



Language of unity

Context:

- Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami has rejected the possibility of implementing the **three-language formula advocated in the National Education Policy (NEP 2020)** in the state of Tamil Nadu.



What is three language formula?

- The three-language formula for language learning was formulated in 1968 by the Ministry of Education of the Government of India and made part of the **National Policy on Education, 1968**.
- The three-language formula provides for the study of “Hindi, English and modern Indian language (preferably one of the southern languages) in the Hindi speaking states and Hindi, English and the Regional language in the non-Hindi speaking States”.

The issue of language:

- The language of education has been an **emotive and political issue over the years**. There have been **agitations against** the imposition of Hindi in the southern states in general and Tamil Nadu in particular. Tamil Nadu has been traditionally opposed to any attempt to introduce Hindi as a compulsory language of learning or administration.
- The origin of the linguistic row goes back to the debate on the official language. In the Constituent Assembly, Hindi was voted as the official language by a single vote and English was allowed to continue to be used as an associate official language for 15 years. The Official Languages Act came



into effect on the expiry of this 15-year period in 1965. This was the background in which the anti-Hindi agitation took place.

- Tamil Nadu witnessed widespread agitations in 1965 when the then Congress state government had attempted to make Hindi the state's official language.
- Opposition from Tamil Nadu in 2019 had forced the Centre to amend the draft NEP and withdraw a proposal to teach Hindi as a third language in schools in non-Hindi speaking States. Yet in the recently approved NEP, the three-language formula finds a place.
- Despite the clarification that the NEP, 2020 would not lead to the imposition of any language, this has failed to convince some sections.
- Currently, the three language system is not followed in Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu follows the two-language policy of Tamil and English.
- Education is a state subject and the implementation of any policy lies with the states.

What are relevant constitutional provisions?

- **Article 29 of the Constitution of India** states that any section of the citizens who have a "...distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same."
- **Article 351** gives power to the union government to issue a directive for the development of the Hindi language.

What are arguments in favour and against the three-language formula?

Arguments in favour of the three-language formula:

- **Cognitive development of the child:** Important committees with respect to the issue have noted that learning languages are an important part of a child's cognitive development. Its implementation **promotes multilingualism and multilingual skills would add to the cognitive skills of the children.**
- **Promoting national unity:** The proponents favouring the three-language formula argue that its implementation **promotes national unity by having a common link language.**



- The adoption of the two language formula in states like Tamil Nadu and Tripura is criticized for depriving students of an opportunity to learn Hindi, often touted as a national link language.
- **Promotion of Hindi Language:** Article 351 of the Constitution notes that efforts should be made to promote the **Hindi language** as the link language and as a **medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India**.

Arguments against the three language formula:

- **Burden on the students:** The three-language formula is also a bad idea in the present form with regard to children actually acquiring language skills.
- The three-language formula will have a **very heavy cognitive burden on a young child** of five to seven years as each of the Indian languages has a very large number of visual units (aksharas) between 400 and 700, to be mastered in a limited time frame. This formulation is developmentally inappropriate for young children.
- Several surveys, like ASER, have shown that a vast majority of children are failing to learn to read with comprehension even in one language.
- **Homogenizing move:** The critics of the three-language formula have alleged that its implementation is an attempt to **'homogenize' the diverse linguistic fabric of the country which consists of many regional languages**.
- **Opposition from states:** The three-language formula faces implementational challenges in a **multi-lingual country** like India. A few states have not adopted the formula in principle. Hindi is not taught in the States of Tamil Nadu and Tripura and Puducherry.
- **Politicization:** Language being an emotive issue can be misused by the regional political parties to whip up regional sentiments. This could prove to be **detrimental to national unity**.
- **Implementational challenges:** The three-language formula is also not implemented effectively in states where it is in place.
- The state governments often do not have adequate resources to implement the three-language formula. The **lack of an adequate number of teachers and teachers with the necessary language skills** remains a challenge.



Way forward:

- **Age-appropriate learning:** The focus in primary education should be on using the children's home language, ensuring that they develop strong oral and reading and writing proficiency in the language used as the medium of instruction (the state language).
- English should, initially, be taught only in an oral, communicative manner until Grade 3.
- Additional languages could be formally introduced at subsequent stages like from middle school. The target could be for developing some oral proficiency through natural and communication-oriented exposure to the language in Grade 6 or later. Also, this additional language should not be a mandatory requirement and the choice should depend on the child or parent or the school.
- **Choosing the link language:** Any language that's supposed to become a unifier language for the country must have the necessary pull factors.
- **English could act as the necessary link language, with English also emerging as a global link language.**
- **Voluntary learning over imposition:** Given that compulsion is often met with resistance, instead of imposing new languages, voluntary learning of Hindi should be promoted through schools and institutes like **Dakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha**. There would be no opposition to the voluntary learning of Hindi.
- **The Dakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha was established in Chennai by Mahatma Gandhi in 1918.** The institution imparts Hindi teaching at various levels to anyone who enrolls for its programme.
- There has also been the increasing multilingualism being observed across the country given the high internal migration. This can be encouraged further.
- Out of necessity, many in the State of Tamil Nadu have picked up conversational Hindi to engage with the migrant population that supplies the labour needs of the state.
- **Consultation with states:** The three-language formula has to be implemented in consultation with the State Governments. **India's federal nature and diversity** demand that no language is given supremacy over another.
- **The States could be allowed to follow their own language policy.**