


# Chapter 11

## Politics of Language Education in Tamil Nadu: Changes and Challenges

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study explores the attitudes of college-going youth in Tamil Nadu toward language education, focusing on Tamil, English, and Hindi. Using an online survey of 2,223 participants, it investigates perspectives on Tamil as the medium of instruction, the role of English as a communicative language, and the feasibility of Hindi as an additional language. The findings reveal a shift in youth attitudes: a strong preference for multilingual competence, a demand for quality language education, and advocacy for bilingual resources. The study highlights the need for decentralised language policies that balance linguistic identity with global and national mobility, providing actionable insights for policymakers in multilingual societies.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Even before independence, Tamil Nadu was widely recognized for its language-centred politics. It is a state in southern India, known for its rich cultural heritage, ancient history, and vibrant traditions. It has a history that dates back thousands of years, with significant contributions to art, architecture, literature, and classical music. It is renowned for its Dravidian-style temples, such as the Brihadeeswarar Temple in Thanjavur and the Meenakshi Amman Temple in Madurai. It is also famous for its classical dance form, Bharatanatyam, and its classical music tradition,

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Carnatic music. Economically, it is one of India's most industrialized and urbanized states, with a diverse economy that includes industries such as automobile manufacturing, textiles, information technology, and agriculture. It has a well-developed infrastructure, including a strong transportation network and several prominent educational institutions.

India, a union of 28 states and 8 union territories, does not have a national language of its own. According to the 1971 census, the country is home to 1,652 languages, with 22 of them recognized in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution. Hindi is designated as the Official language of the Union government while English serves as the Additional Official language. Each state in India has adopted its own regional language as its Official language, with English often serving as the Associate Official language. Notably, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland are the only states where English is the sole official language. Tamil is the official language of the state, and the people of Tamil Nadu take great pride in their language, literature, and cultural identity.

India's known educational language policy is the three-language formula as recommended by the second and third education commissions in 1958-59 and 1964-66 as a way to promote multilingualism and foster national integration. It suggests that students in non-Hindi-speaking states should learn the regional language like Tamil in Tamil Nadu, Hindi as the official language of the Union government, and English while in Hindi-speaking states, the formula recommended learning Hindi, English and a modern Indian language other than Hindi. Most North Indian states have introduced Sanskrit as the third language in schools, whereas all South Indian states, except Tamil Nadu, have introduced Hindi as the third language in their educational curriculum to a varying degree.

The controversy over the three-language formula in India, particularly in Tamil Nadu, revolves around the proposed inclusion or perceived imposition of Hindi as one of the languages to be taught in schools. This formula has been a point of contention since its inception as it touches on issues of linguistic identity, regional autonomy, and national integration. The Tamils/Tamil politicians, who perceived a threat from Hindi being a dominant language in North India, had fought against its perceived hegemony even before the Independence and fought against its perceived imposition of Hindi in the early 1960s after independence. Tamil Nadu has a long history of resistance to the 'imposition' of Hindi, dating back to the anti-Hindi agitations of the 1930s and 1960s. The political perception of two Dravidian parties that rule Tamil Nadu alternatively from the 1960s holds that the promotion of Hindi is a threat to their linguistic and cultural identity, leading to strong opposition to the three-language formula. It takes immense pride in its language, Tamil, which has a rich literary tradition dating back thousands of years. Dravidian political parties

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