

Analysing Opportunities and Challenges to learn Spanish in India

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Abstract:

The expansion of Spanish language education in multilingual India has received an unexpected boost from the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which promotes learning foreign languages with regional language/s to prepare learners for life and work globally, striving for cognitive development (NEP, 2020). By providing Spanish language education as one of its options at the secondary level, NEP 2020 allows Indian students to embark on international career pathways whether that be higher education opportunities through Spanish language learning and/or cultural enrichment. NEP 2020 affords dynamic opportunities for pupils and educational systems to implement Spanish language education through the framework of a flexible three-language formula allowing states and schools to educate their students in Spanish because there is no overarching language from the NEP to broadcast against other languages or link with other cognitive learning (NEP, 2020). The implementation of Spanish language education provides opportunities for multilingualism and choice for the students. However, with Spanish education propagation includes substantial challenges such as a lack of qualified Spanish teachers, inequitable resources across schools, different parental preferences for regionally/nationally languages, and regional languages differ from school-to-school system. Spanish language learning is successful to produce English proficient speaking literates if there is an investment in teacher training, development and production of quality teaching and learning resources, and language policy at the state level. Should these challenges be identified and overcome, Spanish, with its acceptable and apparent relevance to the multicultural and multilingual linguistic profile of India, can contribute to the production of globally competent individuals, interculturally aware citizens with a firm understanding of their own language identity and cultural community.

Keywords: Spanish Language, NEP 2020, Multilingual India, Education

Introduction

India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has fundamentally altered the educational framework of the country. It is significant in itself as it focuses on multilingual education. The emphasis on mother tongue and regional languages in education, particularly in the foundational phase of education, is noteworthy. The NEP is an opportunity for schools to offer foreign languages (for example, Spanish) to secondary and higher secondary schools. The NEP dual tracks: to hold on to India's wealth of culture and linguistic diversity, while at the same time, advocate for global interdependence. By introducing foreign languages like Spanish, which is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world, the NEP 2020 evokes and recognizes all the benefits associated with developing a range of skills to be globally competent, along with academic mobility and opportunities, while at the same time retaining your culture and regional identity. (Gupta, D. S. and Chatterjee, J. 2023).

NEP 2020: Language Policy Overview

NEP 2020 proposes the use of a mother tongue or local/regional language as the medium of instruction in schools. It specifically encourages that instructional use of such languages occurs at least until Grade 5 and preferably until Grade 8. The use of the mother tongue/language as a medium of instruction strengthens foundational learning, as well as literacy and conceptual development, in the language in which the student has greatest comfort. The NEP continues its commitment to the three-language formula which supports students learning three different languages as a part of school. NEP gives priority to Indian languages, but allows states and institutions flexibility: they may decide how to implement the instruction of languages and which languages to implement, including foreign languages (such as Spanish, French, German) at the secondary and higher secondary levels (Alvear, 2020). This flexibility reflects NEP's vision to balance local language and literature with global opportunities. Introducing foreign languages in schools increases employability in global markets while simultaneously providing languages that develop the multilingual competence to contribute to cognitive development, problem-solving skills, and creativity. In addition, learners of global languages like Spanish will also embrace various cultural standpoints, underpinning the concepts of intercultural sensitivity or global citizenship. Through a balanced approach to language learning, India will not only continue to preserve and celebrate its rich linguistic heritage but will also prepare its constituents for a world that is more interconnected and more competitive. (Gupta, D. S., & Chatterjee, J. 2023).

Opportunities for Spanish Language Education

1.1 Increased Global Competence: Spanish is the second most widely spoken native language in the world and is the official language of over 20 nations in Latin America, Europe, and parts of Africa. Learning Spanish offers students in India the potential to engage and integrate into current and future global networks and opportunities in possible careers in international diplomacy, commerce, tourism, education, research, and particularly in the fast-growing technology field.

1.2 Increased Access: NEP 2020 also recognizes engagement with foreign languages and languages acquisition; Thus, Spanish may be offered in a more systematic way across the K-12 school system and by higher education institutions. This also opens up opportunities for more students across different geographical parts of India possibly finding international scholarships, travel accommodation, and higher education in Spanish-speaking countries as they become well-positioned for both innovation and cultural hubs. (Gupta, D. S. and Chatterjee, J. (2023).

1.3 Cross-cultural Enrichment: Locating Spanish relatively recently in the Indian school system goes beyond solely focusing on linguistic competence. It also enhances students' opportunities to interact with passionate linguistic communities across the world, and discover the historic, literary, and tradition of the Hispanic cultural footprint. This engagement strengthens cultural awareness and intercultural appreciation while supporting the broader global engagement objectives of India through mutual understanding and collaboration with Spanish-speaking countries. (Gupta, D. S. and Chatterjee, J. (2023).

1.4 Pedagogical Innovation: The NEP 2020 promotes new methods of next-generation learning that place the learner at the center while utilizing technologies and interactive and activity based learning. What does that mean for Spanish education? It means using digital apps, gamified apps and websites, multimodal resources, and role-play to create relevant and experiential lessons. Students can go beyond just memorizing vocabulary and practice real-life communication using creativity and cultural awareness. The lessons also make it more delightful to learn Spanish whilst moving Spanish education towards the internationally accepted principles of language learning. (Gupta, D. S. and Chatterjee, J. (2023).

2. Case Studies and Expansion Trends

- Spanish has become the third most popular foreign language in India, after French and German, and particularly at the secondary level in schools. During 2019–20, over 7,500 students were learning Spanish in schools, indicating more acceptance of Spanish in formal education. Spanish has also become popular in non-formal contexts; almost 10,000 learners are learning Spanish in private academies and cultural centres, adding to the character of the English as a foreign

language teaching context. Growing interest in Spanish is likely related to many factors, including Spanish being one of the world's most spoken languages, Spanish being relevant to students pursuing international business or diplomacy, and India is expanding its cultural and financial engagement with Spanish speaking regions. With the number of learners continuing to rise, Spanish is shifting the market for foreign language education in India to include alternative choices than just the traditional European options.

- Institutions such as Instituto Cervantes in New Delhi, Hispanic Horizons in Mumbai, and universities like University of Mumbai have made significant efforts in expanding Spanish teaching, including certification programs and preparing students for internationally recognized exams like DELE and SIELE.

The exchange of Indian language assistants to Spanish educational centers has not only supported English teaching in Spain but also deepened mutual understanding of Spanish and Indian cultures, helping future Indian Spanish teachers gain field experience.

Impact of NEP 2020 on Language Policy

- NEP 2020's "Three Language Formula" allows educational institutions and states to offer Spanish alongside Indian regional languages, making foreign language acquisition more democratic and widespread.
- Student surveys indicate that a majority of learners now have a favorable attitude towards learning three languages, including Spanish, especially at the secondary school level, reflecting changing perceptions and aspirations.
- NEP 2020 acknowledges the cognitive, cultural, and career benefits of multilingualism, positioning Spanish as a path to global citizenship and professional mobility.

Core Implementation Challenges

Teacher Shortage and Training

India currently faces a serious shortage of trained Spanish teachers. This shortage makes it difficult to expand Spanish language education. The demand for foreign languages has been growing steadily, especially with policies like the NEP 2020. However, there are still not enough qualified educators who can teach Spanish effectively in schools and colleges. (Singh, A. K. 2025). Mandating foreign language instruction on a large scale requires significant investment in recruiting and training teachers. It also needs the systematic development of curriculum, teaching materials, and assessment

methods. Without addressing these gaps, including Spanish and other foreign languages in the national education system could end up being more superficial than transformative.

Resource and Infrastructure Constraints

Many schools in India are facing severe issues with having the resources to implement effective foreign language programs, including Spanish language programs. Many schools do not have language labs with the ability for students to practice listening and speaking in an interactive way. Every school does not have current, relevant, multimedia, digital text books to use updated teaching strategies. This obliges teachers to use out-of-date, or improvised, material. Further, there are almost no opportunities for extra-curricular support (i.e. Spanish Clubs, cultural exchange activities, past ties to Spain/Spanish countries, or authentic communicators from online) for students studying Spanish language and culture. These shortages affect the Spanish learner's experience with the language/culture. For example, an actual Spanish curriculum is constructed from language skills, cultural exchange, and communication. Lacking the above-mentioned opportunities makes it very hard for students to form language skills, so they effectively cannot build a communicative and cultural understanding. Therefore, without continued investment in infrastructure and resources, Spanish will remain an unevenly delivered program, and the benefits will flow to a limited number of well-funded private schools, while most learners will be left without.

Sociocultural Resistance

Parents and students in India tend to prioritize English or major regional languages over foreign languages like Spanish, primarily because of the direct association of foreign languages with economic mobility. English, especially, continues to be construed as the pathway to higher education, global employment, and the associated social mobility that status seekers need; and regional languages are concomitantly regarded as crucial for the preservation of a cultural identity and a means of communicating locally. Thus, the study of Spanish and other foreign languages are often viewed as additional rather than primary, or essential, particularly in non-urban contexts. This perspective has resulted in low Spanish course enrolment figures, with prospective learners typically residing in metropolitan areas and elite institutions. In rural areas and the periphery, where opportunities for resources and exposure to global opportunities are limited, families are even less willing to spend the time and commitment learning Spanish, as it is perceived to have little immediate benefit. Barring policy reform or awareness raising efforts that draw attention to the longer-term cultural and career benefits of Spanish, the language is unlikely to ever be more than marginalised compared to English and the major regional languages.

Policy Implementation Gaps

Because of regional differences and their autonomy in NEP 2020, there are major inconsistencies in the way foreign languages are taught and promoted in India. The NEP provided regional states with a flexible framework within which to develop a curriculum suitable to their linguistic and cultural context. The flexibility encouraged some states to place priority on local or regional languages instead of foreign languages, like Spanish. Spanish cannot even claim institutional legitimacy in the context of government-funded schools, especially given the already constrained resources. Alternatively, other states or urban centers may be wealthier and/or have better access to global markets, which may make them more inclined to introduce Spanish programs, thus creating unequal access for students based on where they live in the country. These differences will exacerbate the urban vs. rural education divide and the private vs. public schools' gap, as Spanish may thrive in elite spaces without access or participation throughout much of the country. A coordinated national strategy could address this---like developing a national "framework" for a foreign language to be included in school systems, offering state incentives for introducing Spanish, establishing resource sharing protocols---without eliminating state autonomy while providing more equitable access to foreign language education across India.

Curriculum and Assessment Alignment

The Spanish curriculum in India has to be closely aligned to the linguistic backgrounds, cultural contexts and learning styles of Indian students. Given that most learners are grappling with multilingualism (i.e., mother tongue, regional language, Hindi, and English), Spanish courses need to recognize this multilingual reality and build on students' prior knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and phonetics. A Spanish curriculum that is imported with one-size-fits-all solutions from Spain or Latin America are not always useful, as we must use locally-generated teaching materials that make connections from Spanish to Indian contexts but remain authentic.

The development of contextualized and meaningful assessment frameworks is equally important. Assessment should not only be based on academic written examinations where students display rote learned grammar and vocabulary, but look to assess communication, cultural awareness, and authentic contexts of use. Consider this: oral proficiency tests or oral dialogues to assess speaking and listening; project-based tasks around cultural presentations, role-plays, or short videos to assess planning and promotion of creativity and authentic use; peer collaboration activities, portfolio assessments, and reflective journals that all attempt to promote learner autonomy and critical thinking. These frameworks could also align more broadly with the NEP 2020 as it relates to holistic and skills-based

education, so that Spanish is not only considered an academic subject, but one that represents an articulate use of a living language and skill that can widen intercultural awareness, careers, and forms of global citizenship.

Solutions and Strategic Recommendations

- **Teacher Development:** A major step towards strengthening Spanish language education in India is to systematically increase the offerings of teacher training programs. At this time, the number of professionally trained Spanish teachers is incredibly limited as regards Spanish language instruction. This lack of trained teachers inhibits the quality of instruction, and ultimately limits the reach/block of instruction. To supplement these needs, teacher development models must be established that include both pre-service and in-service training. Ultimately, creating online certification programs at universities, or developing them with cultural institutions [i.e. Instituto Cervantes] may eliminate the accessibility challenges for all educators whether they are located in urban or rural areas. Development options can include immersion workshops, summer institutes, and/or exchange programs with Spanish-speaking countries to provide authentic linguistic and cultural exposure and experience to teachers, which will add significant value to their effectiveness. Beyond just training, there must be some incentive for educators to engage in upskilling and ongoing development: salary increase, positional or promotional roles in relation to the Spanish language, rewards and/or accolades. Making substantial investments into the professional development and incentive opportunities of our educators may very well lead India towards a group of adequately qualified Spanish teachers skilled to meet the greater demand established under NEP 2020.
- **Technology Integration:** Technology can be transformative in increasing access to Spanish education in India, especially in contexts when schools do not have physical facilities, such as language labs, or trained teachers. From augmented digital resources, mobile apps and online educational resources, students will encounter interactive vocabulary, pronunciation tools and real-time practice exercises to build upon their classroom routines. Popular and accessible free options are Duolingo, Memrise and Busuu, which offer gamified, self-paced, modules to cover some curriculum material, while Coursera and edX present structured courses from college or university world-class institutions that can help enhance curriculum material. Remote instruction can allow students in rural and resource-poor areas to connect with trained Spanish teachers (in India and from abroad) through video-conferencing platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet or Microsoft Teams, all of which help to lessen geographical

divides in learning opportunities. AI tutors and chatbots provide practice and immediate feedback and have become more customisable through platforms like Babbel and conversational tools using ChatGPT (like Bing or similar). Online libraries, curated media repositories, and cultural resources, including Spanish films, music and podcasts, can help familiarise students with resources to foster intercultural understanding, and provide enjoyable ways to access material outside of formal learning space.

Implementing the technologies used here not only addresses limited access to decentralised infrastructure development and support, it similarly affords possibilities for personalized, flexible and student-centered learning that is wholly consistent with that of the National Education Policy 2020. With proper agency to the deployment of this technology, the second language learning afforded to students can reduce borders to equitable language learning in Spanish as inclusive, scalable and sustainable access across the nation.

- **Community Engagement:** Engaging effectively with the community is critical to the viability of Spanish language education. Engaging with the community consists of designing awareness campaigns that could help create awareness for parents, their children and local stakeholders on how Spanish language proficiency is linked to larger goals such as global citizenship, intercultural competence and employability in global/ international job markets. These awareness campaigns can be supported by, for instance, state educational boards and cultural organizations (like the Cervantes Institute), to help link community, parents and student campaigns with national policy objectives. Activities may include parent-student workshops, cultural festivals, seminars with industry representatives, and success stories of Spanish language learners going into various careers. These activities can help to strengthen the sense that Spanish is a practical (and aspirational) language - as the importance of involving parents is that it cultivates support at home but also a collective understanding that the study of foreign languages is a valuable investment in their child's future learning aligned to the vision of the NEP 2020 and aim of a globally competent citizen.

Conclusion:

Spanish language education in India is at a critical crossroads, where global opportunities meet local realities. The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 opened exciting possible opportunities to include Spanish in the school system, which allows students to connect with a wider world. Spanish is more than just another subject, it is a passport into cultural exchanges, international friendships, and

improved career options in a global economy. The realization of this vision however, will depend on taking action- such as mentoring/train more teachers, developing good quality learning resources, and ensuring parents and students have a concrete understanding of the societal and individual benefits of learning Spanish. It is possible if there is a commitment from policymakers, schools, cultural organizations, families - not just to make learning Spanish a reality but to make it relevant and sustainable for the student. If we can, the multilingual/multicultural background of India may become a genuine asset and once again allow young language learners to see that Spanish could be a bridge to their world and opening to new opportunities.

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