

Schools face mid-term three-language test

**BASANT KUMAR
MOHANTY**

New Delhi: The Central Board of Secondary Education's sudden extension of its three-language policy to Class IX, with the academic year into its second month now, has faced its 33,000 affiliated schools with several questions.

■ How to teach the third-language subjects without textbooks, which are still unavailable?

■ How to get enough teachers for these subjects?



While many schools so far allowed their students to choose English, one Indian language and a foreign language like French or Arabic in Classes VI, VII and VIII, the CBSE insists that from this academic year, the three

languages must include two Indian languages — from Classes VI to IX. This has raised a third question:

■ A Class IX student who studied English, and an Indian language (say, Hindi) and a foreign language in Classes VI to VIII must now learn another Indian language (say, Sanskrit) from scratch, unlike those among their classmates who had chosen two Indian languages (say, Hindi and Sanskrit) right from Class VI.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4 ►

Three-language test

► FROM PAGE 1

How will the schools handle a situation where different sets of students in the same class have different levels of knowledge about the same language subject?

The CBSE, which has made the study of three languages — R1, R2 and R3 — “compulsory” from July 1 this year for Class IX students (to be carried forward to Class X from the next academic year), has tried to provide some answers.

Until dedicated R3 textbooks are available for Class IX, the students should use the Class VI R3 textbooks for their chosen third language, the central board has said.

“Schools facing constraints in the availability of adequately qualified native Indian language teachers may, as an interim arrangement for R3 language, engage existing teachers of other subjects who possess functional proficiency in the concerned native Indian language,” the CBSE circular said.

As for Class IX students who have to start learning a new third language, they can continue to use the Class VI textbook throughout, presumably proceeding at a different pace from other classmates who have learnt that subject from Class VI.

Such a differential arrangement may well work, for the board exams will not have

a third-language paper, the CBSE has clarified. The schools will carry out an internal assessment and annual exams in R3 for Class IX and X students.

If students who had chosen a foreign language like French or German in Classes VI to VIII so wish, they can continue with it as an optional fourth language.

“Students who wish to study a foreign language may do so as the third language only if the other two languages are native Indian languages, or as an additional fourth language,” the CBSE circular said.

Sudha Acharya, principal of ITL Public School, Delhi, said: “All our students have studied Hindi till Class VIII. They can study Hindi as the second language (in Class IX and X). For the third language, we took feedback from the students; most supported Sanskrit.”

She continued: “Those (Class IX) students who have not studied Sanskrit in Classes VI, VII and VIII will be taught from the Class VI Sanskrit textbook if they take up Sanskrit as the third language.

“Those already studying French or German as the second language in Class IX (the session began in April) can continue with that subject as the fourth language.”

Acharya, however, said the students might not want to study four languages since that could affect their focus on

other subjects like mathematics, science and social science.

“It may so happen that the foreign languages, except for English, will not be pursued by the students in schools,” she said.

A schoolteacher from Kerala who didn't wish to be identified said many pupils in the state choose Arabic or Hebrew as their second language throughout. They may now have to give up the language of their choice and study a new, unfamiliar Indian language instead.

“Many teachers are engaged in teaching foreign languages like Arabic and Hebrew; they might lose their jobs,” the teacher said.

M.A. Khader, a retired faculty member from textbook-preparing body NCERT, said the language subjects should be introduced systematically from an early stage.

“The introduction of a language subject in Class IX puts a heavy load on the child. Ideally, two languages should be introduced in primary classes (up to Class V) and a third language in the upper primary (Classes VI to VIII) stage,” Khader said.

He said the government should have conducted a study before introducing the three-language policy. Now that it has already imposed the policy, it should still carry out a study on its impact and take necessary steps based on its findings.