Critically Examining the Conceptualisations of Language and Literacy in the National Curriculum Frameworks

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the conceptualisations of language and literacy in the National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage (2022) and National Curriculum Framework for School Education (2023) developed in consonance with the National Education Policy, 2020 (NEP 2020). The criticality of early literacy and numeracy leveraged on the pedagogical and transactional aspects of the same, are a major focus of the documents among other areas of early childhood care and education. The analysis is organised around the conceptualisations of Foundational Literacy in the NEP and the curriculum frameworks, analysis of the curricular contexts in the curricular frameworks and assessment and learning. It points to three conceptual shifts that have majorly shaped literacy pedagogy in the documents, an emphasis on comprehension, an understanding of literacy from a developmental perspective, and a focus on a balanced view of literacy for pedagogical implementation. The paper suggests a more nuanced understanding of language and literacy which is organically connected with the sociocultural context and enables learners to critically examine the relevance of literacy in their lives. It also points to the need for more concerted efforts across stakeholders in order to accomplish the agenda set by NEP 2020 for Foundational Literacy.
Keywords: *Early Literacy, Emergent Literacy, Foundational Literacy, NEP 2020*

Introduction

After almost three decades, the Ministry of Education launched the much-awaited National Education Policy 2020. One of the salient changes that the policy has brought about is in the structuring of the school education, from the previous 10+2 to the new pedagogical and curricular restructuring of 5+3+3+4, which now includes a consolidated focus on Foundational Stage comprising three years of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in continuation with two years of primary schooling. With the creation of the Foundational Stage, the NEP 2020 has not only emphasised the criticality of ECCE and provided a connection for smooth transitioning from ECCE to school education but has also brought explicit focus on the development of literacy and numeracy in the early years.

Emphasis on ECCE is not exclusive to the NEP 2020. In fact, it has been a subject of increased attention since the National Policy on Education (NPE 1986) which laid extensive prominence to it "as a feeder programme for primary education" (p. 7) and argued for a play-based approach to learning at this stage. The decades following the NPE (1986) saw numerous constitutional directives, regulations, policies and programmes, often discreetly addressing various ECCE related challenges in India. However, the National Curriculum Framework (2005) and the corresponding Position Paper on Early Childhood Education (NCERT,

2006) highlighted gaps in the effective implementation of ECCE largely owing to "the adoption of a fragmented approach and divided responsibility" (NCERT, 2006, p. 12) and made recommendations for developing a common framework to account for the "existence of multiple models, diverse sectors, and different programme approaches" (NCERT, 2006, p. vi). This was followed by the development of the first consolidated National Policy on ECCE (MWCD, 2013) which focused on all concerns related to the care and early learning of children below the age of six years, accompanied by the National ECCE Curriculum Framework (MWCD, 2014) synthesising recommendations of both NCF (2005) and NPECCE (2013).

These developments mark a shift in the significance and understanding of ECCE as more than just a feeder programme to recognising the criticality of this stage in laying the foundations for learning and development for all children whilst also recognising the special features of children's thinking and qualitative differences in children's developmental and contextual needs at this stage. More recently, thus, terms such as Foundational Literacy and Numeracy have found explicit and extensive focus within recent policy and curriculum developments. In consonance with the NEP (2020), NCERT has developed a National Curricular Framework for School Education (NCFSE, 2023) as a comprehensive document, accompanied with a National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage (NCFFS, 2022), with eight more to follow catering to specific curricular areas. ECCE has been the center of concern in all policy documents. All these developments have also brought Foundational Literacy to the centerstage of discussion.

NEP 2020 lays extensive emphasis on Foundational Literacy and has already brought much-needed attention to this domain. The two curriculum framework documents focus on principles and outcomes of learning, how children learn, contexts of schooling, specific pedagogical practices across curricular areas, planning, and assessment. They also emphasise linkages to preparatory stages and strategies for creating a supportive ecosystem for the implementation of quality ECCE. The NIPUN Bharat (2023) document is significant in this regard in providing a 5-tier implementation mechanism for the same. In light of the significance of the document, in this paper we examine the conceptualisation of language and literacy across the recently launched documents, keeping in mind its larger theorisation as a social and critical practice. This paper examines some of the key principles of early literacy that have been highlighted in the document.

Perspectives of language and literacy

The launch of NCFFS (2022) and NCFSE (2023) based on NEP (2020) reflect two significant shifts and developments—one is the criticality of early literacy and numeracy in the Indian context and the second is the focus on the pedagogical and transactional aspects of the same. In order to examine the principles of early literacy in the NEP, NCFFS and NCFSE, it is important to first map the broad perspectives of literacy that reflect the socio-cultural-economic and political contexts in the existing literature.

Traditionally, cognitive and psychological perspectives have dominated literacy conceptualisations, where literacy is viewed largely as a skill, competency or ability of reading and writing, assumed to be developed in a linear and sequential manner, and where attention lies primarily on the individual (Larson & Marsh, 2015). Such perspectives which characterise literacy in strictly technical terms, as a neutral, ahistorical, and decontextualised skill that can be applied in any context, are referred to by Street (1995) as representing an autonomous model of literacy. The autonomous model appoints a unitary, unidirectional view of literacy and assumes that literacy by and in itself intrinsically leads to 'progress', 'civilization', 'individual liberty', and 'social mobility' (Street, 1995).

With ground-breaking works of researchers like Marie Clay (1966), an "emergent literacy" perspective was developed which focussed on observing young children in their early engagement with literacy (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). The introduction of emergent literacy in the 1980s was referred to as a "paradigm shift" (Teale & Sulzby, 1986) and as a "new perspective" (Mason & Allen, 1986). It also implied continuities between early and later (independent) literacy behaviors as opposed to 'reading readiness' which specified a point when children were ready to read and write (Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2003). Researchers have continued to look for transitions between "emergent literacy" and "beginning reading". With the emergent literacy perspective, the focus of early literacy research expanded from "reading" to "literacy," encompassing reading, writing, and oral language development in homes and at school (Mason & Allen, 1986; Sulzby & Teale, 1991).

From these conceptualisations, we have now come to understand literacy as what can be termed a critical sociocultural perspective (Lewis et al., 2007). This perspective has shifted the understanding of language and literacy as an individual's skill or ability to conceptualising literacy as a social and cultural practice (Barton & Hamilton, 2012; Heath, 1983; Steet, 1995). Literacy within this perspective, quite simply put, is something people do, that is, it is an activity, which is embedded in and shaped by history, social context, and institutionalized power (Barton & Hamilton, 2012; Compton-Lilly, 2013). In this respect, literacy practices encompass a wider notion of being linked to and influenced by values, sentiments, dispositions, and social relationships rather than being limited to actions with texts (Perry, 2012). The critical sociocultural perspective, thus, represents what is referred to by Street (1995) as an ideological model of literacy rooted in particular contexts and intricately connected to institutionalised culture and structures of power in society (Street, 2001). It has expanded the purview of literacy to include not just issues of power but empowerment, agency, and identity as well. This plurality of literacy further entails that the perspective is especially sensitive to the changing nature of literacy with respect to changes in the larger social, cultural, economic, political, and material world, and, has expanded the scope to include the concept of 'multiliteracies' (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Multiliteracies have broadened the scope of literacy from the sole focus on print or written forms to viewing literacy as involving multiple modes of visual, gestural, spatial, and other forms of representation (Perry, 2012). It encompasses the recognition of multimodality (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) and entails technologies of communication and information (Green & Beavis, 2013).

The concept of critical literacy has been influenced by the wider discipline of critical social theory (Foley, 2015) and connects to literacy predominantly through the works of Freire (1970), who has envisaged literacy as a process of *conscientização* (or consciousness), which entails linking the word with the world for facilitating the purposes of empowerment. As Luke and Freebody (1997) suggest, critical literacy largely marks a "coalition of educational interests committed to engaging with the possibilities that the technologies of writing and other modes of inscription offer for social change, cultural diversity, economic equity and political enfranchisement" (p. 1). In this sense, the emphasis of critical literacy is not just on the critique of the dominant but also on designing (or redesigning) alternate social worlds (Foley, 2015).

We have examined these perspectives to enable us to understand the literacy conceptualisations proposed in the NCFFS (2022) and NCFSE (2023). The developmental perspective gives insight into the complexities of learning language and literacy by young children while the critical sociocultural perspective enables us to analyse language and literacy as ideological practices grounded

in local contexts. Thus, the ideological and autonomous frameworks become significant lenses to examine language and literacy practices across contexts.

Framework for Analysis

In order to do this analysis, the framework has been conceptualised around three aspects (1) Conceptualisations of Foundational Literacy in the NEP and the curriculum frameworks; (2) the Curricular contexts in the curricular frameworks; (3) Assessment and learning

Conceptualisations of Foundational Literacy in the NEP and the Curriculum Frameworks

Even though the NEP (2020) and its corresponding curriculum frameworks are the first to explicitly mention Foundational Literacy, references to literacy development in the early years have found expression in earlier policies as well. The NCF (2005) in this regard have criticised the prevalent mechanical, linear, and sequential approach to literacy education and instead argued for meaningful engagement with opportunities for individualised practice at all stages. For the primary years, it envisaged a holistic approach to language and literacy with listening, speaking, reading and writing development happening in conjecture. Following suit with NCF (2005), the National ECCE Curriculum Framework (2014) also argued for opportunities to foster early engagement with literacy and creation of a print rich environment for the same. It alluded to developmental perspective on literacy, referred to in terms of "reading and writing readiness" (p. 24), a term which signals quite an opposite concept from developmental perspective within the larger literature on early literacy but which was used within the document to describe the development of early reading and writing processes.

With an explicit and detailed focus on 'Foundational Literacy', the NEP (2020) and its corresponding curricular frameworks have consolidated and extended the earlier conceptualisations of language and literacy by formalising three main conceptual shifts that have majorly shaped the documents, namely, an emphasis on comprehension, an understanding of literacy from a developmental perspective, and a focus on a balanced view of literacy for pedagogical implementation. To underscore these shifts and understand their significance, it is first important to note the conceptualisations of language and literacy that have thus far shaped the practices in early language classrooms in Indian settings. As highlighted by the NCFFS (2022), "…early language classrooms are focused mainly on teaching the *varnamala* and *matras*, choral repetition of a text being read by the Teacher or children and copying or handwriting practice." It further states that, "There is little emphasis on meaning-oriented work, and few opportunities are provided for children to develop as readers and writers" (para 4.5.1).

This overt articulation of the gaps is necessary because, for decades, the understandings of language and literacy that have dominated early language classrooms in Indian settings envisaged literacy as a static, monolithic, and mechanical skill of decoding and encoding (Sinha, 2019; Singh, 2019). In such a scenario, the focus lies majorly if not entirely on the sequential mastery of 'sub-skills' of reading, that is, on the formal aspects of reading and writing, and comprehension is seen not as an integral part of becoming literate but rather as an end product of literacy (Kumar, 1993; Sinha, 2010). In contrast to this prevalent notion of literacy, NEP (2020) has referred to Foundational Literacy as "the ability to read and comprehend basic text" (GoI 2020, para 2.1), making comprehension integral to the understanding of literacy even at foundational stages. This is significant in bringing the question of comprehension into the spectrum of literacy learning.

Moreover, adding to the ideas of NEP (2020), the NCFFS (2022) and NCFSE (2023) has appointed a developmental view of literacy which marks the second significant shift in

language and literacy conceptualisation in the documents. The NCFFS (2022) and NCFSE (2023) moved away from understanding literacy as an 'all or none' phenomenon to looking at literacy as a developmental process, with the NCFFS (2022) endorsing the emergent literacy perspective. The NCFFS (2022) defined emergent literacy as, "the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that children develop about reading and writing before they become conventional or fluent readers and writers." It further adds, "With adequate exposure to print and opportunities to read and write, children could start learning to read and write from a very young age and much before they are able to decode and write conventionally" (GoI 2022, para 4.5.1.1). The NCFFS (2022) accepted the resulting 'approximations' as part of the early literacy developmental process. For instance, the document introduced ideas of 'pretend reading', 'invented spelling', 'drawing', 'scribblings', and so on as legitimate reading and writing processes (pp 112-113). These developmental shifts that take into account processes have been well documented in the literature on emergent literacy (Teale & Sulzby, 1986).

Furthermore, the NCFFS (2022) and NCFSE (2023) avoided any exclusive focus on the phonics or whole language approach, which rather characterise the politics of literacy education (Pearson, 2004), and instead argued for a focus away from a purely sequential literacy approach to a 'balanced literacy' approach. Balanced literacy emphasises literacy pedagogy based on the needs of students using appropriate materials of interest (Reutzel & Cooter, 2003). It rests on a balance between: teacher-centered explicit instruction and learner-centered discovery, the use of skill-based and meaning-based lessons, the use of trade books and the use of published materials, the use of informal observation and formal assessment strategies, and teaching use of language and awareness of language (Blair-Larson & Williams, 1999). The NCFSE (2023) also emphasised on the balance between whole class instruction and giving space to students to individually engage with reading and writing on their own.

Broadly, these three perspectives also reflect a shift in the philosophical, conceptual, and implementation aspects of the NCFFS (2022) and NCFSE (2023). These understandings of early literacy indicate a displacement of the sequential model of listening-speaking-reading-writing to a model that enables us to understand that these processes are simultaneous (CARE & USAID, 2016). Lastly, even though these broad shifts are of critical significance, these changes also need to be examined more deeply vis-a-vis the larger perspectives of literacy.

The Curricular Contexts in the Curricular Frameworks

While the documents provide a fairly detailed description of literacy strategies, there is a need to focus on more organic and holistic approaches in order to connect literacy experiences across contexts. This section will present an in-depth analysis of the key principles highlighted in the documents and also identify some gaps and areas that need more attention.

Discontinuous and autonomous approach to language and literacy education

The NCFFS (2022) and NCFSE (2023) combined, are fairly extensive in their coverage of the components related to early language and literacy education, dedicating whole chapters to explicitly stating the principles of language and literacy education, pedagogy, content selection and organisation, and of assessment, along with discussing particular strategies for each. However, in their expanse, the documents are not able to fully address several concepts related to the components of language and literacy education. The NCFFS (2022), while discussing its approach to language education and literacy, stated that,

> The concept of reading and writing (i.e., emergent literacy and emergent reading comprehension and written expression) is developed in a child through the development of oral language; meaning-making (including making sense of and interpreting images and other symbol-systems such as gestures, facial expressions, art, music, dance, drama, games); and exposure to print material. (p. 78)

This indicates that the document sees a continuation and connection between oral language development and the development of reading and writing. Moreover, while discussing strategies for literacy, the NCFFS (2022) appointed the emergent literacy perspective, which rejects the idea of sequence or hierarchy between oral and written language development, arguing instead that in literate environments, listening, speaking, reading and writing skills develop concurrently and interrelatedly (Teal and Sulzby, 1986).

On the other hand, however, the NCFFS (2022) also held the view that "reading and writing does not come naturally the way oral language does, there must be plenty of 'handholding' through meaningful contexts" (p. 78). Similarly, the NCFSE (2023) whilst talking about literacy development, paid exclusive focus to reading development that too as happening in discrete and incremental 'stages.' These stages highlighted by the NCFSE (2023) envisioned reading, by the end of preparatory level, as hierarchically developing from first acquiring oral language, to then developing "decoding" skills and finally being able to shift the focus on meaning-making (p. 44).

These views do not follow from the emergent literacy perspective—in fact, it points to a disconnect between oral language and literacy. Given the rich oral tradition in the Indian context, an attempt needs to be made to enable young learners to see the connections between oral language and literacy. Furthermore, the NCFFS (2022) also proposed that "the concept of reading and writing... is optimally taught first through a

single language, which ideally is the home language whenever possible" (p. 73). In this respect, the idea of multilingualism, multimodality, and diverse nuances of language use in multiple contexts, which is accepted for oral language development has not been extended to literacy development. As such, the document is ambiguous in its approach to language and literacy education and also presents a discontinuous approach to literacy development, where the continuation and connection between oral language development and literacy are not clearly outlined.

The NCFFS (2022) has presented strategies for literacy, in the form of models of literacy education, such as emergent literacy, balanced literacy, and the four-block approach as discrete simplified versions, without adequate contextualisation. Further, the use of balanced literacy as an approach does not lend itself to context building. The actual implementation of balanced literacy depends on the teacher to a large extent. It has also been noted that balanced literacy is a philosophical perspective, not a specific method of instruction that the teacher needs to follow (Fitzgerald, 1999). The transaction of a balanced programme in a classroom is an indication of how the teacher has been able to emphasise the diverse components of literacy based on beliefs. Teachers play a crucial role in implementing the right balance of literature and skills instruction so that participation by the students is maximised.

In the Indian context, it may be noted that many children come to school from non-print backgrounds. Advocating for specific models of literacy that assume a print-rich environment, may alienate many children who are already on the margins. Further, the NCFFS (2022) states that, "Many children do not get exposure to print and may join school with little awareness of print. They need to be initiated into understanding print through a print-rich environment at school and through engagement with books" (p.113). This also symbolises an emphasis on the 'deficit' in children's environment and

resources, without any reference to what children do bring into the classroom. These parameters are a reflection of an autonomous and decontextualised approach to language and literacy education.

Examining language and literacy conceptualisation from the socio-cultural perspective

As the section on perspectives of language and literacy has highlighted, the concept of literacy has evolved from understandings based purely on the *"in-the-head"* abilities of individuals to understanding literacy as *"in-the-world"* activities embedded in social, cultural, historical, political, and material contexts (Compton-Lilly, 2015). This shift in understanding has also brought forth the plurality of literacies, or literacy practices, and the contested nature of the same, where some literacy practices acquire dominance over others (Barton & Hamilton, 2012; Heath, 1983; Gee, 1996). As a result, critical significance is placed on local, contextual, and contingent conceptualisations of literacy, and in developing organic approaches to language and literacy education. Luke (2003b), in this regard, argues that it is "utterly naive" to formulate "state or national literacy policy just on the basis of a debate over test scores and methods" (pp. 61-62). Literacy policy, instead, should reflect and respond to the challenges of changing times, of new identities resulting from new economies and cultural conditions, which are further made complex with the emergence of globalisation and new technologies (Luke, 2003a; Luke, 2003b). In other words, literacy policy requires a more complex focus and understanding of the varying contexts in which people are acquiring and using literacies (Luke, 2003b).

The NCFFS (2022) and NCFSE (2023) have discussed at length the Indian traditions, making reference majorly to the ancient practices and systems as well as listed some of the pioneers and thinkers of the past, without an adequate analysis of how these may inform language and literacy pedagogy in today's classrooms. The NCFFS (2022) analysis and understanding of the contemporary contexts is limited to discussing the current institutional limitations, such as challenges of learning crises, poor learning outcomes, institutional diversity, unregulated private sector, issues of access and enrollment, and issues related to teacher education for the preschool years (pp. 27-30). The policy documents do not discuss the variety of *literacies* existing in the Indian context as well as the variety of contexts in which literacies are practiced and acquired in the current times. The documents have also not mentioned some of the effective organic approaches developed in the Indian context, for instance, Jan Shiksha Abhiyan of Madhya Pradesh (Saxena, 2010), Mathura Pilot Project launched by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT, 2012-2013), works undertaken by the Organisation Early Literacy Project (Jayaram, 2008) and such, which even though are far, few and sporadic but represent significant insights for contextualisation.

Missing focus on Critical Literacy

The NEP (2020) acknowledges the role of education as the most effective means of achieving social justice and equality (para 6.1), and thus emphasises, "full equity and inclusion" as the driving force for "all educational decisions" (p.5). The corresponding curriculum documents further reiterates these commitments, with the NCFFS (2022) also highlighting three paradigm shifts, of which one is the "transitioning to an emphasis on critical and analytical thinking rather than rote learning" (p. 34). However, commitment to social justice, equity, and inclusion as well as the development of critical and analytical thinking through and within education, remains symbolic unless concrete and concerted steps are taken to reflect and translate these into pedagogical and classroom practices right from the Foundational Stage.

Current theorising argues that critical literacy approaches are appropriate not just for older and 'more advanced' students but also for early childhood literacy education (Comber, 2012; Lee, 2011), with several studies effectively operationalizing critical literacy pedagogies and curriculum for the early years (Dyson, 1993; Dyson, 1997; O'Brien & Comber, 2000; Vasquez, 2001; Vasquez, 2010). However, there is no mention of critical literacy for language and literacy education in the NCFFS (2022) and the NCFSE (2023). On the contrary, elaborating on the 'stages' of reading development, the NCFSE (2023) has reserved the development of reading for new information, ideas, concepts, and imagining possibilities to be achieved only by the end of the middle stage, that is, in Grades VI to VIII. It further reserved the development of critical understanding of text, consideration of multiple viewpoints, as well as engaging in construction and reconstruction of worldviews to be achieved only by the secondary stage, that is, in Grades IX to XII, by much older students, instead of synthesizing the critical aspects of reading into the very process of reading development from the Foundational Stages itself.

Critical literacy practices, which make apparent the relationship between language and power; enable students to question the dominant worldviews and social practices that maintained those worldviews; as well as take actions promoting diversity and empowerment, are most suitably oriented to address issues of social justice and equity (Comber, 2012; Lee, 2011; Lewison et al., 2008). Luke (2012) has argued, as the age of new media and technologies have engendered more complex and dynamic forms of culture, identity, social movements and politics, it has also expanded the notion of literacy to include multiplicity of semiotic forms. Thus, what is required of the curriculum policy is not a mere inclusion of "new technologies" or a focus on "designer career" (p. 9), rather to reflect the "possibility of using new literacies to change relations of power, both people's everyday social relations and larger geopolitical and economic relations" (p. 9) through pedagogies of critical literacy. In the Indian context especially, where reading and writing practices in schools have been alienating for marginalised students, it becomes even more imperative to bring in critical perspectives so that they are able to see the relevance of the worldview being presented to them.

Assessment and learning:

The NCF 2005 emphasised a learner-centric approach and aimed to promote holistic development among students and laid down a philosophical and pedagogical foundation for the Indian education system. The document supports a competency-based assessment, but also warns against assessment which mechanically breaks down competencies into sub-competencies and sub-skills with an assumption that a total of these skills are the competencies. Keeping in view a holistic development perspective, NEP 2020 and the consequent curriculum frameworks emphasise on learning outcomes with a view to understand and implement what students should know, understand, and be able to do at different stages of their education.

The NCFFS (2022) and NCFSE (2023) connect the learning outcomes with the competencies, curricular goals and the aims of education. These are seen to enable teachers to plan their curricular transactions for attaining specific competencies in a sequential progression. The document also points to the need for teachers to have autonomy to define the learning outcomes that would be appropriate for their classroom contexts while ensuring the attainment of the competencies. In fact, it also provides several specific examples of what kind of classroom activities a teacher could engage in order to achieve specific learning outcomes for specific goals. For the foundational years especially, while diverse kinds of services for young children are on the rise, adherence to some specific learning outcomes would ensure that children are

learning and not only participating in the programmes. However, there is also a need of caution that documentation of learning outcomes strike a balance between defining clear expectations and allowing for flexibility, creativity, and a broader educational experience that goes beyond mere compliance with predetermined outcomes. The previous sections have highlighted the complexities of the developmental perspectives, contexts of learning, the nonlinear nature of literacy-- thus, posing the need for a nuanced approach to assessment and learning of the same. Thus, effective implementation of learning outcomes should consider the specific needs and goals of students and educators while fostering a more holistic approach to learning. An effective implementation of the NIPUN Bharat Mission would enable teachers to understand the multiple perspectives of literacy and the perspectives that children bring to the classrooms.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article focused on the conceptualisations of early literacy in the NEP (2020), NCFFS (2022) and NCFSE (2023). The critical analysis indicates that language and literacy education has received the much-needed attention in both documents in creating a more holistic and engaged model for transaction in classrooms. The two curricular documents have been envisioned to be 'aspirational' in its approach with its goals to leverage the quality of language and literacy pedagogy in the country by bringing about a paradigm shift. The framework also has its gaze set on use of technology in an inclusive manner for diverse students. The analysis points to a need for more organic, ideological approaches that provide spaces for critical engagement across contexts.

One of the major reasons for the inadequate focus on literacy pedagogy has been the lack of literacy experts in the country. As a result, knowledge generation in conceptualisation and theorisation has taken a backseat. While some organisations have developed contextually relevant models of literacy pedagogy in the country, there is a dearth of systematic research in this area (Sinha, 2019). In all of this discussion centering on language literacy and its curriculum and pedagogy, it is also important to keep in mind that the classroom teacher plays the most important role in the transaction of the curriculum. It is the teacher who has the task of differentiating instruction for the diverse students in the classroom and ensuring emphasis on skill based as well as holistic and literature-based activities in the classroom. It is also imperative that the classroom engagement provides opportunities for developmentally and contextually appropriate, meaningful literacy instruction, independent and critical thinking. A focus on 'methods' of instruction may not be fruitful. It thus becomes critical to prepare pre-service teachers to work with the multilingual, multimodal languages and literacies that children bring with them into the classrooms. Moving towards achieving the goals of foundational literacy, NIPUN Bharat (2023) has set the task for all stakeholders for,

> building the capacities of teachers and academic resource persons; engaging parents and community members, contextualizing and creating quality teaching learning material for both children and teachers, devising mechanisms for assessment and regularly tracking children's learning, and creating infrastructure for universalization of foundational learning, etc. (p.2)

An important consideration is also to enable children to become critically engaged in the process of becoming literate. There is a long way to achieve goals of literacy—but it is important to continue advocating across all stakeholders.

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