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A New Era of Japanese Language Learning: The Impact of NEP 2020

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ABSTRACT

The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a transformative approach to foreign language education in India, promoting linguistic diversity and global readiness. This paper examines its impact on Japanese language education, emphasizing its potential to enhance India-Japan cultural and economic ties. With growing collaborations like "Make in India" and JENESYS, the demand for Japanese language proficiency is on the rise. However, learners face significant hurdles, including mastering complex writing systems (kanji, hiragana, katakana), understanding intricate grammar, and limited cultural immersion opportunities. NEP 2020's emphasis on adaptability, technological advancements, and interdisciplinary approaches provides innovative pathways to address these challenges. Strategies such as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Total Physical Response (TPR), and digital tools like WaniKani and Anki are explored, alongside leveraging Japanese pop culture (anime, manga) to inspire cultural engagement and learning motivation.

This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach to assess NEP 2020's influence on Japanese language learning. Case studies and educator experiences highlight current challenges and innovative practices. TBLT and TPR methods are evaluated for active learning effectiveness, while feedback and data from learners assess digital tools like WaniKani and Anki for kanji acquisition. Interviews and surveys explore how cultural elements like anime enhance learner enthusiasm, and AI-driven platforms are analyzed for their capacity to provide adaptive, personalized instruction. The policy's focus on training educators and fostering international partnerships is also key to developing instructors equipped to teach linguistic and socio-cultural nuances. By merging traditional teaching methods with modern technology, this paper underscores NEP 2020's potential to transform Japanese language education, making it more effective and widely accessible.

Keywords: NEP 2020, Japanese Language, Language Policy Reforms, Task-Based Language Teaching, Digital Learning, Digital Learning Tools, Global Competencies

Introduction

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, launched by the Government of India, represents a bold and transformative framework aimed at overhauling India's educational landscape. As the first comprehensive policy reform in over three decades, replacing the NEP of 1986, it introduces sweeping changes designed to prepare Indian students for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. Central to NEP 2020's vision is the creation of an inclusive, flexible, and multidisciplinary education system that fosters critical thinking, creativity, and lifelong learning. The policy envisions an education system that not only preserves India's rich cultural heritage but also embraces modern technological advancements, thus creating a balanced environment where tradition meets innovation.

One of the features of NEP 2020 is its emphasis on flexibility. The previous system constrained students with rigid academic pathways, offering little room for interdisciplinary learning or personal choice. NEP 2020 addresses this issue by introducing a flexible curriculum structure, allowing students to explore diverse subjects across various disciplines, reflecting their individual interests and career aspirations. For example, students can now combine arts, science, and vocational subjects to create a more holistic education model. This flexibility also extends to higher education, where students can choose from a wide range of courses and even take academic breaks without losing credits, thanks to the Academic Bank of Credit (ABC) system[1].

Another key pillar of NEP 2020 is its focus on multilingualism. Recognizing India's rich linguistic diversity, the policy promotes the use of regional languages as the medium of instruction at foundational and elementary levels. This approach not only helps preserve India's cultural heritage but also enhances cognitive development and comprehension among students. NEP 2020 encourages students to learn at least three languages, including their

[1] The Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), introduced under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, is designed to enhance academic flexibility and mobility by allowing students to accumulate and transfer credits earned from various recognized Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This initiative supports interdisciplinary and personalized learning pathways, enabling students to achieve qualifications such as degrees and diplomas through a seamless credit transfer mechanism. (https://www.abc.gov.in/faq.php)

mother tongue, Hindi, English, or another regional or international language. Multilingualism is positioned as a crucial skill in the globalized world, enabling students to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries and enhancing their ability to adapt to global challenges.

In terms of foreign language learning, NEP 2020 places significant emphasis on equipping students with global competencies. As India's role on the world stage continues to grow—both diplomatically and economically—knowledge of foreign languages becomes an essential tool for international communication, trade, and cultural exchange. The policy advocates introducing languages like Japanese, French, German, and Spanish from middle school onwards, marking a strategic shift toward global readiness. This initiative aims to foster international cooperation and improve employability in a global marketplace.

In particular, learning Japanese plays a pivotal role in realizing NEP 2020's vision of global competencies. As Japan remains one of India's key diplomatic and economic partners, initiatives such as 'Make in India'[2] and cultural exchange programs like JENESYS[3] highlight the growing importance of Japanese proficiency for Indian students. Mastering Japanese offers students' opportunities to engage with one of the world's most technologically advanced nations while accessing its rich cultural traditions and vast business opportunities. NEP 2020 recognizes that in today's interconnected world, proficiency in foreign languages is no longer a luxury but a necessity for building global careers and fostering cross-cultural understanding.

The promotion of Japanese language education under NEP 2020 also aligns with broader goals of enhancing India's cultural diplomacy and fostering closer economic ties with Japan. Innovative teaching methods, such as digital tools and task-based learning, further enhance the potential for Japanese language education to thrive within the Indian education system. Ultimately, NEP 2020 opens new doors for foreign language learning, contributing to both individual student development and India's growing stature in global cultural and economic exchanges. It serves as a vital roadmap for building a globally competent, multilingual workforce ready to meet future demands.

Importance of Japanese Language Learning in India

The growing emphasis on Japanese language education in India reflects the strengthening diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties between the two nations. As India and Japan deepen their relationship through government policies, business collaborations, and cultural exchanges, the ability to communicate effectively in Japanese has become a valuable skill for Indian students and professionals.

India and Japan share a longstanding partnership built on shared democratic values and economic cooperation. Over the years, initiatives such as the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor[4] (AAGC) and the Japan-India Institute for Manufacturing[5] (JIM) have highlighted their collaboration in technology, infrastructure, and trade. The 'Make in India' initiative has further attracted significant Japanese investments from corporations like Toyota, Honda, and SoftBank[6], creating opportunities for Indian professionals proficient in Japanese. Language skills enable smoother communication, foster cultural understanding, and enhance employability in industries influenced by Indo-Japanese collaborations.

The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between the two countries has expanded trade and investment opportunities. Fields like engineering, IT, automobile manufacturing, and healthcare increasingly demand Japanese language expertise. Proficiency in Japanese not only bridges linguistic and cultural gaps but also strengthens professional ties, making it an indispensable tool for advancing Indo-Japanese relations.

Cultural exchange programs like JENESYS (Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youths) and scholarships offered by MEXT [7](Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology) play a pivotal role in promoting educational and cultural connections. These initiatives expose Indian students to Japanese culture, technology, and society, encouraging mutual understanding and collaboration. Moreover, the popularity of Japanese anime, manga, and media has fueled interest among Indian youth, driving a surge in Japanese language learners.

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[2] The 'Make in India' initiative, launched in September 2014, aims to position India as a leading global manufacturing hub. By fostering innovation, enhancing skill development, and creating a robust infrastructure, the initiative seeks to attract investments and establish India as the most preferred destination for manufacturing on the global stage. https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/Make_in_India_Initiative.pdf

[3] Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youths is an initiative aimed at fostering mutual understanding and solidarity among the younger generations of East Asia and Southeast Asia through cultural and educational exchanges. https://india.afs.org/japan-east-asia-network-of-exchange-for-students-and-youths/

[4] The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), announced by PMs Modi and Abe in 2016, promotes sustainable, people-centric growth across Asia and Africa. Focused on development projects, quality infrastructure, skill enhancement, and people-to-people ties, it aligns with Africa's priorities and supports SDGs. Institutions like RIS, ERIA, and IDE-JETRO developed its Vision Document. https://aagc.ris.org.in/en/about-aagc

[5] The Japan-India Institute for Manufacturing (JIM) and Japanese Endowed Courses (JEC) were initiated under a 2016 Memorandum of Collaboration between India's MSDE and Japan's METI to train 30,000 professionals in Japanese manufacturing standards, emphasizing technical expertise, practices like 5S and Kaizen, and improved soft skills.https://jimunchamajra.com/background-of-jim/

[6] SoftBank Group Corp. (ソフトバンクグループ株式会社) is a Japanese multinational investment holding company based in Minato, Tokyo, specializing in technology-focused investments across various industries, including the internet and automation. https://www.softbank.jp/

[7] The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) of Japan offers scholarships to international students for higher education at Japanese institutions, aiming to promote academic exchange and foster mutual understanding. Recipients are selected through recommendations by Japanese embassies, consulates, or universities. https://www.mext.go.jp/en/

Recognizing this demand, universities across India, like Visva-Bharati[8], Jawaharlal Nehru University[9], University of Delhi[10], English and Foreign Language University [11]and Nava Nalanda Mahavihara [12]and other institutions have introduced Japanese language programs. Additionally, certifications like the Japanese Language Proficiency Test [13](JLPT) boost employability by formally validating language skills, which are often prerequisites for jobs in Indo-Japanese industries.

Cultural Exchange Programs and Rising Interest in Japanese

Economic collaborations, cultural ties between India and Japan are growing stronger through various exchange programs. Initiatives like JENESYS and scholarships like MEXT are crucial in promoting educational and cultural exchanges. The JENESYS program, for instance, invites young people from India and other Asian countries to Japan to experience the country's culture, history, and advancements in technology. Through this, students develop a deeper understanding of Japanese society and form lasting relationships with their Japanese peers.

Cultural exchange programs play a vital role in fostering people-to-people connections, which are essential for long-term diplomatic relations. By learning Japanese, Indian students not only gain access to these cultural experiences but also become ambassadors of Indo-Japanese relations, helping to strengthen the cultural bond between the two nations.

The Role of Japanese Language in Education and Employment

Interest in Japan is steadily growing, leading Indian universities and institutions to expand their Japanese language offerings, with dedicated departments now common in many institutions. This reflects the rising demand for language experts across fields such as translation, teaching, diplomacy, and business. As India and Japan deepen their collaboration in sectors like AI, robotics, renewable energy, and space research, initiatives like 'Make in India' and exchange programs like JENESYS and MEXT further encourage engagement with Japan. Proficiency in Japanese opens doors to education, employment, and cultural understanding, making it an invaluable skill in the globalized world.

Teaching Techniques from 90s to 20s

The evolution of teaching techniques from the 1990s to the 2020s reflects the influence of technological advancements, pedagogical innovations, and evolving student needs. In language learning, traditional methods like grammar-translation[14] and audio-lingual [15]approaches gave way to more interactive strategies, such as Task-Based Language Teaching [16](TBLT) and Total Physical Response[17] (TPR), focusing on communication and real-world application. The rise of digital tools, including apps and virtual platforms, further transformed the learning experience, enabling accessibility and adaptability. This period also saw a growing emphasis on personalized and immersive learning, making language education more engaging, practical, and aligned with modern learners' expectations.

1990's Traditional Methods

In the 1990s, language teaching primarily relied on traditional methods, notably the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) and the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM). GTM emphasized reading, writing, and translation, with students focusing on grammatical rules and translating texts between languages. Vocabulary was memorized through rote learning, while speaking and listening skills received minimal attention. Conversely, ALM

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[8] www.visva-bharati.ac.in

[9] www.jnu.ac.in

[10] https://www.du.ac.in/

[11] https://www.efluniversity.ac.in/

[12] https://www.nnm.ac.in/

[13] https://www.jlpt.jp/index.html

[14] The ***Grammar-Translation Method***, a traditional language teaching approach, emphasizes reading and writing skills through the study of grammar rules and vocabulary, coupled with translation exercises. While effective for understanding grammatical structures, it has been critiqued for neglecting speaking and listening proficiency, limiting its applicability in conversational contexts.

[15] The ***Audio-Lingual Method*** is a language teaching approach that emphasizes listening and speaking skills through repetition, drills, and pattern practice. Rooted in behaviorist theories, it focuses on habit formation by encouraging learners to mimic and memorize language patterns. This method gained popularity in the mid-20th century but has been critiqued for its lack of focus on communicative and contextual language use.

[16] ***Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)*** is an approach that emphasizes the use of meaningful tasks to facilitate language learning. In TBLT, learners engage in activities that require them to use the target language to achieve specific goals, promoting real-life communication and practical language use. The approach typically includes three stages: pre-task (introducing the topic), task cycle (completing the task), and post-task (reflecting and receiving feedback).

[17] Total Physical Response (TPR) is a language teaching method developed by James Asher that incorporates physical movement into learning. In TPR, teachers give commands in the target language, prompting students to respond with physical actions. This method enhances comprehension and retention by engaging learners in a fun, interactive way, making it especially effective for beginners.

prioritized listening and repetitive drills to foster habit formation through imitation. While these methods provided a strong grammatical foundation, they often overlooked practical communication, placing greater importance on accuracy than fluency.

Classrooms of this era frequently utilized language labs, where students practiced pronunciation and listening through audio recordings. These tools improved phonetic accuracy and listening comprehension but lacked opportunities for authentic interaction or cultural immersion. Consequently, the focus remained on controlled, teacher-driven learning, with limited emphasis on real-world language use.

2000's Focus on Communication and Practical Language Use

The 2000s marked a pivotal shift in language education towards more communicative and learner-centered approaches. Communicative Language Teaching [18](CLT) became a cornerstone of this evolution, emphasizing real-life communication over the rote learning of grammatical structures. This method prioritized fluency and confidence in practical language use, encouraging activities such as role-plays, group discussions, and pair work. Students were now engaged in dynamic interactions that mimicked real-world scenarios, helping them develop speaking and listening skills while fostering an understanding of cultural contexts. Unlike earlier methods, CLT focused on using language as a tool for communication rather than as an academic subject.

The decade also saw the emergence of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which emphasized completing meaningful, everyday tasks like writing emails, making phone calls, or participating in conversations. TBLT shifted the focus from mastering language forms to functional usage, enabling learners to achieve specific communication goals. By engaging students in practical tasks, this method helped bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world application, ensuring that language was learned as a means of interaction rather than mere theory.

2010's Incorporation of Technology and Blended Learning

The 2010s transformed language education through technology and blended learning models. Combining traditional instruction with online resources, blended learning offered flexibility and personalized study options, catering to diverse learner needs. Language apps like Duolingo[19], Memrise[20] gained popularity for their gamified[21], self-paced approach, incorporating rewards and interactive exercises to make learning engaging and enjoyable. Smart classrooms and interactive whiteboards became common, integrating multimedia tools like videos, internet resources, and interactive exercises to enhance the learning experience.

A major advancement was the use of video conferencing tools like Skype and Zoom, enabling virtual language exchanges with native speakers. These platforms provided authentic speaking and listening practice, bridging the gap between learners and real-world cultural contexts. This decade marked a significant shift towards accessible, practical, and engaging language learning, leveraging technology to create globally connected and interactive educational experiences.

2020's Digital Transformation and AI-Driven Learning

The 2020s have ushered in a new era of language education, heavily influenced by the digital transformation and advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift to online learning, making virtual platforms a cornerstone of education. Learning Management Systems[22] (LMS) like Moodle and Google Classroom enabled teachers to deliver lessons, monitor progress, and assess students in an entirely digital environment, ensuring continuity in learning.

AI-driven tools revolutionized personalized learning during this decade. Apps such as WaniKani [23]for kanji memorization and Anki[24] for spaced repetition learning became indispensable for mastering complex writing systems and vocabulary. Platforms like Busuu[25] and Babbel[26] used AI algorithms to adapt to individual learner needs, offering tailored exercises and feedback that optimized language acquisition.

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[18] ***Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)*** is an approach that emphasizes interaction as the key to language learning. Developed in the 1970s, it focuses on developing learners' communicative competence by engaging them in authentic communication through activities like role-plays and discussions, promoting fluency and confidence in real-life situations.

[19] https://www.duolingo.com/course/ja/en/Learn-Japanese

[20] https://www.memrise.com/en/learn-japanese

[21] ***Gamified*** refers to the use of game design elements in non-game contexts, such as education, to enhance engagement and motivation through rewards, challenges, and interactive activities.

[22] ***Learning Management Systems (LMS)*** are software applications that facilitate the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting, and delivery of educational courses and training programs. They provide a centralized platform for instructors to manage course content, assessments, and student progress, enhancing the learning experience through online resources and interactive tools.

[23] https://www.wanikani.com/

[24] https://apps.ankiweb.net/

[25] https://www.busuu.com/en/course/learn-japanese-online

[26] https://www.babbel.com/en/magazine/guide-to-japanese-language

Innovations in AI chatbots and speech recognition technology allowed learners to engage in simulated conversations with instant feedback on pronunciation, grammar, and fluency. These tools enabled immersive, self-paced practice, fostering greater autonomy among students.

Virtual Reality[27] (VR) and Augmented Reality[28] (AR) further enriched the language learning experience. Platforms such as ImmerseMe[29] and Mondly[30] VR offered learners the chance to 'travel' to virtual environments, practicing language in contextualized, real-world scenarios. These technologies not only enhanced linguistic skills but also provided cultural exposure, bridging gaps in traditional classroom instruction.

Pre-NEP Era: The Rise of Japanese Language Studies in India

The study of Japanese language in India saw a steady rise long before the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Indian universities and cultural institutions have played a pivotal role in fostering this growth, fueled by India's increasing diplomatic, cultural, and economic interactions with Japan. Notable institutions such as Visva-Bharati, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), University of Delhi, Nava Nalanda Mahavihara and others were some of the first to introduce Japanese language courses, offering structured programs in Japanese language, literature, and culture.

The driving force behind this was India's growing need for professionals proficient in Japanese, particularly in sectors such as technology, business, and diplomacy. During this time, the Japanese language curriculum was largely dependent on traditional methods like the Grammar-Translation Method and some Communicative Approaches. However, the availability of immersive experiences was limited due to resource constraints.

Japanese language education also benefitted from significant contributions made by organizations such as the Japan Foundation and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The Japan Foundation was instrumental in providing teaching materials, organizing workshops, and facilitating faculty exchange programs. This helped Indian universities broaden their curriculum and improve the quality of instruction. JICA further supported capacity-building initiatives, collaborating with institutions to offer tailored programs for professionals who sought employment in Japanese companies or aimed to work in Japan. JICA also provides volunteers to various institutions to support the departments.

Despite the growing interest in Japanese language studies, the pre-NEP era faced several challenges. One of the most pressing issues was the shortage of qualified language instructors. Many teachers had received their training through foreign exchange programs or postgraduate studies, but the absence of a formal teacher training mechanism in India created gaps in the quality of instruction. Additionally, students faced resource limitations in terms of textbooks and digital learning tools. The scarcity of exposure to native speakers and language immersion opportunities further limited the ability of students to achieve fluency.

Post-NEP Era: Transformative Changes in Language Education

A key reform introduced by NEP 2020 is the focus on hybrid learning models, combining traditional classroom-based education with digital tools and online platforms. In the post-NEP era, universities are leveraging technology to address some of the long-standing challenges in language education. Digital tools like Duolingo, WaniKani, and HelloTalk[31] are now commonly used to supplement classroom learning, making language acquisition more interactive and engaging. The use of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodologies have become increasingly popular, shifting the focus from rote memorization to practical language skills.

In the post-NEP era, Indian universities have further strengthened their ties with Japanese cultural institutions like the Japan Foundation and JICA. Collaborative programs now offer more study abroad opportunities, student exchange programs, and scholarships like the MEXT scholarship for Indian students pursuing academic and professional goals in Japan. These initiatives are helping students to not only master the Japanese language but also gain a deeper understanding of Japanese culture and society.

The NEP's emphasis on skill development and vocational training has also been a game-changer for Japanese language education in India. More and more institutions are now offering job-oriented Japanese language courses, in collaboration with Japanese companies operating in India, ensuring that students are well-prepared to meet the demands of the global job market.

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[27] ***Virtual Reality (VR)*** is a simulated experience that immerses users in interactive, computer-generated environments. In education, VR enhances learning by allowing students to engage in experiential activities, practice skills safely, and visualize complex concepts in a 3D setting.

[28] ***Augmented Reality (AR)*** overlays digital information and images onto the real world, enhancing the user's perception of their environment. In education, AR can provide interactive experiences, such as displaying 3D models or animations in real-time, enabling students to explore and understand complex subjects more effectively.

[29] https://immerseme.co/

[30] https://www.mondly.com/learn-japanese-online

[31] ***HelloTalk*** is a language exchange app designed to connect users worldwide for practicing languages with native speakers. It offers text, voice, and video chat features, allowing users to correct each other's grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary in real-time. The app fosters cultural exchange and collaborative learning through its community-driven platform.

Conclusion

The integration of Japanese language education into the broader framework of India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a crucial step in aligning the country's educational strategies with global trends. This policy reform focuses on enhancing multilingualism, promoting flexibility in learning, and encouraging interdisciplinary studies, all of which offer immense potential for the expansion of foreign language education.

Japanese language education plays a pivotal role in the broader context of Indo-Japan relations. Given the increasing economic and cultural exchanges between the two countries, proficiency in Japanese is no longer just an academic pursuit but a valuable skill for students aiming to work in sectors like technology, trade, and diplomacy. The historical relationship between India and Japan, highlighted by cultural figures such as Rabindranath Tagore and Tenshin Okakura, has laid a rich foundation for continued cooperation, and NEP 2020 further supports the cultivation of such ties through education.

One of the major contributions of NEP 2020 is its emphasis on the use of technology in education. This has made language learning more accessible, engaging, and tailored to the needs of individual learners. The hybrid approach that merges traditional classroom instruction with digital tools like WaniKani, Duolingo, and HelloTalk allows students to practice language skills at their own pace while reinforcing classroom learning. This blend of technology with traditional methods is especially significant in the context of Japanese, a language known for its complexity due to its writing systems—hiragana, katakana, and kanji—and intricate grammatical structure. Digital tools help break down these challenges by providing innovative ways to learn kanji through gamification, enhancing vocabulary retention through spaced repetition, and offering opportunities for real-time conversation with native speakers.

Furthermore, NEP 2020's flexibility in education allows for the integration of foreign languages like Japanese from an early stage, providing students with the opportunity to start language learning in middle school. This early exposure, combined with cultural immersion programs like JENESYS and scholarships such as MEXT, creates a conducive environment for mastering the language while gaining insight into Japanese culture. The academic flexibility offered by the Academic Bank of Credit (ABC) system further supports students in pursuing their academic and professional aspirations, even as they navigate the challenges of a foreign language. Through language, students will not only gain skills for a globalized world but also contribute to the rich cultural dialogue between these two nations.

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