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## Survey of English Language Teaching with Special Reference to India

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### Abstract:

English today has truly gained a global status, serving as *lingua-franca* at the pan-world level. It has become a language of opportunities, offering a booming market for its fluent speakers and hence its demand and importance virtually all over the world. Countries across the world stress on the need to introduce English in their educational systems either as a second language (SL) or as a foreign language (FL) at an early/primary stage, so that a solid foundation is laid for fluent communication in the language. Even in India, English enjoys a very high status of a SL under the framework of *three-language formula* and also having been declared as an *Associate Official Language* of the country; thus, acting as a *link language*. It specially plays the most dominant role in the educational system of the country and is taught at all levels of education as a compulsory subject or as a medium of instruction. The main objective of teaching English in India is to develop the communicative skills of our students in this language. But despite all the enthusiasm for teaching/learning of English, there are many grey areas in the ELT programme. The paper discusses the special position of English across the world as a major language of trans-national significance, serving as a *lingua franca*. Also, the difference between English as SL and FL is clearly brought out. The paper also briefly traces the development of English in India from its position as a language of the elite to its present dominant status, having deeply penetrated into all the major domains. The main focus of the paper is on the teaching and learning operations of English as a SL in the country.

**Keywords: English as SL/FL, Lingua Franca and Library Language.**

English indeed has come a long way ever since it began its journey as a mere vernacular restricted to a small region, but now has made its presence felt almost everywhere within and outside the globe. To quote Broughton et al: "From its position 400 years ago as a dialect little known beyond the southern counties of England, English has grown to its present status as the major world language" (1980:1). And although the sun set on the British Empire long ago, the growth of their language continues unabated to this day. According to some estimates, in addition to over 400 million native speakers, more than 750 million use English as a SL or FL. Its importance in the world has increased significantly because of its frequent use at different national and international fora. To put Broughton et al in this regard:

Of the 4,000 to 5,000 living languages, English is by far the most widely used. As a mother tongue, it ranks second only to Chinese, which is ... little used outside China. On the other hand, the 300 million native speakers of English are to be found in every continent, and an equally widely distributed body of second language speakers, who use English for their day-to-day needs, totals over 250 millions. Finally, if we add

those areas where decisions affecting life and welfare are made and announced in English, we cover one sixth of the world's population. (1980: 1)

Of course, the figures of both the native and the non-native speakers have grown considerably over the years and continue to grow with each passing day. At present more than 62 nations use it as their official language. Thus, English has correctly attained the status of a 'Global Language'. Consequently, most of the countries across the world encourage the teaching and learning of English either as a SL or FL right from the primary level, so that a firm foundation is laid for fluent communication in this language.

Today English performs multiple roles in a wide range of fields. Its function as a 'library language' with most of the knowledge being accessible through this language, is the most significant one. It has truly emerged as 'a window on the world knowledge'. It is the main language of science and technology, academia, international trade, travel, aviation, sports, media, judiciary, diplomacy and so on. Thus, it has grown into a pre-eminent language of wider communication in the world. As Shankar observes, "The global spread of English over the last 40 years is remarkable. It is unprecedented in several ways: by the increasing number of users of the language; by its depth of penetration into societies; by its range of functions" (2004:197).

Before we proceed with the detailed discussion of teaching English as a second language or as a foreign language, it would be appropriate to describe the terms such as 'First Language' (L1), 'Second Language' (SL), 'Foreign Language' (FL).

First language (L1) is the native language or also known as the mother-tongue (MT) which a child learns from birth in his home and not in a formal setting. The child picks it up from the people around in the interactive environment during the so-called 'critical period'. L1 is a natural language acquisition process. Second Language (L2) is said to be any language which is learnt after the L1 or the mother-tongue has already been learnt. It stands for any language learned after having learnt the L1, regardless of whether it is second, third language. It refers to the acquisition of a language in a classroom situation as well as in a more 'natural exposure situation.' FL, on the other hand, is a non- native language learned for the purpose of communicating with foreigners or for reading printed material in the language. It is learnt in a formal situation as a subject, though it may not be used as a medium of instruction. Scaringi differentiates between SL and FL thus:

The idea of second language is only slightly different from that of foreign language, for it is less the quality of a speaker's command than the status of the language within a given community that determines whether it is a second or a foreign language... a foreign language is a language learned in school and employed for communicating with people from another country. A second language in contrast, may well be one learned in school, too, but one used within the learner's country for official purpose and reinforced by the power of the state and its institutions. (2007:15)

In a second language context, students may receive language input both from inside and outside their school environment; whereas, in a foreign language situation, they mainly receive the input from the school alone.

In a situation where English holds the status of a foreign language, it is copiously taught in schools and colleges, although its role in the national and social affairs remains minimal. On the other hand, in a second language situation, English is the language of administration, commerce, media, education etc. Albert H. Marchwardt states that when English is taught as a school subject or on an adult level for the sole purpose of providing the student a foreign language competence, then it is taught as a foreign language. But when it is used as a medium of instruction in schools and colleges and also as a 'link language' between speakers of varied linguistic groups as in India, it becomes a second language (qtd. in Vohra 2005:169-170). Thus, when it comes to teaching of English to students as a SL or as a FL in a non-native environment, it takes up two different roles with varying priorities in learning the language. The following definition clearly states:

Teaching English as a second language (TESL) refers to teaching English to students whose first language is not English, usually offered in a region where English is the dominant language and English language immersion situations are apt to be plentiful. In contrast, teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) refers to teaching English to students whose first language is not English, usually in a region where English is not the dominant language and natural English language immersion situations are apt to be few. (Online)

English as a second language refers to a situation where this language is used extensively in different important sectors such as education, administration, business etc., but is not the first language for the people. English, as a foreign language, on the other hand, refers to a situation where it is taught as a school subject for international communication. As is evident, English language operates at many different levels, which reflects its wide-ranging importance in the world. It has particularly taken on an important function in the non-native environments, where its knowledge as an international language (IL) has become essential. English having attained the international character as a language is likewise used in three different contexts: as a first language, as a second language and as a foreign language. Kachru (1985:12-14) in his own characteristic manner has elaborated on the use of English in all the three above-mentioned situations. He divided the world 'Englishes' into three broad concentric circles: "the inner circle", "the outer circle" (or extended circle) and "the expanding circle". The Inner circle consists of the native countries of English such as the UK, the USA, Australia and New Zealand. English is the first language (L1) in all these countries. In the Outer Circle, Kachru places the non-native countries of English, where English reached because of historical and political reasons. Such countries include India, Singapore, etc. English is taught as a SL in these countries. The Expanding Circle includes those countries, where English holds the status of an international language. English has become popular in these countries because of the importance the language has assumed across the world and not because of colonization. It is taught here as a FL and these countries include China, Saudi Arabia etc.



In fact, today the use of English is so wide spread across the world, labeling it as ESL, EFL, seems out of place. Larry Smith argues that we should stop calling the English a foreign or second language or even ESOL and instead we should call it as “an international auxiliary language” (1983:5). Having mastery of English language in the context of a second language is greatly valued in the job market. Broughton et al (1980:6) rightly state, “Clearly, a good command of English in a second language situation is the passport to social and economic advancement”.

English holds a rare distinction among all the languages of the world of having the largest number of users spread across all continents and its knowledge makes a person ‘a true citizen of the world’. The number of English speakers continues to grow throughout the world at an ever-increasing pace. Interestingly, now there are more second language speakers of English than the native speakers and in this growth of the language, the non-native speakers have played a very significant role. The language is no longer the property of the English alone. In fact, “English belongs to any country which uses it and may have as wide or as limited a use ... as is felt desirable” (Smith, 1983:1). Now instead of English, we have many ‘Englishes’ represented by different varieties of the language like Indian English, Australian English, African English and so forth. Broughton et al (1980:4) remark, “It is arguable that native speakers of English can no longer make stronger proprietary claims to the language which they now share with most of the developed [even developing] world.” The native speakers of this language seem to have become a minority as per the current statistics. English is also the widely written language in the world. It is primarily influential throughout the world, because of its educative importance, as also because the world’s important knowledge has been and continues to be preserved in this language.

The British Empire collapsed, but English still remained vital, as it had already entered different other areas like science and technology, diplomacy, education and the like. The position of English has also been strengthened by the rise of the US as a major political, economic and military superpower. Now, “barriers of race, colour, and creed are no hindrance to the continuing spread of the use of English” (Broughton et al 1980: 7). Quirk observes in this respect:

For between 1600 and 1900, speakers, of English pushed themselves into every part of the globe (more recently to lunatic deserts far beyond the globe), so that at this present time, English is more widely spread, and is the chief language of more countries than any other language is or ever has been. (1985:1)

There does not seem to be any threat to its present pre-eminent status as an ‘International language’ from any other language at the moment, although other European and non-European languages are also gaining strength and currency in view of the changing geo-political, economic conditions and power equations. As Shankar (2004:200) rightly asserts, “There is no reason to believe that any other language will appear within the next 50 years to replace English.” ELT experts foresee the development of English into three different forms; or rather, they speak about a “Tri-English world”, in which the speakers of

English will speak a “local dialect” at home; a “national variety” at work, school or university and some kind of an ‘international variety’ to talk to foreigners (Aslam 2008:60).

### **English as a Second Language (SL) in India**

The position of teaching English as a second or foreign language is dependent on the function, which it performs in a particular social set-up and the importance of English is hardly anywhere more significant than in the context of India, where it has become a true part and parcel of day-to-day life, enjoying the status of a SL, as it is used for both ‘external’ as well as ‘internal’ purposes. The development of English in India has really been extraordinary, evolving from its position as a foreign language to its present status as a SL. Now Indian users of English outnumber even the native speakers in England and elsewhere. Commenting on the unique position of English in India especially in terms of the huge number of users, David Crystal states:

In terms of number of English speakers, the Indian subcontinent ranks third in the world, after the USA and UK. This is largely due to the special position which the language has come to hold in India itself, where... 4 or 5 percent of the people now make regular use of English approaching 40 million in 1996. (Crystal 1997:41)

English is closely associated with education all across the subcontinent. The teaching and learning of English forms the back bone of our educational institutions. From the very beginning, it has occupied the minds of our educationists. Even the first Education Commission called the University Education Commission (1948) had stressed on the study of English to get access to the growing knowledge in the world. Speaking about the important, or rather, unavoidable role of English in the field of education in the Indian context, Meenakshi Raman rightly observes:

If we take cognizance of the pervasiveness of English in almost all fields of education, it will not be an exaggeration to say that education in India has virtually become synonymous with being proficient in this language. The importance and dominance of English cannot be discounted at any level of education starting from the lowest to the highest one. In fact, in the modern context, no education system in India can do without the English language. (2005: 130)

English language formally got introduced about two centuries back. The inauguration of English language education in India is mainly associated with Macauley’s minutes of 1835 which replaced the indigenous system of education and later English became the official language and was implemented as the medium of instruction in secondary schools, colleges and universities during the British Raj, amidst the opposition from the detractors of the language.

After independence, the Constitution of India adopted in 1950, had envisaged Hindi as the only official language of the Union of India, and a period of 15 years was set aside for English to continue, after which English had to be replaced completely by Hindi. However, this decision of removing English was vehemently opposed by some southern States. As a

result, the Parliament had to enact the Official Languages Act 1963 amended in 1967, which declared English as the 'Associate Official Language' of the Union of India to be used for an 'indefinite period'. Therefore, instead of one, India has, as it were, two national languages for serving the administrative as well as non-administrative purposes of the country. This had serious implications for the teaching/learning of English in this country and consequently under the framework of *Three-language formula*, English came to hold the status of a second language in the education structure of India. Thus, it is mandatory for all students to learn English during their schooling period. Naturally, English is the second most widely used language after Hindi apart from being the most widely taught language at various stages of education. As a matter of fact, English has always dominated the teaching/learning programme in India. The National Policy on Education (1968) had emphasized on the teaching of English in these words:

Special emphasis needs to be laid on the study of English and other international languages. World knowledge is growing at a tremendous pace, especially in science and technology. India must not only keep up this growth, but also make her own significant contribution to it. For this purpose, study of English deserves to be specially strengthened. (qtd. in Elizabeth 2004: 26)

After independence, the language policy with regard to the medium of instruction and the introduction of English as a subject was changed across the country. Some of the States, in their nationalistic fervor, did away with English as a medium of instruction at the school level and also at higher levels of education. As Elizabeth states, "Before independence and immediately after independence, the medium of instruction in secondary and higher education was English. Gradually, shift in the medium of instruction at all levels was made from English to mother tongue or the regional language of the area" (Elizabeth 2004:27). The States wanted their regional languages to be developed for the instructional purposes, but replacing English did not prove to be useful for them. Of late, therefore, there has been a shift in focus from the regional to the English medium of education. Now most of the States introduce English from the primary stage, in view of its wide importance which it has gained across the world especially within the country's educational system. Elizabeth notes in this connection:

Recently some State Governments have announced the introduction of English from first standard. Some other state Governments are considering the issue of introducing English from first standard. Rather, it has become a serious problem with them. Discussions and debates are going on there. (Elizabeth 2004: 28)

Also, teaching of English as a subject is on the increase throughout the country. It is now introduced as a subject from the pre-primary level even in the government schools, where previously it was taught from 6th Class onwards. In his survey Omkar Koul also finds that, "Keeping in view the needs of the students, the so-called 'nationalist' feelings against English have faded away. Some states (Maharashtra, Punjab, J&K) have decided to introduce English as a subject in Government schools right from the primary classes" (2005: 55).

In the context of India, English is used in many other areas which include both formal as well as informal settings such as judiciary, science, business, broadcasting, media, travel and transport, information technology etc. Most of the seminars, conferences, competitive examinations etc. at the national level are conducted in English. Here its influence is all pervading and wide-ranging. It has become the main instrument to access knowledge of all kinds and Kothari Commission had rightly recommended English as a 'library language'. The use of English in India is so common that it has even penetrated into our personal lives. Within the socio-cultural context of the country, English enjoys the dignified status of being a 'prestige-language' or the 'language of power'. There is a general agreement among people on the bright potential of English in the job market, as Aslam (1989:9) remarks, "Knowledge of English is considered as a successful passport for employment." It has really become the 'queen of all languages' here, outclassing the regional languages.

One of the important functions of English at the pan-India level has been that of a *lingua franca*. India being a multi-linguistic, multi-cultural and a multi-ethnic country, needs a common *link language*; English has been playing this role fairly well over the past many decades and will continue to do so even in future. Here it does not seem to be an alien language; it is like one of the indigenous languages of India. The Supreme Court in its judgment in the Bombay Education Society case has ruled as early as in 1954 that English was as much an Indian language as any other (qtd. in Koul 2005: 54-55). Raja Rao says to the same effect that, "as long as we are Indian - that is not nationalists but truly Indians of the Indian psyche - we have the English language with us and amongst us, and not as guest or friend, but as one of our own..." (cited in Kachru 1983: 2).

Many farsighted leaders such as Moulana Azad, Pandith Nehru, among others had long back visualized the great potential of English as an international language and had therefore stressed on the need to maintain high standard of teaching and learning of English. At present it is taught as a compulsory subject at different levels in our educational set up. As Vaseeker observes in this context: "The status of a language in the educational system is an important barometer of the importance it enjoys in the country concerned. English is taught as a compulsory subject in most of the schools and colleges in India..." (2005:18).

Although in many States English has already been implemented as the medium of instruction, it still finds an important place in curriculum as an important subject where it is not used as the medium of education. As Koul confirms that the role of English in education in the country is very significant in both school and college education. There is a preference for the study of English as a subject and its use as a medium of instruction at different levels of education (2005: 53-54). As far as teaching/learning of technical subjects is concerned, English is the only medium of instruction right across the country. In such specialized institutions, it is taught as ESP. Mamta observes in this respect:

The number of students pursuing higher education and ... going for specialized, professional education in India is so vast that there is a constant need for ELT/ESP



educationists and academics to keep pace with the developments in the fields of social sciences as well as science and technology. (Mamta, 2006: 208)

Considering the importance which English has assumed in a wide range of areas in this country, it becomes necessary that it is taught in the right and effective manner to ensure that our students develop the much-needed 'communicative competence' in this language, so that they could take up their future roles as useful and contributory members of the society.

The objectives of ELT in India, according to Prakash Rao are:

1. To give the students the much-needed communicative skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.
2. To teach the meanings of words and structures.
3. To increase the students' productive vocabulary.
4. To enable the students to refer to books on the areas of research.
5. To enable the students to understand the current affairs in the world. (1991:14)

Moreover, English is taught in India with the general aim of giving learners access to higher and professional education. So, we can observe, the four skills must be developed by all means, besides the allied abilities. The ELT activities in this country, as a whole, aim at equipping our students with the functional and utilitarian aspects of English, so that they can communicate fluently as it has made its presence felt in a broad range of activities in and outside the country. In addition to the aforementioned aims, we have some literary aims as well, which direct our efforts in teaching/learning of English in India. In fact, the syllabi of English in India are mainly based on the English literature, written mostly by foreign authors, rather than the Indian writing in English, which is now equally 'authentic'. These foreign authors usually pose difficulties to the Indian students, in general, as they represent a different cultural experience. The students do not easily identify themselves with these authors, which is not a healthy sign for teaching/learning of English. According to Jaydeep Sarangi what is worse is that the teaching of English in India is still 'text-oriented' and this bookish knowledge of English does not prove helpful to the learners. He adds that, "Only a few universities in India offer a full paper on language or applied linguistics even at the postgraduate level. Honours and postgraduate courses in English are full of literary stuff" (2005: 75).

There is a strong curiosity among the people of India to learn English, as they have realized its value in social as well as in academic circles. As a result, there is mushrooming of English medium schools and the language teaching institutes all across the country. The government schools have also felt the heat and are fast changing their medium into English. Parents themselves are eager to admit their children in good English medium schools, regardless of their economic condition. As Vaseeker observes, "...in India more and more students are getting enrolled in English medium schools in preference to the vernacular medium schools." (2005:38) Elizabeth observes in this regard:

...during the last two decades, a large number of English medium schools have cropped up. Keeping the ever-growing demand of the people for English medium schools, more and more English medium schools are being established not only in

cities but also in rural areas. Its effect on Government schools has also been felt by all concerned. (2004:27-28)

English is taught for seven years or more at school and generally six periods a week are allocated for teaching English at different levels of our education system across the country, i.e., on all the working days. The general technique which is followed for teaching English throughout the country is the lecture-mode of teaching. Generally, in our schools and colleges, the Grammar Translation and Bilingual Methods are utilized for teaching English, which emphasize only reading and writing skills. Speaking, in particular, is completely neglected in the English classroom. Some researchers point out that a large number of students have problems with reading and writing skills as well, which is really a cause of concern.

Most of the universities teach English as a compulsory subject at the undergraduate level, whereas other universities use English as the medium of instruction both at the undergraduate as well as postgraduate levels; as the people, in general, and the planners and policy-makers, in particular, have recognized the real worth of English in today's world. English still remains the most preferred medium in the higher education sector in India, as in many other countries. Kachru reports that, "In India, English is the widely taught second language at practically all levels of education. All the Indian universities, graduate colleges and junior colleges have separate departments for teaching English" (Kachru 1983: 53).

One of the problems is that there is no uniformity in the introduction of English in the country. Different States introduce English at different levels - some States introduce it from nursery classes, some delay it up to Class 3<sup>rd</sup>, while others start it from Class 5<sup>th</sup>, as per their own needs. However, one thing which is common among all the States is that they consider English as something indispensable. As Kachru observes:

... in spite of the regional differences in the role of English in the school system, English is taught in every State as the main second language. The total number of years for the teaching of English and the stages at which a child may be exposed to bilingualism in English are not identical in all the states" (1983: 89).

Moreover, across India, we find broadly two different kinds of schools namely the English-medium and the vernacular-medium schools (government and private) which show varying results and performance in terms of proficiency levels of their students in English. The privately-run schools are usually better in terms of teaching and learning of English than the government schools, because the former have English as the medium of instruction right from the earliest stage (K.G. classes) all across the country, which is not the case in the government schools. Besides, these private schools provide a comparatively far better teaching/learning environment to their students as against the government schools. This gulf between the results of these different categories of schools in English needs to be narrowed down.

There are many impediments as far as teaching/learning of English as a SL in India is concerned, which thwart our efforts. It goes without saying that the overall ELT situation in India is far from satisfactory. It is not taught/studied as a skill-subject but rather as any other content-subject in the curriculum but we know that, “A language isn’t just a ‘subject’ in the sense of package of knowledge. It is not just a set of information and insights. It is a fundamental part of being human” (Helliwell 1992:11). Further, despite the fact that English is taught at almost all levels of our education system, we seem to have badly failed in imparting quality instructions in English, which is the reason why the students even after many years of learning English in their schools and colleges, do not develop functional proficiency in English. This is primarily because the spoken form of English does not receive much attention in our classrooms and the students do not get the right kind of exposure to English in and outside the classroom, which is so very crucial for learning any language. The aims of teaching English although specified, are not fulfilled given the current ELT scenario in the country. As the teachers are not updated with the latest developments in the field of ELT, and the classrooms are mainly teacher-centric rather than student-centric, as is expected under the prevailing instructional system. Hence, teaching receives more importance than learning of the language. Both teachers and students have examination in mind when it comes to teaching and learning of English and securing a pass percentage is not a very difficult task for the students for which purpose, they resort to so called ‘Guides’ easily available in the market before the actual test starts. Hence, development in the communicative competence of students in terms of all the four skills of English is only meager. The teacher is usually faced with a heterogeneous group of learners in the classroom coming from different socio-economic backgrounds and hence their proficiency levels also vary in English, which makes his work rather more difficult. The teachers themselves lack proper training in teaching English. Many experts of the language, on the whole, identify the following problems in the ELT programme in India: unspecified aims, unsuitable syllabus, mixed-ability group, faulty teaching methods, lack of teaching aids, lack of training, over-crowded classrooms, and faulty examination system. (Aslam 2003:20-23, Elizabeth, 2004: 40-43). In this context, E. V. Gatenby’s observation is very much relevant: “Why is it that in all countries where a foreign language is taught, a very large proportion of the pupils fail, after five or six years’ of work, to become proficient? The main reasons are: (1) unsuitable classroom conditions, (2) unsatisfactory textbooks, (3) wrong methods and (4) untrained teachers...” (qtd. in Sharma 1989: 52).

If ELT in this country has to become effective, fruitful and result-oriented, then some drastic reforms need to be made in our syllabi, Methods, instructional materials and examination process at all the levels of our education system. What is really needed is to design such course content and methodology of teaching/testing English, which take into consideration the needs of our students and help develop both ‘receptive and productive skills’ of the learners. The teachers teaching English as a SL also need to be very well trained in language teaching.

It becomes quite clear that despite all the problems which hamper the process of ELT, English in India occupies a highly very special status and its supremacy in terms of its

multi-dimensional roles, is very likely to continue even in future. As Omkar Koul fittingly remarks:

No matter how many attempts are made to arouse sentiments against the English language ... its importance in education cannot be ignored... English is accepted throughout the country as the only medium for the access to modern knowledge, and will continue to be so in the years to come. (Koul 2005:55)

In all likelihood, English might be taught as a subject and incorporated as the medium of instruction from the pre-primary level right across India. Since, English is the most widely spoken, understood, read, and the most widely written language in the world, it is very well poised to become the 'world language', a distinction which it has achieved already to a considerable extent. As a result of which, more and more countries might introduce it at an early stage, i.e., primary level, either as SL or FL, as the need may be, considering the fact that, "...more teaching hours are [already] devoted to English in the classrooms of the world than to any other subject of the curriculum" (Broughton et al, 1980:11).

The foregoing discussion in this paper clearly shows that English is the most widely spoken as well as written language in the present day world having truly emerged as an 'International Language'. As a result of this widespread use and expansion of the language across a wide range of fields throughout the world, it has been adopted by many non-native countries either as a SL or a FL. The paper also brings to light the highly privileged position of English right across India as a SL particularly in the education system of the country. The study also highlights some problems in the ELT programme; therefore, needs to be restructured.

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