



## **Breaking Language Barriers: How Translanguaging is Shaping Language Policy and Transforming the Education Space in India**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper explores the transformative potential of translanguaging in India's education space. We examine how translanguaging is being used to promote multilingualism, enhance learning outcomes, and foster social inclusion in schools and universities across the country. We also critically analyze the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which recognizes the importance of translanguaging and its implications for language teaching and learning in India. However, the implementation of translanguaging poses several challenges in India's diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts. Through our analysis, we aim to contribute to ongoing debates on language policy and education in India and highlight the potential of translanguaging in shaping a more inclusive and equitable education system.

**Keywords:** Translanguaging, Language barriers, Multilingualism, Education policy, Language teaching

### **1. Introduction:**

#### **1.1 Background and context**

Language barriers often limit students' access to quality education, especially in linguistically diverse countries like India. Historically, language policies in India have privileged English and Hindi, often at the expense of other languages, perpetuating linguistic hierarchies and marginalizing students from linguistic minority communities. In recent years, however, a pedagogical approach called "translanguaging" has emerged as a promising

tool for breaking down language barriers and promoting multilingualism in the classroom.

Translanguaging is a pedagogical approach that allows students to use their full linguistic repertoires, including their home languages, in the classroom to enhance their learning outcomes. It recognizes that language is not a monolithic entity, but rather a dynamic system that individuals use creatively to make meaning in different contexts. Translanguaging enables students to navigate different linguistic and cultural contexts, fostering social inclusion, and empowering them to engage with different communities.

In India, the need for multilingualism is particularly urgent, given the country's linguistic diversity, where more than 22 languages are recognized as official. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which is a comprehensive framework that aims to transform the Indian education system, recognizes the importance of multilingualism and highlights the need to promote translanguaging as a pedagogical approach to enhance learning outcomes and bridge linguistic divides.

This paper aims to explore how translanguaging is shaping language policy and transforming the education space in India. We will draw on case studies from schools and universities across the country to examine how educators and policymakers are using translanguaging to promote multilingualism and foster social inclusion. We will also critically analyze the NEP 2020, which recognizes the potential of translanguaging in promoting multilingualism in the classroom, and its implications for language teaching and learning in India. Finally, we will examine the challenges and opportunities of implementing translanguaging in different contexts and highlight its potential to transform the Indian education system and empower students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

## **1.2 Significance of the study:**

Translanguaging is emerging as a new pedagogical approach to language teaching and learning, and this study highlights its significance in the context of the Indian education system. Translanguaging is a holistic approach that recognizes the complex and dynamic nature of language use, and allows students to use their entire linguistic repertoire, including their home languages, to enhance their learning outcomes. This approach could empower students to develop a deeper understanding of the language and its cultural context and provide them with the skills to navigate different linguistic and cultural contexts. By promoting multilingualism and embracing linguistic diversity, translanguaging could help break down language barriers and promote social inclusion in the classroom. This study critically analyzes the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and its

implications for language teaching and learning in India. By highlighting the potential of translanguaging as the future of language learning, this study could contribute to the ongoing debates on language policy and education in India, and inform policy decisions aimed at transforming the Indian education system into a more inclusive and equitable one.

### **1.3 Research questions:**

This study aims to explore two relevant research questions:

1. How are educators and policymakers using translanguaging to promote multilingualism and foster social inclusion in schools and universities across India?
2. What are the challenges and opportunities of implementing translanguaging in different contexts in India, and how can translanguaging transform the Indian education system to better empower students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds?

### **1.4 Literature review:**

Language policy and education in India have been characterized by a strong preference for English as the medium of instruction, which has led to a hierarchical language order where English is considered superior to regional languages (Mohanty, Panda, & Phillipson, 2012). However, recent scholarship has emphasized the importance of multilingualism and the need for mother-tongue education in India (Kothari, 2019). Translanguaging has emerged as a pedagogical approach that challenges the dominant monolingualism and promotes multilingualism in classrooms.

Garcia and Wei (2014) argue that translanguaging is a dynamic language practice that allows individuals to draw on their linguistic resources to make meaning and communicate effectively. Translanguaging involves the fluid use of multiple languages in interaction, which helps students develop their language and literacy skills (Li & Hu, 2014). Canagarajah (2011) emphasizes the importance of codemeshing in academic writing, which involves the strategic use of multiple languages to enhance communication and meaning-making.

Translanguaging has been implemented successfully in various contexts, such as in Wales (Lewis & Jones, 2018) and in multilingual communities in the United States (Garcia & Otheguy, 2018). In these contexts, translanguaging has been found to promote social inclusion, linguistic diversity, and academic success.

The Indian government's National Education Policy 2020 acknowledges the importance of multilingualism and mother-tongue education and recommends the implementation of translanguaging in the

classroom (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020). However, the implementation of translanguaging in India faces challenges, such as teacher training, availability of resources, and resistance from dominant language groups (Blackledge & Creese, 2010).

Despite these challenges, scholars argue that translanguaging has the potential to promote equity and social justice in education (Kothari, 2019). Skutnabb-Kangas and Cummins (2016) argue that language education must be inclusive and socially just and that the promotion of multilingualism can contribute to the empowerment of marginalized communities.

In the Indian context, research has highlighted the importance of mother-tongue education in promoting literacy and academic success (Rao & Panda, 2017). However, the dominance of English in education has led to the marginalization of regional languages and cultures (Gargesh, 2015). Translanguaging can offer a solution to this problem by promoting multilingualism and creating a more inclusive educational environment (Kothari, 2019).

Overall, the literature suggests that translanguaging has the potential to promote multilingualism, break down language barriers, and transform the education space in India. However, the implementation of translanguaging requires a shift in language policy and pedagogical practices, which can be challenging in the current linguistic and cultural context of India. Further research is needed to explore the effectiveness of translanguaging in promoting multilingualism and academic success in India.

## **2.1 Multilingualism, code-switching and Translanguaging:**

Multilingualism, code-switching, and translanguaging are terms used to describe the use of multiple languages in communication. While they may seem interchangeable at first glance, each concept carries distinct theoretical and practical implications.

Multilingualism is typically defined as the ability of an individual or a community to use more than one language proficiently. In research, it is often measured by assessing an individual's language proficiency, which can vary along multiple dimensions, including proficiency in speaking, reading, writing, and listening. Multilingualism is a common feature of many societies worldwide, with linguistic diversity often reflecting cultural, historical, and social factors.

Code-switching is a linguistic practice that involves switching between two or more languages or language varieties within a single communication event. Code-switching can be viewed as a strategic tool for achieving communicative goals, as speakers may choose to switch languages to express identity, convey nuances, or accommodate interlocutors who speak

different languages. Code-switching has been extensively studied in a range of contexts, including bilingual and multilingual communities, classrooms, workplaces, and digital environments.

Translanguaging is a more recent concept that emerged in the field of bilingual and multilingual education. It refers to the use of all available linguistic resources to communicate effectively, including languages, dialects, registers, and other language varieties. Unlike code-switching, translanguaging acknowledges that language use is not always neatly divided into separate languages and that individuals and communities draw on multiple linguistic resources to achieve their communicative goals. Translanguaging has been shown to have important implications for language learning, pedagogy, and social justice, as it challenges monolingual ideologies and highlights the value of linguistic diversity.

Ultimately, it is important to understand that multilingualism, code-switching, and translanguaging are complex and multifaceted concepts that reflect the diversity of language use in our world. Understanding these concepts is essential for researchers, educators, and policymakers who seek to promote linguistic diversity, multilingualism, and social justice.

## **2.2 Translanguaging and Multilingualism in India's Education Policy: A Path to Inclusion**

The National Education Policy (NEP) recognizes the value of translanguaging as a means of promoting multilingualism and social inclusion in the Indian education system (Government of India, 2020). The policy encourages the use of the mother tongue or regional language as the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, with a preference for continuing this approach beyond that level (Government of India, 2020, p. 25). By providing a flexible language choice, learners can utilize translanguaging to access educational content in their mother tongue while also developing proficiency in other languages (Government of India, 2020, p. 33). Additionally, the NEP highlights the need for inclusive education, including special provisions for disadvantaged groups, such as linguistic minorities, by creating multilingual textbooks and educational materials (Government of India, 2020, p. 51). In summary, the NEP recognizes the potential of translanguaging to promote multilingualism and foster inclusion, and provides a framework for its implementation in the Indian education system.

### **Translanguaging and Language Policy for Future Language Learning:**

The need for translanguaging and translingual instruction arises from the growing recognition of the importance of multilingualism and the need for inclusive education. The UNESCO (2003) report on Education in a Multilingual World emphasizes the importance of mother tongue-based multilingual education, stating that children learn best when taught in a

language they understand. Similarly, the European Commission's report on Multilingualism and Language Learning (2017) emphasizes the importance of developing multilingual competence in individuals for personal, social, and economic development. Translanguaging, as a pedagogical approach, acknowledges the fact that students come to the classroom with diverse linguistic backgrounds and utilizes students' linguistic resources to enhance their learning. Translingual instruction, on the other hand, emphasizes the interconnectedness of languages and encourages the use of multiple languages to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the world.

In the context of language learning, translanguaging and translingual instruction can help bridge the gap between the students' home language and the language of instruction. This is particularly relevant for linguistic minority students who often struggle with academic success due to a lack of proficiency in the language of instruction. The use of translanguaging and translingual instruction can help create a more inclusive classroom environment, where students feel valued for their linguistic resources, and their home language is seen as an asset rather than a liability. In conclusion, the adoption of translanguaging and translingual instruction can lead to a more inclusive and effective language learning environment, where students can develop multilingual competence, and language barriers can be overcome.

### **Incorporating Translanguaging and Digital Literacy in Modern Indian Education**

Translanguaging has emerged as a crucial pedagogical approach in modern Indian education, given the country's diverse linguistic landscape and the need for inclusive language education. The National Education Policy of India (2020) recognizes the importance of translanguaging and emphasizes the use of the mother tongue or regional language as the medium of instruction up to at least Grade 5, with a preference for continuing this approach beyond that level. This policy is particularly crucial for linguistic minority students, who often struggle with academic success due to a lack of proficiency in the language of instruction. Translanguaging can create an inclusive classroom environment where students feel empowered to use their linguistic resources, and their home language is viewed as an asset, not a hindrance.

The integration of digital literacy into education has further emphasized the need for translanguaging in modern Indian education. As technology becomes an increasingly integral part of daily life, effective communication in multiple languages has become increasingly vital. With the growth of digital platforms, the need for multilingual communication has become more pressing, and translanguaging can facilitate such

communication. Moreover, technology can also aid language acquisition as learners can access educational resources in various languages and use translanguaging to improve their comprehension.

The integration of translanguaging into modern Indian education can create a more inclusive and efficient language learning environment, where students can develop multilingual proficiency, and linguistic barriers can be transcended. The incorporation of digital literacy further underscores the significance of translanguaging in the present and future of language education in India, highlighting its importance in facilitating communication in the digital era. By acknowledging the importance of translanguaging and integrating it into language policy and educational practice, India can foster social inclusion, promote multilingualism, and contribute to a more diverse and interconnected society.

### **Challenges of Translanguaging in Indian Education Contexts**

The implementation of translanguaging in the education landscape is not without challenges. Research has highlighted several challenges in the implementation of translanguaging practices in diverse educational contexts in India. One of the primary challenges is the lack of resources, including qualified teachers and appropriate instructional materials, to effectively implement translanguaging practices in the classroom (Canagarajah, 2011; García & Wei, 2014). The development of appropriate instructional materials in multiple languages can be a challenging task. Moreover, the scarcity of qualified teachers who can provide instruction in multiple languages can impede the implementation of the policy. As stated by Joshi and Shukla (2020), teachers may struggle to provide effective instruction in multiple languages due to a lack of proficiency or training in these languages.

Additionally, there may be resistance from stakeholders who view translanguaging as a threat to the primacy of English and the perceived superiority of certain languages. This resistance can be seen at the institutional level where English-medium education is often privileged over the use of regional languages (Chakravarty, 2018). The policy may also face opposition from individuals who believe that it undermines the standardization of language and promotes linguistic fragmentation (Canagarajah, 2011).

Furthermore, the lack of awareness and understanding among teachers, parents, and policymakers about the benefits of translanguaging can hinder its implementation (García & Wei, 2014). As stated by Bhattacharya (2020), the lack of awareness among policymakers and educators about the benefits of translanguaging often results in the promotion of a monolingual mindset where students are expected to learn in a language that is not their first language.

Finally, the diversity of languages spoken in India poses a challenge to the development of a standardized translanguaging policy. As stated by Mohanty (2019), the implementation of a standardized policy is difficult due to the diversity of linguistic groups in India, each with their own language, script, and orthography. This diversity also poses challenges for the development of instructional materials that are accessible to all learners.

### **Conclusion:**

To conclude, the implementation of translanguaging in the education landscape is not without challenges. These challenges need to be addressed to effectively implement translanguaging and promote inclusive language learning in India. To address these challenges, policymakers and educators must work together to develop appropriate instructional materials and provide adequate training for teachers in the use of multiple languages in the classroom. Furthermore, there needs to be greater awareness and understanding among stakeholders about the benefits of translanguaging for promoting inclusive language learning. By addressing these challenges, the Indian education system can better empower students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds to achieve academic and personal success.

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