

# Challenges to Implementation of Mother Tongue as Medium of Instruction in India: A case study of Maharashtra

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# Abbreviations

Abbr.	Expansion
GR	Government Resolution
L1	Language 1/First language
L2	Language 2/Second language
L3	Language 3/Third language
MT	Mother Tongue
Mol	Medium of Instruction
NEP	National education Policy
NPE	National Policy on Education
TLF	Three Language Formula
UDISE+	Unified District Information on School Education

# Introduction

## Mother Tongue and Medium of Instruction

The term "mother tongue" refers to a person's native language — that is, a language learned from birth. Also called a first language, dominant language, home language or native tongue. In common usage the term L1 refers to a first or native language (the mother tongue) and the term L2 refers to a second language or a foreign language that's being studied<sup>1</sup>. The mother tongue is often believed to be a carrier of culture and traditions. India has a total of 270 mother tongues which are grouped into two sets of scheduled and non-scheduled languages (Census of India, 2011).

A medium of instruction is a language used in teaching. It may or may not be the official language of the country or state. The recently launched National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) laid down some monumental additions to the existing educational system that were instantly in debates throughout the country. The policy emphasised on promoting multilingualism in the form of various regional and mother tongue languages by introducing them as the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond. Several questions were raised upon the implementation of this idea in a diverse multilingual country like India, where a popular saying goes as such "*Kos-kos par badle paani, chaar kos par bani*" (The language spoken in India changes every few kilometres, just like the taste of the water)<sup>2</sup>. The classrooms in India are a representation of its multilingual character, where teaching and learning in only one or two languages may be an injustice to the vast linguistic diversity.

## Why or why not Mother tongue as a Medium of Instruction?

Mother tongue is a language that a person has grown up speaking from his/her early childhood. Hence it is a medium of communication that one is familiar with from the beginning. It is well understood that young children learn and grasp non-trivial concepts more quickly in their home language/mother tongue. Home language is usually the same language as the mother tongue or that which is spoken by local communities. However, at times in multilingual families, there can be a home language spoken by other family members which may sometimes be different from mother tongue or local language. This familiarity can be used for providing education in order to make it easier for students to build a strong base right from the foundational years.

In developing countries like India where the medium of instruction is popularly a foreign language like English, the transaction of knowledge is done either through English, Hindi or any other regional language. The scenario within the states is also different as there is not one language used in a state. There may be many different dialects and tribal languages used by people. For example in Maharashtra, Marathi is used as L1 and Hindi and English is used as L2. But in the tribal parts of the state where tribal languages are used as L1, Marathi becomes L2 (Sindkhedkar, 2003). In that case

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<sup>1</sup> The Three language formula, NPE 1968 and 1986 define the first, second and third language as -  
Language 1 (L1) - is the first language, native language or the mother tongue, it can also be the regional language. A language can be a regional language but not necessarily the native/mother tongue.  
Language 2 (L2) - is a second language, a foreign language, a target language, or a foreign tongue. When the mother tongue of a speaker is different from his/her regional/state language, it becomes his/her second language.  
Language 3 (L3) - is a third language, or a second foreign or non-native language.

<sup>2</sup> Common proverbs used in society.

the mechanics of implementation face several problems such as identification of a specific mother tongue language for medium of instruction, recruitment of language teachers, training teachers in a variety of languages, translation of books in all languages for all the subjects, development of adequate infrastructure and implementation of the policy throughout the vast diversity of the country where classrooms are mostly language diverse (Reddy. J., 2020).

The working paper aims to analyse the history, challenges and current representation of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in education. It focuses upon the progression of educational policies from time to time that have emphasised on the incorporation of local/regional/mother tongue languages till grade 5 or 8 and above. The gaps in the policy implementation over the years and its current status in relation to the directed policies and principles. The paper will be dwelling upon the three major approaches to understand the state of the medium of instruction in the country with special reference to Maharashtra -

- a) Review of available literature,
- b) Analysis of gaps in articles and policies in relation to current practices and status,
- c) Review and analysis of quantitative data from U-DISE and Census of India reports.

## Review of literature

### History of Language variety in Medium of Instruction in India

Multilingual education in India has existed even before colonisation. Literature suggests that in the pre-colonial period, education was designed along caste lines where the Brahmins were imparted knowledge in Sanskrit, the monks in Pali and the commoners in local language (Mohanty, 1990 and Annamalai, 2008). It was only after the advent of the British that English was introduced as a medium of communication and later as medium of instruction by the British to create a band of English speaking clerks (Sindkhedkar, 2003). English became the language that gave one access to power and position within the British ruling system. It was not only included in the education system of the country but it was very soon recognised to be the most important medium of instruction. And not just that, English was used like a tool for administration (Annamalai, 2008 and Sindkhedkar, 2003). The importance of English was retained even after independence but a subsequent effort was also made to revive the Indian languages into the education system as it seemed that English overpowered as a medium of instruction in the education system. Given which attempts were made in the post-independence period to make education available in the mother tongues to even the minority sections of the society (Saha, 2017).

In 1950, the Constitution of India recognised 15 languages, naming 14 modern Indian languages and 1 classical language (Sanskrit), by including them in the eighth schedule. Hindi was made the official language of the country and English was made the associate official language. The 14 modern Indian languages were spoken by 87% of the population (Krishnamurti, 1990). Following which the committees and policies on education emphasised more upon the usage of regional and local languages as a medium of instruction through the education policies that were launched in the post-independence period to promote Indian languages. In order to develop the educational status of India in the post-independence period and given the concern of losing many

regional and tribal dialects to the dominantly accepted medium of instruction in English, some necessary steps were taken.

The Education Commission, 1964-66 popularly known as the “Kothari Commission” suggested that instead of relying on a completely English medium of instruction, regional languages can replace English and English can be introduced as a subject rather than a medium of instruction in education. The Idea was operationalised through the introduction of the “Three language formula” (TLF) in the National Policy on Education (1968), which was also continued with the NPE 1986, according to which the students have to study three languages in a set of either 3 or 6 years. The mother tongue is used as the medium of instruction (MOI) for primary stages. Higher primary stage introduces the union language (Hindi) as the second language (For Hindi speaking students it will be English). The implementation of the TLF was however uneven throughout the nation (Saha. A., 2017).

### **NEP 2020 and recommendations on Medium of Instruction**

The TLF and the use of regional languages as medium of instruction as well as the focus on inclusion of minority languages in education has been quite dormant since 1986 NPE. Until the recently launched NEP 2020 discussed several changes and additions to the educational system in India. It introduced the Mother tongue as a medium of instruction from pre-primary to grade 5 or most preferably grade 8 and above. There is a lot of debate around why the medium of instruction should or should not be the mother tongue of the child.

The NEP 2020 laid down certain directions to implement the Mother tongue as a medium of instruction. It says that mother tongue languages will be taught in an enjoyable and interactive style, with plenty of interactive conversation, early reading and subsequent writing in mother tongue, along with the development of skills for reading and writing in other languages from Grade 3 and beyond (Highlights of NEP 2020, Ministry of education, 2020). Major steps to be taken by the governments to implement the mother tongue as medium of instruction are -

- Both central and state governments will invest in recruiting large numbers of language teachers in all regional languages around the country, and, in particular, for all languages mentioned in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India.
- States from different regions of India, may enter into bilateral agreements to hire teachers in large numbers from each other, to satisfy the three-language formula in their respective states, and also to encourage the study of Indian languages across the country.
- Extensive use of technology will be made for teaching and learning of different languages and to popularize language learning.

### **Importance of using Mother tongue as a Medium of Instruction**

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 on 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. Studies suggest that the medium of instruction (MOI) plays an important role inside the classroom because young children have an easier time adjusting to the school setting when they are familiar with the language used by the teacher (Duguiang, N. &

Dekker, D., 2010). If the language child is being taught is a different language then he has to learn to read, write, comprehend and speak the language first and then he/she will be able to learn the concept. Meanwhile if the child is taught in the mother language then he can directly learn the concept (Benson. C., 2004). This familiarity can be used in teaching - learning so that the child can start making a connection with the concepts in less time.

Some of the common benefits of introducing mother tongue as a medium of Instruction as discussed by the Readers Blog, 2021 are as follows -

- It helps develop a foundation where the students can learn better by connecting it with their own language.
- Mother tongue is vital in framing the thinking and emotions of individuals.
- Educating children in their mother tongue will also build a strong home-school partnership in their learning.
- It will also benefit the primary school teachers as many of them find it difficult to express themselves in English, therefore reducing the knowledge deficit.
- Education in mother tongue will help the students in getting a better sense of their cultural background.

### **Minority languages as Mol in India**

The NEP recommended that introducing mother tongue as a medium of instruction would be beneficial for the students' learning and development. In that case it becomes important to understand the situation of the linguistic minority groups given the articles in the constitution that support their continuation and development. The government adopted a segmented approach where the minority languages of the tribes/castes and minority groups were neglected and not actively included as the medium of instruction, unlike other majorly spoken regional languages. The lack of attention towards the minority linguistic groups has led to the substandard level facilities for them (Pagan. S., 2017).

When we talk about minority groups in India, it is important that we highlight the recognised religious minority groups by the Ministry of Minority Affairs, India as - Buddhists, Christians, Jains, Muslims, Sikhs and Zoroastrians. All these religious minority communities have settled with either state/regional languages along with English and Urdu. Whereas as far as the minority linguistic groups like the languages of the tribes/castes or other linguistic groups are concerned the issue of lack of recognition is a matter of discussion. And given the large variety of languages spoken by the tribals within close groups makes them linguistic minorities as well.

### **Tribal languages and Medium of Instruction**

Vinoba Gautam (2003), elaborates upon how the linguistic minorities like tribals have to study in a dominant regional language and they struggle with developing a cultural connectivity as it does not match with the lifestyle of the individuals and needs of the tribal community. Pradhan and Pattanaik(2011), state that the tribal children who usually speak in their home language have very limited contact with the regional/state language that is taught in the government schools and hence fail to understand and communicate in the regional language, which is their second language, with their classmates, inmates and teachers. In that case the minority languages that are neither recognised as regional languages nor used as the medium of instruction, remain as a minority dialect. Also teaching tribal/caste/minority children in a regional/state language other than their



mother tongue is like acculturating them to adopt a foreign language and culture and in return lose touch with home language (Gautam. V., 2003). They are thus also unable to fully comprehend classroom teaching and activities, read in the state language or understand the texts properly. This results in outcomes like low levels of learning, dropouts, etc.

Whereas using the tribal mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the pre-primary and primary grades and then gradually introducing the state language can improve the child's potential in mainstream education systems (Pradhan and Pattanaik 2011). The use of the tribal language in the initial years can develop a sense of comfort for the tribal child. It must be the first language and taught as a means of acquiring knowledge of tribal culture, ethnicity, literature and the arts. It can also help in tackling problems of poor enrolment, absenteeism, low levels of learning, dropouts, etc.

## **Constitution of India on linguistic minorities and education**

In order to study the usage of the mother tongue of the linguistic minorities and especially the tribals as a medium of instruction, there are a number of articles in the Constitution of India that state the rights of minorities, linguistic groups and medium of instruction in education. Some of the articles are that of 15, 29, 30, 45, 46, 343, 345 and 350A.

Article 15 states that there should be no prevention in making special provisions to develop the socially and educationally backward classes of the citizens from the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe communities. Reinforcing the above right, article 29 protects the educational and cultural rights of the religious and linguistic minority groups. The article 45 makes it a provision to avail free and compulsory education to all till the age of fourteen. Following which the article 46 mandates that the state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes.

Whereas the article 30 gives rights to the minorities to administer educational institutions in order to keep their culture and language alive. The article 350 A emphasises that there should be "adequate facilities for instruction in the mother-tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups"; it is to reiterate that education in the mother tongue is a basic right for each citizen. The article 343 and 345 states that the official languages to be used in the state and the union. The official language of the union should be Hindi and that the states can use one or more languages than Hindi including a regional/state language.

While the articles in the constitution of India states that the linguistic minorities should be given provision to receive education in their own mother tongue, so that they can not only learn, connect easily and necessarily keep the language alive, but also improve educationally and economically at par with other dominant communities. It is very clear that the articles directing the implementation of mother tongue as a medium of instruction have not been taken very seriously by the government over the years. And even after being present in the constitution of the nation since 1950, it had to be emphasised by the NEP 2020 after almost 34 years of the NPE 1986, in order to make it a reality. It becomes important to study the gaps and progressions in the educational policies over the years in order to understand the status of the medium of instruction in education.

## Progression and Gaps in the Educational policies in India

The Government of India released several policies since independence right from the release of the constitution of India. Mahatma Gandhi was the first person to put forward the concept of “*Nai Talim*” meaning New Education in his Newspaper “*Harijan*” in year 1937, It is a well developed philosophy of education based on experiments he did from 1904 when he was in South Africa to his stay in ashrams in India. It had laid emphasis on making mother tongue as the medium of instruction in addition to free compulsory education and skill training to the students. After independence a range of policies were designed by the government of India to improve the educational, economical and social status of the population. In that range the educational policies were based upon some of the commissions and programmes of action that were conducted to develop such policies. This section presents the recommendations and suggestions by the various committees and policies and then analyses the gaps in its progression over the time.

1. **The Kothari Commission (1964-1966)** - The Indian Education Commission also known as the Kothari commission was set up by the government of India on 14 July 1964. The Commission aimed at examining all aspects of the educational sector across the country. The Commission had submitted its Report on 29 June 1966; its recommendations were accommodated in **India's first National Policy on Education in 1968**. The commission put forward seventeen recommendations on the all round development of education in India post-independence. The kothari commission among other recommendations also put forward the importance of development of languages and minority education.

### i) Development of Languages

**(a) Regional Languages:** The commission focused upon the energetic development of Indian languages and literature for promoting educational and cultural development. It emphasises that the regional languages are already in use as media of education at the primary and secondary stages. It suggests that urgent steps should be taken to adopt them as media of education at the university stage.

**(b) Three-Language Formula:** The Three language formula was devised in the year 1962, which was later revised by the education commission in 1964-66. As per TLF (NPE 1968, and NPE 1986), the students have to study the three languages in a set of either 3 or 6 years. The mother tongue is used as the medium of instruction (Mol) for primary stages. Higher primary stage introduces the union language (Hindi) as the second language (For Hindi speaking students it will be English).

Also, an optional third language apart from these should be provided. At the lower secondary stage, all of them should be made compulsory. Study of a modern Indian language, preferably one of the southern languages, apart from Hindi and English in the Hindi-speaking states. At higher secondary classes only two languages should be made compulsory as students are more engaged in the preparation of their higher education.

The commission highlights the need of integrating languages like Hindi, Sanskrit, English and other foreign languages in education. It lays special focus on developing Hindi as a link language so that it can serve as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India. It also recommends encouraging hindi as a medium of instruction in colleges and other higher educational institutes in the non-hindi states. It also emphasised on English and other international languages in order to match the global pace of development.

**ii) Education of the Minorities** - Every effort should be made not only to protect the rights of the minorities but to promote their educational interests as suggested in the statement issued by the conference of chief ministers of states and central ministers held in August 1961 and that of the Articles.

2. **National Policy on Education 1986** - The National policy on education intended to prepare India for the 21st century. It emphasised on a variety of topics for the all round development of education in the country. The NPE 1986 elaborately discussed the concept of language development and emphasised the adoption of regional languages as the medium of instruction at the university stage. It also highlights the importance of mother tongue as a medium of instruction at the school level. Some of its recommendations regarding language development continued from the 1968 NPE are as follows -
  - a) Three language formula
  - b) Improvements in the linguistic competencies of students at different stages of education
  - c) Provision of facilities for the study of English and other foreign languages
  - d) Development of Hindi language as a link language etc.
3. **Programme of Action 1992** - The recommendations from the Prof. Ram Murti committee in the early 1990 on decentralisation of the education system to remove social, economic, regional and gender disparities formed the base for the revised Programme of Action (PoA) 1992. Before considering the suggestions of the Ramamurthy Committee, the Government appointed another committee under the chairmanship of Janardan Reddy in 1992. The report of the committee provided a base for the modified National Policy on Education and a concrete programme emerged as Programme of Action, 1992. The revised programme of action proposed education for equality. The policies that followed after the PoA 1992 focused more upon reducing disparities in education through overall inclusion from all the sections of the society.

In lieu of reducing disparities and promoting holistic development of students from the beginning as well as promote and keep alive the vast linguistic diversity of India, the NEP 2020 reinforced the implementation of mother tongue based education in India.

### **Analysis of Gaps in policy formulation and implementation**

Even though Mahatma Gandhi popularised the importance of mother tongue education based on his experimental approach in 1937, it was not taken much into consideration during the educational planning of the country. The first commission of 1964-66 put forward recommendations regarding the Three language formula which talked about imparting education in three languages and that there should be provisions to improve the regional and minority languages and prepare them for

educational purposes. These recommendations by the Kothari commission were carried forward in the NPE 1968 that continued till NPE 1986. Both the policies stressed upon the development of regional languages and minority languages, so that they can be included as medium of instruction.

The three language formula was implemented unevenly throughout the nation. It can be observed that while the policies in the past elaborately discussed improving regional languages and minority languages as medium of instruction, none of them emphasised upon the term “Mother tongue as a medium of Instruction”. It was put forward by Mahatma Gandhi in Nai Talim and exhumed after years and added to the NEP 2020, where it gained a lot of attention.

While most of the policies post independence discussed the need and usage of minority languages or mother tongue as a medium of instruction to reduce the disparities in educational development the implementation has not been even throughout the nation and the policies definitely have not discussed about the challenges in implementing such recommendations (Saha. A., 2017). The recommendations of the NEP 2020 were welcomed with several debates and discussions by parents, teachers, educationists, and leaders. Glancing upon the variety of debates and discussions can help us gain a bird’s eye view of the situation of the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in India.

### **NEP 202 and Mother tongue as Medium of Instruction**

Given the multilingual nature of India, there are so many instances where the language known to teacher, student and the textbook or reference materials are different. This often leads to low learning levels, poor understanding of the topics, high dropout rate and less enrollment. This leads the minority students to be stuck in the indefinite vicious cycle of inequality of opportunities, which contradicts the fundamental rights provided by the constitution to each one of us (Reddy., J. The News Minute, August, 2020).

While the government emphasised upon implementation of regional and mother tongue languages as a medium of instruction in both the government and private schools, many parents who are spending a good amount of their salaries in sending their children to English medium schools so that they can be future ready global citizens raised the concern about difference between a private English medium and government Hindi medium school (Sharma. K., The Print, August 2020). The operational difficulties of implementing the policy where the people are concerned about teaching their children in English, and a country where most of the children are first generation learners, it might be difficult for the government to both teach in mother tongue as well as develop global citizens. The students may develop a strong foundation of various concepts when taught in their mother tongue or regional language but may face the problem of less years of exposure to a national or international language like Hindi and English respectively. The concerns are over the fact that a highly talented and deserving mass with a strong conceptual base should not be left behind only because they are unable to express themselves in the required manner, i.e in English (Dias. C. D., El.gazette, February 2021). Sthabir Khora, Associate Professor at the School of Education, TISS (Tata Institute of Social Sciences) Mumbai, also says that in practice, the more that learning in English is delayed, the more it could be difficult for children to learn the language.

Where the government may be taking steps to remove disparities in the education system that clearly represent the class-differences created since independence, it is hugely tough to settle upon one medium of instruction especially in the tribal as well as urban metropolitan regions, where the demography is defined by immigrants from throughout the country (Sharma. K., The Print, August 2020). Education being in the concurrent list gives states the freedom to choose which aspects of the NEP 2020 they want to accept. While a good majority of experts are in favor of English as a medium of instruction and deeply concerned about the implementation of mother tongue as a medium of instruction, said that “without additional measures to improve the quality of teaching, the medium of instruction could be irrelevant” (Reddy J. 2020)

Reddy J. 2020 quotes K. Nageshwar, a political journalist who raised concerns about the political turn of events - “It all depends on whether the government has the political will to ensure its implementation in private schools. Otherwise private schools will continue to offer English medium, and government schools will have to offer regional language medium because they will have no option but to implement government policy. As a result, there will be an exodus of students from government to private schools,” he says, adding that such selective implementation in government schools will only further marginalize the government schools.

There have been several oppositions regarding the implementation of Mother tongue as a medium of instruction from the state of Tamil Nadu, who already have policies regarding Tamil and English as a medium of Instruction and feel that the Three language formula may overburden the students or indirectly force the students to learn Hindi (Ghosh. R, Times Now, August 2020). Unlike Tamil Nadu many states were either for or against the new recommendations by the NEP 2020 on medium of instruction.

All these above discussions and more debates in the national media about using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction discuss both the benefits and challenges of implementing the policy and also the readiness of the education system for the policy recommendations. While it may be a necessary step to reduce disparities and help in keeping the minority languages alive, it might seem really tedious to actually realise it on ground. In order to understand the status of the recommendation about the mother tongue as a medium of instruction, let us take Maharashtra as a case study.

## **Case Study of Maharashtra : Medium of Instruction in Schools**

Maharashtra, has 12 varieties of Marathi and 38 other languages spoken by adivasis and nomadic tribes (People’s Linguistic survey of India, 2011). The tribal population in Maharashtra in 2011 was 10.5 million constituting 9.35 percent of the total population of the state. The state has the second largest tribal population in the country, with 10 percent of the total ST population of India. There are more than 25 varieties of tribals throughout the state of Maharashtra (Tribal Research and Training Institute, Maharashtra) who speak a different dialect heterogeneous to the tribal community which makes it a linguistic minority in itself (Shindekar. S., 2003). Given the vast variety

of spoken languages totaled from the tribal and non-tribal regions of the state it looks like quite a strenuous task to impart education in the variety of languages.

The data from UDISE+ and Census of India present a picture of the number of government/private/aided schools and medium of instruction in the districts throughout the state. It will help us analyse the use of various languages as common tongue as well as the medium of instruction in the classrooms. The UDISE+ data presents that out of the total schools in Maharashtra, 60% are government schools, 21% are aided schools, 18% are private schools, and the rest 1% fall under other category schools. Where Ahmednagar (5.5%) and Pune (6%) have the highest percentage of Government schools. Solapur (5.0%) and Pune (6%) have the maximum % of the Aided schools in the state. The highest percentage of private schools are in Thane (10.0%), Pune (9%) and Aurangabad (7%). We now create a link between the distribution of government/private/aided schools in the districts with the language diverse tribal population of the state.

Evidences from the Census of India, 2011 data on the distribution of tribal population with a language diversity shows that districts like Nashik (15%), Nandurbar (11%), Palghar (11%), Dhule (6%) and Jalgaon (6%) are the top five districts with the highest percentage of tribal population. It can be very clearly observed that the districts with the highest percentage of government/private/aided schools are quite different from the districts with tribal populations. And the introduction of mother tongue as a medium of instruction especially in the tribal districts where the proportion of all the three categories of schools are not at par with other districts with higher percentage of schools, raises our concerns over a list of implementation challenges such as -

- How does the state plan to implement mother tongue as a medium of instruction in districts where there is huge linguistic diversity?
- How can poor school infrastructure like a lesser number of schools, one classroom, one teacher schools, etc suffice the need of teaching in a multilingual medium of instruction?
- Are the private and aided schools shifting to affordable school fees along with multiple mediums of instruction to cater the needs of the tribal population?

To support our argument we present a statement made by scientists and government officers who believe that implementation of the policy is going to be a tedious task given the status of schools and language materials and infrastructure in the state. The officers from the State School Education Department thoughtfully put forward the challenges of implementing the policy. Quoted by a scientist from the Tata institute for fundamental research (TIFR) that "In the state, a variety of tribal languages are practised in different regions. To implement the policy, teachers will need to speak to students in their language instead of Marathi. Also, there are multiple linguistic groups in every city. So ideally, you should have schools with multiple languages. Issues of access to these schools are also going to be a challenge." (Garodia. A., The Indian Express, 2020).

On the other hand, News 18 on December 9, 2021 reported that the State Education Department recently issued a Government Resolution (GR) making Marathi compulsory from classes 1 to 10 in all government/private/aided schools. The decision will be rolled out in a phased manner, first Marathi will be made compulsory in all boards starting with 1 to 6 in 2021. Then it will be further increased till class 10. In this situation it is important to understand the status of medium of

instruction in the schools of Maharashtra, to be able to analyse the challenges and steps to implement mother tongue as a medium of instruction in Maharashtra.

- According to the Census of India and UDISE+ data, Maharashtra has four major mediums of instruction in its schools, they are Marathi, Hindi, Urdu and English. The UDISE+ and Census data says that there are 79% schools with Marathi as Primary Mol for the 54% population whose mother tongue is Marathi. The Census data says that 93% of the government schools have Marathi or English as their medium of instruction. Leaving 46% of the population whose mother tongue is either Hindi or Urdu, with an option to enroll in 7% of the government schools or aided and private schools. Only 2% of schools have Hindi as Primary Mol as for the 21% population whose mother tongue is Hindi. Whereas only 5% of the schools have Urdu as their primary Mol for the 12% population whose mother tongue is Urdu. As far as English is concerned only 14% of schools have English as their Primary Mol for the 2% population in the state whose mother tongue is English.

This points towards the fact that, if a student who has Hindi as their medium of instruction and wants to study in their mother tongue will have very limited options. They either have to look for a far off Hindi medium govt. school or aided school or would have to enroll in an educational institution with any other language as their medium of instruction, which will also increase their cost of education and other challenges linked to eventual dropout. As far as tribal students are concerned, it has been already mentioned that they speak a variety of tribal languages, which puts them at a distinct disadvantage in terms of studying in their mother tongue leaving them with no option but to enroll in Marathi or English medium schools. While the government has put forward the guidelines to implement the mother tongue as a medium of instruction and also the state has taken it on serious terms by implementing committees to look after its successful implementation, given the situation of schools in the limited languages as Mol, makes it a matter of concern about its success. Where there are lesser schools in the tribal regions and the medium of instruction shifts between Marathi, English, Hindi and Urdu, in such situations the tribal languages remain unrecognised and neglected. If the state wants to realise the policy guidelines into reality then it will have to overcome the various challenges in its implementation.

### **Challenges in Implementation of Mother Tongue as a Medium of Instruction**

The NEP 2020 mandated the implementation of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in school education from grades 1 to 5 or 8 and above. While it seems a beneficial policy for the students to develop their foundational learning, many journalists, researchers, experts and teachers have called it an ambitious aim for a multilingual country like India. Some of the common challenges in making the policy a success are as follows -

1. **Infrastructure development** - From our above analysis it was clear that there are a very few number of schools that can cater multilingual education. There is a huge difference in government/private schools which needs to be developed first such as more classrooms, as now even the same subjects cannot be taught in the same classroom since the language is different and may lead to a learning deficit. This leads to our need to also design the timetable accordingly for the students and teachers both.

- 2. Prevent social segregation** - The schools now have to meticulously plan and design the timetables of the students in such a way that they learn the same content in different languages and also be able to take some common subjects together. It should be designed in such a way that the students should also get time to interact with each other and feel as a part of the same grade, otherwise this language separation may lead to segregation and isolation. In such a situation of isolation especially the minority groups may find it even more difficult to connect with the outer world.
- 3. Selection of one/multiple mediums** - India is a multilingual country where a good proportion of the population are migrants, who have shifted from their native states to other neighbouring or far off states for government/private jobs and businesses, etc. In that case selecting and deciding a particular medium(s) of instruction may sound a difficult task to execute because the school's particular classroom may have more than one variety of language speaking students. Even if it becomes possible it might be quite difficult to recruit staff for so many languages.
- 4. Recruitment and training of teachers** - There is a great need to recruit teachers who can speak, read and write a particular mother tongue language, no matter how small its speaking community is. It is still a tough task to recruit teachers in the maximum possible number of mediums as till now the country followed the TLF and there may be very few teachers who can speak, read and write a particular mother tongue language. Therefore, the humongous duty of training the teachers in all the subjects for all the languages remains primary. It indirectly also creates the need to develop a cadre of teacher trainers in several languages.
- 5. Translation of books** - The most important challenge that may act as a roadblock in the implementation of policy recommendation is translation of all content of all subjects from grades 1 to 5 or to grade 8. The major difficulty here seems to be the lack of vocabulary in most of the new mother tongue languages as it is a known fact that literature in any language develops over years of writings. The problem of lack of vocabulary may be very significant for subjects like Science, Mathematics, etc with increasing grades as the level of complexity increases (Lopez, Shirley B, Castañeda, Norie C, Castillo, Nympha Rose L, Ikwuka, Victoria A., 2020).
- 6. Lack of Scripts for mother tongue languages** - The task of translation of the textbooks may become even more difficult for the government as many local/tribal mother tongues are only dialects and spoken by small groups of the population that do not specifically have any written script. Therefore, it might pose a prime situation before translating books into the mother tongue language.



## Conclusion

The educational policies right from the beginning with the Kothari Commission in 1964-66 made attempts to change the existing language situation of the country where there were multiple mediums of instruction but among all English emerged as a language of power and recognition. The recommendations from the Kothari commission helped in designing the regional language and the Three language policy as well as the minorities education, an important mandate in the NEP 1968. These policy mandates continued with the NPE 1986 as well, since it was seen that these were not evenly implemented and needed a lot of attention. The policy remained untouched until the New Education Policy 2020 raised the need of introducing mother tongue as a medium of instruction.

There have been several debates that discuss, accept and reject the steps, challenges, benefits and outcomes of implementing mother tongue as medium of instruction. Over the years the languages of the minorities or the tribals have seen a huge amount of politics involved in the integration and minimization of the number of languages. It shows how it promotes majoritarianism and excludes the minority languages. This violates the constitutional value of equality for each citizen of India. The language policy in census often governs the language policy in education, it influences the mediums in which instruction is given, the books are published, the fund allocation to the minority language speaking population, it affects the seriousness by which the teachers take the topic of mother tongue teaching and its application.

To overcome the challenge of respecting the official languages and regional language along with the international language and other minorly spoken tribal languages the policy of 3 languages was introduced to which if it was applied in an ideal case scenario the Hindi speaking population would have learnt one southern language and southern states would learn Hindi. The interpretation by the multiple agencies have led this to become a formula of 3+/- 1 for the country. Where the student studying in the Hindi states would learn one more language, that is English. Students studying in the non-Hindi speaking state would learn three languages: State language, Hindi and English. Where it is most difficult for minority students is where they have to learn their mother tongue, their state language, Hindi and English. This often leads to high repetitions and dropouts in the state as the tribal children may not be able to connect a link between the regional culture and their tribal culture.

The seeds to this inequality were planted when the first language policy was getting established, where they were replacing Persian with English as the official language of communication. It caused a huge loss to the Persian speaking population in India. It also influenced the education system at that time where they started English as a medium of instruction to create a workforce which would meet that demand. As Britishers were facing challenges to educate the mass population of the country as there were multiple mediums. They started promoting universalization of education which caused harm to vernacular language and culture in India. It also created barriers in using vernacular language as the medium of instructions in the school.

Maharashtra is the state with the second largest tribal population in the country. It is obvious that the classrooms in the school will be diverse in terms of language. There are more than 25 varieties

of tribal and sub-tribal communities that speak a large variety of dialects and mother tongues. Operationalising the recommendations of the NEP 2020 on medium of instruction may seem a tedious task where the infrastructure like books translated in all languages, trained teachers to transact learning from those books, create/train a cadre of teachers to be able to teach the current generation, recruit more than one teacher to teach in the same classroom to different students, infrastructure like more classrooms to teach students same subject matter in different classrooms, making timetable arrangements to manage time to teach students of same grade in different classrooms and still keep interaction and togetherness as a grade, exact translations of content to ensure accurate transaction of knowledge about a topic, etc.

A case study of the Maharashtra state reveals that there are very few number of government schools and the medium of instruction is majorly state language, English or Hindi. Which itself projects the bottlenecks in implementing an ambitious policy like the NEP 2020 in terms of mother tongue education. Also a well known fact about the differential development pattern of the nation suggests that the development starts scattering as we move away from the urban nucleus. Where the urban schools report loopholes in facilities, imagining preparation of rural and tribal schools with adequate infrastructure for the full-fledged implementation of mother tongue as a medium of instruction is still a distant dream.

## Way Forward

The review of literature reveals that India is a multilingual country where settling with limited languages as the medium of instruction would be an injustice to its vast population with heterogeneous linguistic diversity. While English has been the most widely accepted medium of instruction at all levels from school to higher education, other regional languages have been utterly ignored and only after some government education policies the regional languages found a recognisable place. Literature also suggests that the implementation of the Three language formula has been haphazard throughout the nation, as there are so many schools which are still based on only one medium of instruction like English or a regional language.

The policy recommendation presented the argument that implementing mother tongue as a medium of instruction will help students to grasp non-trivial concepts in less time. It said that mother tongue instruction will help students to connect easily with any concept and build better understanding about it. Researchers have also given examples of the success rates in countries like Japan and China where the mother tongue medium of instruction is mandated in all schools. Unlike these countries where they use a few varieties of languages for communication, but majorly Japanese in Japan and Mandarin in China. But taking inspiration for a country like India with its multilingual diversity becomes a matter of debate for us.

There is literature that discusses the benefits and drawbacks of implementing a mother tongue as a medium of instruction, as well as the issue of minority linguistic groups. Some research articles highlight the problems faced by the tribal students in regional medium of instruction classrooms, as well as its impact on school enrolments and dropout rates, but there is a great need to focus upon

the challenges, changes and suggestions for the implementation of the policy in the tribal districts of the state so that the linguistic minorities of the state can be benefitted from the policy.

After a detailed analysis of the available literature, discussions and debates, there are a few questions that still need to be worked upon, and can be benefitted from future research -

- *What is the progress of implementation of the policy since its declaration and is the school education department prepared enough to implement this policy across all public/private schools?*
- *For communities, how will the mother tongue medium of instruction benefit the linguistic minority groups in preserving their language and culture along with actively indulging with the dominant culture and help prepare students as future ready global citizens?*
- *What is the representation of different dialects of the dominant languages and use of languages of linguistic minority in school textbooks (in particular the non-scheduled language spoken by scheduled tribes) and everyday classroom teaching learning practises?*
- *What are the best teaching and learning practices when there is a gap between the language of the child and language of curriculum and classroom?*

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