

Multicultural Education in India: A Critical Analysis of National Policies of Education Using James Bank's Framework

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Abstract

Diversity is a unique feature of Indian society that is reflected in classrooms. This diversity among the student population necessitates multicultural education. The purpose of a school is not only to prepare individuals for various roles in society but also to help them understand and appreciate people from different sociocultural and economic backgrounds. The kind of experiences children receive in schools is shaped by the education policies and regulations laid down by the state. This paper tries to examine major Indian national education policies—namely, National Policy on Education, 1968; the National Policy on Education, 1986 and the National Education Policy, 2020—from a multicultural or culturally responsive perspective. It analyses these policies using James Banks' multicultural education framework. Based on the policy analysis, the paper highlights that NEP 2020 encompasses almost all five dimensions of Banks' framework. However, the previous policies lacked focus on its application aspect.

Keywords: Multicultural education, policy analysis, schooling, grammar of schooling, National Education Policy 2020

Introduction

Multicultural education is an outcome of the socio-political struggle that arose due to power dynamics, economic changes and the Civil Rights Movement in the West during the 1960s. Amidst these struggles, numerous marginalised groups demanded that public schools include their cultural and ethnic content (Banks, 1989) to ensure representation. These movements ultimately led to the establishment of multicultural education as a means to promote equity for all. According to Banks (1993), multicultural education is not exclusive to a handful of minorities or people of different races; instead, it empowers all individuals to become active, empathetic and respectful towards each other. This indicates that multicultural education should be an integral part of all

societies as it fosters equal opportunity, access and equity in schools.

India has always been a multicultural nation. It is home to multiple religions (such as Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism and Buddhism), approximately 120 languages, over 19,000 dialects, regional variations, and a complex caste structure (Singh, 2006). In India, like all parts of the world, globalisation and liberalisation have led to an increase in the mobility of people, resulting in greater intermixing of multiple cultures across the country. This diverse population comes in close contact with each other in schools. In such a context, multicultural education in a country like India can help educational planners reform schools and improve the academic (Banks, 2009) performance of students from all backgrounds. However, as Banks (2004) puts it, multicultural education

can become a reality only when schools are considered as social systems that reflect the diversity of society and promote the possibility of coexistence among all.

Furthermore, teachers are key actors in school settings who work directly with children from diverse cultural backgrounds. This cultural diversity in classrooms can serve as both a challenge, as well as an opportunity, for teachers. Therefore, teachers and schools must respect this diversity and be equipped to integrate it meaningfully, as doing so will prepare students for sustainable coexistence and harmony.

While several researchers have highlighted the significance of multicultural education in the Western contexts (Banks, 1988, 1989 and 2004; Gay, 1994; Delpit, 1988, 2006), its presence and implementation at the school level have been sparsely explored in the Indian context, especially in relation to different communities (for instance Sujatha, 1987; Nambissan, 1994; Panda and Cole, 2007; and Gupta, 2015). Moreover, multicultural education has received limited attention in mainstream or public schools. This lack of application may be traced back to the orientation of educational policies. Since educational policies serve as the guiding frameworks for the Indian school system, their stance on cultural diversity may shed light on how multicultural education is addressed.

Thus, this paper attempts to analyse Indian education policies through the lens of multicultural education. The research question guiding the study is—‘Do Indian education policies comprehensively reflect the components of multicultural education? If yes, what elements are included, and what are the missing links?’ This question is explored by examining the three major educational policies introduced in post-Independence India—the National Policy on Education (1968), the National Policy on Education (1986) and the National Education Policy (2020). These policies are analysed using a multicultural education framework proposed by James Banks (1993).

James Banks’ Multicultural Education Framework

James Banks is a prominent educationist who strongly advocated for multicultural education in evolving society of the United States of America during the 1980s. He analysed the crucial role of schools as social systems and their existence in multicultural societies. He provided five dimensions of multicultural education through his seminal work. These dimensions have been used in this paper to examine and evaluate the Indian education policies. The dimensions are as follows.

1. **Content Integration:** This dimension focuses on how teachers integrate examples and content from diverse cultures and backgrounds to explain key concepts or subject matter within a discipline.
2. **Knowledge Construction:** This dimension enables students to understand and critically analyse information through engaging teaching activities. It allows students to actively participate in constructing their own understanding of different cultures, rather than passively receiving knowledge.
3. **Prejudice Reduction:** This dimension relates to teacher interventions and school curricula to reduce biases and prejudices against any community. It helps students develop a positive attitude towards individuals who are different from themselves.
4. **Equity Pedagogy:** This includes improvising teaching methods to facilitate the learning of students from diverse backgrounds. It aims to enhance the academic performance of all students, regardless of their sociocultural affiliations.
5. **Empowering School Culture:** The fifth dimension encourages reconstructing the school environment and culture to promote equality for all students, irrespective of their background. It calls upon changes in school policies, structures, and engagements of staff, teachers and management to promote inclusivity.

Situating Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education in India

The Constitution of India reflects multicultural values in every respect. It outlines rights and provisions to protect the country's rich diversity across its various communities. The Preamble of the Constitution begins with inclusive phrase — 'We, the people of India...' — which embraces the vast range of diversities present across the country. It upholds the ideals of equality and justice for every citizen, regardless of their caste, creed, race or religion. The sentiments of togetherness and unity in diversity are further reinforced through the insertion of terms like fraternity, equality and liberty for all citizens, reflecting the commitment to an inclusive society.

The final version of the Constitution went through numerous drafts, and integrating provisions to ensure equity for all citizens was an enormous task for the Constituent Assembly. As a result, the Constitution of India includes Fundamental Rights, along with several other provisions like Article 325, Article 330, Article 332, the Fifth Schedule, Article 164, Article 338, Article 339 (1), the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, Article 331, Article 350A, Article 345, Article 347, Article 350, Article 210 and Article 120. Together, these provisions offer a comprehensive legal foundation for promoting multicultural education in India.

However, these provisions alone are not sufficient to ensure the implementation of multicultural education at the institutional level. Realising its significance also depends on political will and the commitment to uphold the values of a pluralist society like India.

It is well-established that the overall growth of any diverse country depends significantly on how minority and other marginalised groups participate in the development process. Mishra and Kumar (2014) emphasised that

the inclusion of minority groups is essential to preserving the idea of India. This implies that the development process, policies and education systems must be inclusive of all social groups. Government policies and provisions must ensure equal opportunity, access and participation for every community. Therefore, educational opportunities for children should be designed to guarantee equal access and promote mutual respect among students.

Some studies have already examined the educational experiences of children from diverse backgrounds in Indian schools, reinforcing the need for inclusive education policies. For instance, Kumar (1983) highlighted the educational experiences of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe children in Indian schools, shedding light on issues related to the representation of children coming from marginalised communities. Razzack (1991) examined the experiences of Muslim children in school and society, highlighting how schools could help nurture a Muslim child's identity through integration and correct representation of the community. Panda (2012) also highlighted how a school should enable children to become 'insiders' in the academic discourse practices through multilingual education (case study of Odisha and Andhra Pradesh).

These significant research studies suggest that the Indian education policies should include provisions for incorporating community practices and the voices of all children from diverse backgrounds to foster a sense of belonging and participation. The access and participation of diverse students groups can be effectively addressed through national-level educational policies. Therefore, it becomes important to examine if these policies are inclusive in the Indian context. However, the three National Education Policies have not been analysed from these perspectives in recent times. This paper tries to review and analyse them using Banks' multicultural education framework.

Policy Analysis

The analysis of public policies is a significant area of research within the field of political science. Over time, policy analysts have tried to analyse and understand how governments make policy decisions and how these decisions vary across contexts. A historical thematic analysis of policies offers valuable insights into how policy priorities have evolved over time. In this paper, Qualitative Document Analysis (QDA) has been employed. Bowen (2009) describes QDA as a systematic method for reviewing and analysing all forms of written documents. Since Independence, three National Education Policies (1968, 1986, POA 1992 and 2020) have been formulated in India. In this paper, all three policies have been

reviewed using James Banks' Framework of multicultural education.

The analysis follows a theory-driven approach, drawing upon Banks' five dimensions of multicultural education. The selected policy documents were reviewed through the lens of multicultural education, inclusion or culturally responsive education. Relevant sections were identified and labelled according to Banks' dimensions. This labelling led to the identification of patterns across the sections, and a comparative table was created for the three policies. The table helped check which policy includes which dimensions and where it lacks. The following paragraphs elaborate the relevant sections from the three policies and discuss them in light of Banks' framework.

Dimensions of multicultural education (James Banks)	NPE 1968	NPE 1986–92	NEP 2020
Content integration	×	✓	✓
Knowledge construction	×	✓	✓
Prejudice reduction	✓	×	✓
Equity pedagogy	×	✓	✓
Empowering school culture	✓	✓	✓

National Policy on Education, 1968

India's is characterised by a diverse population throughout its length and breadth. It is essential to have an educational framework that emphasises integrating this diversity. The first National Policy on Education was brought about in 1968, based on the recommendations of the Kothari Commission (1964–1966). The policy consisted of 17 areas for improvement. However, there were no clear and explicit mentions of the features of multiculturalism.

The NPE 1968 displayed concern for national integration by advocating reconstruction and integration of economic, cultural and educational structures so that brotherhood and a sense of citizenship prevailed in Indian society. It also highlighted the need to safeguard minorities' legal rights and

advancing their educational interests. Furthermore, the policy emphasised the advancement of Indian literature and languages, describing it as the sine qua non for educational and cultural development (p. 2–3). In continuation, the policy emphasised the advancement of Hindi 'as a medium of expression for all elements of the composite culture of India'. The NPE 1968 also highlighted the need to establish higher education institutions in non-Hindi speaking states.

In accordance with the James Banks' framework for multicultural education, the NPE 1968 focused on Indian languages and advocated regional languages as the medium of instruction; thus, it incorporated the 'equity pedagogy' in its description. Additionally, the policy subtly addressed national integration and empowerment through common citizenship and culture. Therefore,

it also touched upon the 'empowering school culture' dimension of James Banks' framework. However, the policy did not mention the other three dimensions, i.e., content integration, knowledge construction and prejudice reduction. This highlights that while multicultural education was recognised as necessary for India's growth and development, its implementation at the school or classroom level was missing.

The National Policy on Education, 1986, POA 1992

The National Policy on Education (1986, POA 1992) focused on national growth and shared citizenship. It underlined that the Indian educational system needed to be revamped, with an emphasis on science and technology, the development of values, and improved interpersonal connections. The National Policy on Education must be reviewed periodically; therefore, a new policy was formulated in 1986 and revised based on the recommendations of the Janardhan Reddy and Ramamurthy committees in 1992.

From a multicultural lens, this policy highlighted the role of education in acculturation and racial integration. It mentioned that "education has an acculturating role" (p. 4). The policy promoted an education system in India which guaranteed that children from all castes, creeds and locations access to high-quality education to a particular degree. Additionally, emphasis was placed on understanding other cultures and social structures. The policy recommended measures to foster acceptance among students regarding the diverse cultures across the country.

The policy further clarified the necessity of eliminating inequalities and granting equal access to education for people who were previously denied equality. It advocated making special provisions for people who were not able to access education and ensured that there would be no disparity in educational opportunity. Further, the

policy specifically mentioned about the Scheduled tribes and identified the distinct nature of their cultural and social milieu; it advocated for curriculum development in tribal languages in at least the early years, with provisions for shifting to the regional language in the middle years of schooling.

The National Policy on Education, 1986, also mentioned the need to bridge the knowledge gap between the official educational system and the national cultural heritage. It discussed that "the existing schism between the formal system of education and the country's rich and varied cultural traditions need to be bridged" (p. 26). Compared to NPE 1968, this policy emphasised using as much cultural content as feasible. It recommended locating community resources that could enhance schooling through cultural enrichment.

Additionally, the policy stressed on the significance of advocating principles that promote human unification. Owing to India's diverse population, it is essential to have an education system that fosters universal values and unites the country and its people. The policy also emphasised the necessity of developing programmes that are culturally sensitive and recommended that education technology should ensure the creation of culturally compatible and responsive educational programmes.

The policy advocated for including the content of different cultures in as many forms as possible, thus addressing the 'content integration' dimension of James Banks' framework. It also discussed the growing gap between India's rich cultural heritage and the formal education system, thereby incorporating the dimension of 'knowledge construction'. Further, similar to the National Education Policy, 1968, the 1986, POA 1992 policy championed the use of regional languages as the medium of instruction in schools, as well as promoting national integration and common citizenship. Therefore, it also supported 'equity pedagogy and empowering school culture'. However, this policy too failed to include the aspect

of 'prejudice reduction'. At the school level, conflicts may arise due to differences when a diverse population comes into close contact. Thus, provisions to reduce prejudices at the school level are necessary to achieve equity which was missing from NPE 1986.

National Education Policy, 2020

In 2020, after a gap of about 34 years, the Indian government brought about the next education policy—the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The policy envisioned some fundamental changes in the education system of our country and promoted India's emergence as a global leader. The new policy highlights the importance of multicultural education in various ways.

The NEP 2020 recommends the creation of multiple pathways to education through both formal and informal modes, with emphasis on Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs). It underlines the importance of using the mother tongue or the local language as the medium of instruction at least until Grade 5, with a preference for continuing education in the mother tongue, home language or regional language till Grade 8 and even beyond. The NEP 2020 envisions a multilingual, unified country, as it says, "...promote multilingualism and national unity while providing for greater flexibility" (p. 12). It also talks about more ways to integrate children with disabilities through strengthening of infrastructure, peer-to-peer tutoring, open schooling, and other measures.

Further, the NEP 2020 advocates for an education system that creates an empowering culture for all, including those at the last mile. Reducing biases in the curriculum is seen as critical to building a society free from prejudice; therefore, the policy mentions that considerable efforts should be made to eliminate biases from curricula and school materials. Schools are encouraged to include more content that reflect the diversity of Indian society.

The idea of unity in diversity is exemplified

multiple times in NEP 2020. It emphasises introducing initiatives to create awareness among children about different religions, fostering respect for both commonalities and differences. A broader curriculum incorporating traditional Indian heritage is seen as essential for rooting education in Indian culture.

It is NEP 2020 that incorporates all five dimensions of James Banks' framework for multicultural education. The policy advocates for content integration by supporting and emphasising the incorporation of India's traditional knowledge systems (Indian Knowledge System). It also supports the facilitation of resources so that every child can learn, with a focus on SEDGs, thereby emphasising knowledge construction. Notably, it is the first national policy to explicitly identify the presence of 'bias' and advocate for its removal, promoting the development of more relevant educational materials. Additionally, similar to previous national education policies, NEP 2020 advocates that the medium of instruction in schools should be the mother tongue or regional language at least until Grade 5, and promotes the development of a school culture that empowers every child. Thus, the policy incorporates the dimensions of 'equity pedagogy' and 'empowering school culture' from James Banks' framework.

Discussion

Multicultural education, according to Banks (2004), "is a wide notion with various diverse components". When attempting to adopt multicultural education, he notes that "practising educators can use the dimensions as a roadmap to school transformation". These dimensions can be used to examine how schools operate and how multicultural education is promoted. They can also serve as guidelines for school reform.

It is important for our policy documents to embody the essence of multicultural education as we are an extraordinarily diverse country. Our practices can only

align with this goal when there is detailed discourse on pluralistic education and a push at the policy level. Therefore, the paper analyses the three major National Education Policies and reflects on how they incorporate the different dimensions of multicultural education.

The National Policy on Education, 1968, POA 1992 included just two dimensions out of five: Empowering School Culture and Equity Pedagogy; the National Policy on Education, 1986–92 mentioned four dimensions: Content Integration, Knowledge Construction, Empowering School Culture and Equity Pedagogy. It was only with NEP 2020 that, for the first time, a national policy advocated for all five dimensions, including prejudice reduction.

It took 73 years and three national education policies for India to develop a comprehensive policy that includes all five dimensions of multicultural education. Although delayed, this is indeed a progressive step forward. It will help educators across India align with various aspects of multicultural education and transform schools into spaces that promote cohesion in plurality. For a diverse nation like India, NEP 2020 provides the much-needed focus on building upon our strength as a diverse society.

Conclusion

As a diverse nation, we need to make our grammar of schooling more inclusive, and a national education policy advocating for greater multicultural education can strengthen this effort. In this study, India's three major national education policies were examined using the multicultural education framework proposed by James Banks. The findings revealed that the first National Policy on Education included only two dimensions of multicultural education. Further, the next policy (1986, POA 1992) incorporated four dimensions of the Banks' framework. It was only in 2020 that the National Education Policy included all five components of the James Banks' framework for multicultural education. It took us over two-thirds of a century to develop an education policy that genuinely supports building a multicultural nation through multicultural education in schools across the country. We now need to focus on making NEP 2020 a reality by embedding multicultural education into all aspects of school education, including curriculum, teacher training and assessments.

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