INVESTIGATING ANTHROPOCENTRISM IN NEP 2020: AN ECOLOGICAL APPROACH

Article

ABSTRACT

The rising capitalism and consumerism act as the driving force in making the education policy purely anthropocentric. The present paper analysed how the current education policy is skewed towards anthropocentrism, deliberating primarily on human rights while exhibiting green washing behaviour throughout the policy. It tries to inquire whether the steps towards sustainable growth show a lack of sense of belonging to the planet. How readily does it contribute to the carbon footprint when we already contribute to other kinds of pollution, leading to artificial disasters? Will the policy's reiteration of affinity towards cultural heritage help students grapple with climate concerns? How much does it focus on developing climate crisis education? This work will explore the stated concerns extensively and propose to rethink the human-nature relationship perpetuated in the policy. It will also emphasise the significance of an Anthropocene-informed educational framework to mitigate the climate crisis.

Keywords : *anthropocentrism, greenwashing behaviour, NEP 2020*

Introduction

The Anthropocene is marked by human effects on the world and atmosphere on a global scale that started around the 18th century (Crutzen & Stoermer 2021). Human language is remarkably anthropocentric. It makes one develop ideological assumptions that solely abound in human well-being, like believing in the unremitting availability of natural resources, one among many, thereby fashioning our language and the world in the ways we want. To exemplify, Luu (2019) explains the anthropocentric nature of English grammar by referring to Halliday, who marks the distinction in the use of pronoun (he, she, it) and categories of noun (uncountable and countable) for human and non-human, which not only belittles the non-human, but also exhibits a callous disregard to it. About human being's unecological use of language, Chen (2016) describes Halliday's appraisal of "linguistic anthropocentrism" as "… can be understood in two senses: on the one hand, in everyday communications nature and non-human creatures are often addressed in mere categories of usefulness, which demonstrates the sense of utilitarian anthropocentrism embedded in daily language usage; on the other hand, ecological issues are often escalated by discourses promoting non sustainable actions (109)." One among many such discourses is the educational policy. The rising capitalism and consumerism act as the driving force in making the education policy purely anthropocentric. The current education policy is critically examined in this study, which also highlights its anthropocentric focus and propensity to prioritise human rights while engaging in greenwashing, or the superficial concern for the environment. It calls into question whether the strategy actually promotes a sense of belonging on a global scale or if it unintentionally fuels environmental deterioration, such as carbon emissions and other types of pollution. The study also evaluates the extent of climate crisis education in the policy, looks at whether highlighting cultural heritage can effectively address climate challenges, and discovers ecological metaphors that expose greenwashing practices.

There are three different traditions in ecolinguistics: Haugenian, biolinguistics, and Hallidayan. The paper uses the Hallidayan one to closely read the NEP document as it situates the study within the paradigm of ecolinguistics and critical discourse analysis, which falls within the scope of this paper. It will critically analyse the policy document to identify the 'sins of greenwashing' embedded in it.

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Greenwashing Behaviour and Sustainable Development

Greenwashing was first introduced in 1986 by an environmentalist, Jay Westervelt. With the rising public awareness about the consequences of climate change, the capitalist society is compelled to disclose information regarding the nature of its products and services, i.e to reveal how much and in what ways these are environmentally friendly. In their review paper, Netto, Sobral, Rebeiro and Soares (2020) emphasise, "To reach the integration of social and environmental concerns in business operations, companies must be sustainable and socially responsible, not only economically. They have to aim at the three bottom lines: economic, environmental, and social performance of people, planet, and profit." (p.2) Thus, the stakeholders majorly work on green marketing strategies to assert themselves as socially responsible beings. Therefore, the proliferation of the green market ultimately leads to greenwashing behaviour. Green washing is defined as "the intersection of two firm behaviours: poor environmental performance and positive communication about environmental performance" (Burbano V, 2011, cited in Netto et al, 2020, p.2). To identify such behaviour, the following 'sins of greenwashing' are listed by Terra Choice (2010) and Scanlan (2017) to help consumers understand how they can be misled in the name of making a 'green' choice:

1. The sin of the hidden trade-off
2. The sin of no proof
3. The sin of vagueness
4. The sin of worshipping false labels
5. The sin of irrelevance
6. The sin of the lesser of two evils
7. The sin of fibbing
8. The sin of fearmongering
9. The sin of false hopes
10. The sin of broken promises
11. The sin of injustice
12. The sin of hazardous consequences
13. The sin of profits over people and the environment

Sustainable development tends to be both anthropocentric and growth-driven. (Netto et al, 2020). The Education Policy 2020 discusses changes in the education system in a sustainable, social, and economic way. The policy's preamble states, "It is essential that youth and children in the country are equipped with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values as well as employable skills that would enable them to contribute to India's social, economic and political transformation." (p. 27). However, it does not state that the youth should primarily focus on nature conservation and restoration for a sustainable future, thereby observing the sin of profit over the environment. Any such large-scale planning needs to acknowledge our uncertain and vulnerable present-future. Adopting the greenwashing behaviour will not do any good to the vulnerable planet, ultimately to the lives on Earth.

Moreover, India is one of the major greenhouse gas emitters and one of the countries that is contributing to projected climate change. The country itself is experiencing and battling changes in climate and the impacts of climate change, which include disasters such as water crises, heat waves, droughts, cyclones, landslides and flooding. This has adversely affected people's health and livelihoods.

Any large-scale planning and development for economic growth somehow disturbs the lives, livelihoods, and nature in specific ways. To exemplify, Gadgil and Guha (1994) in their seminal work state that tribals are evicted from their homelands in the name of growth. Such decisions that cause displacement affect the ecology of people accustomed to their own lands for ages.Furthermore, in the education sector, most of the concerns perpetuated through schools are animal extinction, water crisis and flood situation. However, issues related to e-waste disposal pollution, carbon footprint and population displacement are scarcely disseminated through education at school, thereby observing the lesser of two evils.

Though all kinds of activities related to economic growth keep sustainable development as its focal point, the preference of humans over nature/planet is observed throughout the policy and planning. The future they plan to prepare seems ignorant to the implications of serious issues like carbon footprint and climate crisis. Martilla (2020),

while describing Romania's sustainable development strategy in her seminal work, states that the goals of sustainable development, "…denies agencies to non-humans who are not even at all considered as relevant agents, although they are the first to suffer from biodiversity loss and actions taken to sustain anthropocentric economic growth." (p.104) Hence, it becomes critical to establish an association between policy planning promises and socio-economic reality, and identify those tangible action plans that incorporate sustainability models with equity and environmental justice.

The education policy tends to propose that education be in tandem with environmental and social sustainability. The outcomes associated with schools in terms of achievement, attendance, and completing education are very dependent on environmental factors that interact with students' lived experiences. In his budget speech, Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said that by 2022, every block with more than 50% ST population and at least 20,000 tribal persons will have an Ekalavya Model Residential School. The statement needs to be scrutinised for its practical implications too. The 104 million Indians are notified as STs and the literacy rate of STs has increased to 72.1% in June 2022 according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey report.(Khanna & Masoodi, Februaru, 2018).Though the literacy rate increased over the years, and the 2009 Right to Education Act was implemented to make free and compulsory education available to all children between the ages of six and 14, significant discrepancies exist in enrolment rates and drop-outs across the country. One of the many reasons for such disparities is environmental factors. The flood-prone areas that include West Bengal, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab have many scheduled tribes too. However, the document of NEP 2020 fails to acknowledge environmental factors as well as the reason for the increasing number of school drop-outs, thereby exhibiting the sin of vagueness; the reason mentioned is not clearly and specifically defined. The document spells out the reason as stated below, which is accurate but incomplete. It says that,

Tribal communities and children from Scheduled Tribes also face disadvantages at multiple levels due to various historical and geographical factors. Children from tribal communities often find their school education irrelevant and foreign to their lives, both culturally and academically. (p.25)

Thus, unless the problem looming around is acknowledged, one cannot claim to attain sustainable development goals.

The document reiterates that the teaching-learning process and curriculum must develop students in all possible ways. Still, it only makes passing remarks regarding their responsibilities towards nature conservation and environmental protection. It aims to produce a skilled class to represent India globally. Skilled classes are the highly valued goal of any nation; nevertheless, it only remains anthropocentric, which is unhealthy for developing countries like India. The following text from the document proves its anthropocentric nature:

"The curriculum must include basic arts, crafts, humanities, games, sports and fitness, languages, literature, culture, and values, in addition to science and mathematics, to develop all aspects and capabilities of learners; and make education more well-rounded, useful, and fulfilling to the learner. Education must build character and enable learners to be ethical, rational, compassionate, and caring while preparing them for gainful, fulfilling employment."(NEP 2020, p.3)

The greenwashing behaviour is evident in the policy document as it talks about environmental education quite incomprehensively. The education of ecological education finds its place, although without keeping pace with the carbon emissions. The following lines from the document extensively talk about introducing technology-assisted learning in the early years of education itself:

"Once internet-connected smartphones or tablets are available in all homes and/or schools, schools will develop smart classrooms, in a phased manner, for using digital pedagogy and enriching the teaching-learning process with online resources and collaborations". (p.20)

Adopting digital pedagogy will accentuate India's contribution towards the digital carbon footprint. It refers to the consequences that the environment will bear due to the use of digital technologies, including electronic devices,

software applications, and data centres. According to a report presented in Energyworld.com (December 5, 2023), India's contribution to carbondioxide emissions is estimated to have increased by 8.2 per cent over the year 2022. Such an anthropocentric approach will further worsen the condition of the planet, leading to unsustainable consumerism. Environmental education at present requires more awareness about the impact of digitally reliant pedagogy on the Earth and its habitat.

The NEP 2020 explicitly states the importance of "building upon India's traditions and value systems." It includes a rich heritage of living in close harmony with nature, traditional knowledge about sustainable practices, and a deep respect for the environment, often embedded in cultural practices, folklore, and indigenous knowledge systems. Integrating these aspects can give students a unique, culturally relevant lens to understand environmental stewardship. It advocates for a holistic and integrated approach to education, breaking down rigid separations between subjects. It allows for the seamless integration of cultural heritage with environmental studies, science, social sciences, etc. For example, students could learn about traditional water management systems or land cultivation in history class and analyse their sustainability in science. Though the claim that the rationale behind deletions from the NCERT curriculum is to reduce students' academic burden after the COVID-19 pandemic and to create a more manageable syllabus aligned with the NEP 2020 and include current issues, the recent step to remove the chapter "Kings and Chronicles: The Mughal Courts" from the Class 12 history syllabus and "The Industrial Revolution" from Class 11 world history contradicts with what the policy upholds regarding promotion of affinity towards cultural heritage. These chapters may offer a glimpse into certain critical explorations, such as how the Mughal era or the Industrial Revolution adopted/propagated sustainable practices or how they mitigated or contributed to the climate change crisis. For example, Akbarnama mentions the establishment of gardens and parks, which may have been seen as recreational spaces but also served as experiments in landscape design and plant cultivation. The removal of the chapter on the "Industrial Revolution" from the NCERT syllabus could be interpreted as a downplaying of the historical roots of the climate change crisis. The Industrial Revolution marks the beginning of large-scale fossil fuel consumption and industrial processes that significantly increased greenhouse gas emissions. Removing this chapter could be seen as overlooking a crucial historical context for understanding the origins of climate change.While the environmental consequences of industrialisation (pollution, resource depletion) might still be touched upon in other contexts, a dedicated chapter would have provided a more in-depth analysis of how human activities began to alter the environment on a larger scale, drastically. This historical perspective is vital for grasping the long-term trajectory leading to the climate crisis. Hence, the step to remove such chapters exhibits the sin of irrelevance; a step that may be truthful but is unimportant or unhelpful for the policy seeking environmentally preferable outcomes.

Conclusion

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a comprehensive framework that aims to overhaul India's education system. The analysis of this paper reveals a potential tension between the policy's stated goals of environmental awareness and its underlying anthropocentric assumptions. Anthropocentrism, the belief that humans are the central or most important entities in the universe, can significantly affect how we perceive and interact with the natural world. To foster a more ecologically sound education system, NEP 2020 needs to move beyond anthropocentrism and embrace a more ecocentric approach. It would involve recognising the intrinsic value of nature, promoting an understanding of the interconnectedness of all living beings and the importance of respecting the rights of non-human entities, incorporating ethical frameworks that emphasise the moral standing of the natural world and the importance of living in harmony with it, and adopting teaching pedagogies that place nature and the environment at the center of the curriculum.By adopting a more ecocentric approach, NEP 2020 can play a crucial role in shaping a generation of ecologically conscious citizens committed to protect the planet for all its inhabitants.

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EXPLORING TEACHERS'...

The computed F-value (0.744) for the subject area is smaller than the table value (3.04) at the specified degrees of freedom. This indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the groups with respect to subject area.

Article

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it can be said that teachers' self-efficacy beliefs regarding the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in K–12 instruction are largely consistent across different factors like grade level instructed, nature of AI tools utilised, availability of these tools, teaching experience, and subject matter. This indicates that despite all these variables, teachers have equal confidence levels in applying AI tools in teaching. Yet, a strong difference exists with respect to school type, which means institutional context is instrumental in influencing teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. Schools can also vary regarding available resources, professional development opportunities, administrative support, and general technology readiness for integration, which can directly affect teachers' confidence in using AI within their classrooms. These results support the importance of school-level support and specific professional development in making teachers more confident and effective with AI tools for education.

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