

Learning the English Language within Multilingual Context

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ABSTRACT: *The article explores the benefits of learning and knowing English in a multilingual context. Nowadays, knowing more than one language is a requirement for many people worldwide in order to compete with other professionals within the business environment. In today's world, English, as a chief language of international business, is spoken as a second or third language in many countries around the world. In many multilingual countries, English is considered one of the main languages, which ease the process of communication and interaction among different individuals, people, and societies. So that English can be considered as a core factor in the creation and development of multilingualism within society. Research evidence suggests that having more than one language generates varied kinds of networks in the brain, which gives multilingual individuals advantages and benefits in some respects compared to other monolingual individuals. Thus, knowing the English language plays an important role not only in developing communication skills but also in achieving success in career life.*

Keywords: *English language, multilingualism, teaching English, education, Azerbaijan.*

I. Introduction

In today's contemporary world, there is an overt fact that English is well considered as the universal language in many parts of the world. Currently, up to 1.8 billion people in the world speak English so that this language encompasses varied kind of fields, including business, trade, economy, education, medicine, engineering, politics, and other related spheres. The English language is also the language of diplomacy. It has to be mentioned that it is one of the official languages of the United Nations along with the European Union and other regional international organizations. Therefore, today's English mainly is the language of education. As education get an international character, (internationalization process) the use of the English language is deeply widening.

In many multilingual countries, English is considered one of the main languages, which ease the process of communication and interaction among different individuals, people, and societies. (*See Appendixes 1 and 2 below*). One of the core reasons why English is so dominating is that it is closely linked to the deep influence of the British Empire, enclosed a quarter of the globe at its largest, including North America, the Caribbean, Australia, New Zealand, much of West and Southern Africa, South Asia, and parts of South-East Asia. The British Empire set up English-speaking systems of government, industry, and exploitation in these areas, which established English as the language of global power in the industrial era. So that the spread of English across the continents and colonies was the result of its "soft power" policy (influence and enlightenment of the English language) that emerged right after the

imposing of its “hard power” policy. Even today, which is why the popular saying “the sun never set on the British Empire”. The British Empire may not exist today, but the dominance of the English language says well its word throughout the world. ^[1]

The prevalence of English-language films, TV shows, and even music makes it readily accessible and easy to practice. Undoubtedly, today not only in multilingual countries but also simply in other countries have limited job opportunities for those who do not speak English. The English language proficiency as an asset is actively enrolled in a competitive work environment in many nation-states. For example, if you do not speak English and in turn, your opponent has a good command of spoken English so that your chance of getting a job will get down. Today, parents send their children to different summer language courses or summer schools in English-speaking countries such as UK, USA, Canada etc. to acquire stronger English language skills, which will play an important role in their future career life. ^[2]

Nowadays, English is the focal language of MBA courses, Business administration, the world economy, and trade in the education system of many universities. So that in order to study at the bachelor’s or master’s level, foreign universities as shown at the application requirements ask an official English language proficiency document (*an official language certificate such as IELTS, TOEFL, Cambridge ESOL examination etc. testifying that you have a good command of English to study abroad*) confirming English language knowledge from students/candidates. On the other hand, universities offer pre-bachelor, pre-master or foundation courses for those who do not have enough English language proficiency. ^[3]

At the same time, the English language is more commonly defined as the main language of different Mobility programmes namely “ERASMUS+”, “Mevlana” and other bilateral exchange programmes. Anyone with sufficient English language skills is able to participate in those mobility programmes which provide a big opportunity for students to continue their 1 or 2 semesters at the host university. During the course of the mobility programme, the English language will allow students to get well acquainted with different cultures, traditions, and communicate with different people within an international environment. In this regard, knowing English is of vital importance in terms of studying abroad, communicating with different people etc. There is a quite popular statement: “New language means a new person”. Thus, it is significant to learn a new language, like English, in terms of having new people, different cultures and traditions, and new job opportunities.

II. Nature of English language proficiency in multilingual countries

In the contemporary world, multilingualism exists in many countries of the world. One of the best examples of multilingual countries are the post-Soviet countries. Upon the demise of the Soviet regime in these countries, except their own national or mother tongue, the Russian language has always been dominant one in post-Soviet countries including the Baltic, Central Asian, and South Caucasus countries. Since they proclaimed their independence after the toppling down of the Soviet Union until today, there has been Russian-language division in schools and universities in those countries. Because of economic and social integration processes, most people know more or less two or three in these countries. Therefore, in post-Soviet countries, except their own local language, English and Russian are mostly used

languages in different spheres such as economics, politics, education, and others. Nowadays, English in this multilingual context occupies a unique space. It is not a foreign language but a second language and also the associate official language. Is it the ostensible fact that the majority of Azerbaijani people know Russian; so that it is not difficult for them to learn and gradually develop English. Learning of multiple additional languages gives the rise to both individual and societal multilingualism within society. ^[4]

Within the last decade, English was regarded as a foreign language, but today, in the twenty-first century, it has become the language of economic and social mobility in post-Soviet space. According to the standpoint of Mohanty (1994), bilingual persons or communities need to be accepted as those who can efficiently encounter the communicative demands of the self and the society in their normal functioning and in their interaction with speakers of any or all of these languages. In the modern period, most courses are taught in English in many countries. English is the language of business, politics, and economy as mentioned earlier. Getting access to any type of information databases English is available. For example, if we look up information on intercultural relations in Russian, we would find 300 sources in Russian, however, in English, we would get access to more or less million sources on that topic. Due to improved social mobility and closely linked economies, many countries currently have fundamental multilingual populaces in their workforces and in educational systems. Students who study English as a Foreign Language (EFL) often already speak two or more languages. ^[5]

Nowadays, knowing more than one language is a requirement for many people worldwide in order to compete with other professionals within the business environment. Research evidence suggests that having more than one language generates varied kinds of networks in the brain, which gives multilingual individuals advantages and benefits in some respects compared to other monolingual individuals. Lambert in his article points out that speaking more than one language enhances cognitive flexibility in order to deal with problem-solving and acclimatize to new ideas and thoughts. In order to improve the social economic development and engenders innovative ideas and thoughts in the education system, linguistic awareness activities should have to be undertaken by the government in the primary, middle, and high school and universities. Those kinds of activities will pave the way to increase people's linguistic, cultural and sociolinguistic knowledge. Therefore, knowing the English language plays an important role not only in developing communication skills but also in achieving success in career life. ^[6]

III. English language use in multilingual Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan has always been characterized as a multi-lingual country in South Caucasus. After the collapse of the Soviet regime, the Russian language was defined as the dominant language in many local sectors. However, over the past five years, the English language has now become a key communication language in different sectors due to the integration process of Azerbaijan towards European values and standards. At the same time, today Azerbaijani people are able to speak two or more languages. This, of course, is regarded because of social-economic development of Azerbaijani society. The organization of many international

projects, seminars, and programs in Azerbaijan emphasizes the importance of English as a communicative language. ^[6] As we know, the use of foreign labor in the oil and non-oil sectors and the transparent organization of labor migration put the necessity of English language onto the center stage. In today's competitive environment, flexible English speaking and writing skills are preferred in Azerbaijan. Therefore, Azerbaijani people are far more thrilled to take some English proficiency tests such as IELTS, TOEFL, and others to get high-paid jobs or study abroad with full scholarships.

IV. Language-in-education policy and practices in Twenty-First Century Azerbaijan

In the new Azerbaijani higher education space, universities are encouraged by the government to promote and develop multilingualism among students and teaching staff. It is undeniable fact that even today, English reigns supreme and has become the main foreign language used as means of tutoring in Azerbaijani universities. In this regards, internationalization has played a key role in this process, becoming one of the focal chauffeurs of the linguistic supremacy exerted by English. ^[7]

According to the higher education system of Azerbaijan, students are able to opt for the courses whether Azerbaijani, English or Russian depending on their own choice. During the course of their academic years, they could get a big opportunity to participate in different mobility programmes in order to pursue their studies 1 to 2 semesters at host universities. For example, those kinds of opportunities are far more flexible and successful at ADA University, Baku State University, Azerbaijan State University of Economics (UNEC), Khazar University, Western Caspian University etc. For example, UNEC is the only Azerbaijani university which offers higher education (both in undergraduate and graduate levels) in four languages: Azerbaijani, Turkish, English, and Russian. ^[8] The International School of Economics (ISE) at UNEC where all studies are held in English only and the Quality Assurance and Management Center are expected to contribute to making UNEC able to compete with advanced foreign universities. The establishment of ISE was a part of the University's strategy to intensify internationalization and to improve educating standards in line with Western universities.

So that internationalization can be considered as a focal strategy in terms of interaction and integration among people, societies, and institutions of different countries and regions. In this regard, Azerbaijan universities undertake the principle of internationalization of education as a key priority in its agenda refers to a comprehensive institutional transformation process which aims to integrate international and intercultural dimension in its mission and the substantive functions of higher education institutions.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, as the most spoken language in the world, English embraces a huge part in communication among individuals, people, and societies. International business goes well because of English. It helps people when they are using technology products although growth of technology increasing continuously. English also helps the student to comprehend the subject that written in English properly. Besides that, it makes the people keep in touch

although they have different language and come from different country. That's why everyone needs to learn the English language in order to get in touch on an international level. English is also crucial to the field of education. At the university level, students in many countries study almost all their subjects in English in order to make the material more accessible to international students. Most universities are encouraged by their government to promote and advance multilingualism among students and teaching staff. It is undeniable fact that even today, English reigns supreme and has become the main foreign language used as means of teaching in universities. Finally, it has to be mentioned that English cannot be disconnected from human life.

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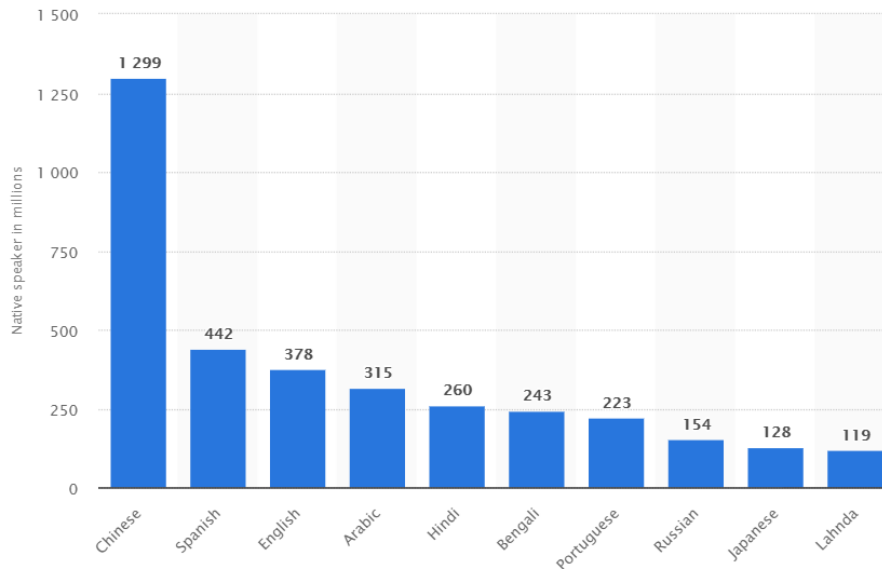
APPENDIXES

Appendix 1. Illustrates the world’s top 10 multilingual countries based on Ethnologue’s 2016 rankings.



Source: Ethnologue 2016. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/11/worlds-most-multilingual-countries/>

Appendix 2. shows the most spoken languages worldwide (native speakers in millions).



Source: Statista, The Statistics Portal, Statistics and Studies from more than 22,500 Sources Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/266808/the-most-spoken-languages-worldwide/>