

TAPPING TECHNOLOGY FOR MULTILINGUAL LEARNING

Relevant for: null | Topic: Indian Languages and Literature

International Mother Language Day | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

It is my conviction that expression in one's mother tongue lies at the heart of an individual or community's cultural identity. For centuries, India has been home to hundreds of languages and thousands of dialects, making its linguistic and cultural diversity the most unique in the world. In fact, our linguistic diversity is one of the cornerstones of our ancient civilisation. As I always emphasise, it is our mother tongue that lends expression to our vision and aspirations, our values and ideals, as also our creative and literary endeavours.

In a speech some years ago, the former UNESCO Director-General, Koïchiro Matsuura, underscored the importance of mother tongue when he remarked that "the language we learn from our mothers [mother tongue] is the homeland of our innermost thoughts." He aptly described each language to be "as valuable and distinct as every irreplaceable human life".

While languages are among the key bridges that ensure cultural and civilisational continuity, globalisation and Westernisation have impacted not just the growth but also the survival of many of our dialects in this rich cultural and linguistic tapestry. Therefore, International Mother Language Day has special significance to the Indian context.

In November 1999, the UNESCO General Conference approved the declaration of February 21 as International Mother Language Day, in response to the declining state of many languages; it has been observed throughout the world since 2000. UNESCO has been striving to protect the cultural and linguistic diversity of member-states through such pro-active international measures. According to the UN agency, at least 43% of the estimated 6,000 languages spoken in the world are endangered — an alarming figure indeed!

The theme of International Mother Language Day in 2022 — "Using Technology for Multilingual Learning: Challenges and Opportunities" — is one of special relevance to us. The underlying concept is to discuss the role of technology to further the cause of multilingual education. The central idea is to leverage technology to support and enrich the teaching-learning experience on a multi-lingual level. It also aims at achieving a qualitative, equitable and inclusive educational experience. Inevitably, the widespread use of technology would fast-track development. As the Director-General of UNESCO, Audrey Azoulay, observed in her message, "Technology can provide new tools for protecting linguistic diversity. Such tools, for example, facilitating their spread and analysis, allow us to record and preserve languages which sometimes exist only in oral form."

Multilingual education predicated on the increasing use of one's mother tongue is a key component of inclusion in education. To underscore the importance of mother tongue in laying the foundation for one's intellectual development, I have always likened it to eyesight and spectacles to other languages. Spectacles can function only if there is eyesight. When applied to Indian classrooms, a multi-lingual approach would also create new pathways of learning by addressing the emerging challenges on a regional and global scale. Seen in its entirety, this is in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of "sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas".

Globally, the role of technology came to the fore during the COVID-19 pandemic when school

shutdowns forced educators and learners to adapt themselves to online education. Over weeks and months, this became the new normal across the world, though it did present a host of new challenges. These include the requisite skills employed in distance teaching, Internet access, and, importantly, adapting materials and content in diverse languages. While the central and State governments are taking active measures to promote digital learning, it becomes our responsibility to ensure that there is no digital divide.

It would be pertinent to note that the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a visionary document which encourages the use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction till at least Class five but preferably till Class eight and beyond. In drawing up a road map for the future, the NEP seeks to tailor the teaching and learning process and modify it by making it holistic, value-based and inclusive. The use of mother tongue in teaching is bound to create a positive impact on learning outcomes, as also the development of the cognitive faculties of students.

There is a pressing need to create and improve scientific and technical terminology in Indian languages. This would help transform the educational experience by making existing knowledge systems in a range of disciplines accessible to learners. It would be relevant to recall the words of the renowned physicist, Sir C.V. Raman, who observed with great clarity and vision that “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.”

Sir C.V. Raman’s observation has a prophetic ring of truth when we see it in the light of the fact that we have been able to create a large English-based education system which includes colleges that offer courses in medicine and multiple disciplines of engineering. This impressive system paradoxically excludes a vast majority of learners in our country from accessing higher education. Therefore, the need to build an effective multilingual education system across diverse streams and disciplines becomes all the more imperative. It is important to bear in mind that in a survey conducted by the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) in 2020 involving over 83,000 students, nearly 44% of students voted in favour of studying engineering in their mother tongue, highlighting a critical need in technical education.

In this context, the collaboration between the AICTE and IIT Madras to translate some courses on the central government’s e-learning platform, Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM) into eight regional languages such as Tamil, Hindi, Telugu, Kannada, Bengali, Marathi, Malayalam and Gujarati, is commendable. Such tech-led initiatives will serve to democratise higher education. At the same time, the decision of the AICTE to permit B. Tech programmes in 11 native languages, in tune with the NEP, is a historic move which would open the door for students to a wide range of opportunities; the languages are Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Gujarati, Malayalam, Bengali, Assamese, Punjabi and Odia.

Additionally, learning in (your) mother tongue is at the core of building a sense of self-esteem and identity. While I feel that one must accord equal respect to all languages, there is a tendency, which must be noted with regret, among some educators and parents to take a condescending view of education in Indian languages in preference to English language learning. As a result, children’s access to their mother tongue becomes restricted, leading to a sort of socio-cultural rootlessness, especially if corrective steps are not taken. We have to teach our children not to mistake competence in English to be a yardstick of intellectual superiority or as a prerequisite for achieving success in life.

Our policy-planners, educators, parents and opinion leaders must bear in mind that when it comes to education in mother tongue and local languages, we can take the cue from European countries as well as Asian powers such as Japan, China and Korea, among others.

According to the Language Census, whose findings were widely reported in 2018, India is home to 19,500 languages or dialects, of which 121 languages are spoken by 10,000 or more people in our country. It is our collective responsibility to revive and revitalise the 196 Indian languages which fall under the “endangered” category. Let us not forget that every single language constitutes a cultural crucible which stores the distilled knowledge and the wisdom of our collective consciousness — our values, traditions, stories, behaviour and norms, proverbs, sayings and idioms. Co-existing over centuries, borrowing from and nurturing each other, our languages are interwoven with our individual, local and national identity.

M. Venkaiah Naidu is the Vice-President of India

[Our code of editorial values](#)

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

CrackIAS.com