



KAMARAJ IAS ACADEMY
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Multilingual education: A necessity to transform education

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Why in News: In November 1999, UNESCO declared February 21 as International Mother Language Day in response to the declining state of many languages all over the world. This year's theme is "Multilingual education — a necessity to transform education,"

About Multilingual Education:

Multilingual Education means the use of more than one language in the teaching-learning process. In multilingual education, no language is considered to be superior or inferior.

Instead, multiple languages (including children's home language and the school language) are used simultaneously in a carefully considered manner.

Children's familiar home language is used to teach unfamiliar and new languages

Leaders view on Mother tongue

The Nobel Prize-winning physicist C V Raman said, "We must teach science in our mother tongue. Otherwise, science will become a highbrow activity. It will not be an activity in which all people can participate."

Writing in Young India in 1921, Mahatma Gandhi spoke with concern, of the strain of the foreign medium which turned "our children into crammers and imitators." Gandhiji foresaw how "the foreign medium has made our children practically foreigners in their own land."

The former UNESCO Director-General, Koichiro Matsuura, highlighted the irreplaceable significance of one's mother tongue when he observed that "the languages we learn from our mothers are the homeland of our innermost thoughts."

Need for multi lingual education in India

India is an ancient repository of hundreds of languages and thousands of dialects with rich linguistic and cultural diversity.

It is in our mother tongue that we express, with authenticity, our deepest thoughts, feelings, values and ideals, as also our literary endeavours.

Our languages, which are an integral part of our ancient culture, give us a sense of identity.

The International Mother Language Day has added significance in the Indian context because of the threat westernisation poses to the survival of as many as 42 of our dialects and languages which have fewer than 10,000 users.

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The situation is equally grim all over the world with 40 per cent of the speakers of 6,700 languages not having access to education in their mother tongue.

It is appropriate, therefore, that revitalising languages that are disappearing or are threatened with extinction is one of the themes of Mother Language Day this year.

India's concerns with Monolingual system

Even as we celebrate Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav, to mark 75 years of Independence, we have not been able to shed this colonial legacy of dependence on English.

Educators and parents continue to accord unquestioned primacy to English and, as a result, the child is compelled to study his or her mother tongue as a “second/third language” at school.

Our emphasis on English has, ironically, made the educational system exclusive and restrictive.

As a result, while limiting the acquisition of knowledge in technical and professional courses, to a select few, we made it inaccessible to a vast majority of our students.

We scarcely seemed to realise that we were building barriers in the path of our progress.

Significance of Multilingual Education

UNESCO promotes mother tongue instruction in the context of bilingual education (BE)/multilingual education (MLE) from the earliest years of schooling because

It lays a solid foundation for learning

It improves access to education, especially for girls

When used at home and/or at school, it promotes literacy in the mother tongue (L1) and later in the second language (L2)

It facilitates learning both of academic subjects as well as the second language (L2).

At school, children can concentrate on the subject matter instead of struggling to understand the language of instruction as well.

It improves learning outcomes as it promotes dialogue and interaction between learners and teachers by means of better communication and understanding

It raises the quality of education by emphasising understanding and creativity rather than repetitive memorization.

Despite the known benefits of bilingual/multilingual education, the principle of education in the mother tongue is not always respected. More often than not, children are taught in a language that they do not master.

Government measures for promoting multilingual education

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a farsighted document which advocates education in one's mother tongue right from the primary-school level

The UGC has, in a welcome move, written to governors and chief ministers of various states to give a fillip to measures for the promotion of mother tongue education in colleges and universities.

In a survey conducted by AICTE in February last year of over 83,000 students, nearly 44 per cent voted in favour of studying engineering in their mother tongue, highlighting its necessity.

The Centre's initiative to give prominence to native languages in employment and job creation is a welcome step.

It is also heartening that the Staff Selection Commission has decided to conduct examinations in 13 Indian languages in addition to Hindi and English.

Similarly, the Supreme Court's decision to make verdicts accessible in all Indian languages is of great significance.

The Way Ahead

Several studies have shown the importance of multilingual education in upholding cultural and linguistic diversity.

Mainstreaming of mother tongue-based multilingual education should be accorded the highest priority.

Recognising the role of technology and artificial intelligence in transforming the educational landscape globally, societies, including ours, must fast-track methods to make quality education more accessible, equitable and inclusive.

We must involve all key stakeholders in education — policymakers, schools, colleges and universities, teachers, regulatory institutions and non-governmental bodies.

We must hasten the process of content creation in mother languages, especially with respect to technical and professional courses. Leveraging technology will drive development in this respect