Foreign Language Learning in Government Schools - Punjab

Why in news?

Punjab CM Amarinder Singh has directed the Education Department to explore all possibilities to have foreign languages as optional subjects for students of government schools.

What was a similar move earlier?

- Earlier in 2018, Amarinder had said that Mandarin Chinese would be offered to senior secondary classes in government schools.
- This was because “China was emerging as the most significant neighbor” and it was “need of the hour to learn their language”.
- However, the project could not take off even as Education Department started looking for qualified instructors.

What is the rationale for the current directive?

- Punjab is a state where majority of youths live with NRI dreams and are keen to learn foreign languages.
- They mostly move to countries such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand among others.
- Most students in Punjab government schools come from rural background.
- They face difficulty in speaking and writing English language.
- This is largely due to weak basic skills acquired at primary level.
- Later, clearing the IELTS exam becomes a challenge, which is mandatory for moving to countries such as Canada.
- The government school students are mostly not in position to afford private tuition/coaching facilities to learn other languages or even English.
- So, if students are taught at least one foreign language, it would improve chances of their employability across the globe.

How is it being planned?

- The Education Department has been asked to explore all possibilities to offer languages such as ‘French, Chinese, Arabic’ to the students.
- The plan so far is to start online classes after tying up institutes/coaching centers.
- Students can opt whichever language they want such as German, Chinese,

and French etc.
- This will be completely optional, and not compulsory.
- Besides, a batch of at least 15 government school teachers from Punjab is currently undergoing training in Japanese language.
- [They are being trained under state's Skill Development Mission to create taskforce that can be eligible for jobs being offered by Japanese firms under 'Invest Punjab' programme.]
- These teachers are being trained as 'master trainers.'
- They would further train students in Japanese, who want to apply for jobs with Japanese companies that are expected to invest in Punjab.

How is elementary level education generally?

- Various reports including the annual ASER have highlighted that elementary reading, writing and arithmetic skills elude a substantial section of children even after spending 8 to 10 years in school.
- Local administrative agencies rarely take ownership of the education crisis.
- So, policies to address pedagogic deficits do not attain the desired results.

How has Punjab dealt with it?

- Amidst the above condition, Punjab topped the recent National Performance Grading Index in school education for 2019-20.
- The state topped, on the back of a school revamping initiative by its education department.
- It is the brainchild of the state's education secretary.
- The programme has rationalised teacher posting, ramped up infrastructure and made optimum use of both analogue and digital avenues.
- The project has converted 67% of the government-run schools into smart schools.
- But it is not totally technology-centred; school spaces such as doors, windows and classroom floors now serve as learning resources.
- The State witnessed a 15% increase in government school enrolment in the current year, amidst the pandemic.
- Punjab's reforms hold lessons for other states too.

Source: The Indian Express

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