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IS ENGLISH IN INDIA JUST A LANGUAGE?

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**Dr Dharitri R Gohel**

Assistant Professor, English

L D College of Engineering,

Gujarat Technological University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat

[dharithrigohel@ldce.ac.in](mailto:dharithrigohel@ldce.ac.in)

**Abstract:**

English is not just a language in India it is much bigger and larger than just a language. It is playing a strategic role in reviving Indian economy, feel good factor for confidence and added to impressive personality; not only that, it is many times connected to etiquettes too. Indians attitude towards English language has paved a concrete path towards international job market and success. English language is playing role of a catalyst to hasten modernization process in India along with rising of new middle class inculcated with respect for Indianness and confidence to communicate across boundaries. Moreover, English language has become a thread which connects all the regional diversity inside Indian Territory. In spite of this obvious reality, some questions arise, why are we so much after English? In India not only rich class but even labour class want their children to study in English medium schools. This kind of social conditioning has its root in colonization or in futuristic vision? This research article is a humble investigation into finding out roots of

retaining English language in India after independence and how English is playing a role in constructive progress of India as a developing economy. The article also incorporates an interesting result of a survey made on how youngsters of Gujarat are taking English language.

**Keywords:** English language, Indian economy, modernization, attitude of (students of Gujarat)

English language has played prolific and profound role in constructing progressive journey of India that is Bharat. Whether it is before independence or after independence English language is continuously playing a strategic role in developing India. However, many times mind becomes skeptic over retaining English language in India; as we Indians, very much adore our own language, so much so that first state boundary of India had decided on the basis of language and language is very much part of a culture and

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

expression too. Consequently, a lot many questions storm the mind like: is it the deep effect of colonization on the mind of people living in Indian Territory that has retained English language even after 73 years of freedom? Why people of India want their children to study in English medium schools? Which logics are working behind not only retaining but also continuing English language in India? Besides technological revolution; is it attraction of English language that is playing role or curiosity and adaptability of human nature? Why majority of people are in favour of English? Why English language has been given so much importance in India? Is it because English language speaking skills expands opportunity for job market across the world, or is it because it has capability to quench hunger for knowledge? Or English language is a culture, by adopting it we can learn western etiquettes and manners leading to modern life style! Or the language is powerful enough to help a person to come out of hollow modernity? Is this that fluency of English language decides educational level of a person in our social mindset? How many of us were aware about the fact that the greatest of knowledge is available in English before falling in love with the English language? I honestly did not know that, but I wanted to become a fluent speaker of the language. What is the reason behind this kind of social conditioning?

**Possible reasons behind retention of English Language in India:**

Most of the time it is political decisions play role behind social conditioning and many times tradition. Here, in spite of having rich tradition of languages in India, English language is enjoying prime status. The reason is perhaps Indian mindset. In this case, point of view of Shree C Rajagopalachari, last Governor-General of India, is not worthy.

...Rajagopalachari. At the time of independence, he had been the most articulate advocate for retaining English. The language, he argued, is ours. We need not send it back to Britain with the Englishman. He added that according to Hindu tradition, all languages were the gift of the goddess Saraswati.

Therefore, English belonged to us by origin, the originator being Saraswati, and also by acquisition. (181 The Indian renaissance)<sup>1</sup>

This point of view of Shree C. Rajagopalachari is of one of the best examples of आ नौ भवति:

इतवो य=तु विवतः Suggesting the great spirit of adopting and adapting, if it can be thought, why not a language? In addition, the second strong factor behind retaining

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

English is Jawaharlal Nehru's 16 years long rule over India.

Jawaharlal Nehru imbibed a great deal of Western culture and was self-conscious about it. He is said to have once joked that he was the last Englishman to rule India. He was in awe of the West and its achievements. (181 The Indian Renaissance)<sup>2</sup>

Along with Nehru, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the architect of Indian Constitution, was also in favour of retaining English in India.

RETAIN ENGLISH AT ANY COST Aurangabad, July 3, 1953. "Dr.B.R. Ambedkar, former Law Minister of India, has pleaded for the retention of English as the medium of instruction in colleges and universities at any cost. In an interview, Dr. Ambedkar remarked that English was the richest of all languages and said: "I do not believe any other language in India including Hindi can be used instead of English in schools and colleges." Dr. Ambedkar, who is the founder-chairman of the People's Education Society in Aurangabad, said that he would not allow either Hindi or the regional language to be the medium of instruction in the Aurangabad College. English, he added, would be the medium of instruction. Talking of Indian languages, Dr. Ambedkar said that no other language could take the place of Hindi. He explained they had selected Hindi because of the fact it could expand. However, he said, Hindi lacked "literature

and depth," both of which the English language possessed. To enrich Hindi, Dr. Ambedkar said, a Hindi Academy consisting of eminent men should be started and a vocabulary should be prepared.—UPI."<sup>1</sup>

[https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume\\_17\\_02.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume_17_02.pdf) <sup>3</sup> Even the first copy of Indian Constitution is written in English and Hindi language. So, the rule book on which independent India is commencing her maiden journey there is no question of English being a foreign language. It is very much our own.

Moreover, according to Article 343 of Indian constitution, English will remain official language of India for 15 years but then it was amended and Hindi was added as official language. <https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/pdf1/Part17.pdf> <sup>4</sup>

Along with political decisions, Indian linguist has also played role by writing a book, The Indianization of English in which, Brij Kachru, an eminent Indian linguist, wrote that it is not British English, English is now completely Indian with Indian accents. In India we have many Englishes.<sup>5</sup>

Along with that, a quick fix link between job opportunity and economic success among people of India, has brought

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

a craze for English language. With liberalization and globalization, Indian market made open for MNCs to invest in India. Cross cultural communication took place and with the advent of internet and media, English language knowing people became more aware about what is going around the world and how it is changing the way we live. And how job opportunities can be generated with knowledge of English. There might be a time when people of India had thought of English being superior but now with rise of new middle class whose children have studied in English medium schools and have brought up observing presence of English in every veins of society, are considering English as necessity or need of the time. Even Jawaharlal Nehru was not sure about emerging capability of Indians to compete with the world when he was trying to modernize India based on state-directed investment. But the change has come in Indian mindset.

However, when India re-emerged, Indians were less apologetic about its Indianness and far more confident in its interaction with the outside world. This is an important difference with the pre-independence middle class. Whereas the earlier middle class had prided itself on ability to speak English and quote Shakespeare, the new middle class is both more casual and confident of both its English and its Indianness. For this generation, a combination of Indian English

and Hindi has already become the common tongue and English is thought of as an Indian language that was accidentally invented in Britain! (181 The Indian Renaissance)<sup>6</sup>

Gradually, it is being proved that it was not colonization of mind for inclination towards learning language but future opportunities in job and business that has lead we Indians to learn to communicate in English. Though sometimes it is connected with social status, most of the time now it is taken as necessity even to communicate easily within India. And that is also noteworthy that the attitude of Indians and culture of India promotes multi-language, and that is why perhaps, youngsters have already adopted a mixture of English and Hindi in their daily communication due to spread of media.

Spread of Hindi has been due to cinema, television and popular music. Just as English is the language of business and higher education, Hindi is the language of popular culture. India has long been comfortable with the use of multiple-languages and will confidently continue to do so in the future. (182 The Indian Renaissance)<sup>7</sup>

Besides, while studying emergence of great civilization in the world, the fact emerges that every great civilization borrowed from its predecessor, so does India. And India has long tradition of

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

accepting people and culture from outside, similarly, English language has been accepted as our own.

Now let us take a view on connection of English language and Indian economy.

**English language and Indian Economy:**

In India English language has direct connection with development of Indian Economy. Nandan Nilekani, Indian entrepreneur, bureaucrat, and politician, said during his talk on 'Ideas for India's future' in 2009 when he was talking about Indian population converting in to skilled labour force or human capital and demographic dividend, he also noted acceptance of English language has given boost to development of Indian Economy. He also added that attitude of Indians towards English language has made them comfortable with fast globalization process. Furthermore, English has become language of aspiration for Indians, English is becoming a huge strategic asset.<sup>8</sup>

Even Sanjeev Sanyal, in his book 'The Indian Renaissance' noted how knowledge of English language has made Indians to be capable enough to absorb in international market. The easy availability of cheap but educated middle-class workers and the globalizing technological shift in communications made it possible for these white-collar workers to quickly absorb new ideas as well as participate in the international market place. 9 it can also be said the knowledge of communicative English may not make the person able to

make software and scientific innovation, but at least they can follow basic instructions and run simple machinery. In other words, the combination of population dynamics and improved literacy should lead to a sharp increase in the availability of blue-collar workers.<sup>9</sup>

Besides strategic role of English language in Economic success, knowledge of English is directly involved in economic gain. Today on every nook and corner one can find Spoken English Class, people are ready to pay heavy fees to learn English language, lot of mobile applications are available on Google play store where people can enhance their vocabulary, learn sentence structures, check grammar and what not! IELT classes are also generating employment. Knowledge of English language is need to clear most of the competitive exams also. Rashmi Bansal, a celebrated author of India has noted Entrepreneurship based on English speaking skills in her story 'Welcome to our Jungle' in which, two young boys were running a business in the name of 'Be the Local'. (65 Poor Little Rich Slum)<sup>10</sup>

Now a day's society is expecting homemakers also to converse in English that is why movie like English-Vinglish came to existence. This movie had earned 121 crores may be because the theme of the movie was to earn respect of the family members by learning English.

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Even movie Super 30 shows that knowledge of English adds to confidence of students. Besides, English is required in all **Corporate language:**



Figure 1 Wikipedia

Most of the renown multinational companies of the world have made English as the common corporate language—Airbus, Daimler-Chrysler, Fast Retailing, Nokia, Renault, Samsung, SAP, Technicolor, and Microsoft in Beijing, to name a few—to facilitate smooth communication and performance across geographically diverse functions and business endeavors.

Amazon.com had acquired number of companies across the globe and established joint venture with major companies in China, Indonesia, Taiwan, Thailand and Brazil. That made Hiroshi Mikitani, the CEO of Rakuten—Japan’s largest online marketplace—to make English, the official language of his company.

the fields like Science, academia, and tourism, diplomacy, management consultancy and finance.

English is the fastest-spreading language in human history, it has become language of communication for around 1.75 billion people.<sup>11</sup> therefore, English language has been adopted in India to participate confidently in world market and help growing Indian economy. Therefore, we can say that English is playing a strategic role in development of Indian Economy. Along with Economy, knowledge of English has played a role of catalyst in modernization process of India too.

**English and modernization:**

Dawn of modernization started with Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, key social reformer of India under East India Company, petitioned for introduction of English education in Indian schools. He established Hindu college with David Hare in 1817 and Vedanta College in 1826 based

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

on western curriculum. He was of the opinion that this would help in progress of India. He also advocated for western science and mathematics to be incorporated in Indian learning system. Along with that he played crucial role in Abolition of sati pratha which can be considered a beginning of modernization.<sup>12</sup>

Even Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, a Pandit of Sanskrit favoured English education because he was of the belief that students should be able to examine Indian and western concepts and thus discovering truth for themselves. Along with Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, many others like Debendranath Tagore, Kesabchandra Sen had played significant role in preparing a platform for India to adopt modern thoughts and somewhere their knowledge of English language had played role.

Gandhiji, a political hero, who arouse the people of India from the long sleep of ignorance, stir them and prepared them for mass movement was very good at drafting in English which helped him a lot in fighting against British rule. It can be said that prominent Indian political leaders have fought back the British with the help of English language and their English education.

After, independence, inclusion of fundamental rights in Indian constitution,

freedom of press, idea of welfare state, Right to information Act 2005, giving importance to human rights, all these modern thoughts can be called influential agents for speeding up modernization process in India; we have to accept that these are the product of western civilization and here English language has been playing a powerful and constructive role either directly or indirectly.

Most of the advance researches in medical science, physics, chemistry, Technology, Economy, politics, linguistics, psychology are available in English language so even a common man can widen his horizon of knowledge, of thought of life style and many more. For example, if we take only one aspect that is of thinking, one will have all the types of thinking at his disposal, like; convergent thinking, critical thinking, creative thinking, scientific thinking, divergent thinking, lateral thinking, analytical thinking, linear thinking along with the explanation of where do we need it and how can we develop it.

Another example modern thinking is, idea of feminism; originated in the West. One of the prominent books written advocating women's right to education is by Mary Wollstonecraft, Vindication of Rights of Women' written in English.<sup>13</sup>

RESEARCH ARTICLE

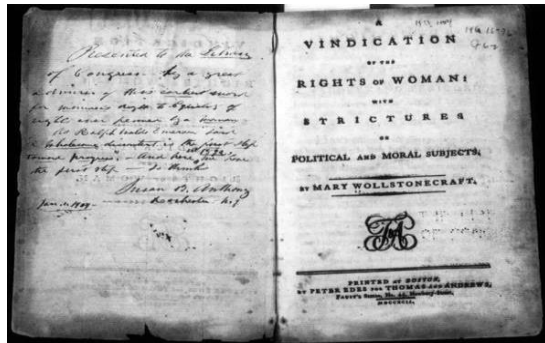


Figure 2 Britannica

It is idea which is changing the world. Though India had a great tradition of considering woman as Devi or Shakti, but in that great fragile veil how woman were being suppressed suffocated and exploited! Woman's heart core deep wish to be considered as a human was neglected. But now modernity has entered in women's rights too. English language helps in understanding advance research in politics, economics, entrepreneurship, scientific thinking, research, analysis, interview etiquettes and of course communication skills.

With liberalization and globalization, Indian market made open for MNCs to invest in India. Cross cultural communication took place and with the advent of internet and media, English language knowing people became more aware about what is going around the world and how it is changing the way we live. People are becoming more open minded towards change due to their knowledge of

language. So it can be said that English is playing a role of a catalyst in modernization process taking place in India.

**Attitude of students of Gujarat towards English:**

A survey was done to see how youngsters are taking English language in Gujarat. There were 330 responses. The result is displayed in following charts:

Considering English language as a need of time Gujarat government has come up with the Finishing school project to be implemented in higher education institute. In Finishing school, English language along with other soft skills is taught to prepare students of Gujarat for job market.

**Conclusion:**

Therefore, it can be said that English is not just a language in India it is much larger than a language. English is now very much our own. It is playing a tactical role in developing Indian economy. Considering a



**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

whole process of modernization in India, English language is working as a catalyst. Knowledge of English language provides wings to an Individual to fly in sky of knowledge and fills him up with solid confidence in his formal and informal communication, along with that, knowledge of English language adds to an impressive personality, not only that it is many times connected with etiquettes too. Indians attitude towards English language has paved a concrete path towards international job market and success. Moreover, in India, the language is accepted as a thread which connects all the regional diversity inside Indian Territory. Though there are many challenges teachers are facing in teaching English, but if students will be made aware about strategic importance of English language by supporting it with statistical data and facts regarding how in 73 years of independence, knowledge of English language has created miracle in all aspects of life, a teacher can generate expected interest among students.

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