

**Dr Ambedkar Chair  
and  
Symbiosis Centre for Higher Education  
Research and Policy Advocacy (SCHERPA)**

**jointly present**

**A Report on  
Language in Education:  
A Multi-stakeholder  
Policy Dialogue on the  
Three-Language Formula  
in Maharashtra**

**November, 2025**

## Executive Summary

India's linguistic diversity, encompassing 1,369 languages, 270 mother tongues, and countless dialects, has long shaped its educational, cultural, and political life. Language is not only a tool of communication but also a marker of identity, social belonging, and cultural preservation. The Three-Language Formula (TLF), introduced in the 1968 National Policy on Education and reaffirmed in National Education Policy 2020, was envisioned as a framework to balance regional identity, national integration, and global connectivity. Yet, its implementation remains inconsistent and contested, in many states including Maharashtra, where the politics of Marathi identity, resistance to Hindi, and neglect of tribal and minority languages complicate its outcomes.

This report, jointly prepared by the Dr Ambedkar Chair and SCHERPA explores these complexities through a multi-stakeholder policy dialogue involving students, teachers, parents, policymakers, and policy observers. Insights reveal deep concerns such as the continued preference for English, the recognition of the mother tongue as essential for cognitive and cultural development and structural inequities in government and private schools. The study also highlights the limited inclusion of tribal and minority languages, and an acknowledgment of Hindi's limited perceived relevance in certain regions. In Maharashtra, the recognition of Marathi as a singular linguistic identity ignores the plurality of "Marathis" spoken by Dalit, Adivasi, and nomadic communities, whose linguistic and literary contributions remain under-recognized. Structural challenges such as shortages of multilingual teachers, lack of culturally responsive materials, weak digital infrastructure, and disparities between urban and rural schools further impede the effective realization of the TLF's objectives.

The report recommends measures such as flexible curricula and culturally responsive pedagogy, teacher training, resource development, assessment reforms, equity-focused financing and establishment of language resource centres at schools. Revitalizing the TLF requires moving beyond symbolic policy to genuine linguistic justice, valuing diversity, protecting endangered languages, and ensuring equitable access to education in Maharashtra's multilingual classrooms.

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## 1. Contextualizing the Status of School Education in Maharashtra

India is a linguistically diverse country with 28 states and eight union territories, most of which are organized along linguistic lines. Each state has a dominant regional language, but the linguistic landscape is further shaped by the presence of numerous minority languages, caste- and class-based dialects, many of which do not have standardized scripts. According to the 2011 Census, a total of 1,369 Indian languages belonging to five language families - Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burman, and Semito-Hamitic were identified. Of these, 78.07 per cent of the population speak Indo-Aryan languages, 19.64 per cent speak Dravidian, 1.11 per cent speak Austro-Asiatic, and 1.01 per cent speak Tibeto-Burman (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2022).

Of these, 121 languages have over 10,000 speakers, making them significant in terms of population coverage. The Constitution of India recognizes 22 languages under the Eighth Schedule, which are considered official regional languages. Despite the vast number of languages spoken, over 95 per cent of the population speaks one of these 22 scheduled languages as one of their languages if not mother tongue. Additionally, the Census identifies 270 distinct mother tongues, encompassing a wide variety of linguistic and cultural identities. However, around three per cent of the population speaks languages that fall outside the scheduled list and are categorized as “other languages.” Notably, no single language is spoken by a majority of the country’s population. Hindi, the most widely spoken language group, particularly in the northern part of the country, is spoken or understood by 43.6 per cent of the population. The Constitution of India recognizes Hindi as the official language and English as an associate official language, alongside the other scheduled languages (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2022). It is important here to note that no one language is identified as the national language.

Multilingualism is a defining and celebrated feature of India, deeply embedded in its democratic and socio-cultural fabric. While it offers significant opportunities for inclusion and cultural preservation, it also presents complex challenges within the education system. Language has long played a central role in shaping education policies in India, often reflecting broader socio-political realities. With growing global mobility and domestic linguistic diversity, multilingual classrooms have become common within India. Students with diverse backgrounds join these classes where the language of instruction could be a second or third language as the language or dialect spoken at home can be completely different.

The Supreme Court of India upholds the right of students and parents to choose medium of instruction in schools (Rajagopal, 2025). While this legal provision supports autonomy and choice, in practice, speakers of minority languages often have limited options and are compelled to adapt to the dominant regional language to access quality education. A recent example is the Maharashtra Secondary School Certification (SSC – grade 10) exams in 2025, where the percentage of students failing in Marathi, a compulsory subject and primary medium of instruction in most schools, was six times higher than that in English. The pass percentage in Marathi dropped from 97 per cent in 2022 to 94.1 per cent in 2025, while Hindi also saw a decline from 97 per cent to 92.2 per cent (Bhaya Nair, 2012; Sarkarnama, 2025). These trends highlight the difficulties students face in a multilingual educational environment, where the gap between home language and school language can hinder learning outcomes.

The 2011 Census reports that Maharashtra alone is home to 231 mother tongues, yet only nine of these are spoken by more than 0.5 per cent of the state’s population (Langlex, n.d.). This linguistic diversity further complicates the educational landscape, making it essential to design inclusive language policies that accommodate the needs of both majority and minority language speakers.

To better understand this diversity, the People’s Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI) under the leadership of Prof Ganesh Devy started a nation-wide survey of languages in 2010. Conceived as a rights-based movement, PLSI undertook this initiative as a continuation of *Bhasha* Research that has been functional since 1966 (People’s Linguistic Survey of India, n.d.).

The survey sought to identify, document, and assess the condition of Indian languages, with particular attention to fragile linguistic traditions among nomadic, coastal, island, and forest communities. Unlike the national census, the PLSI included every language spoken in the country, regardless of the size of its population.

The PLSI documented 780 languages across India and revealed that more than 200 languages have become extinct over the last five decades. It also highlighted a sharp decline from the 1,100 languages spoken in 1961, showing that nearly 20 per cent of India’s linguistic wealth has disappeared within a relatively short period of time. As the most comprehensive language survey conducted in recent decades, the PLSI underscores both the richness of India’s linguistic heritage and the urgent threats it faces.



Alongside linguistic diversity, demographic factors also shape the educational landscape of India. From the Projected Population of India by Age Group, Gender, and Social Groups (2023-24), we can derive important insights into the demographic composition of children and adolescents, which directly impacts the planning, monitoring, and evaluation of school enrollment, sustenance, and inclusion especially for marginalized groups like Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). Below is a broader representation of the status of various groups in schools, drawn from the projected population data:

<b>Projected Population of India by Age Group, Gender and Social Groups 2023-24</b>						
<b>India</b>	<b>Overall</b>		<b>Schedule Castes</b>		<b>Schedule Tribes</b>	
	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>
Age 3-7	67795835	60781225	11923600	10882200	6703015	6303477
Age 8-10	36867904	33120906	6452400	5860800	3606499	3385609
Age 11-13	36859338	33644455	6363000	5862000	3480649	3303104
Age 14-17	50137036	46107111	8501000	7736000	4485328	4292787
<b>Maharashtra</b>	<b>Overall</b>		<b>Schedule Castes</b>		<b>Schedule Tribes</b>	
	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>
Age 3-7	5100914	4447638	616003	557922	599488	558315
Age 8-10	2879788	2499930	340772	307755	338891	311428
Age 11-13	3000856	2633425	365466	332426	347653	314620
Age 14-17	4201720	3724639	517689	463256	444598	401928

**Source:** Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Report of the Expert Group on Population Projection, June 2020. Projections have been made as per state-specific age criteria and has been adjusted as per the latest saturation reports of Aadhaar

At the institutional level, the school landscape in India, as in 2023-24 is largely dominated by government-managed institutions, accounting for nearly 69 per cent of all schools. Within this category, the majority fall under the State Government control, while centrally managed schools like Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs), Navodaya Vidyalayas (NVs), and other central government schools constitute a very small portion. In Maharashtra, the overall pattern follows the national trend but shows a relatively higher presence of private institutions. Of the total 1.08 lakh schools, about 60 per cent are government-managed and 40 per cent are private. Notably, government-aided private schools make up more than half of the private sector, which is a distinctive feature in Maharashtra’s education system.

According to the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2023-24, India has nearly 1.5 million schools catering to approximately 248 million students. The government sector, primarily consisting of state-run schools, continues to dominate in terms of both the number of schools and student enrollments, accounting for about 51 per cent of all students. However, the private sector—particularly private unaided schools—is rapidly expanding its footprint, now educating nearly 48 per cent of students despite operating fewer schools. The distribution of teachers is relatively balanced, with around five million working in government schools and approximately 4.77 million in private institutions.

Number of Schools, Students and Teachers Vs Types of Schools 2023-24							
Area		India			Maharashtra		
Students/Teachers		Schools	Students	Teachers	Schools	Students	Teachers
<b>All Management</b>		1471891	248045828	9807600	108237	21375970	738114
Govt	<b>Total</b>	1017660	127490199	5037671	65157	5325571	228491
	KVs	1251	1392570	47462	59	79005	2642

	NVs	650	275714	14408	34	14825	752
	Other Central	255	120000	5926	20	12278	502
	State Govt	1015504	125701915	4969875	65044	5219463	224595
	<b>Total</b>	<b>454231</b>	<b>120555629</b>	<b>4769929</b>	<b>43080</b>	<b>16050399</b>	<b>509623</b>
Private	Govt Aided	80313	25547841	775574	24173	9772608	275475
	Private Unaided	331108	90036939	3730047	18642	6236610	232368
	Others	42810	4970849	264308	265	41181	1780

Source: The Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2023-24 (Ministry of Education, n.d.)

In Maharashtra, the trends differ notably from patterns visible at the national level. The state accounts for about 7.4 per cent of India's total schools and 8.6 per cent of the student population. Private schools, especially government-aided ones, play a significantly larger role in Maharashtra than in most other states. Of the total 108,237 schools in the state, 43,080 are private and serve nearly 75 per cent of the student population—roughly 16 million out of 21.38 million students. In contrast, government schools in Maharashtra serve only about 25 per cent of students, much lower than the national average. Government-aided schools alone cater to 9.77 million students, representing nearly half of the state's school-going population, highlighting their critical role in Maharashtra's educational landscape.

India has an average teacher-student ratio of 1:25, while Maharashtra has a slightly higher load at 1:29, indicating more pressure on teachers in the state. Central government schools like KVs and NVs, though limited in number, serve a large number of students per school. These schools are known for better infrastructure, quality education, and more favourable teacher-student ratios.

The following table provides details of gender-wise distribution of school students as in 2023-24.

Enrolled Students with their Gender Vs Types of Schools 2023-24					
Area		India		Maharashtra	
Sex/Gender		Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
<b>All Management</b>		<b>128744591</b>	<b>119301237</b>	<b>11226536</b>	<b>10149434</b>
<b>Govt</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>62537625</b>	<b>64952574</b>	<b>2641341</b>	<b>2684230</b>
	KVs	744864	647706	42348	36657
	NVs	159334	116380	8455	6370
	Other Central	71336	48664	6985	5293
	State Govt	61562091	64139824	2583553	2635910
<b>Private</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>66206966</b>	<b>54348663</b>	<b>8585195</b>	<b>7465204</b>
	Govt Aided	13124709	12423132	5086594	4686014
	Private Unaided	50435526	39601413	3475860	2760750
	Others	2646731	2324118	22741	18440

Source: The Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2023-24 (Ministry of Education, n.d.)

Gender distribution further highlights equity concerns. Government schools, especially state public schools, are closer to achieving gender parity with some of them having more girls as students than boys. However, private unaided schools tend to have significantly more boys due to social and financial priorities that favour the education of boys in paid institutions. Government-aided schools, especially in Maharashtra, are found to have better gender balance than unaided private schools. This suggests that affordability and access continue to influence gender equity in

school education, especially in the private sector. Language in education also plays a prominent role in these access decisions and that needs to be studied closely as well.

Maharashtra's educational landscape illustrates the deep interconnections between linguistic diversity, demographic shifts, and institutional structures. These factors provide the backdrop against which language-in-education policies, particularly the Three-Language Formula (TLF), must be understood and assessed.

Therefore, Dr Ambedkar Chair of Symbiosis Centre for Ambedkar Studies (SCAS) and Symbiosis Centre for Higher Education Research and Policy Advocacy (SCHERPA) organized a multi-stakeholder policy dialogue on TLF. This was aimed at going beyond the statistical data available and to provide space for the voices from different sections of society regarding language acquisition and challenges associated with it. The objectives of this program were as follows:

- To examine the lived experiences shaping language development in school education, with an emphasis on how language influences learning and the construction of cultural identity
- To assess critically the implementation and effects of the TLF throughout India's diverse linguistic and regional landscapes, taking into account the complexities and variations encountered in different contexts
- To promote an interdisciplinary and intergenerational engagement by drawing on insights from fields such as education, linguistics, sociology, and policy studies
- To develop equitable, effective, and context-responsive strategies for language education, underscoring the importance of language policy in advancing social inclusion, national integration, and the celebration of cultural diversity

This exercise involved understanding the TLF as an idea through its earliest forms until NEP 2020. The next section attempts to provide policy developments in this direction at different time periods in independent India.

## **2. Three-language Formula in Educational Policies of India**

The TLF has been around in India for a few decades now despite facing challenges every now and then. These challenges are not only political but also operational. Though TLF is not new, National Education Policy (NEP 2020) again emphasizes on the TLF without addressing its inherent ambiguities. This comprehensive investigation focuses key provisions on TLF, shifts and

continuities, and implementation issues. This section examines the TLF's gradual evolution from constitutional foundations to educational commissions and national policies to contemporary policy, highlighting one of India's most significant and enduring language policy initiatives in education since independence.

The TLF specifies that every student learns at least three languages out of which two are Indian languages. This includes learning in mother tongues or regional languages, and Hindi in non-Hindi speaking states and other Indian languages in Hindi-speaking states along with English or any other modern global language. In practice, except for Tamil Nadu, Hindi is offered in non-Hindi states. There are much fewer examples of other Indian languages offered in Hindi-speaking states. This has created an asymmetry in language learning between states, particularly those in Hindi-speaking north Indian states and the non-Hindi-speaking south Indian states.

The constitutional makers needed to address India's different linguistic landscape while still establishing a unified nation-state. The language provisions were essential in balancing federal unity with regional diversity, establishing a framework for official communication while protecting linguistic minorities.

Article 343 of the Constitution designated "*Hindi in Devanagari script as the official language of the Union,*" however Article 343(2) permitted "*continued use of English for official purposes for fifteen years from the commencement of the Constitution.*" This created a fundamental constitutional foundation that would eventually influence educational language policies (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2024).

Article 350A of the Constitution provided that "*it shall be the endeavour of every State and of every local authority within the State to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother-tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups*" (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2024). This constitutional article established the legal framework for education in the mother tongue, which was eventually implemented through the TLF.

## **2.1 From Radhakrishnan Commission to NEP 2020**

Building on these constitutional foundations, the nation that became independent required concrete educational policies that would transform the language provisions into effective educational frameworks. India's multilingual education policy evolved through a series of commissions and policies aimed at balancing linguistic diversity, national integration, and educational goals. While the TLF was envisioned as a progressive framework, its trajectory reveals

deep tensions between ideals of inclusion and the realities of political, cultural, and social contestations.

TLF was once envisioned as a framework for promoting national cohesion and linguistic diversity but it is now a symbol of contested identities, bureaucratic uncertainties, and regional resistance (Laitin, 1989). Among many sections of the country, particularly rural, indigenous, and disadvantaged communities, the TLF is more prevalent in policy documents than in practice. Its failure to foster an inclusive language environment has worsened educational disparities. Instead of promoting educational empowerment, the TLF has turned into a site of cultural negotiation and political confrontation due to the imposition of Hindi in many states, the preference for Sanskrit over native southern or tribal languages, and the dominance of English as the language of aspiration (Meganathan, 2011). Given this, the question of how we got to this standstill is crucial. Why does the TLF, an apparently progressive program, keep failing in practice? To respond to this, we need to go back to the historical roots of TLF policy and conduct a critical analysis of the political, ideological, and educational factors that influenced its creation (Ricento, 2002).

In the context of postcolonial nation-building, a review of the suggestions made by the Radhakrishnan Commission (1948–49) and the Kothari Commission (1964–66) shows that the TLF was not only an educational approach but also a political one.

### **Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-49)**

The first steps toward a multilingual framework were articulated by the Radhakrishnan Commission (1948–49). Constituted as the University Education Commission under the chairmanship of Dr S Radhakrishnan, it recommended the study of classical languages such as Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian, alongside modern Indian languages and English (Ministry of Education, 1950). While it did not formalize the TLF, the Commission's emphasis on multilingual education laid the intellectual groundwork for future reforms (Ministry of Education, 1950).

### **Mudaliar Commission (1952-53)**

The Mudaliar Commission (1952–53), also known as the Secondary Education Commission, was set up by the Government of India on 23 September 1952. Dr. A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar, Vice-Chancellor of Madras University, led the commission. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad

inaugurated it on 6 October 1952. The commission examined the weaknesses of India's secondary education, which was too focused on exams, overly literary, and not connected to social and economic needs. The commission recommended a new structure of 8 years of primary, 3 years of secondary, and 3 years of higher secondary education. It suggested diversifying the curriculum to include technical, vocational, and agricultural subjects, improving teacher training, enhancing student welfare, and reforming the examination system. These changes intended to prepare students for higher education as well as vocational opportunities and responsible citizenship.

One of the commission's most important contributions was its detailed recommendations on the study of languages, which later became the TLF. It highlighted that the mother tongue or regional language should be the primary medium of instruction throughout the secondary stage. It also recommended that every child should learn at least two languages in middle school, with Hindi and English introduced gradually after the Junior Basic stage. The guideline stated, "*No two languages should be introduced in the same year.*" At high school and higher secondary levels, students had to study at least two languages, one of which should be the mother tongue or regional language. The commission clarified that either Hindi or English could be introduced first, with the other taught a year later to avoid overwhelming students. This framework aimed to balance regional identity, national integration, and international communication. It laid the groundwork for the TLF adopted later in the 1968 National Education Policy.

### **Kothari Commission (1964-66)**

Building on this foundation, the Kothari Education Commission (1964-66), also known as Indian Education Commission was set up on 14 July 1964, under the chairmanship of Dr D S Kothari. The Commission was assisted by experts from countries such as UK, USA, USSR and international organization such as UNESCO. The recommendations of Kothari Commission on education reforms became part of the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1968.

The report proposed the TLF under the section - Education and Social and National Integration in Chapter I on Education and National Objectives. The Commission recommended that government incorporate this formula into secondary education to enhance multilingual competency among students by teaching them the regional language, Hindi and English, aiming to strike a balance between regional pride, national integration, and global orientation. However, the ideological underpinning championed Hindi as the national language while allowing English

to be used for official purposes. This decision generated the roots of conflict between Hindi imposition and linguistic federalism, which would subsequently define political opposition to the TLF (Ministry of Education, 1966).

The NPE of 1968 formally incorporated TLF into the education policy at the national level, giving it a statutory legitimacy. While it reinforces the goals of integration and multilingual competence, the policy's prescriptive nature offered limited flexibility for state level adaptation, resulting in uneven implementation and localized resistance.

The NPE 1986, revised in 1992, reaffirmed the TLF and expanded its scope to enhance inclusivity. The Policy emphasized mother-tongue instruction at the primary stage and sought to strengthen classical and minority languages through curricular and pedagogical interventions. Nevertheless, implementation challenges persisted, and the TLF often remained more symbolic than substantive, constrained by administrative capacity and political contestation.

The National Education Policy (2020) retained the TLF while repositioning it within a more flexible and decentralized framework. It recommends that students learn three languages, with at least two of Indian origin, and advocates the mother tongue or regional language as the medium of instruction until Grade 5 (preferably Grade 8). By refraining from explicitly privileging Hindi, the Policy addresses longstanding political sensitivities and emphasizes inclusivity. However, structural hierarchies remain, with Hindi and English continuing to dominate at the expense of tribal and minority languages.

These successive commissions and policies illustrate that the TLF has been a consistent, yet contested, instrument of India's multilingual education policy. While its objectives have evolved to incorporate flexibility and inclusivity, the formula's implementation continues to be influenced by political, linguistic, and structural factors. The following section examines the key provisions of the TLF, highlighting its intended structure and operational mechanisms.

## **2.2 Key Provision of TLF**

The TLF is an important policy initiative in Indian education implemented to manage the nation's rich linguistic heritage while encouraging equal language representation and national integration.

The evolution of TLF provisions across different policies demonstrates both continuity in multilingual objectives and shifts in implementation approaches.

**a) The National Policy on Education (1968)**

This is the first policy to formally introduce the three language Formula.

**Key Provision**

**“Paragraph 5(b):** *At the secondary stage, the State Governments should adopt and vigorously implement the three-language formula, which includes study of a modern Indian language, preferably one of the southern languages, apart from Hindi & English in Hindi-speaking States, and Hindi along with Regional Language and English in Non-Hindi-Speaking States”* (Ministry of Education, 2013)

**Key features of the Policy**

- Promote multilingual competency
- Ensure national integration through Hindi
- Maintain global connectivity through English
- Preserve regional linguistic diversity
- 

**b) National Policy on Education (1986)**

Building on the 1968 framework, NPE 1986 reaffirmed the TLF while introducing new elements to address language development more broadly (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1998).

**Key Provision(s)**

- **Section 8.15:** *"The three-language formula will continue to be implemented, adjusting it, where necessary. English will continue to be taught."*
- **Section 8.16:** *"Regional languages will be promoted and developed. There will be special emphasis on the development of Hindi."*
- **Section 8.17:** *"Classical languages like Sanskrit and Arabic-Persian will be available for study. The study of these languages and associated literature will be encouraged."*
- **Section 8.18:** *"Programmes for the development of languages mentioned in the Constitution will be strengthened and vigorously pursued."*
- **Section 8.19:** *"Mother tongue will be the medium of instruction at the primary stage wherever feasible."*

### **Key Features**

- Continued TLF implementation with flexibility
- Emphasis on classical language preservation
- Mother tongue instruction at primary level
- Constitutional language development programs

### **b) Programme of Action (1992) (POA) - Part VII - Language Development**

To implement TLF in practice, Section 18 of the Programme of Action (POA) 1992 laid down concrete strategies for curriculum, teacher training, and language preservation (Ministry of Education, 1992).

### **Key Components**

- "Implementation of Three-language formula, improvements in the linguistic competencies of students at the different stages of education"
- "The NPE and POA elaborately discussed about the concept of language development and emphasized the adoption of regional languages as the media of instruction at the university stage"
- "Promotion of classical languages like Sanskrit"
- "Detailed guidelines for curriculum development and teacher training programs for multilingual competency"
- "Special emphasis on the promotion of ancient languages such as Sanskrit and the preservation of tribal and minority languages"

### **Implementation Strategy**

- Teacher training for multilingual education
- Curriculum material development in regional languages
- Preservation of tribal and minority languages
- Classical language promotion programs

### **c) National Education Policy 2020**

Marking the most significant shift, NEP 2020 retained the TLF but redefined it with unprecedented flexibility, aligning language education with cognitive research and learner autonomy (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020).

### Key Provision(s)

- **Section 4.11 (Medium of Instruction):** *"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."*
- **Section 4.12 (Early Language Learning):** *"As research clearly shows that children pick up languages extremely quickly between the ages of 2 and 8 and that multilingualism has great cognitive benefits to young students, children will be exposed to different languages early on (but with a particular emphasis on the mother tongue), starting from the Foundational Stage onwards."*
- **Section 4.13 (Three Language Formula - Core Provision):** *"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."*
- **Section 4.14 (Language Change Flexibility):** *"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."*
- **Section 4.15 (Bilingual Education Materials):** *"All efforts will be made in preparing high-quality bilingual textbooks and teaching-learning materials for science and mathematics, so that students are enabled to think and speak about the two subjects both in their home language/ mother tongue and in English."*
- **Section 4.16 (Cultural Integration):** *"Thus, every student in the country will participate in a fun project/ activity on 'The Languages of India', sometime in Grades 6–8, such as, under the 'Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat' initiative."*

### Key changes in NEP 2020

- Maximum flexibility with no language imposition
- Agency to both students and state while selecting language of instruction
- Requirement: "at least two of the three languages are native to India"
- Mother tongue instruction extended to Grade 8
- Bilingual materials for science and mathematics
- Cultural integration through pan-India language projects

## TLF Framework Structure Across Policies

Traditional TLF Structure (1968-1992)	NEP 2020 Framework
<p><b>For Hindi-speaking states</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- First language: Hindi</li> <li>- Second language: Modern Indian language (preferably South Indian)</li> <li>- Third language: English</li> </ul> <p><b>For non-Hindi speaking states:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- First language: Regional language/mother tongue</li> <li>- Second language: Hindi</li> <li>- Third language: English</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Three languages with at least two being native to India</li> <li>- State, regional, and student choice in language selection</li> <li>- No mandatory Hindi</li> <li>- Flexibility to change languages in Grades 6-7</li> </ul>

Across these successive policies, the TLF has been consistently reaffirmed but interpreted in different ways to address India's complex linguistic and educational landscape. Rather than a static framework, it represents an evolving policy instrument shaped by shifting national priorities, pedagogical insights, and sociopolitical realities. The following section examines the key shifts and continuities that have defined this evolution.

### 2.3 Shifts and Continuities with regard to TLF

**From Prescription to Flexibility:** The evolution of TLF demonstrates a significant shift from rigid, prescriptive language combinations mandated between 1968-1992 to the flexible, choice-based approach introduced in NEP 2020. Earlier policies imposed specific language combinations with little room for adaptation, requiring Hindi-speaking states to learn a South Indian language and non-Hindi states to study Hindi. In contrast, NEP 2020 empowers states and students to make language choices based on local needs and preferences, requiring only that at least two of the three languages be native to India.

**From Political to Pedagogical:** The foundational approach to TLF has transformed from primarily political motivations focused on national integration and unity to evidence-based pedagogical considerations emphasizing cognitive benefits and learning outcomes. Earlier policies prioritized Hindi as a unifying national language and English for global connectivity, viewing

language education as a tool for political cohesion. NEP 2020 shifts this focus toward a research-backed understanding of multilingual education benefits, emphasizing mother tongue instruction for cognitive development and natural language acquisition processes.

**From Uniformity to Diversity:** The TLF framework has evolved from a one-size-fits-all approach that assumed uniform implementation across India's diverse linguistic landscape to current recognition and accommodation of regional linguistic diversity. Previous policies applied identical language combinations regardless of local linguistic contexts, often creating artificial impositions on regional communities. NEP 2020 acknowledges India's multilingual reality and allows contextual adaptation while maintaining core multilingual objectives.

**Persistent Challenges:** Despite decades of policy evolution, TLF implementation remains largely symbolic due to several interconnected factors. Political opposition and cultural resistance continue to undermine uniform implementation, as demonstrated by Tamil Nadu's consistent rejection of 'Hindi imposition' and limited reciprocal adoption of South Indian languages in Hindi-speaking states. Practical limitations in resource allocation persist, including inadequate teacher training, insufficient multilingual teaching materials, and administrative capacity constraints across different educational boards and institutions.

Social inequities in language access remain pronounced, with elite private schools often circumventing TLF requirements while rural and marginalized communities face barriers to quality multilingual education. The fundamental gap between policy aspirations and ground reality continues to widen, as symbolic policy commitments fail to translate into meaningful multilingual competency development among students.

## 2.4 Historical Evolution of the TLF

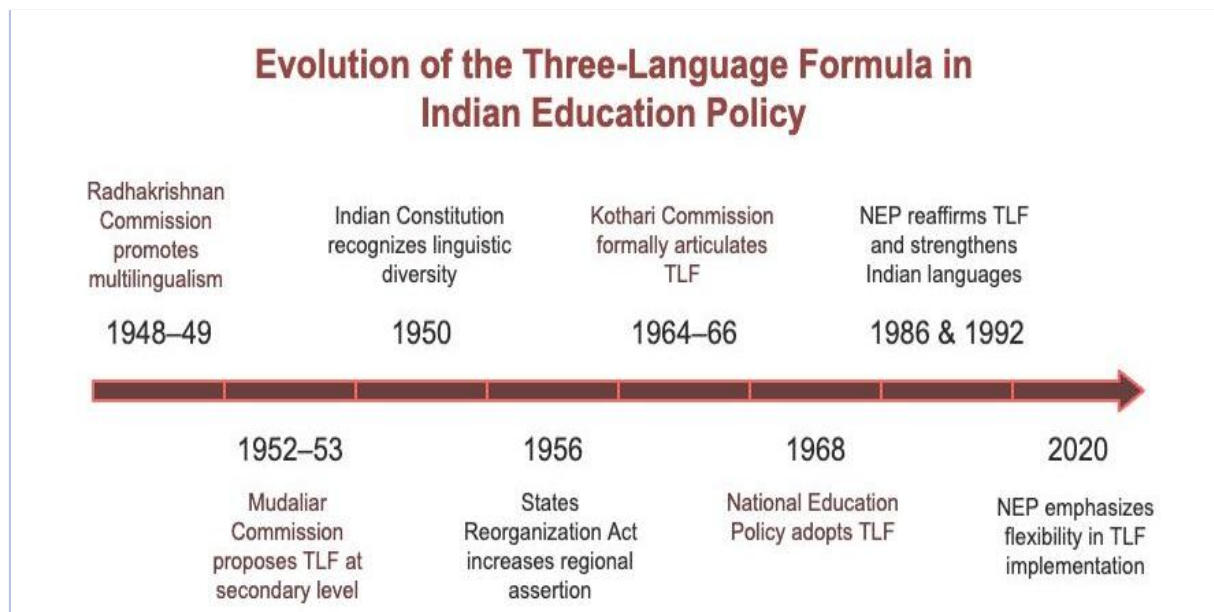
Name of the Commission /Policy	Time Period	Relevant Sections / Quotes	Key Attributes on Language / TLF
Radhakrishnan Commission	1948–	<b>Chapter IX, p. 292, Section: Recommendations on Language</b>	- Promoted multilingualism

(University Education Commission)	49	<b>Policy)-</b> “We would, therefore, recommend that all students who are able to do so should study at least <b>three languages</b> , namely, the <b>regional language</b> , the <b>classical language (preferably Sanskrit)</b> , and <b>English.</b> ”	- Language as a tool for national integration - Early push for TLF-like framework
Mudaliar Commission (Secondary Education Commission)	1952–53	<b>(Chapter VI: The Curriculum, p. 127)</b> “The Commission recommends that, as far as possible, every child should at the secondary stage learn <b>at least three languages</b> , namely, the <b>mother tongue or regional language, Hindi</b> as the national language, and <b>English</b> as the international language.”	- Mother tongue + Hindi + English - Functioning in multilingual democracy - Proposed implementation at secondary level
Indian Constitution	1950	Article 351: “It shall be the duty of the Union to promote the spread of the Hindi language...” Article 343: “Hindi shall be the official language of the Union.” Articles 29 & 30: Protect linguistic minorities	- No national language; multilingual recognition - Promoted Hindi development, not imposition - States can choose official languages - Protected minority linguistic rights
States Reorganization Act	1956	Not a direct education policy, but important for context	- Reorganized states on linguistic basis - Increased regional

			<p>assertion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Need for a unifying yet diverse language policy like TLF</li> </ul>
Kothari Commission	1964–66	<p><b>Chapter VIII: School Curriculum, Section on Languages, Page 358, Volume II.</b></p> <p>“Every child should, by the end of the secondary stage, have acquired a working knowledge of three languages, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) the mother tongue or regional language,</li> <li>(ii) Hindi, and</li> <li>(iii) English.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Formal articulation of TLF</li> <li>- Aimed at linguistic harmony, equity</li> <li>- Emphasized flexibility and avoidance of Hindi imposition</li> <li>- English for global access</li> </ul>
National Education Policy	1968	<p><b>Section 4 (i):</b> In the non-Hindi speaking States, Hindi should be studied as a second language, the first language being the mother tongue or the regional language.”</p> <p>“In the Hindi-speaking States, the first language will be Hindi, and the second language should be <i>some other modern Indian language</i>, preferably one of the southern languages.”</p> <p>“The third language would be English</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Official adoption of TLF</li> <li>- Inter-state understanding through language</li> <li>- Promote South Indian languages in North</li> <li>- Encourage Hindi in non-Hindi regions</li> </ul>

		or a modern European language.”	
NEP 1986 (and revised in 1992)	1986 & 1992	<b>Section: Strengthening of the TLF, Para 8.15:</b> “The implementation of the three-language formula will be strengthened, taking into account the need to promote national integration and the economic and cultural development of the various States.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reaffirmed TLF</li> <li>- Strengthening Indian languages</li> <li>- Emphasis on functional use of Hindi, but flexible</li> <li>- Resistance in South, notably Tamil Nadu</li> </ul>
National Education Policy	2020	<p><b>Section 4.13:</b> “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.”</p> <p><b>Section 22.17:</b> Efforts to preserve and promote all Indian languages including classical, tribal and endangered languages will be taken on with new vigour. Technology and crowdsourcing, with extensive participation of the people will play a crucial role in these efforts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Flexibility in TLF implementation</li> <li>- No imposition of any language</li> <li>- Emphasis on local/mother tongue in early education</li> <li>- Inclusion of tribal and minority languages</li> <li>- Promotion of linguistic justice and autonomy</li> </ul>

**Sources:** (Ministry of Education, 1966, 1992, 2013; Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1998; Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020; Ministry of Law and Justice, 2024)

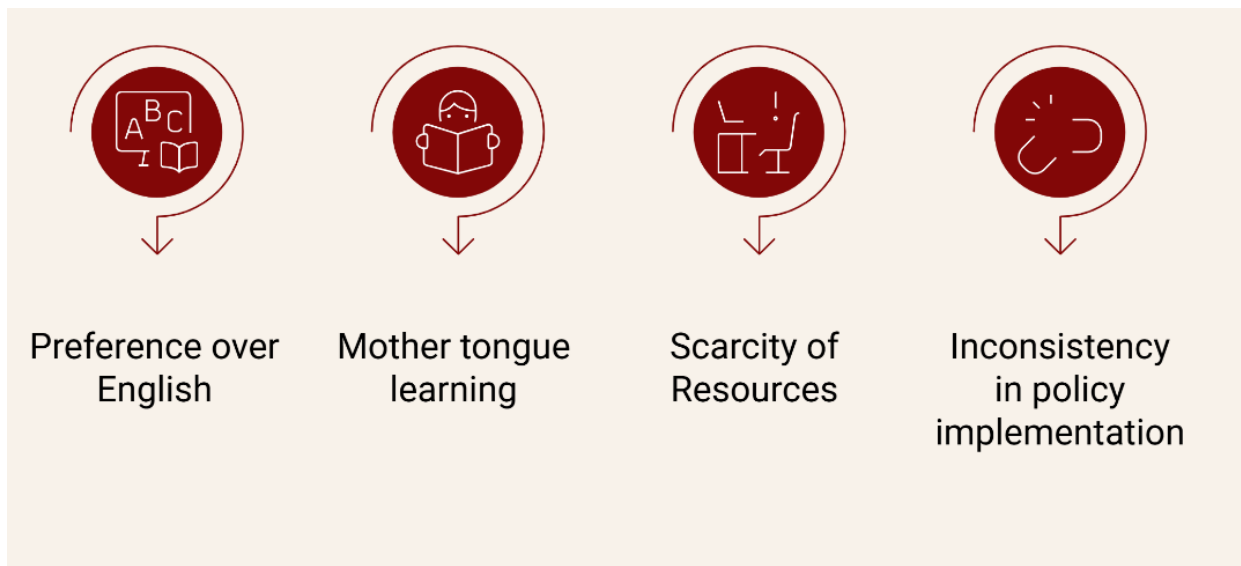


### 3. Insights from Stakeholders

Though TLF aims to promote multilingualism, cultural integration, and equitable access to knowledge, its implementation across India faces diverse challenges shaped by regional variations, student experiences, teacher capacity, and policy-practice gaps. This section presents the multistakeholder insights under various themes consolidated from the Policy Dialogue on Three Language Formula organized by SCHERPA and Dr Ambedkar Chair at Symbiosis International (Deemed University) on July 9, 2025. This policy dialogue had representations from among students of schools from across Pune district, teachers, parents, researchers, policy observers/makers and those from NGOs working with schools. This was supplemented by field data from Marathi, Adivasi, and Beldari Students of Government schools in Mulshi Taluka.

Efforts were made to include students, teachers, and parents from different public and private schools and from different socio-economic backgrounds. From among the researchers, efforts were made to have both young and senior researchers on board for these consultations.

In the following section, we provide the outcomes of these deeply engaging stakeholder consultations. This is provided in six themes, each enabling the voices of the participants to come through for a better understanding of the situation. As stakeholders shared their views in various Indian languages such as Marathi, Kannada, Hindi, these have been translated into English to enhance readability.



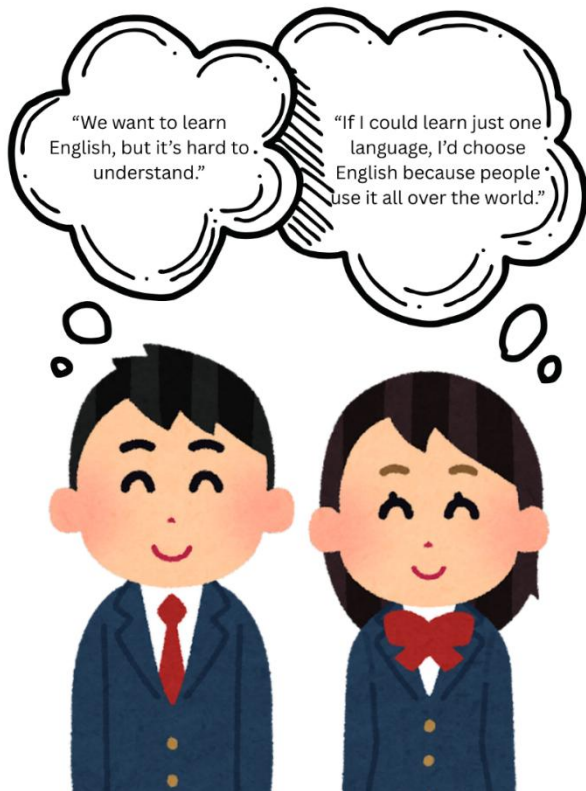
### 3.1 Continuing Preference over English

English has become the dominant language of global communication, largely due to its central role in technology, the internet, and international business. English serves as a common medium between people from different linguistic backgrounds, which facilitates cross-border collaboration in academic, professional, and technical fields. With the spread of globalization, the need for English proficiency has grown rapidly, making it a critical skill for accessing opportunities in high-tech industries and knowledge-based sectors worldwide.

India's relationship with English is shaped by both its colonial history and its contemporary global aspirations. Initially introduced through missionary education in the 18th and 19th centuries, English gained institutional backing with Macaulay's 1835 Policy and the 1854 Wood's Dispatch, which promoted English-medium schools and higher education systems to develop in India. Post-independence, political resistance from non-Hindi-speaking states led to English being retained as an additional official language. Today, English in India functions in two distinct ways: as a nativized form for local communication - Indian English, and as a globalized one used in international business and communication (Bhaya Nair, 2012). Despite concerns about linguistic imperialism, many Indians view English as essential for upward mobility, especially in sectors like technology and education, where fluency can significantly impact career prospects.

While English has come to symbolize both opportunity and inequality in India, its role cannot be understood in isolation from the lived realities of those directly engaged in education. The perspectives of students, teachers, parents, and policymakers reveal how aspirations, challenges, and structural constraints shape the everyday experience of English in India's multilingual landscape.

**Students:** Students from varied educational backgrounds, including urban and rural, public and private schools, expressed a strong preference for a bilingual model that includes English and their regional language. Out of 19 students, 12 favoured this two-language approach, with English perceived as essential for future academic and professional opportunities. English was often referred to as a



“global passport,” signifying its symbolic and practical value in accessing education, employment, and mobility. Despite recognizing the importance of English, students admitted struggling with comprehension, particularly when it is used as the medium of instruction without adequate support. Many continue to aspire toward fluency in English even when their foundational understanding remains weak.

**Teachers:** Teachers observed that while students consider English essential for their future, it remains the most challenging language to comprehend. Many students are unable to understand English textbooks and classroom instruction without teacher support. Teachers highlighted that there is an imbalance in study materials being heavily tilted toward English and Mathematics, giving relatively less attention to regional languages. This makes it difficult for students to develop proficiency even in their mother tongues. Given the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students, teachers emphasized the importance of adopting flexible and inclusive teaching strategies to ensure clarity of concepts, regardless of the language

“English is given more preference in schools. Government-provided materials and teachers mainly focus on English and Math. Other languages, like Hindi and Marathi, are not given the same importance. As a result, children often find Hindi, Marathi, or any other regional language difficult to learn.”



used.

“Language connects our children to their roots, it helps them speak to their grandparents and understand their culture. But at the same time, we can't ignore the role of English today. For competitive exams, jobs, and higher education, English is necessary. So, while we want our children to learn our mother tongue, we also want them to be fluent in English for a better future.”



**Parents:** Parents viewed language as a bridge between generations and a means of upward mobility. They also acknowledged the instrumental value of English for competitive exams and careers prospects of their children.

**Policy makers/observers:** Policymakers and observers emphasized the need to move away from English as the sole medium of instruction in government schools, particularly in the early years. They advocated for greater focus on mother tongue-based education, highlighting that early childhood learning (ages 2-8) is largely driven by listening and reading, which is most effective in a familiar language. They also acknowledged that language policy is deeply intertwined with cultural identity and political dynamics, citing resistance to Hindi and prioritized English in southern states and the symbolic use of classical languages like Sanskrit.

While English continues to be valued as a gateway to global opportunities, its dominance often overshadows the role of the mother tongue in shaping a child’s cognitive, cultural, and emotional development. This tension between aspirations for English and the

“Language and even education often carry political weight. Sanskrit, once a revered classical language, is now largely symbolic and often limited to media narratives. Similarly, the promotion of Hindi has faced resistance in southern states, where linguistic identity plays a strong cultural and political role.”

“Language is just a tool. Policies around it change in cycles; what’s necessary today might not be needed in ten years.”



foundational importance of learning in one’s native language underscores the need to balance global mobility with cultural rootedness. Against this backdrop, the following theme examines the critical role of mother tongue-based education in ensuring equity and meaningful learning.

### 3.2 Learning in Mother tongue

Learning in one’s mother tongue plays a crucial role in a child’s early education. It is not just a means of communication but also a key to cultural identity and personal development. The NEP 2020 highlights that child understand and engage with the world best through their mother tongue, especially in the foundational years. It supports cognitive growth, emotional belongingness, and better academic outcomes. Since the mother tongue is closely tied to how children think, understand, and learn, it should be used

“Children in the 2–8 age group learn primarily by listening and reading. This is a crucial stage in their development.”



as the medium of instruction in the early stages of schooling. This ensures a smoother learning

process and helps children build strong educational foundations (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020).

India, being a home to 270 mother tongues, recognizes only a limited number of languages in its education system. While 22 languages are recognized by the Constitution, many tribal and minority mother tongues are excluded from the school curriculum. Over the years, the number of languages taught in schools has decreased, leaving many children, especially from marginalized communities, to learn in a dominant language that is not the same as their home language (Mohanty, 2023). This creates a learning disadvantage and may weaken their connection to their native language.

During the field visit, we observed that a student speaks Beladari at home, Marathi at school as the medium of instruction, and English as an additional language. Such multilingual settings, combined with the lack of support for minority languages, contribute to educational inequality and limit opportunities for many children across India.

While the policy discourse strongly highlights the cognitive and cultural benefits of mother tongue instruction, its success ultimately depends on how it is experienced and implemented at the ground level. The perspectives of the following stakeholders will provide critical insights into both the promise and the practical challenges of mother tongue-based education in India.

**Student:** Students expressed a clear preference for learning in their mother tongue, as it made it easier for them to understand concepts and enhanced their overall classroom experience. Marathi emerged as the most preferred language since it serves both as a native tongue for many and as a common cultural link within the classroom. However, some students mentioned facing difficulties with complex grammar, even in their own language.



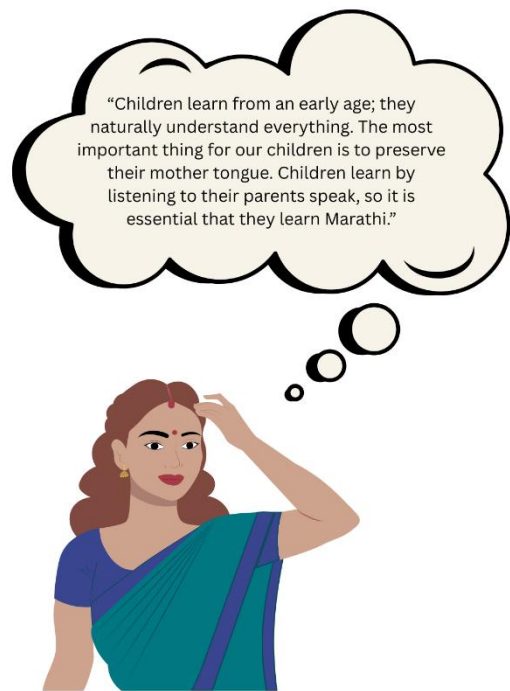
While most supported learning in a familiar language, few students from private schools showed interest in learning classical and foreign languages such as German, French, Japanese, Mandarin, etc, for their future.

At the same time, students highlighted that the language of instruction should also prepare them for national and state-level examinations and future career opportunities. Many shared that learning Hindi could be more enjoyable if it were taught through engaging and creative activities, rather than being tied to formal examinations. They felt that making Hindi optional and learning it in a relaxed, interactive way would help them see it as a language to enjoy and use, rather than as an academic burden.

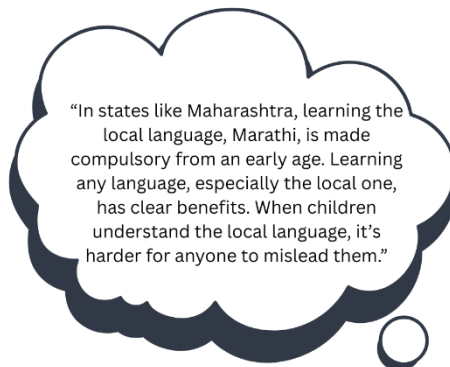
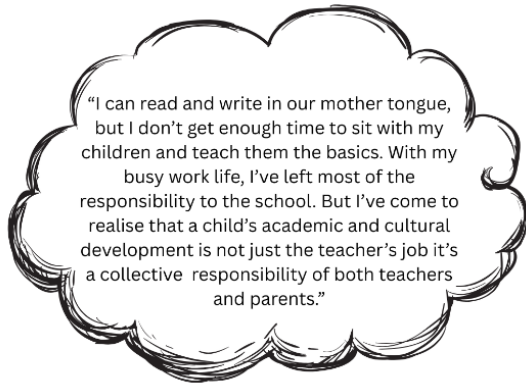


**Parents:** Parents emphasized the significance of mother tongue-based learning, expressing concern that the growing dominance of regional language over the dialects might cause a disconnect between their children and ancestral linguistic traditions. While some parents attributed this shift to systemic shortcomings in the education system, others, particularly those who were literate, acknowledged their own limitations in supporting mother tongue learning at home. In contrast, illiterate parents, whose children are often the first in the family to attend school, placed their

**Teachers:** Teachers reported using the mother tongue, primarily Marathi, to help students grasp concepts, particularly in early grades. However, they faced challenges when students spoke different languages at home, citing a lack of training and resources. Educators stressed the importance of mother-tongue instruction for foundational learning and called for pedagogy that is sensitive to the region's linguistic diversity. They highlighted the need for context-sensitive teaching aids.



trust entirely in the education system. They looked to schools, teachers, and government support to provide language instruction that could enhance their



children's future opportunities and socio-economic mobility.

**Policy makers/observers:** Policymakers emphasized the importance of promoting mother tongue-based education as a means to strengthen

foundational learning, particularly in the early years of schooling. They viewed the NEP 2020's recommendation for mother tongue instruction until at least Grade 5 as a progressive and necessary step. However, they expressed concerns over the inconsistent implementation of the TLF across states. While the TLF was intended to encourage multilingualism and foster national integration, policymakers noted that it often ends up privileging dominant languages, limiting its effectiveness in representing India's linguistic diversity. Resistance to Hindi in some regions and the continued prioritization of English in others were seen as key barriers to its uniform application. In response, policymakers advocated for the equitable distribution of resources to support the development of teaching and learning materials in tribal and minority languages. They also highlighted the need for community involvement in curriculum development, especially in tribal areas where many local languages are endangered. Observers further pointed to a disconnect between the policy's vision and ground-level realities. In many rural and marginalized areas, students struggle to attain academic proficiency in any of the three languages, while in urban and

elite settings, the growing preference for English-medium education is contributing to the marginalization of regional languages, raising broader concerns around linguistic equity and inclusion in the education system.

Although policy frameworks and community voices strongly support the use of the mother tongue in education, translating this vision into practice faces considerable obstacles.

The lack of resources, limited teacher training, and inadequate infrastructure



"A study of 15,000 Marathi-medium government schools in areas like Gadchiroli and Nagpur shows that parental involvement is key in learning Marathi. However, Marathi is losing its natural use and becoming restricted, as other languages increasingly influence daily communication."

create persistent barriers to effective multilingual education. These gaps are most visible in classrooms, where teachers and students struggle with uneven support systems. The following theme highlights the structural and pedagogical challenges that limit the successful implementation of the TLF.

### **3.3 Lack of resources, infrastructure, and challenges in teaching and learning**

Despite the progressive goals of the TLF to promote multilingualism, cultural integration, and national unity, its impact has remained uneven, with significant gaps between policy intent and classroom reality. A major factor contributing to this gap is inadequate infrastructure. In the context of educational policy, infrastructure extends beyond the physical condition of schools, such as safe buildings, adequate classrooms, electricity, and sanitation, to include qualified teachers, multilingual teaching materials, digital resources, and an inclusive environment that supports equitable learning for all students. The absence or insufficiency of these foundational elements, especially in rural, tribal, and economically disadvantaged areas, creates persistent barriers that undermine student learning, teacher effectiveness, and the overall outcomes of the TLF.

Schools lacking proper infrastructure struggle to deliver even basic instruction, let alone foster multilingual education. Shortages of trained teachers often force educators to cover multiple subjects, sometimes beyond their expertise, resulting in superficial or rote learning. Similarly, the

limited availability of textbooks and digital learning tools, particularly in local, tribal, and minority languages, denies students culturally relevant and comprehensible educational experiences. Without consistent access to electricity and digital environments, innovative pedagogical methods, such as language labs or online learning platforms, remain largely inaccessible. Addressing these infrastructure gaps is not only essential for policy implementation but also a matter of educational equity and social justice.

Challenges in teaching and learning are further compounded by structural constraints and resource limitations. Teachers face high student-to-teacher ratios, minimal professional development opportunities, and the need to manage multiple subjects or adapt to evolving curricula without adequate support. Students, in turn, struggle with language barriers, diverse learning paces, and the pressure to master several languages simultaneously. Variations in background knowledge, home environment, and access to learning materials exacerbate disparities in academic outcomes. These interconnected challenges affect both the quality of instruction and long-term learning outcomes, making targeted interventions, such as comprehensive teacher training, resource allocation, and inclusive pedagogical strategies, crucial for effective education.

Both private and government schools across Maharashtra encounter these challenges, though the nature and intensity differ. Differences in resources, infrastructure, teacher availability, and student backgrounds influence how the TLF and other educational policies are implemented, resulting in varying levels of multilingual competency and educational attainment.

The uneven distribution of resources and infrastructure, combined with diverse student needs, has particularly profound implications for government



"70% of schools are government-run, while 30% are private. Currently, 28% of teaching positions are vacant. Additionally, several posts remain unsanctioned, even as efforts are underway to expand government educational resources."

schools. Understanding these specific challenges is critical to addressing gaps in language instruction, ensuring equitable access, and strengthening the implementation of the TLF in public education settings.

### 3.3.1 Challenges in Government Schools

- i) **Shortage of Trained Language Teachers:** Government schools in Maharashtra, especially in rural and tribal areas, face a severe shortage of qualified language teachers, with at least 28 per cent remaining unfilled. This situation forces existing teachers to manage multiple subjects, many outside their expertise. As a result, the quality of instruction and student support in language learning suffers.

“You know, at Balbharati, we develop textbooks in multiple languages: English, Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, and Marathi. For each grade, especially in the early years, we create two textbooks with support from linguistics experts and teachers. In 1st and 2nd grade, the focus is on teaching in the mother tongue. For Hindi-medium students, there's a special teacher cell to support this. We carefully design the scripts and include stories that reflect the child's environment. Schools are functioning well within this structure. From 5th grade onward, students start learning a second language, which could be Hindi or another language, sometimes even one without the Devanagari script. The only gap is that for students taking Hindi as a second language, there's currently no dedicated textbook. That's something we still need to work on.”



schools where basic resources are already limited.

ii) **Lack of educational infrastructure and resources:**

Adding to this problem is the lack of adequate teaching materials. Textbooks and helpful learning aids in regional and tribal languages are rare, leaving many students without the trilingual or relevant resources they need for effective language learning. The situation worsens due to poor infrastructure. Many schools operate in unsafe or dilapidated classrooms, experience frequent power cuts, and lack essential digital tools. These issues severely disrupt teaching and learning, especially in rural and Adivasi

Field visits to tribal schools in Pune district revealed situations where water leaked into classrooms during the monsoon. This highlights the unstable physical conditions where students are expected

to learn. Poor digital infrastructure and inconsistent maintenance mean that innovative teaching methods, such as digital language labs, online learning, or multimedia resources, are rarely available in rural schools.

- iii) **Lack of consistent attendance of students:** Socio-economic pressures make matters even more challenging. Many children in these areas help support their families and often miss classes, making it hard for teachers to ensure consistent attendance and continuity in learning.
- iv) **Gaps in Professional Development:** NEP 2020's call for capacity building, training in multilingual, inclusive, or socially sensitive language instruction is minimal, especially for new or informal language teachers. Teachers, who are already overwhelmed with large class sizes and different grade levels, usually have no access to ongoing professional development, particularly in multilingual and context-specific teaching methods. These interconnected challenges all contribute to ongoing struggles in providing quality and inclusive language education.

### 3.3.2 Challenges in Private Schools

- a) **English medium emphasis:** Private schools in Maharashtra often focus on English-medium instruction to meet parents' expectations for social advancement and success in competitive exams. This emphasis on English creates a language hierarchy that can alienate students who do not speak English at home or who have limited skills in the language. Consequently, these students may struggle to fully understand the instruction, which can hinder their academic progress and confidence.
- b) **High Academic Pressures:** In addition to language challenges, students also face significant anxiety and pressure due to high academic expectations and heavy workloads. The need to excel not only in regional and national languages but also in foreign languages like French or German adds to their stress, sometimes leading to disengagement.
- c) **Cultural disconnect:** The curriculum and teaching materials often lack cultural relevance and do not connect with students' local experiences, creating a gap between their classroom learning and real-life context. Although private schools generally have better access to resources, many teachers still lack sufficient training to effectively support students from different linguistic backgrounds. This makes modifying lessons to meet the needs of learners from non-English-speaking homes a constant challenge.

### 3.3.3 Shared Challenges across both sectors

Students in both private and government schools in Maharashtra often find it hard to understand English, especially in classrooms where it is the main language of instruction. This language barrier makes it tough for many students to keep up with lessons, particularly when teacher support is limited or when their basic English skills are weak. The problem becomes worse in subjects that rely heavily on technical English vocabulary, increasing students' feelings of frustration and inadequacy.

On top of these challenges, students need to learn multiple languages at the same time, as required by the TLF. Many students say they feel overwhelmed by the pressure to master three or more languages simultaneously, especially when they lack proper support materials, relevant content, or connections to their home language. This exposure to multiple languages, without enough support, often causes confusion and disengagement, affecting both language learning and overall educational results.

Teachers also deal with significant workload pressures, often managing large classes with students from different language backgrounds across various grades. There are not enough professional development opportunities focused on teaching in multilingual settings, inclusive practices, and lessons that connect to students' cultures. This gap in training limits teachers' ability to adjust their teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of students, particularly those struggling with English or balancing different language requirements. As a result, the quality and inclusiveness of language education suffer, reinforcing existing inequalities in education. The lived experiences of students, teachers, parents, and policymakers illustrate how gaps in resources and institutional support translate into daily challenges, shaping both the possibilities and limitations of multilingual education in India.

**Students:** They feel disconnected and overwhelmed by having to learn languages with little support at school or at home. Those from tribal or non-dominant language backgrounds are at a higher risk of exclusion.

**Teachers:** Many highlighted the lack of subject-specific materials, insufficient language teaching resources, and heavy workloads as major obstacles. They noted that students struggle to understand English without support, and while mother tongue instruction is preferable, it is seldom adequately backed.

**Parents:** Due to limited literacy and the unavailability of bilingual learning materials, parents in Adivasi and Beldari communities find it challenging to guide their children's studies at home.



"We are only three teachers in the school, and we have to manage multiple subjects without proper training or digital infrastructure and on top of it, we're not even getting paid on time."

“In municipal schools, only about 72% of teacher positions are filled; in tribal schools, the number is often lower, directly affecting the implementation of TLF language policies. Failures in infrastructure, like leaking classrooms, poor sanitation, and a lack of digital tools, severely impact the learning environment and teacher morale.”



**Policy Makers and observers:**

They recognize that well-intentioned TLF initiatives often falter due to insufficient funding, barriers to recruiting teachers, and the gap between rural and urban infrastructure. Many believe that practical shortcomings in institutional capacity compromise linguistic justice. These structural and pedagogical challenges highlight that, while the TLF aims to foster multilingual competence and inclusion, uneven resources, infrastructure gaps, and teaching-learning difficulties hinder its

consistent implementation. Addressing these disparities is critical, as they directly influence how policies translate into classroom practice and student outcomes, setting the stage for an examination of inconsistencies in policy implementation across Maharashtra.

### 3.4 Inconsistency in Policy Implementation

The implementation of the TLF in Maharashtra, which designates Marathi, Hindi, and English as essential languages, reflects the state's unique linguistic richness but also reveals ongoing challenges. The policy seeks to promote multilingual skills and cultural inclusivity; however, its execution shows significant variation between urban and rural areas, among different school boards, and between government and private schools. These inconsistencies impact students' access to quality language education, affecting educational equity and the development of strong multilingual competencies. Consequently, the TLF's success is uneven, highlighting the need for more consistent and context-sensitive implementation strategies (Economic Times, 2025).

#### 3.4.1 Key Issues of Inconsistency in Maharashtra

- i) **Variation across school boards:** Maharashtra's implementation of the TLF shows significant differences among school boards, regions, and types of schools. State Board schools usually follow the TLF by making Marathi the primary language along with Hindi and English. In contrast, many private schools and those linked to national boards like CBSE and CISCE focus on English-medium education, often neglecting Marathi and Hindi. This gap limits students' opportunities to learn all three languages.
- ii) **Urban-rural disparities:** The divide between urban and rural areas makes these differences even more pronounced. Cities like Pune, Mumbai, and Nagpur generally have better infrastructure and more qualified language teachers. This helps in effectively putting the TLF into practice. On the other hand, rural and tribal areas, especially in places like Vidarbha and parts of Konkan, struggle with a lack of trained teachers and educational materials. This weakens the quality of third-language instruction.
- iii) **Political and cultural factors affecting Hindi instruction:** The role of Hindi in Maharashtra's education system is politically sensitive and complicated. Although it is officially part of the TLF, historical and political opposition related to pride in the Marathi language sometimes reduces its presence in schools. Many Marathi-medium

government schools struggle to hire enough Hindi teachers, leading to inconsistent teaching. Some students and parents begin to view Hindi as an imposed subject rather than a valuable part of their education.

- iv) **Resource shortages and systemic challenges:** Maharashtra also faces broader systemic problems such as teacher shortages and gaps in resources. This affects Hindi and tribal languages spoken by Adivasi communities in districts like Palghar and Gadchiroli. Despite government efforts to promote digital education, weak digital infrastructure in rural schools limits access to multimedia language learning tools, making language acquisition harder.
- v) **Impact of medium of instruction on language outcomes:** The type of school and its medium of instruction greatly influence TLF results. Government schools mainly use Marathi as the language of instruction, and they often apply the TLF more thoroughly, although ongoing resource shortages hinder progress. Private schools, on the other hand, usually prioritize English-medium teaching, with Hindi and Marathi being offered only sporadically based on what parents want and market trends. These choices are significantly shaped by community preferences, economic factors, and perceived usefulness, leading to varied language skills among students.
- vi) **Insufficient Monitoring and evaluation:** Adding to these challenges is the insufficient monitoring and evaluation of the TLF's implementation and language outcomes across Maharashtra's diverse areas. The lack of regular follow-up limits policymakers' ability to spot issues effectively and adjust language education policies, which further restricts necessary improvements to ensure fair and quality multilingual education throughout the state.

The uneven implementation of the TLF in Maharashtra illustrates how linguistic, institutional, and regional dynamics shape educational realities on the ground. Insights from stakeholders reveal the complexities of balancing cultural identity, political sensitivities, and aspirations for upward mobility within the state's multilingual framework.

**Teachers:** Teachers in Maharashtra, especially in rural areas with few staff, face major challenges when they teach three languages under the TLF. The heavy workload often leaves many teachers, who are already stretched thin, feeling unprepared. This is particularly true for Hindi, as there is

not enough training or ongoing support available. This situation lowers the quality of language instruction and adds more stress for educators.

**Parents:** In Marathi-speaking regions, students and parents value Marathi highly, seeing it as “key to their identity and culture.” At the same time, there is strong pressure to become fluent in English, which is seen as crucial for higher education and job opportunities. These competing demands create tension, forcing families and schools to make tough choices about language instruction and resources.

Tribal and Adivasi communities bring another important aspect to the conversation. They consistently stress the need for their languages and dialects to be included in the school curriculum. They argue that neither Hindi nor Marathi fully meets their linguistic and cultural needs. Unfortunately, their requests for including “Adivasi languages are often overlooked” during the implementation of policies. This shows a gap between what policies intend and how they are carried out.

**Policy makers:** Policymakers are becoming more aware of the differences across regions and institutions, along with the downsides of a one-size-fits-all approach. They push for the TLF to be implemented in ways that match the flexibility emphasized in NEP 2020. This promotes local adaptation and community involvement in language choices and curriculum planning.

Meeting these diverse needs requires more flexible, inclusive policies and direct engagement with all stakeholders. This way, multilingual education in Maharashtra can truly honor and reflect the region’s rich linguistic diversity.

The uneven application of the TLF not only reflects practical challenges but also exposes deeper issues of linguistic identity, political sensitivity, and cultural representation. These dynamics extend beyond classrooms, shaping how multilingualism is experienced in the broader democratic fabric of India. All the above themes reveal a common concern, that is, the distance between the vision of multilingual education and its everyday practice. From the dominance of English and the sidelining of mother tongues to structural shortages and uneven policy application, stakeholders repeatedly pointed to systemic gaps that restrict equitable language learning. The following section brings these strands together to highlight the overall challenges identified across contexts.

#### 4. Challenges identified



The multi-stakeholder dialogue and field research conducted in the Pune district of Maharashtra in 2025 reveal a complex landscape in the implementation of the TLF. The experiences and opinions of students, teachers, parents, policymakers, and researchers highlight multiple challenges that influence the effectiveness of language education in the state.

Students generally recognize English as a vital global language that opens doors to higher education and employment opportunities. However, many struggle with understanding and mastering English and Hindi in classroom settings, often finding Hindi less relevant or even imposed. Marathi remains the heart of their cultural and emotional identity, yet balancing three or more languages creates significant cognitive and emotional strain. Many students prefer a more flexible or reduced language load, favoring Marathi and English.

Teachers face critical barriers including a severe shortage of trained language instructors, especially for Hindi and tribal languages. With limited staff, they often handle multiple unrelated subjects without proper training or support, diminishing teaching quality and motivation. The scarcity of

multilingual teaching resources and inadequate digital infrastructure further hamper effective pedagogy. Teachers emphasize the need for professional development focusing on mother tongue-based, culturally relevant, and multilingual instructional methods. There is concern that Marathi is losing ground in private schools where English dominates, risking the erosion of foundational language skills.

Parents are caught between aspirations for their children's future and cultural preservation. While they prioritize English proficiency for social mobility, they deeply value Marathi for maintaining heritage and family ties. Many worry about declining fluency in mother tongues due to the strong focus on English and unclear roles for Hindi, especially in tribal and marginalized communities that face literacy challenges at home, thereby widening educational inequalities.

Policymakers acknowledge the well-meaning objectives of the TLF but recognize that implementation is hindered by Maharashtra's unique sociolinguistic and political context, particularly regarding Hindi. Ongoing issues include teacher shortages, resource constraints, and inconsistent policy enforcement. They support decentralizing decision-making and involving communities in curriculum design but note that budgetary and political limitations make sustained support difficult. Without systematic monitoring and adaptive feedback mechanisms, the TLF risks becoming symbolic rather than transformative.

Researchers contribute critical perspectives by highlighting the cognitive and cultural benefits of early multilingual and mother tongue instruction and underscoring the exclusion of tribal and endangered languages in current policy models. They draw attention to how language hierarchies involved in the prominence of English and Hindi perpetuate broader social inequalities tied to caste, class, and region. Advocating for plurilingual, flexible teaching approaches rooted in community contexts, researchers stress the role of language education in promoting social justice and democratic inclusion.

Maharashtra's commitment to the TLF principle is challenged by disparities in policy execution, political sensitivities, especially around Hindi, staffing shortages, and differences between private and government schools. While private schools often enjoy better infrastructure and resources, both sectors grapple with cultural relevance, material availability, teacher training, and equitable access issues. The lack of adequate digital infrastructure, timely teacher recruitment, textbook availability, and professional development are core obstacles hindering TLF's goals. Addressing

these is critical to preventing the perpetuation of educational and linguistic inequalities rather than their resolution.

Stakeholders concur that ensuring effective language education requires prioritizing mother tongue-based early learning, expanding recruitment and multilingual teacher training, developing accessible and culturally appropriate multilingual materials, implementing flexible, context-sensitive policies, establishing robust monitoring with community input, and investing equitably in infrastructure especially in rural and tribal areas. Through coordinated and sustained efforts on these fronts, the vision of Maharashtra's TLF can be revitalized into an inclusive framework supporting educational equity, cultural preservation, and global connectivity for its diverse learners.

Based on the review of relevant literature, secondary data, field visit and the stakeholder consultations, the following key observations could be noted.

#### **5. Key observations**

- i. Most stakeholders were comfortable with multilingualism as a lived reality but had challenges when it is brought into classrooms.
- ii. There was a stark difference in both the preference for multiple languages, and language preferences among students and parents of different socio-economic backgrounds.
- iii. While those in the upper socio-economic strata demanded for more languages including classical languages like Sanskrit, and foreign languages like German, French, Spanish, Japanese etc., those in the lower socio-economic strata demanded for not more than two languages – Marathi and English.
- iv. Those speaking different dialects of Marathi found learning Marathi also as acquiring a new language.
- v. English was considered an important tool for economic progress and therefore continued to remain aspirational despite challenges that students faced in acquiring the language.
- vi. There was a consensus among learners, teachers and parents that learning in mother tongue enhanced comprehension and provided conceptual clarity.
- vii. Students preferred bilingual teaching-learning that helped them understand concepts and also provided access to two languages – Marathi and English.

- viii. Stakeholders perceived no pressing need for Hindi as a compulsory third language while English was seen as aspirational and Marathi as culturally rooted.
- ix. Schools in rural and tribal regions suffered from inadequate infrastructure, limited teaching materials, and lacked access to technology.
- x. Resource development efforts are fragmented, with insufficient collaboration between educational institutions, NGOs, and community groups.
- xi. The availability of high-quality multilingual learning materials in Marathi, English, and Hindi was found insufficient, especially for inclusive and culturally responsive education.
- xii. The main barrier was not linguistic diversity but the quality of teaching and teacher preparedness.
- xiii. Teacher trainees lacked adequate policy literacy and preparedness to engage with multilingual education frameworks.
- xiv. Policy implementation remained inconsistent and required broader, coordinated engagement amongst multiple stakeholders.
- xv. Consensus prevailed that learning in mother tongue strengthened cultural identity and helped students to connect with their immediate environment.

## 6. Key Recommendations

- i. Implement Three-Language Formula (TLF) with a difference. Two languages – Marathi and English - offered with assessments and Hindi, as a third language offered with a fun-filled learning experience without assessments. This would make Hindi not only acceptable but loved as a language and added to the linguistic skill sets of students. This would also provide adequate attention to both Marathi and Hindi in the curriculum.
- ii. Institutionalize bilingual teaching-learning methods that combine the mother tongue with English to ensure smooth transitions and equitable learning.
- iii. Establish continuous teacher training programs in bilingual or multilingual pedagogy, inclusive classroom strategies, and effective management of linguistic diversity.

- iv. Innovate newer pedagogical approaches to teaching English, emphasizing comprehension, contextual application, and learner support rather than rote learning.
- v. Design curricula and resources that integrate local culture, oral traditions, and community knowledge embedded in different dialects that strengthen cultural identity.
- vi. Invest in infrastructure and develop affordable, context-sensitive, and technology-enabled teaching-learning resources, particularly in rural and tribal schools.
- vii. Build collaborative platforms involving NGOs, universities, and teacher education colleges to jointly create context-specific educational materials.
- viii. Incorporate policy literacy modules into B.Ed. and M.Ed. curricula, linking them to field-based projects on language policy implementation.
- ix. Commission the creation of multilingual, high-quality, and inclusive learning resources that address diverse learner needs across regions.
- x. Promote structured partnerships among government agencies, NGOs, universities, and teacher training institutions to ensure coordinated, sustainable support for multilingual education.
- xi. States can be empowered to adapt the TLF according to their unique linguistic landscapes, especially in tribal, border, and multilingual regions.
- xii. States can hire qualified teachers for underrepresented regional and tribal languages to meet the language needs of learners.
- xiii. Textbooks, audio-visual aids, and digital content can be made available in multiple languages, particularly tribal and minority languages.
- xiv. Transitional materials can be introduced to help students gradually shift from their mother tongue to the second and third languages.
- xv. Periodic reviews of policies and structured feedback from the stakeholders can be incorporated to continuously improve implementation strategies.
- xvi. The government can allocate specific funding to schools for developing the necessary infrastructure that supports effective language learning for students.



## 7. Conclusion

Maharashtra's linguistic diversity represents the broader challenges and opportunities of multilingual education in India. While Marathi is central to the state's identity, it exists alongside a spectrum of dialects and languages spoken by Dalits, Adivasis, tribal, and nomadic communities, each carrying unique linguistic and cultural traditions. This plurality demonstrates that linguistic

identity in Maharashtra is layered and dynamic, rather than monolithic. Incorporating these varied voices into education is not only vital for cultural preservation but also for strengthening students' sense of belonging and ensuring equity in learning opportunities. Recognizing and valuing these languages within formal systems is an essential step toward an inclusive and representative language policy.

Effective TLF implementation requires a comprehensive reimagining of the framework to promote linguistic justice and inclusivity. This transformation must incorporate indigenous and endangered languages currently marginalized in formal education systems, ensuring that tribal and minority community languages receive adequate representation and resources. Additionally, policies must acknowledge and build upon the actual multilingual practices of Indian children from diverse socioeconomic and geographic contexts, moving beyond theoretical frameworks to practical, community-based language education that respects and enhances existing multilingual competencies while fostering genuine national integration through linguistic diversity rather than uniformity.

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