



## Research article

# Integrating Historical Research: Enhancing Present-day English Language Education and Career Preparedness

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## Abstract

To understand the evolving dynamics of English Language Education (ELE) today, it is imperative to delve into the historical development of the language. The numerous specialized areas of Applied Linguistics, prevailing today, such as English Language Teaching (ELT), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Computational Linguistics (CL), and Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI), reflect multifaceted and specific language-function needs and require humans to be accurate, intuitive, and scientifically focused to perform specific language tasks. Our assertion in this paper is that integrating historical research may give us a clear picture of the vibrant shifts in English language education in India and present-day trends. It also helps us grasp how the various aspects worked in the past and how they came to be the way they are now. The study focuses on: (a) what historical research is in the context of English language education, and (b) how it could enhance our understanding of the present-day changes in the English language. The insights may be helpful for research scholars, reviewers, English language educators, historians of education, experts in educational technologies and policymakers in furthering and empowering historical research. This article argues for the value of historical research in ELE for its multidimensional impacts and its capacity to construct arguments for the future, highlighting how today's research in English education will continue to bear its historical significance in the years to come.

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## 1. Introduction

The shift in the status of English from its role in the landscape of territorial expansion and administrative power to its subsequent institutionalization in the Indian educational tiers, to its present status as an associate official language and teaching or learning it as a first, second or third language, motivates our attention to look back at its historical and social perspectives. The historical lens helps gain a deeper understanding of the root cause (s), process and effects of development and various other factors that lead to an evolving nature of a language. Critically approaching the present-day advancements in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as linguistic genres, and the rise in the English-speaking population, language educators ought to inquire about its growth to develop a 'historical sense' (Smith, 2013) about the historical conditions of those times that led to its growing recognition for professional development and vigorous language pedagogies today, despite what Article 343 of the Indian Constitution records: "Notwithstanding anything in clause (1), for a period of fifteen years from the commencement of this Constitution, the English language shall continue to be used for all the official purposes of the Union for which it was being used immediately before such commencement." (The Constitutionofindia.net team, 1950)

Historical research includes two distinct components: history and research. 'History' refers to events or human experiences of a certain time in the past, and 'research' is a sustained process to question past events and incidents to solve a problem, or revise past ideas based on a systematic and chronological study of its past evidence, experiences, events, features, facts, approaches/behaviour, and theories. One must understand why to study history, what aspects and kinds of history, and which archives to research (Smith, 2013), or the methods and design to be followed –it's a process. Archives have broader perspectives beyond written records; monuments, museums, manuscripts, materials, diaries, individuals (as oral history), and metanarratives function as archives. The way the archived materials are grouped or arranged is also educationally intrinsic. They confirm their evidential value, as a product of a specific time, the order in which they were created – chronology, subject/theme, genre, context of creation, creator's identity (single or multiple), workflow (single work or series), and so on.

Archives in any form, as key historical records, help to understand the sequence of events, the original structure/classification it belongs to (as indicated by its creator), the narrative and the mode of narration and whether they hold any relationship in their textual occurrence/series. Here, one needs to be critical when estimating narratives and check with the original sources, because a historian's attitude towards the past may involve subjective or biased observations, depending on their cognition and comprehension of the facts, class status, academic grounding, social standing, experience, etc., which have already been recorded. The present-day reader and/or student ought to be very careful about the historiographical aspects in creating and developing today's records to be treated as history in future.

However, in ELE, historical research differentiates itself from 'historiography', an interrelated concept that studies how history was interpreted, narrated, and written by historians, and the two complement each other. Historiography aims to analyse how language education historians have interpreted, framed, and written their arguments about events and experiences - about (English) language evolution, linguistic changes, and various teaching/learning methods and theories of

different schools of thought. Historical research critically studies historical events and experiences - the English language evolution in India and the social, political, economic, and cultural influences on linguistic changes over the years. The contemporary English language conceptions and practices are analysed using available primary, secondary, and tertiary data, which may involve examining history and historiography, as differentiated in their presentation and delineation of facts or events. It offers a broader scope when investigating facts. Language is context-bound. For example, social facts such as world war(s), colonialism, industrialization, etc., have triggered the need and development of specific training requisites for learners and employment.

In what follows, this study proposes to delve into a critical appreciation of how historical research is apposite to a comprehensive understanding of the landscape of past didactics, methodological changes, and social conditions for English language education evolution.

## **2. Research Gap**

Although a significant amount of cross-sectional research has been conducted in the field of English language education and its history, there remains a palpable gap in capturing how historical research could shape our understanding of present-day changes and influences in the learning and teaching of English. This, in turn, may have crucial and intricate cause-and-effect relationships in their social applications and real-life functions vis-à-vis the demands of the world of jobs and career prospects. For example, English communication skills (or ESP), as one of the demanding intersections of applied linguistics, has found a special place in the majority of education programmes across stages, shaped by today's social settings, global reach and requirements. This has a direct bearing on the primary stakeholders, the curriculum framework, pedagogical practices, the world of jobs and business dealings, when considering a holistic view in building a skilled workforce and the nation's economic superstructure.

## **3. Research Method**

The study employed a qualitative approach to explore the insights of leading professionals in English Language Education (ELE). It also drew on the researcher's lived-in-service experiences and direct observations of curricular changes over the years. The study used purposive sampling and reflective narratives of a selected expert group of teachers and renowned language historians, curriculum developers and policy influencers. This article thoroughly studied relevant articles in SCOPUS and Web of Science-indexed, peer-reviewed databases, and reports to identify key ideas about the nuanced perspectives of historical research.

Data were also gathered from direct observation and heeding of live interviews and formal discussions of historians, including Dr Parimala V Rao, the historian of education (Rao, 2025) to capture nuanced perspectives for interpretive analysis. Her edition of *New Perspectives in the History of Indian Education* (2014, paperback 2016) critically studies various aspects of 'indigenous education and examines the education system under the British administration.' (Rao, 2025). The researcher's positionality regarding this topic has also been reflected in the development of this paper to delineate thematic patterns within lived-in-service (classroom) experiences and critical observations of scholarly articles. For example, in the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP),

as language facilitators, we often go back and forth to the changes in writing styles or oral communication and how they have evolved over the years in alignment with societal needs. Similarly, our English Literature curriculum is a blend of the study of Old English as well as Modern English to contextualize the chronological evolution. Thus, the present study builds upon the idea that to understand modern phenomena of language functions or organizational and educational policies, it is necessary to trace back their origin -analyze and uncover what succeeded or failed in past cultural and societal practices, infrastructure or influences of colonial association, if any, etc., and shape future language study or use using current analytical evidence.

To uphold research ethics, proper acknowledgement and citations have been maintained.

#### **4. Discussion and Insights**

To argue the interrelation and need of historiography and historical research of ELE, let us explore the contexts of relevance. Probing into the etymology of 'relevance', its dictionary meaning is 'close connection' or 'relatedness' or a 'frame of reference'; the relatedness of past experiences to gain perspective on the present, while directing towards the future. The contemporary diversification of English language education encourages researchers to investigate the reticulation and zeitgeists of time, to re-read, re-interpret and re-interrogate the subtleties of social, political, cultural, and administrative interplay on curricular framework, weaving of thoughts and interpretations, or pedagogical practices to understand societal and educational needs and demands and today's relatedness with the past.

How to conceptualise the expression *English language education*?

Is it education about the English language (the content) or education in the English language (the medium)? It would not be impertinent to say that it is a combination of teaching about the content, delivering it in the same language, and aiming to build competence and self-efficacy in using the target language with proficiency.

It appears to be a much more complex process, serving as both a means and an end in itself. Studying changes in grammar rules, morphology, phonology, diction, syntactic structures, semantics, etc., will enhance our linguistic awareness as well as the cognitive mechanisms involved in language acquisition or adaptation (language education as an end) using the same language (language as a means). Researchers involved in the study of any of these would have to look back to history – to identify the changes it has undergone, either from how it was when it entered India or how it was at a certain period in its country of origin.

To identify the changes, one has to study their history and/or historical past using the same language as a medium. By engaging with the past, the literary genres of different periods inform about their societal conditions, reflect culture, reveal underlying assumptions in the texts, and show the style of writing or any newness distinct to the genre, textuality, etc. Today's global integration, interaction and labour market context set new dynamics as part of ongoing purposive communication functions for specified professional or academic usage, like English for Specific Purposes (ESP). To understand, the professional way we speak, read and write today may encourage a comparative study of its current societal needs with those of the past.

For example, the statements:

First, the characteristics of exercises to identify emerging skill needs are often not aligned with their potential policy uses: the way skills are defined may not map onto useful policy-making variables; the output may be too technical; or the results may not be sufficiently disaggregated at the regional, sub-regional or sectoral levels. Second, the key stakeholders may not be sufficiently engaged and, when they are, disagreements about skills needs and the required policy response may arise, requiring consensus building. (OECD, 2016)

This report is an in-depth analysis of what policies or practices faced challenges and need to be overcome and those which were accomplished and achieved. It is a study of the past from the available records. It analyses all the linked perspectives –policies, assessments, pedagogical framework, etc. that turned out as major challenges for its end-users to ensure a better future.

In language classrooms, while studying the present society's professional imperative for English proficiency (or mastery) in the job market or for career advancement, the extent to which the political and administrative purposes that led to the recruitment of English-speaking people in colonial India have shaped change is a matter of historical inquiry that a language student is expected to know. The rise of the middle class before 1947 led to some reservations about literary and cultural attainment, while conferring higher professional advantages and social mobility on a group of 'intellectuals'. Scholars seeking to study the present-day influence of English communication skills on achieving an affluent career in today's global labour market or on social mobility have to look back to analyse whether the past professional advantages of English education have any bearing on the present. To understand the persistent and intriguing discourse on the coexistence of the occidental and oriental, or the global and the local, in the context of language practices, this trail cannot be overlooked.

With changes in the socio-economic and cultural backdrop, ELE has surged in distinctive specialisations such as English Language Teaching (ELT) and in specific genres such as ESP and English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and is not confined solely to the aesthetic appreciation of linguistics and literature. From the language of its masters, the demand for mastery of the language to meet professional requirements in the global labour market or to bring business to the table calls for a study of its societal journey.

The higher the language competence, the finer the ability to use the language in linguistic interpretation, narrative intent, organisational structure, evaluation and application. It is a marker of one's social, biological, political, professional and socio-economic standing, and cultural orientation, each shaping the other while substantiating the co-existence of the concepts of hegemony and the subordinate. Research enables people to be informed of the linear progression of history. This, in turn, would leave a historical scaffolding for posterity. Precisely, historiography does not indicate a mere study of the historians' record; it transcends that, as each account relates to the subtle interplay of power and politics as much as to varied linguistic inheritance in a global multilingual scenario.

Today's student of the English language may be unaware of the Charter Act of 1813, its impact on English language education today, and the background to its enactment. Historians'

interpretations of whether economic, political and educational shifts led to the spread of English education will serve as a source of inquiry for present-day learners, using the same language of the colonisers. History interlinks language and literature, revealing how society is portrayed today through English literature, compared with what Christian missionaries, English administrators, or other European invaders conveyed through literature in their time. It involves researching historical data to identify and compare its grammar, spellings, syntactic arrangements, the inclusion or redundancy of lexical items, text interpretation, and the roles of author and reader in contemporary society, functioning in the age of artificial intelligence (AI) and social media influences, with those of the past.

For example, the Old English usage in *The Canterbury Tales*, or Shakespearean English, alongside Post-structuralism and Gen Z coinages, evoke studies of the evolution of the English language. Simultaneously, it piques curiosity about the development of other (native) languages, connecting existing languages to the pre-colonial aeon. Whether identifying a national language in a multilingual country like India relates to the hegemonic impact of ELE, which has incurred debate, fuels historical research.

English in India is largely taught as a second language, but it is also taught as a first or third language. English is the official language in some Indian states and the sole medium of communication among their several existing mother tongues. The effects of these diversions on learners and the evolving changes in language usage are dominant fields of historical research in ELE. Similarly, online platforms have enabled global accessibility and wider reach, but English learning still remains unapproachable and inaccessible to many for varied reasons, including a shortage of trained trainers and quality teachers. The study of the effects of these well-off and/or struggling spectrums is rooted in researching historical perspectives.

The relevance of historical research in ELE also lies in comparing the non-uniform inclusion of English in the curriculum tiers and structure across the country. What led to these fluctuations in policy implementation across the country is a matter for historiography and historical research into national politics, for scrupulous analysis and reasoning. This directly bears on the educational objectives, desired outcomes, career readiness and competence, and real-time implementation, urging revised considerations in future policy-making decisions and recommendations.

Furthermore, the context of relevance applies to investigating the influence of culture and its reciprocation on interpersonal relationships among today's and future learners, and among nations and their socio-political agendas. Because these differences affect the scope of education, employment, and, overall, the labour market, it would be grossly unfair to loosely label people as skilled or unskilled when competing for employment and work opportunities. Understanding and studying history would enhance our grasp of various aspects and issues of society as a whole – how it worked in the past, how it came to work the way it is now, and how differences formed and evolved over time. Alongside this, it will hone their critical thinking skills, help them navigate multinational environments, inform them, develop their language for internal and external communication, and enhance career readiness.

There is another intriguing dimension. Though unparalleled, discourses of mother-tongue supremacy over English are age-old controversies in multilingual India. How do we contextualise the idea of one nationhood here, while also talking of a 'global village'? In this, how were countries,

societies, groups, families, and the concept of native/non-native languages formed, and how are they different, or is there now one village in their approach? Historians have been able to provide us with a sense of this larger historical change.

Official documents and government and non-government skill reports seem to reflect an exponential requirement (not just a demand) for excellent English communication skills. From a state of anti-national feeling in the pre-independence era to a hit at the business box office, the journey must have been epoch-making, though its status trajectories were stumbling. Historiography can show how it tipped the stage of colonial legacy (or, blemishes, maybe) towards a widening desire for its access. It is a deep human interaction with the past - i.e. history and historians' records and interpretations.

The language concerned, while appealing to cognitive and aesthetic aspects, also engages in business exchange with the learning and teaching of ELT, 'a dynamic, forward-looking field, constantly reinventing itself', and with its specialisations, ESP, EAP, Business English, Technical Communication, Business Communication, etc., within the broad spectrum of language education. Notably, English remains a common unit in educational programmes at all stages. English remains a common unit in educational programmes at all stages.

Historical research examines whether the rise of English education was grounded in trade or in the nation's deep-rooted commitment to progress through the adoption of Western education. One has to trace whether contemporary accelerating commercial or employment requirements for English, or social mobility vis-à-vis global economic prospects, echo the past. Likewise, posterity will look back at history, just as we are, and, in doing so, will rely on digital repositories, archives and databases as sources.

One may be stuck here. Was the trade between the East India Company, the Indian and Persian traders, or the colonial rule and expansion, and their motive in spreading English education, on the same footing as the British Crown, the English parliament and intellectuals? How have the World Wars or the Industrial Revolution influenced the shaping of our world and language dynamics?

To find answers, one has to consult the original government and non-government historical records. To understand the political atmosphere during Hastings' administration or that of Cornwallis, manuscripts, letters, petitions, and their interpretations are the sources for understanding how these contexts shaped the global political system today. Similarly, this will help language researchers gain deeper insights into the key elements of business correspondence and their enduring principles, symbolism, critical thinking, and other useful skills, then and now. Students would learn to pitch ideas, write business reports, and lead meetings, and show a strong correlation with the team - 21st-century skills essential for leadership roles and persuasive communication. Knowledge of a chronological file of correspondence preserves a record of the evolution of communication over time.

While reviewing articles, a construct called historical perspective, distinct from historical research, could be identified. Barbara conceptualised historical perspective as using historical information to compare developments or differences (changes) today, whereas historical research studies history from historical records; thus, history provides the raw materials for historical perspective.

To trace the present-day historical perspective of language change, from what it was and how it was to what it is and how it is, one has to re(search) the history of that time for the specific and related information. Recent developments cannot be prioritised over history. Impressively, the lexical item 'recent' itself connotes past involvement – a movement – a continuity.

As evident from the report reprinted for the House of Lords in 1853 (Viswanathan, 1987), it was in the early 1820s that English made its way not only as a study of language but also as a study of culture (Hancher, 2014). Why English, as the medium, in the hands of Christian missionaries, was intended to spread the gospel in India by the "Indian Christians" (Ilame, 2020), leading to sociocultural changes, and that could only be examined by looking into its history. To understand why Charles Grant (1771) is credited with setting the stage for Western education through (official) English, or the debatable discussions about the motives of the Evangelical Anglicans, requires historical research. One is curious to know how adding a new member to the then-existing native languages affected the sociocultural setup.

The formation of a non-Indian culture and inclusion into the (then) existing Indian set-up evokes a range of considerations –the political atmosphere under which it began, the economic situation and its subsequent impact, the kind of social acceptance, or the newly admitted culture's trailing records (further historical past), its foundation and political background. This raises growing interest in learning more about it and how its association with other cultures has influenced its expansion, refinement, or rejection today.

Today, English is a global language of business (Neelay, May 2012). This applies to the Indian sub-continent too; lineage to its (past) encouragement by native reformers in pre-independent India, or as a *window to the world* (Pt. Nehru) post-independence, cannot be ignored. The reinforcement objectives, oppositions, and effects may differ in degree within the respective society of its time. By this reasoning, an extensive study of its primal conditions -challenges, advancements- will provide a context to understand the present disposition and trends, which again will influence future trajectories.

The 'relevance' of historical research is important to study because, for today and tomorrow's language/learners, it is essential to understand whether the inclusion of English language education in the Indian curriculum has made any difference to the then-national economic scenario, or, at present, where we were, where we are, and where we are headed, which will influence proactive planning and informed decision-making amidst a multinational work environment and cultural diversity. The emergence of a non-oriental language as a medium of instruction (English-medium schools) alongside oriental languages as media of instruction (vernacular medium schools) necessitates understanding the phenomenal changes entering the scene. This diversification of instructional media has brought business considerations into the picture, which typically focus on affordability for private and public schools today.

The point here is how the formation of a new class –the middle class- impacted the country's education, culture and economy in the past. It constitutes an academic standing, professional competence and the process of socialisation (acculturation of the emerging middle class) from the past to the future through the present. We have to turn to the archives to understand the socio-political (re)construction over the ages, as attempts are made to adjust to the changes and compromises in education and career opportunities.

The socio-economic transition that the country has witnessed or is witnessing, concerning employment/business opportunities and associated social mobility, has a contextual reference to whether development (or challenges) is mutual, which will effectuate changes in human attitudes, psychological perspectives, and value systems. To understand the forces enabling a shift, whether or not English language education constitutes a turning point, historical records and original sources are the lens.

As of February 2025, English is used by around 50% of all websites<sup>1</sup> and is considered the leading language for content, as published by Statista Research Department<sup>2</sup> and is “one of the largest English book-producing countries in the world” (Sen, 1995). Lately, English proficiency is more than a mere demand, “a global language of business, because unrestricted multilingualism is inefficient and gets in the way of accomplishing business goals” (Neelay, May 2012). There is a history behind this, shedding light on how past events influence the present – social dynamics and geopolitical issues.

How the educational goals and measures met the challenging scrutiny of politics and the emotional sensitivities of people, both in a pre-independent state and in a (then) newly independent nation, is historically intriguing. Curiosity arises about whether any other non-Indian language existed in pre-independent India, and enjoyed an illustrious status like English, as several foreign invaders had set foot in India and established dominion. One may wonder whether the existence of several languages created rifts and played a subtle role in the entry and prominence of the English language in India, or what factors have led to the growing importance of native languages today in academic spheres, alongside English.

The appositeness of historical research is distinctly felt in finding out how many native languages were prominent or what their status was then, as they shared standing with English. Whether they influenced the rise of a non-native language as a lingua franca is the context of historiography and historical research. If the beginning of English education is a past event, then the present is its influence and outcome, and the future is anticipation and informed planning. Whether English is still “a language of power or a fringe language” (Bharadwaj, 2017) demands a complex task of checking the process of change over time and helps us become better-informed citizens.

## **5. Social Significance**

The significance and formative influence of the educational process on children born after independence, in parts of the country that included English, is a matter of thorough investigation. The upbringing of a new generation in a cosmopolitan atmosphere would anchor research in a specific socio-political context of nation-building and evolving national identity. The emotional affiliation arising from cultural changes and from receiving education under a new curriculum and the recommendations of educational policies of independent India is a key area of inquiry with obvious implications for posterity.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://w3techs.com/technologies/overview/content\\_language](https://w3techs.com/technologies/overview/content_language)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/262946/share-of-the-most-common-languages-on-the-internet/>

With the inclusion of English, the thoughts and philosophies of the Western world, literature, language, culture, style, values, trade and commerce, industry, science and technology were also unfolded, raising implicit differences between its benefactors and those educated differently. These are food for thought on the cultural ideologies nurtured in the colonial context and their long-term effects on the post-colonial generation (s). It will be historical research for today's and future learners to make further, more exhaustive inquiries into the linkages and lineages of developments in their past (our present) and their impacts.

As a convergence of interest, candid acknowledgement and appreciation of the work done, the present study invites us to accentuate the multiplicity of newer questions and deeper penetration into the study of history – social, political, cultural, literary, psychological, economic and ethnological contexts. Were Oroonoko or Cleopatra influential in shaping feminist thought, or what constitutes andro- and gyno-texts, or have the posits of Saussurean structuralism given way to post-structuralist deconstruction and defamiliarisation concepts, or has synchronic analysis of structuralism significantly emphasised a shift to diachronic analysis of post-structuralism? To understand language evolution, language learners/educators would need to raise their consciousness to develop ideas about the interplay of history and present-day rearrangements.

One may inquire into the rich sociological, linguistic and political aspects of institutionalising and mobilising English language education in India, not only about how it began but also about the role of its oppositions, their thoughts and arguments. To unearth history is to question the uninformed, the misinformed, myths and beliefs, as an awakening call to reinterpret. All philosophical and scientific perspectives resonate with the interconnectedness of the past, present and future as a composite unit. In the words of historian Rudrangshu Mukherjee: "The study of history is a humanising experience...archives make history possible, and history makes possible the greater humanisation of individuals."

## **6. Conclusion**

In summary, the study emphasizes the relevance of historical research in contextualizing current English language education; related research articles over the periods enabled us to build on its present perspectives. It is logical to study the present developments in light of their past, and the notion of change will emerge from their collective and cumulative assessments of achievements and setbacks. Today's nascent germination of other foreign/non-Indian language studies, such as German, Spanish, French and Chinese, has already taken root and made its way into the Indian curriculum, and will call for the relevance of their historical research tomorrow. The posterity, while investigating contemporary linguistic developments, will explore today's archives as their historical records to delegate work to their future cohort to pursue.

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