
LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

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English Medium Education - The Need of the Day B. V. L. Narasimha Rao

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Medium of Instruction

Medium of instruction is the language used for academic communication in educational instructions in any region. Normally mother tongue is considered as the best medium for academic transactions for a variety of reasons. But several national and international happenings like colonization before World War II and internationalization of human interactions after 1980's opened a new window for discussion on medium of instruction policies, not only in India but also in many developing and developed countries.

Medium of Instruction Policies

Medium of instruction policies have considerable impact, not only on the school performance of students and the day to day work of the teacher but also on various forms of social and economic activities. It is said that the use of mother

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B. V. L. Narasimha Rao

English Medium Education - The Need of the Day

tongue in elementary education not only improves the quality of education but also strengthens the individuals' capacity in the mother tongue. It further strengthens the culture of the community.

Many research studies established that students who learn reading and writing in mother tongue perform better in later life better than those who had their primary education in a language other than their mother tongue. In India there are at least one thousand languages and a far more number of dialects. But education in primary level is available in about 45 languages.

According to Prof. Singh (2003) children learn faster in their mother tongue. Even before independence in the year 1904 the Government of India, in a resolution suggested that education up to the age of 13 should be in the local language. In the year 1915 Mr Rama Rayaningar (Raja of Panagal) moved a resolution in the imperial legislative council to introduce local language as medium of instruction. According to the Kothari Commission (1964) education must be through the local language for the overall development of the child and for improving the quality of education. Even the constitution of India favors mother tongue as medium of instruction through Article 350 (A).

What is English Medium?

An English medium education system is one that uses English as the primary medium of instruction. A medium of instruction is the language that is used in teaching. The language used may or may not be the official language of the territory. Most schools and institutions of education in modern-day mainly English-speaking countries such as the UK, United States, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand use English as the medium of instruction.

Because a working knowledge of English is perceived as being required in many fields, professions and occupations, many states throughout the world mandate the teaching of English, at least at the basic level, in an effort to increase the competitiveness of their economies.

International Scenario

Many developing countries in the world have been rethinking on their educational policies particularly on the medium of instruction. Some evidences on this are presented here.

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B. V. L. Narasimha Rao

English Medium Education - The Need of the Day

Hungary (Beacco and Byram 2003)

“Whether or not one believes that English is threatening Europe with linguistic homogeneity it remains the case that dominant social representations attribute very virtue to this language (for use, communication new technologies etc) and thus contribute to disseminating an ideology of monolingualism. English therefore not only plays a role of language of communication but also valued for itself as the language of a model of life or society.”

Indonesia

English plays an important role as medium of communication in the globalization era. Considering the importance of the language the Indonesian government issued the decree no 20/2003 about the establishment of f international standard schools in every level of education. It aims to create quality Indonesian human resources who are able to compete and collaborate globally so that Indonesia can compete with other countries

Srilanka

In a talk delivered in July 2004 by Rajiva Wijesinha, minister of education the government of Srilanka, strongly argues in favour of English medium instruction in the island country by suggesting that Parents have recognized the importance of English, and are of giving their children the wherewithal to compete with the urban child by providing English medium Education to their children.

Tanzania

Commenting on the Tanzania Governments’ decision to make English to be a medium of instruction in primary schools, Pmlay (2006) says that

“The proposed new education policy has highlighted the importance of using English language as a medium of instruction in primary schools in the country, ‘The Guardian’ has authoritatively learnt. The government notes in the report that the use of English had increased due to globalization, thus necessitating making it a medium of instruction in primary schools in future.”

Malaysia

The current nation building process in Malaysia: A critical look at the English as a Medium of instruction – MINE ISLAR (2007) reports that the Malaysian Government has taken a policy decision to introduce English Medium to teach Mathematics & Science at the Primary level in education, to strengthen national economic development.

Namibia

Mayari Cantoni (2007) in the classic study “What role does the language of instruction play for a successful education? A case study of the impact of language choice in a Namibian school,” reported the following:

Namibia is a country where the official language has been English since independence in 1990. There are different national languages in the country and a majority of the people does not have English as a mother tongue. Nevertheless, the language of instruction from fourth grade and onwards is indeed English. Consequently, for the majority of the population the education is in their second language. What this essay explores is the role English as a second language has as a medium of instruction and the implications it may have. It is a minor field study that was carried out with the help of a scholarship from SIDA (Swedish Agency for International Development Cooperation) and it took place in a school in Northern Namibia, April and May 2007. It is a qualitative study that explores the use of English among teachers and students as well as the transition from mother tongue instruction to English instruction and the implications that this can have for the quality of education. The reality of the Namibian students that have to study and perform in a second language is questioned and discussed from pedagogical and linguistic points of view. The results show that most pupils do not speak English before starting fourth grade. Furthermore, the sudden transition from mother tongue to English instruction creates some descent in the participation of the pupils and possibly in the learning, not only of the new language but also of the content subjects. As far as the teachers concern, there are positive but ambiguous opinions among them concerning English as a medium of instruction.

Sweden

‘English and Swedish in Sweden’ – Swedish Pupil attitudes towards the project of diglossia DAHLIN GAUSTAV (2007) reports that “the English language holds a powerful role worldwide and now is used in some domains in Sweden

Bangladesh

A J Prabash (2009) in the article posted on net “The importance of English in Bangladesh” suggests that the aloofness of Bangladesh from the contemporary world is due to its disregard for English Medium Education and strongly argues in favor of English Medium.

Korea

Conjoint analysis of enhanced English Medium instruction for college students: “Angela Kim” et al. (2009) reports that many universities in KOREA are adopting English Medium instruction.

The above review puts forward a case for English medium education in countries where the mother tongue is not English.

Present Need

Education systems worldwide have changed a great deal in recent years. The pressure for English has become so strong that we did not even think of choosing another language. Parents wanted English and most teachers who spoke a foreign language spoke English only. Every student wants to strengthen his/her English language skills to take competitive examination like TOEFL, GRE, GMAT etc.

Situation in India

In today’s India, without English a student cannot enter the grown up world of science and technology. Like it or not, college science, medicine and engineering are taught in English. We do not have enough reference books and literature in the regional languages to cater to the educational needs of the students. If advanced subjects are taught in the regional languages the students will be deprived of the facility of gathering knowledge and information from all over the world. Further with increasing use of Internet and digital libraries in educational programmes the students will be deprived of a vast treasure and source of information. Another factor in

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B. V. L. Narasimha Rao

English Medium Education - The Need of the Day

support of English medium is non-availability of sufficient number of teachers particularly in science and technology subjects to teach in regional language.

English is the language which rules over the present day World particularly the academic world. In India all schools and colleges provide an opportunity to study English as one of the compulsory or elective subject. It is one of the tools to establish our view point. We can propose, propagate, promulgate the new approaches, ideologies, facts, concepts, discoveries etc., and introduce them to the World, when we are well versed in this link language.

The growing middle class in India, the fast changing socio-economic climate, the forces of globalization and liberalization, the rise of private educational institutions not only in the secondary level but also at the university level all these created an environment for the government of Andhra Pradesh to think of introducing English as medium of instruction secondary schools. Further providing free compulsory education to everyone up to class X is the constitutional obligation of the government. The education that is provided must be in accordance with the aspirations of the people. The concentration of English medium institutions in private sector denies the access to the people below the poverty line to that education as many poor parents cannot meet the cost. This results in a kind of social injustice. A democratic country like India which believes in equality of opportunity cannot accept this situation. The only option left to any government is to provide English medium education opportunity also in schools managed by the government agencies like local bodies, and municipal corporations, social and tribal welfare departments etc.,

Accordingly, the Andhra Pradesh Government decided to start English medium instruction in schools under its management vide G O NO 76 dated 10-6-2008

Parents living in remote villages have a strong desire to see their wards acquire academic proficiency through English medium for their bright future. Working class parents, rural-urban migrants also perceive English medium education as a tool for their children to flourish in their career. Further the whole world looks towards English Language and countries like China has reoriented their medium of instruction in favour of English make one to think in favour of English medium Education even in India

In an article posted in the Internet, Rajesh Mohan (2009) argues that “Over the years, English language has become one of our principal assets in getting a global

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B. V. L. Narasimha Rao

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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.

Internal 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"

Startling Growth of English Medium Schools

According to government figures enrolment in English medium schools is at an all-time high, having increased a sharp 74% in just three years during 2003-2006.

The most dramatic increase is seen in southern states.

- A.P 100% increase (from 10.6 lakh to 20.9 lakh)
- Tamil Nadu 17%.
- Maharashtra 12%

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B. V. L. Narasimha Rao

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- Kerala 3%
- Punjab and Himachal Pradesh 4%

Science and Research

Today, USA and other countries have made tremendous progress in the field of science and technology. In space technology, we are no match to them. The world is making progress in these fields at a terrific speed. To increase and encourage more research work in Science and Technology, we have to study all these subjects in detail. And for this the importance of English cannot be denied. Our own regional languages do not have the depth and capacity to understand and co - relate all these technological developments and as such, cannot serve the purpose to keep pace with the fast growing world outside. Most of the best books on all such subjects are available in English language only. We cannot translate it all in our own regional languages, therefore, knowledge of English can only prove to be a blessing.

Controversy Relating to the Role of English in India

The role of English in India has been controversial right from the time of its introduction. During the British Rule, there were two groups, the Orientalists and the Anglicizes. The Orientalists were in the favour of use of classical languages of India such as Sanskrit and Arabic. The Anglicans supported English. The Anglican group included Charles Grant, Lord Moira and T.B. Macaulay. H.T. Prinsep was the spokesman for the Orientalists

Lord Macaulay's speech in the British Parliament discussed the issue of education in India. According to Macaulay the Indian dialects were not suitable for conveying literary or scientific information. In the Macaulay's Minute he has said that even those who supported the oriental plan of education admit that western literature is superior to Indian literature. "I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia."

Emergence of Hindi and the Associate Official Language Role of English

After Independence Hindi became the National language and English was given the position of Associate Official language. It was decided at that time that English should be used for a period of 15 years in which time Hindi should be developed to function fully as the official language.

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B. V. L. Narasimha Rao

English Medium Education - The Need of the Day

After 15 years with raging controversies between the Hindi-speaking Northern States and the Non-Hindi Southern States, the importance of English was felt more acutely for communication among the different States of India which were formed according to the prominent language of the people who lived there.

English has become an important second language of the multilingual population of India. As per the 1991 census there are 114 languages in India. The Indian Government has marked 18 languages as Scheduled Languages and 96 are non-specified in the schedule. All Government documents are sent in Hindi, English and the regional languages.

After 58 years of Independence English is still the Associate Official language. Even today English is considered superior by a large majority of educated Indians.

According to researches made in the 1980s about one-third of Indians study or studied in schools, which have English as medium of instruction. This number has gone up in the 1990s. For these people, English is in many senses their first language and it is easier for them to read, write and even communicate in English than in their own Indian languages. This makes India the second largest English speaking country in the world after USA.

"Based on present trends India will become the largest English-speaking nation in the world by 2010, crossing the United States, according to the English linguist, David Dalby, the author of Linguasphere Register of the World's Languages and Speech-Communities. Dalby predicts that India will then become "the centre of gravity of the English language". Thus, it would seem just as intrusive to want to remove English from India today as it was to introduce it during the time of Rammohun Roy and Macaulay." [Source: Gurucharan Das, Sunday Edition, CCS India]

The Initiative of the Government of Andhra Pradesh

Consequent to the decision of the A P Government several questions have crept in academic circles which need answers. Andhra Pradesh Government took a decision on implementing English Medium of instruction in 6500 Government-run schools in the State from the Academic Year 2008-09

The Government said that the move was aimed at shoring up standards in school education and to prepare the students studying in schools under the

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 14:5 May 2014

B. V. L. Narasimha Rao

English Medium Education - The Need of the Day

200

government management for national and global competition. Officials of education department were of the opinion that this was to ensure rural students to get on par with their counter parts studying in Private English Medium Schools.

The authorities have made arrangements to train the teachers who are currently teaching in Telugu Medium. The Government's move to introduce English as a medium of instruction was welcomed by the teaching community and students.

Also Andhra Pradesh Government took a decision and launched English Medium instruction in 250 Primary Schools of Hyderabad and Secunderabad in the year 2008-09. In the A P legislative assembly the then Chief Minister of the state Late Dr Y Rejasekhara Reddy stated that in the absence of English Medium in Government Primary Schools parents are forced to send their wards to Private Schools. As many parents particularly those belonging to the weaker sections and poorer communities could not afford the cost of primary education in private sector, the initiative of the government of A P was welcomed by many.

Parents' Favourable Attitude

A study has been conducted recently in our state by a researcher and it has been established that parents and teachers have a favorable attitude towards English medium education. Of course there are some apprehensions and reservations in the minds of the parents and teachers. The issue is to be discussed at various forums and platforms to arrive at an appropriate policy.

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