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The Importance of English in Scientific Research: Justifications and Concerns

“Academic writing should strive for clarity, maturity, and formality and should strike a balance between confidence and tentativeness”. Glatthorn, A. (1998)

Abstract:

Intellectually, the elite find themselves ripped between their native language and the imperative of conducting scientific research in a foreign language. This creates political tensions and pulls in different directions. On the one hand, there is an undeniable need to adopt a global language that dominates all fields of knowledge, in communication and scientific research, even in Western countries. Historically, the choice to teach, research, and communicate in French was imposed by colonialism. The struggle continued with partial Arabization while maintaining French for scientific research, until the challenge of integrating English as the language of instruction in Algerian universities became evident.

However, between the ideal and reality, many members of the academic community are hesitant to embrace this trend, citing various reasons. At the same time, scientific research necessitates proficiency in English. This paper analyzes the concerns surrounding the use of English and the justifications for linguistic shift in scientific research, while also providing practical recommendations for integrating English alongside Arabic.

Keywords: English language use, scientific research: justifications, concerns

1_ Justifications for Using English in Scientific Research in Developing Countries

English has become the predominant language in academic and research circles worldwide, making it the primary language of communication among researchers in various countries, including the Global South. Here are some of the key reasons for using English in scientific research in these nations:⁴

1. Reaching a Wider Global Audience:

- Publication in International Journals: The majority of prestigious and globally indexed scientific journals are published in English. This gives researchers in the Global South a greater opportunity to disseminate their research and reach a broader audience of readers and researchers.³
- International Collaboration: English is the working language of most international conferences and scientific symposia. Its use facilitates communication and collaboration with researchers from different countries.

2. Accessing the Latest Research:

- **Scientific Literature:** Most recent research and studies in various disciplines are published in English. This means that researchers in the Global South need to be proficient in English to access the latest knowledge and discoveries in their field.⁵
- **Staying Updated:** By reading research published in English, researchers in the Global South can stay informed about the latest developments in their field, aiding them in developing their own research.

3. International Recognition:

- **Academic Reputation:** Publishing in English increases researchers' chances of gaining international recognition for their work and contributes to building a strong academic reputation.
- **Academic Evaluation:** Many universities and research institutions worldwide use English as a criterion for evaluating the academic performance of researchers.

4. Developing Language Skills:

- **Improved Communication:** Proficiency in English helps researchers communicate effectively with their colleagues in the international scientific community, fostering cooperation and innovation.
- **Continuing Education:** Researchers can enhance their language skills by reading scientific research and participating in international conferences and symposia.

5. Integration into the Global Scientific Community:

- **Participation in International Projects:** English is used in most international research projects. Proficiency in it enables researchers in the Global South to participate in these projects and contribute to addressing global challenges.

2_ Concerns Regarding the Adoption of English as the Primary Language for Scientific Research in the Global South.

The adoption of English as the primary language for scientific research in developing countries has raised numerous concerns and reservations among intellectuals in these nations. Some of the most significant concerns include:

Resistance to Change:

_ **Established Practices:** The transition to a new language, especially in the context of extensive Arabicization, is challenging for older academics who have significant experience in teaching and research using Arabic.

_ **Fear of English Dominance:** There is a fear that English could dominate decision-making processes in the same way that French once did, leading to a linguistic double standard where Arabic is the official language but French is used for correspondence and documentation.

Marginalization of National Languages:

_ Cultural Identity: There is a concern that the adoption of English could marginalize national languages and undermine cultural identity. This could lead to the loss of a significant portion of knowledge accumulated in local languages, hindering sustainable scientific and cultural development.

Limited Access to Information:

_ Resource Constraints: Not all researchers in developing countries have access to scientific resources in English, either due to unavailability or insufficient language skills. This limits their ability to actively participate in scientific research and widens the knowledge gap between the Global North and South.

_ Scientific Dependency:

Northern Dominance: Some argue that relying on English increases scientific dependency on the Global North, as the vast majority of research and scientific journals in English are published in these countries. This could reduce opportunities for developing countries to develop independent research agendas.

_ Loss of Originality:

Western Imitation: There is a concern that relying on English could lead to a loss of originality in scientific research, as researchers may be inclined to imitate Western models rather than developing their own ideas.

Additionally, there are other concerns, such as:

_ Difficulty in Translating Concepts: There may be difficulties in translating certain scientific and conceptual terms from English into national languages, affecting the accuracy and clarity of meaning.

_ Impact on Critical Thinking: Researchers may become overly reliant on research published in English, reducing their ability to think critically and develop new ideas.

3_ Recommendations:

Immersion Approach: Use an immersion approach where English is used for all subjects, except for the native language. This maximizes exposure and accelerates learning

Teacher Training: Invest in rigorous teacher training programs to ensure educators have the skills to teach English effectively.

Communicative Approach: Focus on communicative language teaching, emphasizing practical language skills like speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Authentic Materials: Use materials like books, and movies to make learning more engaging and relevant.

Cultural Integration: Incorporate cultural elements into lessons to provide context and motivation.

Language Learning Apps: Utilize language learning apps and online resources to supplement classroom learning.

A Gradual Strategy for Empowering English Language Use in Academic Settings:

Supporting the Translation of Key Research into National Languages:3

- This involves actively facilitating the translation of significant research findings into local languages to make them more accessible to a wider audience within the country.1

Providing Intensive English Language Training for Researchers:

- Implementing comprehensive language training programs specifically designed to enhance the English proficiency of researchers.

Encouraging Publication in National Languages alongside English:

- Promoting the parallel publication of research in national languages and English to foster a more balanced linguistic landscape within academia.

4_ The gradual transition to introducing the English language.

- _ Encouraging English-language research in practical sessions.
- _ Shifting from copy-pasting to original translation of books and articles.3
- _ Delivering presentations in English at conferences.1
- _ Completing graduation theses in English.
- _ Integrating short, interactive, and targeted English-language videos into in-person and online classes to complement lecture topics.

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