



How has English evolved from the stage of a mere language of communication and connection to a vital anvil of making a global India shaping itself into language of commerce while splicing global citizenship, equality, innovation and collaboration?

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Abstract:

English has evolved far beyond its native roots, hovering over horizons to become the dominant language of global commerce, creativity, innovation and intercontinental collaboration. Undoubtedly, this paper explores and portrays the multifaceted and multi-dimensional role of English as the language of connection, commerce and economy shaping nations into world leaders. As the primary medium of instruction right from school to quintessential bridge in framing multinational and multicontinental business operations, academic publishing, and also digital communication. Cross-border transactions, technological advancements and market growth are solely because of English language. Thus, English has become the cornerstone of global commerce and innovation, serving as the primary language. It is working towards fostering global citizenship and inclusive growth.

This paper examines how English proficiency models itself as a strategic economic asset; more so, in developing countries such as India and Philippines. English also is considered as a key drive of employability and mobility in sectors like finance, engineering, tourism and diplomatic relations. The paper also promotes English for global citizenship while giving people democratized digital resources. No doubt, English is a bridge rather than a barrier. English is not only a language of market but also a vehicle for empowerment and progress to interconnect the world together.

Keywords:

global economic language, international communication, economic empowerment, global citizenship

Introduction:

Language has always been more than a tool for basic communication - it shapes thought, identity, power structures, opportunity, and control. English, originating in England and disseminated through colonialism, trade, and cultural influence, was initially a language of conquest and administration. Over



time, it has transitioned into a key asset for globalization: a lingua franca enabling cross-border business, diplomacy, research, education, media, and digital interaction.

In post-colonial countries like India, English has held a complex position: simultaneously a colonial relic, yet an opportunity-laden tool. With liberalization of India's economy since the 1990s, growth of the IT/BPO sectors, expansion of higher education, proliferation of global trade and multinational corporations, English has become deeply enmeshed in India's economic and social transformations.

This paper tracks how English has evolved in India from being a mere medium of communication to a vital pillar of commerce, global citizenship, equality, innovation, and collaboration. It assesses empirical data, globally and locally (especially India), exploring returns to English proficiency, employability, inequality, educational trends, and how English shapes India's position in the world economy.

Literature Review:

1. English and Economic Returns:

1. Mehtabul Azam, Aimee Chin & Nishith Prakash (2013), in *"The Returns to English-Language Skills in India"*, using IHDS (India Human Development Survey) data, found that being fluent in English (versus knowing no English) increases hourly wages of men by about 34%, which is comparable to completing secondary school and about half the return of a bachelor's degree. Even speaking a little English yields increases (~13%).
2. Many studies globally (e.g. in SE Asia, Africa) similarly find that English ability enhances employability, access to higher paying jobs, multinational firms, etc.

Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that English language proficiency yields significant economic returns. Azam, Chin, and Prakash (2013), using data from the India Human Development Survey, show that fluency in English is associated with approximately a 34% increase in hourly wages for men, a return comparable to completing secondary education and nearly half that of earning a bachelor's degree. Even partial proficiency confers measurable benefits, with wage gains of around 13%.



These findings align with a broader body of international research from regions such as Southeast Asia and Africa, which similarly links English proficiency to improved employability, access to higher-paying occupations, and participation in multinational and globally integrated labor markets. Collectively, the literature positions English not merely as a communicative skill but as a form of economic capital with substantial labor-market value across developing economies.

2. Proficiency & Skills in India:

1. The *Pearson Global English Proficiency Report 2024* shows India ranks above global average in speaking English, though its overall skills score lags slightly behind. Specifically, India's average English-skills score = 52 (versus global average 57), but speaking score = 57 (higher than global speaking average) and writing score = 61 (equal to global average). States like Delhi, Rajasthan, Punjab lead.
2. The *India Skills Report 2025* indicates strong ESL (English as Second Language) proficiency in many states/cities, contributing to employability growth.

Recent proficiency assessments indicate that India demonstrates comparatively strong communicative competence in English despite modest overall skill gaps. The Pearson Global English Proficiency Report 2024 shows that while India's aggregate English skills score (52) remains below the global average (57), its speaking proficiency (57) exceeds the global speaking average, and writing proficiency (61) matches it. These strengths are unevenly distributed, with states such as Delhi, Rajasthan, and Punjab performing notably well.

Complementing this, the India Skills Report 2025 highlights strong English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) proficiency across several states and urban centers, identifying English competence as a contributing factor to improving employability outcomes. Together, these findings suggest that India's English capability is increasingly functional and employment-oriented, though marked regional disparities persist.

3. Employability Trends in India:

1. Graduate employability has risen from ~33.95% in 2013 to ~54.81% in 2024.

2. Nonetheless, challenges remain: a significant portion of graduates are still unprepared for knowledge economy roles, especially in non-technical, cognitive, English language and soft skills. A recent Mercer-Mettl report found only ~42.6% of Indian graduates are employable, with decline tied to deficits in non-technical skills and creativity.

Graduate employability in India has shown measurable improvement over the past decade, increasing from approximately 33.95% in 2013 to 54.81% in 2024, reflecting expanded access to higher education, skill initiatives, and exposure to globalized labor markets. However, this aggregate progress masks persistent structural deficiencies. Recent assessments, including the Mercer–Mettl employability study, indicate that only about 42.6% of Indian graduates currently meet employability benchmarks, with declining readiness attributed largely to gaps in non-technical competencies such as English communication, cognitive flexibility, creativity, and problem-solving.

This divergence highlights a critical misalignment between formal educational attainment and the multidimensional skill requirements of the knowledge economy, suggesting that improvements in employability metrics must be accompanied by qualitative enhancements in language proficiency and higher-order skills to sustain long-term workforce competitiveness.

4. Social Inequality & Access:

1. Surveys show English ability is strongly correlated with urban residence, higher income, being educated, and belonging to certain social groups. For instance, only ~6% of respondents in a nationally representative survey said they spoke English, with variation: ~12% in urban areas, ~3% in rural. Also strong links with class, caste, religion.
2. There is a growing demand for English medium education even in public schools; e.g. in Ahmedabad, the number of students in English-medium sections doubled in AMC schools over a year.

Survey evidence indicates that English proficiency in India is unevenly distributed and closely aligned with existing socioeconomic structures. English-speaking ability is strongly correlated with urban residence, higher income levels, and educational attainment,



with nationally representative data showing that only about 6% of respondents report speaking English - rising to approximately 12% in urban areas but falling to around 3% in rural contexts. These disparities are further mediated by class, caste, and religious affiliation, suggesting that access to English functions as a form of social capital rather than a universally accessible skill. Such patterns reinforce the argument that English proficiency both reflects and reproduces broader structural inequalities within Indian society.

At the same time, rising demand for English-medium instruction - even within public education systems - signals widespread recognition of English as a pathway to socioeconomic mobility. The rapid expansion of English-medium sections in Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation schools, where enrollment reportedly doubled within a year, illustrates a shift in parental and institutional priorities. This trend suggests that English is increasingly perceived not merely as an academic subject but as a strategic investment in future employability. From a policy perspective, this growing demand underscores the need to strengthen the quality and inclusiveness of English-medium education to prevent further stratification while leveraging its perceived economic and social value.

5. Global Dimension / Cross-Country Comparisons:

1. In many non-native English speaking countries, proficiency in English is tied to participation in global markets, tourism, outsourcing, research publication, etc.
2. English dominates global higher-education publishing, international business contracts, tech documentation, scientific research, etc. - making it *de facto* the language of innovation and global discourse.

Across many non-native English-speaking countries, English proficiency is closely linked to integration into global economic and knowledge networks. Participation in international trade, tourism, outsourcing, and transnational service industries often presupposes functional English competence, positioning the language as a critical enabler of global market access. Empirical evidence from developing and emerging economies



indicates that English proficiency enhances countries' attractiveness to foreign investment and facilitates labor mobility in sectors such as information technology, hospitality, and global services. As a result, English operates not merely as a communicative medium but as an infrastructural component of globalization.

In parallel, English has achieved near-hegemonic status in global knowledge production and dissemination. The dominance of English in higher-education publishing, international business contracts, scientific research, and technological documentation effectively establishes it as the default language of innovation and global discourse. This linguistic centrality shapes academic visibility, research collaboration, and technological diffusion, often privileging English-proficient individuals and institutions. From a research perspective, this underscores how language proficiency functions as a gatekeeping mechanism within global systems of knowledge and commerce, reinforcing the strategic importance of English while simultaneously raising concerns about linguistic inequality and epistemic exclusion.

Research Methodology:

Given the nature of this paper - combining historical, economic, educational, and sociolinguistic perspectives - a mixed methodology is adopted:

1. Secondary data analysis: Using published surveys, reports (Pearson, Wheebox / India Skills Report, Mercer-Mettl, IHDS, etc.) to get quantitative metrics on proficiency, employability, income returns, inequality.
2. Case study approach: India as the primary case; some comparative references to other developing countries (e.g. Philippines, Southeast Asia) drawn where data is available.
3. Qualitative synthesis: Drawing from literature in sociolinguistics, education policy, globalisation, to understand how English functions beyond raw numbers - power, identity, inclusion/exclusion.



Analysis & Discussion:

1. English as Strategic Economic Asset

- a) The wage returns to English proficiency in India are large. Being fluent in English gives ~34% higher wages compared to no English, which is often equal or greater than returns to many forms of formal education.
- b) In globalised sectors (IT, finance, outsourcing, tourism), English is a minimum requirement; firms recruiting for BPOs, global service delivery, customer support, software development expect high English proficiency.
- c) English medium schooling and English used in higher education (especially in professional courses) amplify this effect, creating a feedback loop: proficiency → better education → more opportunity → more demand for English.

2. Education, Policy & Medium of Instruction:

- a) The rise of English-medium instruction even in public/state schools (as illustrated in AMC schools in Ahmedabad) indicates that parents and policymakers see English not merely as an academic subject but as a vehicle for upward mobility.
- b) National education reforms (such as India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020) emphasize multilingual education but also accept the importance of English for global competitiveness.
- c) There is significant state-wise variation: some states/cities showing strong ESL proficiency; others lagging. Disparities in rural vs urban, among different socioeconomic groups, access to quality teachers, exposure to English media, etc.

3. Equality, Inclusion & Barriers:

- a) While English provides opportunity, it also risks reinforcing existing inequalities: those with better access to English education (urban, middle/upper class, certain caste groups) benefit more; those without such access are left further behind.
- b) The data shows only a small proportion of rural, poor, marginalized communities have strong English ability. Thus English can function both as bridge *and* barrier.

- c) Gender, caste, religion also seem to intersect: surveys show differences in English-speaking ability by religious/community groups; access to education; confidence and social capital to use English in formal settings.

4. Global Citizenship, Innovation & Collaboration:

- a) English enables Indian professionals, scholars, creative artists to access global networks: research publications, international collaborations, conferences, innovation ecosystems often function in English.
- b) Digital communication: the internet, software, open source, MOOCs, international media, tech platforms often use English or require English skills. This gives people in India access to global knowledge, skill development, remote work.
- c) Cultural exchange: English facilitates cross-cultural dialogue, global perspectives, diaspora connections.

5. Challenges & Negative Aspects:

- a) Overemphasis on English may undermine indigenous/local languages and cultures, possibly leading to erosion of linguistic diversity.
- b) Quality of English instruction is inconsistent; rote learning, grammar focus rather than communicative competence.
- c) Psychological costs: for some, English proficiency is associated with elitism, language anxiety, identity tension.
- d) Misalignment: fluency alone isn't sufficient; employability also depends on other skills (cognitive, creativity, critical thinking, technical skills). Reports (e.g. Mercer-Mettl) show decline in non-technical skills.

Data & Case Findings: Here are some of the key empirical findings relevant to the thesis:

Indicator	India	Comparative / Global Reference	Implication
Graduate Employability	Improved from ~33.95% in 2013 to ~54.81% in 2024.	Many developing countries struggle with employability in knowledge economy.	Signifies growth partly driven by better English + skill building.
English Proficiency	Pearson Report: average speaking score = 57 (India) vs global speaking average = ~54; writing score = 61 equal to global average.	India somewhat ahead of many comparable countries on spoken English; writing still catching up.	Indicates rising communicative competence.



Indicator	India	Comparative / Global Reference	Implication
Returns to Proficiency	Fluent English speakers earn ~34% more (men) compared to those with no English; “some English” yields ~13% more.	Comparable studies elsewhere show similar returns.	Demonstrates economic value of English.
Disparities in Access	Survey: ~6% report being able to speak English; urban-rural split: ~12% urban vs ~3% rural. Also class, caste, religious differences.	Other countries with colonial legacy or linguistic diversity also show similar patterns.	Highlights that while English offers gains, access is not uniform.

The empirical indicators collectively suggest that English proficiency plays a significant role in shaping employability and economic outcomes in India’s evolving knowledge economy. The steady rise in graduate employability - from approximately 33.95% in 2013 to 54.81% in 2024 - signals broader improvements in workforce readiness, partly driven by enhanced exposure to English and complementary skill development. Comparative evidence indicates that many developing economies continue to struggle with aligning education systems to knowledge-intensive labor markets, positioning India relatively favorably due to its widespread use of English in higher education, technology, and service sectors. This alignment has enabled greater participation in globalized industries, particularly IT, business process outsourcing, and international services.

Proficiency data further reinforce this interpretation. According to the Pearson Global English Proficiency Report, India’s average speaking score exceeds the global speaking average, while its writing proficiency matches global norms. This suggests growing communicative competence, which is critical for employability in service-oriented and collaborative professional environments. At the same time, wage-return studies demonstrate that English proficiency yields substantial economic benefits: fluent English speakers earn approximately 34% higher wages than non-speakers, with even partial proficiency producing measurable gains. Comparable findings across other developing regions underscore that English functions as transferable human capital rather than a context-specific advantage.

However, these gains are unevenly distributed. Survey data indicate that only about 6% of the population reports English-speaking ability, with sharp urban-rural disparities and strong correlations with socioeconomic status, caste, and religious background. Similar patterns are

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observed in other post-colonial and linguistically diverse societies, suggesting that while English serves as a mechanism for mobility, it simultaneously risks reinforcing structural inequalities. From a policy and research perspective, this dual role underscores the need to expand equitable access to quality English education while integrating it with broader skill development, ensuring that English operates as an inclusive bridge to opportunity rather than an exclusionary barrier.

Key Findings:

1. English proficiency is now a measurable economic asset in India: significant wage premiums, better job opportunities, especially in sectors favoring global interaction.
2. Employability among Indian graduates has improved considerably in the last decade, and English ability is one of the contributing factors (alongside digital skills, technical skills, policy initiatives). However, still many graduates are not fully employable due to gaps in other skills, including English.
3. English speaking and writing are improving, especially in urban centres, but there remains variation across states, rural/urban divides, social strata.
4. English is increasingly the medium not just for higher education but starting from early schooling, as parents and institutions recognise its importance.
5. While English fosters global citizenship, innovation, and collaboration, it also perpetuates inequalities unless equitable access is ensured - in terms of quality education, teacher training, resources.

Policy Implications & Recommendations: Based on the analysis, the following recommendations emerge:

1. Expand and improve quality of English language education, especially in rural and underprivileged communities. This includes training teachers in communicative English methods, better curricula, use of technology (edtech, digital tools).
2. Integrate English with other skills development: soft skills, creativity, critical thinking, digital literacy - so that English is not just a token skill but a functional one.
3. Ensure multilingual policies recognize the value of English while preserving local languages: balancing national / regional identity, cultural heritage, and global opportunities.



4. Access to English medium instruction from early grades: but with scaffolding to ensure students who may lack exposure (home environment, media) can catch up.
5. Use of English in official, business, digital contexts: governments, firms and institutions should ensure that essential services, information, and materials are accessible to non-English speakers, and that bilingual or multilingual modes are used.
6. Encourage global exposure: international exchanges, collaborations, research, digital platforms - so English isn't just about domestic commerce but enabling Indians to participate in global innovation ecosystems.

Conclusion:

English in India has transformed from a colonial legacy and a language of administration/communication into a powerful tool for commerce, equality, global citizenship, innovation, and collaboration. The evolution is marked by increasing proficiency among populations, rising employability tied to English skills, and its growing role in education and digital life.

However, to realize its full potential, challenges of access, quality, inequality, and alignment with other essential skills must be addressed. English should be harnessed as a bridge - not a barrier - ensuring that global India is inclusive, innovative, and engaged with the world.

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