



# **MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION: A STORY OF LANGUAGES**

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*MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION:  
A STORY OF LANGUAGES*



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*This story is dedicated to my nana who is always ready to teach me Hindi, my dad, and my mom for your unconditional support and love, and my sister for your terrible acting skills.*



**"One language sets you in a corridor  
for life. Two languages open every  
door along the way"**

**- Frank Smith.**

September 8th was *International Literacy Day*, and this year's theme contours the experiences of my life: *Promoting multilingual education: Literacy for mutual understanding and peace* - UNESCO. As I type each word, I reminisce about the blossoming of each language and the vibrant colours of life.

Welcome to my voyage, rooted from the bottom of my heart, watered, cared for, kept in the sun, and grown into a beautiful journey.

Let's travel back to 2010 when I lived in the charming country of Indonesia. Barely able to form words, Bahasa Indonesia (the national language of Indonesia) soon became the composition that orchestrated my world. It was the key to unlock the door between me and those around me. As I got older, I realized the importance of balance. While the locals became my source of language education, I became their Bollywood entertainer. Not only was I fluent in Bahasa at such a young age, but I was also fluent in my mother tongue, Hindi.

Bahasa has faded from me, leaving a blank space, yet the essence of its charming words still reverberate like the rhythm in Lady Gaga's *Poker Face*. It's fast, it's pop, and it's unforgettable.

It's funny how the one phrase I remember of Bahasa is one I used as I soared and saved my sister from the claws of my cousin-brother (not literally). Sure, you must be intrigued by what this phrase might be. Don't worry! I will reveal it because who said a climax can't be at the beginning of a piece? The magic words are "Didi sakit hai." Which roughly translates to "My sister is hurt." They stuck with me like a bad habit, etched into my brain, never to be forgotten. The reason? This nostalgic phrase derives from one of my cousins who used to stage a fight with my elder sister, with her consent, to see how I would come to save the day. It is quite cliché to leave all the battle to the kid. We have all read enough Harry Potter and Percy Jackson books to know that the good versus evil theme always favors the good, no matter how bad the acting of the actors (my sister and brother) may be.

Though Bahasa may have left its residency in my brain, it always has a place in my heart.

One thing I have learned about languages is that even if you don't remember any words or vocabulary, their essence always holds on to you, and no matter what, you can always count on them to be there for you.

My love for Hindi is like the comfort you get on a rainy day curled up in your bed, wearing an oodie, and drinking a warm chai (tea). It's more than just a chorus to my culture- it's my home. When I moved to India in 2013, Hindi became my newfound love. Even though Hindi is what I spoke at home in Indonesia, adding Bahasa to the mix, my Hindi formed a tiny crack. As I learned so much about it, it soon became not the symphony that conducted my life in India but the one that became a conveyer to all my life experiences.

As much as I loved Hindi, studying it during exam times was quite tiring because it was "Shudh Hindi" we were taught. You can compare it to speaking Elizabethan English. Quite Shakespearean if you ask me, but it reflected its pulchritudinous and shone a light on ideas and principles that are so powerful, so much that I still lead through my life with them. Such as this quote, "वसिष्ठः से बड़े अणुब सविज्ञे बाला बदिपाल्य ना लो आज तक खुना है न कभी खुलेगा।" - "There's no greater school that teaches life experience than its own challenges." - Premchand. Even though I am still discovering how to let go of mistakes that harm my perfectionism, I learned from this quote that instead of being infuriated at myself for being human, I can learn from them.

A memory of me all wide-eyed and grinning in Hindi class remains captured in my mind like an image. I was apprehensive to read a paragraph from my Hindi textbook because the words were quite technical. As I read the paragraph flawlessly with no hesitations and perfect accents, my teacher applauded me with a sweet nod. It was a lot for me back then because the language that I had been giving all my blood, sweat, and tears into fruited into a successful day.

I have always been in awe of English, especially American accents, and how did I perfect mine? Well, to answer my own question and leave you in the dark (just a bit), let's say it required sixteen hours of travelling and some rom-com movies.

Weekends in India consisted of my sister, mom, and I watching rom-coms and chick flicks like *The Devil Wears Prada* or *The Princess Diaries*. My ears often focused on how the words sounded because I was fascinated with this foreign way of speaking English.

It was right then and there when I knew this new change in my life would be a door to perfect my English. It all came naturally to me, and I never expected it. Who knew I would be strutting with my new perfected accent (in less than three months) like Sandra Bullock at the end of *Ocean's 8*? As I strengthened my English skills, I soon began to lose my ability to read or write Hindi. Without the practice, it was impossible to keep up.

In 2022, my dad told my sweet, loving, and devoted Nana (mom's dad) to teach me how to write and read Hindi. Every summer I go to India, I learn Hindi. Each session turns into a cycle of reading, writing, revising, and repeating. But for the time when I do have the full package, I feel complete. I gain wisdom, my decisions are more careful, and I act with consideration. With the lack of time I have to devote to Hindi, I drain all my learning in a week of being back in Canada. But as I continue to bridge the gaps between me and Hindi, I am picking up the pieces I lost along the way, and I wouldn't be able to do it without my Nana.

Ps: I hope no one tells my Nana this, and we can keep it between us, but I haven't practiced reading or writing once since I came back to Canada. Oops! Sorry about that!

There is always something special about the first language you have learned because it will always be warm. Its place of residence is a *Presidential Ritz Carlton Suite* in my heart. As much as I love English Bahasa, and French, Hindi stands on a well-deserved pedal stool for me, because at the end of the day, I will come home from school and make all my rowdy jokes in my mother tongue.

For me, art is more than a pretty picture. It's a tale I tell with every language I know. When I pick up my pencil and create a rough draft, I harness the power of English to give me bold and unique ideas. As I approach the colouring/painting stage, I remember my vibrant culture and colour my piece in Hindi. My Bahasa is an unconditional supporter, reminding me to add a touch of curiosity and youthfulness to my painting. When it's time to add the finishing touches, I speak through art with my French, reminding me of my path as a learner and a student, always leaving room for improvement.

In the end, each language collaborates with one another, resulting in a piece I proudly call my own.



Hindi, English, Bahasa, and French represent my past, present, and future, but they all represent the artist and being in me. As we look to the hereafter evolution of multilingual education, I want to cheer for this new aspect of literacy we all need to promote as global citizens. It is an incredible opportunity for everyone to all become the learners we are, and to use our skills for harmony throughout the world. We all have to experience being *Emily* in Paris at least once, and I sure have when I re-learn Hindi in the summer. As we all connect in this world, languages are our passport to discover the world and to find ourselves. The one thing I never forget to pack on my trips? My beautiful languages.

Love,  
Devangana



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Inspired by this year's theme of September 8th, International Literacy Day:  
Promoting multilingual education: Literacy for mutual understanding and peace.- UNESCO

"In my life, I have moved a lot, from traveling across the globe to different places to live, not only have I acquired special skills, but along with that languages- Hindi, English, Bahasa, and French. In this short narrative, I share my story of how each language I have come to gain has influenced my identity as a student, and artist, and paved the way for multilingual education. From being Emily in Paris (quite literally) when learning how to read and write Hindi to using *The Devil Wears Prada* as a source of knowledge, this is my story of languages.