

The Student and the Three-Language Debate

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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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