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## Journey of English Language Teaching in India

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**Abstract** This research paper explores the historical evolution and contemporary trends in English Language Teaching (ELT) in India. It delves into the multifaceted aspects of ELT, addressing its societal, educational and linguistic impacts. English is substantially used language of today has often been mentioned as, “global language”. It is the lingua franca of the current era and the same is taught and learnt as a second language around the world. In India, English is used not only for communicative purpose but also serves as a link language for inter-state and intrastate coordination as the nation is found with the great ethnic and linguistic diversity. Though modern technology has started playing a significant role in imparting and acquiring the language in schools and colleges especially in the small towns and rural areas is rather inadequate and unproductive. The students studying English at school and college level manage to get through the exams without making enough attempts to either understand the language or learn to appreciate the utility of language. This article highlights the significance of using English as a tool to fulfill the interminably increasing requirements of the competitive corporate world. The tasks before educators in the contemporary day ELT and strategies to overcome are considered in this paper. The method by which the learners can put their knowledge into real daily practice is to fulfill their real-world necessities to gain an expertise over the language is emphasized.

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**Keywords** ELT in India, received standard English, linguistic imperialism, colonial period, post-colonial period.

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### 1. Introduction

The introduction serves as a gateway to the paper, giving readers an understanding of the historical roots of English language education in India and emphasizing the significance of English in the diverse educational landscape.

English is a language which has been considered man's most remarkable achievement is so much a part of our lives, like the air we inhale and exhale, that very often we take it for granted and as usually are not aware of its characteristic features. Language is a system. English has a status of associate language but in fact it is the most vital language of India. After Hindi it is the most popularly spoken language in our country and probably the most read and written language in India. English in our nation is used not only for communicating with the outside world but also for inter-state and intrastate communication. English symbolizes in Indians' minds, better education, better culture and higher intellect. Indians who know English often mix it with Indian languages in their conversation. It is also usual among Indians to abruptly move to speak fluent English in the middle of their conversations. English also serves as the communicator among Indians who converse in various languages. English is too much significant in some spheres—legal, financial, educational, journalism and business in India.



## **2. Historical Perspectives of ELT in India**

This section delves into the historical context of ELT, examining its evolution during colonial rule and the subsequent shifts in language education policies post-independence. It provides a foundation for understanding the roots of English language teaching in India.

According to protocol English has a status of assistant language but factually it is the most significant language of India. After Hindi it is the most commonly spoken language in India and probably the most read, write and spoken language in India. Indians who are familiar with English will ever try to show that they know English. English symbolizes in Indians minds, better education, better culture and higher intellect. Indians who know English often mix it with other languages in their conversations. It is also usual among Indians to move precipitously to speak fluent English in the middle of their conversations. English also serves as the communicator among Indians who speak various language. English is very important in some spheres—legal, financial, educational, business and journalism in India. Until the initial decade of 1990s, foreign movies in India weren't translated or dubbed in Indian languages but were broadcast in English and were meant for English speakers merely. The cause Indians give such vitality to English is related to the fact that India was an English colony. When the British began ruling India, they looked for Indian mediators who could assist Britishers to administer our country. The British turned to aristocrat Indians to work for them. A number of upper caste Indians, especially the Brahmans worked for them. The British scheme was to create an Indian class who should reflect like the British, or as it was said then in Britain "Indians in blood and colour but British in taste, in views, ethics and wisdom." The British also founded in India universities based on British models with emphasis on English. These Indians also educated themselves in British universities. The Christian missionaries arrived India from 1813 and they also established schools at elementary level for Indians in which the commanding language was local language. Afterwards these missionaries built senior secondary schools with English as the language of instruction which compelled the Indians who wanted to study to have a good knowledge of the language. The British rulers started establishing their universities in India from 1857. English was now the first language in Indian education. The "modern" leaders of that time in India also assisted British language and claimed it to be the main key towards prosperity. Indians who were familiar with good English were known as the new elite of India. A number of new schools were opened in which the commanding language was English. As per the British laws the language of instruction at university level was English. Hence, schools that focused on English were preferred by ambitious Indians. Even after independence, English continued to be the main language of India. Officially it was given a idol of a subsidiary language and was estimated to bring to an end officially after 15 years of our independence but it still remains the principal language of India.

## **3. Different Stages of ELT in India**

### **3.1. Pre-colonial stage**

In the 17th century, the English language found its way to India through the East India Company, established for trade in the East. Initially, the British tried learning Indian languages for communication and even set up special colleges. However, as their political influence grew, they prioritized English, creating British Indian provinces like Bengal, Madras and Bombay. English gained prominence over Indian languages with missionary institutions teaching it and the East India Company taking charge of Indian education.

By the 1830s, the Indian middle classes recognized English as crucial for securing government jobs. Private schools in Calcutta thrived by offering English education. Raja Ram Mohan Roy initiated movements to introduce Western scientific education through English, aiming to replace traditional Sanskrit and Persian teachings. Lord Macaulay, leading a committee on this issue, advocated English as the medium of instruction. His goal was to make Indians culturally British while maintaining their distinctive taste and opinions in English. Macaulay aimed to establish British cultural dominance and control Indian minds through English, envisioning that a class proficient in English would disseminate knowledge. The British Government favoured Indians with English proficiency in job opportunities. Some Indian students faced challenges in obtaining degrees, particularly in literature. As new colleges and universities emerged, the English education system, rooted in English literature, persisted until India gained independence.



### 3.2. Colonial stage:

Following India's independence, the government faced the task of deciding its language policy. Hindi was chosen as the official language, while regional languages received the status of national languages. Some states advocated for English as an associate official language. The educational landscape in India saw a rapid increase in universities and schools, expanding beyond elite institutions. Even individuals from neglected segments of society showed interest in learning English. However, concerns arose regarding the standards of English education.

The government addressed this by appointing numerous commissions to enhance English standards in schools and colleges. Despite these efforts, there were fears that such changes could isolate India from the global flow of knowledge. Commissions, like the Secondary Education Commission, reiterated the importance of English due to its rich literature both humanistic and technical. Educated Indians' command over English played a significant role in India's international position.

In 1958, the Central Institute of English was established in Hyderabad with regional institutes in Bangalore and Chandigarh. While English was traditionally studied for education and administration, its role evolved as an international language of communication. With advancements in science, technology, travel and entertainment, English became vital for listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

Despite a long-standing literature-based English education system, there were global shifts in teaching methods. In India, English began to be taught from the first standard in non-English medium schools, emphasizing skill-based learning over literature. Evaluation systems adapted, introducing oral tests in secondary and higher secondary schools from 2006-2007. Recognizing the importance of spoken English, various courses, language laboratories and computer-assisted learning emerged.

Language trainers and private institutions played a crucial role in enhancing communicative and spoken English skills, especially in urban areas. Television channels like NDTV Imagine contributed to this by running programs like "Angrezi Mein Kehte Hain." Despite criticism of these learning centers as "commercial institutes," they significantly influenced the changing landscape of English Language Teaching (ELT) in India as noted by Dr. Deepti Gupta.

### 3.3. Colonial Stage:

Teaching English with a focus on conveying the story of Jesus has a rich history but there have been varying opinions among missionaries about its effectiveness. English, while containing significant Christian literature, also encompasses secular literature. The influence of Secular Humanism, spread through the learning of English language and literature has played a role in shifting the emphasis away from the deep Christian foundation of the language.

Despite English's association with Christian metaphors and idioms, the practical aspects of the language, such as its cultural, scientific and business communication capabilities, often take precedence. In the teaching of English, some Christian educators have shifted away from explicitly incorporating Christian values, interpreting ethical and moral lessons in literature through a lens of universal humanism.

Due to the lingering Christian elements in English, many nations have adopted a process of contextualization in English textbooks. Original works by native English speakers are being replaced by the writings of nationals who excel in English prose and poetry. This creative writing often integrates metaphors, idioms and phrases from national languages, reflecting local culture and religion. Translations of local tales are increasingly included and government-inspired documents on ideology become part of the English curriculum. Nations aim to embrace English as a language while distancing it from the cultural and religious aspects it traditionally represents.

In the evolving landscape of English teaching and learning, it's essential to recognize that English education is not solely facilitated by native English speakers, especially in countries like India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and various African nations. These countries primarily employ their nationals to teach English. Conversely, some nations like Japan and China prefer to invite a higher number of native English speakers to teach the language. The goals of English education are continually being redefined, reflecting a dynamic and evolving approach to language instruction.



#### **4. Obstacles and Opportunities of ELT in India**

The discussion in this section focuses on the challenges faced in implementing ELT in India, considering factors such as linguistic diversity and socio-economic issues. It also explores opportunities for improvement, emphasizing innovations and teacher training.

In navigating the landscape of English Language Teaching (ELT) in India, a multitude of challenges and opportunities emerge, intricately woven into the fabric of the country's diverse socio-cultural milieu. The foremost challenge lies in the vast linguistic diversity that defines India. With a multitude of languages spoken across the nation, crafting effective and inclusive ELT strategies becomes a complex task. Tailoring language instruction to meet the needs of a linguistically diverse population requires a nuanced understanding of regional dialects and linguistic variations.

Socio-economic factors further compound the challenges faced in the implementation of ELT. Economic disparities influence access to quality education, creating a divide in language proficiency levels among different socio-economic strata. Bridging this gap necessitates innovative approaches that go beyond traditional classroom settings. It calls for the integration of technology, flexible learning models and inclusive policies that address the socio-economic dimensions of language education.

Amidst these challenges, however, lie abundant opportunities for transformative change. Innovations in teaching methodologies, including the incorporation of technology, can enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of English language education. Teacher training programs play a pivotal role in equipping educators with the skills to navigate linguistic diversity and cater to varied socio-economic backgrounds effectively.

Moreover, the diverse cultural tapestry of India itself offers a rich resource for ELT. Integrating local cultures, languages and traditions into the curriculum not only fosters a sense of inclusivity but also enhances the relevance of English education to the daily lives of learners.

In essence, the challenges posed by linguistic diversity and socio-economic factors present an intricate puzzle that demands thoughtful solutions. By embracing these challenges as opportunities for growth, India's ELT landscape has the potential to evolve into a dynamic and inclusive space, where the English language becomes a tool for empowerment and bridging societal divides.

#### **5. Role of English in Education**

English holds a unique position in India, being the state language in Meghalaya and Nagaland and serving as the primary medium of instruction at the postgraduate level. Additionally, it is taught as a second language at every educational stage across all Indian states. The role of English in India is intricately shaped by political, cultural and social considerations, as discussed by linguist Kachru.

Three key questions persistently surface in these discussions. Firstly, the inquiry revolves around English's role in both early and higher education. Secondly, there is ongoing deliberation regarding the roles of regional languages, particularly Hindi and English. The third question pertains to the model of English presented to Indian learners and the need for a uniform and effective approach.

While the government of India has primarily focused on the first two questions in relation to national and state-level language planning, no universally accepted answers have been reached. The three-language formula was introduced to create a fairer educational load, promote national integration and provide a broader language choice in school curricula. However, practical implementation has proven challenging, with Hindi states not consistently enforcing the curriculum leading to variations across regions.

The sociolinguistic landscape of India is marked by diverse pressures influencing language education. Spolsky identifies various factors such as family, religion, ethnicity, political, cultural, economic, legal and military pressures that contribute to shaping language policies within the education system. Education is seen as a powerful tool for enforcing language policy, with pressures both shaping and being shaped by the language policies of schools.

The effectiveness of English language learning is emphasized as dependent on the learner's ability to communicate fluently in both writing and speaking, along with using English for library purposes. However, Mahajiteswar Das challenges the notion of teaching English solely as a "library language," arguing that competence in all language skills is crucial for effective communication and job opportunities.



Addressing the elitist status of English in India, Mark Tully highlights concerns related to economic development, suggesting that encouraging the widespread use of English throughout the country could transform it into a genuine link language for all, rather than remaining confined to elite circles.

## 6. Conclusion

In the conclusion, it is evident that English has played a significant role in India since gaining independence. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, English is no longer perceived solely as a foreign language tied to the USA or the UK but is recognized as a global language. Over time, Indians have witnessed and experienced the advantages of being more proficient in English in various contexts.

While English initially held the status of a major foreign language in India, the evolving functions and benefits associated with English proficiency have transformed its standing into that of a global language. This shift reflects the changing dynamics of communication on a worldwide scale and underscores the importance of English in diverse settings.

The field of English language teaching has seen substantial growth in India. This expansion is attributed to the contributions of dedicated researchers who have made valuable advancements in English language teaching. Additionally, the field has been enriched by the efforts of numerous linguists who have left their mark in the realm of applied linguistics. This collective progress indicates a positive trajectory for English language education in India, reflecting the evolving importance of English as a global means of communication.

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