

# English as an International University Language

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## INTRODUCTION

Universities are influenced by the advanced technology and worldwide communications to adapt their education to the process of internationalization. They have to collaborate with universities across the world in order to promote better understanding among people from different countries and cultures. Therefore, a number of international activities has been developed. More students spend some periods of study at universities abroad in the form of a study abroad or an exchange programme. Some faculty members visit universities abroad from time to time. International cooperation projects have been developed, such as joint research projects, and international conferences.

English is used in most cases of university internationalization because of its major advantages. First, it is a world language. Geographically, it is the most widespread language on earth, and is used in most countries around the world. Secondly, it is the main language of knowledge dissemination worldwide in terms of textbooks, scientific journals, computerized databases, and

computer networks. It has become a major language used to access and to contribute to knowledge internationally. It is also seen as a language of technological development.

Since English is the world language and the dominant language of scientific knowledge dissemination worldwide, it makes international communication and cooperation easier. Therefore, it is expected that when the internationalization of universities is accomplished, English will become an international language used among scholars and students in universities around the world. In other words, English would be an international university language as Latin used to be in the Middle Ages of Europe. English would be the Latin of the 21st century (Altbach 1987:66)

However, at the moment, there is a diversity of universities around the world. Universities are different in many ways. They have their own structures; their own organizations; their own purposes; their own curricular, and their own languages. Why should they introduce more English into their university systems? Why should they use

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English to communicate with scholars in the outside world? Why should not other languages be used instead of English? Why is only English important to all universities?

This paper discusses the importance of English to the internationalization of universities and the possibility that English would become an international university language. The first section describes the

university internationalization process. The second section describes the influence of English on the present world situation. The third section discusses the concomitant of the university internationalization and the domination of English as the world language and the scientific knowledge language dissemination worldwide. Finally, the conclusion is drawn.

## THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF UNIVERSITIES

The internationalization process has changed the role of universities from serving their own societies to increasing the awareness of an international society. It is seen to be the key element to prevent and solve many international problems, such as protection of the world's environment, the prevention of war, and the competition in the world market. Universities should help people to look beyond the national frontiers and see the relativity of the national viewpoints. They should give them the knowledge, methods, and tools with which to overcome boundaries and to work in and for an international society

The internationalization of universities may be divided into two levels: regional (or regionalization), and international. The regionalization is the collaboration of universities in countries within a certain area, such as, EC, Eastern Europe, and Southeast Asia. The internationalization at the international level is the collaboration of

universities in countries around the world. The internationalization of universities is an idea with many dimensions. It includes the introduction of global perspectives into the content of the curriculum, specialized international studies, or area studies foreign language studies, international exchange of information, international exchange of faculty members and students, international cooperation projects, and international comparability, equivalence, and recognition of studies, diploma, and degrees. Generally, it may be divided into four components : (1) the flow of knowledge, (2) the flow faculty members, (3) the flow of students, and (4) the internationalizing curricula (Kerr 1990:10).

The flow of knowledge used to be a one-way flow from developed countries to underdeveloped countries. The developed countries produced knowledge and transmitted it to the underdeveloped countries. They never learned anything from the other

side. The underdeveloped countries were receivers and never sent their knowledge to the other side. At present, the situation has changed into mutual exchange of knowledge from both sides. The knowledge exchanged at this time is not only the universal knowledge but also the local knowledge: histories, cultures, traditions, and languages. It aims at promoting a better understanding among people from different countries in order to be able to live happily together in this one world.

The advanced technology makes the knowledge flow rapidly and spread throughout the world without frontiers. People around the world could see the Gulf war at the same time because of the modern telecommunication system. The information super highway flows across the world, and through it anyone will be able to access and contribute to knowledge. This rapid and worldwide flow of knowledge is a new phenomenon that never happened before. We are, at present, in the *Information Age*. One who has more information is at a considerable advantage.

Universities have to adapt themselves to cope with these situations. They have to develop more and better intellectual contacts with universities in other countries in order to gain the knowledge of other countries, and to distribute their knowledge to other countries as well.

The flow of faculty members is another aspect of the internationalization of

universities. Universities should provide for faculty members an opportunity to collaborate with colleagues in other countries so that they can exchange their ideas and are able to enhance their knowledge up to the international level. The faculty mobility activities are concerned with teaching, research, and conferences. Some faculty members spend some periods of work teaching at universities abroad. They may teach here for a term, or a few weeks. They, sometimes, do joint research projects with faculty members from other countries. They, from time to time, participate in international conferences.

The next component of internationalization of universities is the flow of students. The student mobility is the movement of university students from one country to another. It aims at acquiring both the knowledge and crosscultural experiences. However, according to students, the strongest expectation from the study abroad program is the desire to improve their foreign language proficiency, and the second strongest is to get to know and to understand other countries (Bunt-Kokhuis, and Bergmens. 1994: 185).

There are many types of study abroad programs. Some students study at universities in other countries for the whole programs. Some of them spend some periods of study at universities abroad for a year, a term or a semester, a few months, and a few weeks. In the entire world in the 1980s, about one million students per year were

undertaking higher education outside of their own countries. Over 80 percent of students were studying in the countries of Europe and North America, and the rest were in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Oceania (Clark, and Neave, 1992: 1020). Until recently, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the student exchange program has been extensively developed, especially in Europe, such as, ERASMUS, TEMPUS, and LINGUA. It is expected that 10 percent of European students will spend some periods of study at universities abroad. It seems likely that in the future the amount of student mobility will continue to increase.

The internationalizing of curricula is the process of introducing more international dimensions to the content of curricula. It should aim at promoting better understanding about other countries in all aspects: geographical

aspect, culture, and language. There are two approaches to internationalize the curricula. The first approach is to develop new courses which focus on international dimensions and add them to ordinary program. Sometimes, the new program which major in international dimensions are developed, such as, Environmental Studies, Peace Studies, European Studies, and Asian Studies. The other approach is to include a global perspective in the existent or ordinary courses in the various subjects. In addition, in some countries, other models involving the internationalization of universities have been developed. Those are insitutional partnerships, making of branch campuses or colleges with new concept, making of courses designed specifically to foreign students, and provision of joint degree program.

## INFLUENCE OF ENGLISH ON THE PRESENT WORLD SITUATION

The English language has some influence on the present world situation. First, it has become the world language because of its establishment as a mother tongue outside England, in all the continents of the world. Geographically, it is used in most countries around the world. Twelve nations have English as their native language and another thirty-three countries use it as a major medium of communication (Altbach 1987: 65).

People who speak English fall into one of three groups: those who have learned it as

their native language, those who have learned it as a second language in a society that is mainly bilingual or multilingual, and those who are forced to use it for a practical purpose administrative, professional or educational. A value judgement is a factor of people's desire, and motivation to learn a foreign language. The reason most frequently stated why people value English highly is the size of the area where the language is spoken, and also because of the language's economic importance, while touristic or

cultural-historical interest is less important (Schroder and Macht Cited in Apeltauer, 1993:276). It seems likely that the number of people who speak English tends to increase.

Secondly, English has become the main language of knowledge dissemination worldwide in many forms. The main internationally circulated journals are in English. A number of textbooks in all scientific fields is published in English. Most international scientific meetings are conducted in English. Computer-based networks which have several important functions in transmitting knowledge are in English. The database systems such as the *ERIC* system in the field of educational research, and the *Index Medicus* in the field of biomedical sciences are in English.

The main reason for the domination of English as the major language of knowledge dissemination worldwide is that most of the producers and consumers of scientific knowledge are located in English speaking countries. The United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia are all important producers of research, and all use English. The American academic library market, the largest in the world, is important to the establishment and success of scholarly journals. Therefore, English language publications have access to the largest market and thus attract the largest numbers of

potential authors.

The domination of English as the language of scientific knowledge makes English more important in educational systems. In many countries, even though English is not the language of instruction, students, especially at advanced levels, are required to use books and journals in English. In some countries, English is used as a medium of instruction at universities even though it is not the native language, such as in Singapore, India, South Africa, and Jamaica. Furthermore, in highly developed academic systems, such as, the Netherlands, Japan, and Sweden, English is increasingly used as a means of internationalizing university and communicating with the outside world.

At the secondary school level, English also affects school curricula. Cha (1991) has found that the first foreign language subjects in the secondary school curricula have gradually shifted from French and German to English after the World War II. In some countries where English is not the native language, the number of international schools where English is used as a medium of instruction has steadily increased, such as Thailand, and the Netherlands. It is found that the increasing demand for English language education in the Netherlands is a consequence of internationalization (Dronkers 1993).

## THE CONCOMITANT OF THE UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONALIZATION AND THE DOMINATION OF ENGLISH AS THE WORLD AND THE SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE LANGUAGE

The language used as a medium of communication in the activities of the internationalization of universities is different between activities and universities, depending on the partners concerned. It could be one of the partners' languages or an international language. However, with collaborations at the international level, where partners are from different countries around the world, an international language is preferred. And among the international languages, English is often used.

The domination of English as the world and the scientific knowledge language has an impact on all components of the internationalization of universities: the flow of knowledge, the flow of faculty members, the flow of students, and the internationalizing curricula. The more the internationalization activities have promoted, the more the English language is used.

The knowledge flows among universities around the world by means of textbooks, scientific journals, computerized databases, computer based network, and international conferences. As mentioned earlier, English, at present, dominates all the means of knowledge dissemination worldwide. For example, many textbooks in all scientific fields are published in English, most scientific journals are in

English, most computerized databases are in English, and computer based networks are in English. Therefore, scholars and students at the moment read the English textbooks and journals, search for new knowledge from the computerized databases in English, communicate with colleague at the outside world by using the computer based networks in English, and go to the international conferences which are conducted in English.

The faculty members should have more and better contact with colleagues at the outside world in order to gain new knowledge, to exchange their ideas, to enhance their knowledge up to the international standards, and to acquire an international reputation. English, of course, is the most useful tool to communicate with colleagues in most countries around the world in all kinds of faculty mobility activities. Teaching at universities abroad is usually in the host universities' language or in English. The joint research projects where colleagues are from various countries are inevitably done in English. Since journals that are worldwide dissemination are published in English, scholars who want to meet the international standards and to reach the international audiences have to write in English.

To date, the research concerned with the faculty mobility is limited; however, it is evident that there are differences among faculty members who are in different fields of study. Faculty members in some fields are more international than in other fields. Kerr (1990) divided faculty members into three categories of areas of study: areas of worldwide uniformity in the content of knowledge, as in mathematics, science, engineering, and anthropology, areas of intra-cultural similarity of knowledge, as in the study of history and of the classical literature of each civilization, and areas of intra-national knowledge, as in domestic law, public administration, and social welfare. Faculty members within these three categories are different in many ways. They go to differently located conferences, write for and read different sets of journals of international, or intra-cultural, or intra-nation orientation, and know colleagues around the world, of within their culture, or at the national levels. Scholars in the first group are the most international, and scholars in the second group are more international than the last one. Nevertheless, in the future, the internationalization of universities would make all fields of study more internationalized.

Students who want to go abroad must be skilled in a foreign language. Most of them, except those who are in the field of language studies, are able to communicate in English. This is because they have learned English as a foreign language since the secondary school

level, because they have read some English textbooks and journals, and because they have used the English databases. In addition, students stated that the most strongly expected from the study abroad programme is the desire to improve their foreign language proficiency. Therefore, it is found that most students choose to go to the English speaking countries (Bunt-kokhuis,1994).

In the Information Age, skills of English and of computers are a requirement for all scholars and students. This is because the knowledge and information flows rapidly and spreads throughout the world by the computer-based networks and most computer-based networks are dominated in English. A professor in Europe can directly communicate with a colleague in America, or a student in Asia can directly consult with the advisor in Europe by using e-mail in English. In the 21st century, one who is not able in English and computer skills is at a considerable disadvantage. Therefore, students who do not have a chance to go abroad should have an opportunity to improve their English proficiency as well.

There are two approaches in preparing academic programs for incoming students. One approach is to assign the foreign students to ordinary programs. The other is to design special programs for foreign students. According to the first approach, the language problem is often said to be an obstacle. Generally, students coming for an academic

year, or part of it, do not have sufficient proficiency of the host universities' language to attend the ordinary academic courses. Therefore, universities tend to develop special

## CONCLUSION

The use of English in universities is not a new phenomenon. Perhaps all libraries have some English textbooks and journals, and all faculty members and students have read some English textbooks and journals. But what is new is that the English language is not an option anymore. The English language has become a requirement for all scholars and students in order to communicate with colleagues at the outside world, and to access knowledge internationally. This is because universities are forced by the present world situation, which is the effect of advanced technology and worldwide communication, to initiate more and closer contacts with other universities across the world. In accordance with the situation that English has become the world language used in most countries around the world, English, therefore, is the most advantageous language used in communication with people in other countries around the world. Moreover, English has become the dominant language of knowledge dissemination worldwide in the terms of textbooks, scientific journals, computerized databases, and computer based networks. It then becomes an important tool for scholars and students to access and to

programmes for foreign students. Usually, these special programmes are conducted in English because of the domination of English as mentioned earlier, and in order to attract the foreign students as well.

contribute to knowledge internationally. Sooner or later, English will become an international university language used among members of universities around the world.

One may argue that this is not the case because the dominant international language has changed from one language to another. For instance, Latin used to be predominant international language of learned people in Europe until the mid-nineteenth century. French and German used to be the predominant international languages from the second half of the nineteenth century until early in the twentieth century. English has become a popular language since the post World War II period, and is gradually becoming the world language. It is true that English may be pushed back by other language, but it will not happen in the foreseeable future. Moreover, it has never happened before that any language was widely used as English is used at the moment. And the world cannot be changed within a day.

There is a recommendation for every educated person in Europe to be able to speak at least two European languages other than his or her own language. Since English has become the popular language of the young



people in Europe, this could be implied that one of the two languages would be the English. Hence, in the 21st century, every educated person in Europe would speak English.

In the future, universities will have uniformity as Kerr (1990: 17) noted that while internationalization or regionalization of higher education had its advantages, it could have its disadvantages as well, particularly in the loss

of diverse heritages. Or they will have a multiformity as Cerych (1989: 321-322) pointed out that because of the existent diversification and the borrowing and copying from multiple sources, the diversity of higher education will continue. It depends on how universities react to the situation. Perhaps the language policy of universities should be re-examined. However, the importance of English in university education should not be overlooked.

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