

Importance Of Languages

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Abstract:

Language is purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols. These symbols are auditory and produced by organs of speech. We use language in order to communicate our thoughts and feelings. Persons who use languages well are skilled equally in four aspects of language skills. In the most general way we can identify four major skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing. Speaking and writing involve some kind of production on the part of language user. Therefore they are called 'productive skills' or 'skills of expression'. Listening and reading allow the language user to receive information which may be in spoken or written form. These are called 'receptive skills' or 'skills of comprehension'.

Language as communication process :

Language may be said to be any means of expressing mental concept by any living being and of communicating them to and receiving them from any other living being. Language is a communication process, which functions through an encoder and decoder. The person has a message in his mind; he first puts it in either spoken or written form. This message is then available outside his mind as text. The text is now accessible to the mind of another who hears or reads it- who decodes the message it contains. Once it is decoded, the message enters the mind of the decoder. Next, decoder plays the role of an encoder who gives feedback through spoken, written form or through gesture. Now encoder plays the role of a decoder by receiving the message, only then the whole communications process is completed.

Multilingual world :

Over the past few decades, significant economic and political changes have taken place around the world. These changes also have put a significant mark on language teaching and learning practices across the globe. There is a clear movement towards multilingual practices in the world, which is also evident in the title of UNESCO 2003 education position paper, "*Education in a multilingual world.*" Given the long-standing history of multilingual contexts of the Himalayan region and the emergence of the two major global economic power centers of 21st century, China and India, language policies and practices of the region have become a great matter of interests for linguists and policy makers around the world. This paper is to investigate how globalization influences language education policies and practices in multilingual countries. The case studies that we have drawn from the four nations of South East Asia - Afghanistan, China, India, and Nepal offer insights for other multilingual nations of the world, as they portray the influences of globalization on language policies and practices of multilingual countries. This paper suggests more research on comparative studies of multilingual education across multilingual nations in the world.

In the past three decades, significant economic and political changes have occurred all across the globe. Consequently, cross-cultural contact is at an all time high in human history, as physical and geographical boundaries are shrinking day-by-day. These changes have also affected language education policies and practices, as multilingualism has become a common phenomenon all across the globe. To date, around 200 countries in the world recognize two or more official languages (e.g., Canada, India, Luxembourg, Nigeria, Singapore, Hong Kong SAR of China, Malaysia, and South Africa). However, a small number of languages including Arabic, Bengali, English, French, Hindi, Malay, Mandarin, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish are also used as lingua-franca or languages of wider communication across the globe. These languages are also often spoken as second, third, fourth, or later-acquired languages. The recent trend of "globalization" gained popularity in the 1980s when the first and the last

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president of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, introduced his open door policy in terms of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. As he once said, "The market is not an invention of capitalism. It has existed for centuries. It is an invention of civilization." However, the notion of globalization is not new since it has been rugged in many different ways throughout the centuries in terms of slavery, colonization, missionary activities, and alliances, such as NATO, WARSAW PACT, Non Align Movement (NAM), League of Nations, United Nations Organization, and Common Wealth are few to name.

With the advent of globalization, English language continues to grow as a second or third language in many parts of the world. Mohd-Asraf (2005) states that, "[a]s an international and a world language, its influence spans the entire globe, and there is hardly any country today that does not use English in one way or another or that is not affected by its spread" (p. 103). The increasing use of English as a second or third language is making changes in language education in the countries with linguistic minorities and indigenous communities.

According to De Swaan (2001), who presents the organization of languages and their relationships in a global context, "[i]t is multilingualism that has kept humanity, separated by so many languages, together...It is this ingenious pattern of connections between language groups that constitutes the global language system" (p. 1). He adds that at the bottom of this system are the world's many small languages that he called peripheral languages. Peripheral languages constitute 98% of the world's languages and are used by under 10% of the population of the world. Often these languages have no written script, and are passed on orally and rely on people remembering them rather than recording them. At the next level, connecting peripheral languages, are central languages (e.g., Chinese, Hindi, and Russian). There are about 100 central languages in the world and they are acquired as second languages by speakers of peripheral languages. Central languages are often national or official languages and are used in politics, courts, education systems, television, textbooks and newspapers. Multilingualism is not only requisite for ecological sustainability, but it is also as an individual and collective asset.

Much has been written on the influence of globalization on culture, politics and the economy, but its impact on language education policies and practices has hardly been presented. Here are some examples from South-East-Asia in terms of language policies and planning, with reference to bilingualism/multilingualism in the changed contexts of a globalized world. There is a clear movement towards multilingual practices in the world within the last two or three decades. Given the long-standing history of multi-ethnic and linguistic diversity of South-East-Asia, where India and China, the two emerging power centers, are geographically located, this paper offer cases in which language policies and planning of multi-ethnic and diverse linguistic contexts are discussed.

The Notion of Language Policy and Planning

The notion of language policy and planning emerged in the early 19th century along with the concept of a nation-state, "when one language one nation ideology" was prominent. Many sociolinguists and researchers argue that it is the joint venture of nation-states and linguists that created or labeled languages such as mother-tongue, national, official, native, non-native and many more different categories so that they (nation-states) were able to control and manipulate linguistic behavior of their citizens.

It was mainly after World War II that many new independent nation states emerged, with increasingly bilingual and multilingual policies, but most of them tried to maintain *status-quo*s by adopting the former colonial languages, mostly in Asia and Africa. Most of these newly independent states followed the same old path of their former colonies by adopting the colonizer's educational policies in general and language polices in particular. Some of the examples from Asia could be Cambodia and Vietnam, where French remained as an official language, and also India, where English was kept as an official language along with Hindi. Similarly, in Africa, many new nation-states kept French as their official language, such as Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, Mali, Niger and Rwanda.

The Concept of Multilingual Education

In regard to multilingualism and multiculturalism, globalization has become the most significant and widely used term over the past few decades, implying contradictory forces of global homogenization and local hybridity; and global domination and local resistance. In other words, the world has seen many changes in the field of education in the light of information technology and globalization over the past three decades. As a result, the focus of language education has shifted from monolinguals to bilingualism and multilingualism. There are many more bilinguals or multilingual than monolinguals in the world now.

Nevertheless, there still remains an incorrect belief that when an additional language is introduced into a curriculum, the child must go back and completely relearn the academic concepts. Contrary to empirical evidence, many policy makers still have characterized bilingual education as a high risk undertaking in that it is necessary to attend to a complex set of interacting educational, sociolinguistic, economic, and political factors . Consequently, a majority of children face a language gap between schools and homes that must be bridged (UNESCO, 2003). In this regard,

Phillipson (2001) contends that in order to fully take advantage of globalization, each country should learn English as an additional language after the mother tongue, and not to the extent that it endangers one's native language. Discouraging children from developing their mother-tongues is a violation of child rights.

Education In Mother Tongue:

In 1953, UNESCO brought its declaration on the use of vernacular languages in education, given the above stated scenarios. The UNESCO declaration was based on worldwide surveys of classroom instructions where researchers found that in most cases media of instructions were dominant languages of the nation-states or former colonial languages were used and minority and indigenous languages were discarded as mere dialects or local vernaculars. By emphasizing the importance of mother-tongue, it was stated:

Mother-tongue instruction should be the best way for children to learn as it bridges the gap between home language and language of instruction. Every language is sufficient enough to give high cognitive skills to its users and there are no major or minor languages. Therefore, mother-tongue instruction should be extended as long as possible. A Lingua Franca or a language of wider communication cannot be a substitute for the mother-tongue, and it should be avoided until the child fully acquired their mother-tongue (UNESCO).

Conclusion:

Globalization brought about more awareness of the values of indigenous cultures and mother tongues. Meanwhile, it also has brought about the challenges such as the place of English. It is essential for educators and policy-makers in each nation to reshape the evolution of national language policies in such a way that the rights of all citizens to education in their own mother-tongues should be respected, and the social, cultural, and linguistic resources of multi-ethnic and diverse societies can be sustained and preserved. The cases also call for the UNESCO or other international organizations to further investigate the patterns of language education in many other countries and develop programs that help them to tap their rich linguistic and cultural heritages for betterment societies and nations in the global era.

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