



Significance of Language in Sustainable Development

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Abstract: We often say that Language is an ever-changing and lively entity which progress as the society progresses but vice versa of this is equally true. Societies grow when we communicate. And language certainly plays a significant role in communication in any society. The foundation of any society is communication and it has undoubtedly given wings to dreams of human development. It won't be an exaggeration to say that language plays a very significant role in the growth of a society on all fronts-be it economic, social or individual. But it is heartening to see that when we talk about sustainable development, rarely do we find a mention of role of language skills. We talk about the developments in economic, scientific, technical or cultural fronts but fail to give credit to language skills that play a significant role in achieving all these developments. Today, we are living in a global community. Language skills are inherent elements to any such progress which is based upon the mutual collaboration of societies, cultures and people across the globe. This paper attempts to bring to fore the important place that language skills have in a comprehensive progress. It also highlights the inattention given to role of language skills in the discussions and debates on sustainable development.

Key words: *language skills, sustainable, culture, society, growth, multiethnic*

Introduction: The ability to communicate through words is undoubtedly the foundation of the civilized societies the world has today. The capability to communicate using different languages is certainly one of the most important developments of civilized man. Communication has no doubt given wheels to development. Language is ever-evolving; it evolves as the society evolves; and society evolves when we share our ideas; and language is the means to share our ideas. So, we can say with certainty that language is vital in the growth of any society on all fronts - be it economic, social, cultural or individual growth. But it is heartening to see that when we talk about sustainable development, rarely do we find a mention of the role of language skills. We talk about the developments in economic, scientific, technical or cultural fronts but fail to give credit to language skills that play a significant role in achieving all these developments. The present times are the times of a global community and language skills are inherent elements to any such progress which is based upon the mutual collaboration of societies, cultures and peoples across the globe. In most of the discussions, seminars, conferences etc. on sustainable development, the emphasis is on science, technology and economic aspects having a bearing upon the social and environmental facets. The significant role language skills can play in comprehensive progress which brings better social, economic, employment prospects for people, is relegated to a periphery.

Today, the world is not bothered by the lack of development but more by how to make sustainable development- a development which takes into account the welfare of all comprising entities of society and world as a whole. These entities should pertain to both sides of the coin-the social and individual, economic and cultural, materialistic and spiritual, nature and human- it should be all encompassing. The moment we talk about the social, cultural or individual perspectives, language and communication automatically become a crucial part of it. It becomes pertinent that language which is a reflection of the social and cultural aspects of a society be made a part of any discussion on sustainable development. This is especially true in today's world where growth of a nation or society cannot happen in isolation. It has to happen in collaboration with other nations or societies.

Language and Education: The need to incorporate language as a central constituent in development has been felt. UNESCO in its plan for sustainable development has also included '*Quality Education*'. Despite this most of the platforms discussing sustainable development focus upon the technical, administrative, commercial and economic aspects related to progress. Language and communication find only a trivial mention and are referred to as if having secondary importance. But the need of the hour today is that we focus upon linguistic and communication skills as central to any development. Its high time that school and college syllabus focus more on a practical, multidisciplinary approach with emphasis on the linguistic and communication skills of the students as it is going to make them actually employable and bridge the skill gap in job sector. The curriculum in most of the courses focusses primarily on physics, chemistry, biology and math relegating language skills to a secondary place. On the basis of different studies, feedbacks, surveys etc. it has been found that in India a large percentage of the students lack a complete command of the language of their professional fields. This problem is found to be more enhanced if students belong to diverse lingual backgrounds. India is a multilingual and multicultural society and hence the problem of lacking a command of the professional language skills becomes more heightened. Language and culture are closely connected. Language can't exist in isolation of a cultural context. Every word in a language imbibes the cultural and social essence of the society in which it exists. So, it will be right to say that the mother tongue of an individual will relate him to his culture and social contexts. Mother-tongue based multilingual education has now been increasingly emphasized upon though it has its own challenges.

Amidst these challenges, there is a need to understand the importance of mother-tongue and the language of instruction/education, the language of workplace and the international/national language and mutual dependence or interdependence of all these. When students enter the professional arenas, they need to be job ready and industries especially seek such candidates whom they have to train less for job skills. One of the problems that has been found is that many of the students are exposed to the professional language at a very later stage of their education/training This exposure too is restricted to only their academic environments. Its but natural that such

candidates will not be able to relate effectively to the social and cultural contexts of their professional/ workplace language. The result is that they don't develop a full command of the language that they need to learn for their employability. As a result, they fail to have a better grip of their profession. This is a huge challenge that job market is witnessing.

Developing a workforce which is lacking in language and professional communication skills can hinder any initiatives taken for professional and human resource benefits or for that matter any discussion or initiatives in the direction of sustainable development. There is a need to develop a human resource that has skills needed to work in multiethnic or global scenarios. And focusing on language studies for diverse professional needs can be an effective measure to achieve this. There is also a requirement to develop a balance which can take into consideration the effective learning needs of the students/ professionals as well as preserve the indigenous languages and cultures. Today, we live and work in a global community and it becomes pertinent that language and professional communication skills are made central elements to any progress. As rightly said,

“[As part of their preparation to live and work in a globalizing world, graduates need increasingly well-developed lifelong learning skills and attitudes, including an international perspective. They need to interpret local problems within a wider and global framework and to judge the importance of global phenomena for their own lives and work. Internationalization of the curriculum, therefore, incorporates a range of values, including openness, tolerance and culturally inclusive behavior, which are necessary to ensure that cultural differences are heard and explored” (110).]”

Therefore, a need has been felt by the educationists, corporate houses, employers, employees and all the stake holders for more emphasis on the development of communication skills for a strong command of the workplace language. There is a need to bring into the curriculum of all educational institutions, at elementary as well as higher education level, an in-built social approach which takes into consideration the multi-lingual structure of societies/cultures. The best way to bring in this awareness is through the curriculum; how the language departments can contribute in this. In addition of the teaching and training of the students, training the teachers is also an important part of this. There is need for teachers trained in different aspects of the language skills as per the requirements of different professions such as business communication, literary language, legal language, technical language and so on. Initiative such as faculty exchange programs and students exchange programs are a result of this realization only. Teachers and students who have been exposed to multiple cultures and countries through such initiatives can contribute immensely to this. Such initiatives and efforts should be accelerated. These will help build proficiency in language skills of the instructors as well as students at multiple levels- language of instruction, workplace language and international language.

Another significant challenge we face in this global work culture is the need to understand the value, significance and co-existence of mother tongue i.e., first language, second language and foreign language. The personnel in the global work environment of present day comes from breadth and length across the world. This human resource forms the basis of any development and growth. It comes from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. It is also understood that in professional working place, one use communication and language skills for varied purpose. Added to this is the multilingual, multiethnic workforce which will offer numerous unconventional sorts of global perspectives to any communication/language. One needs, in such a scenario, a common platform or means of sharing one's ideas and a good understanding of the particular language which is used as a means. This has been aptly put forth in the following words:

“[Language is the basis of the skills, communication and participation through which populations can play an active role in socio-economic development (Cheffy, Djite, Mufwene).]”

Therefore, it can succinctly put forth that any education and development must focus upon the means and measures that must be adopted to guarantee that individuals can participate efficiently in their multiethnic educational, professional , economic, legal workspaces. This brings us to the need that the inter-reliant relation between language and development is understood, and explored in interdisciplinary scenarios.

Language Skills and Employability: UNESCO has set in its SDGs targets-

“[“by 2030, to substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship]”

Unfortunately, this target of creating a human resource which possesses these employability skills is way far from being achieved. Language skills and communication form a necessary element of vocational skills needed for getting better job opportunities in this cut throat global competitive market. It can be noticed That there is a direct relationship between language/ communication skills and job opportunities for youth and thus also to development. With regard to engineering education, “ Aspiring Minds” finds

“[only 18.43% of all engineering graduates are eligible for a software engineer's job in India.]”

The results were based on the test conducted by the Aspiring Minds. One of the important parameters in the test was business communication and English language skills. NASSCOM in a report has revealed very somber result which raises question about one of the important aspects of sustainable development i. e. quality education and employability. The findings reveal that

“[Of the 3 million engineering graduates which join the job sector only 25% possess the required employability skills or are industry ready. Even in the science and humanities stream the figures are extremely grave. The employability skills of the science and humanities students are lower than this.]”

The above-mentioned studies as well as other studies done in this field reveal that amongst graduates lacking in language skills the key problem areas are grammar, sentence construction, comprehension and fluency skills. When we talk about having a language proficiency, one of the basic characteristic feature or capability is that one can give words to their feelings/ideas. Unless and until one is proficient in reading, writing and speaking skills in the dominant language of a profession one has to settle for only listening to what others have to bring forth in any discussion. One fails to add anything valuable, only due to lack of command on that language; though one may be having great ideas. One fails to put to words one's ideas and knowledge. And, it's a known fact that any idea or knowledge not expressed and shared, is of no constructive use. The people or professionals lacking in these skills will be dependent on others for relevant information know-how. However, knowing and understanding the nuances of a professional/ workplace language enables the workers to access and understand information for themselves in a very prompt manner. It helps them become initiators of oral and written communication in meetings, presentations and official communications. It assists them to become more vocal and expressive about their ideas which otherwise would have perished due to lack of appropriate communication.

Today, we work in a professional environment which is collaborative and global in nature. If one needs to excel in such an environment then one needs a firm grasp of not only the technical know-how but an in depth understanding of the communication needs of the workforce and colleagues. Understanding the language is vital but a proficiency can be attained only when one understands in depth the cultural contexts of spoken and written communication. Proficiency goes far beyond the basic understanding of vocabulary or grammar. Today the professional communication requires expertise not only in the written language skills but the soft skills as well. Working in a professional environment requires verbal discussions at the levels of presentation of projects, meetings and to connect in multi-cultural workforce environments. Many companies and professions are today training their human resource to cater to this necessity but the obligation is to develop a workforce as per the needs of the present century.

Conclusion: To conclude it must be stated that we need to highlight the important place that language skills have in an all-inclusive progress for creating better social, economic, employment prospects for people. Communication is without saying the core of any intellectual discourse be it academic, literary, research or professional. It becomes more necessary for professionals working in a sector which is multiethnic; as most the growing professional sectors

of the world today are. There is also a requirement to bring to fore the inattention given to role of language in the discussions and debates on sustainable development.

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