CHAPTER III

GLOBAL STATUS OF ENGLISH AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN INDIA
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The present world has entered the era of international communication and advanced technology. There are more and more chances for engineers and technical professionals to convey technical information in English for various purposes. Therefore, besides learning general English as an international language, engineering students of colleges and technical institutes need to be equipped with adequate language skills so that they can communicate technical information clearly at least on a basic level.

English is the most widely spoken language in the world even though the native speakers of English are less in number—there are many more Chinese speakers than native English speakers—but Chinese is spoken little outside the Chinese communities. It is difficult to estimate exactly the number of people who speak English all over the world. According to one estimate “there are more than 350,000,000 native English speakers and more than 400,000,000 speakers of English as a second language (a language used in
everyday life, even though it is not the native language) or foreign language (a language studied but not used much in everyday life)” (Krishnaswamy 2003: 68). English is used as the library language, as language of international trade, travel and as a contact language between nations. It is also in group language that unites the elite speakers across the ethnic, religious and linguistic boundaries.

However, even these numbers do not really indicate how important English is as a world language because less than fifteen percent of the world population uses English. The importance of English is not just in how many people speak it but in what it is used for. English is the major language of news and information in the world. It is the language of business and government even in some countries where it is spoken by less number of people. It is the language of maritime communication and international air traffic control and it is used even for internal air traffic control in countries where it is not a native language.

The European common market has resolved to use what they call “Euro-English” as the common language for communication. No other language has spread around the world so extensively in a very short span of time within the last fifty years. English is a pre-eminent language of wider communication at the international level. Barriers
of race, colour and creed are no hindrance to the continuing spread of the use of English. Besides being a major vehicle of debate at the United Nations and the language of international aviation. "Indeed more than 60 percent of the world's radio programmes are broadcasted in English and it is also the language of 70 percent of world's mail" (Broughton 1978:38).

**English as a Global Language**

English achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country. This might seem like stating the obvious, but it is not, for the notion of special role has many facets. Such a role will be most evident in countries where large number of people speaks the language as a mother tongue (USA, Canada, Britain, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa etc.). However no language has ever been spoken as a mother tongue in more than few countries (Chiefly in Latin America) so mother tongue use by itself cannot give a language global status. To achieve such status a language has to be taken up by other countries around the world. They must decide to give a special place within their communities, even though they may have few or no mother tongue speakers.
There is a close link between language dominance and economic, technological, cultural power, and this fact becomes clear from the history of English. Without a strong power-base, of whatever kind, no language can make progress as an international medium of communication. Language has no independent existence, living in some sort of mystical space apart from people who speak it. "Language exists only in the brains and mouths and ears and hands of its users. When they succeed on the international stage their language succeeds. When they fail, their language fails" (Crystal 1997:12).

A language does not become a global language because of its intrinsic structural properties, or the size of its vocabulary, or it has been a vehicle of great literature in the past, or it was once associated with great culture or religion. All these factors can motivate someone to learn a language, but none of them alone or together can ensure a language's spread across the globe. Such factors cannot even guarantee survival as a living language.

A language traditionally becomes an international language based on the power of its speakers especially their political and military power. This fact is evident from history. But international language dominance is not solely the result of military might. It may take a powerful nation to establish language, but it takes an economically
powerful one to maintain and expand it. This has always been the case, but it became a particularly critical factor in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the economic developments beginning to operate on a global scale, supported by the new communication technologies and fostering the emergence of massive multinational organizations.

The growth of competitive industry and business brought an explosion of international technology, marketing and advertising. Technology, chiefly in the form of movies and records, fuelled new mass entertainment industries which had a worldwide impact. The drive to make progress in science and technology fostered an international intellectual and research environment which gave scholarship and future education a high profile.

Any language at the centre of such explosion of international activity would suddenly have found itself with a global status. By the beginning of nineteenth century, Britain had become the world’s leading industrial and trading country. British political imperialism had sent English round the globe, during the nineteenth century, so that it was a language "on which the sun never sets" (Crystal 1997:12). During the twentieth century, this world presence was maintained and promoted through the economic supremacy of the
new American superpower. Economics replaced politics as the chief driving force. And the language behind the US dollar was English.

This alone is not enough to make English a "global" language. According to Crystal (1997) English not only has a large number of first language (L1) speakers in a number of countries, but it has also been made the official language in a number of others (eg India, Ghana, Nigeria and Singapore) and a priority foreign language in many more. Kachru (1997) describes the spread of English as three concentric circles. The countries where there are most L1 speakers of English (eg UK & USA) represent the "inner circle"; the countries which were formerly colonised and where now English is the official language (eg India & Singapore) form "the outer circle"; and those where English is increasingly being taught as a foreign language (eg China, Greece & Poland) are in the expanding circle.

These developments, coupled with economic developments on a global scale, new communications technologies, the explosion in international marketing and advertising and mass entertainment have also supported the continued expansion of English as a global lingua franca.
There has never been a time when so many nations needed to talk to each other so much. There has never been a time when so many people wished to travel to so many places ... never has there been a more urgent need for a global language (Crystal 1997:12).

The importance of English as a global language is likely to continue to grow in the foreseeable future and in the field of engineering and business, arguably even more so than in other areas. In the words of Julian Amey “Although there are some concerns about American imperialism, there is a belief that young people need English to be internationally competitive” (Graddol 1999:17).

The English language teaching (ELT) business is a huge industry worldwide, with the British Council estimating that students learning English would reach 1,000 million in the year 2000 (Crystal 1997:13). Large providers of transnational tertiary education, require minimum English language levels, often measured with international tests such as IELTS, for entry. Many also provide pre-entry English language courses and bridging courses as well as support programs of various types for international students. Even with minimum English language requirements, the fact is that most ELT courses all over the world, teach only first level (literal) meanings and correct grammar and only a limited amount of what the authors call second level
meanings, ie culture specific meanings essential for effective intercultural communication. It is possible, therefore, that even high levels of linguistic competence would not necessarily make it easy for an international student to understand a lecture with lots of local references and knowledge.

Students of English in India have realized that English is necessary if they are to talk about their identity, their languages, their literature, their science and technology, their society, economic policy, their values and culture so that the world outside will know what they are. English is necessary to interpret India and sell its goods in the global market. If the cognizance of the pervasiveness of English is considered in almost all fields of education, it will not be an exaggeration 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 the modern context no educational system in India can do without the English language. And India is not the only country in the world to have this type of phenomenon as, because of the global status of English, most countries of the world have been forced to include this language in the curricula for its students at one level or the other.
China offers the most shining example in this regard. This country considered English to be a symbol of the western hegemony and imperialism and hence an anathema till the other day. But when the reality of the predominance and indispensability of this language in international affairs dawned upon its rules they were shrewd and quick enough to bid farewell to Anglophobia once for all and made it mandatory for all the public servants of the country to either attain a reasonable degree of proficiency in this language within the stipulated period of time or face the axe.

English has also attained the status of the most important library language of the world in all fields of learning, including science, technology and commerce. The increasing demand for English in almost all these fields makes it imperative for the teachers of English language in India to prove themselves equal to the task of making all students attain a high degree of proficiency in this language by keeping themselves abreast of the latest innovations in the teaching methodologies and equipping themselves with the strategies necessary for making English language teaching more functional and meaningful than ever before.
Purpose of introducing English in India

The introduction of English to the indigenous people of British colonies which led to the existence today of numerous independent states where English continues in daily use is one of the causes of the spreading of English. The process began, with Lord Macaulay’s minute of 1835. With the arrogance that is natural to a conqueror, the British saw no reason why their administrators and army officers should have to learn India’s army languages when the conquered could be required to learn the language of their masters.

In making the English language the medium of instruction and of government business, the British were not displacing the living language of any large Indian community. By bringing in English, the British were not eclipsing the living language of the masses. They were simply creating a space for their own language and permitted the two classical traditions flourishing in our country to dwindle and decline. According to their argument they were giving the Indians access to a superior culture and a superior literature.

Nations are like individuals. They have their moments of triumph. They also have their periods of trials and failure. What ultimately
accounts for success is not the absence of adversity but the use they make of setbacks and defeats.

The point I am trying to make is that even if English in India is the consequence of defeat, we must not view it in the simplistic terms of victor and victim or of conquest and subjugation. As with disability, the important thing is not the physical disadvantage but the quality of response from the human subject. (Sena 2004:4)

The introduction of English in India was a direct consequence of our country being defeated and conquered by the British. But even before its passive acceptance and formal introduction, English was imposed on Indians, and of the Indian leaders who viewed English and English education as a window of progress and opportunity. “I never hated before and I do not hate today the Englishmen. And so I cannot cast out the English from my small store of knowledge. I do not wish to forget the language nor do I wish all Indians to give up or forget it” (Sena 2004:2)

If the English language helped the British administer a country of continental size more effectively, the Indians used it to subvert this control by developing a national movement in which the intelligentsia of different regions freely used English to network with
one another. Now English, inextricably woven into the intricate story of modern India, has become inseparable from the likes of Indians.

**Position of English in India**

English has spread into many new domains, such as family, friendship, neighbourhood, transactions, education and employment. English today represents the scientific knowledge, modernization and development. People’s motives for supporting English in India are mainly to raise the standard of life of the Indians. English is perceived as a useful language mostly because of the potential it possesses in the fields of education, employment and national as well as international trade and communication. 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 schools and students are getting enrolled in English-medium schools in preference to the vernacular-medium schools.

English is growing stronger and stronger with the passage of time despite its unrelenting condemnation by some political and social reforms. India is a land of diverse cultures, languages and ideas, but it is English that performs the role of a link language between the linguistically alienated regions. Within higher education institutions,
English is the preferred medium, especially in the fields of science and technology. At social level too, it endows its speakers with a certain status and prestige. Even though politicians indulge in anti-English rhetoric from time to time, the position of English as the prime language of the country remains unshaken. It stays dominant and goes from strength to strength every day. Ironically, the most ferocious baiters of English too generally send their wards to those English-medium schools where the use of any language other than English is strictly prohibited.

Until 1979 English alone was the medium of all civil services. Though candidates can now choose any of the official languages as the medium for civil services examinations, this policy decision of the government of India has not affected the social status of English in India in any manner whatsoever. Though the educational policies of the Indian Government after Independence have undergone major changes through the years, matters related to the teaching of English at different levels constituted a crucial part of the deliberations of all bodies and documents concerning education right from the Report of the university Education Commission by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan in 1950 to the New Education policy in 1986 and even later.
Despite the privileged and dignified status of English in India, a large majority of learners find it difficult to attain proficiency in this language. The genesis of the problem lies at the basic at which this language is taught. While English is taught as the second language in most states, there is a lot of difference in the level at which it is introduced. Even in the same state, there is a disparity amongst different schools. Thus, in convent schools, English is the medium of instruction from the earliest stage, whereas in government schools, students begin to learn English from class 4 or 5 or even later. All these create a lot of confusion as far as the standards of English teaching and learning are concerned.

In India, English is the most widely taught second language practically at all levels of education even today. All Indian universities, degree colleges and junior colleges have separate departments for teaching English, but still students are not given proper exposure to English as a language. The communicative competence of most of the learners who have already passed their first-degree course is woefully low. Even the brilliant students confine themselves to the pedestrian type of English as hardly ever ventures to acquaint them with the finer nuances of the language.
The conditions under which English, at present, is taught are not quite satisfactory. "The foundations years for the teaching of English in schools are in the hands of teachers who neither know enough English nor are familiar with the latest and far reaching developments in the pedagogy of English" (Gokak 1963:74). Although this statement is only partially true in the fast changing educational scenario in India, it is a pointer that urges to rethink about the needs and requirements in terms of a changing society. The approaches and methods used in teaching English are to be tailored to suit the present needs.

Many learners of English find it very difficult to construct grammatically correct sentences. The reason for this problem is that the construction of English sentences does not become a habit with them even after putting in many years of learning this language. Errors will not occur if correct constructions become automatic and habitual. As the process of habit formation requires a prolonged practice, opportunities must be provided to use this language to the maximum possible extent.

Another major problem faced by the learners of English is the influence of the mother tongue. The teachers make a comparative analysis of the linguistic structures of English with the learner’s
mother tongue for making the learners understand the similarities and dissimilarities between the two. Most of the students from vernacular medium schools lack confidence to work on their own. Individual attention lacks, when the class is large. The students with shy nature have a lot of fear to converse and have a lot of excessive inferiority complex since they come from rural and backward areas.

The excessive reliance on the classics as material for teaching English in itself is one of the basic causes behind the dismally low achievement level in this language of a majority of Indian students. The students virtually burn the candles of their energy and stamina at both ends by grasping a foreign language and an exotic culture simultaneously. Now focus is shifting from English Literature to Literatures in English. Many boards and universities have now started including Indian writing in English in their syllabi.

With the inundation of the Indian by the foreign media, the importance of English is increasing day by day. The amount of bilingualism is increasing even in programmes in Hindi and other languages. The only other factor that has become prominent is the tilt towards American programmes that shift the focus from the British model of pronunciation to American English spoken with typical American accent. The main reason for this is the progress made by
the outsourcing companies in India and the job opportunities behind it. Thus, in India, we have a variety of English spoken at different levels.

The importance of English as an international language too continues to grow day by day. The twenty first century opens new avenues of globalization, and English is the most widely used language as far as globalization is concerned because of its richness, flexibility and other historical reasons. Although Indians have good technical skills as well as problem solving capacities, which create a great demand for them in the global market, they are often unable to make use of such opportunities and to become important stakeholders in the field of globalisation because of their inadequacy in communicating effectively in English. Now majority of students wish to join Engineering colleges because of the fast changing demands of the employment market.

It has to be kept in mind that the usefulness of English teaching and learning is determined by the role this language plays in a given socio-cultural context. The increasing professionalism and operational mobility have brought significant changes in the learners expectations from the language learning courses. The teaching learning process in the case of technical education must
adapt itself to the demands of the requirements of the employers. There has been a distinct shift from English for Academic Purpose (EAP) to English Specific Purpose (ESP) during the past years. Specific modes of teaching are required for special purposes. Teaching of literature should be done for language in use, as literature and language should reinforce each other. In the changing scenario of today, emphasis should be on teaching of literary text for enhancing practical skills, problem solving capacities and purposeful learning.

The present day requirement is to teach English useful for a special communicative purpose. But this does not mean that English Literature shall not be taught for literary purposes. Those who want to study English for academic purposes should continue to do so, but the scope has to be widened to meet the changing demands of the future. The popularity of call centers in our metros is indicative of the high percentage of English-speaking workforce that is required to meet the ever-growing global demands.

Calibre, inspiration and imagination to learn and teach English have been consistently annihilated by some needless controversies in India. Due to the global importance gained by English, fanatic opposition to the study of English has almost disappeared and more
and more people have begun to realize the cultural, technological and international advantages that flow from the study of English. There are uncountable English medium schools. The pace of mushrooming of such schools has been becoming faster and faster with the passage of time. It must be admitted that there is a kind of stimulus given to the establishment of English medium schools and that this spur is directly in proportion to the inability of the vernacular schools to teach their students the minimum quantum of English which is necessary for comprehending lectures and textbooks in colleges and universities.

Macaulay might have thought that the knowledge of English was essential for civilizing Indians. The next generation might have thought English was necessary for the shaping of character or the development of the aesthetic sense. But the present generation is convinced that English is needed for mobility and social and economic advancement. English is the language of opportunities because it takes one outside one’s own community to places where more opportunities are available for professional and economic growth.

Learners have realized that English not only gives them “information advantage” – it provides information in every
conceivable branch of knowledge—but also “the power to change the world that change us” (Krishnaswamy 2003:11). In other words, English is the language, not of westernization, but of modernization. This is why, English is the language of our agricultural universities even though it is not the language of our agriculturists. Unfortunately, while our learners are fully aware of this modernizing role of English in India and would like to speed up the process, the curriculum designers are not. The English book prescribed for study in Tamilnadu Engineering College was written twenty years ago. The book speaks of technical English with technology which is obsolete today. The curriculum designers must lend a helping hand if English is to become an agent of change and modernization.

**English and Technical Education**

It is generally believed that the students pursuing professional courses need not bother too much about learning any language, as their primary goal is to master the technical aspects of their respective professions. But there exists an urgent need for teaching English to the students of professional education in a well-planned manner.
Professional education is the process education that grooms a student for achieving his specific professional goals and enables him to climb the ladder reaching into the chosen profession. The aim of professional education should not be limited to providing just the requisite types of technical skills to the students. It should also inculcate in the students a sense of social responsibility, an appreciation of social and human values and relationships, and the power to look at the things without prejudice or blind commitment. While professional men largely set the pattern of national life, the type pattern they set in turn will depend largely on the type of intellectual and moral experiences they have during the prime of their life, especially during their professional training. Thus it is necessary for the students of professional education to acquire not only technical skills but also soft skills like those in communication, motivation, creative thinking, self-management, etc. Of all these soft skills, communication occupies the topmost priority. As English has come to enjoy the status of being the most important link language at both national and international levels, it has become a must for all successful students of professional education to have the capability for communicating in this language in a highly fluent and effective manner.
Professional education in India generally begins after the higher or senior secondary school education, but it does not stop with the acquiring of any under graduate degree by the students. While some students go in for higher education in professional education either in India or aboard, others take up professions in academic, research institutions and various industries such as software, chemical, pharmaceutical, electronics, etc. Thus, the process of learning in professional education goes on and on. The role of English in all these processes is extremely relevant and significant.

As a student can join a professional institute only after completing the tertiary education with English being one of the compulsory subjects for seven to fourteen years, he is supposed to have learnt the basics of the English language at the entry level of his professional education. However, his need in the area of English language learning at the school level drastically differs from that at the university or college level where the student wants to pursue his professional education.

A student of professional education needs both communicative competence and skill in English. He should develop his passive skills to become more competent and active skills to become more proficient in English. Therefore, it is appropriate to say that at this
stage, the role of English teachers is to develop all the four English language skills in the students. These skills, besides making the student proficient in English, also help him face the competitive and entrance examinations of various types with more confidence as English forms a very important component of all these examinations. Moreover, the written tests for most of the competitive and entrance examinations are followed by group discussions and/or interviews to assess the candidate’s attitudes, personality, leadership qualities and creativity. Thus, only those candidates can hope to achieve the goal of getting selected for best jobs or higher professional courses in their respective professions who possess beside the technical knowledge and skills of the profession concerned, a high degree of proficiency in both written and spoken skills.

The mastery of communication skill in English is necessary not only for getting selected for the desired post but also for giving a high account of oneself in the professional career. Most of the students of professional education come to occupy executive life which requires proficiency in English. Starting from giving instructions to participating in high-level meetings, they have to perform various tasks requiring effective use of English. The ability to use English competently and confidently matters enormously not only to those
managers and personnel who have to do a lot of desk work, but also to such professionals who have to do only the field work. Moreover, none of them can escape the need to listen, speak, read or write in their social life.

The needs for developing English language skills during the course of professional education are many, varied and crucial. The basic requirement underlying all these needs is the same, namely, improving the student's skill of listening, speaking, reading and writing English. The most important question is how to make the students of professional education learn these skills. The strategies like designing well-structured courses are the first step. Secondly, focus should be given on the areas of vocabulary, pronunciation, accent, word order and composition according to the requirements of the students. The student must be trained through innovative methods, language games, language laboratories especially through computer-based courseware. Adopting interesting and reliable evaluation technique is also very important.

It is important that the materials, courses and methodologies are modified, whenever necessary, to cater to the local needs. The focus must shift from teaching as a unidirectional, teacher-centred, knowledge-oriented activity to learning as an interactional activity,
involving sub-activities like problem solving, group work, drawing inferences, making generalizations and other activities with the help of second language.

With the increasing globalization in almost every field of activity, English – the potential language of the world – has acquired the status of the most important language at both national and international level. Hence, the acquisition of a high degree of proficiency in communicative skills in English has become a major requirement for success in any profession. English language teaching is very relevant in the process of professional education. The teachers of English are expected to shoulder the responsibility of making it more meaningful, functional and beneficial. To accomplish this goal, it is not enough if these teachers understand the need for English language teaching in the educational process pertaining to professional education but they shall also be able to devise appropriate strategies and the procedures for the implementation of these strategies.