

English as Global Language and its Pedagogical Implications for India



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ABSTRACT

The paper aims to highlight the impact, place and role of English in modern India. Its significance is phenomenal that we can afford to neglect it only at the cost of missing the bus to being a part of globalization, and reaping its benefits. Moreover, it has rooted itself deeply as 'our very own language' and so its pedagogical issues are of utmost importance to planning decisions.

Introduction

English, without an iota of doubt, is the global language today. Teaching-learning of English as a second or foreign language has been redefined in the milieu of globalisation and the digitised world we live in today. It has consolidated a solid position as one of the world's top ten languages among the 7000 languages used throughout the world. It is estimated that more than 51 million people speak it worldwide. The affluence and vivacity of the English language as noted by Frederick T Wood has "been enriched by foreign languages of all kinds" that its beauty comes from "an essential unity underlying them all" (1969:258). What began as an obscure language "is the most important of all living languages. Partly because of the commercial advantages...and partly, again, because it opens up one of the world's greatest literatures, it is not only the native speech of large communities scattered over various parts of the earth's surface, but it is a second language to

numbers of people in many different lands" (ibid:275). Today, "At its best, English is a beautiful language. It is a flexible and expressive vehicle for the transmission of thought, whether the simplest and plainest of thought or the highest and most profound" (Mehta 1950: 11).

Global Impact of English

It is amazing that the English language today is a global one and has an enormous impact on thousands of other languages of the world. It is more so because it is the language that binds our heterogeneous world. It is the common language of communication, trade and commerce that networks the world into one. It is a language that places us at ease in any corner of the world, for it is the lingua franca of the international business, media, scientific and academic communication. As such, the phenomenal expansion of English in the growth of trade, empire building, immigration and the recent boom in technology has ensured the teaching of

English as sometimes primary and sometimes secondary in the educational history of virtually majority of the countries on earth. The position of English as a world language is accentuated in its inimitable place in the teaching programmes of the developing countries. Its study has outstanding educational significance as it contributes to shaping learners in the liberal humanist mode of learning. Properly planned and taught, English contributes to the critical, intellectual, emotional, cognitive, imaginative and creative faculties concurrently. Its learning has excellent disciplinary value, helping to produce balanced and liberal minds.

Position of English in India

English is no more stigmatized as a colonial language in India. It is instead considered as a global language thereby becoming the language of economic empowerment, modernization and emancipation. In his work *English as a Global Language*, (1998) David Crystal asserts its significance that English deserves to be and is the global language. In support of its global status, he accepts “the value of multilingualism” and recommends that “everyone would (should) be at least bi-lingual”, as being so benefits a person in experiencing an enriching “part of two cultures” (1998: x). Furthermore, in the Indian context, Baral states that English language should not be perceived only as part of two linguistic cultures (mother tongue vis-à-vis the second language in traditional binary classification), but also as part of more than two literary cultures (following not only the

logic of comparing the vernacular literatures with the English literature but in the larger context of English studies that includes works by English men and women, historically produced in Great Britain, as well as writings in English by others both from countries that were never colonies as from the postcolonial countries of Africa and Asia, including Indian Writing in English) (2005:40). . Crystal idealizes experiences of the Welsh and English languages and cultures as the benefits of being a bilingual. Likewise a learner of English literature in an Indian university lives in and experiences not only two but many languages and cultures both inside and outside the classroom.

In the global context, English has provided a competitive advantage to countries where it is being taught as a second language. India not only has the English advantage but also is a partner in global English. It is because of the English language advantage that it has been successful in producing a huge number of skilled workers who could take up jobs across the world. Very pertinently, David Graddol observes: “India has been triumphantly playing the English card in establishing its global leadership of outsourcing and BPO” (2006:20). He further maintains that English in the context of the global economy has transcended the Hindi/ regional languages conflict in establishing itself firmly without any ideological or political challenge. Such a situation directly brings to attention teaching of English in the country as it divides people having access to good and effective language

education and not having it. With the passing of the Right to Education Bill in the Parliament (2009), and the Knowledge Commission (2006) insisting on effective English Language Education, the scenario has changed drastically. The Knowledge Commission has maintained that “the quality of English language teaching is simply not good enough. The support systems, such as the number of teachers or materials for teaching, are neither adequate nor appropriate. We are recommending a fundamental change that seeks to introduce nationwide, the teaching of English as a language starting in Class I. This is not meant to be a stand-alone, add-on subject. It is meant to be integrated into the school curriculum” ([http://www.knowledgecommission.gov.in /consultations/wg.language.asp](http://www.knowledgecommission.gov.in/consultations/wg.language.asp)). In view of the global English and the scenario of teaching of English as a second language, it is necessary to explore the terrain of English Language Education in order to address some of its limitations if the country has to continue with the English advantage for economic growth.

Graddol argues that, “...the argument about the language of education is also an argument about national identity, as much as developing the intellectual skills of children” (2006:116). In India, there is no confusion about the status of English language vis-à-vis national identity. English is no more considered as a language of hegemony, instead it is considered as one of the Indian languages. But what is problematic in the Indian context is the right

pedagogy that could address to multiculturalism and diverse student groups with different learning abilities and aspirations.

Pedagogical Implications

English language pedagogy in recent years has assumed significance. When it comes to pedagogy, decisions concerning what to teach are equally important as how to teach. All teachers need to remember that exposing learners to a well-thought-out curriculum is not the same thing as educating them if it means helping them to learn how to integrate the contents of the curriculum into their minds, hearts, and everyday lives. Education is a continuous interface between learners and the objective world they live in. Teaching imparts knowledge of a particular subject to the learners. This knowledge includes in education, but education cannot be limited to teaching only. Teachers should be prepared to go beyond imparting knowledge of a subject and contribute to the all round development of the learners’ personality. In India, English plays an important role in education and its teaching with a well-formulated pedagogic mechanism has an enormous value in the field of ELT research in the country.

Learning as such could be self-directed, group-directed or, in most cases institution-directed. Our focus in this study is institutional learning of English language in the context of India. As has already been said earlier, learning of English as a second language is mostly skill-directed. Thus the

emphasize should be on skill development that would take into consideration classroom situation, the teaching method, mother tongue influence, the learning material and the training for producing efficient English teachers. What is at the heart of such an endeavour is to explore the concept of “learning to learn” in the institutional mode (Grima 2004:351) that also includes a positive motivation towards learning while examining the conditions of learning. The development of self-knowledge is directly linked to the procedures of “learning to learn” or, in other words, how to learn a language to master it. In short, productive learning can take place through the system of well thought out programmes in the context of language teaching, i.e. mastery over the language being the basic objective of being successful.

In India, English has established firmly as a language of communication across language barriers. In the absence of a common link language in India, English has helped and is still helping to bring together people from different parts of the country. Although English is a colonial language, it has been useful to a large extent as a unifying force. It has become the language of many upper middle class Indian families in which children are mostly bilingual from the beginning. Its influence is phenomenal that it is today a national language in every sense. It plays an important role in administration, education, trade and mass media. It is not only the official language

with constitutional status but also a lingua franca within the country. On the whole, the teaching/learning of English in our country, for various reasons, is an area of immense importance unlike many countries of the world where English is being taught as a foreign language.

References

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