



# Role of English in the Context of Contemporary Developments

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## Abstract:

*English is inherently a borrowing and an anglicizing language which the accidents of history have made it the most important language for wider communication and most useful to study. Perhaps, the reasons for the predominance of English can be found related to two important phenomena in the world, i.e., the vast expansion of English cultural and commercial influence in many parts of the world by the British imperialism in the nineteenth century, and secondary with the economic influence of the United States of America, in the twentieth century. English is being used as an international language in diplomacy, international trade, tourism, air-traffic controls, etc., English is official language of international aviation and unofficially is the first language of international sports, as well as for international pop-music industry. The rapidly developing technology of the English speaking countries started spreading more programs on the media like radio, television, films, recordings and books readily available to the developing countries. The present paper described the role of English in contemporary era with its advantage and present scenario of English Language.*

**Keywords:** *Advantage of English, English Language, International Language, Language Learning, Present scenario, Second Language*

## 1. Introduction

It was always a matter of controversy and contention whether English should be the official language of the country or not. English is a sad heritage of our past imperialist masters. It is now the window to project our rich culture. In the early stages of its introduction the acceptance was good as it was supported by the enlightened elite who thought that the learning of the language would open up many opportunities to project Indians on International platforms. During the freedom struggle leaders like Gandhi, Tagore and Azad attached more importance to the learning of the mother tongue. But Nehru, Rajaji and Radhakrishnan laid more emphasis on the learning of the English language because of their foresight and the relative importance of the language in the world. It is a fact that for two hundred years English was part of the Indian culture and heritage and it has become one of the languages of the country.

The present scenario represents the importance of English as a language of science and technology. At the higher levels of study English as a medium of instruction is more useful than any other language. English is a rich language with abundant vocabulary and structures where every single expression finds a meaning. It opens new avenues into the world of learning. For higher education, mastery of English is mandatory as maximum number of books is available only in English. English is the most commonly used link language. The scientific and technological progress has helped the world to come together and become closer. And perhaps in this situation, English is the only language, which can keep the bond alive. English as an international language certainly gives us an opportunity to enjoy the feeling of being one in the world and communicate freely with others. Along with this the growth of literature and scientific advancement is much finer and faster in English than any of the Indian languages. In view of the above facts the **Education Commission (1964-1966)** and University Grants Commission (UGC) recommended English as the medium of instruction at the higher education level. **National Policy of Education (1986)** supported English as a scientific

language. The UGC has recommended that at least the national level teaching and training institutes should use English as the medium of instruction. In India English is retained as a medium of instruction at university stage because in professional and technical courses like medicine, law, engineering, agriculture, computers, etc., the books are more readily available all over the world in English only. The translation into vernacular languages will be a vain effort wherein the quality would be of doubt. Besides, the learning of English is mainly to communicate. In this it is in no way cultural but only an instrumental device for wider communication prospects. Therefore, it is apt to say that English occupies the important place as a second language and medium of instruction in our country where almost every course is offered in English keeping in mind the international standards.

Just like the Americans, Australians and British have their unique English words and phrases, Indians also have their own unique English. Most of the words in Indian English are derived from Hindi. Indian accent is sometimes difficult to understand for non-Indians. There are some Indian pronunciations that don't exist in foreign languages. The British faced many problems with such pronunciation and hence they changed some Indian words to suit their convenience. Indians started using, these changed words and made them part of their English. Though it was used as an associate language in the British India it was the language of colonialists. Its usage was strongly opposed by the nationalists who considered English language as a language for professionals only. But in independent India, the language became a major and divisive issue in a multi-lingual nation, with the southern states opposing the imposition of Hindi as an official language; English was introduced as the Associate Official language. So today English continues to enjoy the status of link language and one cannot ignore its influence in the Indian context. Considerable role and status of English in India are therefore indisputable. Despite its long colonial history and global significance, English is used by less than two percent of Indian population. It is considered as a second language of a small elite class. English is India's language of administration, business and commerce; the language of technical and professional education in national institutions; the language of opportunity for better paying jobs in public and private sectors; the language of law, courts and influential sections of media in India.

English is not only taught as a compulsory second language but also used very extensively as a medium of instruction in higher education. In due course English has become India's own language, a language of inter-state communication, a link language and the language of power and social control. In addition, it serves as an important window to the outside world. **Crystal (1987)** calls English, "the world's first genuine global language". It enjoys a dominant position in international politics, banking, news agencies, science and technology, knowledge management and communication. No other language has achieved such a wide spread profile or is likely to in the near future. English has been growing in an Indian socio-cultural-linguistic setting for over two hundred years. It has been a powerful tool to expound Indian culture and philosophy. In terms of the number of people speaking or using English either as first or second language, India ranks third next to United State (US) and United Kingdom (UK). The official status, the role and function of English in all major walks of life have led to an ever-increasing demand for English language in India. The teaching of English in India has been associated right from the beginning with career advancement, social mobility, western knowledge and status in society. English language is very widely spoken across the country as a medium of instruction and subject of study in many schools; it is also used as a medium of official and informal communication.

## **2. Role of English in the Context of Contemporary Developments**

In the modern world, English can be considered as the only language of communication worldwide. Every country has its own language and culture. In spite of that English essentially occupies a supreme position in every walk of life. Political, educational commercial, social and cultural life in any country is influenced by English. It has become so indispensable a language that in our country too the government has established rural universities and Navodaya Vidyalyayas to train the rural

students on par with the urban students. English speaking and learning courses are a craze in the society. Let us now assess the importance of learning English in the context of modern day developments.

- Knowledge explosion in scientific and academic disciplines emphasizes the need for learning English language.
- The rich and abundant wealth of information is available only in English. Hence, for excelling in any subject, knowledge of this language is compulsory.
- Every language is unique and it has got its own importance. But, if the student wants to compete in the international arena, the knowledge of English is a must.
- English is a National link language. It is useful for Centre-State and interstate communication. It also ensures smooth running of several systems and sub systems without any prejudices.
- As an International link language it fosters development, fraternity and establishes a bond of togetherness among the people.
- As a language of higher education, it gives an opportunity to pursue a career of one's choice. For excelling in professional courses, knowledge of English is indispensable in India. The Constitution of the country allotted a place for the language and allowed it to be the associate official language of the country as a medium of communication.
- The burning problem today is unemployment. Knowledge of English opens up job prospects all over the world. But this is leading to another problem called brain drain. But instead of making the youth end up in depression owing to lack of employment, the opportunity of a decent living is much better. Only English can help the students to cash in their talent and caliber in any part of the world.
- Every country has its own values and culture. It is necessary to project this heritage for everyone to appreciate it and learn from it. To transmit culture is perhaps one of the important features of languages and no single language does a job better than English.
- The availability of computer technology and latest software helps in easy transmission of culture and set up links with every part of the world. For example, e-mail has made communication quick and hassle free.
- English is a means of social and intellectual communication. Hence, it is a unifying force in social life of a country as well as in the entire world.
- In the process of modernization and globalization, English is the only language, which established a permanent bond between India and rest of the world.
- English is the language of court and law in India. Courts at all levels present their directions in English. Article 348 of our Indian Constitution stated that all proceedings and all authoritative texts in the Supreme and High courts shall be in English language. If any other Indian language or Hindi is to be used, prior consent or permission should be taken from the President of India.
- In countries like India, where English is a second language its function is that of a federal language and medium of inter-state communication.
- Modernization is necessary in every field. And our agricultural system is not an exception. To take our research and rapid knowledge explosion to agriculture, business and trade, English is the only means to reach the destination.
- The study of English creates a spirit of scientific inquiry. This had led many great men and women to excel in the field of science, literature, philosophy, politics, etc. For example, without English, Tagore's, Geetanjali would never have got the coveted Nobel Prize in literature.
- English is an International commodity without which International mobility, socio-economic growth and better employment opportunities will be in a standstill.
- All the above reasons prove that as an international language, English is of premier importance and plays an important role as the language of communication and development in the context of all modern day developments.

### **3. Advantages of English Language**

- It is a utility language across India and across the globe.
- It is the language in which all contemporary knowledge is accessible. It has been called as the language of development.
- It is also called library language.
- It is required to exchange views and gain knowledge from various international schools of thought, diverse cultures and world literature and also to interpret Indian thought abroad.
- In India the English language serves as a linguistic tool for administrative cohesiveness of the country. (Verghese 1989) gave the following factors, which make English a second language.

#### **3.1 Common Language**

The word common denotes that it is for everyone. Then, there should be a reason and purpose when we say that English is a common language. In a country like India more than 1600 languages are spoken. Diversity and multilingual nature of our country always gives scope for many problems and controversies. No language is considered as a common language. People have a great sense of regionalism and feel that there is a superior language. These issues often end in controversies rather than in agreement. In many developing countries, English is the common spoken language. The borrowed words are understood even by illiterate people. For example, even an illiterate person uses words like pen, paper, post-office, road, etc. English thus occupies the position of a second language and also a common language.

#### **3.2 National Link Language**

National identity stands firm on a common language in the absence of a common language we have been taking help of English since two centuries. In India we do not have a common language for communication. Hindi or any other language could not rise to the standard of English in all its aspects and invariably English is used as a second language. Nehru said "One hundred and fifty years of intimate contact has made English an integral part of our Educational System and this cannot be changed without injury to the course of education in India. In addition, English is today one of the major languages of the world and Indians can not neglect its study only at the risk of loss to themselves." He emphasized on the thought that language is a greater link. In our country for inter-state and center state communication English is the official medium. Many efforts towards translating the official documents into the national language ended in vain as it was not possible to do it. English remained as the link language.

#### **3.3 International Link Language**

English is the most widely spoken language in the world. It is the language of every world organization, media and mail. Rapid knowledge explosion and development in every field has lead to a fast paced life. India too required an international link language having wide contacts with every country in the world. This demanded the use of English as an essential means of communication international understanding and better employment opportunities. "English is international in the sense that it helps in interlinking the relationships of people living in different countries of the world. The world today has become one as it was never before. India cannot afford to isolate itself from the rest of the world. In order to keep pace with the march of world events and growth of ideas, India must keep up her contacts with the western world. English therefore is essential and indispensable for such contacts. It brings the people of different countries closer and leads to better understanding among the different nations of the world".

#### **3.4 Medium of Instruction at Higher Education-Language of Science and Technology**

Our Indian educational system is a sad heritage from our past imperialist masters. In many developing countries parents and elders trouble and burden children to learn at least two languages at a time. The learning of second language does not come naturally to them. But there is no other way either because instruction of all technical professional and higher education courses are

conducted only in English. The course material is readily available only in English. Learning of English language is indispensable for scientific education. The Official Language Commission (1956) proclaimed, English is the key to the store-house of knowledge not yet available in the Indian languages and a window to the rapid progress for technology and scientific knowledge that is constantly taking place in the world.

### ***3.5 Passport for Employment***

As the most commonly spoken language in the world, if one is well versed in English, the command over it can help in securing employment not only in India, but also abroad, anywhere in the world. In the 21st century, globalization has given scope for the rise of multinational companies. English is the only language which can prove to be an asset to secure job anywhere in the world.

### ***3.6 Library and Source Language***

**The Education Commission (1964-1966)** observed that "English as an important library language would play a vital role in higher education. No student should be considered as qualified for a degree unless he has acquired considerable proficiency in English". It is natural to feel instigated to uproot English in favor of our regional languages. But this tendency has to be overcome, as we should get reconciled to the fact that advanced knowledge, excellent literature of the world lies in books written in English. The translations into regional languages always leave a wide gap. The knowledge explosion especially in fields like science, technology, law, medicine, engineering and agriculture has made it compulsory to turn to English. More than sixty percent of the books in the world are published in English. Even though the fluency in English may be difficult to acquire, comprehension of the reading material is very important.

### ***3.7 Language of Trade, Commerce, Administration and Mass Media***

English is perhaps the most widely used language in administration, legal and banking systems, trade and commerce. It is the only language understood by people all over the world. The official and private communication among many parts of the country and world will be cut off without English. It is a language of opportunity, development and socio-economic advancement. It promotes social mobility of ordinary people. It is the medium for trade, commerce, banking, transport, industry, etc., as it is a language for employment, the acquisition of language skills in English will continue to be needed by all those seeking higher prospects.

### ***3.8 Aesthetic Language***

English is a vast, rich, flexible, lively, expressive dynamic and beautiful language. It comprises more than three billion vocabulary. Every sort of thought whether it is simple or profound finds a means of expression in this language. English is a means of social, political, economic, academic and sophisticated intellectual communication. For wide readership and general criticism best literature from all over the world is translated into English. Ever growing English literature is of interest and value. It even played an important role in bringing about cultural renaissance in our country, and has helped raise the standards of creative writing. To deny access to such vibrant language is to lead our students to intellectual starvation. In the modern world, English is a means and access to our classical literature and diverse regional languages. The best literature from all over the world is first translated into English and it is only through it that we gain access to the thought of the world.

### ***3.9 Unifying Factor***

India is a multi-lingual country, where diverse religions, cultures and languages co-exist. Still it is a matter of pride that all of us live together and are an example of unity in diversity. English is a link language that helps us understand each other. Therefore, we can say that in inter-cultural understanding and international understanding, English plays a vital role. Nationally and Internationally English becomes a platform to help us integrate with the thought processes the world of the entire nation. English helps us feel part of human community and also helps foster peace,

understanding and prosperity in this world.

#### **4. The Problems of Learning a Second Language**

Need for learning a language arises from natural situations. If a person is forced to communicate his feelings to satisfy his daily needs, he will make an attempt to learn the language. But a second language lacks this basic motive. So, learning is generally formal in nature. There arise several problems while learning a second language. The problems while learning a second language given by **Baruah (2001)** are as follow:

##### ***4.1 Lack of Exposure***

Lack of exposure to the language is perhaps the most important problem for a teacher and student in learning a second language. For example, a student of Andhra Pradesh is exposed to his mother tongue, Telugu. It is only when he is exposed to a foreign language that he learns it. It means to say that without exposure the learners do not make an effort to learn.

##### ***4.2 Untrained Teachers***

It is quite a common phenomenon that most of the teachers who teach English are not well trained. If they are not trained, they cannot teach well either. In our country, the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL), Regional Institute of English (RIE) and English Language Teaching (ELT) Centers give training to the teachers of English to improve English language teaching.

##### ***4.3 Lack of Motivation***

Utility is the main motive behind the learning of any subject or skill. Teaching of a second language lacks this urge. Hence, the teacher has to motivate the students to learn the new language. When the students don't feel a need to learn that the teacher has to create interest through motivation.

##### ***4.4 Non-Availability of Suitable Study Material***

Another problem is non-availability of suitable study material. Learning aids such as radio, cassette recorders, charts, pictures, TV, English readers, supplementary readers, workbooks, and teacher's handbooks are all essential for learning a second language. In the absence of these materials it is very difficult to comprehend the language properly.

##### ***4.5 Lack of clear-cut policy***

There have been frequent changes in government policy towards the teaching and learning of English in several states. Educationalist, politicians and journalists express different views on the place that English should be given in India. It is time to lay down a clear-cut policy regarding the place of English in schools and colleges.

##### ***4.6 Little understanding of aims***

Unfortunately, the average Indian teachers of English lose sight of the aims of teaching the language. The language is not taught as a skill subject but as a knowledge subject. So that at the end of the course, the pupils have acquired very little proficiency in the linguistic skills that really matter.

##### ***4.7 Defective method***

The translation method, which is most wasteful, is still followed in a majority of schools. Oral work, which is the soul of any good method, is neglected. There is no oral practice on the part of the students, as a result of which they cannot construct a few sentences in English on their own accord. All that they do is to cram... answers to certain set of questions and the teachers help to do so. A student even though he passes the examination, by such cramming work has not acquired any linguistic skill.

##### ***4.8 The faulty examination system***

Since the type of examination influences the methods of teaching to a large extent, examination in English is to be blamed for some of the defects that have crept in, under the present system of student can get through the examination if he cares to remember answers to certain stock questions. He need

not even read the prescribed textbooks. The result is that although a student succeeds in the examination, yet he has no practical command of the language. He can neither speak correct English, nor write it. The standard of spoken English in schools is so deplorably low.

### 5. The Present Scenario of English

English still occupies an important place in educational system and life of our country. It is the language that continues to dominate the national scene. It is taught compulsorily in most of the states in the country although the class from which its teaching is started differs from state to state. In the Union Territory of Chandigarh, for example, the teaching of English is started from the standard third. In Punjab and Haryana, its study is commenced from the 6<sup>th</sup> class, but in Gujarat the teaching of English is delayed up to the 5<sup>th</sup> class so far as the government schools are concerned. English is taught in Gujarat as one of the school subjects. In some of the schools it is taught from the fifth standard and in others eighth. Recently, the Government of Gujarat has introduced English from the Sixth standard and they are going to introduce English language teaching from the first standard. Gradually the department of school education has initiated the movement of introducing English from the primary level. Still it is not clear how English is to be taught in the classroom. English language is taught from the first standard in non grant in aid Gujarati primary schools. English language teaching exists from primary education to college education. In Gujarat, everywhere in small towns and villages; the people have started sending their wards into English medium schools. Why the Government is not thinking of introducing English uniformly from primary to college education? The Universities are autonomous and they can modify their curricula but schools cannot do anything on their own. The board for Secondary and Higher Secondary Education and Commissioner of Primary Education look after the plan and policies in respective level of education. The coordination is needed for common Programme in teaching English for better and prospective future of learners.

Another issue in English language teaching is methodology; teachers have their own plans and methods of teaching language without having clear understanding of second language learning or acquisition. Having no consensus on teaching English, the schools don't insist English as compare to Mathematics and Science. The parents also insist learning Mathematics and Science because in common belief these subjects are important for the career particularly in getting admission into medicine and technology. There is a need to bring awareness among parents and teachers that the language learning is not a studying a subject; it enables learners to open an opportunity to the world of knowledge. The learning should be not in the form of learning other subjects; it should enable learners to use English without fear. It is to be understood by all educationists, policy-makers, teachers, parents and above all learners.

The foundational years for the teaching of English in schools are in the hands of teachers who neither know enough English nor are familiar with the latest and far reading development in the pedagogy of English. Pupils are taught English for six years, in spite of that, their standard of English is very low. They fail to acquire the basic linguistic skills. The conditions under which English is taught in India differ from state to state and from one type of school to another.

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