



TEACHING ENGLISH IN A MULTILINGUAL AND MULTICULTURAL COUNTRY LIKE INDIA IN THE GLOBALIZED CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

Since the English language has evolved in different social environments to become a widely distributed code for communication of knowledge and thought, the need for efficient acquisition of competence in understanding and using the language to enable sustenance and support development in a competitive world has grown exponentially. Because of colonization, English has become the most spoken language worldwide. Knowledge of the English language gives us an advantage of being able to condia being a multicultural and multilingual country has Hindi as its official language and English as its Assistant Official Language. English is thus a window language. For those who do not know Hindi or whose mother tongue is not Hindi, it is imperative that they should at least have knowledge of the English language. English is the most commonly spoken after Hindi in India. English serves two purposes. First, it provides a linguistic tool for the administrative cohesiveness of a country, and, secondly, it serves as a language of wider communication. It functions in the Indian socio-cultural context to perform roles relevant and appropriate to the social, educational and administrative network of India at international level.

Keywords: Multicultural, Multilingual, colonization

INTRODUCTION

English now is said to be an international language or a global language. Today it is a unique language, functionally and structurally quite different from other languages of the world. Functionally speaking, English has conspicuously spread among non-native speakers as a sizable number of Asian, African, Pacific, and other countries designate it as their official, associate official, or working language. In view of the situation, millions of students are learning English as a language for wider communication. According to a survey conducted by Japan's National Institute of Language in 1999, people of the world unanimously

consider English as the most useful language for world-wide communication.

Structurally speaking, as the spread of English progresses, English is bound to reflect a diversity of disparate cultures. Importantly, non-native speakers are taking advantage of this additional language and are exploring new dimensions of English usage, phonetically, lexically, syntactically, semantically, and pragmatically. Since no language is used to its fullest extent by its native speakers, there is always much room left for non-native speakers to exploit it in their unique ways. As most Asian countries recognize English as a useful language for international or international communication, they are increasingly committed to

strengthening and improving English language teaching. Most prominently, they start teaching English at the elementary school level.

Globalization in all the fields, it necessitates the learning of a language which is international. Undoubtedly, English has become a world language rather than the language of only the English speaking countries such as the UK and the USA because the number of the people who use English as a means of communication exceeds much more than the number of the people who speak it as their mother tongue. In the case of English in India, more than two centuries, India has been directly and indirectly had influence of the language, English on all the fields, such as Education, Medical Science, etc. Text materials relating to the subjects of Science, Engineering and Technology as also Medicine are available only in English. Moreover, all over India, there is no single language to unite the whole country. Since, in India, several languages are spoken and also one set of people are reluctant to learn one common Indian language, we have to borrow a new non-Indian language. Considering the above facts, learning English, the universal language, as a Second Language, becomes inseparable branch as also unavoidable in Indian education System.

India as a Multilingual and Multicultural Space:

India is a multicultural space accommodating many races, castes, languages, religions and cultures. These exist paradoxically as distinct and, at the same time, interconnected, even overlapping, identities, at multiple levels. India can be described as a nation of nations, a land of many Indians, variously imagined by these communities/collectivities through various cultural forms and expressions. Multiculturalism relates to communities containing multiple cultures. India is culturally, linguistically, religiously and to a certain extent, ethnically, one of the most diverse if not the most diverse country in the world. As per the 1961 Census of India, the country is home to 1652 mother tongues. The culture of India has been shaped by its long history, unique geography and diverse demography. India's languages, religions, dance; music, architecture and customs differ from place to place within the country, but nevertheless possess a commonality. The culture of India is an

amalgamation of these diverse sub-cultures spread all over the Indian subcontinent and traditions that are several millennia old.

In India, which is multicultural and multilingual country, English is a global language. A variety and range of English-teaching situations prevail here owing to the twin factors of teacher proficiency in English and pupils' exposure to English outside school. The level of introduction of English is now a matter of political response to people's aspirations rather than an academic or feasibility issue. While endorsing prevailing academic opinion for a later but more effective introduction of English. In India today it is a symbol of people's aspirations for quality in education and a fuller participation in national and international life. Its colonial origins now forgotten or irrelevant, its initial role in independent India, tailored to higher education (as a "library language", a "window on the world"), now felt to be insufficiently inclusive socially and linguistically, the current status of English stems from its overwhelming presence on the world stage and the reflection of this in the national arena. The visible impact of this presence of English is that it is today being demanded by everyone at the very initial stage of schooling.

Multilingualism and Multiculturalism:

Multilingualism is the act of using, or promoting the use of, multiple languages, either by an individual speaker or by a community of speakers. Multilingual speakers outnumber monolingual speakers in the world's population. Multilingualism refers to the condition in which more than two languages are used in the same setting for similar purposes. Bilingualism and multilingualism, that is, the use of more than one language in daily life is very normal practice in this context. It has been one of the characteristics of modern civilization. In multilingualism, moving from one language to another in the course of a single conversation is very common; sometimes people may not know consciously when they move from one language to another.

But it is still a matter of debate just how much proficiency is required to get mastery over languages. Many linguists define bilingualism/multilingualism as 'mastery over two/more

languages...’, but they are not clear on what level of mastery makes competence in grammar, vocabulary, communicative function, etc.

The multilingual situation is a result of migration, movement of people after the World War II, spread of colonial power, the volunteer programmes, travel and tourism, etc. Once the British became the administrator of India, the status of English underwent a sea change. From being a foreign language used by a handful of traders for the purpose of trade it became the language of the rulers. Though still considered as a foreign language it became the language of administration. Indians were quick to see the advantages of learning English and they started learning it. Every patriotic Indian started realizing the advantages the knowledge of English offered and advocated its learning. English came to be learnt with lot of enthusiasm as a window to the world of knowledge of science, technology and philosophy. It was this generation of educated Indians of the nineteenth century who brought about the Indian Renaissance.

Multilingualism is closely related to multiculturalism. Multiculturalism relates to communities containing multiple cultures. The cultural richness of different ethnic groups may lead to multilingualism. The role of English in a multicultural and multilingual country is beneficial as it helps people of various ethnic and linguistic groups to be united. In the article “Language Choice and Cultural Imperialism: A Nigerian Perspective” Joseph Bisong shows that Nigeria which has an estimated number of 450 different languages, gave English the status of official language which it still enjoys after 45 years of independence. The spread of English there has not eliminated 450 different languages in Nigeria. In countries like Nigeria, China, and India, the ‘principal Ingredient’ of unification and strong unity is the English Language. India, a country of over a billion people, has many hundreds of local dialects and languages. In such a complicated situation, the State has given English the official language status to facilitate easy communication.

After evaluating the arguments for and against the spread of English as a world language, it

appears that it is positively accepted and English works well in a multicultural and multilingual society and there it works as a means of wider assimilation and unification. The Periphery countries where English is resisted on the plea that it eliminates local languages cannot themselves protect their own small indigenous languages from extinction. If they could do so, everyday 3-4 minority languages would not have died out from the world. So, the threat may come from any powerful first language, not simply English.

In much of Asia, English is no longer a colonial import. Throughout the region, English is the language of education, culture, business and, above all, regional cooperation. English-speaking Asians claim English as India has long captured Western imagination since its days as a crossroads for trade on the Silk Road. Exotic food spices, and fabric brought from India became precious luxury items. Under the East India Trade Company, India became a commonwealth of the British Empire, which increased the need for the local inhabitants to learn English for business purposes.

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The term multiculturalism is not much used in India. Within Indian culture, the term unity in diversity is more commonly used.

Common factors affecting teaching/learning English in India:

There are so many factors that affect the teaching-learning process in India. The students in India can be categorized into two; the one having the regional language as medium of study from the primary level and the other having English as the medium of study. Hence, the problem of teaching English as a second language, to the Indian students starts from the pre-schooling.

Further environment and family background play vital role in success of learning process. For example, countries like India, where majority of the people are farmers, have poor background in education. Moreover, the income of majority of the families is not adequate. Hence, the parents are not interested in giving good education background to their children. In contrast, they willing engage their children in some jobs in order to earn money. This is the very basic reason and the affecting factor in teaching.

Secondly, the infrastructure, viz. school buildings – class rooms, labs, etc. is not adequate as required. The first category of the students is almost compelled to attend their classes under the trees. If the nature fails, the survival of the farmers becomes questionable. Hence, the students are mentally discouraged due to the family conditions.

In the second category, the students having enough background in basic education since their parents are educated and they do not depend on the nature much. Many of the students from second category join English medium schools and hence, they do not find much difficulty in pursuing their higher education.

Moreover majority of the families of second category dwell in towns and cities and hence, they have easy access to quality education. But, the first category of students score good marks the examinations conducted. It proves that they have good writing skill in English. The only thing is that they have to be given training in oral English communication also.

CONCLUSION

Hence, a common programme for English Language Teaching must be framed in the pre-schooling itself five year plans. The concept of English as a multicultural language is based on the fact that English is here to stay as an indispensable language for intranational and/or international communication in Asia and other parts of the world

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