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## English as Medium of Education

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### Why in News

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Recently, the Supreme Court refused to stay the Andhra Pradesh High Court's order **striking down** the state government's decision to make **English the medium of education for government school students** from Classes I to VI beginning 2020-21 academic year.

The Court pointed out that **Section 29(2)(f) of the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009** says that the medium of instruction shall, as far as practicable, be in a child's mother tongue.

### Key Points

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- **Constitutional and Legal Provisions:**
  - **Article 29 (Protection of interests of minorities)** gives all citizens right to **conserve their language and prohibits discrimination on the basis of language.**
  - **Article 120 (Language to be used in Parliament)** provides for use of Hindi or English for transactions of parliament but gives the right to members of parliament to express themselves in their mother tongue.
  - **Part XVII of the Indian Constitution** deals with the **official languages in Articles 343 to 351.**
    - **Article 350A (Facilities for instruction in mother-tongue at primary stage)** provides that it shall be the endeavour of every State and of every local authority within the State to provide adequate facilities for **instruction in the mother-tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups.**
    - **Article 351 (Directive for development of the Hindi language)** provides that it shall be the duty of the Union to **promote the spread of the Hindi language.**
  - The **Eighth Schedule** recognises **following 22 languages as official languages:** Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Bodo, Santhali, Maithili and Dogri.
  - **Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009** says that the medium of instruction shall, as far as practicable, be in a child's mother tongue.
- **Arguments in Favour of English as Medium of Instruction:**
  - **Career:** The ability to speak in english qualifies one for many jobs which are not yet available for speakers of regional languages.
  - **Competitive Exams:** Lack of knowledge of english will put the students of government schools on a backfoot as compared to those of English-medium private schools in competitive exams,
  - **Higher Education:** Most technical and scientific books are available only in english and much of higher education is also imparted in english. This may hinder the access of students from government schools to STEM and higher education.
  - **Global Opportunities:** English being the global lingua franca gives the students opportunity to compete at the global level.
  - **Status Symbol:** Knowing english is often equated with progressiveness.

- **Arguments against English as Medium of Instruction:**
  - **Accessibility to Knowledge:** The use of mother tongue or regional languages makes the process of learning familiar, comprehensible, and approachable for the students. This encourages wholehearted engagement of students in the learning process and boosts their confidence.
  - **Promotion of Local Culture:** Also, using mother tongue allows students to express themselves better and communicate their experiences, their multifaceted identities, and their cultures.
  - **Encouragement to Merit:** The use of English language often creates a divide between students hailing from backward castes and communities and the 'upper' class. Often, **real talent and merit gets suppressed** due to an **imposed linguistic disability**.

- **Government Initiatives to Promote Regional Languages:**
  - The recently announced **New Education Policy** states that wherever possible, students **till Class 5 in schools** should be taught in mother tongue/regional language/local language. It also introduces the **Three-Language Formula** for **primary education**, as per the recommendation of **Kothari Commission, 1968**.
  - The **Commission for Scientific and Technical Terminology (CSTT)** is providing publication grants towards the publications of University Level Books in regional languages.
    - It was established in 1961 to evolve technical terminology in all Indian Languages.
  - The **National Translation Mission (NTM)** is being implemented through the **Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL)**, Mysore under which the text books of various subjects prescribed in Universities and Colleges are being translated in all languages of the Eighth Schedule.
    - CIIL was established in 1969 under the administrative control of the **Ministry of Education**.
    - Its objective is to **coordinate the development of Indian languages**, to bring about the essential unity of Indian languages through **scientific studies** and **protect and document minor, minority and tribal languages**.
  - The Government of India is running a scheme known as **“Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages”** for conservation of threatened languages.
  - The **University Grants Commission (UGC)** also promotes regional languages in higher education courses in the country and supports nine Central Universities under the scheme **“Establishment of Centre for Endangered Languages in Central Universities”**.
  - Recently, an initiative **Namath Basai** by Kerala State Government has proved to be very beneficial in educating children from tribal areas by adopting vernacular languages as medium of instruction.
- **Global Efforts:**
  - The **Yuelu Proclamation made by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) at Changsha, China, in 2018** plays a central role in guiding the efforts of countries and regions around the world to **protect linguistic resources and diversity**.
  - The **United Nations General Assembly** has proclaimed **2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages (IYIL)**. The IYIL 2019 strives to preserve, support and promote indigenous languages at the national, regional and international levels.

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- **Countries around the world have successfully substituted english with their mother tongues** and have been able to produce world-class scientists, researchers, technicians and thinkers. The barrier of language is only as long as there is lack of proper encouragement to the generation of knowledge in the respective language. The government should encourage original scientific writing, publication of books in regional languages to help this transition.
  - Also, studies around the world have shown that children are able to **learn multiple languages** if they are taught from an early age. We can actively promote regional languages without compromising knowledge of English language which can be taught as an extra subject. It is important to remember that **English is one of many skills which we can equip the children with** in order for them to fully participate in and experience the world.

**Source: IE**