

# Three-Language Policy: What the World Teaches Us

The debate over the **three-language policy** has resurfaced in India. The central government has withheld **₹2,152 crores** meant for Tamil Nadu's schools because the state has refused to implement the **New Education Policy (NEP)**. Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has clearly stated that **funds will be released only if the NEP is implemented**. However, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister **M.K. Stalin** has firmly responded, saying, **"Even if they offer ₹10,000 crores, we will not accept it."**

At the core of this **controversial education policy** is the **three-language formula**. The initial proposal mandated learning **the mother tongue, English, and Hindi (for non-Hindi-speaking states)**, which sparked **strong opposition**. Later, the policy was revised to allow students to learn **their mother tongue, English, and any other Indian language of their choice**.

Since **1968**, Tamil Nadu has followed a **two-language policy (Tamil and English)**, rejecting the three-language formula. This remains the primary reason for its opposition to the NEP.

## A Long History of the Three-Language Policy

During India's independence movement, **national leaders debated the need for a common national language**. In 1925, at the **Kanpur Congress session**, Mahatma Gandhi proposed adopting **Hindustani (a blend of Hindi and Urdu)** as the national language to promote Hindu-Muslim unity. However, many leaders disagreed.

After independence, the **University Commission of 1948** was the first to recommend the **three-language formula**:

- **Mother tongue**
- **English**
- **A third language (Hindi for non-Hindi states)**

In 1950, the Constituent Assembly debated making **Hindustani the national language**. However, leaders like **Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Rajendra Prasad** rejected it due to the **Partition of India**, opting instead for **Hindi (in Devanagari script) as the official language**. The Constitution's **Article 343** declared Hindi as the official language, with a **15-year transition period** for its implementation.

During the **1960s**, several **anti-Hindi agitations** erupted in Tamil Nadu. These protests, which included **self-immolation and mass demonstrations**, ultimately forced the Indian government to **reconsider the mandatory imposition of Hindi**. Later **education policies introduced by Indira Gandhi (1968) and Rajiv Gandhi (1986)** continued to emphasize the **three-language formula**, but they never made it **mandatory**.

However, the **current government has taken a different approach—denying education funds to states that refuse to implement the NEP**, making it clear that Hindi promotion remains a priority.

## The Hidden Agenda Behind the Three-Language Policy

Many people argue that learning **an additional language like French, German, or Japanese** would create **better career opportunities**. However, the NEP mandates that the **third language must be an Indian language—which often translates to Hindi**.

The **central government's actions suggest a broader agenda:**

- **Replacing English with Hindi in government administration**
- **Pushing for Hindi dominance across India**
- **Heavily funding Hindi and Sanskrit education while ignoring other Indian languages**

For example:

- **₹50 crores** have been allocated to **recruit Hindi teachers** in non-Hindi states.
- **₹622 crores** have been allocated for **Sanskrit education**.
- No such funding exists for **Tamil, Kannada, Bengali, or other Indian languages**.

In **Kendriya Vidyalayas (Central Government Schools)** across Tamil Nadu, **permanent Hindi and English teachers** are employed, but **no permanent Tamil teachers are appointed**. If school principals **choose**, they can **hire temporary Tamil teachers at lower salaries**. This **raises doubts about the true intention** of the policy.

## Is Learning a Third Language Necessary?

Dr. **E. Annamalai**, a Tamil linguist and professor in the U.S., argues:

“Learning multiple languages should be a personal choice, not a government mandate. In India, over **10% of people** are naturally bilingual—not because of school, but due to **work and migration**. People **learn languages based on necessity**. Enforcing a third language in schools **does not guarantee its use in daily life.**”

Similarly, **Dr. Porco**, a former university vice-chancellor, states:

“No other country in the world **uses language as a political tool** the way India does. In Europe and America, multiple languages are encouraged, but **no language is forced**. For example, many workers from Bihar, Nepal, and Manipur move to Tamil Nadu. **They learn Tamil naturally** through necessity, without being forced in school.”

## Lessons from the World

Many countries have **adapted to linguistic diversity** rather than **forcing a single language**:

- **The United States** supports **Spanish, French, and Mandarin** alongside English.
- **Germany** offers **French, Spanish, Latin, and Russian** as **optional languages** in schools.
- **The UK** allows students to choose between **French, Spanish, and German**.

India, however, is moving toward an **extreme approach—pushing Hindi as the dominant language** while restricting other Indian languages.

## The Bigger Picture

Since **1963**, the Indian **Official Languages Act** has required a **committee to review Hindi usage every five years**. In **2022**, **Home Minister Amit Shah** submitted a report recommending that **Hindi should become India's common language**. The **three-language policy is a step toward this ultimate goal**.

India is a **multilingual nation** with a rich linguistic heritage. However, **forcing Hindi upon non-Hindi states** is being perceived as an attempt to **establish political and cultural dominance**.

The question remains:

**Is India moving forward with linguistic inclusivity, or is it repeating the mistakes of the past?**