



# Right to English: Myth or Reality – ‘Submerging Trends’ – A case study of South India''

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**Abstract:** Global scenario shows the significance of English as a Lingua Franca while transforming World as a global village. There is no exaggeration in saying that it has become a source of economic strength and a mark of Living for many irrespective of class, color, creed and region. It has become a strong discourse of life. An impeccable reception was granted to English by adding a lot of zeal and zest in learning. However, a strange blight has crept in recent times in receiving the language. Suddenly, a deaf ear is being turned to English nowadays. It has garnered a negative image. A speculation has been spread that English has swept off the local language. As a response, many seminars and programs are being conducted to stampede English. In fact, a few South Indian educational institutions have started eclipsing the language as a whole. When I have started inquiring a few students, they have raised a few interesting facts. Curriculum has no space to provide for English. It has been taken on a lighter note. At this juncture, COVID-19 seems to have challenged Interpersonal and intrapersonal communication skills of the language learners. After having taken all the circumstances into consideration, Right to English seems to be a myth. Indeed, this is the hour of need to reestablish English as strong as it was.

**Key Words:** Pedagogy, Second Language acquisition, Intrapersonal and Interpersonal communication.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Merriam Webster Dictionary defines ‘Communication’ as ‘a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior’. It is understood that every living being communicates in one way or the other. In this case, humans are highly regarded and gifted; the only living being who can communicate in a language. As per the statistics mentioned by Ethnologue, a research center for language intelligence, there are 7117 languages in the world. Every language that exists does have an etymology and scripts to decipher. From past to present, human instincts are always tested extensively whether he/ she could learn a language to communicate or not as per geographical requirements. Especially, the modern world criteria pushed the human to make learn willingly or unwillingly as many languages as possible to survive. Meantime, wonders took place as non-living things were given voice. Incessant technological interventions turned impossible things to possible for humans to communicate, even to a techno living being. For instance, Sophie, the robot, and Amazon Alexa, a virtual assistant, started speaking to the world. It became a reality with the help of AI (Artificial Intelligence). Thanks to human intelligence and an impeccable creativity for such wonders.

However, it is important to comprehend the need of creating such wonders. I would say it was the need for humans to be assisted. In fact, it is done wondrously and meticulously. It is done surely on the basis of communication. Imagine, had not Sophie communicated with the launcher on the day of launching and had not Alexa responded to a command, today there would not be any mention of these replicas of human intelligence. There is no fraction of doubt in saying that it all happened with the comfort man found through a language. A human finds solace in a successful communication within a proper language. Now, as it is mentioned above, we are fortunate to have incessant technological interventions to make every language easier to learn. However, it was not the condition during the medieval period. Our forefathers faced very tough conditions as they had come in contact with new



languages and cultures. History started to be inscribed with the advent of British in India. It is extremely fascinating to know how things started unfolding from the 19th century in the name of Language. It changed the complete dimension of Indian system socially, economically and politically.

## 2. YESTERDAY'S SITUATION:

The 19th century marked a great beginning when it came to the education policy of India. Lord William Benedict, the then Governor General of India, strongly advocated the idea of English medium instruction under the advice of Lord Macaulay and Sir Charles Trevelyan. It all started on 2nd February 1835 when Macaulay, the first Law Member of the Council of the Governor-General, proposed an everlasting discourse on Indian Education policy. He produced a Minute stating a phenomenon to establish English as the sole language of commerce and administration in India. There were impeccable, informative and interesting passages that were mentioned in defense of Western Europe language. The prevailing circumstances prompted the then Governor General of India to pass a resolution giving English Language the highest priority. It was passed on 7th March, 1835. It raised a lot of curiosity among the British officials as well as the native. It signaled the fall of oriental languages especially Arabic and Sanskrit.

It created a storm among the natives. They were instructed to incorporate a new language, English. A few native scholars conveyed their dissatisfaction over the resolution. Initially certain exceptions were made for the oriental scholars to follow their association with their languages. On the other hand, extensive arrangements were made to establish English language as the supreme language in every region possible in India. Mr. Macaulay and Sir Charles Trevelyan, determined to withdraw the Government support from Sanskrit and Arabic Institutions and more funds were allocated for English Education. It was to appropriate the western language on Indian soil. Over a period of time, printing houses busily worked to print as many as books possible in English. English books were highly in demand. Thirty-one thousand English books were sold by the school-book Society within two years. After the growing demand as projected in Fig.1, the people of India started having knack of it. Sir Charles Trevelyan even mentioned in his treatise on the " Education of the People of India," that the natives had an increasing taste for English and it got disseminated quite rapidly.

|   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |        |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|--------|
| " English books   | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 31,649 |
| Anglo-Asiatic, or books partly in English and partly in some Eastern language | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 4,525  |
| Bengalee  | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 5,754  |
| Hinduee   | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 4,171  |
| Hindusthane   | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 3,384  |
| Persian   | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 1,454  |
| Uriya   | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 834    |
| Arabic  | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 36     |
| Sanskrit  | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 16     |

"Indeed, books in the learned native languages are such a complete drug in the market, that the School-book Society has for some time past ceased to print them; and that Society, as well as the Education Committee,

Fig. 1. The last printed Report by the School Book Society from January 1834 to December 1835 taken from 'A HISTORY OF ENGLISH EDUCATION IN INDIA (1781-1893.), pg 52.

In fact, the sudden change indeed had brought a lot of fortune to the people of India. An undeniable fact was that it favored only the elite section of India and kept the working-class people isolated for a long time. However, in due course of time, even the lower section of the society started having access to English Language Education. It improved their situation immensely. Meanwhile, the elite section of India usurped higher posts in British colonies. There started the glorious journey of English in India. It disseminated within no time. English played a pivotal role in making Colonialism cemented. Days and years rolled by the western language had transformed itself into the language of trade and commerce.

## 3. PRESENT SITUATION:

It is triumphant journey carried on for a century or so. The modern world scenario has undoubtedly made English as the language of bread and butter. Interpersonal, person to person communication, and intrapersonal, personal soft, skills are thoroughly tested. It has turned out to be a tool of social and economic empowerment and upliftment



irrespective of caste, color, creed, religion, region, gender...etc as it was proved in my national level ‘Sample Survey on English Language Learning’. 90 percent of people agreed to the above-mentioned statement. The young generations have welcomed it with open arms and an impeccable reception is given to it. People with good English Language Communication Skills started erasing the geographical boundaries in search of employment, education, research and commerce. As it is rightly reiterated in my online ‘Questionnaire on English Language Learning’, 84 percent of people agreed to the fact that English Language turned the whole world into a global village. Everything seems to be going well for a while. A maximum number of people found solace through English Language.

#### 4. AN UNEXPECTED TURN:

A strange blight has crept in terms of Language Learning. Increasing popularity that English Language has earned seems to be garnering a negative image. The 19th century native ideology seems to have returned. Most of the regional states have started complaining that the western language has swept off the credibility of the regional languages. In fact, very strong and strange comments are made that Indians must start the swadeshi movement by boycotting the western language once and for all as it endangers native language and culture. So strange that, people do forget the immense fortune it has brought along with it.

There is no doubt that South Indian Universities impart the best and quality education. As a south Indian, I take pride in it. However, recently certain moves by universities while framing Curriculum and Syllabus. eyebrow raising situation is that the curriculum does not seem to have provided enough scope for students to explore the Second Language Acquisition. The prevailing situation has inspired me to go through the Undergraduate Curriculum and Syllabus of a few reputed Institutions of South India such as PES University Bangalore, Anna University Tamil Nadu, Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University Kakinada Andhra Pradesh and Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University Anantapur Andhra Pradesh. When I have gone through them, I was taken back by looking at the scope created by the universities. There was not enough space created for English Language.

| S. No | Name of the University   | State          | English Theory | Communication Skills Lab |
|-------|--------------------------|----------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| 1     | PES University Bangalore | Karnataka      | Nil            | Nil                      |
| 2     | Anna University          | Tamil Nadu     | 1 Sem          | Nil                      |
| 3     | JNTUK                    | Andhra Pradesh | 1 Sem          | 2 Sem                    |
| 4     | JNTUA                    | Andhra Pradesh | Nil            | 1 Sem                    |

Fig. 2, the consolidated outlook of the Curriculum of the above-mentioned universities. Mentioned numbers are out of Eight semesters. Source: University websites.

The existing situation is undoubtedly complex. The growing technology, the advancement of learning, trade and commerce, and the best research orientation in science and technology opened the doors of Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization in India in the 20th century. It leads to exchange of human resources quite evidently and in fact the situation in the 21st Century demands interconnectedness among the nations. Human resources from India do require a basic language approach to sustain and come out successfully with flying colors. Looking at the growing demand, multinational companies are increasing in number day by day. There is a huge demand for excellent communications skills in English to get recruited as it is a basic requirement nowadays. Instead of setting up an extensive scope for English Language, many institutions have trimmed the language Learning atmosphere from Micro to Macro. It is indeed a sign of danger.

#### 5. VIRTUAL ERA :

In fact, COVID 19 has unlocked the virtual world and now everything is done online. There are pros and cons with the virtual world. It has set high standards of management in connection with many fields such as commerce, administration, health consultancy (Telemedicine), virtual offices, Virtual learning (From KG to PG) ...etc. The virtual setup has pushed all of us to the existential crisis. The education field is under a lot of pressure where



Learning in India has given an immense priority to conventional learning. Undeniable challenges exist for students as well as staff. One of the main challenges is communication. As per my recent survey, 62 percent of candidates raised concerns over the aspect of failing to express thoughts 100 percent conveniently. In fact, it remains a distant dream to express one's thoughts clearly as every student and employee is not habituated to proper communication skills. The confined scope of curriculum would only rub salt into the wounds. Another major concern is that students from rural and poor backgrounds are finding it extremely difficult to fit into the virtual era. Many academicians do feel 'the unprivileged' sections of the society are going to face really existential crisis more than anyone as reputed organizations would only knock at the doors of candidates with impressive English language.

## 6. DATA ANALYSIS:

The above-mentioned scenario led me to conduct online surveys to collect opinions and suggestions from Student, Faculty and Working Professionals to read the context from their perspective as well. Totally two online surveys were conducted. 453 responses and 361 responses were recorded separately. Very fascinating results have come after consolidation. Most of the students do support the need of increasing scope for English Language Learning and certain students did not vote in favor of English as they do carry prejudices against it. The following images show a few of the opinion poll percentages.

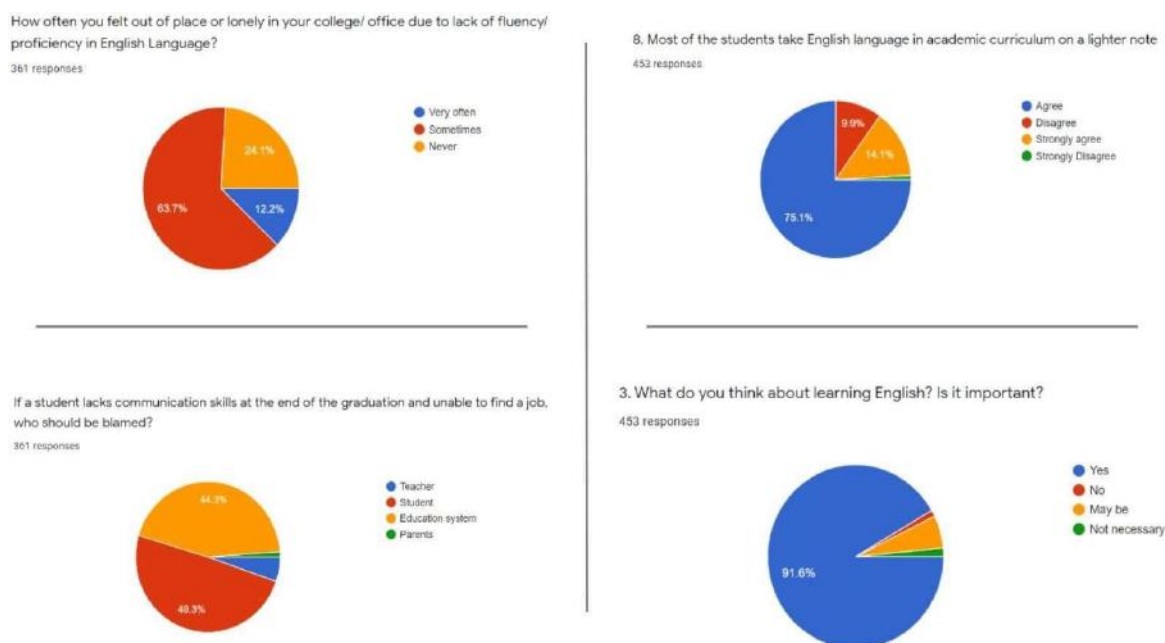


Fig.3 A few excerpts from my online national level surveys conducted on English Language Learning.

I even personally interviewed a fourth-year student and an entrepreneur to record their take on the present scenario. Mr. Manikanta, an outgoing student from Mechanical Engineering, has shared with me his journey from B. Tech First semester to Eighth Semester. He said that he struggled a lot to learn English language, in fact, the effect reflected on his grades. The lack of grip over English Subject gave the nightmare of failing in the Semester exam. He was helpless and not quite confident about his future. A rigorous effort went in to master the language. Over a period of time, he learnt the language and got job offers from Indian Air Force as well as Ashok Leyland. Ms. Jasmin Shaik, an entrepreneur, responded to the question of requirements that she looks for in a candidate to select. She said that she would have the highest preference for the candidate who has grip over communication skills.

However, the prevailing situation does not improve a student's readiness to place himself/ herself in the global arena. Most of the responses have indicated that students do struggle with the language. It is quite unfortunate that most of the respondents who took part in the surveys conducted do not have clarity over their understanding over the language.



## 7. CONCLUSION:

The main challenges are thrown by universities by giving less space for English language which can cause a lot of damage to the 'unprivileged' sections and students are taking the language on a lighter note at juncture where everything is going virtual. It demands an absolute mastery over English, the Universal Language. In addition to that, English language is segregated in the name of love of the mother tongue.

As it is rightly said in a news article on August 24, 2017 by Sudhir Chella Rajan, Professor of Humanities and Social Sciences that to continue to place central emphasis on common curricula with universal access to English across the country. Otherwise, the challenges thrown by organizations constantly prove that Right to English is a myth. I believe it can turn out to be reality if Curriculum and syllabus by universities is revived and provide a promising scope for students to explore nooks and corners of the universe with the everlasting support from English Language. Then You, mostly, and I can strongly propagate that generations may pass, sun and moon may pass countless times, many kingdoms may fall and rise but the significance and nature of English Language may never fade to uplift and empower every section of the society.

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