

ENGLISH AS A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN TEACHING IN COLLEGES/ UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract:

There are two types of academic communication system prevalent in India in the issue of medium of instruction i.e the regional language system and the English language system. However, this system seems to exist in college or university levels and the options are mostly limited to either English or one regional language of that state. The option of regional language is also often restricted and at certain places, it is only either English or Hindi. The question of how much the students are affected by this language policy of universities can be felt better when one engages himself/ herself in interacting or teaching any subject other than the language in colleges/universities. I will discuss in this paper, the effectiveness of using English as a medium of instruction while teaching in college/university and the problems students generally come across when English is not their first language. Current language politics in India is an exemplary case of the issues and controversies surrounding linguistic globalization. A primary characteristic of linguistic globalization is the increasing spread and domination of the English language, which we can capture by the term 'global English'. As a post-colonial democracy, India provides a context for examining linguistic globalization that is generalizable to other cases. Furthermore, in juxtaposition to the homogenizing tendency of global English, India embraces multilingualism; its federal system is based on its linguistic diversity. If we narrow down then more than effectiveness, it is rather the imposition of English as the medium of instruction as the medium and its associated problematics will be discussed.

Introduction:

The medium of instruction is the language used by the teacher to teach. Teaching the language, or educational content, through the target language increases the amount of exposure the learner gets to it, and the opportunities they have to communicate in it, and therefore to develop their control of it. Unfortunately, at the senior academic level, the learner or teacher do not get the opportunity to do any of it.

Recently in a survey conducted by British Council the findings suggest that English as a medium of instruction in schools and colleges are growing rapidly in the last ten years especially in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English. The reason has been justified from many angles. Starting from globalization to the rising phenomenon of increasing demand for English proficiency in all job sectors are to name a few. English just as a language of study and as a medium of instruction in teaching non-literature subjects as an entirely different category but both somewhere converge when it comes to treating it as a foreign language. A brief history of the evolution of the language in our country will help us understand why at all this language made such strong imprints into the daily lives or academic sphere of India.

The historical view of the evolution of the language policy in India let know us how the importance of English and its role in Indian Education. India is multilingual country. It has been reflecting in the formulation of the language policy. The Indian constitution has provided that

the primary education must be taught through the mother tongue or regional language. However, a status survey of language instruction in the country exposed that of the 1652 mother tongues listed by the 1961 Census, there are 51 languages which are spoken by more than 100,000 people each. Of these 51 languages, 16 have no script of their own, and only the remaining 35 languages are accepted as media of instruction at the school level. English is a common language and it is an obligatory language in the higher education for the progress of the life. The Indian government has been following the three-language formula in Education as the National Commission on Education 1964-1966 recommended. Subsequently, the three-language formula in Education was reflected in the National Education Policies of 1968 and 1986. The Commission said that the three-language system is an appropriate formula for the Indian school education and it can be a good approach to accommodate different language people but it has been criticized by the different sections in the society on the implementation. The Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu is the preeminent instance as they vehemently opposed the imposition of Hindi language on south India. There is no proper planning for formulating language policy in India. It can be seen as a question of status planning rather than achievement planning. Finally, the three-language formula has emerged as a policy after elaborate debates and discussions among political and academic peoples with interest of national multilingual languages. The colonial government appointed the Central Advisory Board on Education (CABE) which has been initiated the discussions and negotiations with different sections in the society to frame the language policy in school education for India in the 1940s and submitted its report in 1960. The Board advised the three language formula with a vision to eradicate discrimination among the multilingual people of India. The Board recommended that three- languages should be taught in the Hindi as well as non-Hindi-speaking areas of the country at the middle and high school stages. The three-language formula was finally approved by the Government of India as follows: i. The regional language or the mother tongue, ii. Hindi Language, iii. English Language The Central Advisory Board on Education also discussed on the issue of English language and recommended that English must be a compulsory subject in the schools from 6th class onwards and students must acquire enough knowledge of English so as to be able to receive education through this English in the higher education. There is another development took place in the development of language policy in India. The first National Education Commission had studied the recommendations given by the Central Advisory Board on Education. Finally, they came up with the conclusion that three-language formula must be included in the context of multilingual Indian educational system. I argue that once upon a time the English language was an important part of a mechanism of exclusion language due to upper caste nationalists' creation as they differentiated native language and alien language but now it can be seen as a tool of inclusion. In post-modern India, the English language is an important factor to include all the sections of Indian society. The main reason is an increasing demand for the language which is an important tool for the progress and development of the country. The National Council of Educational Research and Training also documented the demand and importance of English language in the position paper in connection with the National Curriculum Framework (2005) as they stated:

-English in India today is a symbol of people's aspirations for quality in education and fuller participation in national and international life... The level of introduction of English has now become a matter of political response to people's aspirations, rendering almost irrelevant an academic debate on the merits of a very early introduction. The Commission also mentioned that -English will continue to enjoy a high status so long as it remains the principal medium of education at the university stage and the language of administration at the Central Government and in many of the states. Even after the regional languages become media of higher education in the universities, a working knowledge of English will be a valuable asset for all students and a reasonable proficiency in the language will be necessary for those who proceed to the university. However, there is controversy about the English as a medium of instruction in Indian

educational system. The contradiction of demand and notion is reflected through the paradox of access which was depicted by the report of the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) as it stated: -There is an irony in the situation. English has been part of our education system for more than a century. Yet English is beyond the reach of most of our young people, which make for highly unequal access. Indeed, even now, barely more than one per cent of our people use it as a second language, let alone a first language. But NKC believes that the time has come for us to teach our people, ordinary people, English as a language in schools. Early action in this sphere would help us build an inclusive society and transform India into a knowledge society. The National Focus Group on Teaching of English has taken a strong position in connection with 'English language question': -English is in India today a symbol of people's aspiration for quality in education and a fuller participation in national and international life. Its colonial origins now forgotten or irrelevant, its initial role in independence India, tailored to high education now felt to be insufficiently inclusive socially and linguistically, the current state of English stems from its overwhelming presence on the world stage and the reflection of this in the national arena. There is an astonishing faith among all sections of the society in both rural and urban areas that English has the transformative power language. English is seen not just as a skilled language, but as a means of a better life, a pathway out of exclusion and suppression from the unequal society. The English language has emerged as a powerful agent for social change in India.

As elaborated earlier, with the post-colonial hangover India is now stuck in a tryst where the dominating trend of using English as a medium of communication is made mostly compulsory but regional languages are strongly rooted in the culture. Hence, the students are faltering to cope with a new language at senior academic level. An important fact must be noted here that as we are discussing college and university level here, at this stage the students are already engaging themselves in a specialized and specific subject. At this stage, they naturally lack the time to learn a new language as well as they fail to handle the pressure of learning English and their own subject parallel. As a new academician I, personally felt while instructing in a college where students are mostly from Urdu medium backgrounds students are failing to cope with the subject understanding due to their meagre proficiency in English.

In the present days, English has become the common language of the global science and technology market and the overall economy. Government schools do not teach in English medium, those who study in them are denied the opportunities given to their richer counterparts in English medium schools. Students in regional language schools cannot, therefore, think of achieving anything in the globalized economy. These students, when they reach college are failing to cope with their English-medium background counter-parts. Somewhere the madrasas or other regional language medium institutes try to pioneer their inheritance of rich culture and in the process ignore the importance of English. As Urdu/Hindi is not a recognized language in university, the students are forced to take to English. Therefore in a long-term scenario, they fail to understand not just the lectures or even the suggested texts.

India even after seventy years of independence is still battling the strong colonial hangover of the British. The influence is felt more in the old universities as they were established during or before India was a colony. So the English- colonial hangover is more rooted in these universities than in other sectors of the country. Ultimately the crisis strikes the students in the worst ways possible as they are envisaged to meet both ends of being the well- versed and English learned global citizens but groomed in regional languages since school.

The formative years of the students are most sacrificed due to this dichotomous and unplanned medium being chosen by the educational institutes. English is a language which acts as a medium

of instruction and by which the target subject has to be communicated. In the teaching- learning process if proper knowledge of either the content of the subject or the medium language is lacking the process remains incomplete and fallacious. In college or university level the language learning is not given any course or attention in the curriculum unless the student is opting for English as a pass course. Even thereafter the basics of the language are not addressed at any point after school. Good students often come up with poor results due to their incompetence in comprehending this language. It is a mass concern in the entire academic circle but needs serious addressing.

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