

International Mother Language Day - February 21st

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) celebrates International Mother Language Day every year to promote mother tongue-based multilingual education.

International Mother Language Day 2024

The theme for International Mother Language Day 2024 is "Multilingual education is a pillar of intergenerational learning".

- Currently, 40% of the global population (and in some regions, this figure is 90%) lacks access to education in their native language.
- Using native languages in education fosters better learning outcomes, self-esteem, and critical thinking skills according to research.
- This approach also supports intergenerational learning and cultural preservation.
- Multilingual education not only promotes inclusive societies but also aids in preserving non-dominant, minority, and indigenous languages.

International Mother Language Day 2023

The theme for February 21, 2023: "Multilingual education – a necessity to transform education", is aimed at emphasizing Indigenous people's education and languages.

The objective of this Day: International Mother Language Day recognizes that languages and multilingualism can advance inclusion and the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) focus on leaving no one behind.

It also emphasizes on UNESCO's belief that "*education, based on the first language or mother tongue, must begin from the early years as early childhood care and education is the foundation of learning.*"

Significance of 2023's Observance: The event of 2023 aimed at supporting learning through multilingual education and multilingualism in our fast-changing global contexts and in crisis situations, including emergency contexts, as a major goal, among other key aspects.

This has been kept into consideration based on the **United Nations International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032)** for which, UNESCO is the lead agency.

A Brief Background & History

- It was Bangladesh's initiative to introduce the idea of International Mother Language Day.

- The day (February 21) also commemorates a long struggle by Bangladesh to protect its mother language Bangla.
- In November 1999, this day was proclaimed by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)).
- The [UN General Assembly](#) welcomed the proclamation of the day in its resolution of 2002.
- On 16 May 2007 the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution called upon Member States "to promote the preservation and protection of all languages used by peoples of the world".
- The UNGA had then proclaimed **2008 as the International Year of Languages**, to promote unity in diversity and international understanding, through multilingualism and multiculturalism.

Significance of the Mother Language Day

Languages, with their complex implications for identity, communication, social integration, education and development, are of strategic importance for people and planet. Yet, due to globalization processes, they are increasingly under threat, or disappearing altogether.

The overall statistics, based on data across the world, show that:

- Globally, 40 per cent of the population does not have access to education in a language they speak or understand
- At least 43% of the estimated 6000 languages spoken in the world are endangered
- Every two weeks, a language disappears, taking with it an entire cultural and intellectual heritage

India & Languages

- As per the [Census of India 2011](#), there are a total of 121 languages and 270 mother tongues. Out of 121 languages, 22 are officially recognized languages.
- The [National Education Policy](#) (NEP 2020) introduced in India focuses on giving maximum attention to the mother tongue. A Three Language Formula to be implemented, wherein, apart from Hindi and English, the state government can include the regional languages in studies.
- The Government of India also launched the **National Translation Mission (NTM)**, a scheme to establish translation as an industry in general and, to facilitate higher education by making knowledgeable texts accessible to students and academics in Indian languages in particular.
- The Government has also launched the **Scheme for Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages**. This scheme works on the conservation of threatened languages
- Google too has introduced **Project Navlekha**. An initiative to make online content relevant for more Indian users, especially in local languages.

- Many competitive exams too have started making their question papers available in the regional languages, except for the Hindi/English subject paper. This has enabled the option for candidates to get the questions in the available regional languages.

Conclusion

If proper initiatives are not taken globally, the loss of languages may cause a severe threat to the culture and heritage across the world. The International Mother Language Day promotes linguistic and cultural diversity.

The UPSC Exam, too, comprises a compulsory paper for Indian languages. Aspirants can get the [tips to tackle Compulsory Indian Language Paper](#) at the linked article.

