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**EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

# CBSE's Three-Language Formula – NEP 2020, the Hindi Controversy, and the Limits of Educational Federalism

 **INDIAN EXPRESS**9 April 2026 · **GS2** **GS1**

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# CBSE's Three-Language Formula — NEP 2020, the Hindi Controversy, and the Limits of Educational Federalism

 The Indian Express

9 April 2026

GS2

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 The Indian Express

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## CONTEXT

The **Indian Express editorial** analyses the **CBSE three-language formula controversy** — the Central Board's new 2026-27 curriculum mandating a three-language formula from Class 6, which Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, Karnataka, and other non-Hindi-speaking states have condemned as a mechanism for expanding Hindi at the expense of regional languages. The editorial frames it as a conflict between the Centre's NEP 2020 vision and the constitutional principle of linguistic federalism.

## THE EDITORIAL ARGUMENT

### 1. What the CBSE Mandated

The CBSE's 2026-27 curriculum framework mandates that students study three languages from Class 6, with at least two being Indian languages. In practice, critics argue this means:

- Hindi becomes the de facto “third language” in non-Hindi states, since CBSE schools predominantly offer Hindi as an Indian language option
- States that teach the regional language + English are essentially forced to add Hindi as the third
- The “choice” is nominal — the available language infrastructure (trained teachers, materials) privileges Hindi

### 2. The Southern States' Position

Tamil Nadu has historically resisted the three-language formula, operating with a **two-language policy** (Tamil + English) since 1968. CM M.K. Stalin called the CBSE mandate “Hindi imposition” violating the constitutional spirit of linguistic diversity. Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana expressed similar concerns.

### 3. The Constitutional Framework

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Education is in the **Concurrent List** (Seventh Schedule, Entry 25) — both Centre and states can legislate. However:

- The Centre has legislative supremacy on Concurrent List matters (Article 254)
- Hindi is the official language of the Union (Article 343) but not a mandatory medium for states
- Article 345 — states can adopt any regional language as their official language
- Article 29(1) — right of minorities to conserve distinct language, script, or culture

The Centre's authority to set CBSE curricula is valid — but its scope over state-board schools is more contested.

### 4. The NEP 2020 Vision vs. State Autonomy

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The National Education Policy 2020 promotes the **three-language formula** as a national standard, arguing multilingualism enhances cognitive development and national integration. The Centre contends there is no mandatory Hindi — states can choose their own three languages.

The editorial argues this is disingenuous: when CBSE — a Central board — mandates a three-language framework without the infrastructure for non-Hindi Indian languages, the practical effect IS Hindi imposition, regardless of the formal neutrality of the text.

### 5. The Path Forward

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The editorial calls for:

- **Flexible three-language implementation** — states define their own language combinations
- **Investment in non-Hindi Indian language teaching infrastructure** — classical and regional languages
- **Consultation with state governments** before curriculum changes that affect linguistic communities



## KEY CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

| PROVISION                  | DETAILS  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Seventh Schedule, Entry 25 | Education in Concurrent List (Centre and states can legislate)           |
| Article 343                | Hindi is official language of the Union                                  |
| Article 345                | States may adopt official language(s)                                    |
| Article 29(1)              | Right to conserve distinct language, script, culture                     |
| Article 254                | Centre's law prevails over state law in case of Concurrent List conflict |
| NEP 2020                   | Three-language formula promoted as national standard                     |

## UPSC RELEVANCE

### GS Paper 2 — Polity & Governance

- Concurrent List and Centre-state relations — education as a site of federal tension
- Language policy — Official Languages Act, three-language formula, Hindi vs. regional languages
- NEP 2020 — key provisions, implementation challenges, federalism implications

### GS Paper 1 — Society

- Linguistic diversity — India as a multilingual nation; constitutional protection of regional languages
- Regional identity — language as a marker of cultural rights

### Mains Angle

“The three-language formula controversy reveals structural tensions between the Centre’s educational standardisation goals and the constitutional principle of linguistic federalism. Examine.” (GS2)



## FACTS CORNER

| ITEM                                  | FACT   |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Three-language formula origin         | National Integration Council 1961; later included in NPE 1968 and NPE 1986           |
| Tamil Nadu policy                     | Two-language policy (Tamil + English) since 1968                                     |
| NEP 2020                              | Promotes three-language formula; flexibility claimed but not structurally guaranteed |
| Concurrent List Entry 25              | Education (both Centre and states legislate)   |
| Article 343                           | Hindi as official language of the Union  |
| Article 29(1)                         | Right to conserve distinct language  |
| CBSE mandate                          | Three languages from Class 6, 2026-27 curriculum                                     |
| States objecting                      | Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana                             |
| India's scheduled languages           | 22 (Eighth Schedule)   |
| India's total languages (Census 2011) | 19,569 mother tongues; 121 with ≥10,000 speakers                                     |

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