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The Three-Language Formula — Federalism, Rights, and Classroom Reality

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The Three-Language Formula — Federalism, Rights, and Classroom Reality

 **The Hindu** 1 June 2026 **GS2** **GS1**

Source: ujjyari.com — Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs



INTERVIEW ANGLE

"The three-language formula was meant to foster national integration without imposing Hindi. In an era of NEP 2020, is it a missed opportunity or an unacceptable federal overreach?"

CBSE's mandate to implement the three-language formula for Class 9 from July 2026 raises constitutional questions on linguistic rights and federalism, with the Supreme Court issuing notices. The editorial warns against rushing a policy undermined by teacher shortages and federal tensions.

THE ARGUMENT IN ONE LINE

The three-language formula is **educationally sound but politically loaded** — its CBSE operationalisation needs **teacher preparation, state-level flexibility, and constitutional sensitivity**, not a top-down deadline.

WHAT THE THREE-LANGUAGE FORMULA REQUIRES

TYPICAL FORMULATION	STATE
Hindi + English + Regional language	Hindi-speaking states
Regional language + Hindi + English	Non-Hindi states
Under NEP 2020	Any three Indian languages; two must be native to India

THE CONSTITUTIONAL DIMENSION

- **Education is a Concurrent List subject** (42nd Amendment, 1976 moved it from State to Concurrent).

- **Article 350A** — instruction in mother tongue at primary stage.
- **Articles 29-30** — linguistic minorities’ cultural and educational rights.
- **Non-Hindi states** (esp. Tamil Nadu — with a two-language policy since 1968) view mandatory Hindi as unconstitutional imposition.

THE PRACTICAL GAP

- **Teacher shortage** — qualified teachers for third-language options are severely lacking in CBSE-affiliated schools.
- **Quality vs compliance** — a mandate without teacher supply produces nominal enrolment, not learning.

UPSC RELEVANCE

PAPER	RELEVANCE
GS2	Federalism; education on Concurrent List; Articles 29-30, 350A
GS1	Linguistic diversity; NEP 2020 language policy
Prelims	Three-language formula history (1968 NPE); Concurrent List; NEP 2020 language provisions

Source: The Three-Language Formula — Federalism, Rights, and Classroom Reality — Ujyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

CBSE’s mandate to implement the three-language formula for Class 9 from July 2026 raises constitutional questions about linguistic rights and federalism, with the Supreme Court issuing notices over implementation preparedness, and the editorial warns the policy must reconcile national-integration goals with the ground reality of acute teacher shortages and the rights of non-Hindi states.

✓ **SUPPORTING**

- The three-language formula — Sanskrit/regional language + English + Hindi (or another modern Indian language for Hindi-speaking states) — has existed in policy since the 1968 National Policy on Education, but consistent, equitable implementation has been elusive.
- Non-Hindi states (particularly Tamil Nadu) have historically resisted seeing the formula as a vehicle for Hindi imposition; the constitutional protection of linguistic minorities (Articles 29-30) and state subjects include education, creating a federal fault-line.
- The practical barrier is a severe shortage of qualified language teachers — especially for third-language options — in government and CBSE-affiliated schools.


COUNTER

Proponents argue the three-language formula promotes multilingualism and national cohesion, that NEP 2020 gives flexibility in which three languages are chosen, and that SC notices should prompt preparedness rather than retreat.


WAY FORWARD

Phase the implementation with adequate teacher preparation and training; allow states flexibility in choosing the third language (not prescribe Hindi); provide dedicated funding; treat language learning as a long-term pedagogical investment, not an administrative mandate.

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MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK
QUESTION

"The three-language formula is a well-intentioned policy whose implementation reveals the limits of centralised educational planning in a linguistically diverse federation." Critically examine. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

India's linguistic diversity is both a cultural treasure and a governance challenge. The three-language formula, embedded in successive National Education Policies, attempts to reconcile integration with pluralism — but its latest operationalisation by CBSE exposes the persistent gap between policy aspiration and school-level reality.

BODY

The CBSE notification mandating the three-language formula for Class 9 from July 2026 triggered two concurrent reactions: constitutional challenges before the Supreme Court, which issued notices on implementation preparedness, and resistance from non-Hindi-speaking states that view the formula as soft Hindi imposition. Article 350A guarantees instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage; Articles 29-30 protect linguistic minorities' cultural rights; and though education is a Concurrent List subject, the federal compact requires sensitive centre-state coordination on language policy. The ground reality compounds the constitutional concern: a severe shortage of qualified third-language teachers means that a rushed mandate risks producing nominal compliance (students enrolled in a language class) without actual learning. NEP 2020's flexibility — allowing any two of the three languages to be Indian languages — is a genuine improvement, but flexibility in policy is not flexibility in practice without teacher supply and infrastructure.

CONCLUSION

The three-language formula can achieve national integration only if it is seen as a pedagogical project, not a bureaucratic mandate. This requires phased implementation with teacher preparation, state-level flexibility in choosing the third language, and adequate central funding — not a top-down notification with an immediate deadline that courts scrutiny.

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