

Reimagining English Language Pedagogy in Rural Howrah: Transformative Practices and Prospects under the National Education Policy 2020

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has introduced a transformative vision for school education in India by emphasizing multilingualism, experiential learning, competency-based education, and the integration of technology in teaching-learning processes. Within this policy framework, English language pedagogy in rural regions such as Howrah district of West Bengal is undergoing significant change. Traditionally, English language teaching in rural schools has been constrained by inadequate infrastructure, limited exposure to authentic language environments, teacher-centered instructional practices, and socio-economic disadvantages that affect learners' confidence and communicative competence. NEP 2020 seeks to address these challenges through learner-centered pedagogies, the use of mother tongue-based multilingual education, digital learning platforms, and activity-based language instruction.

This paper explores the emerging trends, innovative practices, and future prospects of English language teaching in rural Howrah under the NEP 2020 framework. It examines how teachers are adopting interactive teaching strategies, bilingual approaches, collaborative learning, storytelling, project-based activities, and technology-enabled instruction to enhance students' language proficiency and engagement. The study further analyzes the opportunities and challenges associated with policy implementation, including teacher preparedness, digital accessibility, resource availability, and community participation. Findings suggest that NEP 2020 has the potential to transform English language education from a grammar-focused and examination-oriented practice into a meaningful process of communication, critical thinking, creativity, and lifelong learning. The paper concludes that sustained teacher training, infrastructural support, and context-sensitive pedagogical innovations are essential for realizing the objectives of NEP 2020 and ensuring equitable English language learning opportunities for rural learners in Howrah.

Keywords:

National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), English Language Teaching (ELT), Rural Education, Howrah District, Multilingualism, Experiential Learning, Competency-Based Education, Language Pedagogy, Digital Learning, Teacher Professional Development, Communicative Language Teaching, Educational Transformation.

Introduction

English has emerged as a global language of communication, education, technology, international collaboration, and employment, making proficiency in English increasingly important for learners in the twenty-first century (Crystal, 2003; Graddol, 2006). In India, English serves not only as a link language among diverse linguistic communities but also as a gateway to higher education, professional opportunities, and participation in the global knowledge economy (Mohanty, 2019). Despite its significance, the teaching and learning of English in rural schools continue to face numerous challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, limited access to quality learning resources, insufficient teacher training, and learners' restricted exposure to authentic language environments (Das, 2022; NCERT, 2021). These challenges are particularly evident in rural areas of Howrah district, West Bengal, where socio-economic constraints and educational disparities often hinder the development of effective English language skills among students (Banerjee & Roy, 2023).

The introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a significant milestone in the reform of India's education system (Government of India, 2020). The policy advocates a holistic, learner-centered, and competency-based approach to education, emphasizing multilingualism, experiential learning, critical thinking, and the integration of technology into teaching-learning processes (Government of India, 2020). Unlike traditional examination-oriented methods that prioritize rote memorization and grammatical accuracy, NEP 2020 encourages communicative competence, creativity, collaboration, and practical language use (Tyagi & Srivastava, 2022). These reforms have important implications for English Language Teaching (ELT), particularly in rural contexts where innovative pedagogical approaches are required to address longstanding educational challenges (Kumar & Gupta, 2021).

In rural Howrah, the implementation of NEP 2020 has created new opportunities for reimagining English language pedagogy (Choudhury, 2023). Teachers are increasingly encouraged to adopt interactive and activity-based instructional strategies, including storytelling, project-based learning, peer collaboration, language games, and digital learning tools (Sharma & Singh, 2022). Research indicates that experiential and communicative approaches enhance learner engagement, motivation, and language proficiency (Ghosh & Mukherjee, 2024). The policy also recognizes the value of learners' mother tongue and local languages as foundational resources for acquiring additional languages, thereby promoting a multilingual approach that can facilitate English language learning without undermining local linguistic identities (Government of India, 2020; Mohanty, 2019).

The transformation envisioned by NEP 2020, however, is not without challenges (Prashanth et al., 2024). Effective implementation requires adequate teacher preparation, continuous professional development, access to digital infrastructure, and supportive educational environments (UNESCO, 2021). Rural schools often encounter difficulties related to technological accessibility, resource limitations, and varying levels of teacher readiness (Mishra, 2021). Furthermore, disparities in educational resources between urban and rural schools continue to influence the quality of English language instruction and learning outcomes (World Bank, 2021). Understanding these realities is essential for assessing the potential impact of the policy on English language education.

Against this backdrop, the present paper examines the transformative practices and future prospects of English language pedagogy in rural Howrah under the framework of NEP 2020. It explores how policy-driven innovations are reshaping classroom practices, enhancing learner engagement, and creating opportunities for more inclusive and effective language learning (Government of India, 2020; Choudhury, 2023). The study further highlights the challenges and possibilities associated with implementing these reforms and offers insights into strengthening English language education in rural contexts for the benefit of future generations of learners (UNESCO, 2021; Ghosh & Mukherjee, 2024).

Background of the Study

English language education has become an essential component of contemporary schooling due to its significance in higher education, global communication, technological advancement, and employment opportunities. In India, English serves as an important link language that connects learners with national and international knowledge systems. However, students studying in rural schools often face considerable challenges in acquiring English language proficiency because of limited linguistic exposure, inadequate educational resources, and traditional teacher-centered pedagogical practices.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has introduced a comprehensive framework for transforming school education through learner-centered, competency-based, and experiential approaches to teaching and learning. The policy advocates holistic development, critical thinking, flexibility in curriculum, and active student participation in classroom processes. NEP 2020 emphasizes experiential learning as a key pedagogical principle for improving educational outcomes and fostering meaningful learning experiences.

A significant feature of NEP 2020 is its emphasis on multilingualism and the use of the mother tongue or local language as a foundation for learning during the early years of schooling. The policy recognizes that children learn concepts more effectively when instruction is connected to their linguistic and cultural contexts. It recommends the use of home language, mother tongue, or regional language as the medium of instruction at least up to Grade V and preferably up to Grade VIII.

The policy further advocates innovative and experiential approaches to language teaching, including storytelling, theatre, poetry, music, gamification, digital applications, and real-life communication activities. Such approaches seek to shift language learning from rote memorization and grammar translation toward meaningful communication and practical language use.

In rural regions such as Howrah district of West Bengal, English language teaching has traditionally been dominated by textbook-oriented instruction and examination-focused learning. Many learners encounter difficulties in speaking, listening, reading, and writing English due to limited opportunities for authentic language interaction. The multilingual and bilingual strategies proposed in NEP 2020 provide new possibilities for bridging the gap between learners' home language and English language acquisition.

The integration of technology, digital learning resources, and interactive pedagogical practices under NEP 2020 has further created opportunities for transforming English language classrooms in rural settings. These developments necessitate a re-examination of existing pedagogical practices and the exploration of innovative strategies that can make English language learning more inclusive, engaging, and effective for rural learners. Therefore, the present study seeks to examine the transformative practices and future prospects of English language pedagogy in rural Howrah within the framework of NEP 2020.

Significance of the Study

The present study is significant because it contributes to the growing discourse on educational transformation under the National Education Policy 2020, particularly in the context of English Language Teaching (ELT) in rural India.

First, the study provides insights into how NEP 2020 can facilitate the shift from traditional teacher-centered methods to learner-centered, competency-based, and experiential approaches in English language classrooms.

Second, the study highlights the role of multilingualism and bilingual pedagogy in supporting English language acquisition among rural learners. By recognizing learners' mother tongue as a valuable educational resource, the policy seeks to create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment.

Third, the study is important for teachers, teacher educators, and policymakers because it identifies opportunities and challenges associated with implementing NEP 2020 in rural schools. The findings may support the design of effective teacher training programmes and professional development initiatives focused on innovative English language pedagogy.

Fourth, the study contributes to the understanding of how digital technologies and experiential learning practices can enhance students' communication skills, creativity, critical thinking, and language proficiency. Such insights are particularly relevant for rural educational contexts where access to quality English language instruction remains uneven.

Finally, the study has practical significance for improving educational equity and language learning outcomes among rural students of Howrah. It provides evidence-based recommendations for strengthening English language education in alignment with the goals of NEP 2020 and promoting greater participation of rural learners in higher education, employment, and the global knowledge society.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the existing status of English language teaching practices in rural secondary schools of Howrah district under the framework of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.
2. To explore the implementation of learner-centered, competency-based, and experiential pedagogical approaches in English language classrooms in rural Howrah.

3. To investigate the role of multilingualism and mother tongue-based instructional practices in facilitating English language learning among rural students.
4. To identify the challenges faced by teachers and learners in implementing the provisions of NEP 2020 for English Language Teaching (ELT) in rural schools.
5. To suggest effective strategies and future prospects for strengthening English language pedagogy in rural Howrah in alignment with the goals of NEP 2020.

Research Questions

1. What is the present status of English language teaching practices in rural schools of Howrah under the National Education Policy 2020?
2. How are learner-centered, competency-based, and experiential learning approaches being integrated into English language classrooms in rural Howrah?
3. What role does multilingualism and mother tongue-based instruction play in enhancing English language learning among rural students?
4. What challenges do teachers and students encounter while implementing NEP 2020-oriented English language pedagogical practices in rural schools?
5. What measures can be adopted to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of English language pedagogy in rural Howrah in accordance with the vision of NEP 2020?

Literature Review

Sl. No.	Author(s) & Year	Title/Focus of Study	Major Findings	Research Gap Identified
1	Ministry of Education (2020)	National Education Policy 2020	Emphasized multilingualism, competency-based learning, experiential pedagogy, and technology integration in language education.	The policy provides a broad framework but lacks empirical evidence regarding implementation in rural English language classrooms.
2	Kumar and Gupta (2021)	NEP 2020 and Language Education Reforms	Reported that multilingual and learner-centered approaches can improve language acquisition and student engagement.	Limited focus on rural West Bengal and district-specific implementation challenges.
3	Mishra (2021)	Technology Integration in Rural Education	Found that digital tools enhance language learning motivation and communication skills.	Insufficient attention to infrastructural limitations and digital divides in rural schools.
4	Sharma and Singh (2022)	Experiential Learning in	Demonstrated positive effects of activity-based learning, storytelling,	The study did not examine the applicability of these

		English Language Teaching	and project work on language proficiency.	approaches within the NEP 2020 framework in rural settings.
5	Das (2022)	English Language Teaching in Rural Schools of West Bengal	Identified challenges such as inadequate resources, teacher shortages, and limited English exposure among students.	Did not investigate emerging pedagogical transformations resulting from NEP 2020.
6	Banerjee and Roy (2023)	Multilingual Education and Language Learning Outcomes	Reported that mother tongue-based multilingual education supports second-language acquisition and learner confidence.	Lacked specific analysis of English language pedagogy in rural Howrah.
7	Choudhury (2023)	Teacher Preparedness for NEP 2020 Implementation	Highlighted the need for continuous professional development and pedagogical training.	Focused on general educational reforms rather than English language teaching specifically.
8	Ghosh and Mukherjee (2024)	Innovative ELT Practices in Rural India	Found that collaborative learning, digital platforms, and communicative activities improve language skills.	Did not examine district-level experiences and contextual realities of rural Howrah.

Research Gap

The review of literature reveals that existing studies have extensively discussed the policy framework of NEP 2020, multilingual education, experiential learning, technology integration, and challenges in rural education. However, there is a paucity of research specifically examining how English language pedagogy is being transformed in rural Howrah under the influence of NEP 2020. Limited attention has been given to the implementation of learner-centered pedagogies, multilingual instructional practices, teacher preparedness, and contextual challenges faced by rural schools in the district. Therefore, the present study seeks to bridge this gap by investigating the transformative practices, implementation challenges, and future prospects of English language teaching in rural Howrah within the framework of NEP 2020.

Research Methodology

Research Approach

The present study adopted a **qualitative research approach** to explore the transformative practices, challenges, and future prospects of English language pedagogy in rural Howrah under the framework of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. A qualitative approach was

considered appropriate because it facilitates an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding educational change and pedagogical innovation.

Research Design

The study employed a **descriptive qualitative research design**. The design enabled the researcher to investigate how English language teachers perceive and implement NEP 2020-oriented pedagogical practices in rural school settings and how these practices influence classroom teaching and learning processes.

Study Area

The study was conducted in selected rural secondary schools of Howrah district, West Bengal. The district was chosen because it represents a diverse rural educational context where the implementation of NEP 2020 has begun to influence classroom practices and instructional strategies.

Participants of the Study

The participants included English language teachers, head teachers, and selected students from rural secondary schools.

Category of Participants	Number
English Language Teachers	15
Head Teachers	5
Students	20
Total	40

Sampling Technique

The participants were selected through **purposive sampling**. This technique enabled the researcher to identify individuals who possessed direct experience and knowledge regarding English language teaching and the implementation of NEP 2020 in rural schools.

Sources of Data

The study utilized both primary and secondary sources of data.

Primary Sources

- Semi-structured interviews with teachers and head teachers.
- Focus group discussions with students.
- Classroom observations.

Secondary Sources

- National Education Policy 2020 document.
- Research articles, books, policy reports, and educational journals related to English Language Teaching (ELT) and rural education.

Data Collection Tools

The following qualitative tools were used:

1. Semi-structured interview schedule.
2. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guide.
3. Classroom observation schedule.
4. Document analysis framework.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through visits to selected schools. Interviews were conducted with teachers and head teachers to understand their experiences, perceptions, and challenges regarding NEP 2020 implementation. Focus group discussions were organized with students to explore their learning experiences and attitudes toward English language learning. Classroom observations were conducted to examine actual pedagogical practices and classroom interactions.

Data Analysis

The collected qualitative data were analyzed through **thematic analysis**. The analysis involved the following stages:

1. Data transcription and familiarization.
2. Coding of responses and field notes.
3. Identification of recurring themes and sub-themes.
4. Interpretation of findings in relation to the objectives of the study and the provisions of NEP 2020.

The themes were organized around pedagogical transformation, multilingual practices, learner engagement, teacher preparedness, technological integration, implementation challenges, and future prospects.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, the study employed:

- Triangulation of data sources (interviews, observations, and documents).
- Member checking of interview responses.
- Peer review of thematic interpretations.

- Maintenance of detailed field notes and research records.

Ethical Considerations

Prior permission was obtained from the concerned school authorities. Informed consent was secured from all participants. Confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were maintained throughout the research process. The information collected was used exclusively for academic purposes.

Delimitation of the Study

1. The study was limited to selected rural secondary schools of Howrah district.
2. The investigation focused exclusively on English language pedagogy.
3. The study examined pedagogical transformation within the framework of NEP 2020.
4. Findings are context-specific and may not be generalized to all rural regions of India.

Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis and interpretation of the study were conducted thematically based on the research questions and objectives. Data obtained from interviews, classroom observations, focus group discussions, and document analysis were systematically coded and categorized into major themes reflecting the transformation of English language pedagogy in rural Howrah under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Theme 1: Present Status of English Language Teaching Practices in Rural Schools

The findings revealed that English language teaching in rural schools of Howrah is gradually transitioning from traditional teacher-centered instruction to more interactive and learner-oriented practices. However, textbook-based teaching and examination-focused preparation continue to dominate classroom activities in many schools. Teachers reported that while awareness of NEP 2020 has increased, the implementation of innovative pedagogical approaches remains uneven across institutions. Classroom observations indicated that students actively participated when teachers incorporated communicative activities, although such practices were not consistently observed.

Interpretation

The findings suggest that English language pedagogy in rural Howrah is currently in a transitional phase. While NEP 2020 has created awareness regarding pedagogical reform, the persistence of conventional teaching methods indicates the need for sustained institutional support and teacher training to facilitate meaningful transformation.

Theme 2: Implementation of Learner-Centered, Competency-Based, and Experiential Approaches

Interviews with teachers revealed increasing adoption of activity-based learning, storytelling, group discussions, role-play, project work, and collaborative learning activities. Teachers acknowledged that such strategies enhanced student engagement and participation. Classroom observations confirmed that experiential learning activities improved students' confidence in using English for communication. However, several participants noted that time constraints, large class sizes, and examination pressures often limited the regular implementation of these approaches.

Interpretation

The findings indicate that learner-centered and experiential pedagogies have begun to influence classroom practices in accordance with the recommendations of NEP 2020. These approaches promote active learning and communicative competence. Nevertheless, structural constraints continue to hinder their full integration into everyday classroom teaching.

Theme 3: Role of Multilingualism and Mother Tongue-Based Instruction

Teachers frequently used Bengali alongside English to explain concepts, clarify instructions, and facilitate comprehension among learners. Students reported feeling more comfortable and confident when teachers employed bilingual teaching strategies. The use of learners' mother tongue was found to reduce language anxiety and support vocabulary acquisition and concept understanding.

Interpretation

The findings support the multilingual vision of NEP 2020, which advocates the use of home language and mother tongue as resources for learning. The strategic use of Bengali appears to function as an effective pedagogical bridge that facilitates English language acquisition without undermining learners' linguistic identities.

Theme 4: Challenges in Implementing NEP 2020-Oriented English Language Pedagogy

Several challenges emerged from the data. Teachers highlighted inadequate technological infrastructure, limited access to digital resources, insufficient professional training, large classroom sizes, and diverse learner proficiency levels. Students reported limited opportunities to practice English outside the classroom due to the predominance of regional language use in their social environments. School administrators also expressed concerns regarding resource constraints and the pace of policy implementation.

Interpretation

The challenges identified suggest that successful implementation of NEP 2020 requires more than pedagogical awareness. Effective transformation depends upon adequate infrastructure, continuous teacher professional development, resource availability, and supportive educational ecosystems. Without these enabling conditions, the intended reforms may not achieve their desired outcomes.

Theme 5: Strategies and Future Prospects for Strengthening English Language Pedagogy

Participants recommended regular teacher training programmes, enhanced digital infrastructure, development of contextualized learning materials, increased use of communicative activities, and stronger community involvement. Teachers emphasized the importance of integrating technology, project-based learning, and multilingual instructional strategies into classroom practices. Students expressed a preference for interactive learning environments that encourage communication and creativity.

Interpretation

The findings indicate considerable potential for strengthening English language pedagogy in rural Howrah. The successful realization of NEP 2020 goals will depend upon collaborative efforts among policymakers, educational administrators, teachers, communities, and learners. Continued investment in professional development, digital resources, and innovative pedagogical practices can significantly enhance the quality and effectiveness of English language education in rural contexts.

The study demonstrates that NEP 2020 has initiated a gradual transformation in English language teaching practices in rural Howrah. Emerging pedagogical approaches such as experiential learning, learner-centered instruction, multilingual education, and technology integration have begun to reshape classroom environments. At the same time, significant challenges related to infrastructure, training, and resource availability continue to affect implementation. The findings suggest that sustained policy support, institutional commitment, and context-sensitive pedagogical innovations are essential for achieving equitable, inclusive, and effective English language education in rural schools. The future prospects of English language pedagogy in rural Howrah appear promising if the principles of NEP 2020 are implemented through systematic planning, adequate resource allocation, and continuous professional support for teachers.

Findings of the Study

The findings of the study are presented in relation to the objectives and research questions formulated for investigating English language pedagogy in rural Howrah under the framework of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Sl. No.	Objective of the Study	Major Findings
1	To examine the existing status of English language teaching practices in rural secondary schools of Howrah district under the framework of NEP 2020.	English language teaching in rural Howrah is gradually shifting from traditional teacher-centered instruction toward more interactive and learner-oriented approaches. However, textbook-based teaching and examination-focused practices continue to be prevalent in many schools.
2	To explore the implementation of learner-centered, competency-based, and experiential pedagogical approaches in English language classrooms in rural Howrah.	Teachers have increasingly adopted activity-based learning, storytelling, role-play, group discussion, project work, and collaborative learning strategies. These approaches have enhanced student participation, engagement, and communication skills.
3	To investigate the role of multilingualism and mother tongue-based instructional practices in facilitating English language learning among rural students.	The use of Bengali as a supportive instructional language has improved students' comprehension, confidence, and classroom participation. Multilingual teaching practices were found to facilitate English language acquisition and reduce language anxiety among learners.
4	To identify the challenges faced by teachers and learners in implementing the provisions of NEP 2020 for English Language Teaching (ELT) in rural schools.	Major challenges include inadequate digital infrastructure, limited technological resources, insufficient teacher training, large class sizes, diverse learner abilities, and restricted opportunities for English language exposure beyond the classroom environment.
5	To suggest effective strategies and future prospects for strengthening English language pedagogy in rural Howrah in alignment with the goals of NEP 2020.	Participants emphasized the need for continuous professional development, improved technological facilities, contextualized learning materials, communicative teaching methods, multilingual approaches, and greater community support for successful implementation of NEP 2020.

Summary of Key Findings

Theme	Findings
Status of ELT Practices	Pedagogical transformation has begun, but traditional methods remain influential.
Learner-Centered Pedagogy	Activity-based and experiential learning approaches positively influence learner engagement and communication skills.
Multilingual Education	Mother tongue-based instruction serves as an effective bridge for English language learning.

Implementation Challenges	Resource limitations, infrastructure gaps, and inadequate training hinder effective implementation.
Future Prospects	NEP 2020 offers significant opportunities for improving English language education through innovation, technology integration, and teacher empowerment.

Major Findings at a Glance

1. English language pedagogy in rural Howrah is experiencing gradual transformation under NEP 2020.
2. Learner-centered and experiential teaching methods enhance students' participation and communicative competence.
3. Multilingual and mother tongue-based instructional practices support effective English language acquisition.
4. Infrastructural and professional development challenges continue to affect implementation.
5. Sustainable pedagogical reform requires continuous teacher training, technological support, and context-sensitive educational planning.
6. NEP 2020 provides a strong framework for promoting equitable, inclusive, and competency-based English language education in rural schools.

Conclusion

The present study examined the transformative practices and future prospects of English language pedagogy in rural Howrah within the framework of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The findings reveal that English language teaching in rural schools is undergoing a gradual transition from traditional, teacher-centered methods to more learner-centered, competency-based, and experiential approaches. The implementation of innovative pedagogical strategies such as storytelling, role-play, collaborative learning, project-based activities, and communicative language teaching has contributed to increased student engagement and participation.

The study further highlights the significant role of multilingualism and mother tongue-based instruction in facilitating English language learning among rural students. The strategic use of Bengali as a pedagogical resource was found to enhance comprehension, reduce language anxiety, and support effective communication in English. These findings align with the multilingual vision of NEP 2020, which recognizes linguistic diversity as a valuable asset in the learning process.

Despite these positive developments, several challenges continue to affect the effective implementation of NEP 2020 in rural schools. Inadequate technological infrastructure, limited access to digital resources, insufficient teacher training, large class sizes, and restricted exposure to English outside the classroom remain significant barriers. These challenges indicate that policy reforms alone cannot ensure educational transformation without adequate institutional support and resource allocation.

The study concludes that NEP 2020 provides a promising framework for reimagining English language pedagogy in rural contexts. However, its successful implementation requires sustained teacher professional development, improved technological facilities, context-sensitive instructional materials, and active collaboration among policymakers, school administrators, teachers, parents, and local communities. If these conditions are met, English language education in rural Howrah can become more inclusive, equitable, communicative, and responsive to the demands of the twenty-first century. Ultimately, the transformation envisioned by NEP 2020 has the potential to empower rural learners with the linguistic competencies, critical thinking skills, and global perspectives necessary for academic success and lifelong learning.

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