



Pointing to the Negative Attitude Towards Abandoning English As the Medium of Instruction, Examine Why Learning in Mother Tongue Can be Effective but Hard to Implement? (250 Words / 15 M) (GS-2 Educational)

Approach:

1. Introduction – stating MLE in NEP 2020.
2. Mention the bias towards English as the reason for negative attitude towards learning in regional/mother tongues.
3. Brief reference of earlier attempts to introduce MLE.
4. Mention major bottlenecks in implementation.
5. Conclusion.

The **National Education Policy 2020** says that wherever possible the medium of instruction in schools **until grade V – preferably until grade VIII** – should be **mother tongue** or the **local regional language** to bridge the existing gap between language spoken & the medium of teaching. According to analysis, early schooling in a child's mother tongue can **improve learning, increase student participation and reduce the number of dropouts**.

Bias for English education: Parents prefer to send their children to English-medium schools regardless of the quality of education they offer because of the perception that **mastery of English is the key to success in later life**. In **2017-18**, **14%** in **rural** areas chose private English schools, while it is **19.3%** in **urban** areas.

Experts argue that **English education is not always the best**, because it can **intervenes with a child's holistic understanding**. Good learning happens when children have high self-esteem, are well adjusted to classroom providing positive environment. If a child is taught in a language they don't understand, none of these can happen. The **2011 Census** listed **270 mother tongues**, of which **only 47 languages** are used as instruction mediums in Indian classrooms.

Previous attempts: The idea of using mother tongue in primary school education is not novel to India's education system – there had been discrete attempts. **Art 350** states that **every state & local authority should endeavor to provide adequate facilities for instruction in mother-tongue at the primary stage of education belonging to linguistic minority groups**. The **Kothari Commission (1964-66)** suggested that in tribal areas, **for the first 2 years of school, the medium of instruction should be in local tribal language**. The **RTE Act 2009** said, as far as possible, the **medium of instruction in school** should be a **child's mother tongue**.

Odisha is the only state to formally incorporate **Multi-Lingual education** into its system, but only for tribal areas. For this, teachers from the community have been recruited, besides, creating bilingual dictionaries, supplementary materials, handbooks, etc.

Major issues & bottlenecks:



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- It has been criticized for **widening the gulf between** those who can **communicate in English and those who cannot**.
 - There is a **lack of detailed action plan** in the NEP to implement this & other policy changes. For multilingual education to be successful, it must be accompanied by **pedagogical changes** and **trained teachers**. Being **non-mandatory**, it is up to the local governments & individual institutions if they desire to implement these changes.
 - It might **not be financially viable** due to **lack of funds**, and its **administrative doability** can be **hampered** for **lack of trained staff** to implement the change. There is **no mention of how funding will be raised**, creating uncertainty, as initial investment in bilingual programme can be high.
 - Another challenge is **selecting which mother tongue** can become the medium of instruction since children in a region comes from **varied linguistic groups** (2011 census mentions **270 mother tongues**). If schooling in mother tongue is **seen only as opposition to teaching in English**, then the children will lose out.
 - Also, in many areas, many languages have **non-standardized scripts** that are not accepted by every member of a community. This is a **bigger challenge** in areas having **ethnic violence**.

Teaching in mother tongue is **not a silver bullet** to solve the problem of **low learning outcomes**. Also, there has to be a **systematic outreach to parents** to help them understand that studying in mother tongue is not a drawback, but it aids in a child's overall development. Acc. to NEP, the **aim of using regional languages** is not just to improve a child's learning outcomes, but also for **"instilling knowledge of India, considered critical for the purpose of national pride, self-knowledge, cooperation and integration"**. Hopefully, this policy will be the starting point for all other changes required for making meaningful transformations in our education system.