

**21 February 2024**

9:30 am – 1 pm (CET)  
Room IV, UNESCO HQ



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## Background

UNESCO has consistently highlighted the role of multilingual education based on the first language, also called mother language or home language, on annual International Mother Language Day celebrations.

The mismatch between home language(s) and school languages has long negatively impacted education systems in all regions of the world. For decades, the exclusive use of dominant languages for instruction has been criticized as affecting the quality of teaching. It has also impaired the validity of learning assessments, and more broadly impacted learners' future opportunities for education and work. As many scholars have pointed out, simply using a foreign language as a medium of instruction does not guarantee effective learning of that language.

## Current global situation

The disruption of learning during COVID-19 school closures has put a massive strain on learning. Before the pandemic, 57 percent of children in low- and middle-income countries could not read and understand a simple story by the end of primary school ([World Bank et al., with UNESCO, 2022](#)). In 2022, this figure rose to 70 percent. In some countries, over 90 percent of students are not taught in a language they speak and understand ([World Bank, 2023](#)). Poor learning outcomes may be a reflection of inadequate language of instruction policies.

## Why multilingual education matters

International Mother Language Day 2024 is an opportunity to remind the international community that multilingual education enhances learning when the language of instruction is the learner's first language. The use of learners' own languages for literacy and learning provides a solid pillar for education, and for transfer of skills and knowledge to additional languages. Learning in one's first language facilitates understanding and interaction, and further develops critical thinking. It strengthens self-confidence and self-esteem and stimulates active participation. In addition to boosting learning, multilingual education contributes to opening the doors to intergenerational learning, the preservation of culture and intangible heritage, and the revitalization of languages. It enriches multilingualism on the web and is essential for digital literacy. Multilingual education also helps in acquiring life skills, especially in the context of emergencies, crises and natural disasters. Thus, refugees, internally or internationally displaced people and those excluded or marginalized from quality education, such as Indigenous peoples, are not left behind.

## International Mother Language Day 2024

The theme of International Mother Language Day celebration 2024 is "Multilingual education is a pillar of intergenerational learning". Today, 250 million children and young people still do not attend school and 763 million adults do not master basic literacy skills. Mother tongue education supports learning, literacy and the acquisition of additional languages.

## Objectives

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International Mother Language Day 2024 aims to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal 4 on inclusive quality education and lifelong learning and of the objectives of the International Decade on Indigenous Languages (2022-2032).

The event will also be the opportunity to present the UNESCO Policy brief on Multilingualism and language diversity for inclusion in education. It is a UNESCO input to the implementation of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages and the education of Indigenous peoples, among other initiatives such as the UNESCO/Purdue University (USA) Massive Open Online Courses on *Indigenous Languages: From Policy and Planning to Implementation and Assessment*.

More specifically, International Mother Language Day 2024 will highlight the need to implement a multilingual education policy and practice so that all children benefit from quality and inclusive education and develop their cognitive and non-cognitive skills. The celebration aims towards the prioritization of multilingual education based on mother languages in different contexts; the promotion of the knowledge held by Indigenous peoples within the archives of Indigenous languages and through the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022–2032); and the understanding of the importance of language education in intercultural dialogue.

## Target audiences

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- Key stakeholders in education, including policy-makers and teachers.
- Non-governmental organizations, foundations and other bodies supporting multilingualism and multilingual education, and cultural and linguistic diversity.

## Format and languages

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The event will include an official opening and two panels on 1) Multilingual education as a key component of quality learning; and 2) Multilingual education as a pillar of intergenerational learning.

Experts in language education, in literacy and non-formal or informal learning and intergenerational learning, as well as in Indigenous languages, will make presentations and debate on the challenges and opportunities of multilingual education in multilingual contexts and in crisis and emergency situations.

The event will take place from 9.30 am to 1 pm in Room IV, UNESCO House (7 Place de Fontenoy 75007).

Simultaneous interpretation will be available in English, French and Spanish.

## Contacts

### UNESCO

Section of Education for Inclusion and Gender Equality, Division for Education 2030, Education Sector:

Ms Noro Andriamiseza: [n.andriamiseza@unesco.org](mailto:n.andriamiseza@unesco.org)

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## Provisional Agenda

Wednesday, 21 February 2024

*Multilingual education: a pillar of intergenerational learning*

<b>9:30 – 10:00</b>	<b>Welcoming coffee</b>
<b>10:00 – 10:30</b>	<p><b>Official opening</b></p> <p><b>Master of Ceremony:</b> Ms Min Jeong Kim, Director, Division for Education 2030, UNESCO</p> <p><b>Welcoming remarks:</b> Ms Stefania Giannini, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO</p> <p><b>Introductory remarks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ H.E. Mr Khondker M. Talha, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to France, Permanent Delegate of Bangladesh to UNESCO</li> <li>➤ H.E. Mr Halvor Hvideberg, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Delegate of Norway to UNESCO</li> <li>➤ Ms Nivine Khaled, Director, French Language and Diversity of the Francophone Cultures, International Organization of la Francophonie</li> </ul>
<b>10:30 – 11:45</b>	<p><b>Theme 1: Multilingual education based on mother tongue, a key component of quality learning</b></p> <p><b>Moderator:</b> Mr Carlos Vargas, Chief of the Section for Teacher Development UNESCO</p>

	<p><b>Panelists:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Mr Shannon Bischoff, Professor of Linguistics, Three Rivers Language Center, Purdue University - Fort Wayne, United States of America</li> <li>➤ Mr Mohammed Ayman Sadiq, Educator and Founder of the “10 Minute School”, Bangladesh</li> <li>➤ Ms Isabelle Cros, Primary School Teacher “Teaching languages and cultures”, LPL, Inspé, Aix-Marseille University, France</li> <li>➤ Ms Noro Andriamizeza, Programme Specialist, UNESCO, Education for Inclusion and Gender Equality Section</li> <li>➤ Mr Stephen Bestbier, Government Partnerships Manager, Snapplify Project, South Africa</li> </ul> <p><b>Dialogue with the audience</b></p> <p><b>Video 1:</b> That moment you achieve your lifelong dream, UNESCO</p>
<p><b>11:45 – 12:55</b></p>	<p><b>Theme 2: Multilingual education, a pillar of intergenerational learning</b></p> <p><b>Moderator:</b> Ms Rokhaya Diawara, Programme Specialist, UNESCO</p> <p><b>Panelists:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Ms Mariam Wallet Aboubakrine, Chair, Tinhinan Association</li> <li>➤ Ms Hanieh Moghani, UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (video message)</li> <li>➤ Ms Anna Stevanato, Founder and Director, D’une langue à l’autre (DULALA) Association, France with Ms Mariam Fride Doucouré and Ms Alice le Marchand</li> <li>➤ Ms Dieneke Blikslager, vice Principal of the St. Janschool, Amsterdam (Kingdom of the Netherlands) and Ms Ellen-Rose Kambel Executive Director, Rutu Foundation for Intercultural Multilingual Education</li> </ul> <p><b>Video 2</b> The Origin of language; Yosokwi, Colombia.</p> <p><b>Dialogue with the audience</b></p>
<p><b>12:55 – 13:00</b></p>	<p><b>Closing remarks:</b> Ms Justine Sass, Chief of the Section of Education for Inclusion and Gender Equality, Division for Education 2030, UNESCO</p>

Entrance : 125 Avenue de Suffren, 75015 Paris.