

## **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**