Educational Language Policy

Why in News?

Recent data reveals that only a small fraction of India's population has access to quality English education.

What is the status of English education in India?

- In the age group of 14-18, a little over half (57.3%) can read sentences in English.
- **Widening gap** - Recent data reveals that only a small fraction of India's population — primarily from affluent, urban backgrounds — has access to quality English education.
- **Declining proficiency** - While the 2011 Census recorded over 10% of Indians reporting the ability to speak some English, a recent survey by Lok Foundation reported 6%.
- **Impact of widening gap:**
  - Perpetuates socio-economic privilege of upper sections of the community.
  - Deepens the socio-economic divide among people.
  - Reinforces existing inequalities.
  - Challenges India's aspirations for inclusive growth and socio-economic mobility.

What are the significances of English education?

- **Global medium** - English has become a global medium for diplomacy, commerce, science, and technology.

  80% of the world's academic publications are in English.

- **Access to international opportunities** – Proficiency in English is condisidered a prerequisite for many job and opportunities.
- **Technical language** - In India English underpins key sectors such as medicine, higher education, and IT services.
- **Digital age** - Artificial intelligence and other digital innovations have magnified English's importance.
- **Upward social mobility** – English knowledge drive not only personal success, but also the broader development of their communities and, by extension, the nation.

What are the significances of education in mother tongue?

- **Fostering cognitive growth** – Instruction in mother-tongue offers a crucial cognitive advantage.
- **Better learning** - Children learn complex concepts more easily in their mother

tongue.

- **Cultural** – It helps in retaining a stronger sense of cultural identity when initial teaching is conducted in the language they speak at home.
- **Learning other languages** - Learning any language is significantly enriched by one's native linguistic foundation and the broader environment in which one is immersed.

What are the challenges in linguistic reform?

- **Linguistic Diversity** - India is home to over 1.3 billion people and more than 22 official languages, with thousands of dialects and languages spoken across the country.
- **Conflict between States and Union** – Most of Non hindi speaking states prefer 2 language policy and Union recommends 3 language policy.
- **Half-measures** – A wholistic linguistic reform considering the aspiration of national and regional regions has often been slow and inconsistent.
- **Inadequate resources** - Schools where regional languages serve as the primary medium often lack the resources or curriculum needed to build strong English skills.
- **Uneven access** - Access to English education is not equal between rural – urban , gender and different socio economic backgrounds.

What lies ahead?

- Rather than viewing English and local languages as mutually exclusive, education policies should recognise them as complementary tools, each essential for holistic development.
- Ensure that all children, regardless of social or economic background, graduate from school with solid proficiency in both their mother tongue and English.
- A dedicated national commission to assess the linguistic to identify cultural, economic, and infrastructural barriers to English learning.
- Provide incentives for well-trained English teachers — offering scholarships, higher pay, and rural service allowances.
- Integrating English from the early primary years, without compromising the primacy of the mother tongue.
- Conduct surveys and consultations to get the opinion of families and communities to understand the grassroots reality of India's diverse population.
- A policy that Maintains the child's mother tongue as the bedrock of cultural and conceptual understanding while guaranteeing proficiency in English can tackle deep-rooted educational inequalities and unlock India's unrealised potential on the global stage.

Reference

[The Hindu | A case for two-language policy]

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