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## Technology Integration in English Teaching to Undergraduate Students in India

**Ritwik Balo**

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Rani Birla Girls' College

In a world increasingly interconnected by digital means, the role of English as a lingua franca is undeniable, especially in a diverse country like India. This paper explores the intricate relationship between English Language Teaching (ELT) and technology integration in the Indian educational landscape. By examining historical trends and current challenges, this study underscores the transformative potential of technology in enhancing ELT.

Nearly every facet of life today has been affected by technology and education is no exception to its effects. Technology has changed learning fundamentally in several ways. To begin with, it has substantially widened access to education. When printing had not yet been invented, books were rare and only a handful of elites had access to education. Even worse, in order to get an education, learners had to travel to centers of learning which were often hundreds of miles away. History is full of examples of great centers of learning, such as Florence, Constantinople, and Nalanda, among others, where students gathered from far off countries, even continents. Overcoming the physical constraints alone was a herculean task and it is widely believed that technology has simply eradicated this barrier altogether. For a

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developing country such as India, which is still in the process of overcoming the social inequalities of caste, class, gender, and ethnicity, technology has poised itself as the great equalizer. It has laid the foundations of equality, if not equity, like never before.

As technology continues to bring radical changes to the education sector, language teaching and learning has and continues to be benefitted from it as much as any other discipline. In India, English-language teaching-learning has faced hurdles at many levels and technology integration, this paper argues, is a potential solution to many of these problems, though, it is possible to argue that technology, in some cases, does indeed embolden existing inequalities.

The historical trajectory of education in India, particularly post-independence, has witnessed a significant evolution. English, once a language of colonial imposition, has transformed into a vehicle for economic empowerment and social mobility. Research indicates a direct correlation between English proficiency and the economic performance of a nation, with individuals proficient in English often earning higher wages (McCormick 2013).

## OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This research paper aims to delve into several key objectives to understand and enhance the role of ELT in the contemporary Indian scenario.

**1. *The Importance of ELT in India.*** This study aims to emphasize the crucial role of ELT in India. This section will explore how English proficiency is not just an academic achievement but a vital tool for economic mobility and social empowerment.

**2. *Outlining the Hurdles in ELT.*** The second objective involves identifying and outlining the hurdles that impede the process of learning and teaching English in India. Understanding these hurdles is crucial to developing effective strategies to overcome them.

**3. *Technology as a Solution to ELT Challenges.*** Next, the study will demonstrate how technology, especially in a world altered by the COVID-19 pandemic, emerges as a powerful tool in overcoming the obstacles faced in ELT. The pandemic has not only changed the



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dynamics of education but has also necessitated the integration of technology in learning. The use of Mobile Apps and Learning Management Systems (LMS), previously secondary to traditional classroom models, has now become central. This part of the paper will showcase how technology can revolutionize English teaching and learning, making it more accessible, interactive, and efficient.

### **ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN INDIA: ECONOMIC RAMIFICATIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

In India, the debate regarding the status of English as a “foreign-language” continues to be a topic of contention. As an English teacher, I argue that English in India is akin to other foreign influences like Cricket, Rock Music, Comics, Computers, and certain clothing styles, which have been seamlessly integrated into Indian culture. The process of ‘Indianization’ of these elements demonstrates the country’s adaptability and integration of global influences. In the same vein, irrespective of whether English is accepted as an Indianized language, its significant economic impact on India cannot be overlooked.

The Harvard Business Review provides a compelling argument in this regard, stating, “Research shows a direct correlation between the English skills of a population and the economic performance of the country. Indicators like GDP go up... And on an individual level, recruiters and HR managers around the world report that job seekers with exceptional English compared to their country’s level earned 30-50% percent higher salaries” McCormick (2013). This statement underscores the undeniable economic benefits of English proficiency, both at a national and individual level.

Supporting this view, a study by Azam et. al. (2013) reinforces the economic value of English language skills, finding that “hourly wages are on average 34% higher for men who speak fluent English and 13% higher for men who speak a little English relative to men who do not speak English.” This data is pivotal as it highlights two key aspects: firstly, it establishes English-language skills as a crucial form of human capital, and secondly, it provides a



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quantifiable measure of the extent to which English contributes to individual economic prosperity.

The significance of these studies lies not only in their findings but also in their implications for policy-making in India. By elucidating the direct economic benefits of English proficiency, these studies offer valuable insights that could guide Indian policymakers. Understanding the economic value of English skills can assist in determining the appropriate level of investment in English teaching and learning. More importantly, it emphasizes the need to invest in English Learning Technology in a way that is both meaningful and cost-effective. This approach could significantly influence the future trajectory of English language education in India, ensuring that it aligns with the economic aspirations of the nation and its people.

### **CHALLENGES IN ENGLISH TEACHING-LEARNING IN INDIA: ECONOMIC, CULTURAL, AND INDIVIDUAL CONSTRAINTS"**

*Economic and Cultural Barriers in ELT.* One of the primary hurdles hindering English teaching and learning in the Indian context is Economic Capital. For a majority of Indians, the costs associated with learning English, often requiring private schooling, are prohibitive. While state-run schools do incorporate English in their curriculum, they frequently fall short in providing an environment conducive to developing English skills at par with those obtained through private schooling. Faust and Nagar (2001) note that a dual system of education, with English-medium and vernacular-medium schools, has contributed to social stratification, with English-medium education becoming a symbol of status and a tool for social mobility, especially among the elite. Dey (2019) criticizes the resistance to mainstreaming English education, pointing out the hypocrisy of the ruling classes who send their own children to private English-medium schools while opposing the spread of English among the masses.



The second significant barrier is Cultural Capital. Aside from the elite few, the average Indian has limited interactions with the English language outside the classroom. For most students, their exposure to English is largely confined to their English classes (Lambine 5-7; Küçükler and Sulac 194-215).

*Individual Constraints in ELT.* Moving beyond these systemic barriers, there are also hurdles at the individual learner level that could potentially be mitigated through technology. As a former ELT trainer at a State-run Engineering College, I have noted a generally low individual commitment to learning English at the undergraduate level. This can be attributed to multiple factors.

Firstly, students entering college often experience a sense of “freedom” that can divert their focus away from academics, including language learning. Secondly, the demands of their mainstream curriculum, whether it be engineering, medicine, or another major, require such intensive focus that English learning is often deferred.

Furthermore, there are psychological barriers to language learning. The hesitation to participate in class, a common issue among students, significantly hampers their progress. Additionally, many students are either too shy or unwilling to practice their English skills with peers. Lastly, a prevalent misconception about the placement process leads students to believe that since placements occur only in the final year, they can postpone their English learning journey.

These myriad challenges – economic, cultural, and individual – collectively form a complex web of constraints that hinder the effective teaching and learning of English in India. Recognizing and addressing these barriers is essential for devising strategies to improve ELT, particularly through the use of technology.



## LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY IN ELT AMIDST PANDEMIC CHALLENGES

In the wake of the challenges posed by the pandemic, technology has emerged as the fundamental tool for English teaching and learning. This section explores the diverse ways in which technology can enhance the English skills of students across various disciplines.

*Behavioral Factors and Blended Teaching Models.* The seemingly ubiquitous presence of smartphones and digital devices among students provides an opportunity to exploit behavioral tendencies for the benefit of ELT. A shift towards “technology and a blended model of teaching in language classes would help our students learn more effectively; further, Children could reach their full potential in a shorter time and in a more enjoyable environment” (“Use of Technology in ESL Teaching”). This approach acknowledges the changing habits of students who prefer digital means, like apps and screens, for learning over traditional methods such as dictionaries and paper-based reading.

*Adapting to Digital Preferences.* As a college teacher, I advocate for adapting to this digital inclination rather than resisting it. By utilizing the “phone addiction” positively, we can enhance the teaching-learning process. Moreover, the use of audio-visual methods in teaching has shown to significantly increase attention and retention levels among students, making learning new words and contexts more effective (Indrayanti, Kuntoro, and Romadhon 314-323).

*Overcoming Social Barriers with Technology.* Language learning is inherently interactive, and technology plays a pivotal role in facilitating this interaction. Language labs and AI-based language learning apps offer shy students a platform to overcome social barriers and the fear of judgment (Carney). These tools also address key elements of language learning, such as pronunciation, which is often a challenge for non-native speakers. These new-age tools, many of which are ad-supported and can be used for free, provide meaningful contexts for both educators and learners, making language sessions enjoyable and effective.



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*The Role of ICT and Mobile Apps.* Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has become crucial, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, in creating attractive learning models that ensure long-term retention. Online resources, when available as mobile apps, are more accessible and student-friendly. For instance, Duolingo, a widely recognized language learning app, provides learners with an engaging and interactive platform to practice their English skills. It offers a structured approach to language learning with free, high-quality lessons divided into levels, each tailored to progressively improve the user's proficiency. Duolingo's unique gamification approach, coupled with comprehension questions and interactive exercises, makes learning both enjoyable and effective, catering to various aspects of language learning including listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

#### **CONCLUSION: THE ROLE OF ENGLISH IN INDIA'S LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE AND FUTURE PROSPECTS**

In linguistically rich India, where over a thousand languages and 22 officially recognized ones coexist, English plays a unique role as a functional language, transcending conventional linguistic boundaries. Its significance is not just in its neutrality, offering a level playing field for Indians irrespective of their mother tongue, but also in its capacity as the lingua franca of the global stage. As we recognize English's dominant position in global business and its potential in bolstering India's economy, it's important to note that India, in comparison to competitors like China, Brazil, and Russia, is already several steps ahead in English language proficiency.

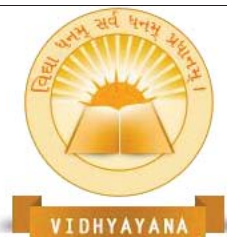
However, as we look towards the future and acknowledge the indigenization of English post-colonialism (Kachru), this paper's exploration into the challenges of English teaching and learning in India brings to light a crucial aspect – the integration of technology in ELT. While technology offers transformative potential in overcoming educational barriers, it inadvertently risks widening the gap due to the existing digital divide. Students in urban areas, with better access to digital devices and high-speed internet, have an advantage over their rural counterparts, where such resources are scarce. This disparity leads to unequal

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opportunities in leveraging technology for English learning, thereby potentially exacerbating educational inequalities.

To address this, we must consider multi-faceted strategies ensuring equitable access to technology-enhanced ELT resources. Government and private sector initiatives aimed at improving internet infrastructure in underserved areas, subsidizing digital device costs for low-income families, and developing low-bandwidth friendly ELT software and applications are imperative. Moreover, integrating offline functionalities in ELT apps and incorporating digital literacy in teacher training programs are essential steps towards bridging the digital divide in education.

While the journey of English in India is a testament to the nation's adaptability and global outlook, the effective integration of technology in ELT poses both opportunities and challenges. By overcoming the hurdles in English education and carefully navigating the complexities of technological integration, India can harness the full potential of English as a tool for empowerment, growth, and global connectivity. The future of English in India is not merely about language proficiency; it is about leveraging a global language to create equitable opportunities for all its people, ensuring that the path to global prominence is inclusive and accessible to every learner across the nation.

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