



The Effectiveness of Language Requirements in Finnish Higher Education Institutions: Decolonization through University Admission Criteria

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Abstract

This research examines the English language proficiency requirement in Finnish universities in terms of efficacy and neocolonialism. The paper exposes hidden fallacies in foreign language requirements for English-speaking immigrants from British-colonised countries where English is used as an official language and medium of facilitating learning, and deconstructs the efficacy and paradoxes reflected in language requirements in Finnish universities for international students from nine British-colonised African countries. There is a research gap caused by inconsistent findings about the efficacy of language proficiency testing as an admission requirement in Finnish colleges. This research employs an empirical autoethnography technique and qualitative approaches to empirically assess the 2022/2023 language requirement in eight Finnish universities and its efficacy for international students from nine British-colonised English-speaking countries. This paper initiates policy-level discussions on the implementation of English language requirements at Finnish universities. This article draws on primary and secondary data from university websites as well as email correspondence with admissions offices at eight Finnish universities. The notion of race and ethnicity is used to dispute the need for English language competency requirements in today's world for various nationalities. Finnish institutions should seek alternate techniques of evaluating the language requirement for all students on an equal footing..

Keywords: British-colonised, finnish universities, english language proficiency neocolonialism, race and ethnicity theory

Introduction

Migration is one of the primary worldwide megatrends that is still shaping the modern world. The global north has been eager to regulate migration, particularly from developing nations in the global south, in order to maintain and sustain law and order in their industrialised communities in a comprehensive manner. Because of its ageing and falling population, Europe continues to draw international talent and students and to be the focal point for migration through study. According to the Project Management Institute's 2021 Talent Gap assessment, the estimates of job patterns for the coming decade rely significantly on migration to satisfy the increasing needs caused by Europe's ageing plague (Project Management Institute, 2021).

Compared to other nations in the global north, migration is very well controlled in the Nordic countries. The Nordic nations see long-term challenges to the Nordic welfare model in global megatrends like digitalisation, population aging, and climate change. Research on the future of work is done by the research institutions and the Nordic Council of Ministers. The consequences of megatrends and the Covid-19 pandemic issue are taken into account by Nordic academics, as well as how current procedures should be updated and enhanced to better suit working life in the future (Finnish Government, 2021).

All immigrants, both from the global north and south, are drawn to Finland. Due to its social welfare system, Finland has developed a good reputation over time and gained international recognition. Finland has publicly urged foreign talent to consider moving there with enticing claims of improved quality of life and career progress. Immigration is acknowledged by Finland as one of the ways to address the problems with the labor market and to maintain the welfare state (Ministry of the Interior, 2022). In order to achieve this, the Finnish government authorized a strategy to boost migration based on employment and educational qualifications (Kototuminen.fi, 2021). In order to achieve the target of tripling work-based immigration by 2030, Finland is adopting the roadmap for education-based migration as an action plan.

Finnish HEIs and projects that aim to achieve 75% retention of education-based immigrants are part of a collaborative multi-agency effort in Finland that also involves the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and other agencies. These agencies include the Finnish National Agency for Education, which supports educational institutions with the mission of developing education and promoting internationalization in Finland. It is necessary to assess the Finnish universities' requirements for overseas applicants from former British colonies where English is the primary

language of instruction and official communication. This will increase the pool of international applicants who can satisfy the prerequisites for admission to Finnish institutions, especially for those immigrants who come to Finland for reasons other than immigration, such as job and family.

Universities and universities of applied sciences (UAS) are the two different types of higher education institutions found in Finland. According to the Finnish National Agency for Education, Finland has twenty-two universities of applied sciences and thirteen universities. The degree programs taught in English are available at the bachelor's, master's, and doctorate levels. The UAS provides bachelor's and master's level higher education that is professionally oriented and has close linkages to Finland's working world and regional development. The universities, on the other hand, place a strong emphasis on scientific research and base the instruction they offer on that research. The universities provide undergraduate, graduate, and doctorate (PhD) degrees.

Finland's educational system is highly renowned. Along with work, family, asylum/refugee, au pair, and other unconventional routes, education is a major factor in immigration to Finland. As in all other nations, immigrants who want to enroll in Finnish institutions must meet the eligibility conditions for admission. This essay examines the fundamentals of the English language test as a foreign language requirement for English-speaking immigrants from nine former British colonies in Africa and exposes the covert neocolonialism in the requirement today. This essay exposes the paradoxes connected to the requirement for the English test and further deconstructs the fallacies of this requirement utilizing the philosophy of race and ethnicity. The research also examines how Finnish society interacts with native English speakers when employing the English language in its educational institutions. Universities are referred to as Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in this study.

Review of Literature

The effects of requiring English as a Foreign Language for admission of students whose first language is not English in academic programs are still being researched, particularly in the global north. The English Language for Foreigners test is taken by hundreds of thousands of people every year for personal professional decisions including job searching, career promotion, or enrollment in school programs. Such scores fairly influence how these people choose their careers (Bachman; Davidson; Ryan; & Choi, 2009). This emphasizes the social injustice and neocolonialism that the test poses to the lives of millions of people around the world.

A study was carried out in the United Kingdom (UK) on the opinions of those responsible for admitting students whose first language is not English into UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) for academic programs, such as academic and administrative staff (Hyatt, 2011). The evaluation's use of English as a foreign language demonstrated the lack of a clear pattern in the selection of different entry requirements by faculties or departments, for example, and revealed that decisions are made on a case-by-case basis.

But unless a study has a language component, like Applied Linguistics or Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), the higher entry requirements, band 7 and above, tend to be associated with older UK universities. The fact that the BALEAP Guidelines on English Language Proficiency Levels for International Applicants to UK Universities (BALEAP, 2022) were not brought up may be indicative of the relative lack of effective communication

between English for Specific Purposes (ESP) specialists and academic/administrative admissions officers. The study emphasized the need for a fair decision's fair examination to be conducted in greater depth.

A study found that there is a 40% chance that eligible students may be misplaced if the placement decisions were made solely on the results of the standardized test (Kokhan, 2013), which is one argument against the use of standardised English test scores for placing international undergraduate students in English programs. The purpose of this study was to determine if the English Placement Test (EPT) should be replaced with pre-arrival scores from the SAT, ACT, and TIEFL iBT for the purpose of placing overseas undergraduate students in degree programs at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

English Language Proficiency Testing and Colonialism in History

The Cambridge Examinations in English for Foreign Students were created and implemented in 1913 for foreign students who wanted verification of their practical knowledge with the intention of teaching it in foreign schools, which gave the English test a colonial flavor (Roach, 1936). Consequently, the new exam reflected current interest in direct method teaching, which demanded that teachers have "reliable command of the language for active classroom use" rather than academic or descriptive language knowledge (Bachman; Davidson; Ryan; & Choi, 2009). The language tests were discontinued between the two world wars but were resumed in 1945, following the conclusion of the second, with the goal of "eliminating at the source, foreign students desirous of federal or other support for study." Does Finland, along with the other nations, comprehend the historical context and motivation behind the use of second language test results to aid in immigration discrimination and social justice? Since objective testing was not used, it was determined that the test results did not fulfill the fairness criterion.

The Use of English Language Evaluation in Modern Europe

Since 2000, internationalization in higher education has rapidly increased in Northern Europe (Graddol, English next: Why global English may spell the end of "English as a foreign language," 2022). Graddol identifies major developments in the use of English in HEIs. The key trends demonstrate that English is no longer used as a foreign language with the rise of students who use English for learning prior to migration, the widening of student age and need that is diversified with varying levels of English proficiency, increasing competition from non-native speakers from other parts of the world, irreversible trends in international students who pursue English courses, growing irrelevance of native speakers, growing monolingualism throughout the world, and more.

The shift from modernism to post-modernity is currently underway in the world. English is becoming the lingua franca of commerce and is being adopted as the official language of the former British colonies and protectorates. English is now being accepted and adopted as a second language throughout Europe, including the Nordic nations, and is no longer considered a foreign language. By assessing the effectiveness of such an entry requirement, academics continue to determine whether proficiency in English as a second language is a necessary criterion for admission to an English medium university (Seelen, 2002). According to Seelen's research, there doesn't seem to be a connection between

university achievement and English language proficiency scores.

Methodology

Through the use of language proficiency requirements at eight Finnish universities, this research aims to shed light on the effectiveness of and neocolonialism and to dispel myths using an empirical autoethnographic approach. Between January 4 and 18, 2023, the admission offices at the eight colleges received answers and participation with the language requirement, which were organized, classified, and visually represented using the efficacy and neocolonialism perspectives. To demonstrate the value of the language requirement, statistics from the admission offices are obtained, examined, and qualitatively presented. In order to highlight the value of English Language Proficiency in the 2021–2022 and 2022–2023 call for applications, the researcher's data were documented from the application experiences. This essay examines the effectiveness of English language proficiency as a prerequisite for enrollment in English-taught courses at Finnish universities by international students from nine English-speaking African nations that were once British colonies. Between January 4 and 18, 2023, the researcher phoned the admission offices of eight Finnish institutions to inquire about their language proficiency requirements. She then recorded the comments and retorts.

This study is important because more qualified international students who studied in English in British-colonized English-speaking nations still have to decide whether or not to pursue their future goals and professional aspirations using a test that was initially developed to screen and discriminate against immigrants entering the UK in the 19th century. Since then, the UK has institutionalized the English for Special Purpose approach in Master's degrees to tweak and adapt the assessments to meet the UK context. The English Language Proficiency exams that Finland adopted are used more as a formality and a check list for candidates to be rejected than as a critically analyzed and significant process that has a direct bearing on the effectiveness and outcomes of the program.

Data Analysis

The Researcher's Profile

The researcher is an English-speaking project manager and fundraiser for a Finnish higher education institution. The researcher has worked in Finland for more than four years and speaks English. Due to employment, the researcher moved to Finland. For more than three years, the researcher employed English while working for one of the biggest Finnish INGOs. The researcher used the English language to do study all over Sub-Saharan Africa before moving to Finland. The researcher graduated from Kenya, a British-colonized English-speaking nation, with a Master of Business Administration and a Bachelor of Business Administration with IT courses taught in English. At all educational levels, the researcher has acquired knowledge using the English language. The researcher has taken a number of quick courses using the English language all around the world, including in the UK, US, Sweden, Croatia, and Finland. All Kenyans who meet the entry requirements are exempt from the UK's English language competency requirement, including the researcher.

Finnish Higher Education Institutions Accept the English Language Proficiency Exams

Like all other international applicants, eligible international students who have studied in English in English-speaking

nations that were once British colonies must provide proof of their English language proficiency in the form of language test certificates that are valid for two years after the date of issuance. The issue is whether language proficiency changes after the two-year timeframe. Historically, the use of English language competence assessments for TESOL decisions was driven by discrimination (Bachman; Davidson; Ryan; & Choi, 2009). Finland recognizes the TOEFL Internet-based, IELTS (Academic), IELTS Indicator, Pearson Test of English (PTE), C1 Advanced, C2 Proficiency, and National Certification of Language Proficiency test (YKI) as valid English language tests. The applicant must demonstrate his or her English proficiency with the appropriate degree certificate and the transcript of their academic record. The other acceptable alternative to the English requirement is whether the applicant meets at least one of the following criteria. A separate language test is not necessary in this case.

African Nations that Make English Their Official Language and Use it for Education

Egypt, Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Gambia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana, Nigeria, Ghana, and Malawi are just a few of the contemporary African nations that were once British colonies. Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Nigeria, Ghana, and Malawi are some of the most noteworthy African nations who have made English their official language of communication and employ it in their educational systems. Furthermore, Liberia, which was never colonized, employs English both as its official language and in its educational system. In order to determine how many immigrants are comparable to or have higher English language proficiency than secondary and graduate students from the exempt countries, including Finland, the researcher examined the number of African immigrants aged 26 to 50 at the time of their migration from the aforementioned countries, as reported by Migri records. The researcher contends that, at age 26, at least one-fifth of new immigrants are potentially in possession of a first degree and, as a result, have shown a proficiency in the academic use of the English language. Based on data from a study report on the immigration of highly trained foreign workers to Finland (Habti, 2014), one-fifth of the percentage is calculated.

Findings

The procedure for evaluating English language proficiency for overseas students from British-colonized English-speaking countries in the global south enrolled in English-taught programs in Finland needs to be reviewed. The effectiveness of the English language competency test as a primary admissions criterion for English-taught courses in Finland was examined in this research along with its application in Finland. The researcher advises enlarging the pool of overseas students eligible for exemption from English language requirements. To satisfy the English language competency requirements, one should only need to complete their studies in an English-speaking nation that was once a British colony and where instruction is conducted in that language. For the sake of educational equality, an English for Specific Purpose method might be adopted and applied to all candidates.

English Language Use around the World in Trends

The report (Graddol, English Next, 2007) commissioned by the British Council serves as the foundation for the analysis of English language usage patterns around the world. The report

recognizes the expansion and widespread use of English around the world.

The Increase in English Language Learners around the World

The number of nations employing English as their official language of instruction is on the rise. The study focused on African nations that were colonized by the British and have made English their official tongue since gaining their freedom. English language competency exams were first offered in the UK in 1913 with the intention of providing evidence of actual language ability for international students who were being taught the language for assimilation. One hundred years later, Finland continues to practice neocolonization by speaking and writing English fluently without being aware of its past.

Growing Requirement and Student Age Range

The discussion on the use of English language competency requirements in Finland is motivated by the dramatic increase in the age of international students and their needs. A forty-year-old researcher with a strong academic background, professional experience, and well-defined academic and professional ambitions. The researcher's English proficiency has been evaluated and put to use in the academic and professional worlds.

Growth of Languages on the Internet

The dominance of English language on the internet remains undisputed. The most commonly used language is English with the 60.5% of top ten million websites developed using the English language (Visual Capitalist, 2021). English was also the most popular language online as 25.9% of worldwide internet users browsed in English (Statista, 2022).

Conclusion

As seen in the educational progression of immigrant children, the intricacies of institutionalized social inequities have been reported in a number of fields, including schooling from the youngest years of education (Ojwang, 2021). The creation of the Finland-Africa strategy in 2020 gave rise to expectations for increased cooperation between Finland and Africa via the education and expertise initiative that fosters cooperation between Finnish and African HEIs (MFA Finland, 2023). All thirteen universities and twenty-two universities of applied sciences are involved in the Finland-Africa strategy's efforts to improve collaboration within HEI networks.

Finland has also played a leading role in the decolonization of HEIs in the developing world. This paper addresses the requirement for English language proficiency for African international students from nine British-colonised English-speaking countries with proof of studies completed in English from their countries, highlighting the use of English language proficiency criteria as a key area where decolonization can be meaningfully achieved. The researcher deconstructs the fallacies and megatrend components to decolonize the Finnish universities while fully acknowledging the megatrends, objective of the English language proficiency test, and its application as envisioned by the Cambridge committee that devised the test in 1913. The study also urges the use of English for Specific Purpose to examine and apply various evaluation procedures.

The researcher comes to the conclusion that even for non-English speaking overseas students, the one-size-fits-all English language examinations utilized for decision-making

in Finland are not beneficial in their current shape because the goal has been surpassed by time. The researcher contends that the use of English as a second language has surpassed the testing of English as a foreign language, citing megatrends in English usage that the UK has recognized. Comparable to the nations excused by Finnish universities are the nations that have embraced English as a second language since gaining their independence and utilize it for learning at all levels of secondary school. The practice of continuing to enforce Finland's English language proficiency requirement on foreign students who already speak English as a second language is colonialism and should be discontinued. The researcher contends that there is no discernible relationship between the level of English language competency and academic success. Giving language proficiency standards a validity period is the height of neocolonialism, which is even worse. A potential overseas student who passes the exam once in a lifetime has demonstrated their proficiency in English beyond a reasonable doubt.

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