

DRAMA PEDAGOGY FOR FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING IN THE MOTHER TONGUE: A NEP 2020 PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This study delves into the effectiveness of utilizing drama as a novel pedagogical approach to enrich the teaching-learning dynamics in the mother tongue, specifically within the foundational stage, aligning with the objectives and principles outlined in the National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020 in India. By integrating drama into educational practices, educators can orchestrate immersive and participatory learning environments that cater to a spectrum of learning modalities and facilitate comprehensive development. In accordance with educational policy, instructing and assimilating knowledge in the mother tongue facilitates a smoother learning process for children by mitigating language barriers. Conversely, the incorporation of drama further amplifies the enjoyment of this process, exerting a holistic influence on children aged 3-8 years as per the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) standards. The utilization of drama as a pedagogical tool holds significant promise in enhancing educational outcomes, particularly in early childhood education. Its interactive nature not only stimulates cognitive faculties but also nurtures emotional intelligence and social skills, contributing to a well-rounded educational experience. Furthermore, drama fosters creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities among learners, aligning with the overarching objectives of the NEP 2020 to cultivate a versatile and empowered generation capable of navigating the complexities of the modern world. Thus, integrating drama into educational frameworks presents an innovative avenue for optimizing the teaching-learning process and fostering holistic development in young learners. This article is a conceptual and theoretical analysis based on secondary sources, policy documents, and scholarly research in drama education and early childhood pedagogy. It adopts an interpretative approach to explore how drama, when integrated into mother-tongue education, aligns with the pedagogical vision of NEP 2020. The discussion synthesizes insights from constructivist and socio-cultural learning frameworks to highlight best practices and implications for foundational education.

Keywords: teaching-learning process, NEP 2020, cultural diversity, mother-tongue acquisition, creative pedagogy

1 Introduction

The National Education Policy 2020 represents a comprehensive blueprint for reshaping India's educational landscape. Officially sanctioned by the Union Cabinet in July 2020, its primary aim is the overhaul of the entire educational continuum from early childhood to advanced studies. NEP 2020 delineates several pivotal objectives, including the advancement of holistic development, cultivation of critical thinking and creativity, facilitation of universal access to high-quality education, and the celebration of multilingualism and cultural diversity among students[13]. One significant aspect of the policy entails restructuring the school education system into a 5+3+3+4 format, covering the developmental stages from ages 3 to 18 (fig.1). The foundational stage, comprising two age groups 3-6 years and 6-8 years encompasses settings such as Anganwadi, preschool, Balvatika, and classes 1 and 2. Within this new structural paradigm, emphasis is placed on establishing a robust foundation in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). This approach aims to enhance overall learning, development, and well-being by integrating indigenous Indian traditions spanning art, storytelling, poetry, games, songs, and more into ECCE practices. Consequently, the framework will serve as a comprehensive reference for parents and early childhood care and education institutions alike[1]. The Foundational Stage under NEP 2020 advocates for five years of flexible, multilevel, play/activity-based learning. The curriculum and pedagogy outlined in the policy draft underscore the significance of ECCE, as mentioned in policy draft 1.2. [3]

The need for innovative and child centered pedagogical methods has become more urgent in the post-NEP era. Despite extensive discussions on multilingual and experiential learning, practical frameworks for integrating creative arts. Especially drama into mother-tongue instruction remain underexplored. This gap provides the central motivation for this paper, which seeks to propose a structured pedagogical model based on drama for foundational learners[2].

The focus of this paper is to explore the incorporation of drama as an effective pedagogical tool in the teaching-learning process within the framework of NEP 2020. Drama, in the context of theatrical techniques and activities in educational settings to enhance student's engagement, communication skills, and understanding of various subjects in his mother-tongue at foundational stage. NEP 2020 encourages innovative and multidisciplinary approaches to education, making drama a potentially valuable method to achieve these goals. By integrating drama techniques into the curriculum,

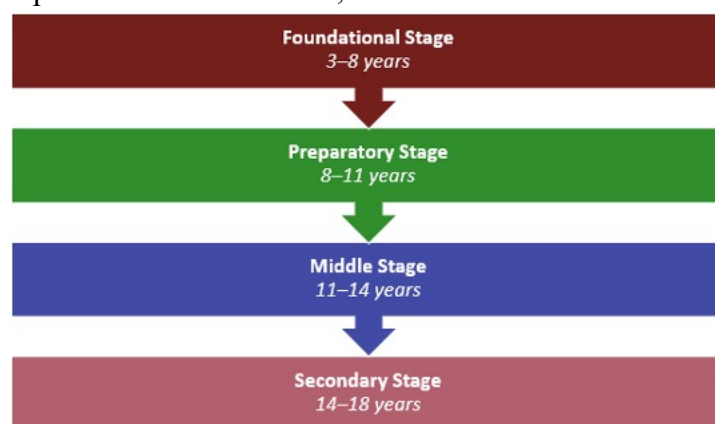


Fig. 1 Structure of School Education (5+3+3+4) under NEP 2020. Source: National Education Policy 2020 (PDF), Part I – School Education, p. 6.

educators can create dynamic learning experiences that promote active participation, empathy, and deeper comprehension of concepts. The utilization of various artistic expressions holds immense significance for India on a national scale, where diversity in languages, dialects, and regional cultures presents a rich resource[4]. Each domain possesses its own tools such as music, dance, theater, and sports, which are integral to the lives or traditions of its people and are showcased through various cultural events. Understanding these expressions is not difficult for local children, as they are already familiar with the environment in which they have grown up[5]. Now the question arises of integrating these expressions, which serve as mediums of expression, into a subject-based study. This integration can aid in developing an understanding of different subjects among children and fostering a creative and analytical mindset. By connecting subject-based studies with various artistic expressions, children can develop a holistic understanding of different subjects while also honing their critical thinking skills. This approach not only enriches their academic knowledge but also enhances their appreciation for the diversity and richness of their cultural heritage. Thus, the integration of artistic expressions into education serves as a powerful means of promoting holistic development and cultural appreciation among the youth of India[6]. Incorporating drama into education aligns with NEP 2020's emphasis on experiential learning, as students are encouraged to learn through hands-on activities and real-world applications. Drama also supports the policy's goal of fostering critical thinking and creativity by requiring students to analyze, interpret, and present information in imaginative ways. Additionally, drama can facilitate the development of communication skills in multiple languages, promoting the policy's emphasis on multilingualism[7]. So, integration of drama in the teaching-learning process can strength implementation of NEP 2020's objectives by offering a dynamic and engaging approach to education that nurtures holistic development and creativity among students. To understand the pedagogical relevance of drama in early education, it is essential to ground the discussion within established learning theories that validate its educational value.

2 Theoretical Framework

The integration of drama as an educational tool is underpinned by several theoretical frameworks that emphasize its efficacy in enhancing learning outcomes. One prominent framework is constructivism, which posits that learners actively construct knowledge through interactions with their environment[8]. Drama facilitates this process by creating immersive scenarios that encourage students to explore, experiment, and make meaning from their experiences. Additionally, Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory emphasizes the role of social interactions in learning [9]. Drama inherently involves collaboration, communication, and negotiation, aligning with Vygotsky's ideas of learning through social engagement. By assuming different roles and perspectives, students can develop a deeper understanding of complex concepts and viewpoints, a concept known as "role-taking" within socio-dramatic play [10]. Drama's effectiveness in promoting active learning, creativity, and emotional engagement is rooted in its experiential nature. Active learning occurs as students physically and mentally engage in dramatizations, moving beyond passive reception of information [11]. The creative process inherent in drama involves brainstorming ideas, improvisation, and problem-solving, fostering innovative thinking and imaginative expression [12]. Emotional engagement is facilitated as students emotionally connect with characters and situations, enhancing their ability to empathize and relate to different perspectives [13]. Such engagement is integral to NEP 2020's vision of holistic education. The goal of the policy is to reinforce teaching-learning process in mother-tongue at foundational stage. And

Drama's impact on language skills, communication, and critical thinking is well-documented. Through dialogues, monologues, and improvisations, students actively use language in context, developing vocabulary and language proficiency [14]. Communication skills are honed as students must articulate ideas clearly and listen attentively to peers [15]. Furthermore, drama requires students to analyze characters, motivations, actions, and emotions, fostering critical thinking and the ability to interpret complex narratives [16]. This aligns with NEP 2020's emphasis on nurturing critical thinking and multilingual skills. That is why, the theoretical foundations of drama in education, promotes active learning, creativity, emotional engagement, as well as its potential to enhance language skills and critical thinking, collectively it establishes compatibility with the objectives of NEP 2020. Aligns well with the vision of India's education policy [17].

Drama serves as a powerful experiential learning tool by creating immersive environments where students actively engage with content and concepts. Through dramatic activities, learners step into the shoes of characters, experiencing scenarios firsthand rather than passively absorbing information [18]. This is emphasizing learning through experience and practical application. Drama encourages students to explore, experiment, and make meaning from their interactions, fostering a deeper understanding of subjects. Drama facilitates the development of problem-solving skills by placing

Table 1 Integration of Drama in Teaching–Learning (Subject-Wise Examples)

Subject	Drama-Based Integration Examples
Language (Mother Tongue)	- Role-play of daily conversations (market, school, home). - Story dramatization of folk tales and regional legends. - Puppet theatre to build expressive language skills.
Environmental / Social Studies	- Role-play of community helpers (farmer, shopkeeper). - Enactment of local festivals and cultural rituals. - <u>Dramatizing historical events and traditional practices.</u>
Mathematics	- Acting out number stories to internalize counting. - Forming shapes (circle, triangle) using body movement. - Drama-based problem-solving (sharing, grouping, division).
Science	- Enacting natural processes (water cycle, plant growth). - Role-play as animals, planets, or weather elements. - Dramatic representation of scientific concepts (atoms, food chains).
Art and Aesthetics	- Mime activities to explore emotions and gestures. - Integrating drama with dance and music. - Mask-making and character creation.
Moral and Values Education	- Role-play of moral dilemmas (truthfulness, sharing). - Dramatizing stories from Panchatantra, Jataka, or <u>local traditions.</u>
Physical Education	- Movement-based drama activities (freeze-and-act, action songs). - Role-play involving locomotor skills. - Pretend-play inspired by animal movements.

students in dynamic, unpredictable situations that require creative solutions. When enacting roles and scenarios, learners must think on their feet, adapt to changing circumstances, and collaborate with peers to

resolve conflicts and move the storyline forward [19]. These problem-solving experiences mirror real-life challenges and instill valuable skills that extend beyond the classroom. The process of improvisation in drama nurtures adaptability, critical thinking, and the ability to navigate complex situations [20]. In addition to this, drama serves as a medium to recreate and represent social, personal, and behavioral knowledge through stories. Therefore, all the knowledge related to various subjects embedded in these stories is significant because these narratives emerge from and contribute to individual and societal economic, social, and political ideologies [21]. Hence, they impact both participants and observers in a dynamic manner, fostering a holistic dimension of influence. Through drama, complex societal issues, personal dilemmas, and behavioral patterns can be explored, understood, and communicated effectively. These narratives often reflect and critique prevailing social norms, values, and power structures, prompting critical reflection and dialogue among participants and audiences alike [22]. By engaging with dramatic narratives, individuals not only gain insight into diverse perspectives and experiences but also develop empathy, tolerance, and critical thinking skills. Moreover, drama provides a platform for individuals to express themselves creatively, building confidence and self-awareness [23]. Overall, drama emerges as a powerful tool for holistic learning and social engagement, facilitating the exploration of complex ideas and fostering personal and societal growth. Its ability to immerse participants and audiences in multifaceted narratives makes it an invaluable asset in education and social discourse [24]. Drama's applicability spans across subjects in the curriculum, enhancing learning experiences in diverse ways:

- **Language Arts:** In literature studies, students can reenact scenes from novels or plays, delving into characters' motivations and emotions.
- **History and Social Studies:** Drama enables students to recreate historical events, fostering a deeper understanding of the past through experiential engagement.
- **Science:** Students can embody scientific concepts, such as atoms or ecosystems, promoting kinesthetic learning and conceptual understanding.
- **Mathematics:** Drama can help illustrate mathematical concepts through interactive scenarios, aiding in comprehension of abstract ideas.
- **Foreign Languages:** Drama provides an immersive environment for practicing language skills, encouraging students to communicate in authentic contexts.
- **Ethics and Values Education:** Through role-playing, students explore ethical dilemmas and examine different perspectives, promoting moral reasoning.

By incorporating drama across subjects, educators tap into the multidisciplinary approach advocated by NEP 2020 and create holistic learning experiences that align with the policy's goals [25].

3 Role of Mother Tongue and Multilingualism

India epitomizes a landscape of diversity, characterized by distinct regions each boasting its unique languages, arts, and cultures. This diversity presents both merits and demerits. Formulating a comprehensive framework or set of tools for universal application across the nation is a formidable challenge [26]. The NEP 2020 places a strong emphasis on promoting multilingualism and preserving mother-tongue to celebrate India's linguistic diversity and cultural heritage. The policy recognizes that language plays a crucial role in cognitive development and learning outcomes. It advocates for a flexible and inclusive approach, promoting the assimilation of regional languages in education while maintaining proficiency in the languages of wider

communication. The significance of regional languages and dialects increases during the foundational stage of education. This is because, during the early years, children primarily engage with their mother tongue in both emotional and behavioral contexts[27]. It is during this time that children undergo crucial mental and physical development, an aspect that the government emphasizes through Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programs. It would not be incorrect to assert that children's social, economic, or political development primarily occurs through their mother tongue during the foundational stage. This assertion is supported by the fact that, during the early years, particularly from ages 3 to 8, the language of their messages or conversations predominantly aligns with their mother tongue. By prioritizing regional languages and dialects in education, especially during the formative years, children are provided with a strong foundation rooted in their cultural and linguistic identity[28]. This approach not only facilitates effective communication but also nurtures a sense of belonging and self-esteem among learners, thereby contributing to their overall development. Therefore, recognizing and valuing the importance of mother tongues in the foundational stage is crucial for fostering holistic growth and ensuring inclusive education[29]. Drama provides a dynamic and engaging platform for teaching and preserving mother-tongues. By incorporating mother-tongue into dramatic performances, educators can create immersive linguistic experiences that promote language acquisition and retention. The interactive nature of drama enables students to actively use the language in context, fostering both communication skills and cultural understanding [30]. Additionally, drama's focus on oral expression complements the preservation of oral traditions inherent in many mother-tongues. Drama activities can be tailored to various mother-tongues to facilitate language learning and cultural appreciation. For instance:

- **Role-Play:** Students can enact everyday situations using their mother-tongue, enhancing their conversational skills while imbibing cultural nuances.
- **Folktales and Legends:** Dramatizing local folk stories and legends not only imparts language skills but also transmits traditional values and narratives.
- **Cultural Celebrations:** Students can prepare and present dramas related to local festivals, deepening their understanding of cultural practices and rituals .
- **Historical Reenactments:** Drama can bring historical events and figures to life through mother-tongues, making history more accessible and engaging.

By tailoring drama activities to mother-tongues, educators can foster a deeper connection between students and their linguistic heritage, aligning with NEP 2020's vision of promoting multilingualism and preserving cultural diversity.

4 Benefits and Pedagogical Implications

The model presented in Figure-2 of the National Research Council's report illustrates holistic development across various domains including cognitive, social-emotional, language, physical, and cultural factors. This holistic approach emphasizes the interconnectedness of these domains in shaping children's overall development from birth through age 8. By recognizing and addressing the multifaceted nature of child development, interventions and policies can be designed to support children's growth in all areas, leading to better outcomes in school readiness, lifelong learning, and overall well-being. This holistic perspective underscores the importance of comprehensive approaches in early childhood education and care.

Drama offers a range of benefits that contribute to holistic development and align with NEP 2020's objectives. One notable advantage is enhanced communication skills. Through scripted dialogues, improvisation, and

public speaking opportunities, students refine their ability to express ideas clearly and confidently [31]. Furthermore, drama encourages collaboration as students work together to create and perform scenes, fostering teamwork, empathy, and negotiation skills. The act of performing in front of an audience also bolsters self-confidence and public presence, attributes crucial for holistic growth and success. Drama is particularly inclusive as it accommodates diverse learning styles and abilities. Visual learners benefit from the visual and spatial elements of performances, while kinesthetic learners engage physically in role-playing and movement-based activities (Fleming, 2009). Auditory learners thrive

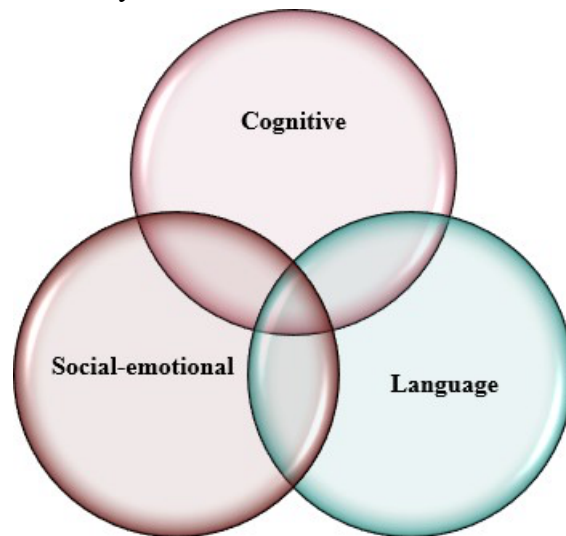


Fig. 2 Domains of Child Development and Early Learning (Holistic Framework). Adapted from National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2015).

during dialogues and oral presentations, and those with linguistic strengths find expression through language-rich scripts [32]. Moreover, drama’s interactive nature allows students to approach learning from various angles, fostering a deeper understanding of subject matter and catering to multiple intelligences. The integration of drama in education provides a host of benefits that resonate with NEP 2020’s objectives. The improvement of communication, collaboration, and self-confidence, alongside its capacity to accommodate diverse learning styles and abilities, makes drama a valuable tool for nurturing well-rounded, capable learners[33]. While the integration of drama in education offers immense benefits, several practical challenges persist in its effective implementation. These include limited teacher training in drama pedagogy, lack of institutional support, and insufficient inclusion of creative arts in curriculum design. Teachers often face time constraints and pressure to complete syllabus-oriented tasks, leaving little room for creative experimentation[35].

5 Recommendations

- **Teacher Training and Capacity Building:** Regular professional development workshops on drama-based pedagogy should be conducted, especially for ECCE and foundational teachers.
- **Curriculum Integration:** Curriculum planners should embed drama activities within subject-wise lesson plans, ensuring that learning outcomes align with NEP 2020 objectives.

- Resource Development: Development of multilingual, culturally relevant scripts and activity guides can support teachers in diverse linguistic contexts.
- Assessment Models: Formative assessments should be designed to evaluate creativity, collaboration, and communication rather than rote memorization.

Addressing these challenges through strategic policy and institutional measures will help realize NEP 2020's vision of holistic, experiential, and inclusive education[36].

The analysis above demonstrates that drama is not merely an extracurricular tool but a transformative pedagogical approach that fosters language development, creativity, and socio-emotional learning, particularly in mother-tongue instruction[37].

6 Conclusion

Drama pedagogy represents an effective and inclusive strategy for strengthening foundational learning in the mother tongue as envisioned by NEP 2020. It bridges experiential learning, creative expression, and multilingual competence-core components of the policy's vision. Theoretical foundations such as constructivism and socio-cultural theory validate its relevance in enhancing critical thinking, collaboration, and emotional engagement.

For large-scale adoption, systematic teacher preparation, policy support, and the development of localized, culturally responsive resources are essential. Harnessing India's linguistic and cultural diversity through drama-based learning not only enhances communication skills but also reinforces cultural identity and national integration. Thus, integrating drama into foundational education is not just pedagogically sound but a crucial step toward realizing the holistic and inclusive goals of NEP 2020.

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