

Contemporary Issue (Language Issue)

Overview of the Issue

Recent language issues in India primarily revolve around the perceived imposition of Hindi, particularly through the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which has led to political and public debate. This includes opposition to the three-language formula, debates over funding for states that resist the policy, and instances of regional language activism and clashes, particularly in southern states. The core of the debate is a tension between promoting national integration through a common language and protecting linguistic diversity and regional identities.

Timeline of Key Events

➤ February/March:

- Tamil Nadu's Chief Minister M.K. Stalin intensified his attack on the central government over alleged Hindi imposition, arguing that the push for a uniform Hindi identity has led to the disappearance of indigenous languages and that non-Hindi speaking states are being compelled to adopt Hindi.
- Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan defended the withholding of Samagra Shiksha funds from Tamil Nadu, questioning why the state would not accept the three-language formula.
- The Kerala High Court dismissed a PIL seeking English nomenclature for new central criminal law acts, stating that the Constitution mandates using English as the authoritative text but does not denounce Hindi in the title of an enactment.
- The controversy also flared up in Karnataka, with pro-Kannada activists enforcing a rule that 60% of business signage must be in Kannada.

➤ April:

- The Maharashtra government issued a resolution making Hindi a compulsory third language from Classes 1 to 5 in certain schools under the NEP, a move that drew sharp criticism.

- A language panel in Maharashtra opposed the move, deeming it "unscientific" and suggesting a two-language formula until Class XII instead.

➤ **May:**

- The Tamil Nadu government moved the Supreme Court seeking the disbursal of over ₹2,000 crore in education funds, claiming they were withheld to coerce the state into implementing the NEP.
- The Supreme Court dismissed a plea seeking to direct Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and West Bengal to implement the NEP, stating that policy decisions are a matter for state governments.

➤ **June:**

- Amid significant backlash and political criticism, including from both Uddhav and Raj Thackeray, the Maharashtra government put the compulsory Hindi policy on hold and formed a committee to re-evaluate it.
- Union Home Minister Amit Shah stated that those who speak English in India would soon feel ashamed, emphasizing the importance of native languages for India's identity.

➤ **July:**

- The Thackeray cousins (Uddhav and Raj Thackeray) held a joint protest march against "Hindi imposition" in Mumbai, which Tamil Nadu CM M.K. Stalin welcomed, noting the struggle for language rights had transcended state boundaries.
- Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut clarified that Maharashtra's protest was against the compulsion of Hindi in schools, not the language itself, distinguishing their stance from Tamil Nadu's more hardline rejection.
- Devendra Fadnavis, facing criticism, clarified that Marathi remained mandatory and the third language could be any Indian language, not necessarily Hindi, provided there were enough students.
- Devendra Fadnavis's statement was followed by comments by Aaditya Thackeray, who accused the BJP of having animosity towards Maharashtra.

Note Points to understand the Issue

➤ Constitutional Provisions on Language:

- **Part XVII (Articles 343-351):** Addresses the official language of the Union, regional languages, language use in the judiciary, and related directives.
- **Article 343:** Official Language of the Union declares Hindi in Devanagari script as the official language.
- **Eighth Schedule:** Lists 22 recognized languages. English is not included in this schedule.
- **Article 345:** Official Language of a State permits states to adopt any language used in the state or Hindi as their official language(s).
- **Article 348:** Language in Judiciary mandates English for Supreme Court and High Court proceedings unless Parliament decides otherwise. State Governors, with presidential consent, may authorize Hindi or another state language in the High Court, but judgments must have an English translation.
- **Article 351:** Directive for Hindi Development tasks the Union with promoting Hindi as a medium for India's composite culture. For further details on these and other constitutional provisions.

➤ Constitutional Provisions on Language & Education:

- **Article 350A:** Instruction in Mother Tongue requires states and local authorities to provide primary education in the mother tongue for linguistic minorities.
- **Article 350B:** Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities provides for the appointment of an officer to investigate and report on safeguards for linguistic minorities.
- **Article 29(1):** Protection of Minorities' Interests grants citizens with a distinct language, script, or culture the right to preserve it.
- **Article 30(1):** Right of Minorities to Educational Institutions allows all minorities to establish and manage educational institutions of their choice.

➤ **Key Legislation & Policies:**

- **Official Languages Act, 1963** allowed for the continued use of English for official purposes and in Parliament alongside Hindi, even after the initial 15-year period. It also requires certain documents to be in both languages.
- **Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009** states that the medium of instruction should be in a child's mother tongue wherever possible.
- **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** supports the Three-Language Formula, recommending mother tongue/regional language instruction up to at least Class 5, and preferably beyond.
- **Three-Language Formula** suggests Hindi, English, and a modern Indian language from a non-Hindi speaking state for Hindi-speaking states, and regional language, Hindi, and English for non-Hindi speaking states.

What is the main cause of recent language issues?

The main cause of the recent language issues is the three-language policy in India stems from a conflict between the central government's push for a national standard (through the National Education Policy 2020) and the strong desire of several states to maintain their linguistic autonomy and cultural identity.

Key causes and contributing factors of the controversy:

- **Perceived Imposition of Hindi:** This is the most significant cause. Despite the NEP 2020 technically allowing flexibility in language choice (stipulating that two of the three languages must be native to India and the third can be chosen by the state/student), many non-Hindi-speaking states, especially Tamil Nadu, view the policy as a "backdoor" attempt to mandate the study of Hindi. Tamil Nadu has a long history of anti-Hindi movements and has adhered firmly to a two-language policy (Tamil and English) since 1968.
- **Federalism and State Autonomy:** Education falls under the Concurrent List of the Constitution, meaning both the central and state governments can legislate on it. States argue it is their prerogative to determine their education and language

policies, and central directives or conditions are seen as undermining the federal structure of governance.

- **Conditional Funding:** The central government has linked educational funding under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) to the implementation of the NEP 2020 and its language formula. The withholding of significant funds from states like Tamil Nadu due to non-compliance has intensified political tensions and accusations of financial coercion.
- **Implementation Challenges and Resource Constraints:** Many public schools, particularly in rural areas, lack the necessary infrastructure, qualified teachers, and materials to effectively teach a third language. Critics argue that enforcing a third language without adequate resources would burden students and lead to poor learning outcomes in core subjects.
- **Lack of Reciprocity:** Historically, Hindi-speaking states have often adopted Sanskrit or another easily accessible option as their "third language," rather than a modern South Indian language, bypassing the original spirit of the formula to foster inter-regional communication. This has created a feeling of an unequal burden on non-Hindi states.
- **Political Sensitivities:** Language is a highly emotive and political issue in India. The debate often fuels regional sentiment and becomes a tool for political parties to assert linguistic nationalism and cultural identity, leading to highly publicised conflicts between state and central leadership.

How does National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 relate to current language issue?

- NEP 2020 promotes multilingual education and flexibility, stating no language should be imposed on any state.
- However, critics argue that the policy's emphasis on certain languages, including Sanskrit, and the broader promotion of the three-language formula, could still lead to Hindi's dominance over regional languages in some areas.
- The policy's funding conditions have also become a point of contention, as mentioned above.

What is the official stance of the Indian government on recent language issue?

The official stance of the Indian government on the three-language issue, as articulated in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, is that the three-language formula is to be implemented with flexibility, and no language will be imposed on any state. The policy is advisory in nature, and states have the autonomy to decide their implementation modalities.

The Government's Stance

- **Flexibility in Choice:** The NEP 2020 specifies that the three languages students learn will be the choice of the states, regions, and the students themselves, provided that at least two of the three languages are native to India.
- **No Imposition of Hindi:** Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has stated that the policy is about "linguistic freedom and choices" and not about imposing Hindi. The government maintains that all languages are equally important.
- **Medium of Instruction:** The policy strongly emphasizes using the home language, mother tongue, or regional language as the medium of instruction, especially until at least Grade 5, and preferably until Grade 8 and beyond, as this enhances cognitive development and learning outcomes.
- **Promoting Multilingualism and National Unity:** The core objective of the formula, according to the government, is to promote multilingualism, bridge linguistic gaps, and strengthen national integration by exposing students to diverse languages and cultures.
- **Implementation Left to States:** Education is a subject on the Concurrent List of the Constitution, allowing both central and state governments to make policies. The Centre has stated that the implementation of the three-language policy is left to the states and Union Territories.

What is Three Language Formula?

The Three-Language Formula is an educational policy in India that mandates the study of three languages in schools to promote multilingualism and national integration. It was first proposed by the Kothari Commission (1964-1966) and formally adopted in the National Policy on Education in 1968.

The three-language formula in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recommends that students learn three languages during their school education, with the primary goal of promoting multilingualism and national integration.

Structure of the Formula

The formula generally involves:

- **First Language:** The mother tongue or the regional language. The NEP 2020 emphasizes that the medium of instruction should be the home language/mother tongue until at least Grade 5, and preferably until Grade 8 and beyond.
- **Second and Third Languages:** These languages will be the choices of the states, regions, and the students themselves from a wide range of options.
 - In Hindi-speaking states, the second and third languages would typically be English and one other modern Indian language (preferably a South Indian language).
 - In non-Hindi-speaking states, they would learn the regional language, English, and Hindi.

Key Principles under NEP 2020

The NEP 2020 reiterates the three-language formula but with important caveats compared to previous policies:

- **No Imposition:** The policy explicitly states that no language will be imposed on any state or student, addressing long-standing political concerns, particularly from states like Tamil Nadu.
- **Flexibility:** Students are allowed to change one or more of their chosen three languages in Grades 6 or 7, as long as they can demonstrate basic proficiency in three languages by the end of secondary school.
- **Emphasis on Indian Languages:** The policy encourages the study of Indian languages, including classical languages like Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, and Kannada, as options within the formula.

- **Foreign Languages:** In addition to Indian languages and English, students at the secondary level can also learn foreign languages such as Korean, Japanese, French, German, and Spanish.

Why is the language policy a contentious issue, specially in South India?

The language policy is contentious in South India, particularly in Tamil Nadu, because it is viewed as a historical attempt to impose Hindi, which threatens the region's distinct linguistic and cultural identity. Southern languages, primarily Dravidian, have little in common with Hindi, making its imposition a significant cultural and practical burden for the region, despite it being the majority language in India overall.

- **History of protest:** Fierce protests have occurred for decades against the "imposition of Hindi," dating back to the 1930s, when compulsory Hindi was introduced and later withdrawn in Tamil Nadu.
- **Two-language formula:** Tamil Nadu has steadfastly adopted a two-language policy, focusing on Tamil and English, and has never implemented the three-language formula.
- **Rejection of imposition:** South India views policies like the three-language formula as unfairly pressuring non-Hindi-speaking states, even though its proponents argue it promotes multilingualism and national integration.
- **Linguistic and cultural identity:** For many in the South, language is deeply tied to their cultural identity, and the imposition of Hindi is seen as a threat to this.
- **Linguistic differences:** Southern Indian languages are primarily from the Dravidian family and have little in common with the Indo-Aryan languages of the North. This makes Hindi difficult to learn and speak properly for many in the South, unlike in many Northern states where there is more affinity due to shared linguistic roots.
- **Not a majority language:** Hindi is not the mother tongue for roughly 60% of the Indian population, and many South Indians see no reason to accept Hindi as a national language just because it is used by a larger percentage of the country.
- **National integration vs. linguistic identity:** The core debate is about balancing the goal of national integration with the preservation of regional linguistic and cultural identities.

- **Economic and funding issues:** In recent years, the language policy has become entangled with funding disputes, as the federal government has linked funding for some educational programs to the adoption of the new National Education Policy, which includes the three-language formula.

What is the role of NCERT in Mother-Tongue Learning?

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has released digital books, specifically primers for foundational literacy, in 104 regional languages and dialects to align with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020's focus on promoting mother-tongue learning.

- **Multilingual Focus:** The NEP 2020 emphasizes the importance of multilingual education and using a child's mother tongue as the medium of instruction, especially in the foundational years.
- **Primer Development:** The 104 language primers (basic reading materials) were developed by the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) and NCERT. They are available digitally to support early learning in diverse linguistic backgrounds across 28 states and Union Territories.
- **Accessibility:** These primers are available online on the NCERT's website to ensure wide accessibility.
- **Broader Initiatives:** NCERT has been directed to develop regular textbooks in all 22 languages included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

What are the main challenges in implementing a multilingual approach in education?

➤ Linguistic Diversity and Policy Implementation

- **Vast Diversity:** India's immense linguistic diversity, with numerous regional and tribal languages and dialects, makes creating a uniform, one-size-fits-all policy extremely difficult.
- **Policy Gaps:** Despite policies like the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 advocating for mother-tongue instruction, a significant disparity exists

between policy objectives and actual on-ground practice due to a lack of clear, localized implementation strategies.

- **Political Tensions:** The issue of language is politically sensitive, with some states resisting the perceived imposition of Hindi and the Three-Language Formula, leading to inconsistent application across the country.

➤ **Resource and Infrastructure Deficits**

- **Teacher Shortage:** There is a critical shortage of qualified teachers who are proficient in local and tribal languages and trained in multilingual teaching methodologies.
- **Lack of Quality Materials:** High-quality textbooks, supplementary reading materials, and digital resources are often unavailable in many home languages, forcing reliance on outdated or poorly translated materials.
- **Financial Constraints:** Implementing multilingual education requires substantial investment in curriculum development, teacher training, and infrastructure, which many government schools, especially in rural and remote areas, lack.
- **Maintaining Global Standards:** Concerns exist that education in regional languages might hinder students' ability to compete in global job markets where English proficiency is a significant advantage.

Practice Questions

1. Consider the following statements regarding the three-language formula in India:

- I. The National Education Policy 2020 strictly mandates Hindi, English, and a regional language in all states.
- II. Tamil Nadu has historically opposed the three-language formula in favor of a two-language formula.
- III. The formula's primary objective is to promote a common national language and cultural integration.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) Only one
- b) Only two
- c) All three
- d) None

Answer: a

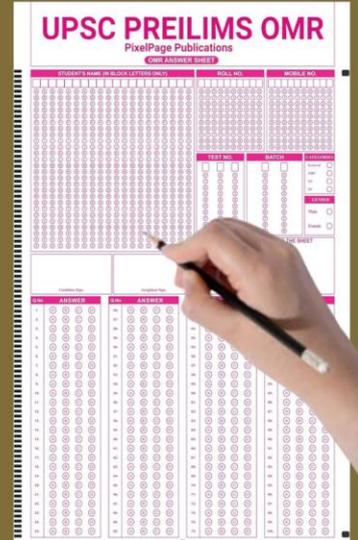
Explanation: Statement I is incorrect: The NEP 2020 provides flexibility to states, allowing them to choose their languages, but it states that two of the languages should be native Indian languages, and the third can be a foreign language at the higher secondary level. It doesn't mandate a specific combination for all states. **Statement II is correct:** Tamil Nadu has a long-standing opposition to Hindi and has consistently promoted a two-language formula of Tamil and English. **Statement III is incorrect:** While a goal is to promote integration, critics argue the formula can lead to the imposition of Hindi and a loss of regional identity, suggesting it is not a universally accepted objective.

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