



The Role of English in skill development of Indian states

Aditi

PhD. Student, Dept., of English, M.D.U, Rohtak, Haryana

Abstract— There are huge demands for English across society because of its perceived economic and social value. There are also various policy initiatives and interventions that promote English language learning program as part of skills development. While skills development and English language teaching are in high demand, there are issues about how this demand can be met. In order to explore whether the cost of providing English language as part of skills development is worth the investment, this report explores the evidence that exists about the relationship between education, English language skills, skills development and economic development in Haryana and the other states of India as well.

I. INTRODUCTION

A language is a systematic means of communication by the use of sounds or conventional symbols. It is the code we all use to express ourselves and communicate to others. It is a communication by word of mouth. It is the mental faculty or power of vocal communication. It is a system for communicating ideas and feelings using sounds, gestures, signs or marks. Any means of communicating ideas, specifically, human speech, the expression of ideas by the voice and sounds articulated by the organs of the throat and mouth is a language. This is a system for communication. A language is the written and spoken methods of combining words to create meaning used by a particular group of people. Language, so far as we know, is something specific to humans, that is to say it is the basic capacity that distinguishes humans from all other living beings. Language therefore remains potentially a communicative medium capable of expressing ideas and concepts as well as moods, feelings and attitudes.

In response to the needs for a more highly skilled labour force, governments across South Asia have launched a range of skills development initiatives. The different countries are at varying places on a spectrum of activity with regards to skills development programmes – with some only at the beginning of implementation. As resources are finite in these countries, the level of the skills development process seems to reflect the stage of development of a country's economy and the current governance and operational contexts. In a country like Afghanistan, which has been devastated by decades of conflict, there are so many needs in terms of post war restructuring, that skills development – while perhaps central to this – features further down on the agenda. At the other end of the spectrum, skills development is a major priority in Sri Lanka, whose current President envisages the country becoming a 'knowledge hub, serving as a key link between the East and the West.

A set of linguists who based their assumptions of language on psychology made claims that language is nothing but 'habit formation'. According to them, language is learnt through use, through practice. In their view, 'the more one is exposed to the use of language, the better one learns'. Written languages use symbols (characters) to build words. The entire set of words is the language's vocabulary. The ways in which the words can be meaningfully combined is defined by the language's syntax and grammar. The actual meaning of words and combinations of words is defined by the language's semantics. The latest and the most advanced discoveries and inventions in science and technology are being made in the universities located in the United States of America where English language is the means of scientific discourse.

The historical circumstances of India (having been ruled by the British for over two centuries) have given the Indians an easy access to mastering English language, and innumerable opportunities for advancement in the field of science and technology. Many Indians have become so skilled in English language and have won many international awards for creative and comparative literatures during the last few years. Sometime ago, an Indian author, Arundhati Roy, won the prestigious booker prize for her book "The God of Small Things". Her book sold lakhs of copies all over the globe.

Over the years, English language has become one of our principal assets in getting a global leadership for books written by Indian authors and for films made by Indians in English language. A famous Indian movie maker Shekhar Kapoor's film "Elizabeth" has got several nominations for Oscar Awards. It does not require any further argument to establish the advantage English language has brought to us at the international level.



English language comes to our aid in our commercial transactions throughout the globe. English is the language of the latest business management in the world and Indian proficiency in English has brought laurels to many Indian business managers. English is a means not only for international commerce; it has become increasingly essential for inter-state commerce and communication. In India, people going from North to South for education or business mostly communicate in English, which has become a link language. Keeping this in mind, the Parliament has also recognized English as an official language in addition to Hindi. All the facts of history and developments in present day India underline the continued importance of learning English in addition to vernaculars.

Some of the states of India are witnessing popular increase in public demand for teaching of English language from the primary classes. Realizing the importance, recently, the Minister of Indian Railways, Laloo Prasad Yadav, demands teaching of English language in schools. The great demand for admission in English medium schools throughout the country is a testimony to the attraction of English to the people of India. Many of the leaders, who denounce English, send their own children to English medium schools. Many of the schools in the country have English as the sole or additional medium of instruction.

A language attracts people because of the wealth of literature and knowledge enshrined in it. English poses no danger to Indian languages. The Indian languages are vibrant and are developing by the contributions of great minds using them as their vehicle of expression. English is available to us as a historical heritage in addition to our own language. We must make the best use of English to develop ourselves culturally and materially so that we can compete with the best in the world of mind and matter. English language is our window to the world. English language is one tool to establish our viewpoint. We can learn from others experience. We can check the theories of foreigners against our experience. We can reject the untenable and accept the tenable. We can also propagate our theories among the international audience and readers.

We can make use of English to promote our worldview and spiritual heritage throughout the globe. Swami Vivekananda established the greatness of Indian view of religion at the world conference of religions in Chicago in 1893. He addressed the gathering in impressive English. Many spiritual gurus have since converted thousands of English people to our spirituality by expressing their thought and ideas in masterful English. English has thus become an effective means of promoting Indian view of life, and strengthening our cultural identity in the world.

When William Caxton set up his printing press in London (1477) the new hybrid language (vernacular English mixed with courtly French and scholarly Latin) became increasingly standardized, and by 1611, when the Authorized (King James) Version of the Bible was published, the educated English of London had become the core of what is now called Standard English. By the time of Johnson's dictionary (1755) and the American Declaration of Independence (1776), English was international and recognizable as the language we use today. The Orthography of English was more or less established by 1650 and, in England in particular, a form of standard educated speech, known as Received Pronunciation (RP) spread from the major public schools in the 19th century. This accent was adopted in the early 20th century by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) for its announcers and readers, and is variously known as RP, BBC English, Oxford English, and the King's or Queen's English.

Generally, Standard English today does not depend on accent but rather on shared educational experience, mainly of the printed language. Present-day English is an immensely varied language, having absorbed material from many other tongues. It is spoken by more than 300 million native speakers, and between 400 and 800 million foreign users. It is the official language of air transport and shipping; the leading language of science, technology, computers, and commerce; and a major medium of education, publishing, and international negotiation. For this reason, scholars frequently refer to its latest phase as World English.

The age of technology and world-wide communication via computers has increased the need for a common language a thousand-fold. English represents the fourth most spoken native language across the world. Considering the actual numbers of individuals using English as their first language, it is the principal official language of the world. Being the primary language in international affairs, it has achieved official status even in countries where it is not the primary language.

Though software allowing translation of whole web pages is now available, with varying results, English remains the primary language used on the all important World Wide Web. Whether it is software, applications, free or shareware, the language typically used is English. This equally applies to social networks and many other websites. Software manuals, fact sheets offering product specifications and hardware installation guides are usually available in English long before being translated into other



languages. In addition, international students attracted to universities in the US, the UK, New Zealand or Singapore, as well as Canada and Australia, will find that the primary language used here for every activity involved in their studies is English. This includes most technical or medical periodicals giving international acclaim to scientists, engineers etc, as well as peer to peer publications, such as journals, for instance. Furthermore, a good working knowledge of the English language opens up a large variety of job opportunities in multi-national companies across the globe, as well as in government related agencies, such as the United Nations facilities in New York, The Hague, Vienna and Geneva. The English language is therefore of utmost, increasing importance in every individual's education.

II. IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Many writers across world agree that English is the 'queen of languages'. Shri C. Rajgopalachari once wrote "English language is the greatest gift of Goddess Saraswati to India". The United Nations Organization (UNO) has given English the status of an official language. It is not just because it is one of the most widely spoken languages, but also because the use of English has made the social and economic exchange between people of different communities and cultures practically possible. It is well recognized that English-speaking persons can be traced in all the continents of the world and is the reason for its importance in the compulsory education of many countries across the globe. It is not only used in public and private offices but also in education institutions, media, sports and business. If it were not for English, we would not have seen India's heading large corporate or occupying key positions in organizations across the globe.

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.

Historically, since its introduction to India, English as a language has played an important role in media and education. A large number of books are published in English in India. India is the third largest English book producing country after the United States and the U.K. Indian writers and poets such as Tara Dutta, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Sarojini Naidu, Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy have contributed to the rich literary tradition of India. Mahatma Gandhi had said, "English is a language of international commerce, it is the language of diplomacy and it contains many a rich literary treasure; it gives us an introduction to western thought and culture."

English is the chief language in the Indian education system today. All the prestigious schools and colleges use English as their medium of instruction. Today, careers in the field of science and technology, business and commerce require a good knowledge of English. Most of the works in the field of space, nuclear technology, medicine etc. are available only in English. The vocabulary and terminology used in these are available in English. Therefore, English has become a passport of getting a good job not only in India but also abroad in almost all fields. With the growing importance of computers in every field, the English language has received a further boost. The Radhakrishna University Education Commission recommended that "English is a language which is rich in literature—humanistic, scientific and technical. If under sentimental urges we give up English, we would cut ourselves off from the living stream of ever-growing knowledge."

Interestingly, apart from the schooling and organized education systems prevalent in India, the competitive examination scenario also reflects importance of English. Most of the general tests, both the admissions-tests and the job-related tests, have a complete section on English language. They are designed to test the candidate's power of expression, flair in English, comprehension skills, sound vocabulary as well as correct use of language. English constitutes a major portion of almost all competitive examinations.

English has taken deep roots in India. It is no more a typical English spoken in England or in the United States but has acquired an Indian character. Indians have achieved a great proficiency in it and have Indianized it. Such evolution is not limited to the



urban population base, but it is happening across the semi-urban and rural India as well. Due to this proficiency, the mass of English-speaking Indians that are versed not just linguistically but have knowledge of diverse industries is increasing, thereby galvanizing presence of many MNCs especially the BPOs/KPOs to setup their base in India. In reciprocation, several words from Indian languages have officially been added to the English dictionaries over the years!

English is an international language. It is the window to the world. It has become a 'must have' to remain in touch with the outside world. It is a language of opportunity. With the advent of Telecommunication Industry and the Information Technology Enabled Services (ITeS) Industry, along with the big role Indians have played in the development of computers and software industry globally, the opportunities are galore for the English speaking Indians. F.G. French observes that it is only through this language that we have "distilled essence of modern knowledge in all fields of human activity. Anyone who can read English can keep in touch with the world without leaving his own house."

Sensing the importance of English to be not only national but international the Government of India, along with the State Governments, have been taking measures to introduce this language at the grass root level. Recently, there has been a thrust towards running government schools especially providing instructions in English as a medium. Many model schools have been established for this purpose. They feel that to be able to grasp education at higher levels, children should be acquainted with it as early as possible. Sensing the importance of English language and its undeniable role in nation-building Jawaharlal Nehru had said "we know it a good deal and we have people who can teach it." With the ever evolving demands of the competitive world, if India and Indians are to become a commendable force in 21st century, we understand his saying holds strong even today.

A language is a systematic means of communication by the use of sounds or conventional symbols. It is the code we all use to express ourselves and communicate to others. It is a communication by word of mouth. It is the mental faculty or power of vocal communication. It is a system for communicating ideas and feelings using sounds, gestures, signs or marks. Any means of communicating ideas, specifically, human speech, the expression of ideas by the voice and sounds articulated by the organs of the throat and mouth is a language. This is a system for communication. A language is the written and spoken methods of combining words to create meaning used by a particular group of people.

Language, so far as we know, is something specific to humans, that is to say it is the basic capacity that distinguishes humans from all other living beings. Language therefore remains potentially a communicative medium capable of expressing ideas and concepts as well as moods, feelings and attitudes. A set of linguists who based their assumptions of language on psychology made claims that language is nothing but 'habit formation'. According to them, language is learnt through use, through practice. In their view, 'the more one is exposed to the use of language, the better one learns'.

III. THE ROLE OF ENGLISH IN HARYANA & OTHER INDIAN STATES

English has continually had a presence in the Indian subcontinent due to British colonial history in the region and the language's subsequent emergence as a global force with a high instrumental value in various domains, particularly commerce and education. As the region is linguistically diverse, English serves as an instrumental link language between countries and regions. It has official status in India and Pakistan. In Bangladesh, the national language is Bangla, but English has been used as a language of education and in higher law courts since colonial times. In Sri Lanka, English has been brought back as a link language after a postcolonial 'Sinhala Only' policy. While Nepal was never part of British India, the status of English there is similar: It is classed as the country's primary foreign language and it is used as the language of higher education, particularly in STEM subjects. While English has no official status in Afghanistan, the language plays an important role as a language of development. In Iran, English is taught as a foreign language from Grade 7. Across the region, English is seen as essential in accessing the best higher education opportunities, which then lead to the best employment opportunities. While English has traditionally been demanded in specialised education and high-level careers, it is now increasingly in demand in a growing number of fields. More and more employers are using school results in English, or results in other types of English assessment, as recruitment criteria, particularly in the private sector and in public institutions. Communication skills in English are framed as a 'basic skill', along with computer literacy.

As a result, there are a number of TVET initiatives in the region, often supported by international organisations that specifically promote English as part of skills development. In Bangladesh, for example, the English in Action project (funded by the UK's Department for International Development) promotes the learning of English 'as a route into work and out of poverty'. In Sri Lanka, Skills for Life in Sri Lanka is an organisation delivering skills development training through initiatives like English for



Life and ICT 6 for Life In India, Project Genesis, a Corporate Social Responsibility initiative, works with 15,000 students in over 240 colleges to provide training in English and soft skills to make general degree college students 'BPO employable.

IV. CONCLUSION

The existence of English in India means that it is no longer necessary to consider the issue of a national language. In other words, India does not need a national language since there are no functions which a national language might play that are not already fulfilled in some other way. The beneficiaries of this de facto policy are the indigenous Indian languages in the regions where they prevail; if any additional function were to be required then it could be satisfied by bringing in English. In a way an associate official language, English knowingly or unknowingly has played an instrumental role in maintaining the diversity of India's language scene because the existence of English has meant that it has not been necessary to select any one Indian languages as a national language. In fact, the states which used to rally to slogans such as angriji hatao (remove English) are now eagerly introducing English in the first year of schooling. English today is almost a compulsory second language. Once deprived sections of the society now perceive the language as an instrument for progress. To sum up:

- There are several initiatives to expand the quantity and quality of skills development in Haryana, including programmes that promote English for employability.
- These programmes have arisen due to demands from employers for better skilled employees, and employees with skills in English.
- There are also strong demands for English across society because of its perceived economic and social value.
- While skills development issues and English language teaching are in high demand, there are issues about how this demand can be met.

References

- [1] English in Action (EIA) (2013) About EIA. Available online at: www.eiabd.com
- [2] Hanushek, E.A. and Woessmann, L. (2008), The role of cognitive skills in economic development. *Journal of Economic Literature* 46 (3), 607-668.
- [3] Nilekani, N. (2010), *Imagining India: The Idea of a Renewed Nation*. London: Penguin.
- [4] Sargeant, P. and Erling, E.J. (2011), The discourse of 'English as a language for international development': Policy assumptions and practical challenges.
- [5] Permani, R. (2009), The role of education in economic growth in East Asia: A survey. *Asian-Pacific Economic Literature*, 1-20.