

## **English: A New ‘Basic Skill’ of 21st Century Globalized Civil Society**

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### **Abstract**

We are living in the globalized 21st century, and the world has become a global village. English is the language of this world village. It is estimated that there would be around 2 billion users of English by the end of this decade. It is the age where interviews are being conducted on the telephone and the internet, and the Exams like IELTS and TOFEL are also being conducted online. Smartphones, tablets, I-pads and different gadgets are seen now everywhere. This paper is an attempt to throw some light on the status of English as a global language. Moreover, we shall take a review of the present status of English in India and refer to the question of how English has become a language of ‘basic skills’, as well as the major language of communication in today’s globalized world.

**Key Words:** globalization, multilingualism, technological advancement, smartphones, tablets, I-pads, role of English, status of English in India.

### **Multilingualism and Globalization**

Since this is the age of globalization, it is good to be multilingual for an individual. It always helps to explore new directions in terms of job opportunities, career advancements, and future prospects. Being students, knowing more languages is always advantageous and it may remain as a very distinct feature of one’s personality and that may lead to better future prospects as well.

A story by V.Saraswathi (2004:14) explains the advantages of multilingualism.

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“A little mouse woke up one morning and was about to go out of its mouse-hole when it heard noises ‘thump, thump, thump, meow.’ ‘Hmm,’ said the wise little mouse, ‘Cats go meow, and cats eat mice. I had better not go out now’. So the mouse returned to its little hole. Later, our little friend was feeling very hungry, so it again started out to search for food but stopped before leaving the mouse-hole when it heard, thump, thump, thump, woof-woof’. ‘Hmm,’ said the mouse, ‘dogs go woof-woof. Dogs do not eat mice. I will go out’.

As soon as the mouse stepped outside the mouse-hole, there was the cat. The cat grabbed our little hero and gobbled it up. After finishing its meal, the cat licked its lips and said, ‘Wow, it sure is great to be multilingual!’ ”

### **Globalization and Knowledge of English**

Knowledge of English is certainly beneficial to him/her in today’s globalized world. The globalization has brought many changes in various fields of life and work. It has impacted languages. Now anybody can learn any language of his/her choice. Numerous courses of learning different languages are available online these days. Foreign languages like French, German, and Japanese, have been introduced at CBSE schools in India. English is one of the dominant languages in this globalized world. It has been found that English is very instrumental in contributing to the globalization, rather than what some people may say about globalization having impacted the English language. So, whatever the fact may be, whether globalization made English global, or English made globalization spread across the globe, the need of English is felt by billions of people these days.

### **What is Globalization?**

The term ‘Globalization’ means - ‘a kind of process of interactions and integration among the people across the nations, in terms of business, trade and commerce, policies, science and technological advancement. It is also the sharing of cultural aspects, traditions, and innovations’. (<http://ifsw.org/publications/human-rights/globalisation-and-human-rights/>) So

languages play a very pivotal role in these interactions and integration among the people across the nations, states, religions, and races. Undoubtedly, globalization has been broadening our

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understanding, thoughts, economics and many more things. It has certainly made its marks on environment, culture, political systems, economic development and well-being of humanity in societies around the world.

### **The Role of English in the Globalized World**

The role of English is very crucial in the globalized world these days. If a person wants to establish himself as an individual in terms of his career, then he must possess a good knowledge English; he must have presentable English. Nowadays English has been acknowledged its global status as it is being used in almost all corners of the world. According to Crystal (1997:2) ‘a language achieves a special genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country’. Since it functions as ‘Lingua Franca’, it occupies the role of global language. English is being extensively used in computer, technology, science, trade, commerce and communication across the nations in almost every field of life and work.

Braj Kachru (1985) describes the worldwide spread of English with the help of a model containing three circles of English speakers. He puts forth the three circles of English: the inner circle, the outer circle, and the expanding circle. According to him, the inner circle includes the countries where English is being spoken as the first language (native speakers), the only language. The outer circle includes countries and people where English is being spoken as a second language for official purposes as well as internal and international communication. The expanding circle refers to speakers who use English as a foreign language for specific purposes. Along with this, English, in most of the countries has been acknowledged a special status in their language policies. Another crucial element of English developed in some of these countries, is that they have developed their own variety of English. Moreover, those varieties are now internationally acknowledged like American English, Indian English, African English, and Australian English. All these varieties have some regional variations in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation, and usage. Thus, English has become a global Language as it has developed a special role and has been recognized in every country.

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## **English, Globalization and Technological Advancements:**

On account of globalization, we are using the wonders of technological advancement like smartphones and social sites. Moreover, globalization has also influenced our classrooms - ICT, Smartphones, blogs, social sites are extensively used in the classrooms all over the globe. The students of any corner of the world have got access to any knowledge available on the Internet and get the best use of it. Now those days have gone where knowledge used to be the monopoly of limited people. It is open to all, can be utilized by any individual at his/her convenience. It is the time when a person from any area of the world can go to another corner of the world. It is happening on account of globalization, no doubt. However, the role of English is very crucial in all these technological advancements, getting job opportunities and for the overall development. So English is now almost a new 'basic requirement' for every individual.

Nowadays, interviews are conducted by telephone and on the internet and numerous exams like IELTS, TOFEL, and such are being conducted online, and only students' listening skills and speaking skills are tested. These are changes that have come along with globalization. So, as students, teachers and researchers, we need to adopt these kinds of changes if we want to survive in today's globalized world. So if we have presentable English, then it will take us way ahead.

## **English in India**

The place of English in India could be understood only when we consider local situations of English as well as larger national contexts. In case of local circumstances, we need to find out how English has affected millions of Indians despite social diversity. We also need to measure linguistic research through the use of English in different communities in modern India. It is also desirable to find out how English has inspired and impacted millions of people in terms of careers and job opportunities. Then we may be able to get a picture of English at the national level.

English is introduced in almost every states of India now from the first Standard. Some states have made English as their official state language. Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Uttarakhand have nominated English as their official state language. According to **Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 15:12 December 2015  
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David Graddol (2014:10) ‘the story of English in India is a still-unfolding one about India’s journey from British colony, through the status of being a ‘developing country’, to its eventual destiny as one of the world’s superpowers’.

### **Teaching English**

The status of English being a global language, has been realized in India. The teaching and learning of English is still an issue of a great concern for teachers, teacher trainers, ELT experts, and linguists. We have lots of problems in our teaching and learning process. It includes lack of proper implementation policies, shortage of teachers to implement newly started English programmes/courses at various levels, such as primary, secondary and vocational education.

### **A Second Language**

English is the second language in India. India may be included in the Outer Circle countries (As per Braj Kachru’s three circles). English needs to be assessed at its different stages in India. Nowadays there has been a mushroom like growth of English medium schools in India, in almost all the states in India. Since India is a multilingual country, there are as many scheduled languages as many states. So, we have regional medium schools all over the states in India. English has also been introduced in regional medium schools in India in almost every state at primary level. Moreover, there has also been an increase in English medium schools in almost every state in India.

### **Four Phases**

We need to assess English in four phases: English in regional medium schools, English in English medium schools, English at semi-English medium schools or units and English in higher education, in degree and diploma classes. We may get an idea of the status of English when we take a look into all the above stated phases. For instance, Arts and commerce colleges have regional language as a medium of instruction except some English medium divisions in some of the ‘A’ grade cities and metropolitan cities. Science stream and Professional courses have got English as their medium of instruction. However, English medium is only just a medium but the communication happens in regional languages or Hindi. Starting English medium schools is not

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only the only solution, because most of the English medium schools and colleges face the dearth of trained and efficient faculty. Though English medium schools have been established in India to a large extent, the problems of learning English have not yet been solved. So the basic question is how we can make our graduating and post graduating population gain a good knowledge of English. Usually when students come to graduate classes, they have already learned English for 10 to 15 years. However, they are still not able to communicate in English in real life situations. This is usually found to be true in the case of Arts, Commerce, and Science colleges; professional colleges may have slightly different situations. However, there is great need to change all this. Our graduating and post graduating population need to acquire English and other skills connected with it, to grab the excellent opportunities of the globalized world.

### **English is Now a ‘New Skill’**

Most of the countries have realized the importance of English, and they have already started teaching English to their young people.

According to David Graddol (2014: 10) ‘English is now identified as a new basic skill that all the children need to acquire if they want to participate fully in a 21st-century civil society’. It is identified now as a new skill in countries like China, Latin America, and some Asian Countries and across Europe. Thus, English has acquired undoubtedly the status of global language today. Graddol calls our attention to the fact that ‘we are fast moving into the world in which not to have English is to be marginalized and excluded’. So, the day is not so far away, that we could be marginalized if we do not know English. It has become one of our basic needs. So if a person wants to survive, rather if one wishes to be the citizen of the 21st century (whichever country he/she lives in) has to have presentable English.

Thus, English is seen as a new ‘basic skill’ that all the students need to get a hold of in today’s globalized 21st century.

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