

Running head: USE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AT THE POST GRADUATE LEVEL 1

Use of English Language as a medium of instruction in imparting higher education at the
post graduate level in India



Abstract

Higher Education and its ability to enhance the quality of labour which in turn can result in increasing the competitiveness of one of the emerging economies/countries like India in terms of efficiency in producing goods and services vis-à-vis other nations has in recent years become a critical component, more so a critical parameter of various global studies that are assessing the competitiveness of nations on a regular basis. The Global Competitiveness Index 2018, The Competitiveness study of IMD World Book and the Global Talent Competitiveness Index can serve as few examples where higher education has been related with the quality of labour in any economy. Even, Management Guru Michael Porter has advocated the need of macro-economic competitiveness being one of the layers/levels of competitiveness wherein he has stressed on quality of labour as one of the key factors contributing to competitiveness of any nation. In this context the current paper makes an attempt to examine and understand the degree/level of usage of English language as a medium of instruction in imparting higher education in at the postgraduate level in India. The research methodology adopted for the paper is qualitative in nature with emphasis on collection and analysis of data from secondary sources only. Neither does the paper attempt to undertake any survey for attaining its objectives, nor does it conduct any unstructured interview of any of the experts in education industry, which may be some of the key limitations of the paper. The findings of the paper may encourage further qualitative and quantitative research on the topic of this paper focusing on different streams in which higher education at the post graduate level is offered in India. In a country with 285 affiliating universities and 390950 affiliated colleges offering several post graduate courses as per the

USE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AT THE POST GRADUATE LEVEL

3

All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE 2017-18), the current paper may serve a relevant source of information for both the teaching and student fraternity.

Keywords: Higher Education, Labour, Competitiveness, English Language, India



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Introduction

Quality of Higher education and its ability to equip labour with the necessary knowledge and skills to make the industry competitive which in turn could raise the quality and quantity of innovation across industries which again in turn could result in increasing the competitiveness of any nation to compete with other nations globally in the field of international business has been one of the key focus areas of several global reports on nations' competitiveness, their overall ability to innovate and compete globally especially in the last 10 years or so. This development has meant that the nations are now increasingly looking at the quality and quantity of labour available in the country and are doing what they can possibly do to enhance the quality of their labour to increase the quality of innovation required for industry and the country's economy on the whole to stay competitive. The rankings of the several nations appearing in various global reports like the global competitiveness index, global innovation index, IMD world book competitiveness index, the global talent competitiveness index to name a few, while pointing towards important factors like political stability, rule of law, fiscal and monetary policies, health, also analyse and measure a country's labour in terms of the education imparted which for example is judged in terms of the quality and quantity of graduates in science and technology, education at the secondary and primary level, or the kind of vocational skills that the labour in an economy possesses. The data analysis of these factors plays a key role in judging the competitive ability of any nation's economy to stay competitive in today's global business scenario. In this context, the ability/efficacy of higher education to raise the quality of labour becomes a critical factor. It is further in this context; it becomes essential to understand how successful/unsuccessful/ what

role English Language as a medium of instruction play in imparting Higher education at the post graduate level in India.

Objectives, Scope & Research Methodology

Objectives of the study

1. To assess the growth of English Language as a medium of instruction in higher education globally with focus on India
2. To determine the benefits and challenges of English as a medium of instruction in higher education in India
3. To determine the current status of English as a medium of instruction in Higher Education in India

- a) **Research Design:** Exploratory
- b) **Source of Data Collection:** Secondary.

Data has been taken from online reports. The research methodology adopted is heavily dependent on secondary data sources because of which the study is qualitative in nature with no attempt been made to conduct a survey.

- c) **Scope of the study:** The study is confined to assessing the usage and extent of such usage of English Language as a medium of instruction at the post graduate level only. The study does not focus either on any specific course of study or courses run by a university. The study does not make any attempt to cover the school curriculum and the undergraduate courses of study. The study attempts to cover a pan-India view rather than adopting a state/region specific outlook.

d) Limitations of the study

- 1) Absence of usage of qualitative techniques like focus group research and in-depth interviews (with experts in the field of management education)
- 2) The study focuses primarily on the higher education at post graduate level and ignores undergraduate level courses
- 3) The content of the paper may be inadequate to present comprehensive picture of the current status of English as a medium of instruction in higher education in India

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English as a medium of Instruction in Modern Education system

Modern education set up across the world today is a continuous witness to educational content being delivered in a language which is not either the native language of the students or any other language of a country/countries. A case in point being India, where Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Gujarati, Kannada, Malayalam, Punjabi and Urdu are some of the prominent languages which can be referred to as “home languages”. This is a phenomenon which is being observed at all the different stages of education that a student passes through after getting access to and enrolled in education, ranging from primary, secondary to higher education level globally with India being no exception.

In countries in the North American continent and in the European nations, this phenomenon is often termed as “immersion”/content-based learning/content- based language learning/content-based language education. Another term which is given to such phenomenon is content and language integrated learning (especially in European nations) which essentially means integration of content and language in higher education. This is also

sometimes referred to as “English -Taught programs”

English as a medium of instruction/**English medium Instruction (EMI)** is often discussed with reference to Higher Education. English medium Instruction (EMI) is referred to *as the use of English Language to teach academic subjects (other than English Itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority/most of population is not English.*

The above definition throws light on the Indian Higher Education set up where English as a medium of instruction is increasingly being adopted in imparting/delivering course contents of a wide variety of courses and subjects.

At this juncture, it is pertinent enough to look at some of the key facts pertaining to Higher Education in India as per *All India Survey on Higher Education in India (AISHE)2017-18 Report:*

Some facts of Higher Education in India as per AISHE 2017-18

- 1) Total Enrolment in Higher education has been estimated to be 36.6 million with 19.2 million boys and 17.4 million girls, wherein girls account for 47.6% of the total enrolment
- 2) Gross Enrolment ration (GER) in higher education in India is 25.8%(18-23 years age group); Male GER being 26.3% and female GER being 25.4%
- 3) About 79.2% of the students enrolled are enrolled in undergraduate programs with maximum number enrolled in B.A. course followed by B.SC and B.Com programs
- 4) At the post graduate level, maximum students are enrolled in social sciences followed by management stream; while at the P.HD level, maximum students enrolled are in Science stream, with Engineering & Technology being second in that list
- 5) There are 903 universities, 39050 colleges in India, with 343 of such universities

being and 78% of colleges being managed privately. 357 universities are in rural areas

- 6) There are 285 affiliating universities which have 39050 colleges across the country
- 7) 15 universities are run exclusively for women
- 8) There are 500 General, 126 Technical, 70 Agricultural & Allied, 158 Medical, 22 Law, 13 Sanskrit & 10 language Universities, while the remaining 83 belong to other categories
- 9) 58% of total teachers are male while 42% are female. At present the female-male teacher ratio stands at 72 female teachers per 100 male teachers in higher education institutions in India
- 10) Pupil teacher ratio in India in universities and colleges is 30

Benefits and Challenges of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in Higher Education Institutions

Universities across the world as per several studies undertaken with time are putting emphasis on use of EMI as they strongly believe that EMI can help in attracting a greater number of foreign students which in turn has its own financial and cultural benefits.

Moreover, students as per survey reports tend to believe that EMI is crucial in higher education in its ability modernise higher education and developing a progressive national outlook. Opportunity to study abroad has been highlighted by students as a benefit of EMI in higher education. As per a research report on internationalisation of higher education and the increasing demand for English as a medium of instruction , there are several contributing factors/reasons that drive EMI in higher education and have the **following perceived**

benefits:

- 1) English proficiency in addition to content knowledge
- 2) Inter-cultural understanding and global awareness/citizenship
- 3) Enhanced career opportunities
- 4) Staff employment

Contributing factors to EMI in higher education

- 1) Gaining access to cutting-edge knowledge and increasing global competitiveness to raise international people
- 2) Increasing income and compensating for shortages in income at the domestic level
- 3) Enhancing the employability of graduates' international competencies
- 4) Improving English proficiency
- 5) Reflecting developments in English Language teaching (ELT)

Challenges to EMI in higher education

The perceived benefits as mentioned earlier do not guarantee success and there is a strong apprehension that paucity/lack of planning may lead to unrealistic expectations on the part of students and faculty. This calls for careful and meticulous planning in order to expand EMI in higher education institutions. Some of the key challenges that can be a hindrance in the path of global expansion of EMI are as under:

- 1) Language-related issues in terms of its impact on national languages and challenges related to proficiency of staff and students
- 2) Cultural and social issues related to westernization in terms of influence of western languages and thought processes on Eastern cultures for example
- 3) Staffing and support for international students, management and faculty culture

English Medium Instruction (EMI) in higher education: A Brief Growth Story

Research reports and surveys done since 2002 suggest/point towards a steady growth of English Medium Instruction (EMI) across the globe with Europe being the flag-bearer of such growth in relation to higher education institutions and English-taught programs in such institutions. The most recent survey (2014) in 28 European countries across 2637 Higher Education Institutions (HEI) revealed a rise of 229% increase in English Taught-Programs (ETPs) since 2007, with the number of English-Taught-Programs (ETPs) going up from 2389 to 8089 in 2014. The maximum number of ETPs reported from Netherlands, followed by Germany, Sweden, France and Denmark.

Use of EMI in Asian countries have been facilitated by governments for example in China and Japan in both private and public universities since the formulation and implementation and guidelines ministry of education since 2001. By 2006, China reported on an average 44 EMI based programs per institutions out of the 132 Higher Education Institutions surveyed. While in Japan, surveys report that 227 universities were offering courses through EMI. Korea being another country with approximately 410000 courses offered out of which 9000 being EMI based.

Asian countries in the middle east have seen perhaps one of the steepest rises in use of EMI in higher education. Saudi Arabia being one of the prominent examples especially in case of university -based nursing educational programs. This resulted in rise of EMI in other higher educational institutions/fields with the government of Saudi Arabia identifying proficiency in English as one of the critical objectives under its education policies. Today, 25 public and 27 private universities and institutions offer EMI based courses to their students. United Arab Emirates in comparison has a long-standing tradition of using EMI based courses since 1970s. In this context, Qatar serves as one big contrast whose Supreme Education Council in 2002 reverted to use of Arabic instead of English for premier higher education institutions- the Qatar University.

Use of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in Higher Education Institutions in India

India is a multi-lingual nation which can be gauged from the very fact that apart from 22 languages which are recognized by the Indian Constitution in the 8th Schedule, the census of India has recorded 1576 “rationalized languages” and 1796 other mother tongues. With time, the Indian Government especially after independence from British rule in 1947, gradually realised the importance of English as an effective instrument or medium of instruction, knowledge transfer, trade and commerce apart from being a medium for maintaining international relations. The Central Advisory Board on Education which is India’s oldest statutory body on education in India devised a three-language formula in 1956 to remove language inequalities in India. It recommended that three languages should be taught in Hindi and non-Hindi speaking areas of India at the middle and high school level. A short version of

three-language formula is presented as under

1. (a) (i) Mother Tongue

(ii) Mother Tongue/regional language

(iii) A composite course of mother tongue and regional language

(b) Hindi or English

(c) A modern Indian Language or a modern European Language provided it has not already been taken under (a) & (b) above

2. (a) as above

(b) English or any other modern European language

(c) Hindi (for non-Hindi speaking areas) or any modern Indian language (for Hindi speaking areas)

The above formula was worked upon and simplified and approved by the conference of Chief Ministers in 1961

1. The regional language or the mother tongue when the latter is different from the regional language
2. Hind or any other Indian Language in Hind-speaking areas
3. English or any other modern European language

The three-language formula thus was recommended to teach three languages in first 10 years of school education to strengthen the multi-lingual character of education, to make the educational load fairer for students, to promote national integration and to provide wider language choice in school curriculum.

The Central Advisory Board on Education (CABE) carried out further and more extensive deliberations on the “The study of English as a compulsory subject” as recommended by Education Ministers Conference held in 1967 that had recommended that *English should be taught as a compulsory language both at the secondary and university stages and that students must acquire knowledge of English so as to enable them to receive education through this language at the university level.*

The **Education Commission** thus after detailed and comprehensive study of languages in the Indian context, between 1964-66 and came up with a modified three language formula for imparting education and the school level, recognised the importance of English from the point of view of language planning and made the following vital observation:

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”

---- Education Commission 1966

Since then till date, English has acquired the status of main medium of instruction at the post graduate level in India. It is the state language of two eastern states- Meghalaya and Nagaland as well. The brief history of the three language formula and the education commission as presented above describe the evolutionary journey of English as medium of instruction and how the fear of domination by the colonial master’s language has been alleviated by the critical role that it now playing in the higher education set up of the country.

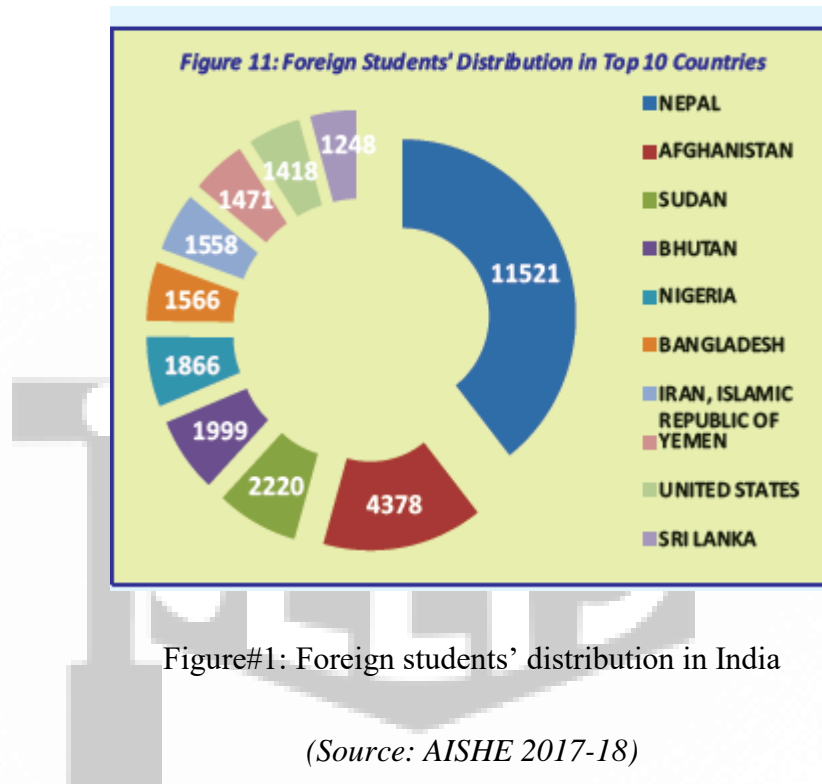
Internationalisation of Higher Education and English in India

If internationalisation of higher education and attracting foreign students is one of key benefits of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in Higher Education Institutions, then as per the All India Survey on Higher Education (2017-18) report points out *some key statistics regarding foreign students in India that can throw light on English as a medium of instruction in Indian Higher educational institutions*

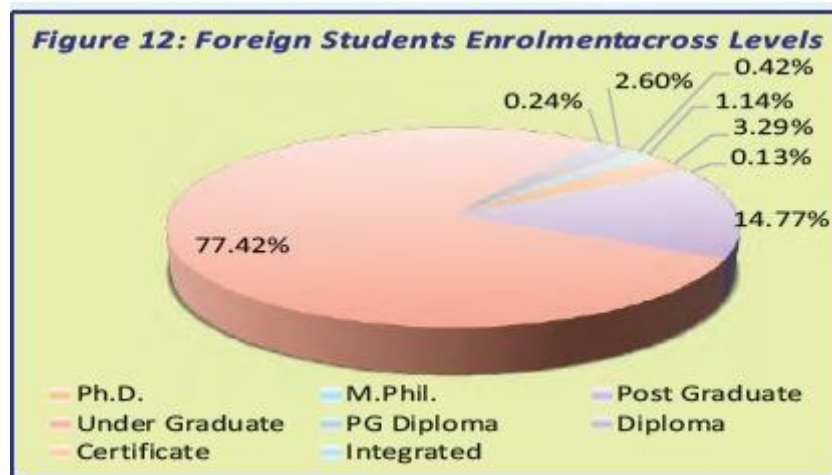
- 1) The total number of foreign students enrolled in higher education institutions in India is 46144
- 2) The foreign students come from 166 nations across the world, with top 10 nations

contributing 63.4% of foreign students enrolled

- 3) Highest number of foreign students come from Nepal (24%), followed by Afghanistan (9.5%), Sudan (4.8%), Bhutan (4.3%) and Nigeria (4.0%) [Figure#1]



- 4) As per Figure#1, students from Bangladesh and Iran constitute 3.4% of the foreign students, while students from United States (3.1%) and Sri Lanka (2.7%)
- 5) The Highest number of foreign students in India are enrolled in undergraduate courses accounting for 77.4% of such students while 14.8% students are enrolled in post graduate courses [Figure#2]



Figure#2: Enrolment of foreign students in Higher education in India

(Source: AISHE 2017-18)

- 6) There are 15 programs that have more than 1000 foreign students enrolled constituting 78% of the foreign students
- 7) Karnataka has the highest share of foreign students with 12041 students, followed by Uttar Pradesh 4465 students, Maharashtra 4306, Punjab 3775, Tamil Nadu 3542, Delhi 2266 students to name a few of the states attracting foreign students in the country
- 8) Foreign student enrolment can be seen the highest in B.Tech, followed by BBA, BA, B.Pharma and BCA and B.E. as far as undergraduate courses are concerned
- 9) In case of foreign students enrolled in post graduate level courses, highest enrolment can be seen in MBA, followed by M.A and M.Sc.

Conclusion

English today has become an inseparable part of our Indian Higher Education system. English as a language of learning and as a medium of instruction has acquired a “transformative power”, which essentially means that English has the ability to be used not just as a necessary and relevant skill but is looked upon as a vibrant symbol of a better life, a gateway to freedom from poverty. From the time it was looked upon as the language of the colonial masters restricted to a few elites, it has become India’s very own language finding a place among the many languages of India. It has become the choice of every Indian citizen who wants to upgrade his lifestyle in terms of access to higher and quality education and better career opportunities. The fact that India’s working population has a sizeable percentage of English-speaking graduates adds to India’s overall charm as investment destination for global companies. With the draft National Education Policy 2019 putting emphasis on a higher education system with either universities or degree granting colleges- and no affiliated colleges apart from focus on categorization of higher education into research, teaching universities and teaching colleges to impart quality education, English seems destined to play an even greater role in fulfilling the aspirations of a New India in the times to come.

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USE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AT THE POST GRADUATE LEVEL

19

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