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Hindi Medium for Medical Degrees: An initiative with Wide-Ranging Positive Implications

In Current Affairs ⌚ 04:34 PM, Oct 30, 2022

Mukul Asher (<https://myind.net/Home/authorArchives/2097>)



It is reported that Madhya Pradesh has launched an MBBS (Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery) course in Hindi. In the first year, in 13 medical colleges in Madhya Pradesh, anatomy, physiology, and biochemistry, will be offered in Hindi. The rationale appears to be that persons can also move ahead in life by learning in Hindi. The self-confidence generated by such belief could have positive spillovers in many other areas as well ¹.

The above is the first such initiative in the country. This column argues that it begins a *process*, the dynamics of which will have wide-ranging positive implications for the opportunities for the Indian population.

Figure 1 provides data on the 10 most spoken languages worldwide. English ranks first at 1131 million, followed closely by Chinese at 1117 million. The global language of business and commerce, and of scientific and engineering discourse is English. Thus, sufficient working knowledge of English is essential as India aims to integrate more and more with the rest of the world, even as it pursues *atmanirbharta* with respect to critical technologies, intermediates, and financial products and services.

The two Indian languages Hindi with 615 million people (3rd rank), and Bengali with 265 million people (7th rank) are on the list.

There appears to be some interest in becoming Hindi literate in traditionally non-Hindi-speaking states. Thus, it is reported that the Chelannur Village in Kozhikode District in Kerala is to soon achieve 100 percent 'Hindi Literate' tag².

There are other Indian languages, such as Marathi, Telugu, and Tamil, with between 50 and 125 million persons speaking them. This is sufficiently large number to offer STEM and Medical education in these languages if desired by respective states.

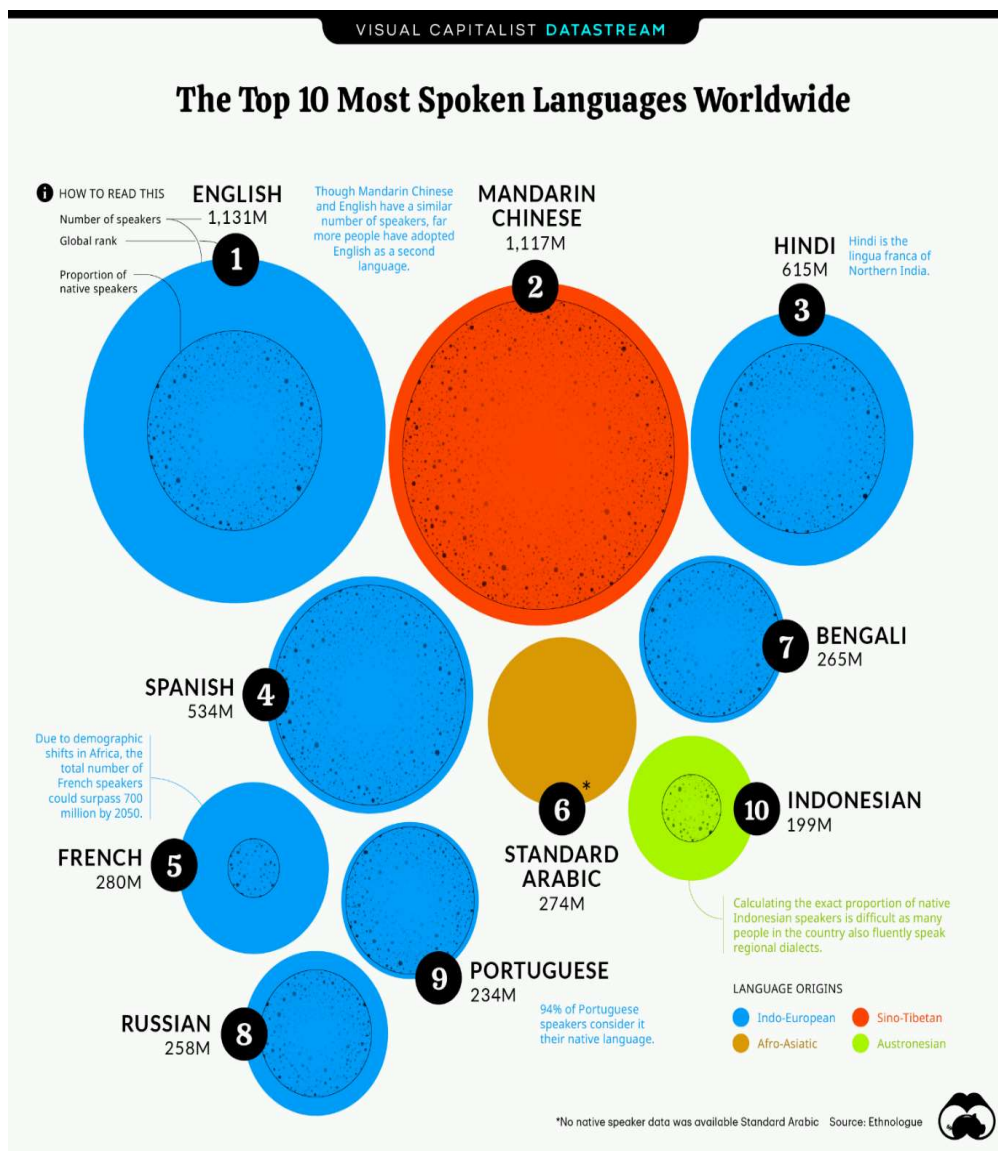
It is reported in the media that MBBS students in Tamil Nadu will receive four textbooks in Tamil by end of 2022. The plan is to make available 25 medical textbooks available in Tamil.

If some of these states take initiatives to begin STEM and Medical Education in their own languages, of course after well thought out planning as Madhya Pradesh has done, that would widen education opportunities and livelihood options. Education is always a dynamic process and many persons receiving education in regional languages will adapt to the circumstances as they arise, expanding and enriching India's skills-sets.

Some analysts have argued that English as a language vs. English as the medium of instruction are different. English as a medium of instruction is arguably a major barrier for the majority of Indians, especially from rural and poor backgrounds. Students should have the option to study STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) in their native language. Of course, all should continue to study English as a language.

Figure 1³





Indeed, a mixture of regional languages such as Hindi and English, and Telugu and English are more likely to be a norm if regional language education becomes widespread. Nearly all students from non-English medium STEM education, such as those from Japan Korea, China, Mexico, Brazil, and Thailand, working in English-speaking countries, for example, the United States, have been able to function well as professionals in these countries.

In arguing for the initiative of Madhya Pradesh, Amit Shah, India's Home Minister has argued that "due to the lack of options in studying in native languages, we have so far been able to exploit not more than five percent of our nation's potential in research, science, and humanities and other academic fields. Therefore, India's goal of Atmanirbharta will receive a big push"⁴.

As the process of STEM and Medical education in regional languages becomes more widespread, research outlets such as journals, policy briefs, discussion papers, and others would begin to develop. This will help disseminate knowledge more widely, particularly as online courses in regional languages could also be in demand.

It has been rightly observed that science is universal, but technology is local. STEM and Medical education in regional languages could be positive for such sectors as agriculture, animal husbandry, and fishing, and for where local technology application is critical.

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Education in STEM and Medicine in regional languages could also have a positive impact on initiatives such as the Uttar Pradesh government's One District, One Product (ODOP) Programme aims to encourage such indigenous and specialized products and crafts⁵.

Even in English language, Science and Engineering (S and E) publications, India needs to accelerate its efforts. Thus, in 2020, India accounted for only 5.07 percent of global S and E publications. While it ranked third globally, China (22.77 percent), and the United States (15.55 percent) had output several times that of India⁶.

Finally, more widespread of regional languages could act as a subtle non-tariff barrier in trade, technology, and other information exchanges. This assumes that given the intra-country mobility of the workforce, and the ability to be comfortable in several languages, this would not unduly affect domestic economic transactions and the exchange of scientific and engineering information.

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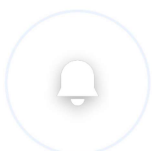
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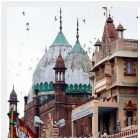


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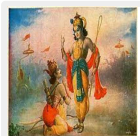
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