

Sustainable Development through English Language: The Global Scene

Janaki Srivastava

Assistant Professor, Amity University, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh

Email: janakisrivastava@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Language is one of the factors that helped in the development of the human race. The purpose of this article is to find out ways of using English language in our everyday life for skill development and sustainable growth. The idea of sustainability, its emergence and prevalence in international discourse have been discussed. English can be understood almost everywhere, among scholars and educated people, as it is a global medium of communication, which is used in movies, music and the world of computers. There is a connectivity between sustainability and English language learning, which helps in skill development. Hence, this article will study the various ways of skill development for sustainable growth with the help of the English language. It will also focus on the progress of English as a language of skills from text to the world of work with the help of some international projects like 'The Mekong: A Living Classroom'. This will make us understand and improve our ability to think about sustainable development critically, to solve problems creatively, and to apply new ideas to new situations.

Keywords: sustainable development; English for sustainable development.

Introduction

The United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), in its 1987 report 'Our Common Future', defines sustainable development as "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs." Before development can reach the people, there must be a means of communication and language has a role to

play in this (Brown, 1987). If the idea of sustainable development is to create a system that can keep going indefinitely into the future, then the English language becomes a key factor in unending development in the areas of education, economic empowerment and national unity (Obiegbo, 2015).

Language is a system that connects space and time; moreover, language is a system that connects people (Zygmunt, 2016). In due

course, the English language has flourished and, rather than replacing local languages, it exists within multilingual societies as a tool for accessing information and opportunities, for participating in specific contexts and with specific communities (Graddol, 2010). It has become the survival tool in this highly technical world, and it is the official language in 70 countries. It is also the language of cinema, social media and technology. All over the world people know many English words, their pronunciation and meaning. Its rich vocabulary has sufficiently accommodated almost all situations of a social nature. Language and society are interrelated; their relationship cannot be underestimated. Chomsky said, "Language is the oil that lubricates activities within any human society." It is an indispensable medium that helps man to achieve effective communication as it mirrors the mind in deep and significant ways. The English language has become the most important language for communication and business in today's technological world. English is now the dominant voice in international politics, banking, the press, the news agencies, advertising, broadcasting, the recording industry, motion pictures, travel, science and technology, knowledge management, and communication. No other language has achieved such a widespread profile or is likely to in the near future. (Crystal, 2003)

The English language is used in a multitude of contexts to express a diversity of views and narratives in global discourse, and is the medium for emerging ideas (Crystal,

2003). As a medium for creativity, international dialogue and debate, English, itself a site of ambiguity, can be used as a medium for identifying assumptions and reformulating knowledge (Rushdie, 1991). English is the language of skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. It enriches literary, linguistic and critical skills. It has helped in making the world a global village to a larger extent. It gives maximum exposure to the world. We come across various literatures which are translated into English and other languages. English is taught right from the early years of schooling. It is not just a language that we need to learn but is a way of life. Today, if you don't know English, you will find yourself lagging behind in various fields of life though the perception is not accurate as any other language is effective in its power of expression.

Link between English and Sustainable Growth

Economically, the English language is the avenue to sustainable development. Economists believe that English is crucial for economic growth, as it helps them trade more widely on an international scale. The international community can easily and comfortably be reached because of the language. English is very important when hiring a new employee. This underlines the fact that English language skills enhance business and trade, while also improving an individual's economic conditions (Obiegbo, 2015). In order to understand the connection between English and sustainable growth, first we need to understand the

concept of sustainable growth. It is the growth which can be maintained without creating other significant problems, especially for future generations. Like the exhaustible resources, languages do get exhausted in due course of time if they are not sustained for future generations. We need to refer to the cherished literatures and keep on projecting them to the next generation. English has helped provide skilled manpower to the industry. It has given them the platform to express their ideas and thoughts in the most effective way. Samuel Johnson said, "Language is the dress of thought."

The Mekong: A Living Classroom

The Mekong River is a river in the south-eastern part of the continent of Asia. It flows through China, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and finally Vietnam. Its name comes from the Thai language's 'Mae Num', meaning 'Mother Water'. The Mekong is one of the most biologically diverse areas in the world. However, the Mekong River is also used extensively for navigation and has many dams along its length. The Mekong River Commission aims at its sustainable development for the benefit of the people who live along its banks. The project has the objective of training teachers at local and regional levels, for sustainability projects in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, China and Vietnam, linking projects through student-generated websites, empowering students in developing their local communities through responsible individual and cooperative actions, and documenting projects for schools in other areas to adapt to local needs.

Based on the same concept, students can be given certain projects during their internship to take a peek into the area of their interest, helping them understand the need and then facilitating them with the required knowledge, thus bringing about the urge for learning instead of compulsion to learn prescribed texts. Language should not be taught to get grades but to develop the art of living and sustaining in this VUCA world.

Project Goal: To make high school students globally communicative and competitive, able to take individual and cooperative actions for an economically prosperous and environmentally sound future for all societies in and around the Mekong River.

English Language and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

There are around 400 languages spoken in Nigeria, with English as its official language. The business of the National Assembly, official transactions of government, administration, trade and commerce, law and justice, and instruction in the education sector are conducted in English. As we understand, sustainable development is a positive change for the betterment of the people. The purpose of education is national unity and development. English is the language of prestige par excellence and a strong knowledge of it is an assurance of climbing the educational ladder of success in Nigeria. Starting from the primary level, English is taught in schools, and later at higher levels as well.

The English language is crucial for economic growth, as it helps them trade more widely on an international scale. As explained in *Open Journal of Political Science*, National Metallurgical Training Institute, Onitsha, Nigeria, “An individual’s economic empowerment in Nigeria is closely linked with good command of English. A wide range of business categories in Nigeria including the banking industry, technology, the pharmaceutical industry, and even vocational workers such as carpenters and electricians see increased need for English language skills.” The report further notes that “the government of Nigeria firmly recognised that English is a key element of business communication and it is essential for attracting new investments. With government and companies pushing for far more English-speaking workers, it can be expected that more individuals will view English, among other skills, as a step towards career advancement and higher pay. This is a motivating factor for individuals to learn English in order to obtain well-paid jobs within the most dynamic organisations and industries in Nigeria. Clearly, we all can see that prospective employees who can speak and write English well have better opportunities economically. This way, English language is a tool for sustained national development.”

Practical Approach

English should not be taught, but should be experienced through LSRW. We need real life situations instead of a classroom. We should not make a child realise that they

are learning a text but let them experience the text. When we are teaching them literature, let them travel in a time machine; let them be Wordsworth, Robert Frost, Emanuel, and Kant. We talk about practical exposure only theoretically. The idea is to let the youth get involved in the society and understand the need of the hour. Once they understand it, they will find a solution. Thus, we can say that English helps in reducing poverty, providing employment through communication and other skills, and aiding in personality development, towards sustainability. It improves their economic status and provides global opportunities for them to study abroad and work.

Conclusion

The purpose of education is to awaken the minds of the students and to encourage critical thinking. The problems faced by any country can be solved through proper education, which can be provided through the English language in an effective way. Sustainable development involves creating a system that can keep going indefinitely into the future, and the English language can help in this effort towards development in education, economic empowerment and national unity.

References

Chomsky, N. (1957). *Language: The properties of human language*. Oxford: Education Press.

Crystal, D. (2003). English in the new world [Online]

http://www.matefl.org/_mgxroot/

page_10658.html [09/09/2009]

Encyclopedia Britannica (2002). *The dynamics of language and societal stability*. Cambridge: University Press.

Graddoll, D. (2010). *English next*. India: British Council.

Language Education for Sustainable Development. Available from:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303914648_Language_Education_for_Sustainable_Development

[accessed Oct 23 2019].

Obiegbu, I. (2015). The English language and sustainable development in Nigeria. *Open Journal of Political Science*, 5: 82-86.

Obuasi, I. (2006). *The place of language in Nigeria's reform agenda*. Nsukka: UNN Press Ltd.

Zygmunt, T. (2016). Language education for sustainable development. *Discourse and Communication for Sustainable Education*. 7.10.1515/dcse-2016-0008.

Why join ELTAI?

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

- A free copy of our bimonthly, Journal of English Language Teaching.
- Reduced registration fees for attending all our programmes.
- Subsidized membership of IATEFL, UK.—A free copy of its Journal, 'Voices', a bimonthly.
- Free subscription for joining our Special Interest Groups—Literature SIG, Business English SIG and Technology SIG.
- Opportunities for interacting with fellow teachers—both offline and online.

Welcome to ELTAI. Our bimonthly, Journal of English Language Teaching (JELT), is sent free to all our members.

Please send your subscription by DD in favour of ELTAI with your postal address and email id for communication to our office by Speed post or courier. Payment may also be made through transfer of money from your bank account to ELTAI account at the State Bank of India at Chennai.

Details of our SB account at the SBI are given below:

SBI, EAST MADA STREET, VILLIWAKKAM, CHENNAI-600049

A/C No.: 30870397943

IFSC Code: SBIN0007108

MICR 600002058

A scanned copy of the bank transfer chalan or details of such a transfer made should be sent to ELTAI office by you.

REVISED RATES OF SUBSCRIPTION (w.e.f.1-9-2017)

	For individuals	For institutions
Annual subscription	Rs.400	Rs.500 (Annual)
Short-term (3 years)	Rs.1000	Rs.1200 (3 years)
Long-term (10 years)	Rs.3000	Rs.4000 (10 years)

S. Rajagopalan. www.eltai.in