

# AP: English to be the medium of instruction in state-run schools

#### What is the issue?

- The Andhra Pradesh (AP) government is set to make all government elementary schools 'English-medium'.
- The plan is to change it from the academic year 2020-2021.

### Why is there a push for English as the medium?

- The push for English as the medium of instruction in government schools in Andhra Pradesh, as in other States including Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, is due to two related factors.
  - 1. There is a belief that English-medium schooling can guarantee good jobs.
  - 2. The economically constrained families are shifting their children from free government schools to private English-medium schools.
- It is to try and reverse this trend that many State governments have made at least some of their schools English-medium or started English-medium sections.

## Why this may not a good move?

- **Research** Children who get educated in their mother tongue learn better than those who start school in a new language.
- A new language in the early school years, especially one that is not used outside school, can become a barrier to learning.
- **Common sense** If a child speaks or understands the classroom language, engaging with new concepts, ideas and information is easier, as is learning to read and write. This is plain common sense.
- Even researchers who advocate privatisation of schools as a quality improvement measure accept that English-medium schools are not the solution.
- A study of learning outcomes in government and private elementary schools in AP has found that children perform best in Telugu-medium schools.

What does ignoring the evidence mean for different people?

- **Governments**, while making policy changes favouring English-medium schools, have ignored the evidence.
- For **politicians**, it is a win-win situation they are able to give a mass of voters what they appear to want, at no significant additional cost.
- For the **influential middle class**, it is comforting to believe that poor children are getting a leg-up through English-medium government schools.
- Even some **Dalit intellectuals** hold that it is English-medium schools that will emancipate them, and that those who disagree are hell-bent on retaining the status quo.

#### What do such English-medium schools need?

- At the very minimum, such schools will need teachers who, apart from being knowledgeable in the subjects they teach, are also fluent in the medium of instruction.
- The vast majority of them have had their entire education in their mother tongue or the State language, and have spent their working lives teaching in that language.
- With rare exceptions, any English they have is bookish.
- **Retraining** them, through short-term language courses, wouldn't transform them into teachers for English-medium schools.
- On the contrary, it will handicap them, making the best of them resentful, and the disinterested even more so.

## What are the other problems?

- **Skewed in-egalitarian system** The problem lies not in the medium of instruction, but in an in-egalitarian education system that is completely skewed in favour of the inter-generationally privileged.
- **System Design** The annual school calendar, the syllabus, textbooks, teacher engagement and the high-stakes board exams.
- This is a system whose design ignores the vastly different socioeconomic realities of a majority of children.
- The focus on English medium pulls a veil over these knottier problems.
- Politicians and the middle class have for too long promoted the canard that if you give everyone the same thing, it makes everything equitable.
- Making Telugu-educated school teachers instruct children, with no English, in English will not transform A.P. government schools into any high kind of the institution.
- On the contrary, such schools will be a parody of the elite schools, like the 'affordable' private English-medium schools that children most often move to from government schools.
- In these schools, teachers, with barely any or no English, read from English

textbooks and use the mother tongue or State language to communicate; students have to cram the English textbooks or prepared answers for their tests.

- The result is that they develop a hold over neither their mother tongue/State language nor English.
- This is what the government English-medium schools will offer, with the only difference that they will be free.
- This sort of 'English-medium education', far from making education more equitable and closing the social gap, will accentuate inequity.
- A government really concerned about education and making English accessible to poor children in government schools should focus on the children's natural receptiveness to new languages by teaching English as a language.
- Investing in modern language-teaching education (not short-term training) for English-language school teachers is essential.
- Anything else is just eyewash that people will soon be wise to.

**Source: The Hindu** 

