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The Substance of English Language and its Role in Higher Education in India

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Abstract

In today's global world and with the help of modern technology, English has become the most common and dominant language spoken and used both at the national and international levels. It has been playing a major role in many sectors as medicine, engineering, politics, economics, international relations, and higher education in particular, the most important area where English is needed. It has also become a medium of instruction at universities in a large number of countries, a basic means of second language learning / teaching, an accessing source of modern knowledge and scientific research, and a means of global communication and earn living. It is realized nowadays at the level of Higher Education in many countries around the world, in addition to India, EU countries as Germany, Turkey, China, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan, and Australian ..., the significance of providing education in English side by side with their natives. Hence, serious steps have taken to improve the quality of instruction in English at the administrative, academic, students', publications and research levels. However, this paper signifies the role of English in modern education, particularly in higher education sector and the role of modern technology in promoting English language learning / teaching quality to meet the standards, communication needs and cultural exchange across the world. Consequently, the role and importance of English language in our national curriculum has increased to a greater extent. The present writing is an attempt to highlight the importance of English language in today's Indian society and the role it plays in present national and international set up.

Keywords: English language, higher education, internationalization, modern technology.

1. Introduction

The increasing demand for English language in higher education and research over the last decades is often assumed to be "a parallel and unavoidable process resulting in improved international academic

communication worldwide". (Balan, 2011) Due to the importance of English as an international language whereby education and cultures are exchanged at all levels. It comprises a major tool for obtaining academic degrees programs. Alongside with the role of internet and multimedia in global communication, English becomes nowadays popular, widely used as a means of instruction in a large number of educational institutions, language centers and universities, a pathway to accessing all fields of knowledge and academic research sources across the world and a best tool for foreign language learning/teaching.

2. The concept of Education and Higher Education Sector in India

Education in its general sense is "a form of learning in which the knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through discussion, teaching, training, and / or research." (Wikipedia).

In other words, Education is a process of enlightenment and empowerment through which individuals can develop their skills and abilities to developing and secure a better quality of human life. It aims at the growth of body, mind, intellect and soul. It also brings change in behavior and nurtures good qualities of citizenship like morality, honesty and humanity. And no one can deny that without education one can't perform successfully in any aspect of life.

Education is normally obtained by learners themselves or by others guidance. Any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts may be considered educational. Education is obtained at different ages and levels from childhood up to the end of life. It is always a very important requirement that can't be dispensed with anytime.

At the academic level, Education is "the knowledge of basic skills; academic, technical disciplines, citizenship

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and best processing that knowledge using inspiration, visionary ambitions, creativity, risk, and motivation". (Webb, 2000) To Webb, these skills are mainly depend on understanding the value of knowledge, best experienced and measured inside the class. As such, many super achievers, as Thomas Edison who never finished school, have succeeded because they knew how to research information for a selected project and best processing that knowledge to the service of humans' needs.

E-learning, on the other hand, becomes nowadays an educational pattern that the present education system completely depends on. It concerns students' motivations, challenges and interests, on one hand, and their intellectual talents on the other to learn and search in an easiest and most up-to-date ways sidestepping with textbooks within which students are able to develop the interest of learning as a lifelong process.

India's higher education system is the world's third largest in terms of students, next to China and the United States. In future, India will be one of the largest education hubs. India's Higher Education sector has witnessed a tremendous increase in the number of Universities/University level Institutions & Colleges since independence. The 'Right to Education Act' which stipulates compulsory and free education to all children within the age groups of 6-14 years, has brought about a revolution in the education system of the country with statistics revealing a staggering enrolment in schools over the last four years. The involvement of private sector in higher education has seen drastic changes in the field. Today over 60% of higher education institutions in India are promoted by the private sector. This has accelerated establishment of institutes which have originated over the last decade making India home to the largest number of Higher Education institutions in the world, with student enrolments at the second highest (Shaguri, 2013). The number of Universities has increased 34 times from 20 in 1950 to 677 in 2014. Despite these numbers, international education rating agencies have not placed many of these institutions within the best of the world ranking. Also, India has failed to produce world class universities. Today, Knowledge is power. The more knowledge one has, the more empowered one is. However, India continues to face stern challenges. Despite growing investment in education, 25 per cent of its population is still illiterate; only 15 per cent of Indian students reach high school, and just 7 per cent graduate (Masani, 2008).

The quality of education in India, whether at primary or higher education is significantly poor as compared to major developing nations of the world. As of 2008, India's post-secondary institutions offer only enough seats for 7 per cent of India's college-age population, 25 per cent of teaching positions nationwide are vacant, and 57 per cent of college professors lack either a master's or PhD degree (Newsweek, 2011). As of 2011, there are 1522 degree-granting engineering colleges in India with an annual student intake of 582,000 (Science and Technology Education, 2009) plus 1,244 polytechnics with an annual intake of 265,000. However, these institutions face shortage of faculty and concerns have been raised over the quality of education (Mitra, 2008).

Despite these challenges higher education system of India equally have lot of opportunities to overcome these challenges and have the capability to make its identity at international level. However, it needs greater transparency and accountability, the role of universities and colleges in the new millennium, and emerging scientific research on how people learn is of utmost important. India provides highly skilled people to other countries therefore; it is very easy for India to transfer our country from a developing nation to a developed nation. However English is very much essential to many aspirants in India and other western countries who want to pursue higher education in other universities of the world for research purpose or any other scientific and technical operations. Here English helps them to reach their destination and opens the window of knowledge since most of the knowledge through books and materials is available only in English language.

3. English as a Tool for Obtaining Global Education

In the present time, English becomes the most important and vivid means of global communication which prevents our isolation from the world, and a window to the rapid progress and development in all spheres of life. It is the most spread and commonly used language among different nations and individuals worldwide for cultural and educational exchange. In addition, the use of English language becomes now a must not only at the level of local but global education as well. Many countries long ago have started making use of English and have even been promoting the benefit its use for education receivers as globally useful language for further studies in future. (Balan, 2011)

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Hence if students in abroad study from a non-English medium, may have problems Moreover, modern education, as English is its best means, is always given primary importance to the international education systems. Many countries over the world often organize some special programs in- and outside the country which aim at increasing learners' number in their own countries. Many scholars and academics are sent out of their countries in pursuit of higher education and academic degrees, whatever their ages, cultures or specializations. Special programs of English language training and cultural exchange are designed to help students and instructors practice the use of English in natively English speaking communities, as UK, USA, Canada and Australia, etc. to keeping them up-to date with the modern English spoken worldwide and teaching methods of ESL/EFL. (Balan, 2011)

Today, English has multipurpose social and educational services. It is used as medium of instruction in a large number of universities in the national and international world. Now, it has realized by all countries the necessity of providing education to its citizens in English (Balan, 2011). Every country now demands their governors, representatives, officials or professionals to draw their students and learners attention to the language which will be helpful both in improving the standard of one's living and will directly or indirectly help to enhance the country's economy. Because, if education is received in this medium then it will allow an individual to develop more professionally and will invite chances of gaining success for respecting the country in the fields of economy, politics, science and technology, arts, medicine etc.

The dominance of English in international academic publications on the other hand, has increased during the last few decades. The vast majority of indexed science journals, including those previously published in other languages have shifted to English from French, Germany, Spanish and Russian to acquire a broader international authorship and readership, and to reach higher impact (number of citations). English language journals have increased the proportion of authors from non-Anglo countries –although proportionally their communities are underrepresented-- while non-English language journals have become mostly national or regional in scope. (Balan, 2011)

Added to that, English becomes the main language of scientific communication and SSH (Social Sciences and

Humanities); it is now dominant in some disciplines, such as Medicine, Mathematics, Science, Computer Science, Psychology, Literature, History, and Anthropology. Books of these fields are now available in English in addition to the original versions of the national languages in many countries such as, India, China, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Turkey.

India is a country with diverse regions and people with diverse languages are its citizens. People are so attached, and naturally so, with their local languages, that they sometimes end up treating people speaking other languages as foreigners or strangers. As India was a British Colony,

English became an official language of India, for all diplomatic and administrative conveniences, and thereby came to be widely used in both spoken and literary contexts. But the reason that English remained an official language after 1947 is attributed to the fact that as a language it played an important role in unifying regions with different people under one flag and constitution. So, English could be rightly termed as the Lingua Franca of India. In a country where Individual mother tongues number several hundred, and where over 30 languages are spoken by more than a million native speakers, English is one common language that is used by people from diverse backgrounds in India as an acceptable vehicular language with high levels of adoption over decades.

4. Modern Technology and English Language Teaching & Learning

Simply, Technology could be defined as “the systematic application of scientific and other organized knowledge to practical tasks”. (Moursund & Bielefeldt,1999). It is implemented to facilitate peoples' life. The term in fact is loosely used to encompass various computer applications that are integrated into the learning process. It is a complex, dynamic, and ever-changing part of our society and the world of today. Computer applications are currently employed in the field of education to facilitate instruction and learning process. In other words, technology could be anything that helps us in our life, electronic and non-electronic.

Due to the rapid development of human civilization, life has witnessed huge and over controlled changes in all its aspects including its educational organizations to keep pace with the changing environment. Technology has

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played a vital role in this revolution which is reflected throughout the use of computer applications in classroom language. In teaching and learning English, a variety of devices are employed such as radios, TVs, CD players, computers, the internet, electronic dictionaries, audio cassettes, Power point, videos, Skype, DVDs, etc. (Nomass, 2012)

One of the advantages of modern technology is the use of Internet and software which has started a new era in all aspects of our lives, specifically in education. As a result, both English language teaching and learning are facilitated. Students now learn faster and easier than before by using technology. Computer based effective teaching and implementation of computational tools offer powerful, interesting and new ways of providing knowledge to students. Thus teaching in physical classroom becomes now a dominant form of delivering lectures, instead of the boring traditional teaching styles.

In addition using technology by teachers has been so successful and influential to achieving the intended targets throughout the effective adoption of teaching strategies. Web-based technologies and powerful internet connections provide various new possibilities for the development of educational technology, online learning and multimedia teaching. (Madhavaiah, 2013)

Furthermore, technology helps in making teaching more interesting and productive. Different teaching methods both visual and auditory are adapted to effectively teaching English in modern sense. With the spread and development of English language worldwide, it has been learned and spoken by a large number of people around the world.

As part of higher education plan to promote its educational organizations worldwide, it works harder to constantly training and developing their employees, instructors, and students to the effective and creative use of modern technology. From time to time, continuing education sections organize and run special training courses and programs to qualifying instructors on how to use technology and its various applications in their professionals. And in order to update and modernize their teaching styles, various strategies and methods of instruction are implemented in which technology are applied to meet students' needs in class enhancing learning

new skills and abilities in subject matters, pedagogy, and educational technology. (Madhavaiah, 2013)

5. Internationalization of Higher Education

Internationalization means adopting English as an international language in Higher Education sector. In today's global world, and with the help of developing technology, English has played a major role in many sectors as medicine, engineering, business, scientific research, social sciences and humanities, and Higher Education, in particular, as medium of instruction. English for academic purposes (EAP), in addition to (GE) General English, and (ESP) English for specific purposes courses are taught to meet learners' different needs in many universities worldwide side by side with their natives, as in addition to India, EU (European Union) countries, such as in Germany, Turkey, China, Republic of Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Mongolia, Japan, and Australia. (Motteram, 2003)

Furthermore, apart from second language countries like India, EAP programs are especially started at tertiary institutions in the English speaking countries of UK, USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand must meet language proficiency requirements before starting their studies. This is usually done in several ways, but the two most common are submission of a satisfactory English language proficiency exam score (as, TOEFL, IELTS) or completion of a recognized EAP preparatory program as 'pathways' to enroll EAP courses before they study in university content courses in abroad from India.

7. Recommendations

Due to the international power of English as the most common language spoken worldwide, it is favored as medium of instruction in Higher Education institutions for many reasons:

First, it is used as a source of accessing scientific knowledge in the students' major fields. Students need it when accessing the required information from English resources and data to do their assignments, researches and projects.

Second, English is very much required to be able to study in the English speaking countries. If one prefers to migrate to some other country for obtaining degree programs, then English is chosen as a means of studying in any reputed foreign university.

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Third, as means of communicating with the international world it is very necessary for university students and graduates to follow the development of technology when learning English and communicate with the international universities over the internet especially those who could not obtain education inside their countries. All the programs of the computer and internet are based on and written in English.

Fourth, it helps graduates of universities whose medium of instruction is English and who have good understanding ability and fluent English to find high-quality jobs in foreign companies. Those will be more efficient in their jobs, because they could find information from foreign sources, use their websites, do business, and communicate with other foreign companies.

6. Conclusion

No matter being in which country, what medium of instruction is, or what subjects are studied, English is truly there as an integral part of the studies or education.

For internationalization of higher education, English is not only locally but globally required as source of accessing students' major knowledge in all fields, communicating with the most reputed universities worldwide, pursuing a variety of degree programs and finding high-quality jobs and positions in educational institutions and foreign companies elsewhere.

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