



# Economics of English in India in the Age of Globalisation

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## Abstract:

English has come of age as a global language. It is spoken by a quarter of the world's population, enabling a true single market in knowledge and ideas. The growth of English as a truly global communication channel, it allows the rapid cross-pollination of ideas and innovation around the world and the development of a new kind of super-national single market in knowledge and ideas. Global English is a highly valued technical skill and it can be prerequisite for many international positions, foreign relations and development and a passport to advancement in global media, entertainment and financial world. As English language now belongs to world and increasingly to non-native speakers and plays the integral role in escalating the country's economy and inclusive growth, this paper reviewed that the awareness of importance of English language in the era of globalisation which has made people learn this universal language consciously. This paper also points out the real scenario of developing countries, like India, is indeed worrisome because of the flaws of Indian education system, pedagogy and evaluation method.

Keywords: English language, Globalisation, Economy, Inclusive growth.

## Introduction

The majority of the population in India does not know English language. According to 2011 census, only 2, 59,000 Indians out of 1.21 billion documented English as their primary language. The recently published India Human Development Survey Round II data shows that only 6% of Indians stated they could speak English fluently. Evidently, English speakers in India are limited in number. Compared to this, the number of Hindi speakers was as high as 521 million (2011 census). Yet, it is English rather than Hindi, on which supervalent importance is given as it is a criteria for employment, means for international transactional communication and symbol of superior knowledge and education. (Bedi, 2020)

The relationship of a language on economic growth and development is different for different countries as its implications are through factors including diffusion of knowledge and promotion of trade, through institutions including educational, political, legal and administrative. Being spoken by a few only, the English language has an under-researched yet evident grasp on the Indian economy and education sectors. The common Indians are aware that 'good' schools and colleges of India are English focused and the job market in India whether it is the private sector or the public sector predominantly requires English speaking capability because English becomes an empowering vocational skill in a globalising economy. (Bedi, 2020 & Salma 2017)

As the pedagogic practice in government institutions in India does not inculcate functional skills of English, there is a need to focus on improved language skills, integrating English into curriculum from the primary or even pre-school years which helps to attract foreign investment. Improving English skills drive up salaries, which in turn give governments and individuals more money to invest in English training. Improved English skills allow individuals to apply for jobs and raise their standards of living. Countries with a low proficiency in English have uniformly low levels of exports per capita. The inadequate English language skills of common citizens of India create lack of inclusive growth which gets a new linguistic explanation. (Bedi, 2020, Salma, 2017 & The English Effect, 2013)

### **Importance of English in the Age of Globalisation**

The medium of communication is language through which we fulfill our needs and express our ideas and opinions. As globalisation is being an influencing force, English language becomes new communication euphoria. Like, in India, besides 22 official languages 'English enjoys the status of associate official language at national level' (Salma, 2015).

Globalisation and English language are said to work as pull factors for one another. Globalisation of trade and commerce and increasing division of work force with different set up have increased the importance of usage of English language. Due to globalisation, English language has become the most prized possession of communication. In this global village, English language acts as a repository of wisdom and wit. English language is a propeller for advancement of career and a machine to mint money. (Bodapati, 2016)

English language can be rightly regarded as the key to the store house of production and productivity. We can make use of this language to promote our world view and spiritual heritage and promote cultural and traditional aspects across the globe. For the generation to be connected soon to inherit influence in commerce, politics, media and cultural life, technology is the vehicle and English is increasingly the fuel on which it will run. As globalisation has brought English language into limelight, the usage of the language has changed completely. The queen's language has become a common man's curriculum. The language has become a silver bowl to earn bread and butter. (Bodapati, 2016 & The English Effect, 2013)

## Correlation between English Language and Economic Growth

The spread of the dominance of English in the economic arena of globalisation, proficiency of the global language has become a necessary skill to possess in the labour market of the country. The language increases access to the people and business outside the national boundary (Bedi, 2020). Billions of people around the world are desperately trying to learn English, not only for self-improvement, but as an economic necessity. Research shows a direct co-relation between the English skills and economic performance of the country. In the latest edition of the Economic Forum (EF), English Proficiency Index (EPI) found that almost 60 countries and territories were surveyed and a rise in English proficiency was connected with a rise in per capita income. (McCormick, 2017)

Accumulation of knowledge by a country has a positive impact on economic growth of the country. The amount of knowledge that a country possesses can be increased and enhanced either through the creation of new knowledge or through access of knowledge founded in other countries. Developed countries possess the capabilities to adopt the technique and new knowledge is created by these developed countries in which the English language enjoys a special status (Bedi, 2020).

Lee suggested that newly created knowledge through research and development in the developed countries can be transmitted to developing countries by increasing economic integration and initiating new means of telecommunication. Globalisation has enabled economic integration to a large extent and opening the door for international knowledge. The area of concentration is now is the medium through which the knowledge can be diffused by the developed countries and absorbed by the developing countries. And the medium is the global language English. Lee provides convincing example to demonstrate the importance of English in disseminating knowledge. One of such example is academic journals, published in non-English-speaking countries. (Lee, 2012)

If we notice the impact of English language on daily activities, we can see the machineries usually come with instruction manuals in English. Without the basic knowledge of that language, workers will not be able to use these machines productively. Thus, individuals are more likely to get access to the new knowledge if they have English proficiency.

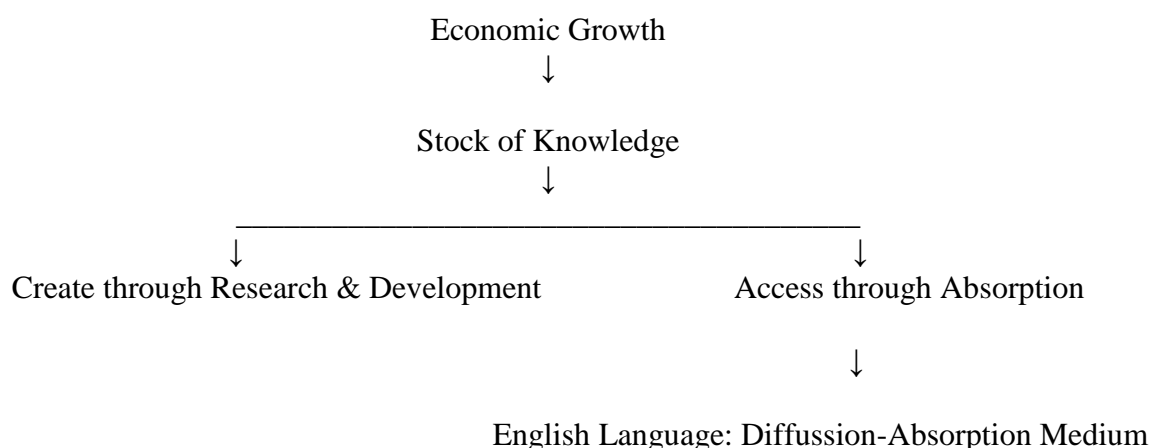


Fig. 1. Relationship between language and economic growth.

Source: Lee (2012)

The interaction between English language proficiency and gross national income per capita is a virtuous cycle, with improving English skills driving up salaries, which in turn give governments and individuals more money to invest in language training. If we observe on a micro level it is found that improved English skills allow individuals to apply for better jobs and raise standards of living. Sweden is one example in Northern European countries which takes top position as economies and leaders of this nation understands that good English is an important component of their continued economic success. The correlation between English proficiency and the human development index is also found in terms of a measure of education, life expectancy, literacy and standards of living. (McCormick, 2017)

In Indian context, the English language had been recognised for official purposes in the constitution for a period of 15 years and continues to enjoy such recognition under the official language Act 1963. Here in India, with 22 scheduled languages (those that are listed in the Eight Schedule of the Constitution) and 99 other non-scheduled languages (as per 2011 census), the introduction of English is the process of subjection under colonialism. (EPW Engage, 2021)

English provides linguistically deprived people to access the language capital that has become essential in the age of globalisation. Sociolinguists emphasized the role of the English language in non-English speakers in Indian society. So, how does the English language theoretically correlate to inclusive growth? The nationally represented data shows that the non-English speakers are greatly disadvantaged in the labour market of India, as they earn eminently lesser than English speaking workers do. The conceptualised language inclusivity theory provides possible reasons for this disadvantage- English is a prominent medium of absorption of knowledge in a society where only a small portion of the population has the language ability. (Bedi, 2020)

Generally a good service is one where employees have suitable communication skills in order to gain and retain clients. For good service delivery in trade, it is compulsory for the employees to have good communication skills in English so as to please the international consumer base. For example, to understand the relevance of the English language in hotels and restaurants sub-service. From the data of qualitative interaction of Bedi (2020) it becomes evident that 'the hotels and restaurants sub-sector views the English language with relevance. English becomes the primary language of communication in this industry, an employment criterion. English is not only circumscribed as an employment criterion in the hotel and restaurant sector, but it is also a criterion for entering higher positions'. (P. 102)

Booming of IELTS (International English Language Testing System) centres in Punjab is another example. Punjab's youth make a beeline for flying to abroad and before the youth of the state can migrate to any English speaking nation, they have to get a minimum score or bands in the IELTS test. Despite the lure of better opportunities in foreign lands, one of the biggest hurdles faced by the youth of Punjab is getting desired IELTS score. A dismal show of English proficiency among the youth of the state has led to the rise of IELTS coaching centres across Punjab. Even who got the sufficient score, after landing on foreign soil the dream of new and better life brings new challenges; and the foremost one is the ability to achieve successful communication with

others. Language is seen to be one of the biggest barriers that newcomers face. (Brar, 2019 & Aligarh Muslim University, 2022)

## The Education System of India

Indeed, English language is positively affecting the economic growth. The disparity created and enhanced by the language is indeed worrisome. Though it is affecting the Indian society by segregating it into the elites and non-elites, the educated and uneducated, yet one finds oneself underlying these negativities in English due to our historical and economic connections to the language. There is a need to analyse the educational institution through which English is disseminated because inclusivity of the English language is required for inclusivity of income and growth. (Bedi, 2020)

To evaluate and monitor the educational policies and programmes of Indian school system, the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) has been playing an essential role since 1935. The National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), besides CABE plays a key role in developing new policies and programmes. Each states has its counterpart called the State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT). These bodies are responsible proposing educational strategies, curricula, pedagogical schemes and evaluation methodologies. The SCERT generally follow guidelines established by the NCERT, but states have considerable autonomy in implementing the education system (Bedi, 2020).

The Indian school system is divided into four levels- primary, upper primary, secondary and high-secondary. Students are largely required to learn a common curriculum until the end of high school, after that they have space for specialisation in higher secondary. As for languages, students throughout the country have to learn three (English, Hindi and mother tongue). However, there are exceptions to this three-language formula and two language system also followed.

There are mainly three streams in school education in India.

1. CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education)
2. ICSE (Indian Certificate of Secondary Education)
3. State Level Secondary and Senior Secondary Education Board.

Under these streams, the problem of Indian classrooms faced by the students in learning English is pedagogy and method of evaluation in the Indian education system. Rote learning and little application in the course were the top two challenges. English is taught as rote learning material, which is reproduced in the examinations. Due to this rote method of teaching-learning and evaluation, students successfully learn the chapters taught in class, but they do not understand the language in its essence, so they cannot acquire the skills of the language. (Bedi, 2020)

## Conclusion

English has huge economic value. The English language creates an easier environment for business and it fuels a booming English teaching industry. English is now spoken by a quarter of the world's population, enabling a true single market in knowledge and ideas. Non-native speakers now substantially outnumber and as a result, English increasingly belongs to the world rather than any one country. Around the world there is enormous demand and need for English in the state and public education systems, specially in developing economies. (The English Effect, 2013)

In this era of globalisation, the domain of English language pedagogy in the Indian education system needs to be revised. Students should be asked application based questions in the examinations and they must not be compelled to simply reproduce the content of the textbooks. They should be taught the language and not the art of reproducing rote-learnt content. For this holistic shift from rote or traditional behaviourist way of teaching to a social constructivist paradigm, the transaction in classrooms and evaluation methodology is changed, then students would be truly comprehend and learn English. (Bedi, 2020)

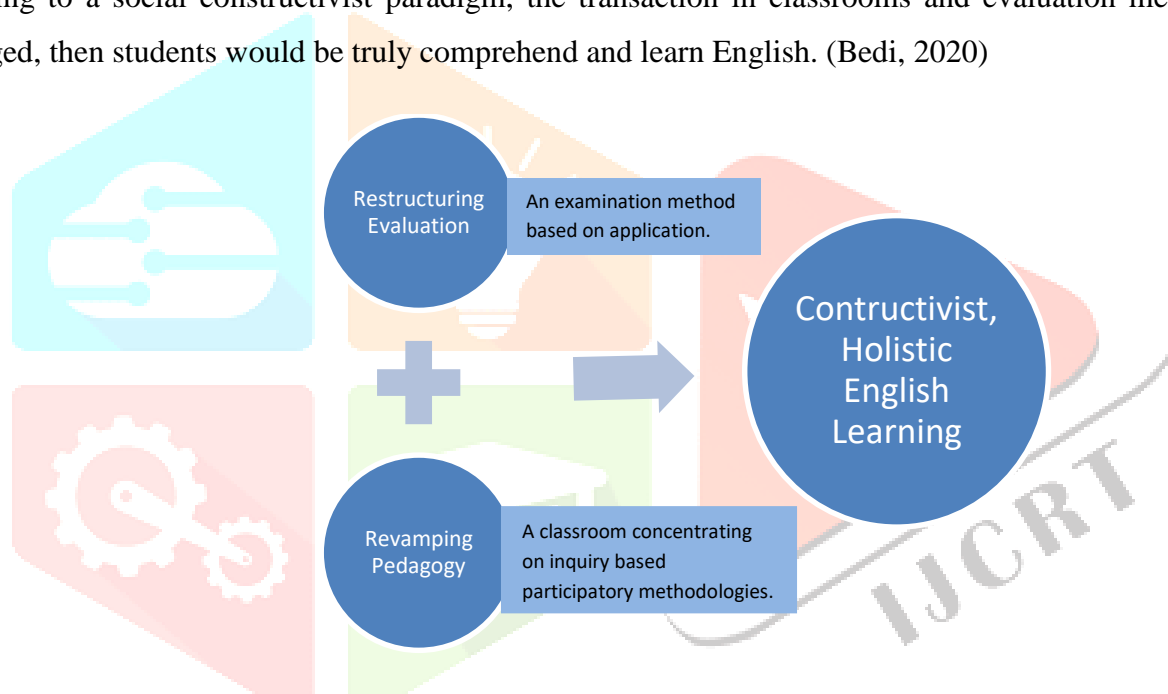


Fig. 2. Two-tiered process for improved English learning  
Source: Bedi, 2020.

The people seek to strengthen their English language skills in developing countries to communicate with business world. As worker, consumer, producer and as responsible citizen it is necessary for every individual to be able to participate in the new economy, which needs to be better informed and more flexible skills in communication. (Setyaningsih & Kurniasih, 2007)

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