

CREATING A MULTILINGUAL ARMENIA: ADDING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TO ARMENIA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM AND SOCIETY

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THE KEY OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PEOPLE IS LANGUAGE

Armenia was part of the Soviet Union, until September 21, 1991. The language in the education system in Armenia has been in Armenian and Russian for years.

However, English language is taught in the elementary schools (grade 1-9), but the level of English taught in schools are very weak.

- ▣ Katy Pearce and Ronald Rice explain in their article that “English opens doors to the digital world (Hargittai, 1999), but it also creates a barrier for those who lack proficiency.” It is of a high standard to use English language specifically in the scientific subjects.
- ▣ Boer Deng believes that English Language is a great benefit in the scientific field since three-quarters of scientific papers that are published, are in the English Language.
- ▣ It is better to use scientific terms in English Language so that the Armenian citizens would be able to share scientific ideas or experiments.

The Multilingualism Debate

- ▣ Becoming multilingual is adding an additional language to the educational system while the national language continues to expand and develop
- ▣ Multilingual education would put students through challenges, where students would be able to experience different opportunities, since multilingualism is more determined and desired
- ▣ Multilingualism encourages immigrants, students from different places, international agencies and aid workers to come and study in universities or invest and get encouraged to open agencies.
- ▣ Multilingualism would encourage the Armenian Diaspora to come over and invest because they have more language opportunities for education, jobs and facilities to actually move to Armenia and continue their lives.

Armenia: A Case Study for Multilingualism

- ▣ Russian language has never become an official foreign language in Armenia but a second native language. However, according to the youth, they are more interested in learning English Language as well.
- ▣ Russian Language is spoken in the countries Armenia is surrounded. This means Russian Language is important and needed in the Armenian society.
- ▣ The interest of the Armenian people in Russian Language has been continuing till now and that is proven by the Yerevan Municipality's official website.

The Case for Including the English Language

- ▣ English language has become a very powerful and influential language in the global world. Adding English as Armenia's second language, equal to the Russian language, will increase the competitive global economy, increase the opportunities for students to become part of a bigger world and be prepared for successive colleges or future professions. (Armanian, 2000).
- ▣ On the other hand, Mesrop Aramian believes that through multilingualism there is probability for the Armenian Identity to be threatened, since English language is a dominant language.

Survey analysis

- ▣ Survey was sent to two different universities, the American University of Armenia and the Yerevan State Medical University. 64 responses from the AUA and 51 from YSMU.
- ▣ According to the survey's result, it is shown that the students in both universities are interested in Armenian and learning other languages further than Armenian and Russian. The interest toward the English language is high but the number of students agreeing and disagreeing the fact of teaching the scientific subjects in English is almost equal.

Interview analysis

- ▣ An expert in Armenia's education opposed the idea of making Armenia a multilingual country, specifically teaching the scientific subjects in English. The expert believes students will be weak in the scientific subjects, due to the low level of English. Armenian Language is already in the list of languages to disappear, then why risk it.
- ▣ On the other hand a CEO of an Armenian company believes that English language needs to be advanced in Armenia because employees must have a strong English base. "Globalization has greatly impacted Armenian economic market and this means that Armenian graduates must be well equipped to survive in the industry".

Interview analysis

- ▣ According to the interview with school principals, we found out that English language is taken into consideration and is being taken seriously, but they believe it should be limited. Students should learn English language for their future's sake but it not needed to be taught in all the subjects, such as the scientific subjects. All principals mentioned that the English language taught in the schools is enough and that the teachers are well qualifies.

Reason why students want or do not want scientific subjects to be taught in English

PRO

- *Because scientific languages have a specific global term that are used. English is an international language and should be adopted in schools worldwide*
- *Learning these subjects in English will help students' transition in non Armenian universities in Armenian or other countries and this helps the students to use the language fluently.*
- *Because I'm English educated, and studying these important subjects in English has benefited me a lot. Especially when it comes to applying to foreign universities.*
- *Because jobs in Armenia are becoming to require communication with foreigners in English*
- *To ease exchange programs with well known universities and colleges worldwide*
- *World demands professionals that can apply their knowledge in an understandable way, which includes the factor of language*
- *English can be used on a international scale more than Armenian*

Con

- ▣ *Because later on they (Students) will be using the Russian terms in real life, and if they learn only in English, nobody (People, Armenian society) will understand them. Not to forget that Armenian language will slowly go extinct.*
- ▣ *Why would Armenian kids possibly need to learn scientific subjects in English? This already creates pre-conditions for the kids to leave Armenia.*
- ▣ *Because all of the subjects in the state universities of Armenia are covered in Armenian.*
- ▣ *Because they (scientific subjects) are hard to understand and learn so it would be even harder to study them in English language. Students may misunderstand lots of important materials due to lack of knowledge of a language.*

Conclusion

- ▣ Through the examination we were able to show the importance of English language and multilingualism with the support of the Armenian students, school principals, experts in Armenian Education and CEOs of different companies, of course few number were opposing it. Nevertheless, not everyone agreed with the idea of the scientific subjects being taught in English language.
- ▣ “Learning a language, any language, is about getting a skill that’s necessary to gain an education. It’s not an education in itself. Moreover, done badly, it deprives a child of proper education”. (Mody, 2015)