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## A Case for Multilingual Education

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# A Case for Multilingual Education

*A book about multilingual education by Amir Kalan, academic director of the UDayton Global pathway program for international students at UD, is now available in the principal language of Iran, a country that doesn't permit multilingual education.*

*The Farsi translation of the 2016 book [Who's Afraid of Multilingual Education?](#) became available Aug. 21 for free on UD's open-access institutional repository, eCommons; in less than one week, it was downloaded more than 600 times from 30 countries. (An [excerpt in English](#) is available on eCommons as well.)*

*In the book, Kalan takes up the topic with some of the world's most prominent academic experts in linguistic human rights, mother-tongue education, and bilingual and multilingual education. His interviewees — Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, Jim Cummins, Ajit Mohanty and Stephen Bahry — provide evidence that mother tongue-based multilingual education has resulted in positive outcomes for the speakers of non-dominant language groups and the country itself.*

*With the permission of the book's publisher, Multilingual Matters and Channel View Publications of Bristol, United Kingdom, Kalan commissioned the Farsi translation by Hiwa Weisi, assistant professor in applied linguistics at Razi University in Kermanshah, Iran. Here, Kalan shares a rationale for multilingual and mother-tongue education.*

## A CASE FOR MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION

*By Amir Kalan*

Teachers with effective pedagogical practices always consider students' backgrounds as an important component of the process of teaching and learning. Good teaching never fails to see students' diverse backgrounds including linguistic differences.

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I have read many reports about how teachers use multilingual pedagogies in the classroom and observed many classrooms in different countries with different languages of instruction. Effective teachers know they should tap into students' linguistic backgrounds (a) for recognizing students' identities and creating a healthy teacher-student relationship and (b) for using students' home languages as valuable sources of knowledge.

Multilingual education is not an academic invention or experiment; it's a reality that every day manifests itself in different forms in classrooms all over the world. Governments can ban official mother tongue-based multilingual education, but they can never irradiate the natural need for plurilingual pedagogies and mother tongue-based multilingual education.

Instruction in students' mother tongues can help students negotiate their identities and foster a sense of belonging. If students' mother tongues are denied in the classroom, and if we constantly send this message to the students that their cultures are inferior, we cannot expect much in terms of student success. Humiliation has never created academic growth. Therefore, as soon as we employ mother tongue-based multilingual education, students will feel welcome in educational settings and instead of wrestling with identity crises fully take part in the process of learning.

Similarly, students' family and community members (in particular those who don't speak the dominant language) feel motivated to be proactively present in students' educational lives and share their experiences and native knowledge with them.

At a national level, when diversity of languages and cultures is seen as a "valuable resource" rather than a "problem," we will witness grassroots participation of more citizens—regardless of their backgrounds—in political and decision-making processes. Also, if languages are recognized, there could be enormous economic gains

Dayton for the fourth consecutive year to host a film series that features a variety of perspectives on Hispanic heritage.

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in culture and entertainment industries through music, literature, and performance arts.

Last but not least, an attention to native languages prevents the disappearance of knowledge and philosophies that have been gained dearly over centuries and that can provide answers for today's problems such as the environmental crises we are currently facing globally.

People intuitively feel that the more you expose your children to the dominant language ("language of power"), the sooner they will learn the language and the more successful they will be in their future lives. This view of language learning reduces language to a technique and language learners to an identity-less machine that can reproduce the new languages you feed them as long as you feed the machine long enough.

Effective teachers, however, know that language teaching and learning is much more complex than this and includes complicated forms of physiological and power-relational dynamics. The psychological pain minoritized students feel causes a sense of indignation in response to humiliation and discrimination because of power relations between the speakers of dominant and minority languages. That is why a lot of students who are "intelligent" enough to learn dominant languages (and hence the subjects taught in those languages) decide not to do so as a form of resistance and an expression of dignity.



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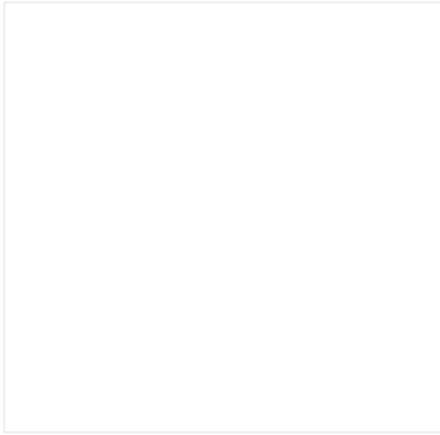
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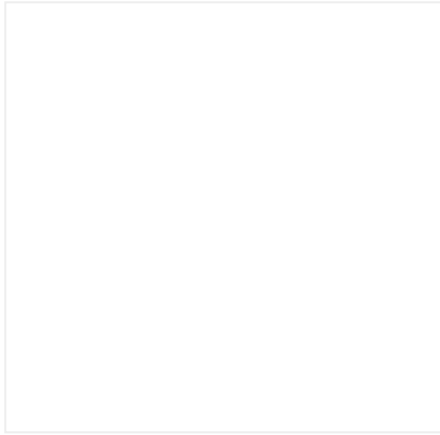


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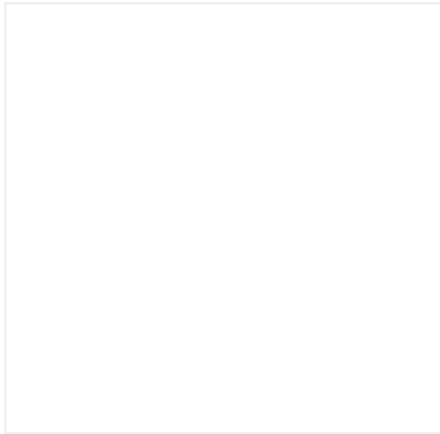
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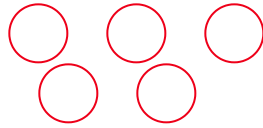
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