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Three-Language Formula Policy: Constitutional Vision, NEP 2020 and Recent CBSE Clarification

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Recent Developments:

- The **Government of India** has clarified that **CBSE** students currently studying in **Classes 7, 8 and 9** can continue their existing **foreign language combinations** until they complete **Class 10**, ensuring that the revised language policy is **not applied retrospectively**.
- The revised **Three-Language Formula** requiring **at least two Indian languages** will apply prospectively to **future batches entering Class 6** under the phased implementation of **NEP 2020** and the **National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023**.

About the Three-Language Formula Policy:

- The **Three-Language Formula** aims to promote **multilingualism, national integration, linguistic diversity and inclusive education** across India.
- The policy seeks to balance **mother tongue education, regional language preservation, national communication and global language competency**.
- The policy is based on the principle that **language learning should strengthen cognitive development while respecting India's linguistic diversity**.

Historical Evolution:

- The **Kothari Commission (1964–66)** first recommended the **Three-Language Formula** as part of comprehensive educational reforms.
- The policy was formally adopted under the **National Policy on Education (NPE), 1968**.
- It was reaffirmed through the **National Policy on Education, 1986**, and the **Programme of Action, 1992**.
- The **National Education Policy (NEP), 2020** re-emphasised multilingual education with greater flexibility and learner-centric implementation.

Key Provisions under NEP 2020:

- Students are expected to learn **three languages**, while retaining flexibility in language selection.
- **At least two** of the three languages should be **Indian languages**.
- **No language shall be imposed** on any State, region or student.
- The selection of languages remains with **States, schools, students and parents**, subject to the policy framework.
- The policy encourages **multilingual proficiency** without undermining regional linguistic identities.

Constitutional and Legal Basis:

- The policy supports the constitutional vision of preserving India's linguistic diversity.
- **Article 29** safeguards the cultural and linguistic rights of minorities.

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Plot A P.127, AF block, 6 th street, 11th Main Rd, Shanthy Colony, Anna Nagar, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600040

Phone: **044 4353 9988 / 98403 94477 / Whatsapp : 09710729833**

- **Article 350A** directs States to provide facilities for instruction in the **mother tongue** at the primary stage for children belonging to linguistic minority groups.
- **Article 351** directs the Union to promote the development of **Hindi** while enriching it through other Indian languages.
- **Education** falls under the **Concurrent List (Entry 25, List III, Seventh Schedule)**, requiring cooperative action by both the Union and States.

Major Objectives of the Policy:

- **Promotion of Multilingualism:**
 - Encourages proficiency in multiple languages while strengthening communication skills.
 - Supports learning beyond the mother tongue without replacing it.
- **National Integration:**
 - Facilitates cross-cultural understanding and inter-State communication.
 - Strengthens the constitutional ideal of **Unity in Diversity**.
- **Preservation of Indian Languages:**
 - Promotes the protection and development of **classical, regional and tribal languages**.
 - Supports constitutional obligations relating to linguistic heritage.
- **Cognitive and Educational Development:**
 - Multilingual education enhances **memory, critical thinking, problem-solving ability and cognitive flexibility**.
 - Learning through familiar languages improves conceptual understanding during early education.
- **Employability and Mobility:**
 - Multiple language proficiency improves educational opportunities across India.
 - Better communication skills enhance employment prospects and labour mobility.

Major Challenges and Concerns:

- **Language Imposition Debate:**
 - Several States, particularly in southern India, have expressed concerns regarding possible imposition of **Hindi**.
 - Linguistic identity remains a politically sensitive issue within India's federal structure.
- **Federal Concerns:**
 - States seek greater autonomy in determining language policy because education is a **Concurrent List** subject.
 - Differences in regional priorities create implementation challenges.
- **Teacher Shortage:**
 - Many schools lack qualified teachers for several Indian and foreign languages.
 - Availability of trained language teachers remains uneven across States.
- **Implementation Challenges:**
 - Rural and remote schools often face shortages of textbooks, digital resources and language laboratories.
 - Timetable constraints increase the complexity of implementing multiple language courses.
- **Equity Issues:**
 - Government schools may offer fewer language choices than private institutions.
 - Unequal access may widen educational disparities among students.
- **Academic Burden:**
 - Learning multiple languages simultaneously may increase workload, particularly during secondary education.

Recent Measures to Address Challenges:

- **Flexibility under NEP 2020:**
 - NEP explicitly states that **no language shall be imposed** on any State.
 - States and students have flexibility while selecting languages.

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- **National Curriculum Framework (NCF-SE 2023):**
- Supports multilingual education while respecting regional diversity.
- Emphasises foundational literacy in the **home language**.
- **Promotion of Mother Tongue Education:**
- NEP recommends that the **medium of instruction** should preferably be the **mother tongue/home language** up to **Grade 5**, and preferably up to **Grade 8**, wherever feasible.
- **Teacher Capacity Building:**
- The **Ministry of Education** and **NCERT** are developing multilingual teaching materials and conducting teacher training programmes.
- Transitional arrangements have also been suggested to address teacher shortages during implementation.
- **Technology Integration:**
- **DIKSHA** provides multilingual digital learning resources.
- Digital content and e-learning materials are being developed in multiple Indian languages.
- AI-based translation and language learning tools are expected to improve accessibility.

Related Educational Initiatives:

- **NIPUN Bharat Mission** promotes foundational literacy and numeracy among children.
- **PM SHRI Schools Scheme** develops model schools aligned with **NEP 2020**.
- **Samagra Shiksha** integrates school education from **pre-primary to Class XII**.
- **DIKSHA Platform** provides multilingual digital learning resources.
- **National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2023** promotes competency-based and multilingual education.
- **Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat** strengthens inter-State cultural and linguistic exchange.
- **Bhasha Sangam Initiative** encourages school students to develop familiarity with multiple Indian languages.

Significance for UPSC and Governance:

- Strengthens **inclusive education** and **constitutional values**.
- Preserves India's **linguistic heritage** while promoting national unity.
- Supports implementation of **NEP 2020** and **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4** relating to quality education.
- Enhances social cohesion through greater linguistic and cultural understanding.
- Promotes equitable access to education through multilingual learning.

Way Forward:

- **Cooperative Federalism:**
- Language policy should evolve through continuous consultation between the Union and the States.
- **Greater Flexibility:**
- Students should receive wider language choices based on regional needs and institutional capacity.
- **Teacher Capacity Enhancement:**
- Recruitment, training and continuous professional development of qualified language teachers should be prioritised.
- **Development of Learning Resources:**
- High-quality textbooks, digital content and assessment tools should be developed in all **Scheduled Languages**.
- **Technology-Driven Multilingual Education:**
- AI-enabled translation, speech technologies and digital platforms should improve language accessibility.
- **Mother Tongue-Based Learning:**
- Strong foundational education in the mother tongue should be integrated with multilingual proficiency for holistic development.

Value Addition for UPSC:

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Important Constitutional Provisions:

- **Article 29** – Protection of cultural and linguistic rights of minorities.
- **Article 30** – Rights of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.
- **Article 343** – Official language of the Union.
- **Article 350A** – Instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage.
- **Article 350B** – Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities.
- **Article 351** – Development and promotion of Hindi.
- **Eighth Schedule** – Recognises **22 Scheduled Languages**