

Language Education in India-2025 (A Call for 'Mother Tongues First' in Education)

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'We have impoverished our mother tongue because of our love for English. We demean ourselves by insulting our language' --
Mahatma Gandhi

Mother Tongues in India Today

Latest-2011(since 2021 census is not held) count of Indian mother tongues/languages informs that Census had a raw return of 19,569 mother tongues. After due processing of this data, it has arrived at a list of 121 languages. Among them, 22 are part of the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution and the rest of the 99 are non-scheduled languages. These 22 Scheduled languages embed 122+ mother tongues, the 99 Non-scheduled languages embed 149+ mother tongues. Thus, India is an abode of more than 271+ countable and nameable mother tongues and more than a thousand un-named mother tongues. Provincial Education Ministers in 1949 had said that 'The mother-tongue will be the language declared by the parent or guardian to be the mother-tongue.' The Census- 2011 recognizes mother tongue as 'The language spoken in childhood by the person's mother to the person. If the mother died in infancy, the language mainly spoken in the person's home in childhood will be the mother tongue. In case of infants and deaf mutes the language usually spoken by the mother...in case of doubt, the language mainly spoken in the household...' In the context of the linguistic minorities the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court of India on May 6, 2014 said that 'Mother tongue...means the language of the linguistic minority in a State and it is the parent or the guardian of the child who will decide what the mother tongue of child is.'

Introduction: Again in 2025, the question of language education has come to the forefront

in India. Blistering debate is going on in the Parliament, state legislatures, active mass media and among the public at large. The danger of another language replacing the mother tongue of the student in education looms large-first as a school language and next as the medium of instruction. The present debate is one sided-Hindi vs some official languages of the states. Discussants have ignored the role of hundreds of mother tongues in education. In India, the status as recognized by the Census-all languages are mother tongues, but all mother tongues are not languages. The issue needs an un biased academic analysis away from the political band wagon. In this context, first it is necessary to briefly look into the roles that makers of the Constitution assigned for different languages, mother tongues in post-independence India.

Administration: The Constitution of India provides for the use of one or two or more languages in the administration of the Union and States. Article 343 states that (1) the official language of the Union shall be Hindi in Devanagari script. For official purposes of the Union the international form of Indian numerals shall be used. (2) Notwithstanding anything in clause (i), for a period of fifteen years from the commencement of this Constitution, the English language shall continue to be used for all the official purposes of the Union for which it was being used immediately before such commencement. At the level of the Union, English is serving as a neutral language for multiple language speakers of the country since her independence and may do so for many decades or centuries to come. The state legislatures were constitutionally empowered to adopt any one or more language/s used in the state or Hindi as the language/s used for official and other purposes in the states. Hence, most of the states have provisions for use of multiple languages in administration though they declare one language which is normally a language of majority of people as the official language in their Official Language Act. Correspondence between the union and the states and vice versa and also between the states is an important factor. The Article 346 makes provision for use of the official language of the union for communication between the union and states and also between two states. At the same time, if there is an agreement between two states, they can use Hindi for inter-state communication

Parliament/Legislature: Representatives of the people in the parliament and the legislature have different mother tongues and they need not necessarily know or be conversant

with the official language of the union or languages of administration. Hence, in parliament though the official business is transacted in Hindi and English, there is a provision under Article 120 that the parliament member shall be permitted by the Chairman / Speaker to address the house in his/her mother tongue. In the similar manner in the state legislature too if a member is unable to express in the official language of the state or Hindi or English, the Speaker will permit him/her to address the house in his or her mother tongue under Article 210.

Grievances Redressal: There is an inbuilt mechanism for redressing grievances of the citizens. For this purpose, under Article 350 the citizens of India have a provision to submit their representation to the union or the state in any language used in the state or the union. This clearly indicates that declaration of one or more languages as official languages and making provision for use of other languages and mother tongues in administration, parliament, legislatures, grievances' redressal are attempts to keep harmony among the population. *It has to be celebrated that the mother tongues have a respectable role in these domains of language use.*

Judiciary: The judiciary has three important levels of structure: The lowest at the sub-divisional and/or at district level, the High Court at state level and the Supreme Court at the highest level. English is the language to be used for 'all proceedings in the Supreme Court, High Court, authoritative texts of all Bills to be introduced or amendments moved in either House of Parliament or in either House of the Legislature of a State Article 348(1) (i); all Acts passed by Parliament or the Legislature of a State Article 348(1) (ii); and all Ordinances promulgated by the President or the Governor of a State, and all orders, rules, regulations and bye-laws issued under the Constitution or under any law made by Parliament or the Legislature of a State' Article 348(1) (iii); In the instances where the 'State has prescribed any language other than the English language for use in Bills, Acts, Ordinances a translation of the same in the English language be published under the authority shall be deemed to be the authoritative text in English language. ' Article 348(3); Whereas the 'official language shall be the language of all Courts of Sessions, Judicial Magistrates, Civil Courts subordinate to the High Court in the State'. But English shall also continue to be the language of the said courts. Any presiding officer whose mother tongue is not the official language of the state may continue to record the evidence in English. One may

make use of such English words and phrases as he/she may think necessary to exactly bring out the purport and meaning of any expression. As far as the Judiciary is concerned though the official language of the state and the union have an important role, English text is used as authority since the legal system has heavily borrowed from the English system.

Education: Language is not only one of the important parts of the education system, but it is also the driving force of the system. A multiethnic, multilingual and pluralistic nation needs to evolve language education policies in such a way that all the segments of population that constitute that nation develop a sense of participation in the process of governance and nation-building. In addition, the specific aspirations of the individual segments of the nation need to be met to the satisfaction of the various ethnic, religious and linguistic communities. It has to be noted that the makers of the Indian Constitution did not lay down elaborately the policy for the domain of education in independent India as they did for administration or judiciary. The constitutional law experts (Jain, M.P:1987) opine the same. ‘A difficult question arises regarding the medium of education at various levels. The Constitution prescribes no policy or principle, and makes no provision, in this regard. To begin with, the matter was left to the legislative power of the States as ‘Education’ was a state subject. The States enjoyed full right to prescribe the media of instruction at the primary and the High School levels.’ After reorganization of the states on linguistic lines, the states have better understanding of the multilingual situation of the respective state and know the aspirations of the people. So, the makers of the Constitution with broad guidelines allowed the language policy for education to be evolved in the context of their multilingual situation under various rights bestowed in the Constitution, through the process of mutual accommodation, adjustment and adjudication. Since education is in the concurrent list of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution, the language policy formulation for education and its implementation is left to the State governments under the Constitutional safeguards and broad guidelines. It was a wise decision to allow the states to adopt what they feel good and right for their subjects.

The *States Reorganization Commission* had asked the Union Government to elucidate a policy outline for education in mother tongue at the Secondary stage. In 1952 the *Secondary*

Education Commission, recommended the study of four languages at the secondary stage: (i) Mother tongue (ii) Regional language (iii) link language–Hindi and (iv) one of the classical languages–Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, Arabic and Persian. The *All-India Council for Education* recommended the adoption of the Three Language Formula (TLF) in September 1956. The *Education Commission* (1964-66) recommended a three-language formula: (a) The mother tongue or the regional language. (b) The official language of the Union or the associate official language of the Union so long as it exists; and (c) A modern Indian or Foreign language not covered under (a) and (b) and other than used as the medium of instruction. In all the cases mother tongue was part and parcel of education. It is to be noted that these 1952 to 1966 formulas were recommendations and not the policies to be accepted for implantation.

The first *National Policy on Education-1968* spoke about the regional languages and the Three Language Formula (TLF) 'which includes the study of a modern Indian language, preferably one of the Southern languages, apart from Hindi and English in the Hindi speaking states, and of Hindi along with the regional language and English in the non-Hindi speaking states' at the Secondary stage. After NPE 1968 came into existence, a study was conducted by the NCERT - *Position of Languages in School Curriculum in India* 67 subject languages in Indian school education (Chaturvedi M G and B V Mohale :1976). They are: Angami, Ao, Arabic, Ardhamagadhi, Aasan Urdu, Assamese, Avesta Pahlvi, Bengali, Bodo, Chakhasang, Chang Naga, Dogri, English, French, Garo, German, Gujarati, Greek, Hebrew, Hindi, Hmar, Ho, Iranian, Italian, Kannada, Karen, Kashmiri, Kharia, Khasi, Khiemnungar, Konkani, Konyak, Kuki, Ladakhi, Latin, Lotha, Lushai, Maithili, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Mizo, Modern Tibetan, Mundari, Nicobaree, Nepali, Oreon, Oriya, Pali, Persian, Phom, Portuguese, Punjabi, Rengma, Sadani, Sangtam, Sanskrit, Santali, Sema, Sindhi, Spanish, Syriac, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Yeimchungere and Zeliang. It has to be noted that not all mother tongues or languages of India were subject languages in the schools at that time.

The language policy of the NPE-1968 was reiterated in the Education Policy-1986. It is *The National Policy on Education -1986* said that. the implementation of this part(languages) of the 1968 Policy has, however, been uneven. The Policy will be implemented more energetically

and purposefully.’ A committee for Review of National Policy on Education-1986 in its final report on December 26, 1990 had said that at the formula level itself ‘The three-language formula does not speak of the mother tongue but only of the use of regional language along with Hindi/Modern Indian Languages and/English.’ The TLF ‘... is restricted only to the secondary stage. Consequently, each State decides how many languages and to what degree fewer or more languages should be taught at other stages of education. The result is that different States have different policies at the primary level and at the higher secondary level.’ Also, at implementation level it had said that ‘often, the state’s offer, in the first, second and third languages more optional than stipulated in the three-language formula, even though the number of languages taught is three, the languages are not those in the formula. The preferred third language in the Hindi state is often Sanskrit and not a modern Indian language- a southern language-though classical languages like Sanskrit do not find place in the three-language formula...There are differences in the motivation for learning of the third language. While there is economic motivation for learning Hindi, in non-Hindi states, the motivation for learning southern languages in Hindi States is largely cultural. This results in lack of uniformity in learning objectives and competence levels in the third language.’

The *National Curriculum Framework 2005* records that: Home language(s) of children, should be the medium of instruction in schools. Where ‘...home language(s) or mother tongues are ... the languages of home, larger kinship group, street and neighborhood, i.e., languages a child naturally acquires from her/ his home and societal environment...If school does not have provisions for teaching in the child’s home language(s) at higher levels, the primary school education must still be covered through the home language(s)...Three Language Formula needs to be implemented in its spirit...In non-Hindi states, children learn Hindi. In the case of Hindi states, children learn a language not spoken in their area. Sanskrit may also be studied as a Modern Indian Language (MIL) in addition to these languages. At later stages, study of classical and foreign languages may be introduced.’

It is to be noted that earlier it was home language/ regional language, but it became home language or mother tongue. In multilingual India, language or language related issue invokes emotional, sentimental and legal responses among the people affected due to policy formulations,

implementation, and envisaged minor or major policy changes. Since 1956, after adoption of the Constitution, Indian Courts have faced litigations of various types by the people affected in the natural process of language policy formulation and implementation. These litigations have questioned the abridgement or curtailment of various rights of the citizens. The courts have also examined them at length and delivered judgments. Sometimes, these judgments have made the Governments to look at their language policy afresh taking into consideration the aspirations of the aggrieved people and the ground realities.

The implementation of the TLF was reviewed and the document released in 2000 itself. The National Curriculum Framework for School Education: A Discussion Document released on January 1, 2000, while reviewing the Three Language Formula, states that- ‘In a number of states/organizations/ boards, however, the spirit of the formula has not been followed and the mother tongue of the people has been denied the status of the first language ... because of the changed socio-economic scenario, the difference between the second and the third languages has dwindled. Thus, in reality, there may be two second languages for all purposes and functions. Some states follow only a two-language formula whereas in some others classical languages like Sanskrit and Arabic are being studied in lieu of a modern Indian language. Some boards/institutions permit even European languages like French and German in place of Hindi.’ In this scenario, the three-language formula exists only in our curriculum documents and other policy statements. According to this document the three languages are: (i) the home language/the regional language, (ii) English, and (iii) Hindi in non-Hindi speaking states and any other modern Indian language in Hindi speaking states. These are the major attempts to arrive at a language policy for education and a review of the TLF.

The TLF designated as strategy for language education in schools of the multilingual nation has no constitutional status the acceptance or otherwise of it is totally dependent on the states and its population. The TLF is Macaulay’s Education Minute for post-independence India. Major beneficiary of TLF is English becoming compulsory language as one of the school subjects and most sought out medium of instruction from the earliest stage of education. This has contributed for the spread of English education in the country. Another benefit accrues to Hindi, since most of

the non-Hindi states and union territories have made Hindi as language of the school system. Remember TLF is applicable at the secondary level not from primary stage.

The social and political context in which this non-working [TLF] language policy for education was evolved is different from the one that exists in the schools today after 70 years. At that time both Hindi and non-Hindi speaking population was to be kept in good humor and exhibited that they are treated on par and Hindi speakers learn another language and non-Hindi speakers learn Hindi. The first of NEP 1968 ignored the mother tongue and gave roles for regional languages, Hindi and English. This has proved to be grand blunder, in ignoring mother tongue and glamorizing English and to certain extent - Hindi. This gave over riding power to English and people started to crave for it in education. The TLF through schooling has helped in the spread of Hindi in many non-Hindi speaking states. It has failed to spread non-Hindi languages in the Hindi speaking states. This affected language learning as well as learning through the language. Due to the constitutional provisions most of the regional languages got declared as official languages of the states and union territories and made efforts to become languages of administration wherever possible. Most unfortunately all regional languages failed to become medium of instruction at all levels, English continues to rule the field. If the regional languages are not made languages of education at all levels for all even now, their growth is bound to suffer in due course of time.

It is seen that discipline of language education is burdened with terminologies (for the sake of terminologies) -home language, local language, mother tongue, first language, second language, third language, regional language etc. Before further discussion let us retain only the terminologies that are needed and transparent to understand and follow. The following terminologies are sufficient for our discussion: **mother tongue, regional language, first-second-third language**. I would like to clarify that the first-second-third language refers to the chronological order of their introduction as a language in the school education, and nothing less and nothing more. The issue of language education could be looked afresh. It has to be linked to people's participation in both knowledge creation/dissemination and their economic welfare. It has to be an inclusive policy to include all mother tongues and beneficial to all the students.

Important language policy statements from the *National Education Policy-2020* which is in limelight now and the very less debated the *National Curriculum Framework for School Education -2023* on the language policy are extracted are discussed here (Policy statement is rendered in italics and discussion in the normal fonts). The *National Education Policy-2020* proposes that:

‘The three-language formula will continue to be implemented while keeping in mind the Constitutional provisions, aspirations of the people, regions, and the Union, and the need to promote multilingualism as well as promote national unity. However, there will be a greater flexibility in the three-language formula, and no language will be imposed on any State. The three languages learned by children will be the choices of States, regions, and of course the students themselves, so long as at least two of the three languages are native to India.’ (NEP-2020)

Imposing a language starts when one says only three languages are part of schooling. Why three languages only, why not four languages? Or why not two languages? Now, the concept and meaning of first, second and third language in school education has disappeared and it does not make any sense at all. Pedagogically first, second, third language etc., refer to the order of their introduction to the child in the schools. For example - Karnataka on Oct 29, 2006 decided to teach English as one of the languages (as a subject) from the first standard itself in all the Kannada medium schools and the schools of the linguistic minorities. In the year 2007, English was introduced as a subject of study in all the government and aided schools from the 1st standard without any training to the teachers and necessary pedagogic preparations that are needed for such an initiative. Now, due to many languages being introduced at the early stage many students are not learning any language well. Like subject components, language components too are learnt by heart. It is not language learning at all. This happens since when the language learnt is not his mother tongue. It has to be noted that hardly anybody opposed this move of the government, including the persons who were opposed to the introduction of Kannada on the ground that it creates a burden on children. In this context, which is the first or second language, which is the second language? English which should have been an additional language in education in India has become a substitute language. Many times, it acts as a substitute for mother tongue, sometimes

substitute for official language of the state and most of the substitute for medium of instruction at all levels of education. Sanskrit has become a substitute language for mother tongue, official language of the state in secondary schools though it is a mother tongue of a few people.

In the original formulation TLF was for three languages in the secondary stage only, not for teaching many languages from the first or second standard itself. The definition and scope of it has been enlarged meaninglessly. There is a paradigm shift. Once in Karnataka, from the first standard first language Kannada or some other language, second language English from the middle school and the third language Hindi from the secondary stage.

Now, can we understand that in Hindi speaking states TLF will be Hindi, Sanskrit and English? In non-Hindi speaking states can it also be Sanskrit, Hindi and English? In reality TLF is a threat to national unity since it cannot be implemented uniformly throughout the nation. Attempt to do so will do more harm to the mother tongues and the country. The phrase national unity/integration is being used now to scare the people.

'In particular, students who wish to change one or more of the three languages they are studying may do so in Grade 6 or 7, as long as they are able to demonstrate basic proficiency in three languages (including one language of India at the literature level) by the end of secondary school...' (NEP-2020)

What level of proficiency? At the end of secondary stage now the students are expected to demonstrate proficiency in three languages at the grade 6 or 7. Is it possible? One should see the annual reports being published by the organizations after the evaluation of the performance of the students to know the field reality.

'There will be a major effort from both the Central and State governments to invest in large numbers of language teachers in all regional languages around the country, and, in particular, for all languages mentioned in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India ... Sanskrit will

thus be offered at all levels of school and higher education as an important, enriching option for students, including as an option in the three-language formula....’ NEP-2020)

Here, Eighth Schedule is used as a list of select languages to help covertly Hindi and Sanskrit. Constitutional Assignment of the Eighth Schedule is (Article 344) formation of the Official Language Commission to make recommendations on progressive use of the Hindi language for the official purposes of the Union, language to be used in the Supreme Court and the High Courts and for Acts, Bills etc., and -language for communication between the Union and a State or between one State and another and ‘restrictions on the use of the English language for all or any of the official purposes of the Union.’ Another one, the Special Directive in (Article 351) also relates to the development of Hindi. Here, (a) it is the duty of the Union to promote the spread of Hindi, (b) it should develop to serve as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India, (c) it has to enrich by assimilating the forms, style and expressions used in Hindustani and in other languages of the Eighth Schedule without interfering with its genius, (d) and also it should enrich itself by drawing vocabulary primarily from Sanskrit and secondarily from other languages.

Thus, the Constitutional assignment is for the development of official Hindi, Hindi for communication across different languages and spread of Hindi across the States and the Union Territories. Attempts are being made to enlarge the scope of the Schedule to make it relevant. One such attempt is the Official Language Resolution, 1968, adopted by both Houses of Parliament. It extended the functions of Article 351. Accordingly, it became the ‘...duty of the Union to promote the spread of the Hindi language and to develop it so that it may serve as a median of expression.’ Simultaneously, ‘... the Eighth Schedule specifies ... major languages of India besides Hindi, and it is necessary in the interest of the educational and cultural advancement of the country that concerted measures should be taken for the full development of these languages’; and ‘... a programme shall be prepared and implemented by the Government of India in collaboration with the State Governments for the coordinated development of all these languages, alongside Hindi, so that they grow rapidly in richness and become effective means of communicating modern knowledge’. The responsibility for the compliance of this is mainly with the Department of

Education of the Central Government. Since the Constitutional assignment was looking biased towards Hindi, the development of languages of the Eighth Schedule for educational and cultural advancement also was added as the / responsibility of the Union Government.

Since 1968 what has been done by the Union government in this regard needs to be evaluated. Is it not true that development of these languages is left to the state governments? What is done for the stateless Scheduled languages? Now Sanskrit will get an additional booster dose by becoming a language in higher education also with the help of TLF.

‘In addition to high quality offerings in Indian languages and English, foreign languages, such as Korean, Japanese, Thai, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian, will also be offered at the secondary level, for students to learn about the cultures of the world and to enrich their global knowledge and mobility according to their own interests and aspirations. ...’ (NEP-2020)

In TLF at secondary stage where and how the foreign languages fit in is not known. In three languages which language is going to get out to make space for a chosen foreign language?

‘Wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language. Thereafter, the home/local language shall continue to be taught as a language wherever possible. This will be followed by both public and private schools. ...’ (NEP-2020)

To make the policy of medium of instruction meaningful, this has to be rephrased by eliminating many options thus - ‘the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, will be the mother tongue, Grade 5 to 8 regional language (official language of the state). Thereafter, the student may choose the medium of his choice. This will be followed by both public and private schools. ...’. In this context a look at the *Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009* it says that ‘medium of instructions shall, as far as practicable, be in child’s mother tongue.’ The word ‘as far as practicable’ has provided ample scope for the states, schools, parents and others to dispense

with mother tongue medium and embrace the English or some other medium. We are not aware of any mechanism available to verify the implementation of this section of the Act. This act needs to be amended immediately to save mother tongues in schools. In amendment to this Act, these four words ‘*as far as practicable*’ should be deleted and the Act made stronger for implementation. The debate educational or legal hardly considers these language issues in the Right to Education Act.

Indian Sign Language (ISL) will be standardized across the country, and National and State curriculum materials developed, for use by students with hearing impairment. Local sign languages will be respected and taught as well, where possible and relevant.’ This is a good development.’ (NEP-2020)

NCFSE-2023: *emphasis a. ‘The curriculum aims at developing linguistic proficiency for academic use in three languages by age 15 (Grade 10). At least two out of these three languages should be languages native to India. At least one language native to India will be studied at the ‘Literature level.’*

At least one among them should be the mother tongue of the student.

‘b. At least one language native to India will be offered as an option for the medium of instruction to all students up to Grade 12.’

In this context of discussion on medium of instruction it is appropriate to recollect what had happened in Tamil Nadu. The Government had issued an order on January 13, 1999 that ‘... at least two out of three subjects, that is, Social Studies (History and Geography), Math, and Science shall be taught through the medium of Tamil, apart from teaching Tamil as a subject in Nursery and Elementary Schools.’ When challenged in the Madras High Court, a single Judge, in his judgment on June 7, 1999, held that ‘... this order is valid only for those students, whose mother-tongue is Tamil. Or in other words ... Government order is not applicable to the pupils, whose mother-tongue is not Tamil.’ Further a five-member committee headed by Mr. Justice Mohan was set up to ‘...frame guidelines for introducing Tamil as medium of instruction at all

levels in the Educational sphere from Nursery to Higher education. On the recommendations of the committee the Government issued another order on November 19, 1999 saying that ‘In all schools Tamil or mother tongue shall be the first language; in all schools from class 1 to 5 Tamil or mother-tongue shall be the medium of instruction.’

‘c. The language in which literacy is first learnt in school (R1) should be a language that is most familiar to the student. Usually, this is the mother tongue of the student or the language that is prevalently used in the neighborhood.’

Here the part of the sentence ‘...or the language that is prevalently used in the neighborhood.’ deserves to be removed to make the policy meaningful or else neighborhood language will naturally have the overriding power.

‘d. Since it is in R1 that literacy is first attained, it must be used as the Medium of Instruction (MoI) for other subjects, at least until literacy in another language is attained.’

Considering that if R1 is mother tongue the policy could be accepted.

‘e. In Grades 11 and 12, at least two languages will be studied, at least one of which is a language native to India.’

This is an extension of the TLF purview to this stage of education. This has to be examined with care along with the data about the current scenario.

‘f. Language Education in all these languages would not just aim for oracy and literacy. Students should develop effective communication, discussion, and writing skills in these languages along with capacities for literary appreciation and creative use of language’.

As a goal of language education, it is commendable. Someone/government should take up this as a challenge and experiment in one rural school in each and every state and come up with an

objective assessment. If it is successful, it could be extended as the aim of the country. The NCFSE-2023 makes the intention of the language education policy very clear. Policy is one entity, and its implementation is another thing. Policy has to be not only idealistic but also practical. Need policy modification and honest implementation.

The tables given below provide the information (though out dated) about the number of school languages and the number of languages used as medium of instruction in India as reported by the documents of NCERT. Accurate current information on status of languages in the schools could not be obtained. But the statistics, though old, say something to attract our attention.

Number of School Languages

Year	1970	1973	1978	1986	1993
Number of languages	81	67	58	44	41

Number of Medium of Instruction Languages

Stage	Third Survey 1973	Fifth Survey 1986	Sixth Survey 1993
Primary	51	43	33
Upper Primary		31	25
Secondary		22	21
Higher Secondary		20	18

Between 1986 and 1993 at all levels of school education the number of languages being used as medium of instruction gradually decreased at all levels. The students were going away from the languages they were taught towards some other language/s. The statistics of the survey remained as statistics and did not open the eyes of educational/language planners. Concerted

efforts to investigate the reasons for this attrition and steps to prevent this, seems to have not been taken.

At all levels of school education, the number of languages being used as subject language and also as medium of instruction gradually decreased at all levels. The students were going away from the languages they were taught towards some other language/s. This is the symptom /indication that the TLF has miserably failed long ago in helping Indian languages to become school languages and also failed to retain them in the schools. Instead, it has forced languages to disappear from the school system. It may also be noticed that as the country goes higher and higher in the educational ladder, the number of languages being used too becomes less. The statistics of the survey remained as statistics and did not open the eyes of educational/language planners. Concerted efforts to investigate the reasons for this attrition and steps to prevent this seems to have not been taken.

A mother tongue/language has two roles in education. One is of communication, and another is the role of the medium to learn various subjects/disciplines. Not only language is one of the important parts of the education system, but it is also the driving force of the system. Now there is no need of artificially numbering school languages. Medium of instruction should invariably be one of the school languages. Now, more than seven decades after the independence of the country and more than five decades of the first *National Policy on Education* 1968, we as a nation have failed to arrive at proper language policy for education acceptable to one and all in the multilingual country. We do not think outside the baggage box of two-three formula and hanging on to the failed attempts and try to remain safe by sticking to ‘three’ of NEP 1968 which at that time itself ignored the term mother tongue though explicitly stated by the *Secondary Education Commission* in 1952 and *Education Commission* 1964-66.

We do not look at the challenging opportunities to change the existing unsuccessful system. The need of this century is a *people-centric* holistic approach and not only nation *centric* patch work approach. Language policy cannot be a cut and paste work. It has to be linguistically sound, acceptable to the people and implementable by the government machinery. The social and political

context in which this non-working TLF language policy for education was evolved is different from the one that exists in the schools today after 70 years. At that time both Hindi and non-Hindi speaking population was to be kept in good humor. The TLF exhibited that they are treated on par and Hindi speakers learn another language and non-Hindi speakers learn Hindi. The first version of NEP 1968 ignored the mother tongue and gave roles for regional languages Hindi and English. This has proved to be grand blunder, in ignoring mother tongue and glamorizing English and to certain extent - Hindi. This gave over riding power to English and people started to crave for it in education. The TLF through schooling has helped in the spread of Hindi in most of the non-Hindi speaking states, it has failed to spread non-Hindi languages in the Hindi speaking states. This affected language learning as well as learning through the language. Due to the constitutional provisions most of the regional languages got declared as official languages of the states and union territories and made efforts to become languages of administration wherever possible. Most unfortunately all regional languages failed to become a medium of instruction at all levels of education. English continues to rule the field. If the regional languages are not made languages of education at all levels for all even now, their growth is bound to suffer.

Need of the Hour - Mother Tongue First-as a Subject and as a Medium of Instruction

The All-India National Educational Conference held at Wardha (Varkey C J: 1940) on Oct 22 and 23, 1937 under presidentship of Mahatma Gandhi had resolved '*That ... compulsory education be provided for seven years on a nation-wide scale*' and also '*That the medium of instruction be the mother tongue.*' So far, we have done very little more than parroting the statement that mother tongue medium is the best medium. First language taught as a subject and the medium of instruction have lost their inter-link. Teaching languages from the beginning of the student's career and medium through which the instruction is imparted to him have lost linkages. In most cases they have moved in different directions. A student may be learning Kannada as first language, but his medium of instruction need not be Kannada, it can be Hindi or English. We have seen in Karnataka, students opting for Sanskrit as first language for the sake of marks and Sanskrit is not medium of instruction at all. It is essential to re-establish the relation between first language and medium of instruction for better educational outcomes. Strategies have to be devised in our Indian contexts to switch over from the mother tongue medium to the regional language or English

medium in the subsequent stages, since the same medium of instruction is not available at higher levels of education.

Now more than seventy years of independence of the country and fifty years of *National Policy on Education 1968* after reiterating the same regarding language education whenever education policy is formulated, we have understood that our languages are no longer problems but valuable resources to be nourished and properly utilised. But continued over emphasis on the TLF has ruined the language education scenario in the country. Slowly rootless students are being produced by the system, and they are hanging on to the branches of English. Instead of glamorizing a formula as strategy that eludes effective implementation for the past 50 or more years, a formula that has proven to be non-practicable has to be abandoned. A viable alternative a non-hierarchical language plan of action to the TLF for language education in the school curriculum should be worked out. There is a need for multilingual education which protects and preserves mother tongue not an education destined by time proved impractical formulae.

In India the language education debate is preoccupied with TLF, Hindi speaking - non-Hindi speaking states and does not think beyond that. Even after 75 years of independence neither all the 119 languages nor all the 271+ nameable mother tongues have become school languages. Strangely the word mother tongue has vanished as a school language from the NEP 2020. There is singular lack of understanding of difference between mother tongue and language in the Indian multilingual context.

The NEP-2020 repeatedly uses the term multilinguals, multilingualism. Existence of more languages in a geographic territory is not multilingualism. Multilingualism is people knowing and using more languages. It is a double-edged weapon. Due to circumstantial compulsions, education, business etc., people may in addition to their mother tongue learn one or more languages and become bilingual or multilingual. However, in due course of time, he /she may leave mother tongue and embrace the other tongue/s learnt, evidence to this exist in the country. Any such learnt additional language (not acquired in the natural process) should not become a substitute for mother

tongue. India needs additive multilingualism which protects mother tongue and not deductive multilingualism which leads to the death of a mother tongue.

Mother tongue is not merely a communication tool, it is a repository of socio-cultural traits, traditional knowledge systems. A mother tongue can survive and develop only if it is learnt at home and also as part of the schooling of the child. Earlier policy of language education, as already said was *national integration centric* and was aimed at spread of Hindi, English and development of the regional languages. It is necessary to note that Hindi too is one of the regional languages. Language education policy has to be *mother tongue centric* which protects and promotes the mother tongue of the child. In the context of Indian linguistic scenario where all languages are mother tongues, but all mother tongues are not languages one of the suggestions based on the experience of the implementation of previous NPEs is a holistic approach towards language education. It includes Grade I to V- Mother tongue of the student is the subject as well as medium of education. Grade VI to VIII – Mother tongue or regional language is subject as well as medium of education. Grade IX and X - the student is at liberty to choose the subject language and medium of education. Here the question is which mother tongue is medium? The answer is simple-all the mother tongues listed by the Census of India-2011 are to be allowed to be part of Indian school system. This shift of focus from idealistic *TLF Hindi-non-Hindi centric* to down to earth *mother tongue centric*- inclusive language education policy is the need of the 21st century India.

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