Relevant of English Language in Asia

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Abstract: This article talks about the relevance of the English language in Asia, how many people and countries speak English today, and similar brief information.

Key words: Asia, Singapore, EPI, language.

Asia is seen as the future for the internationalisation of higher education, and the globalisation of English is enabling this future. Countries in Asia have therefore started to align their internationalisation strategies towards this Asia focus. For example, Singapore's Minister of Education Heng Swee Keat concluded in his talk at the Singapore Management University on 16 February: "Asia is going to be a critical part of our future. The more we understand what is going on in Asia, the better our future will be. We must position ourselves as a global Asian hub that connects Asia with the world." The internationalisation of higher education and the English language play a key role in Singapore's endeavour to become a 'global Asian hub' and to identify and create 'advantages that others find relevant'. However, it seems that the internationalisation policies of countries and universities in Asia seldom question the global dominance of English and what consequences it may have for knowledge and scholarship building and the general well-being of Asian societies in the long run. Let me now turn to a few interrelated issues to elaborate this problem further. Scholars continue to raise questions related to the overemphasis on the English-only curriculum and the English-only mentality when it comes to what counts as valid knowledge and as legitimate intellectual sources in knowledge exchanges and knowledge production. More and more (academic) knowledge is produced in English, while less and less is produced in local (Asian) languages, partly because publications in English are valued and seen as a desirable sign of intellectual integration. Many scholars, including Asians, also admit that they have not tried to publish in Asian languages. Many others do not see the need to learn Asian languages for their academic work because they have many Asian students eagerly wanting to 'teach' them about Asia through the medium of English. Their engagement with Asia tends to stop at the surface, and I believe this can be improved. Asian countries that speak English are the best vacation and investment destinations for those coming from the West. English is widely used in education and business in Asian nations. Everyone agree that there is a

significant divide between individuals who are proficient in English and those who are not. This linguistic divide between urban and rural areas is evident. Due to the population's variety, it is challenging to determine the precise number of English speakers. Yet, the Asian region is home to 372 million native English speakers and a billion non-native English speakers. English is the official language of several Asian nations, including Singapore, the Philippines, Nepal, India, and Pakistan. An estimated 125 million people speak English in India. There are around 94 and 90 million English speakers respectively in Pakistan and the Philippines, two other nations. The remainder of Asia can still speak in English, despite this. Moreover, English was incorporated into many regional languages in various ways. As a result, English is used as a common language among several Asian nations. Asia has the widest variation in English competence when compared to the rest of the world's regions. First on the list of countries having the most native English speakers are Singapore and the Philippines. Malaysia is located in the middle of Asia. It has extremely little English language competency, like with Indonesia and Thailand. The 2021 edition of Education First's English Proficiency Index included 24 Asian countries (EPI). There are several non-native English-speaking nations and areas that have been studied. According to the EF EPI (Education First's English Proficiency Index) study, Singapore gets the highest score, 635. Tajikistan has the lowest score of 405 among the English-speaking Asian nations. Nonetheless, the English Proficiency Index Asia at the regional level of Education First is at 504 average points with middling competency bands.Over-reliance on English With the expansion of English-language programmes, courses, schools and universities across Asia as a part of the drive to become international hubs of education, innovation and scholarship, the over-reliance on English is becoming even more alarming. In certain settings, students start learning in English at a very young age. It is more common, however, that students stop learning and being taught in their local languages once they enter university. Many students and academics do not know how to present a topic in their local language because they do not know the norms, genres, styles, concepts, theories and vocabularies needed to perform such tasks. They become 'illiterate' and thus much less sophisticated in their own tongues. One may also say that for many people in Asia, English is their native language and thus other local Asian languages are not necessarily their mother tongues and-or native languages; yet this group is still a tiny minority in the vast context of Asia. This phenomenon has the potential to (re)produce an unequal and somewhat superficial engagement with scholarship under the banner of internationalisation that is largely driven by commercialisation, the overindulgence of English in government policies as well as a nation-building agenda that tends to take many shortcuts to English while undermining local languages. After all, the international role of English does not have to result in the impoverishment of knowledge and scholarship in other languages, and this needs to be realised in policy and practice of the internationalisation of education and language policies

across the Asian region. Likewise, English is never going to entirely replace local languages. However, it will create a divide in local societies between those who use English and those who do not. At the moment, the knowledge that circulates in the world of international education does so largely through the medium of the English language. It only indirectly touches those beyond the English-language world. Part of the rationale for the internationalisation and globalisation of education is to make the world more equitable – that is, to allow people everywhere to have access to the same body of knowledge.

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