners and their caregivers, supported by teachers and authorities, can choose the language(s) of assessment separately for each content subject on a yearly basis, allowing change to take place if and when learners are ready (for example, if English language assessment is desired/expected by grade 10). In differentiating this choice by subject, the LFL framework recognises the reality of individual differences among learners, and reduces the potentially negative impact of a sudden transition to English (see Simpson, 2019). These transitions could be discussed and shared by teachers in the same institution (rather than happening between primary and secondary school, as often happens). Possibilities for multilingual assessment (incorporating two or more languages) could also be considered, for example, through exam papers that present questions in one language or two (e.g. using parallel text), but allow learners to respond in any available languages or even a translingual combination. Summative examination material would be translated to minority languages by teachers and administrative staff who are literate in such languages, potentially with assistance from minority language support groups (see below).

Parallel development of language competencies

While the above discussion primarily concerns content subjects (e.g. maths, humanities, sciences), language subjects (e.g. Tamil, Hindi, Urdu, English) require some adjustment to these practices, following the first three LFL principles discussed above only (i.e. excluding cognitive independence). Pedagogic practices would orient towards outcomes useful to the learning (both literacy and oracy, as appropriate) of the language subject, although these would be adapted to learner proficiency levels and stage. For example, in early secondary grades, a teacher may encourage translanguaging among learners when discussing texts written in an exogenous language (e.g. English), or suggest learners make use of L1 words or phrases in writing tasks when they have difficulty expressing

themselves in this language (see Figure 15 in Anderson, 2021). As their proficiency develops (particularly in higher secondary grades), learners would be encouraged to produce texts in the subject language only, or to conduct discussions and give presentations in it (i.e. ‘monolingualising’; see Anderson, 2018). At such points, and (ideally) only through negotiated agreement, learners may also be ready (if required) to transition to texts in additional languages (e.g. English) in content subjects without needing to abandon LFL principles. This would facilitate a gradual, scaffolded progression towards additional language proficiency, particularly in English, something that is recognised within the framework as important, both to learners’ future (e.g. tertiary studies and employment); see, for example, Joseph and Ramani (2012) for further discussion of this issue.

Extra-curricular learning and enrichment

Because the LFL framework is inclusive of learners’ first languages, it is also inclusive of caregivers and communities where such languages are used. This has two important implications for extra-curricular contexts and reciprocal enrichment. Firstly, caregivers who have low levels of proficiency in dominant languages are more empowered, able to monitor, support and scaffold their children’s learning and play a more active role in their education. If they are literate, they are fully able to support their children’s literacy and cognitive development. If they are not literate, they can provide more limited oral/aural support (e.g. children can read out stories to caregivers; caregivers can dictate traditional stories/knowledge to children). Particularly in contexts where parents’/caregivers’ work commitments may make such active participation difficult, community support may be available through locally-developed solutions, such as ‘homework study groups’, in which several learners living in close proximity may benefit from supervision and support by one or more caregivers and/or elder siblings. Secondly, their local community, its language(s), culture, and expertise can play a more active role in learning, both in the school (e.g. visits from community leaders to present on community initiatives during social studies lessons and/or hear learner presentations, or visits from elders during history lessons) and outside it (e.g. class visits to local trades people to support learning in social studies or art classes), thereby supporting the preservation of local traditions and community knowledge. This may also increase caregiver interest in, and ownership of, both parent-teacher associations and school management committees.

Sourcing LFL resources and expertise in the community

As outlined above, the LFL framework would require a range of community resources to work effectively, particularly translation services (e.g. of texts, exam papers, etc.), but also greater diversity in language and IT literacy and expertise among both teachers and administrative support staff to enable the writing, dissemination and marking of exam papers, as well as enabling feedback on written work to be provided. Other resources would also be required, particularly for minority languages (e.g. the development of bilingual dictionaries, L1 storybooks, etc.). Needless to say, all of these resource capabilities would require significant investment, particularly in areas where language diversity is greatest. However, this investment would provide useful work for literate speakers of minority languages and support the preservation of local languages, cultures, knowledge and skills, something that is widely recognised as important to India’s wider cultural

heritage (GOI, 2020). The LFL framework would also support the development of language-specific expertise that would have further knock-on impacts (e.g. the establishment of new roles and institutions), all of which would offer greater social worth to communities that may have hitherto been neglected, thereby reducing the marginalisation of minority language users, and creating a new economy based on language diversity, consistent with Hogan-Brun's (2017) concept of *linguanomics*, according to which 'society can benefit from language diversity' (p. xiii).

Critical reflections on the LFL framework

The LFL framework proposed here is offered as an alternative, both to MOI approaches to instruction that have dominated learning in multilingual contexts worldwide for the last 50 years, and to more scaffolded approaches (e.g. CLIL) that have become popular more recently. It is proposed with primary consideration of the varied, complex contexts found in India as a more detailed, more concrete means for implementing the aspirations of the NEP, and we invite critical discussion and debate of the framework within relevant language policy and educational communities in India. However, given certain similarities with other highly multilingual countries worldwide (e.g. Kenya, Indonesia, South Africa), the LFL framework may serve as a useful template for, or contributor to, similar frameworks in such countries.

The most important critical reflection to make clear here is that the framework is offered as an ambitious and untested, albeit well-informed 'vision' of a more inclusive language-in-education policy. It would first require careful debate and extensive piloting prior to wider implementation. Pilot projects would need to involve not only curricular change and the preparation of bespoke resources (e.g. translation of textbooks), but also teacher education support (including examining and potentially challenging teacher beliefs) as well as the exploration of community attitudes to the initiative. The monitoring and evaluation of such pilots would be expected to feed into, and potentially modify, the framework appropriate to local circumstances and needs.

Secondly, as applied linguists, we are aware that attempts to separate out language from content, as the framework seeks to do, are potentially naïve. Content is not simply delivered through language, but embodied in it, with numerous terms, phrases and discourse patterns that are both genre- and subject-specific, and these become increasingly important as learners progress to higher levels of scientific thinking and language use in higher secondary grades. While the LFL Framework recognises the need for learning to accommodate ever-increasing proportions of resources and modalities from additional (typically dominant) languages such as English, the extent to which providing curriculum material in other languages at such levels is both practical (e.g. terminology may need to be borrowed from English) and useful (e.g. parallel constructs may be confusing) needs to be carefully explored. It may be that the LFL framework is most suited to offering a smooth, gradual transition from higher primary to lower secondary grades ('preparatory' to 'middle stage' in the *NEP 2020*).

Thirdly, the cost implications of implementing a LFL framework would be relatively high. Investments in employing additional staff for purposes of textbook, curriculum, materials and exam paper translation, as well as marking and quality control of these processes would likely constitute the primary costs. Teacher training in LFL approaches,

alongside the need to conduct targeted recruitment of teachers and teaching assistants from minority communities, would also require funding. As argued above, the financial expenditure involved would offer useful investment into communities that are currently marginalised. However, for a country with limited expenditure on education, the extent of these costs should not be underestimated.

Finally, while the LFL proposal, in line with NEP intentions, seeks to promote greater interest in, and support for, minority language learning and literacy, it is recognised that, when given choice as recommended above, key stakeholders (students, caregivers, teachers) may nonetheless opt for instruction primarily in dominant languages, particularly English. It may be that, in some cases, use of the framework may be limited to providing useful resources (supplementary textbooks and dictionaries) to learners of certain first language groups, with little change in classroom or assessment practices. However, we believe, firstly, that this would still be an important improvement on current policy and practice (in line with *NEP 2020* recommendations), and secondly, that in other cases and contexts, the wider use of this framework would be highly beneficial to marginalised groups who have campaigned extensively for the right to educate their children in their preferred languages, and would likely make use of all applicable features of the framework. As discussed above, piloting of the framework would be important, both to assessing cost–benefit implications and to establishing the extent to which it is likely to receive support in different communities.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have proposed a framework for implementing India's multilingual language-in-education policy. We have briefly highlighted policy perspectives from the *NEP 2020*, reviewed literature concerning translanguaging to create a theoretical foundation for our framework, and problematised India's TLF from a historical perspective to make the case for our LFL proposal. Based on the principles of language inclusivity and equity, first language support and cognitive independence, and grounded in the linguistic realities of Indian classrooms, the LFL framework plausibly builds on current curricular possibilities in India while treading carefully with regard to sociopolitical aspirations of the country. We have tried not to delegitimize any language during our pursuit of an accommodative and flexible pedagogic model within which methods, materials and assessment used in the classroom can slowly evolve to become linguistically more fluid and cognitively more rewarding for school children. However, we are aware of several challenges that could hinder the smooth implementation of the proposal. Firstly, a strong political will to realise the potential of multilingualism will be key to the utility of the framework. Secondly, designing and implementing training programmes to prepare teachers for including and encouraging all learners' languages in the classroom will be significant challenges. Finally, challenging the beliefs of less sympathetic stakeholders, for example, school headteachers and parents concerning the benefits of a LFL approach will take time and require their participation. Having said this, we encourage all stakeholders, including researchers and policy makers, to make efforts in all possible ways to explore appropriate avenues to promote multilingualism as India's languages-in-education policy. Future research can investigate online training programmes as potentially cost-effective means to support the change process, something that is a realistic

possibility in India, given ubiquitous and fairly cheap access to mobile phones and internet among teachers (Mahapatra, 2015, 2016). It will also be necessary to research how the framework influences practices in areas such as materials design and assessment. Nonetheless, we believe that the proposed framework may contribute to the creation of more harmonious and more productive learning communities for students in India and other multilingual societies, inasmuch as it offers a potential vision for how we can move beyond the reductive, monolingual construct of ‘medium of instruction’ towards pedagogical approaches in which learning and languages operate synergistically in the classroom to the greater benefit of both school education and society at large.

Note

1. Many Indian schools have two or more language ‘sections’, each with a different primary medium of instruction (e.g., Marathi- and Hindi-medium sections in many towns in Maharashtra).

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