

Assessing the Feasibility of Recognising English as One of the Indian Languages: Scope and Challenges

Dr. Saroj Kumar (posttosaroj@gmail.com)

Assistant Professor, Department of English and Foreign Languages, Central University of South Bihar, India



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Abstract: English has been in India since the 1600s and has played a pivotal role nationally and regionally, especially after independence. Indians use English extensively in key domains such as education, judiciary, state governance, inter-state communication, and commerce. The Union also recognizes it as a “subsidiary” official language. English has significantly unified the nation and created global opportunities for its speakers. Despite these contributions, India has not formally recognized English as one of its languages, unlike other Indian languages that are constitutionally included in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. These languages, despite their regional or state-specific usage, hold cultural and national significance. Although Indians do not consider English a foreign language, its official and de facto status remains complex. This study examines how English’s unique use makes it a strong contestant for recognition as an Indian language. By analyzing its extensive use and integration into Indian society, this research demonstrates how English mirrors the attributes of Indian languages and highlights its influence in shaping Viksit Bharat.

Keywords: Indian Languages, Language Planning, Language Policy, NEP 2020, Official Language

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1. Introduction

One of the important things that make India a unique country in the world is its rich cultural and linguistic diversity. The rich and complex linguistic diversity attracts linguists across the globe to investigate its ‘language ecology’ (Haugen, 1972, p. 325). Haugen defines language ecology as the ‘study of interaction between any given language and its environment’ (Haugen 1972, p. 325). English has been in the Indian ecology since about 1600 and has played a pivotal role nationally and regionally, especially after independence. English has extensively been used in some of the key language domains in India such as education, administration, communication, business and commerce, etc. English has also been in use extensively as a medium of instruction in higher education and it has opened a direct access (not via translation) to a huge repository of modern scientific knowledge. Furthermore, English language has provided employment opportunities internationally to Indians. English was used during the colonial period and is still in use significantly in the civil services, public and private sector management, and the professions. It has been the primary language of judiciary, particularly of the High Courts and the Supreme Court of India. At the national level, English has been used for communication since the Union recognizes it as a “subsidiary” official language. At the regional level, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland are the two provinces where English is the only official language of the states. Mizoram, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Manipur, Meghalaya, Sikkim are the states where English is one of the official languages. English has been a good solution to some of the language conflicts and the linguistic resistances. In a way the English language has significantly unified the nation and created global opportunities for its speakers and learners in India.

Despite the aforementioned contributions and 425 years of history, India has not formally recognized English as its language and most of the people have not accepted it as one of its own languages, like other Indian languages that are constitutionally included in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution and people have socio-cultural affinity with them. These languages, despite their, by and large, regional or state-specific usage, hold cultural and national significance and without any doubt, they should be promoted and protected. Although Indians do not consider English a foreign language, its official and de facto status remains complex. According to the established definitions of sociolinguistic English is not a foreign language but mostly there are some

negative attributes associated with it like, a language of colonizers, a non-native language, outsiders' language, immigrant language, a killer language, etc. For example, English official status can be understood by the way National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) deals with it. The policy says:

In addition to high quality offerings in Indian languages and English, foreign languages, such as Korean, Japanese, Thai, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian, will also be offered at the secondary level, for students to learn about the cultures of the world and to enrich their global knowledge and mobility according to their own interests and aspirations. (Government of India, 2020, p. 15)

...translations of important materials from world languages, and constantly updating vocabularies, are carried out by countries around the world for languages such as English, French, German, Hebrew, Korean, and Japanese. (Government of India, 2020, p. 54)

There is a significant amount of politics also involved in either giving a sort of free reign to the language or to put the language in a certain restrictions or limitations. There is also a group of people (mostly they are not aware of the socio-economic and socio-political benefits of the language) who completely want to drive the English language out of India.

In such a case there is need to look afresh at and revisit the English language in India keeping in mind the socio-economic, socio-political, technological, etc. changes we have witnessed in the twenty-first century. For example, one of the significant sociolinguistic changes worth highlighting is the NEP 2020. It is the most ambitious education policy of India which aims at the paradigm shift in its education system in order to fulfil India's economic and socio-cultural growth. The policy suggests major changes in the use of language in education in order to protect and promote the Indian language and culture. One of the obvious but implicit agenda of the NEP 2020 is to limit the use of English language and control its impact, particularly the negative ones, on the Indian languages. The policy puts the Indian languages into the foreground and it has been successful in at least putting the Indian languages in the center of the educational discourse. It is here important to clarify that the NEP 2020 is not an anti-English policy but it does try to limit the use of it because the policy has certain assumptions, premise, and approaches in relation to English. The policy does not treat (since it is, in a strict sense, not an Indian language yet theoretically and practically) English as one of the Indian languages. India has now a sort of cohabitation relationship with the English language, since the language has been used and functioning in the almost the same ways as most of the Indian languages have been used but the problem lies in the official or legal or social sanction of the English language (Kumar, 2024, p. 107). This study tries to explore and examine the possibility and feasibility of recognizing English as one of the Indian languages because of the aforementioned characteristics and functions of it in India. How its unique use makes it a strong contestant for recognition of it as an Indian language. By analyzing its extensive use and integration into the Indian society, this article tries to demonstrate how English mirrors the attributes of Indian languages and highlights its influence in shaping India's journey towards a developed country.

2. Methodology

The study uses both qualitative and quantitative strategies, although it is primarily qualitative with descriptive quantitative elements wherever applicable, to address the research problems. It employs triangulation in terms of both data and strategy by using qualitative and quantitative data and drawing upon multiple secondary sources and analytical approaches. The study adopts an interpretative, or more precisely interpretivist, paradigm as far as its epistemological consideration is concerned (Bryman, 2008, p. 29). The study is argumentative in nature since it has some attributes of discursive and polemical writing. It builds a central argument with the help of close reading, critical thinking, theoretical analysis of the existing studies, and linguistic analysis of legal texts wherever relevant. Additionally, the study uses data from secondary sources. In other words, it draws upon evidence from different existing studies, including books, journal articles, legal documents, statutes, judicial decisions, and other relevant published sources. The data have been selected through purposive sampling, one of the non-probability sampling methods, as the sources were chosen on the basis of their relevance to the research objectives (Bryman, 2008, p. 418).

3. English- The Language Ecology of India

Whether the English language should be treated as one of the Indian languages or not may be a debatable and complex issue to deal with but undoubtedly it has been and is now an integral part of the language ecology of India. It has penetrated so deep into the Indian consciousness and its language ecology that it is very difficult to uproot it now. In the present situation there is no alternative to the English language in India in terms of its communicative functions. According to Singh (2012), '... English now has a definable ecological place in India' (p. 15). In this context Annamalai (2008) argues that 'English in India must be viewed in terms of the parameters of communal linguistic behaviour as to its pattern and mutation' and he considers English as 'the latest addition to the multilingual mosaic of India, which is noted for the linguistic behaviour of its communities to add languages to their linguistic repertoire and to use them complementarily in functional terms and synthetically in formal terms' (p. 164). He summarizes the roles and function of English in the language ecology of India succinctly. He further says:

English in India is used for communication not only with English speaking people outside India, as a foreign language would be, but also for communication among speakers of different Indian languages as a second language would be. It shares the later role with Hindi, but both languages are complementary in that English links the upwardly mobile educated class and Hindi links the working class with itself and with the educated class (Annamalai, 2008, p. 164).

In a way Annamalai (2008) suggests that Hindi is used as a second language by the non-Hindi speakers in India as an alternative to English. This is true to a great extent but the problem lies with the acceptance of Hindi in non-Hindi region of India, particularly in the southern region. However, there are no such problems with English, it has been accepted across India without any resistance and protest. To a great extent Kachru (1983) advocates for considering English as a language of India. He argues: that English in India becomes a language of India and gets the name Indian English. English is no longer alien to the linguistic ecology of India. Now India owns it and it becomes a non-alien part of the ecology. The ownership of English is reinforced by three factors: English is a medium of communication among Indians and it contributes in social cohesion; it has acquired grammatical and pragmatic features of Indian languages and thus has become Indian linguistically. (Kachru 1983)

It seems that Kachru has given the strong reasons for considering English as one of the Indian languages but it is quite clear that these three reasons are not sufficient to accept it as an Indian Language. Despite these reasons we can see that the NEP 2020 does not recognize English as one of the Indian languages and Indian people, by and large, perceive English a non-native, non-indigenous, outsider, etc. language. Kachru (1983) focuses more on the linguistic features of Indian English and he talks about Indian English rather than English in India. After four decades (of Kachru's arguments) the place of English in Indian language ecology has become stronger sociolinguistically. In comparison with linguistic reasons sociolinguistic reasons play more important role in getting native like acceptance of a language in a language community. Therefore, this paper deals with the sociolinguistic characteristics and functions of the English language in India that seems quite similar to the Indian languages.

There are some extreme views too about the place of English language in India, like, Manu Joseph write in an article of New York Times, 'English is the de facto national language of India. It is a bitter truth' (Joseph, 2011). Manu Joseph's view is biased, shallow and colonial. The view is not based on any research.

4. English- A Colonial Legacy

Not all but a significant number of Indians look at the English language as a symbol of colonial imposition and as a language of colonizers. There is no doubt that it was a language of the colonizers and it is one of the parts of colonial legacy in India. There are many colonial legacies that remained in India after its independence and those legacies, after making significant changes in them, have become an integral part of India, for examples, railways, modern European education system, judiciary, etc. English continued in India not because the colonizers wanted

Indians to use it but because a section of Indian people wanted to use it for different purposes either for a limited period of time or for good. However, to what extent the Indian wanted to use English can be matter of debate and discussion.

English came to India as a colonial language but once the language became a part of the language ecology of India it has changed itself significantly to become “Indian English” or more precisely the English language of India. English in India has gone through the process of Indian acculturation and has evolved during four centuries in order to fulfil the communicative functions and need of Indians in different language domains. If we look at a language from the users’ perspective, the moment one learns a language it becomes his/her language. Therefore, the English language the Indian people in general use now it is very much Indian in the same way the English language used in the USA is no longer the same the European colonizers used in the beginning of imperialism. Hence, looking at Indian English as a colonial language or as a part of colonial legacy is not tenable. The decolonization process of Indian English has not finished yet, like Indian judiciary and education we can further decolonize the English language we have in India. The argument will be explained in details in the next section.

5. English Language -Indianized (Adopt Adept and Adapt)

As it has been mentioned earlier, the English used in India or Indian English is no longer the same as it is used in the countries where it is spoken as a native language, like England, the USA, New Zealand, Australia, etc. and as it came to India at the beginning of the colonization. English in India has gone through phonological, morphological, syntactical, etc. changes through the passage of time and after its contact with the Indian languages English has accommodated itself in the language ecology of India. In the beginning English was imposed on Indians by the colonizers but after India’s independence a section of Indian people adopted it for different socio-political and socio-economic purposes. In the next phase a significant number of Indian became adept in the English language and as it has been mentioned earlier the language too went through changes. Lastly the educated citizens now have adapted with the English language in India. It is no longer an alien or a foreign language to them.

The people in India who have anti-English attitude give examples of some countries that have developed or have been developing economically well without the acquisition of English. Like, China and Japan are the two epitomes of countries that have performed economically, socially and culturally really well without using the English language extensively. They argue that if they can grow well without the acceptance of English, why India cannot restrict the English language like these countries did. At the surface level the argument seems valid but India’s socio-cultural, linguistic, historical, political situation is quite different from these countries. The way Indians have been using English, particularly after India’s independence, both for the national and the international purposes, it is very difficult and painful to restrict English language, for example, like China. English language has become India’s need for socio-political, socio-economic and education purposes.

6. Is English a Threat to Indian Languages and Culture?

One of the reasons behind anti-English sentiment and attitude amongst a group of people in India is that the widespread use of English in different language domains in India harming the Indian culture and thereby it has contributed to the significant erosion of regional languages, which are the repository of Indian cultural history. English has also been seen as a language responsible for the attrition of linguistic diversity of India. There is no doubt that the argument is valid since English has been the ‘killer language’ (Eckert, 2004, p. 106). for centuries because of two reasons; colonialism in the past and the USA became the power centre of the world after the Second World War. These are the two primary causes of English language hegemony at the global level. India too witnessed the linguistic changes because of English and it cannot be ruled out. The NEP 2020 too highlights emphatically the need to protect and preserve Indian languages but it does not explicitly blame English. It says:

Unfortunately, Indian languages have not received their due attention and care, with the country losing over 220 languages in the last 50 years alone. UNESCO has declared 197 Indian languages as ‘endangered’. Various

unscripted languages are particularly in danger of becoming extinct. When senior member(s) of a tribe or community that speak such languages pass away, these languages often perish with them; too often, no concerted actions or measures are taken to preserve or record these rich languages/expressions of culture (Government of India, 2020, p. 53).

The policy is not only concerned about the endangered languages but also about the prominent Indian languages listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian constitution. Further it says that “Moreover, even those languages of India that are not officially on such endangered lists, such as the 22 languages of Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India, are facing serious difficulties on many fronts” (Government of India, 2020, p. 53).

It is really quite interesting that the NEP 2020 does not explicitly mention anywhere English responsible for the aforementioned linguistic plight of India. The reasons may be a matter of interpretation but it is quite obvious that English is one of the prime accused for this plight. However, since society always keeps changing, may be slowly in an unmarked way, so its linguistic situations. In the Indian context one can easily observe that the India’s core cultural values are still intact despite several attempts from invaders and colonizers (Kanwal, 2025). Whatever cultural and linguistic attrition have happened in India English is not the only responsible factor behind it (Mukherji & Gupta, 2025). More precisely the English colonizers were more responsible than English. There is no doubt that it was used a tool. It is the responsibility of the policy makers and the speakers of the language to protect and promote their languages and culture. If we look at the English language in India objectively, we find that it has adapted itself in the language ecology of India and it has learnt to cohabit with other languages. It seems paradoxical situation here since here I am trying to defend the argument that English is one of the Indian languages but accepting its drawbacks too for its claim. In the same way as English has been responsible for harming Indian languages, the same is true to the major dominant languages of India too, particularly those who are listed in the Eighth Schedule of Indian constitution, they have been harming the minority languages of India which number more than a thousand. The same is true about Hindi which is responsible for the attrition of several major regional languages spoken as mother tongues in the states like, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, etc.

More than a thousand of Indian Languages have been surviving in India for centuries. In such a case there is hardly any problem if English language can also be allowed to co-exist with other languages. It will make India linguistically rich and more diverse. However, there is a need to limit and control the use of English language and promote the Indian languages.

7. English Language and Identity in India

Language and identity of the speaker of the language are deeply intertwined and the topic, language and identity, is a quite complex and broad one. Keeping in mind, the scope of the article, only the aspects related to social and cultural identity formation with the help of the languages in the Indian context will be discussed. Joseph (2004) talks about two types of identity: “individual identity and the identity of a group – a nation or town, a race or ethnicity, a gender or sexual orientation, a religion or sect, a school or club, a company or profession, or that most nebulous group identity, a social class (the list is far from exhaustive) – is most like a true difference of kind” (p. 04). If we take into account English and regional languages of India (including Hindi because of its usage and acceptance despite being the official language of India), there is no language that constitute the national identity since the Indian Constitution does not designate any language as the national language. However, constitutionally Hindi is the official language of the Union, and English is an additional or “subsidiary” official language. Additionally, the Indian constitution also recognizes 22 languages in the Eighth Schedule which enumerates the languages that have been recognized as official languages of the Republic of India. Even though Hindi is the most used language of India, it does not have national identity in a strict sense since the Hindi speakers in India generally identify as a person from Hindi speaking regions, like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Delhi, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, etc. However, Hindi has different status in terms of identity in comparison with the regional languages.

In recent times, some effort has been made to promote Hindi across the country. For example, “(w)ith the election of Narendra Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), there has been a renewed push for establishing Hindi — mother tongue of less than 44 percent of Indians — as the national language at the expense of English and regional languages’ (Harvard Political Review). In 2019, then BJP President and Home Minister Amit Shah’s comments on the need for expansion of Hindi for national unity provoked the ire of many in India. However, any government in power at the Centre is constitutionally compelled to promote Hindi at the national level. According to the Article 351 of the constitution of India. It is the constitutional duty of the government of the Union to promote and spread Hindi nationally. The Article says:

It shall be the duty of the Union to promote the spread of the Hindi language, to develop it so that it may serve as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India and to secure its enrichment by assimilating without interfering with its genius, the forms, style and expressions used in Hindustani and in the other languages of India specified in the Eighth Schedule, and by drawing, wherever necessary or desirable, for its vocabulary, primarily on Sanskrit and secondarily on other languages (The Constitution of India, 1950, art. 351).

Despite all these efforts Hindi is unable to be part of national identity across the country. On the other hand, the English language is not limited to any region in India.

The English language is quite different in terms of its geographical spread and its relation to identity formation in India. It is used across the country in more or less almost all the domains of language use. The number of speakers of the English has grown significantly in the last two decades because of the cheaper internet data, access of mobile phones to the majority of Indian population, social media, free massive online learning, etc. A new group of children has also emerged in India who acquire English as their mother tongue and/or first language and English along with mother tongue as their first language. Most of the (urban) educated parents want their children to acquire English from the early childhood. Such children watch YouTube channel, like “Cocomelon”, “Masha and the Bear,” “LittleBabyBum,” “Ryan’s World,” “Peppa Pig”, etc. and they have near native like competence in the English language. In the early childhood their accent too is similar to the native speakers but once they start attending school their accent is neutralized to the Indian English. Unlike Hindi and regional languages, the English language in India or Indian English is not limited to any particular region but the Indian English, as a second language, is representative of the entire country. In no way this article tries to suggest that Indian English has the capacity to be the national language of India but it only tries to highlight the acceptance of English, as a second language in India and how it has become an integral part of the language ecology of India. In a way it can also be said that Indian English is one of the identity attributes of any educated Indian who speaks English. To sum up this section, the Indian English, as its name suggests, has some attributes of and it is related to the national identity of India.

8. Indian Literature and Culture in the English Language

One of the strong reasons often cited for the preservation, promotion and use of Indian languages is that they possess India’s rich culture and its history. How much rich, modern and scientific a nation’s tradition and culture are is reflected in its languages. Therefore, it is necessary to preserve, protect and promote the Indian languages. The government of India has taken good initiatives in NEP 2020 to address the linguistic challenges. The NEP 2020 stipulates:

‘India’s languages are among the richest, most scientific, most beautiful, and most expressive in the world, with a huge body of ancient as well as modern literature (both prose and poetry), film, and music written in these languages that help form India’s national identity and wealth’. For purposes of cultural enrichment as well as national integration, all young Indians should be aware of the rich and vast array of languages of their country, and the treasures that they and their literatures contain’ (Government of India, 2020, p. 14).

The policy highlights three prominent reasons to preserve, protect and promote Indian languages namely, ancient and modern literature they have, contribution in national integration they have made and they are an attribute of Indian identity. If we look at English in India, it has now significant amount of literature written by Indians or people of Indian origin and literature about India. Indian writing in English has now rich history of more than

two centuries. It begins with *The Travels of Dean Mahomet*, a travel narrative by Sake Dean Mahomed, published in England in 1794. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838–1894) wrote Rajmohan's wife (the first Indian novel written in English). Lal Behari Dey's *Govinda Samanta or the History of a Bengali Raiyat* (1874) and *Folk Tales of Bengal: Life's Secret* (1912). Toru Dutt and Krupabai Satthianadhan were important women writers who contributed to the early Indian Writing in English.

In the early phase of Indian writing in English a good number of non-fiction prose like, letters, diaries, political manifesto, articles, speeches, philosophical works, etc. too were written and became seminal ones. Several speeches given in the Nineteenth and the early Twentieth century, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Chittaranjan Das, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi and Subhas Chandra Bose, to name only a few, designed and formed the destiny of modern India and also the destiny of English language in India (Auddy, 2019, pp. 9-10). Furthermore, Mahatma Gandhi's *Indian Home Rule or Hind Swaraj* (1910) was written in an indigenised variety of the English language and challenged successfully 'the hegemony of Standard English' (Auddy, 2019, p. 169).

Indian writing in English becomes richer in the twentieth century and it started promoting Indian culture, traditions, rituals, etc. internationally. Although the history of Indian writing in English is relatively shorter but the way it has put India's rich cultural history in the internationally arena is commendable. The contribution of authors like, Raja Rao (popularized Indian ways of storytelling internationally), Dhan Gopal Mukerji, (was the first Indian author to win a literary award in the United States), Nirad C. Chaudhuri (a writer of non-fiction, is best known for his *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*), P. Lal (a poet, translator, publisher and essayist, founded a press in the 1950s for Indian English writing and Writers Workshop). Ram Nath Kak (a Kashmiri veterinarian), etc. in the first of twentieth century have been immense. The amount and quality of literature they have produced is significant and they are as much Indian as any other literature produced in the Indian languages. We cannot call them non-native or alien or foreign literature. The other major contributors were R. K. Narayan, and Mulk Raj Anand whose writings and works are grounded in the Indian soil.

Post-independence Indian writing in English further advances the legacy of the great predecessors. They take Indian literature at new height. Authors like, Salman Rushdie, (*Midnight's Children*, got Booker Prize 1981, Booker of Bookers 1992, and Best of the Bookers 2008), Nayantara Sehgal (1986 Sahitya Akademi Award), Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Ruskin Bond, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry, Shashi Tharoor, Arundhati Roy, David Davidar, etc. have produced substantial fictional and non-fictional prose in English. Their texts are not only read in India but also across the globe.

The similar contribution was made the Indian poets who wrote in English. Early notable poets in English include Derozio, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Toru Dutt, Romesh Chunder Dutt, Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, etc. Notable 20th Century authors of English poetry in India include Dilip Chitre, Kamala Das, Eunice De Souza, Nissim Ezekiel, Kersy Katrak, Shiv K. Kumar, Arun Kolatkar, P. Lal, Jayanta Mahapatra, Dom Moraes, Gieve Patel, A. K. Ramanujan, Madan Gopal Gandhi, etc. There are some modern expatriate Indian poets writing in English that include Agha Shahid Ali, Sujata Bhatt, Richard Crasta, Yuyutsu Sharma, Tabish Khair, Vikram Seth, etc. There are a large number of contemporary Indian poets who write in English and produced poetry of high literary merit. Their themes, issues, poet persona, form and style, inspirations, etc. are rooted in Indian culture and tradition. Therefore, the contribution of the English language in spreading the Indian literature and culture across the globe cannot be ruled out.

9. Indian Literature in English Translation

Similar to the Indian writing in English or Indian literature in English the significant contribution of the English language can be observed in the promotion of the Indian literature and culture through Indian literature in English translation. English spread the Indian literature in different regional languages not only internationally but within the country too since most of the major Indian regional languages are not mutually intelligible. Kisari Mohan Ganguli translated *The Mahabharata* into English. Rabindranath Tagore wrote in Bengali and English

and translated of his own work into English. He got the Nobel Prize for his work translated into English. For example, the author (whose mother tongue is Maithili and first language is Hindi) does not know Bengali, Odia, Marathi, etc. but has read their literature available in English translation.

English has significant contribution in the Indian economy too. The Indian literature in English translation industry is a relatively small compared to the overall Indian publishing market and the global Anglophone publishing industry, but it has been gaining momentum with increasing recognition and investment. However, the industry has its own problems and challenges (see British Council (2021) report for more details).

10. The Contribution of English to the Indian Economy

English plays a crucial role as the primary language for business communication in opening doors to global job markets, particularly in the sectors like IT, BPO, and consulting. It has significantly enhanced employment opportunities and earning potential for individuals proficient in English, especially in the context of globalization and interaction with multinational corporations; essentially acting as a key driver for economic growth by facilitating access to information and international markets. According to Jain (2026), contemporary Indians see the value of knowing English in a rapidly globalizing economy where the services sector and international emigration offer the highest earnings and career opportunities (p. 562). A study conducted by Azam et al. (2013) suggests that the men who can speak English fluently earn 34 percent higher wages for men compared to not speaking English. The study says, “hourly wages are on average 34% higher for men who speak fluent English and 13% higher for men who speak a little English relative to men who do not speak English” (p. 335). There are some other relevant studies that show the benefit of knowing English in the Indian context, like, Chakraborty and Kapur (2016), Geetha Rani (2014), Azad & Fahmida (2024). Therefore, any effort that tries to limit the use of English language in India may lead to economic repercussions. As Clots-Figueras and Masella (2013) argue that ‘change in the language of instruction can have important economic implication’ (p. F334). Timalsina (2021) also highlights the importance of English in the Indian economy. Abundant studies show a significant positive correlation between English language skills and earnings. Better fluency in English leads to higher wages and better job opportunities in India and in the globalized economies of the world (Nair, 2024; Muhawenayo, et al, 2022; Daqiq, et al, 2024, etc.).

A. Publication Industry

The publication industry has a significant contribution to India's economy. It facilitates the dissemination of knowledge through print and digital books, research papers, and academic journals. It has significant contribution to Indian education, innovation, and overall intellectual development. The publication industry creates employment opportunities and promotes culture of learning within the country and overall, it can be called a key driver in India's transition towards a knowledge-based economy.

In the Indian publication industry, English plays a crucial role as it is the primary language for reaching a wider audience across the country, facilitating access to international markets, and enabling communication between diverse regions due to its status as a "link language" within India. It allows publishers to cater to a broader readership and participate in global literary exchanges. According to IBEF (2025), India is the second-largest publisher of English language books, with industry participants estimating a 10 – 15% share of foreign publishers the market. However, the Indian publishing industry is primarily multilingual (Chowdhary, 2024) and after the implementation of NEP 2020 regional language publication will grow since the policy promises to promote Indian languages. However, there is debate about the monopoly of the English language in publication industry globally and locally and it is known as ‘linguistic imperialism’ Phillipson (1992). Since the debate does not come under the scope of the paper, I will not further discuss it.

As it has been mentioned earlier a significant number of publishing houses in India have started translating the work of Indian authors from their respective languages to English. For example, it will serve the purposes of Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) to promote and disseminate Indian literature, culture and heritage, both locally and globally.

In short, English plays a significant role in the Indian publishing industry, dominating the market share with around 55% of trade sales being English language titles, making it the second largest English language book market globally, allowing Indian authors to reach a wider audience and contributing to the growth of the overall publishing sector in India. According to IBEF (2025) the market size of Indian publishing industry is expected to reach around 800 billion Indian rupees by 2024.

B. India's Contribution in English to Science, Technology, Commerce, Medicine, Social Sciences and Humanities

According to a report of *The Economic Times*, 'India has become the world's third largest publisher of science and engineering articles, according to a US government agency data, topped by China' (Anonymous, 2019). It further says:

The data, which was released on Tuesday, stated that in 2008, India published 48,998 science and engineering articles. This increased to 1,35,788 articles in 2018 at an average annual growth rate of 10.73 per cent and the country now accounts for 5.31 per cent of the total world publications in science and engineering (Anonymous, 2019).

It is interesting to note that most of the scientific articles are published in English. In other words, English language plays a pivotal role not only in getting knowledge of science and technology (since most of the good scientific journals and books are available primarily in English) but also in spreading India's contribution in the field. Additionally, such scientific articles help the publication industry of India and they contribute in the Indian Economy.

C. Business and Trade

The role of English is equally significant in India in terms of business and trade both nationally and internationally. The role of the language is quite decisive in the sectors like, IT sectors, Service Sectors, Tourism, Hospitality, Corporate Sector, etc. Since English work as an international lingua franca and it provides access to global business and trade. For example, if we look at the post liberalization, we find that unlike China, India's economic growth is primarily service driven. According to Bedi (2020), 'approximately 45% of India's growth post-1993 was accounted for by the service sector of the economy' (p. 34). Some studies have highlighted the positive correlation between language and economic growth. For examples, Bedi, (2020) stipulates:

The theoretical and positive language-growth correlation lacks in depth empirical underpinning, though recent years have seen an increasing interest in this area of research. Most research concentrations in this area have yielded a similar narrative – there predominantly exists a positive correlation between the English language and the economic performance of countries, even if causality cannot be determined (p. 46).

It becomes quite clear that the role of English is quite significant in Indian business and trade. It seems very difficult to find an alternative of English. Hence, the contribution of the English language in business and trade also supports its claim to be considered as an Indian language.

D. Education System

Indian education system is quite complex if we look at the medium of instruction both at the school level and the higher education level point of view. There is always a debate between Indian languages and English as medium of instruction, particularly at the school level. The NEP 2020 advocates the use of mother tongue or home language in schools. It says, "medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue" (Government of India, 2020, p. 13). On the other hand, the policy also promises to enable the learners to think about science and mathematics in English at the school level. The policy promises, "all efforts will be made in preparing high-quality bilingual textbooks and teaching-learning materials for science and mathematics, so that students are enabled to think and speak about the two subjects both in their home language/mother tongue and in English" (Government of India, 2020, p. 14). The

way English has become part of the Indian education system, it is very difficult not to prioritise it. If we look at the Indian context there is hardly any robust scientific study, to the best of my knowledge, available to prove or disapprove the benefits of mother tongue instruction. For example, Jain 2026 stipulates, “How large are the benefits from mother tongue instruction, either compared to English or another Indian language, remains an open question” (Jain, 2026, p. 562). However, one thing is quite clear that Indians know the socio-economic benefits of the English language and therefore they put all their efforts to learn and use it. “Contemporary Indians see the value of knowing English in a rapidly globalizing economy where the services sector and international emigration offer the highest earnings and career opportunities” (Jain, 2026, p. 562).

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Another important aspect is medium of instruction at the higher education level. English has become the only medium of instruction at higher education primarily at the professional programmes, like, Management, Law, Aviation, etc. and programmes related to science and technology, and medicine, etc. Furthermore, at most of the elite higher education intuitions (both the public funded and the privately owned institutions) mostly English becomes the only commune language among the students. Such institutions enrol students across the country and there is no one common language for communication except English. For example, I teach in a central university in Bihar where students come from non-Hindi speaking states too. Therefore, for classroom interactions and medium of instruction English becomes the only default language. The same is true in Indian Institute of Technology Madras (Tamil Nadu). Since English has extensively been used in the Indian education system both at the school level and the higher education level and so far, there is no common language across the country, there is a need to adopt and use English in the same way as it has been used in the past. However, there is need to limit English and promote Indian languages too. The language also gives direct access to the huge repository of knowledge available in English to the Indian students.

Keeping in mind the contribution English has in the Indian education system both in the colonial and the post-independence India, it seems appropriate to think about considering and treating the language in the same way as Indian see their own languages.

11. Conclusion

The NEP 2020 is visionary and far-reaching and it is full of positive initiatives for educational reform in India. The way it tries to promote Indian languages is commendable but the way it tries to promote Hindi over other regional languages of India and implicitly and practically tries to downgrade the role of English language may be problematic for the government of India to deal with. The difference also lies in what the NEP 2020 says and the way it is interpreted and implemented. If we look at South Asia itself in the previous century, it is full of conflicts, violence and civil wars based on linguistic demands for examples, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, etc. ‘These linguistic demands have changed the way South Asia looks, utilizing their power to create new countries and tear apart old ones’ (Chakraborty, 2018, p. 17). There is need to deal with the issues related to languages in India cautiously. The way English has become a part of the language ecology of India, it is almost impossible to deny its contributions. Even though it is not considered Indian language but it is now an integral part of Indian linguistic repository.

More than thousands of Indian Languages have been surviving since centuries in India without any major conflicts or problems. English language can also be allowed to co-exist with other Indian languages since it is the mother tongue of the Anglo-Indian minority. Since the Anglo-Indian minority is the part of India, their language cannot be considered a ‘foreign language’. Indian language ecology is conducive to adopt and accommodate new languages and it is known for its linguistic diversity and it has adopted English. It has already accommodated itself to fulfil the linguistic needs of Indian people and will change itself too.

If we look at English and its role in the Indian linguistic arena, it has almost all the qualifications and attributes to claim for a status of one of the Indian languages. The Supreme Court of India has recently questioned why English should not be considered an Indian language (Rajagopal, 2026). The court has argued that the language has been in India since the last three hundred years and it is still categorized as ‘non-native tongue’.

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