

# The Student and the Three-Language Debate

By R. Seshasayee

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In the heated political debate about the three-language formula, the most important person has been forgotten—the student.

## Who is most affected?

The real impact is on students in public (government) schools, who make up about 55% of Tamil Nadu's school enrolment. Private school students often get extra coaching, which public school students may not afford. The key question is: Will learning three languages help public school students compete better in jobs and life?

## The Problem with the NEP's Three-Language Rule

The National Education Policy (NEP) aims to improve students' cognitive abilities, job opportunities, and national unity by making three languages compulsory. However, this idea has flaws:

1. **Language is a tool, not the only way to learn.** With AI and technology, knowledge is easily accessible in any language.
2. **Learning more languages doesn't necessarily boost intelligence.** Studies show a strong foundation in the mother tongue is more important.
3. **People learn languages when needed.** For example, Tamil speakers in the Army or business easily pick up Hindi or Marathi.

## The Bigger Issue: Poor Education Quality

According to the ASER 2024 report, **88% of Class 3 students in Tamil Nadu lack basic literacy skills.** Even English learning is weak—many top students struggle in college because their schooling was mostly in Tamil.

## What Should Schools Focus On?

Instead of adding another language, the priority should be:

- **Better teaching quality** to improve learning.
- **More time for critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving.**
- **Stronger English skills** since it helps students compete nationally and globally.

## Practical Challenges of a Third Language

- Public schools may not find enough qualified teachers for a third language.

- Tamil Nadu already spends a large part of its education budget on teacher salaries, leaving little for infrastructure.
- Hiring more language teachers could further strain resources.

## Language, Culture, and Job Opportunities

Language plays a role in culture and national unity, but forcing students to learn a third language is not the best way to achieve this.

- If students can get jobs within Tamil Nadu, a third language may not be necessary.
- If Hindi replaces English in national exams in the future, Tamil Nadu must prepare its students accordingly.

## The Way Forward

Instead of forcing a third language at the primary level, **Hindi could be offered as an optional subject from middle school onwards.** Schools in district headquarters can introduce it first, expanding based on demand.

A rigid political stance may limit students' opportunities in the future. Education policies should focus on helping students succeed, not just on political debates.

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