

Language Across the Curriculum in the Light of NEP 2020 Implications for Teacher Education in India

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Abstract—Language Across the Curriculum (LAC) is an educational philosophy and pedagogical framework that advocates for the deliberate and systematic use of language as a tool for learning in all subject areas, not merely in language classes. It recognises that language is not an isolated skill but an integral component of cognitive and academic development across all disciplines. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) of India, a landmark policy document, places significant emphasis on multilingualism, mother tongue-based education, and the holistic development of learners — values that align deeply with the principles of LAC. This paper explores the conceptual and pedagogical intersections between LAC and NEP 2020, with a particular focus on their implications for teacher education in India. Drawing on a review of existing literature, policy documents, and classroom practices, the study argues that the successful implementation of NEP 2020 requires B.Ed. programmes to integrate LAC principles into their curricula. The paper further highlights challenges in implementation — including teacher preparedness, curriculum design, and assessment — and proposes a framework for LAC-informed teacher education in the Indian context.

Index Terms—Language Across the Curriculum, NEP 2020, Teacher Education, Multilingualism, B.Ed., Pedagogical Implications, India

I. INTRODUCTION

Language has always been the primary medium through which learning is organised, transmitted, and evaluated in educational institutions. Yet, in pedagogical practice, language instruction has historically been confined to language and literature classrooms, while other subject teachers have largely regarded language teaching as outside their professional responsibility. This compartmentalisation of language has led to a significant gap: students who

struggle with academic language often underperform across all subjects, not merely in language classes. It is against this backdrop that the concept of Language Across the Curriculum (LAC) emerged as a transformative pedagogical movement.

Originating in the United Kingdom with the Bullock Report (1975), LAC proposed that 'every teacher is a teacher of language.' This principle, although revolutionary in its time, has gradually gained global recognition as literacy demands in all disciplines have grown more complex in the twenty-first century. LAC encompasses the development of reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in the context of specific subject areas such as science, mathematics, social science, and vocational education.

In the Indian context, the National Education Policy 2020 offers a historic opportunity to institutionalise the principles of LAC. NEP 2020 advocates for multilingual education, the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in the early years, the development of foundational literacy and numeracy, and a shift towards competency-based learning — all of which resonate profoundly with LAC's core tenets. If these policy goals are to be meaningfully achieved, India's teacher education system must undergo a paradigm shift.

This paper critically examines the alignment between LAC and NEP 2020 and explores the implications of this alignment for teacher education programmes in India, with particular reference to B.Ed. training institutions in Haryana and the broader national context.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Language Across the Curriculum: Origin and Core Principles

The LAC movement traces its origins to the seminal Bullock Report (1975), formally titled 'A Language for Life,' which was commissioned by the UK government. The report established the foundational principle that language development is the responsibility of every teacher in every subject. Since then, LAC has evolved into a comprehensive educational philosophy with the following core principles:

- Language is a tool for thinking and learning, not merely for communication.
- All teachers are, in some sense, teachers of the language of their discipline.
- Academic language proficiency is necessary for success across all content areas.
- Reading, writing, speaking, and listening are learning processes, not merely assessment tools.
- Multilingual learners must be supported in developing both their home language and the language of instruction.

LAC has since been complemented by related frameworks such as Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), all of which share the conviction that language development must be embedded in content learning.

2.2 NEP 2020: Language Policy and Its Educational Vision

The National Education Policy 2020 is arguably the most comprehensive education policy India has seen since the 1986 policy. On the question of language, NEP 2020 makes several critical provisions that directly align with LAC principles:

- The mother tongue or home language shall be the medium of instruction at least up to Grade 5, and preferably up to Grade 8 (Section 4.11).
- The Three-Language Formula is reaffirmed, with flexibility for states and learners.
- Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) is designated as a national mission, recognising that language competence underpins all other learning.
- Multilingualism is valued as a cognitive and cultural asset.
- There is a call for integration of local and classical languages across the curriculum.

- Teacher education is to be revamped into a four-year integrated B.Ed. programme that includes subject pedagogy and language skills development.

These provisions signal a clear, if implicit, LAC orientation in NEP 2020's vision for education. The policy recognises that language is not an add-on to learning but its very foundation.

III. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The literature on LAC is extensive in the Western context but remains relatively sparse in India, making this an important area of inquiry. Internationally, scholars such as Britton et al. (1975), Moffett (1968), and Barnes (1976) laid the theoretical groundwork for LAC by arguing that language is central to the learning process across all disciplines. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory further reinforced this view by demonstrating that thought and language are inseparable, and that learning is mediated by language in social contexts.

In the Indian context, Pattanayak (1981) and Agnihotri (2007) have argued for the recognition of India's multilingual character as a resource rather than a problem in education. Their work anticipates the multilingual dimension of LAC by advocating for the inclusion of learners' home languages in school instruction. More recently, scholars such as Mohanty (2010) and Cummins (2008) have highlighted the importance of additive bilingualism — the idea that developing proficiency in the mother tongue supports, rather than hinders, the acquisition of additional languages.

Regarding NEP 2020, several commentators have noted the policy's progressive stance on language but have also raised concerns about implementation. Kumar (2020) and Sadgopal (2020) have highlighted the gap between policy intent and classroom reality, particularly in terms of teacher preparation. Ramachandran (2021) has argued that the success of NEP 2020's language provisions depends entirely on whether teachers receive adequate training in language-responsive pedagogy.

In the field of teacher education, research consistently shows that pre-service teachers lack confidence and competence in using language pedagogically across content areas (Moje, 2008; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). This finding applies as much to India as to other

national contexts. B.Ed. programmes in India have traditionally focused on subject-specific pedagogy, largely neglecting the language dimension of teaching and learning.

The intersection of LAC and NEP 2020 in the context of teacher education in India thus represents a significant gap in the literature — one that this paper seeks to address.

IV. LANGUAGE ACROSS THE CURRICULUM AND NEP 2020: POINTS OF CONVERGENCE

4.1 Mother Tongue as the Medium of Learning

One of the most prominent convergences between LAC and NEP 2020 lies in their shared commitment to the learner's mother tongue. LAC theory, especially as developed in multilingual contexts, recognises that learners think, process, and make meaning most effectively in their first language. NEP 2020's mandate for mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTBMLE) up to at least Grade 5 reflects this understanding. For teachers, this means that they must be equipped to use the learner's home language not as a crutch but as a pedagogical resource — a principle central to LAC.

4.2 Foundational Literacy and the LAC Framework

NEP 2020 designates foundational literacy and numeracy as a national emergency, recognising that millions of children in India reach upper primary school without basic reading and writing competencies. The LAC framework offers a practical response to this crisis: by embedding literacy instruction across all subjects, it creates multiple opportunities for students to engage with reading and writing in meaningful, context-rich environments. Science teachers, for instance, can develop literacy through experimental reports; social science teachers can use map reading and source analysis; mathematics teachers can focus on mathematical language and word problems.

4.3 Competency-Based Learning and Language

NEP 2020's shift from rote learning to competency-based education (CBE) requires students to demonstrate understanding through application, analysis, and communication — all of which are language-mediated processes. LAC directly supports

CBE by framing language skills not as ends in themselves but as means of demonstrating and deepening conceptual understanding. The alignment here suggests that any serious attempt to implement NEP 2020's vision of competency-based learning must necessarily involve a LAC approach.

4.4 Integrated and Holistic Education

Both LAC and NEP 2020 reject the fragmented, siloed model of education in which subjects are taught in isolation. NEP 2020 promotes an integrated, interdisciplinary curriculum that connects knowledge domains. LAC, similarly, argues for the dissolution of artificial boundaries between language instruction and content instruction. This convergence creates a strong rationale for curriculum design that weaves language development into all subject areas.

V. IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

5.1 Reconceptualising the Role of the Teacher

The most fundamental implication of a LAC-NEP 2020 alignment for teacher education is the need to reconceptualise what it means to be a teacher. Under the traditional model, a physics teacher teaches physics; a Hindi teacher teaches Hindi. Under the LAC model — and by implication, under the vision of NEP 2020 — every teacher is also a literacy teacher, a language teacher, a communication facilitator. B.Ed. programmes must equip prospective teachers with this expanded professional identity.

5.2 Curriculum Reform in B.Ed. Programmes

The B.Ed. curriculum, as currently structured in most Indian universities, does not adequately prepare teachers for language-responsive pedagogy. The four-year integrated B.Ed. envisioned by NEP 2020 provides an opportunity to embed LAC principles throughout the programme. Suggested reforms include:

- A mandatory foundational course on Language Across the Curriculum for all B.Ed. students, regardless of subject specialisation.
- Integration of literacy development strategies (e.g., graphic organisers, think-alouds, academic vocabulary instruction) into subject-specific pedagogy courses.

- School experience and internship components that explicitly require student-teachers to plan and teach language-integrated lessons.
- Multilingual classroom management training, particularly for teachers in linguistically diverse states such as Haryana.
- Assessment reforms that evaluate student-teachers on their ability to use language pedagogically, not merely on content knowledge.

5.3 Multilingual Competence as a Teacher Qualification

NEP 2020's trilingual vision and the realities of India's multilingual classrooms demand that teachers develop practical multilingual competencies. In Haryana, for example, classrooms may include students whose home languages include Haryanvi, Hindi, Punjabi, and in some urban areas, English. LAC-informed teacher education must prepare teachers to use these languages as pedagogical resources — through translanguaging strategies, code-switching, and language-sensitive instruction. This requires significant reform in how language skills are assessed in teacher licensing examinations such as HTET and CTET.

5.4 Professional Development of In-Service Teachers

The implications of the LAC-NEP 2020 nexus extend beyond pre-service training to the professional development of practising teachers. The vast majority of India's current teaching workforce has been trained under models that do not incorporate LAC. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programmes, facilitated through SCERT, DIET, and university departments, must be redesigned to introduce in-service teachers to LAC strategies. This is particularly urgent given NEP 2020's timeline for implementation.

5.5 Assessment and Evaluation Reforms

The alignment of LAC with NEP 2020 also demands a rethinking of how students are assessed. Traditional examinations that reward memory over expression, reproduction over analysis, and single correct answers over argumentation are antithetical to both LAC and NEP 2020's vision. Teacher education programmes must prepare prospective teachers to design and use language-inclusive assessments — such as portfolios, project-based assessments, oral examinations, and

reflective journals — that reflect the full range of students' linguistic and cognitive abilities.

VI. CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

Despite the compelling alignment between LAC and NEP 2020, several significant challenges stand in the way of implementation:

- **Linguistic Diversity:** India's staggering linguistic diversity, with over 19,500 dialects and 121 languages recognised in the census, makes a uniform LAC approach difficult to design. Regional adaptations are essential.
- **Teacher Resistance:** Many experienced teachers, trained in subject-specific traditions, may resist the expanded responsibility of language teaching. Attitudinal change is as important as skill development.
- **Inadequate Resources:** The lack of multilingual teaching materials, particularly in tribal and regional languages, is a major barrier to MTBMLE and, by extension, to LAC.
- **Assessment Alignment:** As long as high-stakes examinations such as board exams reward rote recall, it will be difficult for teachers to prioritise language-integrated, communicative learning.
- **Institutional Capacity:** Many B.Ed. institutions, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas of states like Haryana, lack faculty with expertise in language pedagogy or linguistics.
- **Policy-Practice Gap:** There is a well-documented tendency in Indian education for progressive policy to remain aspirational while classroom practice remains unchanged. Bridging this gap requires sustained political will, financial investment, and monitoring.

VII. A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR LAC-INFORMED TEACHER EDUCATION

Based on the foregoing analysis, this paper proposes a five-component framework for integrating LAC into teacher education in India, consistent with the vision of NEP 2020:

- **Awareness Component:** All B.Ed. students complete a course on Language, Literacy, and Learning that introduces LAC theory, the linguistic demands of specific disciplines, and India's multilingual context.

- **Skills Component:** Subject pedagogy courses are redesigned to include explicit language and literacy strategies relevant to each discipline, such as scientific vocabulary instruction, historical source analysis, and mathematical problem-solving language.
- **Practicum Component:** Teaching internships include a Language Across the Curriculum observation and teaching portfolio, where student-teachers document their use of language strategies and reflect on their impact.
- **Multilingual Component:** A dedicated module on translanguaging and multilingual pedagogy prepares teachers for the realities of India's linguistically diverse classrooms, particularly in the context of NEP 2020's mother-tongue provisions.
- **Assessment Component:** Teacher education assessments are reformed to evaluate language-responsive teaching competencies alongside subject knowledge, including the design of language-integrated lesson plans and assessments.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The National Education Policy 2020 represents a historic opportunity to reimagine education in India. Its emphasis on multilingualism, mother tongue-based learning, foundational literacy, and holistic, competency-based education resonates deeply with the principles of Language Across the Curriculum. This paper has argued that the successful implementation of NEP 2020's educational vision cannot be achieved without a corresponding transformation in teacher education — one that places language at the centre of all teaching and learning, regardless of subject.

For B.Ed. programmes across India, and in Haryana in particular, this means moving beyond the traditional model of subject-specific pedagogy to embrace a holistic, language-integrated approach. It means preparing teachers who understand that every lesson is, in part, a language lesson — that the science teacher who explains a concept clearly, the social science teacher who teaches students to read primary sources, and the mathematics teacher who helps students articulate their reasoning are all, in the deepest sense, language teachers.

The road ahead is not without obstacles: linguistic diversity, institutional inertia, assessment misalignment, and resource constraints all pose real challenges. But the convergence of LAC and NEP 2020 offers a clear and principled direction for reform. With sustained commitment from policymakers, teacher educators, and practitioners, India has an unprecedented opportunity to build a generation of teachers — and learners — for whom language is not a barrier but a bridge.

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