

A Critique on the Inclusion of Culture as an Important Factor in Teaching-Learning

DOI: <https://zenodo.org/records/13219424>

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Abstract

गुरुगोविंददोऊखड़े, काकेलागूँपाँय।
बलिहारीगुरुअपने, गोविंददियोमिलाय॥

-Kabir

Guru and Gurukul were the first recorded sources of the education in the history of education system in India. Home has always been the first institution of learning for a new born child. Subsequently, upon reaching adolescence, the child is sent to a gurukul under the tutelage of a chosen guru. The purpose was to create an environment of experiential learning from a young age. This meant that along with other members of the family, the learner lived with the guru's family and participated in the household chores of the guru's home while pursuing academics. Living under strict regulations and following their culture,—meant that the learner was mastering both his own culture as well as the culture of the Gurukul. It taught the child life skills and respect for the values, beliefs, traditions, and practices of the Gurukul and the guru, in tandem with those of his family. While growing up in the Gurukul, the learner understood and accepted diversity as a way of life. In the nineteenth century, frequent and repeated foreign invasions -Islamic and European, brought new cultures and its assimilation impacted traditional learning methods. India was introduced to the modern system of education as enunciated by Lord

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Macaulay. After independence, the structure of education has undergone a change with a new National Education Policy (NEP) being introduced. The current, twenty-first-century version focuses on knowledge of culture in language teaching-learning as globalization is the buzzword and diversity is the gatekeeper. This paper intends to trace the chronological revisions that NEP has undergone and critique why the latest version considers culture as an imperative factor in Language teaching-learning. An exploratory research method will be used to answer questions on the need to understand the role of the cultures of the mother tongue and target language to gain expertise in communication in English as a second language and the Associate Official Language.

Key Words: ESL, Culture, Inter-Cultural Approach, NEP, Language, Culture

Introduction

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In this *Doha*, Kabir explains the importance of Guru. He says one should prefer Guru over the God as the Guru shows the path to go towards the God. Such is the importance of the Guru in Indian Culture.

In ancient India, during the *Vedik* Period, a man's life was divided into four *Ashramas*. Considering the average human life of a hundred years, it was divided into four stages called as *Ashramas*. The four *Ashrama* system was as follows-

Age one to 25 years- *Brahmacharyashrama*(Studenthood)
26 to 50 years- *Gruhashthashrama*(Householder)
51 to 75 years- *Vanaprashthashrama* (Forest Dweller/ Retired life)
76 to 100 years/ death- *Sanyasashrama* (Life of renunciation)

During *Brahmacharyashram*, up to the age of seven years, a child used to have a basic education at home, but by the age of eight years, a child used to be sent to the Gurukul/ Guru's (Teacher's) house to learn. It was not just formal teaching-learning that a child would get at the Guru's

house, he had to even look after the household work and stay there along with the Guru, his family, and the other disciples of the Guru.¹

The major benefit of the Gurukul system was, that the Guru (Teacher) and his disciples were considered to be equal. They used to live together. All the disciples lived together with much love, brotherhood, humanity, and self-discipline. Thus, culture remained a very core part of that education through the Gurukul system. Gurukul had its own culture. The learner and the other disciples had their own cultures. Thus, culturally, the child used to become very rich as he had to master his own as well as the Gurukul's culture. He even had to understand the culture of the other disciples there. It means the learner was trained to accept diversity, and he grew up with an open mind towards diversity. This education was more based on religion and nature along, with some formal subjects like mathematics, metaphysics, and so on.

The gurus imparted academic knowledge and instilled cultural values, moral ethics, and principles of righteous living. The students imbibed the guru's lifestyle and became part of the guru's family, learning through observation and experience. Culture formed the backbone of ancient Indian education. It permeated every aspect of the educational system, from the Gurukul system to the curriculum, teaching methods, and values instilled in students. Education is aimed at the holistic development of individuals, nurturing their intellectual, spiritual, moral, and artistic intelligence.²

In the later period, India experienced many invasions. Naturally, foreigners who had colonised India left behind their culture with the Indian people. They brought their languages and cultures to India. Mughals tried to spread Islamic education rather than any other sort of formal education. For centuries, education was limited to particular castes and classes. It was not there for the masses.

Ancient Universities of Nalanda and Takshashila played a significant role as the centres of knowledge and attracted students and scholars from various parts of the world. Both the universities contributed in advancing knowledge, scholarship, and intellectual exchange. These universities played a major role in shaping ancient India's intellect and culture. They also became the centres of academic excellence by providing a conducive environment for learning, nurtured critical thinking, and fostered a spirit of inquiry that attracted around the world. The teachings

and contributions of these ancient universities continue to inspire and influence the field of education even today.

Later, the system of Gurukul was replaced with formal schools. The transition from the Gurukul system to formal schools in India occurred gradually over several centuries. During the British colonial rule in India, the existing Gurukul system coexisted with introducing Western-style education. The British East India Company, and later the British Raj, established institutions like Fort William College (1800) and Calcutta Madrasah (1781), which were aimed at training administrators and promoting British education and values.

In 1793, the East India Company's Charter Act was prepared; in that act, there were two clauses supporting the education of Indians. But for nearly the next 20 years, the British did not take education of Indians much seriously. In 1813, after the Chartered Act was passed, the education of Indians was taken seriously by the British Government. Macaulay's Minute had immense importance during this time. Lord Macaulay wanted to have a class of clerks from India who were Indians in colour and blood but British in their tastes. Macaulay's aim was to promote the cultural transplantation of Indians. With this aim, he made the English language, literature, and religion central to the cultural enterprise of the empire and the expansion of their trade.

In 1854, Wood's Despatch was prepared by Lord Halifax, who was the then President of Control of East India Company. Wood's Despatch is also called as 'Magna-Carta of English Education in India'. Wood's Despatch differed from Macaulay's Minute as it had the soft tone and convincing arguments. It recommended many things to improve education and English education in India. Mass education started after Wood's dispatch but it was different than what they had for classes.

Indian Education Commission, known as Hunter Commission, reiterated the points stated by Wood's Dispatch. Along with the territorial empire, the British were also becoming linguistic and cultural emperors for the Indians. Lord Curzon arranged an Educational Conference at Shimla in 1901. No Indian was invited for it. In that conference, he said that education in India should be basically employment oriented. It should not be a source of learning or an instrument of culture. In Curzon's words, "Indian education was just a mere shell with no kernel in it."³

Culture became of the least importance in the formal education, which was started during British rule. The education was given to Indians just to produce clerks who would help the British in administration.

British Government helped India with the spread of modern and technical education. While the formal school system gained prominence during the colonial and post-independence years, it is important to note that the Gurukul system has not disappeared entirely. Some Gurukul continue to exist, particularly for studying traditional subjects like music, dance, and spirituality. During these days, this Gurukul system also exists in the field of performing arts. This is called the most effective system of learning the performing arts. The Guru ties a *Ganda* (a thread) in the disciple's hand and takes a promise from him to continue the culture, and traditions of his *Gharana* of the particular art.

Education in Independent India

India got free from British rule in 1947. After independence, education became the responsibility of the Indian Government. The British left India, but the English were left behind. The Indian Constitution was written in English. The language for Administration and judiciary was also English. The transactions of railways, post, and telecommunication, all started in English. The language issue became emotional because Indians had much hatred for British in their minds. English and English education was thought of as a symbol of 'Eternal Slavery'. There was a thought to throw the English language out with the British. English-educated people were called 'Brown Sahibs' or 'Macaulay's Children.'

Many Education Commissions were formed in independent India to streamline Indian education. These commissions made many reforms and policies in the Indian Education System. A few to note are the University Education Commission or Radhakrishnan Commission, the Primary Education Commission, and the Secondary Education or Mudliar Commission.

In 1968, independent India formed the First National Education Policy. It was formed on the basis of the Kothari Commission to guide State Governments and local bodies to prepare and implement educational plans. This was a document which talked about the development of languages. It stressed the development of Regional languages, along with Sanskrit, Hindi, and English. It suggested three language formulas at the secondary stage. The objectives of this National Education Policy of 1968 were mainly to provide equal opportunities for education to all Indians. This policy made education compulsory for children up to the age of 14.

Post the First National Education Policy a new Education Policy was introduced in 1986. This policy aimed at providing equal opportunities for education to women as well as Schedule Caste (SC) and

Schedule Tribe (ST) communities. It also promoted minority education, and along with all this, the policy made attempts to control the rate of school-dropouts. Thus, this policy mainly considered the social aspect of education. A program of action was taken in 1992, which continued with the objectives of the policy of 1986 and worked for free, compulsory education and equal opportunities for education.⁴

After almost four decades the National Education Policy (NEP) was formulated in 2020. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it has not yet been completely implemented. For the first time, the NEP considered the importance of learners' culture in education. Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability, and Accountability are the pillars of NEP on which the policy stands. The policy prescribes home language for education by understanding the importance of the mother tongue.

Language Education and Culture

Language and culture have a close relationship, as one cannot be fully understood or appreciated without the other. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis was the first to emphasize the significance of culture in language education, stating that language shapes how individuals think and act. In language learning, culture is recognized as the fifth skill, alongside listening, speaking, reading, and writing. According to Claire Kramsch, language is viewed as a social practice that reflects cultural realities. Therefore, culture forms an essential part of language education.⁵

A research conducted by J. Yang suggests that culture encompasses beliefs, perceptions, and values that influence language learning, including overall learning styles and specific strategies. This clearly demonstrates the interconnectedness of language and culture.⁶ While culture is not the sole determinant of language acquisition, it has an important role to play in the process.

It becomes crucial for language learners; to familiarize themselves with the culture associated with the language they are studying. Culture serves as a fundamental component in comprehending the language. Learning should not be seen as a mere transfer or transmission process but as a transformative experience. This transformation occurs within the language learner in terms of their cultural understanding. This phenomenon is evident when children learn their mother tongue, as they develop cultural knowledge alongside language proficiency and language knowledge alongside cultural understanding.

The language may be first or second, but language learning always occurs within a cultural context. The activities and cultural influences must be distinct from what is learned in foreign or second language acquisition. Even in second language learning, individuals must also familiarize themselves with the linguistic aspects of the target culture. Thus, it can be said that second language acquisition is, in essence, acquiring a second culture.

Language Learning and Culture in NEP 2020

Chapter 22 of NEP 2020, titled- Promotion of Indian Languages, Arts and Culture, highlights many important points regarding the importance of Indian culture in education. The NEP 2020 considers cultural awareness and expression to be important factors in the well-being of individuals as well as society. A sense of identity, and belongingness is given through Cultural Awareness and Expressions. It also helps in the appreciation of other cultures and identities. Self-esteem and positive cultural identity are possible through a strong sense and knowledge of their own cultural history, arts, languages, and traditions. NEP 2020 has proposed that through the preservation and promotion of Indian arts and languages, culture can be preserved and promoted.⁷

It has been mentioned in the policy document that the curriculum and pedagogy of all the stages of education will be redesigned. The curriculum and pedagogy will have its roots in the local and Indian context and ethos. Therefore, it will reflect the Indian culture, traditions, heritage, and customs. It will also focus on Indian languages, philosophy, and geography. Ancient and contemporary knowledge, societal and scientific needs, and indigenous and traditional ways of learning will be reflected through the newly evolved education system.

Languages and art education have been expected to be culture-related because, language is the carrier of culture, and art always reflects a particular culture. Any art cannot be appreciated without language. The NEP 2020 believes that for the preservation of any culture, arts and languages of the culture should be preserved. The NEP 2020 expects that the style of teaching all the languages should be enjoyable and interactive. There should be a lot of interactive conversation included in it. The early reading should be followed by writing in the mother tongue in the early years, and with skills developed for reading and writing in other languages in Grade 3 and beyond. The language formula has been continued by this education policy.

This policy protects the endangered languages to protect their culture. It thinks about preserving the Indian culture. However, in the process of learning a second language, culture has not been given importance. It does not think about the separate culture of the learner, the facilitator and the language. There are no specific mentions of the teaching methods and pedagogical processes to facilitate culture-based language teaching. Due to linguistic and cultural diversity, it will be hard to implement language and culture-related things mentioned in the policy document in the education system.

In multicultural countries like India, it is necessary to understand the culture of the learner and the culture of the target language in a language classroom. Therefore, culture incorporation in second language pedagogy is needed. But the Educational Policies in India have yet to consider culture as a core element of pedagogy.

Need to Implement Culture in Language Teaching

It is vital that language and culture have mutual integration. Therefore,—while learning a language, it is necessary to understand the relationship between language and culture. Culture acts as a driving force in the process of language learning. It provides the content for the language. Decke Cornill and Wandel have stated in their research that cultural understanding in language learning is co-created by language learners.⁸

Culture should not be studied just to gather information in language learning, the learner should try to analyse his native culture in correlation with the culture of the target language. Cross-cultural transfer takes place when the learner learns the target language. There are cultural differences between native and target languages, and these differences provide a way to prevent misinterpretations in the process of second language learning.—Therefore, culturally aware systems of teaching-learning are necessary for second language development.

In addition to that, Second language learners should always be sensitive to the culture and traditions of the people whose language is being learned. Learning of the target language culture in second language learning will help the learners to understand the second language more easily. As Spackman Christopher states, when a student enters in the classroom, he has his own identity, and when he learns a new language, he

gets a new way of seeing the world.⁹ Therefore, it can be said that second language acquisition becomes second culture acquisition.

Education should connect the students with the outside world of knowledge and information. This connection can be through contextual learning opportunities provided to the learners. Learners have the impact of their own culture. According to Social Learning Theory, learning is motivated through the mediation of conditioned emotional responses and direct responses are not given to the stimuli. This conditioning is through culture. The observations are made through the environment available around the learner, and then conditioning takes place. This environment will be the learner's culture available around him.¹⁰

Including culture in language learning

In ancient times, in the system of Gurukul remained at the core part of teaching-learning. Learners used to carry their own culture to Gurukul, and later, they used to follow the culture of the Guru as well as the culture of their co-learners. Even the process of teaching-learning was culture-based. Later, in ancient Indian universities like Nalanda and Takshashila, culture was given importance in teaching-learning. There was an extensive collection of manuscripts, texts, and scriptures from different cultures and disciplines prescribed for teaching different subjects. These universities attracted students and scholars from India and countries like China, Japan, Korea, Tibet, and Central Asia. Therefore, they served as the centres for cross-cultural exchange.

Later, the Gurukul system was replaced with formal schooling. In this process, the thread of culture in the education system got cut, and slowly, education became a system of rote learning. Further, the Indian education policies did not consider culture as an important element of the teaching-learning process. Thus it is needed to incorporate culture in the pedagogy.

This can be done in several ways. Cultural awareness in the classroom is very much necessary. The teacher and the learners should be aware of the diverse cultures, including the culture of the learners, the language, and the teacher. There should be intercultural sensitivity as there is cultural diversity. If all the cultures are paid attention to, and if the learners have cultural awareness, it will foster the learning of all the languages as each language carries culture with it. The curriculum designers should also pay attention to incorporating culture in pedagogy.

Indian Knowledge System is a separate Division established by the Government of India in October 2020 to spread the rich heritage and traditional knowledge of our country across all sectors of education. All these approaches will help inculcate culture into the process of the teaching-learning process, making it more interesting, easy and enjoyable.

Notes:

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