

Multicultural Education and NEP 2020 through Children's Literature Text Book

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the NCERT Class 5 English Literature textbook within the framework of multicultural education and with reference to National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. NEP 2020 emphasizes the creation of an inclusive education system that celebrates India's cultural plurality, promotes multilingualism, and fosters equity, respect, and social justice. The content analysis has been done of the class 5th English Literature textbook of NCERT and examines the themes and multicultural perspective through the textual and visual elements. The findings demonstrate that textbook moves beyond literacy acquisition to cultivate empathy, intercultural competence, and critical reflection. By embedding regional, tribal, classroom-based, and Northeastern narratives, it envisioned NEP 2020's vision of integrating regional knowledge and celebrating India's cultural diversity. Thus, Children's literature emerges as a transformative pedagogical tool for fostering equity, inclusion, and lifelong learning from the early years of schooling.

Key Words: *Children's Literature, Multicultural Education, Diversity, Inclusion, NEP 2020, Intercultural Competence, Equity in Education*

Introduction

India is renowned for its multifaceted diversity, encompassing rich, linguistic, religious, and ethnic dimensions. A diverse country like India, multicultural education is essential to establishing inclusive and equitable learning settings (Bala, 2024). A strong and inclusive educational system fosters harmony and collaboration among varied groups by assisting students in understanding, appreciating, and respecting

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various cultures. A child's perspective broadens and they become more equipped for a worldwide society when multicultural perspectives are included in the curriculum. By promoting social cohesiveness, tolerance, and respect for one another, such an educational system paves the way for a more just and forward-thinking country. Initiatives of Government of India such as The National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 the vision is to make education more inclusive and accessible for all. NEP, 2020 aims to modernize India's education system and make it more flexible, inclusive and multidisciplinary (Ministry of Education, 2020). NEP, 2020 also focuses on the multicultural education, its core objective is to promote multilingualism, cultural sensitivity, and the incorporation of other customs and knowledge systems into regular education (Praveen & Wasim, 2025). In order to establish inclusive learning environments that honour cultural variety, the policy highlights the necessity of providing educators with training in multicultural education techniques (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020). The NEP 2020 multicultural education policy represents a paradigm shift in India's educational system towards one that is more inclusive and sensitive to cultural differences. The policy seeks to establish an educational setting that fosters tolerance, respect, and understanding between students from all ethnic backgrounds by recognizing and appreciating the nation's rich cultural legacy. Aligned with NEP, 2020 the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2023 advocates learning three languages as R1, R2, and R3 during school years. R1 at the age 8 (Grade 3) typically the regional language to foster a deeper connection to culture and identity and also to attain reading and writing proficiency. Similarly literacy in R2 by age 11 (Grade 6) and R3 by age 14 (Grade 9). The curriculum's intent is to establish a sense of pride, belonging and cultural heritage through language education.

Multicultural Education

Multicultural education is a component of a school reform strategy and a movement for democracy, social justice, and equity (Tamang, 2022). Redesigning schools to provide all students with the knowledge, mindset, and abilities necessary to successfully navigate and contribute to a racially and ethnically diverse society and world is the primary goal of multicultural education. Banks (2009) described that the concept of multicultural education holds that all children should have equal access to education in schools, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, race, culture, language, social status, or religion. James A. Banks has developed a model in which he described the five dimensions of multicultural education: Content Integration, Prejudice Reduction, Knowledge Construction Process, Equity pedagogy and Empowering School Culture (Banks, 2015). Content integration refers to the amalgamation of examples and study materials from diverse cultural perspectives in the curriculum. Whereas

teaching students to critically examine how knowledge is produced and whose viewpoints are given priority in conventional curricula is known as knowledge construction. Prejudice reductions aims at developing favourable views in pupils about other racial, ethnic, and cultural groups and equity pedagogy focuses on the teaching methods and classroom settings that assist students from various racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds in gaining the information, abilities, and attitudes they require. Lastly empowering school culture emphasizes on ensuring the equality and equal status to the students of diverse background by transforming the culture and structure of school. In India, researchers stress the need to embrace cultural pluralism and implement frameworks such as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Relationship and Interaction Management, and Issues-Based Education to support the multicultural education and inclusive practices (Lalita, 2024; Singh, 2024; Tamang, 2022).

An effective tool for implementing multicultural education at the foundational level is children's literature. The role of children's literature is very important in fostering personalities of school going children. The children's book not only develops the cognitive but emotional and spiritual skills as well. "These books reflect the cultural backgrounds of a specific country or group of countries so that the child can learn many things about his traditions, values, beliefs and history" (Ismail, 2023). As child is going to mature, it fosters inclusive social relationships by normalizing variety and integrating it into their worldview. The principles that multicultural literature imparts to children in their early years leave a lasting influence, shaping the way they perceive and engage with diversity throughout their lives. Most of the studies which have been conducted in this area focus on higher education, secondary education or in the area of teacher education (Singh, 2024; Gogoi, 2018; Yilmaz, 2016). Multicultural education helps to develop the cultural competence among the students. When children's literature will be full of stories of different cultures, it will inculcate cultural competence. Children's literature has the potential to support young children in developing intercultural competence or "the ability to communicate effectively, and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skill and attitudes" (Deardoff, 2004). As stated by National curriculum framework (2005) "Literature is also a spur to children's own creativity. After hearing a story, poem or song, children can be encouraged to write something of their own. They can also be encouraged to integrate various forms of creative expansions." Children's literature is widely acknowledged as foundational for early literacy and language development, serving both as a pedagogical tool and a medium for fostering critical discussions and personal connections among young learners (Adam et al., 2024; Ismail, 2023; Ong, 2022).

Research Question

1. To what extent is the multiculturalism of India reflected in children's literature prescribed in school curricula?
2. In what ways do children's literary texts promote inclusion, respect for diversity, and cultural awareness as envisioned by NEP 2020?

Research objectives

1. To examine the multiculturalism in children's literature prescribed in Indian schools.
2. To analyse how children's textbooks reflect the principles of multicultural education outlined in NEP 2020.

Methodology

The present study has been designed as the qualitative approach. The investigator has followed the content analysis method because it helps to understand why, how and other related factors of this study. The content analysis was carried out systematically and aligned with the research objectives, using James A. Banks' Five Dimensions of Multicultural Education-Content Integration, Knowledge Construction, Prejudice Reduction, Equity Pedagogy, and Empowering School Culture as the guiding framework.

In the present study content analysis has been done of the class 5th English Literature textbook of NCERT. The textbook titled "Marigold" comprises ten units and only four chapters (Wonderful Waste Bamboo Curry, Classroom Discussion, Who Will Be Ningthou?) of English Literature textbook [Marigold] to explore how multicultural, intercultural, inclusive, and diversity-related themes are represented.

Findings and Discussion

Objective 1. To examine the multiculturalism in children's literature prescribed in Indian schools.

This study has undertaken a critical investigation into the representation of multiculturalism and diversity in children's literature, with specific attention given to the English Literature textbook of NCERT prescribed for Class 5th. As the story Wonderful Waste, at pp.10 in the textbook set in the culturally vibrant state of Kerala, explores the origin of the regional dish Avial. The narrative centres on a creative act of sustainability, where food scraps are transformed into a celebrated culinary tradition. Cultural diversity is reinforced through the depiction of Kerala's traditional

cuisine, attire, and lifestyle. The accompanying illustration (Fig.1), which shows the Maharaja in royal attire and other characters in customary Kerala dress, visually anchors the narrative in its cultural context. The story encourages intercultural dialogue by inviting students to share their own cultural food practices, fostering empathy and understanding of different culinary traditions. This process of exchange exemplifies interculturalism, wherein learners are not only introduced to distinct cultural elements but are also encouraged to engage with and reflect upon them. By embedding such narratives in the curriculum, educators promote intercultural education that goes beyond content knowledge, cultivating students' ability to appreciate and navigate cultural differences through dialogue and critical thinking.

As part of the exploration of multicultural education, it becomes evident that the inclusion of diverse cultural narratives significantly enriches students' understanding of various communities and their distinct worldviews. In this regard, page 16 of Unit One in the Class 5 English Literature textbook presents the story *Bamboo Curry*, a Santhal folk tale that provides valuable insight into the customs, traditions, and lifestyle of the Santhal tribal community. The narrative highlights cultural diversity through its depiction of traditional food practices, eco-friendly bamboo architecture, and indigenous clothing. Notably, the story centres around the preparation of a distinctive tribal dish known as bamboo curry, made from bamboo shoots an ingredient that symbolizes the community's close relationship with nature and their sustainable way of living. The inclusion of this story marks a significant step toward acknowledging and valuing the voices of tribal communities, particularly the Santhal people, who have long been marginalized and underrepresented in mainstream education. By portraying Santhal characters in a warm, humorous, and relatable light, the story humanizes tribal life, countering long-standing stereotypes that depict Indigenous communities as primitive or isolated.

The Story supports the Knowledge Construction Process by prompting students to reflect on how cultural norms influence interpretation. Constructive engagement and rational reflection help children reduce prejudice by presenting cultural differences in a positive and non-threatening way. Such narratives create opportunities for critical intercultural reflection, fostering appreciation of both uniqueness and shared human values. In doing so, the story contributes to Equity Pedagogy and an Empowering School Culture, nurturing respect for diversity and inclusivity within the learning environment.

The poem *Class Discussion*, on pp.91 is an adapted version of a work by Gervase Phinn, holds significant multicultural value. Thoughtfully contextualized within an Indian classroom setting, it is enriched with familiar cultural elements. The teacher, dressed (fig.4) in a traditional salwar kameez, addresses a lively group of students

seated at classic wooden desks and benches, with colourful educational charts adorning the classroom walls. This relatable environment immediately resonates with Indian students, offering a culturally relevant framework for reflection and engagement.

The poem brings the theme of cultural diversity to life by portraying students from various backgrounds, each contributing their own traditions, appearances, and learning styles.. Through gentle humor and perceptive observation, the verses celebrate the individuality of every learner, naturally fostering an awareness of multiculturalism.

Furthermore, the poem encourages intercultural dialogue by inviting students to share their distinct perspectives and approaches to learning. It emphasizes that meaningful classroom participation extends beyond verbal expression and includes reflective, creative, and observant contributions. In doing so, it promotes interculturalism by highlighting mutual respect, understanding, and the integration of diverse identities within a shared educational environment.

Multicultural education also includes the knowledge of different language the story *Who Will be Ningthou?* set in Manipur, provides an immersive exploration of Northeastern Indian culture through language, attire, and moral values . The use of indigenous terms such as Ningthou (king), Leima (queen), meeyam (people), and khongnang (banyan tree) enhances linguistic and cultural richness, reflecting cultural diversity within the Indian subcontinent. The narrative challenges the conventional belief that leadership must be inherited by the eldest son, promoting instead values such as compassion, wisdom, and justice. This serves as a critique of rigid power structures and introduces students to alternative models of governance and community life. The story actively fosters intercultural dialogue by inviting students to reflect on and compare cultural norms related to leadership and morality. Its integration into the curriculum represents a multicultural approach that includes lesser-known regional narratives, thereby enhancing multicultural awareness and validating indigenous knowledge. As part of a broader framework of intercultural education, the story encourages learners to appreciate ethical and emotional universals while recognizing and respecting cultural specificity. The emphasis on empathy and inclusivity in leadership aligns closely with the principles of interculturalism, advocating for a worldview that transcends cultural boundaries through shared human values.

Objective 2: To analyse how children's textbooks reflect the principles of multicultural education outlined in NEP 2020.

The analysis of the NCERT Class 5 English Literature textbook reveals a meaningful alignment with the principles of multicultural education as outlined in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. NEP 2020 envisions an education system that

celebrates India's rich cultural diversity, encourages multilingualism, and fosters values of inclusion, equity, and respect for all identities. The selected stories and poems from the textbook *Wonderful Waste*, *Bamboo Curry*, *Class Discussion*, and *Who Will Be Ningthou?* demonstrate how literature can be an effective tool for advancing these goals through narrative diversity, visual representation, and culturally rooted content.

Wonderful Waste exemplifies multicultural education by introducing students to Kerala's regional culture through a story grounded in culinary heritage, traditional attire, and sustainability. The vivid illustration of the Maharaja and others in traditional dress not only contextualizes the narrative but also makes the cultural elements visually accessible. The story also encourages students to share their own food traditions, fostering intercultural dialogue and empathetic understanding key attributes of the intercultural competence NEP 2020 seeks to develop.

Similarly, *Bamboo Curry* serves as a strong example of how children's literature can bring marginalized voices into the classroom. The inclusion of a Santhal folk tale is particularly significant, as it introduces students to tribal customs, eco-friendly practices, and indigenous worldviews often excluded from mainstream curricula. Through relatable characters and humour, the narrative humanizes tribal life and challenges persistent stereotypes. This not only supports NEP 2020's emphasis on equity and inclusion but also cultivates critical reflection on social and cultural norms.

The poem *Class Discussion*, adapted and placed within a recognizable Indian classroom, reinforces the notion of the school as a microcosm of broader society. It highlights students' diverse backgrounds, learning styles, and appearances, promoting appreciation of individual differences within a shared space. Through humor and relatable situations, the poem fosters cultural awareness, encourages learners to voice their perspectives, and values non-verbal forms of participation aligning with NEP 2020's vision of holistic and inclusive education.

Further, the story *Who Will Be Ningthou?*, set in Manipur, powerfully reflects India's linguistic and regional diversity. The inclusion of indigenous terms and depiction of traditional attire creates an immersive experience that validates Northeastern cultural identity. The narrative challenges hierarchical power structures, offering alternative ethical models grounded in compassion and justice. By integrating this lesser-known regional story into the curriculum, NCERT affirms NEP 2020's call to include local knowledge systems and underrepresented narratives, thereby expanding the cultural horizons of young readers.

Conclusion

This study critically examines the NCERT Class 5 English Literature textbook through the lens of multicultural education and the principles of the National Educa-

tion Policy (NEP) 2020. The analysis of texts such as *Wonderful Waste*, *Bamboo Curry*, *Class Discussion*, and *Who Will Be Ningthou?* highlights how children's literature effectively fosters inclusion, cultural awareness, and empathy among children at their early stages of the development. These stories depict India's cultural, linguistic, and regional plurality while emphasizing values of sustainability, equity, community traditions, and intercultural dialogue. By engaging learners with diverse contexts from Kerala's south India to Santhal tribal life, classroom dynamics, and Manipuri moral traditions through the textbook goes beyond storytelling to promote reflection, comparison, and intercultural understanding. Aligned with NEP 2020, it integrates local knowledge, inclusive pedagogy, and equitable representation, enabling children to appreciate the ideas of Unity in Diversity.. The study concludes that children's literature, when thoughtfully selected, is a transformative tool for nurturing socially sensitive, empathetic, and responsible citizens in a pluralistic nation.

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