

IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH IN KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

Knowledge is totality of ideas, conserved through human civilization. It is vital for the growth and development of any society. The secret of the phenomenal success of western countries lies in the appropriate acquisition and utilization of knowledge. Knowledge society that is powerful and strong obtain its power when knowledge creation and generation is given due place in the developmental process of the society. The grass root level people must be made able to access the valuable knowledge and English is the most important tool to explore the existing knowledge as qualitative and quantitative knowledge available only in this language.

Key words: Knowledge, English NKC, Society.

Introduction

Society has always been recognized by its people and their occupations. In nomadic society people used to roam from one place to another in search of food for themselves as well as for their cattle. In Agrarian Society agriculture was the main profession of the masses similarly in industrial society industries and their products became the main occupation of the masses of people. In the post-industrial society or information society information is considered as power and the most important and essential commodity. Information Society in which most of the people involved directly or indirectly in creation, dissemination or utilization of information. The fast development of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has brought deep changes in way of working and living.

Knowledge Society

The contemporary society may be described as a knowledge society because of the penetration of scientific knowledge in all spheres of life. The term 'Knowledge society' was first used by Peter Druker in 1969 and the UNESCO document defines the knowledge societies," A knowledge society should be able to integrate all its members and to promote new forms of solidarity involving both present and future generations. No body should be excluded from knowledge society to each and every individual."

It is a society where knowledge is the primary production resource instead of capital and labor.

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Efficient utilization of this existing knowledge can create comprehensive wealth for the nation. Such a knowledge society has two very important components driven by societal transformation and wealth generation. The societal transformation has to be through large-scale development in education, healthcare, agriculture and governance. This new society presents great opportunities: it can mean new employment possibilities, more fulfilling jobs, new tools for education and training, easier access to public services, increased inclusion of disadvantaged people or regions. These in turn will lead to employment generation, high productivity and rural prosperity.

Language is one of the most potent vehicles for spreading knowledge in the society across the barriers of literacy. It has been well said, "Knowledge incubates in the Human Mind and when communicated and applied innovatively, becomes a factor of growth and development". Development of modern communication technologies and information revolution brought sea change in the contemporary society. Knowledge is of two types, Explicit and Tacit. Explicit that is in written form, or presented by some artifact such as a document or video that has typically been created with the goal of communicating with another person. This type of knowledge is very easy to access if the language is known in which that is written. Tacit knowledge resides in the mind of the person, which is derived from experience and embodies beliefs and value. This type of knowledge is very difficult to access unless it is shared. As a matter of fact Language is key to available resources. Plenty of knowledge available in English language all over the world that shaping the world by its own way.

Characteristics of Knowledge Society

Knowledge societies have the characteristic that knowledge forms major component of any human activity. Economic, social, cultural, and all other human activities become dependent on a huge volume of knowledge and information. A knowledge society is one in which knowledge becomes major creative force.

The knowledge Commission, however, makes one thing clear that knowledge societies are not new or of recent origin. Only their definition has not remained constant. Historically, all societies have knowledge society but their model was different. In essence all those societies were class-based with little or no communication of intellectual achievements with masses. For example, fishermen have long shared the knowledge of predicting the weather to their community and this knowledge gets added to the social capital of the community.

Recommendations of Knowledge Commission regarding English

The National policy on education –1968, which was based on the recommendation of education commission (1964-66) made the following proposal stressing the importance of regional languages as media of instruction at various stages of education: "The energetic development of Indian languages and literature is the sine qua non for educational and cultural development. Unless this is done, the creative energies of the people will not be released, standard of education will not improve, knowledge will not spread to the people, and the gulf between the intelligentsia and the masses will remain, if not widen further. The regional languages are already in use as media of education at the primary and

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secondary stages. Urgent steps should now be taken to adopt them as media of education at the university stage.”

As evident from above statement, the NPE-1968 pleaded for accepting Indian languages as media of Instruction and argued that it would improve standards of education, help take education to the masses, and thereby reduce the socio-economic disparities. Following this proposal of NPE-1968, several states, especially in the northern part of the country started to conduct teaching work in the universities and colleges in the regional languages. Several states where Hindi was the spoken language of the masses adopted Hindi as a medium of education in the universities and colleges at undergraduate stage, and in some disciplines in arts and social sciences, at postgraduate stage also. The central government also approved and encouraged this move of these states. But, by the end of the century, it was found that youth coming from these states lagged far behind in their achievements in term of their share in the selection lists of prestigious competitive examinations. It will not be out of place to say that student from these states suffered due to wrong policies of the government. Had they not accepted regional languages as media of education, their student would not have suffered. The policies of the government during the entire period since independence have, directly or indirectly, discouraged the study of English as a subject or its use as a medium of instruction. But now suddenly, when millions of young men and women from poor and disadvantages homes have suffered due to wrong policies, the importance of English is being realized. Emphasizing the significance of language as a tool for developing a knowledge society the NKC has stated: “An understanding of and command over English Language is the most important determinant of access to higher education, employment possibilities and social opportunities. School leavers who are not adequately trained in English as a language are always at a handicap in the world of higher education. The NKC recommends that teaching of English should be introduced along with the first language, Starting from Class I in school... Language learning cannot be separated from and must be integrated with content learning. Therefore, English should also be used to teach some non-language, content subjects, starting from class III in school.”

The above facts that according to NKC are true now, were also true 50 years ago, but that time, mother tongue and regional languages were accorded high position in the school and colleges curricula. The fact is that the quality education has always been a privilege of the upper class. That is why the private English medium quality institutions were accessible only to those who had strong grip on both economy and polity, while the government-run Hindi medium poor-quality schools were available to poor masses. However the NKC suggested the teaching of English from class I. It is good move because ‘better late than never’.

Importance of English

English has special national status in India. It has a special place in the parliament, judiciary, broadcasting, journalism, and in the education system. One can find surrounded by English everywhere. One can see a Hindi-speaking teacher giving the students instructions during educational tour about where to meet and when their bus would leave, but all in

English. It means that the language permeates daily life. It is unavoidable and is always expected, especially in the cities. English and other foreign languages are not just subjects to be studied in school. There are indications that foreign languages are instrumentally involved in many areas of academic research. Medical researchers who want to get responses to their work find it more effective to publish in English. Scholars in fields, such as the social sciences and humanities do not utilize foreign languages in publishing their work to the same extent as those in scientific and technological fields and, as a result, find themselves linguistically isolated from their foreign colleagues. The importance of the ability to speak or write English has recently increased significantly because English has become the *de facto* standard. Learning English language has become popular for business, commerce and cultural reasons and especially for Internet communications throughout the world. English is a language that has become a standard not because it has been approved by any 'standards' organization but because it is widely used by many information and technology industries and recognized as being standard. The call centre phenomenon has stimulated a huge expansion of internet-related activity making the future of India as a cyber-technological super-power. Modern communications, videos, journals and newspapers on the Internet use English and have made 'knowing English' indispensable. The prevailing view seems to be that unless the students learn English, they can only work in limited jobs. Those who do not have basic knowledge of English cannot obtain good quality jobs. They cannot communicate efficiently with others, and cannot have the benefit of India's rich social and cultural life. Men and women, who cannot comprehend and interpret instructions in English, even if educated, are unemployable. They cannot make-up their children's school home-works everyday and decide their revenue options of the future. Students' refusal to take responsibility for learning English does not affect only their own welfare but their family members, the dependents and others too. The highest costs of the unreceptive attitude to the learning of English fall on those who do not learn English. It imposes high costs in unemployment benefits. The lack of effort in learning English and the general feeling of not being interested in learning the English language is a plague to the system. This abuse is what the English teachers should fight against. Those who recognize that learning English is their responsibility have plenty of opportunities to do so. Radio and television are good teachers. So are magazines. Students in their young age can pick up English quickly. They are the best fast learners, provided the preference to speak English at schools, colleges, universities, and what's more at home is made compulsory. Speaking one language enhances the ability of groups of all backgrounds to communicate with one another. With a world that is becoming more connected, speaking a language that is used by the world will help all Indians. English is a language, which could broadly provide the fundamental elements, the important qualities and features of life. The purpose to promote to use English is to enhance competitiveness.

There would appear to be virtually no disagreement in the community about the importance of English language skills. Using English thereby one will almost be the worldwide citizen naturally. English plays a dominant role in the media. It has been used as a medium for inter-state communication and broadcasting both before and since India's independence. India is, without a doubt, committed to English as a national language. The impact of English is not only continuing but also increasing.

Conclusion

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The importance of English cannot be denied at any stage of knowledge society because books, journals, and other reading and audio-visual knowledge resources are available in English. Without English one cannot have access to premier educational Institutions or to the world of work in both professions and other white-collar jobs.

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