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Linguistic capital, cultural recognition, and educational inclusion: the place of Telangana Telugu in school education

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<https://doi.org/10.66483/jsp.2026.001.ch29>

ABSTRACT

Language occupies a significant position in educational systems because it influences not only communication but also cultural recognition, identity formation, and access to educational opportunities. This paper examines the place of Telangana Telugu in school education through a sociological perspective. Drawing upon the concepts of linguistic capital, symbolic power, and cultural reproduction, the study analyses how educational institutions have historically privileged certain language varieties while marginalising others. The discussion traces the historical position of Telangana Telugu within the educational system of the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh and examines the changes that emerged following the formation of Telangana State in 2014. The analysis suggests that the dominance of standard Telugu in textbooks, curriculum, and classroom practices limited the representation of Telangana's linguistic and cultural experiences. In contrast, recent efforts to incorporate Telangana Telugu into educational materials reflect a broader attempt to promote cultural recognition and educational inclusion. The paper argues that linguistic recognition extends beyond language policy and constitutes an important aspect of social justice in education. While the inclusion of Telangana Telugu may strengthen students' sense of belonging and validate local cultural knowledge, effective implementation requires supportive curriculum practices, teacher preparedness, and a balanced multilingual approach. The paper concludes that language-inclusive educational policies can contribute to greater equity by recognising diverse linguistic identities while simultaneously enabling access to wider educational and social opportunities.

Keywords: *Sociology of Education; Telangana Telugu; Linguistic Capital; Educational Inclusion; Language Policy; Cultural Recognition*

1 Introduction

Language occupies a central position in education because it functions not only as a medium of instruction but also as a carrier of culture, identity, and social power. Sociologists of education have long argued that schools legitimise particular language varieties while assigning lower status to others. Through curriculum, textbooks, classroom interaction, and assessment practices, educational institutions often reproduce existing social hierarchies and cultural norms. Consequently, language becomes an important site through which questions of recognition, participation, and educational equity are negotiated.

In multilingual societies such as India, the relationship between language and education assumes particular significance. Educational systems frequently operate within contexts characterised by linguistic diversity, regional identities, and competing claims for cultural

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<https://doi.org/10.66483/jsp.2026.001>

representation. The language used in schools influences not only academic learning but also students' sense of belonging and cultural legitimacy. When the language of schooling differs substantially from the language of home and community, students may experience a disconnect between their lived realities and formal educational experiences. Such differences can shape educational participation, self-perception, and access to symbolic recognition within schools. The Telangana context provides an important example of these dynamics. For several decades following the formation of Andhra Pradesh in 1956, the standard form of Telugu used in educational institutions largely reflected linguistic norms associated with the Coastal Andhra region. Although Telangana Telugu possessed distinctive vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, pronunciation patterns, and cultural references, these linguistic features received limited representation in school textbooks and curricular materials. Consequently, many students from Telangana encountered educational content that did not fully reflect the language practices and cultural experiences of their communities. Scholars, writers, and cultural activists increasingly viewed this imbalance as part of a broader pattern of cultural marginalisation that affected language, literature, and educational representation.

The Telangana statehood movement brought renewed attention to questions of linguistic identity and cultural recognition. Alongside demands for political autonomy, the movement emphasised the need to acknowledge Telangana's unique historical experiences, cultural traditions, and linguistic heritage. Language emerged as a powerful symbol of regional identity, with intellectuals and cultural organisations advocating greater visibility for Telangana Telugu in public institutions. Following the formation of Telangana State in 2014, educational reforms sought to address these concerns by incorporating regional histories, local cultural traditions, Telangana literary contributions, and selected linguistic expressions into school curricula and textbooks. The inclusion of cultural practices such as Bathukamma, local folklore, and the writings of Telangana authors reflected an effort to align educational content more closely with the lived experiences of students.

These developments raise important sociological questions concerning language, power, and educational inclusion. The recognition of Telangana Telugu in educational settings extends beyond language policy and reflects broader struggles over cultural legitimacy and symbolic power. Drawing upon sociological perspectives on linguistic capital, cultural reproduction, and educational inclusion, this chapter examines the historical position of Telangana Telugu in school education and analyses the implications of its growing recognition in post-statehood Telangana. The chapter argues that meaningful educational inclusion requires not only access to schooling but also the recognition of learners' linguistic and cultural identities within the educational process.

2 Language and Power in Education: A Sociological Perspective

Language performs functions that extend beyond communication within educational settings. It serves as a social resource through which power, status, and opportunities are distributed and reproduced. Sociologists of education have consistently argued that schools do not merely transmit knowledge; they also legitimise particular cultural and linguistic forms while marginalising others. Consequently, language becomes an important mechanism through which educational institutions shape students' academic experiences, social identities, and access to recognition.

One influential explanation emerges from the work of Pierre Bourdieu, who conceptualised language as a form of cultural and linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991). According to Bourdieu, language varieties acquire value because dominant social groups possess the authority to define

them as legitimate. Schools play a central role in this process by rewarding specific forms of language through curricula, examinations, and classroom interactions. Students whose home language closely resembles the language of schooling often possess an advantage because they already command the linguistic resources valued by educational institutions. In contrast, students who use non-dominant language varieties may encounter barriers despite possessing comparable intellectual abilities. Such practices contribute to what Bourdieu described as the reproduction of social inequalities through education.

Bourdieu further argued that educational institutions often exercise symbolic power through language. When one language variety is presented as naturally superior, neutral, or academically appropriate, alternative linguistic forms may be viewed as deficient or less legitimate. This process, often described as symbolic violence, encourages speakers of marginalised varieties to accept dominant linguistic norms as the standard against which their own language is judged. Consequently, linguistic inequality becomes normalised within educational settings and may influence students' confidence, participation, and academic self-perception.

A related perspective appears in the work of Basil Bernstein (1971), who examined the relationship between language codes and educational achievement. Bernstein argued that language practices reflect broader social experiences and patterns of social organisation. Educational institutions frequently privilege forms of communication that align with dominant cultural expectations. As a result, students whose linguistic practices differ from these expectations may experience difficulties in demonstrating knowledge in ways recognised by schools. Importantly, this perspective does not suggest linguistic deficiency among learners from diverse backgrounds. Rather, it highlights how educational systems often privilege particular forms of language while overlooking the legitimacy of others.

The relationship between language and power also extends to questions of cultural recognition and identity. Language embodies local histories, collective memories, cultural traditions, and community experiences. When schools exclude or minimise regional language varieties, they may implicitly communicate that certain cultural experiences are less valuable than others. Conversely, the inclusion of local linguistic forms can strengthen students' sense of belonging and validate community knowledge. Educational inclusion therefore requires more than access to schooling; it also requires recognition of learners' linguistic and cultural backgrounds within the educational process.

These sociological perspectives suggest that language policy should be understood as a question of social justice rather than merely a pedagogical concern. The recognition or marginalisation of particular language varieties reflects broader struggles over cultural legitimacy, symbolic power, and educational equity. This theoretical framework is particularly relevant to Telangana, where debates concerning Telangana Telugu have been closely linked to questions of regional identity, cultural representation, and inclusion within school education. Examining the historical position of Telangana Telugu through this lens provides deeper insight into the relationship between language, power, and educational opportunity.

Historical Position of Telangana Telugu in Schooling

The historical position of Telangana Telugu in school education reflects broader political, cultural, and educational processes that shaped linguistic hierarchies within the Telugu-speaking region. Educational institutions have traditionally played a significant role in determining which language varieties are considered appropriate for formal communication and academic learning. Consequently, the relationship between standard Telugu and Telangana Telugu provides an important example of how schooling can influence cultural representation, linguistic legitimacy, and educational inclusion.

Following the formation of Andhra Pradesh in 1956, policymakers sought to promote a unified linguistic identity across the Telugu-speaking population. This objective encouraged the adoption of a standardised form of Telugu in administration, education, media, and public communication. School textbooks, examinations, teacher education programmes, and official educational materials predominantly employed this standard variety. Although standardisation aimed to facilitate communication across regions, it also privileged linguistic forms associated with socially and politically influential groups. As a result, many linguistic features commonly used in Telangana received limited representation within formal educational settings. School language increasingly reflected a linguistic norm that differed from the everyday speech of many students in Telangana.

The marginalisation of Telangana Telugu extended beyond differences in vocabulary and pronunciation. Educational materials often incorporated literary works, cultural references, idiomatic expressions, and social experiences that reflected dominant representations of Telugu culture. In contrast, Telangana's linguistic and cultural traditions received comparatively less attention. The writings of Telangana literary figures such as Kaloji Narayana Rao and Dasarathi Krishnamacharya occupied a relatively limited place in school curricula when compared with literary works that represented dominant linguistic traditions. Similarly, Telangana folk narratives, oral traditions, and local cultural practices were less visible in educational materials. Consequently, many students encountered a curriculum that did not fully reflect the linguistic and cultural realities of their communities.

This imbalance created a gap between the language of home and the language of school. Students who regularly used Telangana Telugu in everyday interactions often encountered expectations to adopt standard Telugu in formal educational contexts. From a sociological perspective, such expectations illustrate the operation of symbolic power within schooling. Educational institutions implicitly communicated which linguistic forms were considered appropriate, prestigious, and academically valuable. As a result, students may have perceived their home language as less legitimate within formal learning environments. These experiences reflect what Bourdieu described as symbolic violence, whereby dominant cultural norms become accepted as natural and desirable, even by those whose linguistic practices are marginalised.

Public perceptions further reinforced these hierarchies. Telangana Telugu was frequently characterised as colloquial, rural, or informal, whereas standard Telugu was often associated with education, social mobility, and cultural refinement. Such perceptions influenced attitudes among educators, students, and parents and contributed to the belief that educational success required linguistic conformity. Consequently, some students modified their speech patterns within classrooms to align with dominant expectations. Although such adaptation may facilitate academic participation, it can also create tensions between linguistic identity and educational achievement.

The Telangana movement fundamentally altered these discussions by placing language at the centre of debates concerning regional identity and cultural justice. Intellectuals, writers, artists, and social activists argued that the underrepresentation of Telangana language and culture in public institutions reflected broader patterns of regional marginalisation. Language became a powerful symbol of self-respect, cultural heritage, and collective identity. Demands for statehood therefore included calls for greater recognition of Telangana's linguistic traditions within educational, cultural, and administrative institutions.

Following the formation of Telangana State in 2014, educational authorities initiated efforts to address these concerns through curriculum and textbook reforms. The State Council of

Educational Research and Training (SCERT), Telangana, revised educational materials to incorporate regional histories, local cultural traditions, Telangana literary contributions, and selected linguistic expressions commonly used in the region. Textbooks increasingly included discussions of Telangana's social history, folk traditions, and cultural practices such as Bathukamma. Lessons drawn from local contexts sought to create stronger connections between school knowledge and students' lived experiences. These reforms reflected an effort to enhance cultural representation while promoting a more inclusive educational environment. Nevertheless, the process of linguistic inclusion remains complex. Standard Telugu continues to serve important communicative, academic, and administrative functions, while educational institutions must also respond to the linguistic diversity that exists within Telangana itself. The challenge therefore lies not in replacing one linguistic form with another but in creating educational spaces that recognise multiple forms of linguistic expression. The historical experience of Telangana Telugu demonstrates that debates concerning language in education extend beyond communication and pedagogy. Rather, they involve broader questions of cultural recognition, social justice, and educational representation. Understanding this historical trajectory provides an essential foundation for examining how contemporary efforts toward linguistic recognition may contribute to educational inclusion and student empowerment in Telangana.

3 Telangana State Formation, Linguistic Recognition, and Educational Inclusion

The formation of Telangana in 2014 marked a significant turning point in the relationship between language, culture, and education. Statehood created opportunities to reassess educational practices that many scholars, writers, and cultural activists viewed as insufficiently representative of Telangana's linguistic and cultural heritage. As debates surrounding regional identity gained prominence, educational policy increasingly recognised the importance of aligning school knowledge with the historical experiences and cultural realities of Telangana society. Consequently, language emerged as a central component of broader efforts to promote cultural recognition and educational inclusion.

One of the most visible outcomes of this shift was the revision of school curricula and textbooks by the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), Telangana. Educational materials increasingly incorporated Telangana-specific content, including regional history, local folklore, folk songs, cultural traditions, and contributions of Telangana writers. Lessons addressing Telangana's social movements, agrarian life, and cultural practices sought to present students with narratives that reflected their lived experiences. Cultural festivals such as Bathukamma and Bonalu received greater attention within educational materials, while literary selections increasingly included works associated with Telangana's linguistic and cultural traditions. The incorporation of regional vocabulary and local expressions further reflected an effort to bridge the gap between school language and community language.

These reforms can be understood through the sociological concept of cultural recognition. Educational institutions influence not only what students learn but also whose knowledge, language, and experiences are considered worthy of representation. Prior to statehood, many aspects of Telangana's linguistic and cultural heritage occupied a relatively marginal position within formal educational discourse. Post-statehood reforms sought to address this imbalance by extending institutional recognition to forms of knowledge that had previously received limited visibility. In this respect, curriculum reform functioned as more than an educational initiative; it represented an attempt to redistribute symbolic recognition within the educational system.

The inclusion of Telangana Telugu also carries important implications for student identity and

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<https://doi.org/10.66483/jsp.2026.001>

educational participation. Language forms a crucial component of self-understanding and social belonging. When students encounter familiar linguistic expressions, cultural references, and local histories within textbooks, they may perceive schooling as more relevant to their lives. Such recognition can foster confidence, strengthen classroom engagement, and create stronger connections between home and school environments. From a sociological perspective, educational inclusion involves not only physical access to schooling but also the validation of learners' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Recognition of Telangana Telugu therefore contributes to a more inclusive conception of educational participation.

At the same time, linguistic recognition should not be understood as a rejection of standard Telugu or other languages of wider communication. Contemporary educational systems must prepare students to participate in diverse linguistic environments that extend beyond regional boundaries. Standard Telugu continues to play an important role in higher education, public administration, and literary communication, while English remains closely associated with higher education and employment opportunities. Educational policy must therefore balance cultural recognition with linguistic mobility. A multilingual approach that values Telangana Telugu alongside standard Telugu and English may provide the most effective means of combining cultural inclusion with academic and professional opportunity.

Despite notable progress, challenges remain in translating policy intentions into classroom practice. The inclusion of Telangana vocabulary and cultural content in textbooks does not automatically transform educational experiences. Teachers remain central to the implementation of language-inclusive practices. If classroom interactions continue to privilege particular linguistic forms while discouraging others, the goals of educational inclusion may remain only partially realised. Effective implementation therefore requires teacher preparation programmes that encourage respect for linguistic diversity and equip educators to utilise students' linguistic resources as assets for learning rather than obstacles to academic achievement.

The Telangana experience demonstrates that language policy is closely connected to broader questions of social justice, identity, and educational representation. Post-statehood educational reforms have expanded the visibility of Telangana's linguistic and cultural heritage within schools and have challenged long-standing assumptions regarding linguistic legitimacy. Although the process remains ongoing, these reforms illustrate how educational institutions can contribute to cultural recognition while promoting more inclusive forms of learning and participation. Through this lens, the recognition of Telangana Telugu represents not merely a linguistic adjustment but a broader effort to create educational spaces that acknowledge and value the diversity of students' social and cultural experiences.

4 Discussion, Conclusion, and Policy Implications

The experience of Telangana demonstrates that language in education is not merely a pedagogical concern but also a matter of cultural representation, social justice, and educational equity. The historical dominance of standard Telugu within educational institutions reflected broader processes through which particular linguistic forms acquired legitimacy and authority. From a sociological perspective, this process illustrates how schools participate in the distribution of symbolic power by determining which languages, cultural experiences, and forms of knowledge are recognised within formal education. Consequently, the debate surrounding Telangana Telugu extends beyond language usage and raises important questions regarding whose identities and experiences are represented in educational spaces.

The post-statehood reforms undertaken in Telangana illustrate an effort to address historical

patterns of linguistic and cultural exclusion. The inclusion of Telangana history, regional literary traditions, local cultural practices, and linguistic expressions within textbooks represents a significant shift toward educational recognition. Such reforms acknowledge that learners do not enter classrooms as culturally neutral individuals; rather, they bring with them distinct linguistic identities and community experiences. When educational institutions recognise these identities, they create conditions that may strengthen students' sense of belonging, participation, and engagement with learning. In this regard, the Telangana experience supports the argument that educational inclusion involves cultural recognition alongside access and participation.

At the same time, the Telangana case highlights the limitations of symbolic recognition when it is not accompanied by structural and pedagogical change. The presence of regional language forms in textbooks alone cannot guarantee inclusive educational experiences. Classroom interactions, assessment practices, teacher attitudes, and institutional cultures continue to influence how linguistic diversity is valued in practice. Educational inclusion therefore requires sustained efforts to ensure that linguistic diversity is treated as a resource for learning rather than as a deviation from accepted norms. Without such changes, curriculum reforms may remain largely symbolic rather than transformative.

The Telangana experience also demonstrates the importance of adopting a multilingual perspective. Recognition of Telangana Telugu should complement rather than replace proficiency in standard Telugu and English. In contemporary society, students require access to multiple linguistic resources that enable participation in local communities, higher education, public institutions, and global knowledge networks. Educational policy should therefore seek to balance cultural affirmation with opportunities for social and academic mobility. A multilingual framework offers the most effective means of achieving this balance while respecting linguistic diversity.

Several policy implications emerge from this analysis. First, curriculum development should continue to integrate Telangana's linguistic, historical, and cultural heritage in ways that move beyond token representation. Second, teacher education programmes should prepare educators to engage constructively with linguistic diversity and culturally responsive pedagogies. Third, textbook development should incorporate a wider range of Telangana literary traditions, folk knowledge systems, and community experiences. Finally, educational policymakers should promote language policies that recognise regional linguistic identities while simultaneously supporting multilingual competence among learners.

In conclusion, the growing recognition of Telangana Telugu in school education represents an important development in the pursuit of educational inclusion and cultural justice. The Telangana experience illustrates that language is not merely a medium through which knowledge is transmitted but also a mechanism through which identities are recognised and valued. By expanding the visibility of Telangana's linguistic and cultural heritage within educational institutions, recent reforms have challenged long-standing assumptions regarding linguistic legitimacy and representation. Although important challenges remain, these developments suggest that inclusive language policies can contribute to more equitable educational environments while fostering a stronger connection between schooling, culture, and community. Future research may explore how students, teachers, and communities experience these changes and how linguistic recognition influences educational outcomes across diverse social contexts.

5 Limitations

This chapter is primarily conceptual and relies on secondary sources, policy documents, and sociological perspectives on language and education. It does not include primary empirical data

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<https://doi.org/10.66483/jsp.2026.001>

from students, teachers, or educational institutions in Telangana. Consequently, the discussion focuses on broader theoretical and policy issues rather than direct classroom experiences. Future studies may employ qualitative or quantitative approaches to examine how language-inclusive educational reforms are experienced and implemented in practice.

Note

This chapter presents a conceptual discussion of language, identity, and educational inclusion in Telangana. The bibliography provides key works that informed the analysis and offers readers additional sources for further study.

Acknowledgement of AI Use

The author used generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools during the preparation of this chapter to support language refinement, organisation of ideas, and improvement of readability. The author reviewed, revised, and verified all content and assumes full responsibility for the accuracy, interpretation, and originality of the final manuscript.

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