

LANGUAGE SKILLS AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

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Abstract :

This paper examines how language skills are imperative for economic prosperity in today's globalized world, especially when English has attained the status of a global language. A lot of researches have drawn a correlation in this aspect – English attracts better job prospects and wages. In this context, the role of educational institutions in imparting language skills through methods and techniques which befit real-life applications are vital.

Keywords: English, language skills, economic prosperity, role of education.

INTRODUCTION :

Language is the core of any communication. This certainly holds true for economic success as well. It opens the learner's world to a wide variety of opportunities especially considering the global economy that we are a part of. However, speaking any language is not as crucial as speaking English. Ricento quotes Phillipson who makes a clear note of how English has penetrated the various fields of economics (Ricento, 2012)

English is integral to the globalization processes that characterize the contemporary post-cold-war phase of aggressive casino capitalism, economic restructuring, McDonaldisation and militarization on all continents...

Examining why has English become the global language leads one to explore history. It all begins with the colonial period when England was the dominant colonial power and consequently its language was more accepted. Then, as the U.S.A emerged a superpower after the World War II, English continued its reign. Political and military power that the two nations wielded / wield has led to English conquering the other languages (<http://iml.jou.ufl.edu/projects/students/Wheaton/page1.htm>). This certainly initiated the spread of English. Then, the language proved itself flexible and adaptable. Further, all technological and scientific discoveries today are documented in English. The language, culminates then, as being a prerequisite to most international opportunities. Indispensable it is, to survive in the competitive world.

Hence, to prosper economically, it is inevitable to use English effectually. However, what works against English is that it has distinct markers to express future and those who converse in this language have a high tendency to separate the future from the present and hence, save less for the future. Languages which connect the present and the future, that is, they equate the two or do not grammatically distinguish between the two, exhibit a 'future-oriented' behavior which implies that they 'save more, retire with more wealth[...]' (<http://www.anderson.ucla.edu/faculty/keith.chen/papers/LanguageWorkingPaper.pdf>) However, this discussion is out of the scope of this paper.

RESEARCHES ABOUT THE ROLE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN ECONOMICS:

According to McCormick's research (McCormick, 2013) -

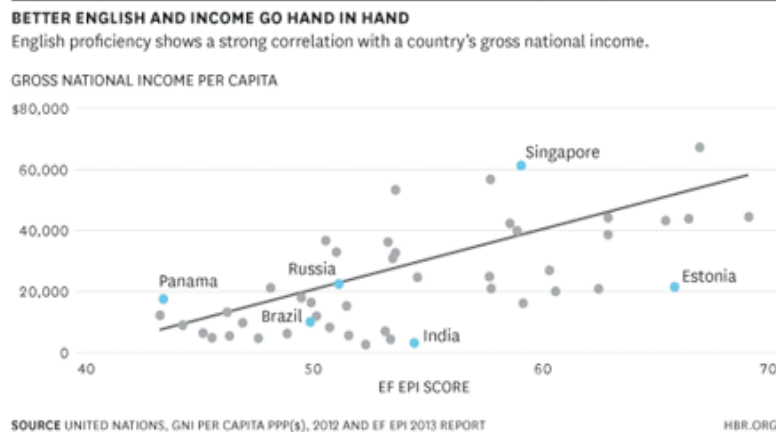


Figure 1. Correlation between income and better English. EF EPI Score is EF English Proficiency Index. (McCormick, 2013)

It could be inferred from the graph that the English speaking population of India is low and so is the gross national income per capita, which shows the increasing importance of speaking English. Further, the researcher also shows how the language has an impact on the quality of life in a country. This research confirms how candidates who have an exceptional command over the language fall into a higher salary bracket than those who do not. It, like the Guardian, highlights how governments tend to finance language training which could then lead to a higher standard of living. McCormick raises questions that could imply that nations incline to English-speaking nations to outsource businesses, that if a nation does not speak quality English, it could obstruct its growth. On an individual level, speaking English increases job opportunities not only on a national level but internationally as well. They would prefer countries that speak English rather than looking at those where would have to learn the native language.

Mehtabul Azam et al in their extensive research publish their findings as follows (Azam, 2011):

On average, wages are 34% higher for men who speak fluent English and 13% higher for men who speak a little English relative to men who speak no English.

They consider the impact of education, secondary schooling and college level on learning English language. As the other researches, this one endorses the conclusion that English language skills fetch better job opportunities. Thus, it is plain that acquiring a good knowledge of English pays. The question then, is where does one start? What are the language skills that one needs to acquire?

COMMUNICATION: IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE SKILLS

For any individual to work successfully, one has to communicate in ‘purposeful, supportive and flexible manner’ (Dwyer, pp.4 2012). In which case, there are four major language skills that an individual needs to focus: listening, speaking, reading and writing. All of these play a crucial role in conveying one’s message effectively and efficiently especially in today’s world where there are diverse ways of communication. This indeed is significant to any economic transaction. Apart from these basic skills, it is also essential to identify the context in which the communication takes place so that the intended outcome is achieved. Every form of communication, whether intrapersonal, interpersonal, public or mass communication follows in figure 2:

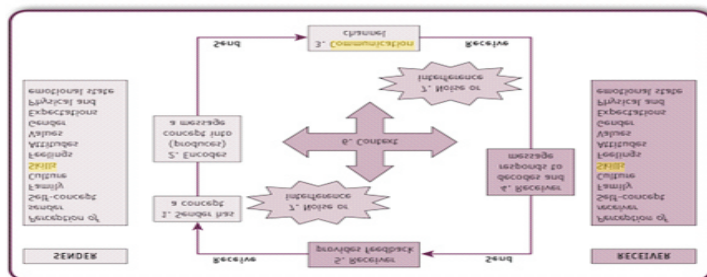


Figure 2. The transmission model (Dwyer, 2002)

It delineates vividly the perceptions of the sender as well as the receiver, the process of transmission of messages. It takes into account external factors as well. This holds true for offline as well as online exchanges. The varied forms of communication today include social media, emails, SMS, one-on-one communication etc. With technological advances, the range is diverse compared to what it was earlier. Further, with globalization, that one ought to communicate across geographical, cultural and linguistic boundaries makes acquisition of appropriate and the right amount of language skills imperative. For example, the advertisement in figure 3 conveys a meaning which does not seem to be what the sender intended. With an apostrophe in the incorrect place, it implies that some person named Alway is always available.



Figure 3 (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/64086520@N00/2507348834/>)

LANGUAGE IN CLASSROOMS:

English appropriately deserves a lot more attention in the educational institutions that it currently is given. Consequently, English teaching needs to undergo a change, the quality of the language must be emphasized. Practically speaking, this language development process that is so fundamental occurs in closed rooms. However it should also be noted that language teaching has evolved from grammar-translation teaching methods to task-based contextual approaches and methods. With every step it has become more skill-oriented. The focus on language skills mainly began with the audio-lingual method. Today, no educator adopts only one kind of strategy in class. Learning is learner-centered in such a way that they are trained for real-life. Interactions in class based on situations from real-life are the crux of most language teaching techniques.

The current communicative approaches include communicative language teaching, cooperative language teaching, content-based instruction, task-based language teaching. Communicative language teaching focuses activities that call for communication among learners, activities where they indulge in meaningful tasks that encourage learning, learning a language that would be used in the real world. Cooperative language teaching accentuates social interaction during the learning process. It aims at developing critical thinking as learners 'ask and respond to a deeper array of alternative question types'. (Rodgers, 2001) This concentrates on grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary which are integral to the four language skills.

Content-based Instruction looks at using authentic material in class, that is, it uses letters, advertisements and transcripts of meetings, lectures etc. Using this kind of material which learners would encounter outside the four walls helps make better connections. It exploits the fact that 'Language contains great potential for communicating meaning'. (208) This approach looks at language as a mode of gaining information and looks at exploiting the prior knowledge of learners about the theme.

Task-based language teaching concentrates on the process of how learners use language during the tasks assigned. The tasks are often related to real-life situations. The complexity of the task takes in to consideration the prior knowledge and learning of the learner.

In classroom at an advanced level, we could put elements of the above discussed approaches into practice using the following activity: divide the class into four groups, one is the owner of a company, one is the advertisers, one is the customers, one is a legal body. The objective of the activity is the owners have manufactured a unique product which they promote. The learners present how they deal with the advertisers, the customers and the legal body for patent-related concerns. They would then understand how a company management operates. Learners would have to understand how it works in real-life. The groups

could create a role-play and then as a reflection activity, could look various possibilities other than what they have considered. At every juncture, the use of persuasive elements of language plays a role in economic success.

Before these activities are conducted, showing videos and advertisements or making learners read situations based on the task would enhance the outcome. Also, such activities in class would render the learners more confident about facing situations outside. For these activities, however, it is important to identify learners' existing learning level. Adequate feedback that captures all aspects of the learning objective will help learners understand their strengths and weaknesses.

CONCLUSION:

With English being spoken world-wide, people do not have a choice but to learn the language for a better future. Governments are investing in the same to better the economy of the nation as well. Given this circumstance, teaching-learning approaches in educational institutions must cater to these requirements. Developing the skills of the learners is as important as giving them an appropriate context to learn where they enrich social skills and learn about cultural contexts as well.

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