

# THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL LANGUAGE

Relevant for: null | Topic: Indian Languages and Literature

For several decades, successive governments in Karnataka have attempted to make it mandatory for students to learn Kannada as a subject. Such attempts have met with opposition from some quarters and long-drawn legal battles.

Also read | [HC asks for Centre's stand on Karnataka making Kannada compulsory for UG courses](#)

The issue has again come to the fore with the government issuing an order (GO) in August 2021 stating that undergraduate students should learn Kannada as one of the two languages from the 2021-2022 academic year. The State government has argued that this is in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020, which states that "in order to preserve and promote culture, one must preserve and promote a culture's languages". It also states that learning Indian languages needs to be integrated into the school and higher education at every level. After several stakeholders pointed out that students from other countries, States or those who have studied in Karnataka but not Kannada in school may find it challenging to learn the language, the State government issued a modified order. It said that such students will have to learn Kannada as a "functional language" for only one semester, while those who learned Kannada in school will have to study it for two years.

However, this [matter is now before the Karnataka High Court](#), with the Samskrita Bharati (Karnataka) Trust and three other institutions challenging the GOs. They have argued that the NEP does not specify any mandatory language for higher education, and that the GOs take away the choice-based credit system offered in the NEP to promote inclusivity and access. Karnataka's Higher Education Department points out that the move only helps students in their day-to-day communication. Such a system has already been implemented successfully in engineering and medical colleges. Although students of professional courses initially showed some resistance, they were convinced to learn functional Kannada, which has proved beneficial.

Karnataka has had a chequered history as far as language learning is concerned. The State government faced a setback after its language policy of 1994 was quashed by the Supreme Court in May 2014. The language policy mandated that the medium of instruction for students in lower primary classes should be in the regional language or mother tongue. After this battle was lost, the State government introduced the Kannada Language Learning Act, 2015, which states that either the first or second language for students in schools should be Kannada. Most schools have begun teaching Kannada as a subject, though some affiliated to the central boards do so only as a third language.

The biggest movement to promote Kannada learning dates back to the 1980s, when the Gokak Committee submitted its report in 1981 that recommended, among other things, introducing Kannada in schools and giving it primacy. The delay in implementing this sparked off a major movement, which still resonates with many. The State government has used some pointers from this report in the current context as well, to argue that promoting the regional language cannot be seen as imposition. It has also cited provisions of the NEP to argue that the State can have a say in the choice of one of the languages. The choice to pick another language rests with the student. In fact, a student can opt for yet another language under the open electives category.

Also read | [Good response to Kannada medium engineering course](#)

It is not unreasonable to argue that learning the local language would help students feel a sense of belonging and communicate better. However, a lot now hangs on the outcome of the pending case in the Karnataka High Court.

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