

# International Mother Language Day

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Traditional Fijian kava ceremony. Picture: TOURISM FIJI

## Preserving your language of birth

By ATASA WILLIAMS

**T**ODAY is International Mother Language Day. A day proclaimed by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in November, 1999 to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and spread awareness about the importance of linguistic, cultural diversity and multilingualism.

Multilingual and multicultural societies exist through their languages which transmit and preserve traditional knowledge and cultures in a sustainable way.

It originated as the international recognition of Language Movement Day, which has been commemorated in Bangladesh (formerly known as East Pakistan) since 1952.

Due to globalisation processes, languages are under threat of disappearing and when this happens the world's rich tapestry of cultural diversity fades too according to website [www.un.org](http://www.un.org).

This year's theme 'Using technology for multilingual learning: Challenges and opportunities,' raises the potential role of technology to advance multilingual education and support the development of quality teaching and learning for all.

As we all know technology has the potential to address some of the greatest challenges in education today.

During COVID-19 school closures, many countries around the world employed technology-based solutions to maintain continuity of learning.

But many learners lacked the necessary equipment, internet access, accessible materials, adapted content, and human support that would have allowed them to follow distance learning. Moreover, distance teaching and learning tools, programs and content are not always able to reflect language diversity.

The General Assembly proclaimed 2008 as the International Year of Languages, to promote unity in diversity and international understanding, through multilingualism and multiculturalism and named the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation to serve as the lead agency for the year.

Today there is growing awareness that languages play a vital role in development, in ensuring cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, but also in strengthening co-operation and attaining quality education for all, in building inclusive knowledge societies and preserving cultural heritage, and in mobilising political will for applying the benefits of science and technology to sustainable development.



Due to globalisation processes, languages are under threat of disappearing. Picture: WWW.NORDANGLIAEDUCATION.COM



Multilingual and multicultural societies exist through their languages. Picture: WWW.ETRANSLATIONSERVICES.COM

The Indian High Commission Indian Cultural Centre *Khatak* dance group at the Fiji Masti Bhara Diwali Mela at Ratu Sukuna Park in Suva in 2019. Picture: FT FILE



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## International Mother Language Day

The University of the South Pacific while it upholds the Pacific values acknowledges and celebrates the diversity of our students and staff ensuring there are equal opportunities offered through our various programmes to meet their learning needs. The School of Pacific Arts, Communication and Education (SPACE) through its Linguistic Programmes offers i Taukei, Hindi, Chinese, and French Languages.

This year the International Mother Language Day will be on 21 February 2022, and the theme is **"Using technology for multilingual learning: Challenges and opportunities."**

The use of technology for multilingual learning during the Covid lockdown has been quite significant and useful as students are scattered throughout the region. The offering of online courses has enabled many students to sustain their studies and to benefit from this alternative approach to learning. While it has its challenges, such as connectivity, it is acknowledged that using technology for cross-cultural and multilingual learning has great advantages and benefits.

The Confucius Institute at USP (USP-CI) has been celebrating and promoting International Mother Language Day for the last two years, together with the Fiji Ministry of Education, Culture and Heritages, and the Fiji Museum.

Respecting and embracing the mother language of a child is very important. It ensures safety, confidence, care, and reassurance for a child. Research has affirmed that using the mother language to learn and teach at the early stage of education strengthens the foundation for a child's cross-cultural and multilingual learning. On the basis of this, providing children with a diversity of languages, could bring them the colours and opportunities for the future and open the window of the world to the children.

USP-CI will continue its efforts towards ensuring equitable and inclusive lifelong learning opportunities, respecting and promoting cross and multilingual learning using modern digital devices and resources.