

Reimagining Language Teachers for Viksit Bharat @2047: From Language Instructors to Inclusive, Digital and Future-Ready Educators

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Abstract

The vision of Viksit Bharat @2047 places teacher education at the centre of national transformation, and among all disciplines, language teaching occupies a uniquely strategic position, since language is simultaneously the medium of instruction, the carrier of culture, and the tool of thought. This paper examines how language teachers, particularly those working in multilingual and regional-language contexts such as Bengal, must be reimagined from transmitters of grammar and vocabulary into inclusive, digitally competent, and future-ready educators. Drawing on the National Education Policy 2020, NCERT and NCTE frameworks, and established scholarship on bilingual education, inclusive pedagogy, and technology-integrated language learning, the paper identifies five pillars of the future-ready language educator: digital literacy, inclusive pedagogy, multilingual and mother-tongue-based instruction, critical thinking and creativity, and socio-emotional and value-based teaching. The paper argues that language teacher education programmes must be redesigned to cultivate these competencies holistically. Recommendations are offered for teacher education institutions, curriculum planners, and policymakers to align language teacher preparation with the aspirations of a knowledge-driven, inclusive, and technologically empowered India by 2047.

Keywords: language teacher education, Viksit Bharat @2047, NEP 2020, multilingual education, digital literacy, inclusive pedagogy

1. Introduction

India's journey toward Viksit Bharat @2047, envisioned to coincide with the centenary of independence, rests fundamentally on the quality and vision of its teachers. Among all categories of educators, the language teacher occupies a position of unusual significance, because language is not merely a subject to be taught but the very medium through which all other knowledge is constructed, communicated, and internalised. In a country as linguistically diverse as India, with more than twenty-two scheduled languages and hundreds of dialects, the language classroom becomes a site where questions of identity, culture, cognition, and citizenship converge. The traditional image of the language teacher as a custodian of grammar rules, spelling accuracy, and literary memorisation is increasingly inadequate for the demands of twenty-first-century classrooms, which are characterised by digital saturation, learner diversity, and rapidly evolving communicative needs.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has placed unprecedented emphasis on multilingualism, mother-tongue-based instruction, and the holistic, technology-enabled development of learners (Ministry of Education, 2020). This policy shift compels teacher

education institutions to reconsider not only what language teachers teach but how they are prepared to teach it. In regional-language contexts such as Bengali-medium education in West Bengal, the stakes are particularly high: Bengali teachers are expected simultaneously to preserve linguistic and literary heritage, to serve as a bridge toward English and other languages under the three-language formula, and to prepare learners for participation in a digitally networked, multilingual national and global economy.

This paper argues that the aspiration of *Viksit Bharat @2047* cannot be realised without a deliberate reimagining of language teacher preparation. It proposes that future-ready language educators must move beyond the role of instructor to become facilitators of communication, custodians of inclusive practice, mediators of multilingual competence, cultivators of critical thought, and nurturers of socio-emotional wellbeing. The paper reviews relevant literature, articulates the objectives guiding this inquiry, traces the changing role of the language teacher, elaborates five pillars of future readiness, and concludes with recommendations for teacher education institutions and policymakers.

2. Review of Related Literature

The theoretical foundation of language teaching has evolved considerably over the past century, moving from grammar-translation and audiolingual methods toward communicative, learner-centred, and task-based approaches (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Richards and Rodgers trace this evolution and emphasise that contemporary language pedagogy privileges meaningful communication, learner autonomy, and authentic language use over rote mechanical drilling, a shift with direct implications for how language teachers must be trained.

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory remains foundational to understanding language as a tool of thought rather than merely a communicative code. Vygotsky argued that language mediates cognitive development through social interaction, positioning the teacher not as a transmitter of fixed content but as a facilitator who scaffolds learners within their zone of proximal development. This theoretical lens underpins much of contemporary constructivist language pedagogy and supports the argument that language teachers must cultivate dialogic, interactive classrooms rather than one-directional instruction.

On multilingualism, UNESCO (2003) has long advocated for mother-tongue-based multilingual education, arguing that initial literacy and cognitive development are best supported when children learn first in a language they understand fluently, before transitioning to additional languages. This position resonates strongly with NEP 2020's emphasis on the home language, mother tongue, or regional language as the medium of instruction at least until Grade 5, and preferably until Grade 8 (Ministry of Education, 2020). Cummins (2000) similarly demonstrates, through decades of research on bilingual education, that strong first-language

competence provides a cognitive and linguistic foundation that supports rather than hinders additional language acquisition, a finding directly relevant to India's three-language formula.

On inclusion, Ainscow and Miles (2008) discuss the evolution of inclusive education from a narrow focus on learners with disabilities to a broader commitment to addressing the needs of all marginalised and diverse learners, including those differentiated by language, gender, socio-economic status, and ability. Their framework is echoed in UNESCO's (2020) Global Education Monitoring Report on inclusion, which calls for education systems, and by extension teacher preparation programmes, to treat diversity as the norm rather than the exception.

The integration of technology into language teaching has been examined extensively by Warschauer and Healey (1998), who trace the shift from restricted, drill-based computer-assisted language learning toward integrative and communicative uses of technology that support authentic interaction, collaborative writing, and multimodal literacy. More recent frameworks, including those articulated by NCERT (2023) in the National Curriculum Framework for School Education, extend this thinking to call for digital pedagogy that is purposeful, equitable, and critically informed rather than merely ornamental.

Finally, Kalantzis and Cope (2012) introduce the concept of "multiliteracies," arguing that language education in the contemporary era must extend beyond print literacy to encompass visual, digital, and multimodal forms of meaning-making, while Freire's (1970) foundational work on critical pedagogy reminds educators that language teaching, at its best, is never neutral but always implicated in the cultivation of critical consciousness. Together, this body of literature suggests that the future-ready language teacher must synthesise sociocultural, multilingual, inclusive, technological, and critical perspectives, a synthesis this paper attempts to articulate for the Indian context.

3. Objectives of the Study

This paper is guided by the following objectives: first, to examine the changing role of the language teacher in light of NEP 2020 and twenty-first-century pedagogical demands; second, to identify and elaborate the key competencies, or pillars, that constitute a future-ready language educator; third, to explore how digital literacy, inclusive pedagogy, multilingual instruction, critical thinking, and socio-emotional teaching converge in the preparation of language teachers, with particular reference to regional-language contexts such as Bengali; and fourth, to offer practical recommendations for teacher education institutions and policymakers seeking to align language teacher preparation with the vision of *Viksit Bharat @2047*.

4. The Changing Role of the Language Teacher

Historically, the language teacher in Indian classrooms, whether teaching Bengali, Hindi, English, or another regional language, was primarily conceived as a transmitter of linguistic

content: correct grammar, standardised vocabulary, and prescribed literary texts to be memorised and reproduced in examinations. This model, rooted in grammar-translation traditions, treated language as a closed system of rules to be mastered rather than a living, dynamic resource for meaning-making (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). While this approach produced learners capable of formal accuracy, it often failed to develop genuine communicative competence, critical engagement with texts, or the confidence to use language creatively and functionally in real-world situations.

The twenty-first-century classroom demands a fundamentally different orientation. The language teacher today must function as a facilitator of communication, designing tasks and activities that require learners to negotiate meaning, express opinions, and engage in authentic dialogue rather than passively absorbing rules. Simultaneously, the teacher must serve as a custodian and interpreter of culture, since language, particularly a mother tongue such as Bengali, carries within it centuries of literary, oral, and folk tradition that risk erosion in an increasingly homogenised, English-dominant, and digitally mediated world. The language classroom, therefore, becomes a space not only for linguistic skill-building but for cultural transmission and identity affirmation.

Equally significant is the teacher's emerging role as a facilitator of critical literacy. In an era saturated with information, misinformation, and multimodal media, learners must be equipped not simply to decode text but to question, analyse, and evaluate it. Freire's (1970) insight that literacy is inseparable from critical consciousness is especially pertinent here: the language teacher who merely transmits content forecloses the possibility of learners becoming independent, questioning thinkers. NEP 2020 reinforces this shift by explicitly calling for pedagogy that fosters critical thinking, creativity, and 21st-century skills across all subjects, with language education positioned as a natural vehicle for these competencies (Ministry of Education, 2020). The language teacher of Viksit Bharat @2047, therefore, must be reimagined as facilitator, cultural custodian, and critical literacy guide simultaneously, a role considerably more complex and consequential than that of a traditional instructor.

5. Pillars of the Future-Ready Language Educator

5.1 Digital Literacy and Technology Integration in Language Teaching

The integration of digital technology into language classrooms is no longer optional but essential to future-ready practice. Warschauer and Healey (1998) distinguish between restrictive uses of technology, where computers merely digitise drill-and-practice exercises, and integrative uses, where technology supports authentic communication, collaborative writing, and access to diverse linguistic input. For the future-ready language teacher, digital literacy means far more than operating a smartboard or sharing worksheets through messaging applications; it entails the pedagogical judgement to select and design digital tasks that

genuinely enhance language learning, such as collaborative online storytelling, multimedia presentations, podcast creation, and digital annotation of literary texts. NCERT's (2023) National Curriculum Framework similarly calls for technology to be embedded purposefully within pedagogy rather than treated as an add-on, emphasising that digital tools should expand access to authentic language resources, including regional-language digital content, rather than replace face-to-face interaction. For Bengali and other regional-language teachers, digital literacy carries an added responsibility: ensuring that regional-language content, scripts, and typing tools are actively used and promoted, so that digital classrooms do not inadvertently privilege English or Hindi at the expense of mother-tongue digital literacy. Teacher education programmes must therefore train prospective language teachers not only in generic educational technology but specifically in digital tools that support regional-language typing, text-to-speech, and multimedia content creation, alongside a critical awareness of the digital divide that continues to separate urban and rural, and privileged and marginalised, learners across India.

5.2 Inclusive Pedagogy for Diverse Learners

Inclusive pedagogy requires language teachers to recognise and respond to the full range of diversity present in contemporary classrooms, encompassing learners with disabilities, linguistic minorities, first-generation learners, and students from varied socio-economic backgrounds. Ainscow and Miles (2008) argue that inclusion should not be understood narrowly as the accommodation of learners with special educational needs but as a broader philosophy of restructuring teaching to respond to the diversity of all learners, a perspective reinforced by UNESCO's (2020) global monitoring report, which frames inclusion as central to the right to education itself. For language teachers, inclusive pedagogy translates into differentiated instruction: providing multiple entry points into a text through varied reading levels, visual supports, and oral scaffolding; adapting assessment formats for learners with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia; and ensuring that classroom materials reflect diverse social, regional, and gender identities rather than a narrow, homogenised cultural norm. In the context of Bengali-medium classrooms in districts such as Alipurduar, which include tea-garden communities, indigenous and tribal populations, and speakers of languages such as Rajbanshi and Nepali alongside Bengali, inclusive language pedagogy also demands sensitivity to linguistic variation within the so-called mother tongue itself. Teacher education institutions must therefore prepare language teachers to recognise dialectal and sociolinguistic diversity as a pedagogical resource rather than a deficit to be corrected, fostering classrooms where every learner's linguistic identity is affirmed rather than marginalised.

5.3 Multilingual Education and Mother-Tongue-Based Instruction under NEP 2020

Perhaps no policy shift has more direct implications for language teacher education than NEP 2020's strong endorsement of multilingualism and mother-tongue-based instruction. The policy recommends that, wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5,

and preferably until Grade 8, should be the home language, mother tongue, or regional language, with the three-language formula continuing to expose learners to multiple languages, including at least two that are native to India (Ministry of Education, 2020). This approach draws direct theoretical support from Cummins' (2000) research on bilingual education, which demonstrates that well-developed first-language proficiency provides a transferable cognitive and linguistic foundation for acquiring additional languages, countering the misconception that early exposure to a dominant language such as English necessarily accelerates overall academic achievement. UNESCO (2003) similarly affirms that mother-tongue-based multilingual education improves comprehension, learning outcomes, and retention, particularly in the early years. For language teachers in Bengal, this policy direction validates the pedagogical centrality of Bengali while simultaneously demanding new competencies: teachers must now be prepared to teach Bengali not in isolation but as part of an integrated multilingual curriculum, building explicit bridges between Bengali, English, and Hindi or other additional languages, using techniques such as translanguaging, comparative grammar discussions, and code-switching as legitimate pedagogical strategies rather than errors to be suppressed. Teacher education institutions must accordingly revise their curricula to include training in multilingual pedagogy, translanguaging theory, and the practical craft of sequencing language transfer across the three languages a learner encounters in school.

5.4 Fostering Critical Thinking and Creativity through Language

Language is the primary medium through which critical thought is formed, articulated, and refined, a claim rooted in Vygotsky's (1978) assertion that thought and speech are dialectically interconnected, developing through and with each other rather than in isolation. The future-ready language teacher must therefore treat every reading, writing, and discussion activity as an opportunity to cultivate analytical and creative capacities, rather than reducing language learning to comprehension questions with predetermined answers. Practices such as open-ended textual interpretation, debate, creative writing, poetry composition, and comparative analysis of texts across genres and languages allow learners to move beyond literal comprehension toward inference, evaluation, and original expression. Kalantzis and Cope's (2012) concept of multiliteracies further extends this vision by insisting that creativity in language education today must engage multiple modes of meaning-making, visual, spatial, and digital, alongside the purely textual. In the Bengali literary tradition, rich with poetry, short fiction, and essay writing, teachers have a particularly fertile resource base for cultivating creativity, yet classroom practice often remains constrained by examination-driven rote reproduction of model answers. Reimagining language teacher preparation therefore requires explicit training in questioning techniques, such as open-ended and higher-order questioning aligned with Bloom's taxonomy, alongside assessment reform that rewards original interpretation and creative expression rather than verbatim reproduction of textbook content.

5.5 Socio-Emotional and Value-Based Language Teaching

Finally, the future-ready language educator must attend to the socio-emotional dimensions of learning, recognising that language classrooms are also spaces of emotional expression, identity negotiation, and value formation. Language, more than any other subject, provides learners with the vocabulary to name their feelings, narrate their experiences, and empathise with the experiences of others through literature. Teachers who model patience, empathy, and respectful dialogue while facilitating discussions on sensitive literary or social themes help learners develop emotional regulation and interpersonal skills alongside linguistic competence. NEP 2020 explicitly foregrounds the holistic, multidimensional development of learners, including ethical reasoning, empathy, and constitutional values, positioning language and literature study as a natural vehicle for value education (Ministry of Education, 2020). Bengali literature, with its long tradition of humanist and socially conscious writing, offers rich material for cultivating values such as compassion, social justice, and cultural pride, provided teachers are equipped to facilitate value-oriented discussion rather than treating such texts merely as comprehension passages. Teacher education programmes must therefore incorporate training in socio-emotional learning frameworks, classroom dialogue facilitation, and trauma-sensitive pedagogy, recognising that many learners, particularly in economically marginalised or historically underserved regions, bring emotional and social vulnerabilities into the classroom that language teachers are uniquely positioned to address through sensitive, values-anchored instruction.

6. Discussion

The five pillars articulated above, digital literacy, inclusive pedagogy, multilingual instruction, critical thinking and creativity, and socio-emotional and value-based teaching, are not discrete competencies to be developed in isolation but deeply interconnected capacities that together constitute holistic language teacher readiness. A teacher who integrates digital tools without inclusive sensitivity, for instance, may inadvertently widen the digital divide; a teacher who champions mother-tongue instruction without cultivating critical thinking may reproduce rote learning in a different linguistic medium. The synthesis of these pillars therefore demands a fundamental redesign of teacher education curricula, moving away from siloed methodology courses toward integrated, practice-based training that mirrors the complexity of real classrooms.

This reimagining carries particular weight for regional-language teacher education institutions such as those preparing Bengali teachers in districts like Alipurduar, which serve linguistically and socio-economically diverse populations at the geographic and administrative periphery of the state. Such institutions are uniquely positioned to model the very inclusion and multilingual sensitivity that national policy envisions, provided they receive adequate institutional support, faculty development, and access to digital infrastructure. The gap between policy aspiration, as articulated in NEP 2020, and ground-level implementation remains a

persistent challenge; teacher educators themselves often lack sustained professional development in digital pedagogy, inclusive practice, or multilingual methodology, a gap that teacher education institutions must urgently address if the next generation of language teachers is to be genuinely future-ready. The discussion, therefore, points toward an implementation challenge as much as a conceptual one: the vision of the future-ready language educator must be operationalised through concrete curricular reform, sustained mentorship, and institutional investment.

7. Recommendations

Based on the analysis presented, several recommendations emerge for teacher education institutions, curriculum designers, and policymakers. First, B.Ed and language teacher education curricula should embed dedicated modules on digital pedagogy specific to language teaching, including training in regional-language digital tools, rather than generic educational technology instruction alone. Second, inclusive pedagogy should be mainstreamed across all language method courses rather than confined to a single elective, ensuring that every prospective teacher graduates with practical strategies for differentiated instruction. Third, teacher education institutions must develop concrete pedagogical frameworks for implementing NEP 2020's multilingual vision, including translanguaging strategies and structured approaches to teaching the three languages in coordination rather than isolation. Fourth, assessment practices in teacher education programmes should be reformed to reward creative and critical engagement with language over rote reproduction, modelling the assessment reform expected at the school level. Fifth, socio-emotional learning and value education should be explicitly integrated into language pedagogy courses, equipping teachers to facilitate sensitive classroom dialogue. Finally, sustained in-service professional development, mentorship networks, and institutional collaboration between teacher education colleges and school systems are essential to bridge the gap between policy vision and classroom reality, particularly in geographically and linguistically diverse regions.

8. Conclusion

The realisation of Viksit Bharat @2047 depends fundamentally on the capacity of India's education system to prepare teachers who can navigate the complexity of twenty-first-century classrooms with competence, empathy, and vision. Language teachers, given their unique position at the intersection of communication, culture, and cognition, bear a particular responsibility in this national project. This paper has argued that the traditional model of the language teacher as a transmitter of grammar and content is no longer adequate, and that future-ready language educators must instead be cultivated as facilitators of communication, inclusive practitioners, multilingual mediators, critical thinkers, and socio-emotionally attuned guides. For regional-language teacher education, particularly in Bengali-medium contexts such as Alipurduar, this reimagining offers both a challenge and an opportunity: the challenge of

institutional and curricular transformation, and the opportunity to model, from the periphery, the inclusive, multilingual, and digitally empowered education envisioned for the nation's centenary of independence. Only through such deliberate and sustained reimagining can language teacher education fulfil its promise of preparing educators equal to the aspirations of Viksit Bharat @2047.

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