

# **LANGUAGE IN INDIA**

**Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow**

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## **Importance of English in India**

**Nilanjana Syam, M.A. (English), M.Ed., Ph.D. Scholar**

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### **English is Used in Many Fields**

Many years have passed since the commencement of the Indian Constitution. Still it has not been possible to replace English by Hindi as it was envisaged in the Constitution. English still enjoys an important position in our country and as the matters stand at present it is obvious that it will continue to enjoy this position for a considerable period of time to come. It is still used and would continue to be used as the associate official language as long as the non-Hindi speaking people want it. It is also used in administration, law courts, legislature, and communication between the provinces, commerce and for all international purposes. It is still the medium of instruction in medical, engineering, technical, nursing and some other professional education.

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## **A Generally Accepted Lingua Franca among the College-educated**

English is the *lingua franca* in a vast country like India where too many languages are spoken and so many diverse cultures and ethnic groups co-exist. English fulfils a large number of utilitarian purposes including acquisition of knowledge of all kinds in a fast moving world of informatics and knowledge. This is not possible through any other language of India. It can be safely said that English with its almost two hundred years of co-existence on our soil cannot be called a foreign language. We have, over the years, adapted and mastered it, and have made it our own. We have learnt a great deal through the acquisition of this language and we have taken advantage of English being a language of our legacy of two hundred years.

## **A Window**

Nehru said that English works as a window for us to discover and learn about the outside world, and we have definitely recognized at once the practical approach of a man who is otherwise often charged of being an idealist. Gandhi too expressed himself in English in order to reach a wider number of people, and was well aware of the fact that in order to build public opinion, he was using English as a medium to achieve an end – that was getting India freed from the British yoke. Gandhi recognized the usefulness of English to spread his ideas in the minds of those who mattered.

## **Some Important Decisions and Declarations**

On 27.7.67 the then Education Minister Mr. Triguna Sen announced in the Lok Sabha that the mother tongue should be the medium of education ‘at all stages and in all subjects.’ But afterwards it has been resolved in the Vice-Chancellor conference that “English should be retained as the medium of instruction at the university stage.” In the great majority of cases the knowledge of English has become indispensable for securing well-paying jobs.

The Indian Education Commission (1964-66) has also recommended the continuance of English in the interest of national integration and for higher academic work. It is therefore apparent that English may continue as a national link language for quite some time to come.

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## **Renewed Enthusiasm for Learning and Using English**

As a result, a growing tendency to master the language with renewed energy is noticed in recent years among the educated people of our country. Of course the growing popularity of English all over the world is also responsible for it.

English is learnt by the people in order to acquire a higher social status. The advantage of having sufficient knowledge of English always puts one in an advantageous position, and one's value for the purpose of employment also goes up. The graduates without English language normally find it difficult to get suitable jobs.

## **The Original Motive for the Introduction of English**

It is generally held that the British introduced English in our educational system in order to produce cheap clerks for their colonial administration and to produce what Lord Macaulay called "a class of people, Indian in blood, and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect."

## **Subsequent Motives**

In the first place English helped the growth of nationalism which ultimately helped free the country from the British yoke. Our national leaders drew their inspiration from the writings of the great thinkers like Ruskin, Carlyle, Abraham Lincoln and others who wrote in English. It is also interesting to note that the founder of the Indian National Congress, Allen Octavian Hume was British.

Even now, English is playing this important role as the national link language for the purpose of inter-state correspondence and as the language of trade and commerce between different parts of the country.

## **Enriching Indian Languages**

Study of English has enriched the Indian languages and literature. All the Indian languages have freely borrowed words from English and have coined words and phrases on Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

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English models to enrich their vocabulary. The influence of world literature on the vernacular literature of India is also directly attributable to the popularity of English literature in India.

English has also greatly contributed to the growth of knowledge in India, particularly in the fields of science and technology. It has brought home to us the different developments in the international scene and helped us in properly understanding the world situations.

Besides being the Associate Language for inter-State communication and communication between the state and the Centre, English is the only language which is understood by the educated people all over the country. Without English both official and private communication between many parts of the country will be completely cut off.

### **Simultaneously International and National**

English is the most widely spoken language in the world. It is the mother-tongue of more than 320 million people and another 200 million use it as their second language. English is an important second language almost everywhere in the world. Even in India, it is not only a popular second language but also the mother-tongue of a small Indian community, the Anglo-Indians. Besides quite a few Indian States and Union territories, viz., Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Sikkim have adopted English as their official language. Mr. M.C. Chagla, when he was chief justice of the Bombay High court, once ruled that English was an Indian language and the Supreme Court upheld this judgment. The Sahitya Academy of India recognizes English as one of the Indian languages and Jawaharlal Nehru even wanted to include it in the VIIIth Schedule of the Constitution, thus giving it statutory recognition as an Indian language.

### **An Effective Library Language**

Perhaps the most important role that English has to play in India today is a *library language*. This term was used by the Kothari Commission. Commission has said that no student should be awarded a university degree unless he has acquired some proficiency in English. This is as it should be, for English can be rightly regarded as a key to the store-house of knowledge.

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Books on all branches of knowledge are available in English. Besides, more than 60% of the world's technical journals, newspapers, periodicals, etc. are published in English. It might be possible to translate some of the books into the regional languages of the country, but not even the richest country with the most sophisticated translating machine will be able to cope up with the ever growing stream of knowledge that is being spread through these publications. Therefore, to keep themselves abreast of the latest developments in the field of science and technology, our students will have to acquire a reasonable amount of proficiency in English.

The importance of English as library language can be best described in the words of the Radhakrishnan Commission **year**.

English however must continue to be studied. It is a language which is rich in literature-humanistic, scientific and technical. If under sentimental wages we should give up English, we would cut ourselves from the living stream of ever-growing knowledge. Unless to have access to this knowledge our standards of scholarship would first deteriorate and our participation in the world movements of thoughts would become negligible.

### **Position of English in School Curriculum**

For almost 200 years, English dominate the school curriculum. It was the medium of instruction not only at the university level but also at the school level until the early thirties of this century. Even when it ceased to be the medium of instruction, maximum number of periods was devoted to it and the students' main preoccupation was the impossible task of acquiring a mastery of the kind of English written by the great English writers of the past. Needless to say, this was a highly frustrating situation and except in the case of a very few brilliant students the standard of achievement in English was extremely poor. It is now realized that this state of affairs cannot continue and that the teaching of English should be made more practical and language-oriented in order to achieve the limited objective of learning this important foreign language. The Official Language Commission **year** appointed by the Government of India clearly indicates the position of English in our educational system:

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Since we need knowledge of English for different purposes, the content and character of that language as well as the method of imparting it have to undergo a change. English has to be taught hereafter, principally as 'language of comprehension' rather than as literary language so as to develop in the students learning it a faculty for comprehending writing in the English language, more especially those relating to the subject matter of their specialized fields of studies. No doubt, to a limited extent, a capacity for expressions would also accrue and may usefully be cultivated along with the faculty for comprehension.

The three-language formula, first suggested by the National Integration Commission (1962) and later recommended by the Indian Education Commission (1964-66), envisages compulsory study of English either as a second language or as a third language for a duration of six years or three years respectively in non-Hindi speaking areas, and as a second language of six years duration in Hindi speaking areas. The Regional Language or the first language is to be taught from class I to class X and the second and the third languages are to be introduced in class V and class VII respectively. In Hindi speaking area, the third language should be a modern Indian language other than Hindi. The mother tongue or the regional language should be the medium of instructions at all levels of education. All the states except Tamilnadu have accepted the three language formula with necessary modifications to meet local requirements. Though most of the universities have switched over or are switching over to regional languages, they have retained English as a compulsory subject of study up to the graduate level.

### **Freedom to Frame the Syllabus**

Education being included in the concurrent list of the constitution, the states got the liberty to frame their own academic syllabus keeping their indigenous needs in view, but they are mostly not in conformity with the national curriculum. In different states of India, English is, therefore, introduced from class IV-VI and is made compulsory up to degree level. But there is little uniformity regarding this language in school curriculum from state to state in respect of duration and intensity of the programme of instruction and in designing text books and syllabus, etc. Somewhere it is optional while somewhere else it is compulsory.

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The following table shows the overall position of English teaching-learning conditions in different states and in the union territories.

**TABLE 1.**

**POSITION OF ENGLISH TEACHING IN INDIA**

Name of states/ Union Territories	English is taught from	Compulsory up to	Duration
Asaam, Orissa	Class I	Degree 1 <sup>st</sup> year	13 years
Arunachal Pradesh	Class I	Degree level	15 years
Andhra Pradesh, Delhi,	Class V	Class XII	8 years
Maharashtra ,Bihar	Class V	Class XII	8 years
Nagaland	Class I	Degree level	15years
West Bengal & Goa (UT)	Class III	Class XII	10Years
Tamilnadu & Mizoram	Class III	Class X	8Years
Himachal Pradesh, Jammu&Kashmir	Class VI	Class XII	7Years
Kerala,Punjub, Uttar Pradesh	Class VI	Class XII	7Years
Madhya Pradesh,	Class VI	Class XII	7Years

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Rajasthan	Class VI	Degree level	8years
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Recent developments indicate that most states prefer to start teaching English from Class I in every school.

In view of the present position of English in the new setup of India, the Conference of Professors of English (1953) recommended:

- (a) That English should continue to occupy an important place in the curriculum of Secondary schools;
- (b) That the aim should be the attainment by pupils of a good working knowledge of English at the end of the secondary stage;
- (c) That the course in English should consist of detailed study of texts of simple modern English prose written within a vocabulary of about 2,500 'essential' words; non-detailed study of books in prose and verse with a larger vocabulary for rapid reading and simple composition;
- (d) At present English should be taught as a compulsory subject for a period of six years at the Secondary stage, but with improvements in the training of teachers of English, it should be possible to curtail the duration of the course by one year, provided, however, that English is taught for six periods of Fifty minutes each per week.
- (e) That pupils may, at their option, offer an additional course in English; and
- (f) That facilities should be given for the training of administrators & diplomats in the use of English, both spoken & written.

### **Increasing Demands of Mother Tongues and Regional Languages**

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The increasing demand of mother tongues and regional languages happen to be one of the primary causes of divided opinion and focus on the place of English in Indian curriculum. Though considerable efforts are being made to prepare Hindi as the national language it is widely felt that sudden banishment of English without sufficient and careful preparation would not only bring down the standard of higher education, but would also deprive the country from the fruits of ever growing knowledge explosion.

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