

## THE ROLE OF ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE

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### Abstract

In the twenty-first century, the entire world has become narrow, accessible, sharable and familiar for all the people living on this earth as English is used as a common language even though there are some variations in habits, cultures, traditions, regions and idiosyncratic aspects. As English has got the common qualities, it has been accepted as the global language among the speakers of thousands of different languages. Since science and technology is progressing, there are tremendous changes taking place in the lives of the human beings everywhere in the world. As a result, the whole world has become a global village and the people have to maintain good relationship with the others. Moreover, business, trade and commerce have become international and most of the business organizations have their offices in most of the countries. In order to maintain international relationship in science, technology, business, education, travel, tourism and so on, English serves the purpose as a common language and a global language. It is the language mostly used not only by the scientists, business organizations and the internet but also in higher education, and tourism sectors. As English plays a dominant role in almost all the fields in the present globalized world, there is a need to discuss its role as a global language.

The present paper highlights the importance of English as a global language as most of the world's communications is done in English. It also reveals how English is being widely used in scientific research, business and education. This paper also throws a light on how travel and tourism and entertainment fields are benefitted by adopting English as their principal language of communication. This paper also highlights the importance of English in education and employment. Finally, some useful suggestions are also given in order to extend the use of English into several other fields.

Keywords: English, Global, Language, Use, Communication etc

## Introduction

With the ever-growing levels of interconnectivity and globalization around the world, the significance of immediate and appropriate modes of communication has been increasing very rapidly in this modern world. It is an undeniable fact that there is a need for a common language to communicate with the present growing commerce and trade between companies from all over the world. With the development of informatization as well as globalization, it is evident that most people all over the world are communicating with the people of other regions in only one internationally recognized language, that is, English. English is the language that is almost used between an agent and an international company. English, being the first world language, is said to be the first global lingua franca and it is the most widely used language in the world in international trade, diplomacy, mass entertainment, international telecommunications and scientific publications as well as publishing newspapers and other books.

As English is a lingua franca, most of the native and non-native speakers of English are using English as their mode of communication in their business matters or business organizations. English has become the fastest increasing language in this modern world and it occupies the status of a commercial language by connecting the East and the West and the North and the South. English language is spread all over the world into almost all the fields such as science, engineering and technology, medicine, trade and commerce, scientific research, education, tourism, internet, banking, business, advertising, film industry, transportation, pharmacy and to name a few. Undoubtedly, English occupies a unique place as it is the language that is so extensively used and so firmly established as a dominant global language in the above mentioned fields and the dominance of English has become like a snowball that is too big to prevent.

Since English has assumed such a major role, several researchers have tried to coin a term by considering the various aspects of the use of English in diverse settings. Among them, Ahlu (1977) coins it, "General English", McArthur (1987) says it, "World Standard (Spoken) English, whereas David Crystal (1997) invents a phrase, "English as a global language" and House (1999), Gnutzmann (2000) Seidlhofer (2001) & Jenkins (2007) name it as "English as a Lingua Franca". Furthermore, Widdowson (1997), Modiano (1999) and Jenkins (2000) coined another phrase, "English as an International Language" and Brutt-Griffler (2002) invents a new word, "World English". Of these, the most commonly used terms are English as a global language or English as a lingua franca or English as an international language. Even if there is a variation in vocabulary while using these terms, they give almost the same meaning which signifies that English is the most widely spoken and the most widely used language in almost all the major fields around the world. In this context, it is appropriate to say that English deserves the position of an international or global status in order to fulfill the

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needs of the people who live in various regions all around the world by speaking different languages.

Though English was originally considered the language of the British, it has become a second language of many former British colonies such as the US, Australia, Canada, Nigeria, South Africa and India due to the historical efforts of the British Empire. But today, English has become the principal language of the countries influenced by the British colonialism and it is also the main language used in business, trade and commerce and cultural spheres dominated by these countries. There is no hesitation to say that English has been used as the *de facto* language in the field of science and technology. Even most of the Hollywood movies and TV programmes are made in English and a majority of the newspapers in the world are published in English. It is also the language of scientific research and the common language used in the tourism department.

Moreover, most of the students who go to foreign countries to pursue their higher studies should know this language as almost all the books of science, engineering, information technology, medicine, tourism, and business and so on are written only in English. Almost all the courses are taught in English in foreign countries. Furthermore, English has become an essential tool for those who wish to work in a foreign country or in any multi-national company. It is also the language mostly used on the internet and in the electronic media and press. English is the only language where 85% of the scientific journals are published in that language. Even the Chinese language, Mandarin, is spoken by a majority of people in the world, English has got its status as a global language only because Mandarin is limited to a part of the world whereas English is spread all around the world. Even though Mandarin has the highest number of speakers in the world, now the Chinese are learning English in order to expand their business in all regions of the world.

As it is mostly used in the internet, the present e-business has been in progress and attaining good results in the field of trade and commerce. It is also the language used not only by the diplomats but also by some world organizations such as UNO, WHO, UNESCO, UNICEF, OPEC, EFTA, ASEAN, UNHRC, WTO, ILO, BRICS, INTERPOL and so on. One third of these international organizations use English only but 90% of English is used among the Asian international organizations also.

As different people from different parts of the world speak various languages, there is a need for a common language that is spoken by most of the people around the world. At this juncture, English has become the global language as it the language spoken by the people of all the countries in the world. Even though it is the native language of the US, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa, it is spoken by more non-native speakers of the world. It has also got official language status, that is, a language used in citizen interactions with government officials, for around sixty countries and fifteen countries are

using it as a *de facto* official language, but not as a primary language. There are even fifty-four countries with English as their official language and the language of their instruction in higher education. According to the recent statistics, English has been the official language in 55 sovereign states and 27 non-sovereign entities. Even many country subdivisions have also declared English an official language at the regional or local level. Therefore, English has attained the status of a global language in order to meet the needs of the people across the world.

Although English was the first West Germanic language spoken in medieval England, now it has become a global lingua franca. It has been the first language for a majority of the population in several countries, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand and a few Caribbean nations. Around 375 million people speak it as a first language and more than 750 million people speak it as a second language. Moreover, English has official or special status in almost 70 countries. By observing these statistics, one can easily understand why English occupies such an important role as a global language. Giddens (2000) asserts, "Globalization is a separation of space and time, with instantaneous communications, knowledge and culture could be shared around the world simultaneously". Primarily, globalization has been viewed as an economic phenomenon by involving more interaction or integration of national economic systems through the progression of the international trade, capital flow and investment. Now the term of globalization expands to cross-border technological, political, social and cultural exchanges between nations, particularly, between people.



■ States and territories in which English is the first language of the majority of the population.

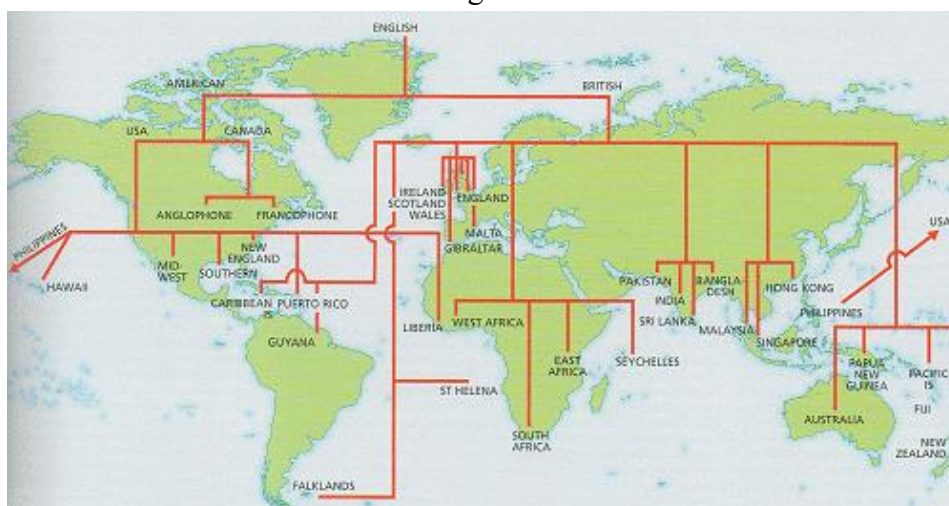
■ States and territories in which English is an official, but not the first language.

(Source: The Importance of the English Language in Today's World

<https://owlcation.com/humanities/importanceofenglishlanguages>)

There are certain reasons why English has attained the status of a global language. The UN currently uses five languages for the global community, such as English, French, Spanish,

Russian and Chinese and among them 85% of the international organizations have English as at least one of their official languages where as French comes next to English with less than 50%. Even about one third of the international organizations including OPEC, EFTA and ASEAN use English only and 90% of English is used among Asian international organizations. In this regard, Crystal (1997) says, “85% of the world’s international organizations use English as their official language in transnational communication. About 85% of the world’s important film productions and markets use English as well, and 90% of the published academic articles in several academic fields, such as linguistics, are written in English. In many cases, the increased growth in the use of English language can be attributed to educational economic or cultural globalization”.



**Fig: A family tree representation of the spread of the English language around the world.**

(Source: The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language, 2018)

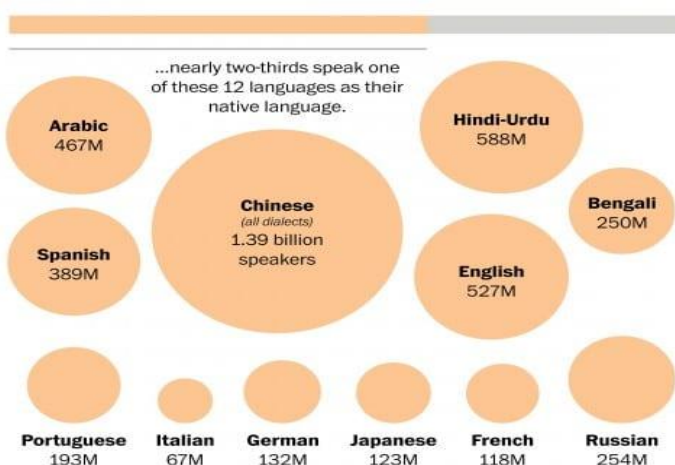
The above family tree is the representation of the spread of the English language around the world. The family tree shows that English is spread to all the countries of all the continents. It is not only due to the British colonialism and the American imperialism, but also its flexibility and adaptability. So English has got the status global language. A global language mainly arises due to the political as well as the economic power of its native speakers. It was the British imperial and industrial power that caused the spread of English around the globe from 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is the legacy of British imperialism as well as colonialism that has left many countries with the language thoroughly institutionalized in their parliament, civil service, courts, schools and education establishments. Moreover, English provides a neutral communication between different ethnic groups of the other countries.



A linguist, Robert Phillipson, labeled the expansion of English as “linguistic imperialism”. Kachru (1983) further says, “As a result, English became the most dominated and most powerful language in the world that motivated many linguists and language researchers to call it an *international language*”. So the term “international language” has been widely used only after English became both the mother tongue as well as the second language spoken by non-native speakers of various regions all around the world.

Language is a means of communication and people share their thoughts, feelings, expressions, ideas and expressions. In other words, language exercises cultural transmission, socialization, status, sharing power, politics, and knowledge and so on. Even though there are different communication systems, human communication system is well-recognized because of its arbitrariness, duality of patterning, displacement, voluntary-vocal, etc. No language is alike and all languages are different from one another with respect to their popularity, cultures, dictions, influence, scope, aspects, accents, popularity, extra-linguistic features, standardization, status and so on.

Of the **7.2 billion people** on Earth...



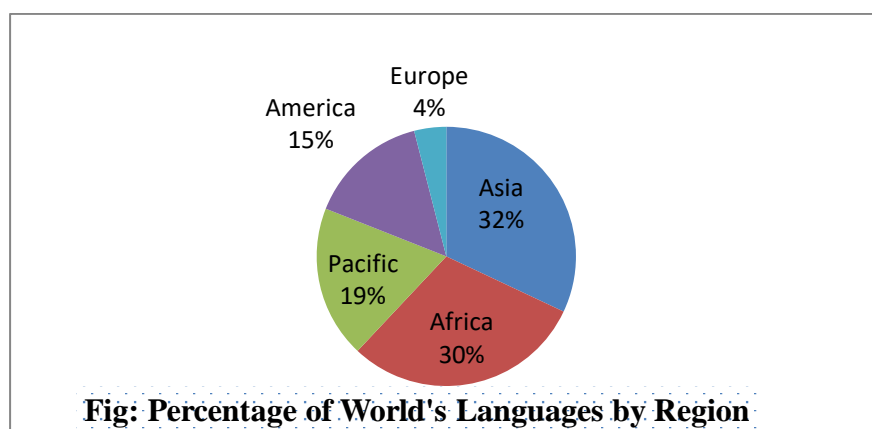
Sources: Ulrich Ammon, University of Düsseldorf, Population Reference Bureau

Note: Totals for languages include bilingual speakers.

THE WASHINGTON POST

Fig: The World's Languages

The above diagram unveils that even though there are 7.2 billion people on the earth, nearly two-third of them speak the above mentioned 12 languages as their mother tongues. It clearly indicates that there are a very limited number of languages spoken by many of their native speakers around the world. Today, almost 7,000 spoken languages are there in the world whereas around 2,000 languages among these have less than a thousand speakers. So, almost a third of languages are now endangered as they are spoken by very less number of speakers i.e., less than a thousand speakers. Almost two-third among these 7,000 languages is from Asia and Africa. The percentage of the world's languages is given by region here in the form of a chart:



The above chart unfolds that a majority of the languages in the world are spoken in Asia and then in Africa with a percentage of 32 and 30 respectively. The next places go to Pacific with 19%, America with 15% and Europe with 4%.

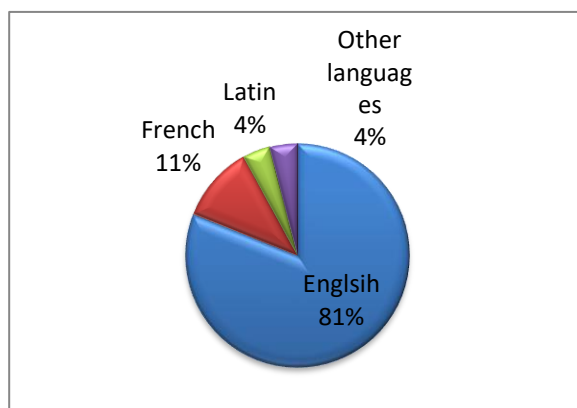
Crystal (2003) states, “Since roughly one out of every four users of English in the world is a native speaker of the language, most of the interactions take place among non-native speakers of English”. For those, According to Firth (1996: 240), “English is a contact language between people who share neither a common native tongue nor a common culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication”. Sneddon (2003) says, “As a global language, it is obvious that English plays an important role in international interaction. International interaction includes economic relationship among countries, international business relationship, global trading and others”. English is used as lingua franca in these international interactions.

Lingua franca is a language that is used to communicate among different people all over the world. It is a well-known fact that Chinese is the most spoken language in the world with the number of 1.2 billion native speakers and among them, nearly 1 billion speak Mandarin and it is the language that is spoken by a majority people in the world. Then if we consider only the native speakers, Spanish has its nose in front of English with almost 400 million speakers. Whereas English is concerned, it is spoken by nearly 360 million native speakers as well as 500 million people speak it as a second language. Though the Chinese language has a large number of speakers in the world, it is limited to China only. On the other hand, English is spoken in all the countries in the world irrespective of their mother tongue. This clearly shows the remarkable success of English as lingua franca of travel and tourism, business and international relations. Though the Chinese language has a large number of speakers in the world, it is limited only to China, whereas English is the language that is spoken in all the countries of the world irrespective of their mother tongue.

Science and Technology

English is the language widely used in the field of science and technology. It has also been adopted as the de facto universal language and this resulted a great impact on scientific communication. As a result, scientists all around the world can make use of the available scientific literature and communicate with the scientists of the other regions wherever they are in the world. Now-a-days, the working knowledge of English has become a minimum requirement in a number of professions and occupations such as a research, medicine, and computer and so on.

Since the middle of the twentieth century, there has been a drastic change in the global scientific community. Now, English has become the prevalent predominant language in some non-English speaking countries like France, Spain and Germany. In this context, Adam Huttner-Koros says, "The academic papers outnumber in publications in the English language several times more than that of in their countries' own languages". He further says that this ratio is astounding that it has reached 40:1. It reveals that scientists who wish to produce influential, globally recognized work have to publish their papers in English as they have to share and enhance their knowledge with other scientists around the globe either by attending several international conferences, seminars and workshops or by reading papers written in English or through their discussions in English.



**Fig: Languages of Articles**

Even in the scientific publications, English plays a dominant role as more than 80% of all scientific journal articles in 1998 were indexed by Chemical Abstracts and these were written only in English. Moreover, almost all the articles published in natural science in 1996 were in English and 90% of the publications in humanities by 1995 were also in English. It is a fact that English is spoken by 5% of the native speakers among 15% percent of its speakers world-wide. In the field of scientific research also our scientists prove their talent and getting progress in all their attempts as they have a common language to communicate with their co-scientists of the other regions of the world. As most of the literature available in scientific and technology which are the major fields in the present research is in English, there is a need to learn the English language by all the students as well as researchers around the world.



## Education

It is a known fact that English plays a predominant role in the field of education all over the world. It has become a compulsion to learn English as most of the books of higher education are written in English. English has been widely used by the students as well as the teachers and researchers around the world as English is the main medium used in the various fields of education and it is the only language where the information is stored in the form of books and journals in both printed and electronic form. As there have been rapid changes in the field of educational system, the students can make use of the resources available all around the world just by accessing the internet.

Moreover, the learners can learn the subjects independently and develop self-learning attitude. Now-a-days, most of the students would prefer to study in a foreign country in order to get better employment opportunities around the world and English will be a great asset for them. So, the learners of English as a foreign language are encouraged to learn English in order to promote their learning abilities in the fields of science and technology, IT, engineering, medicine, law, business, tourism, and so on. Though English is not an official language in some countries like Sweden and Netherlands, the syllabi in science and engineering is written in English because most of the literature in these areas around the world is available only in English.

As the main intention of writing the materials of higher education in English is to make it available for the learners and the teachers wherever they are located on this earth, most of the students, teachers and research scholars make use of this opportunity to enhance their qualification as well as knowledge. So, there is also a possibility for them to improve their language skills and also with the learning knowledge of these subjects. Therefore, the importance of English in the field education is of immense use as most of the books are published in English and the research that is done in education is also in English.

## Employment

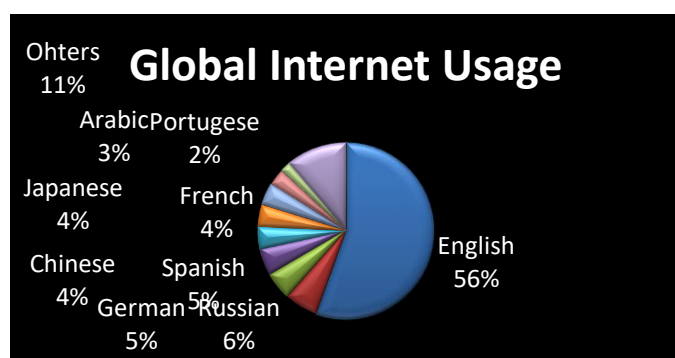
Another advantage of learning English is getting employment as most of the job providers ask for the language skills, especially, communication skills in English. This is because most of the companies are dealing with the international companies. At the time of the interviews also the interviewers test the candidates' communication skills in addition to their academic background. Even if the candidates' educational qualifications are excellent, the job providers concentrate mainly on their ability of expressing their ideas freely and frankly to the target people. As there are ample numbers of opportunities to work for the international organizations in the present global job market, everyone is trying his best to acquire the language skills in English. Once the job seekers acquire oral as well as written communication skills, they can work anywhere in this world. Even a majority of the Chinese and the Japanese are learning English in order to get better employment opportunities in this global era.

## Business

In the modern business world, English is widely used for all the international business, trade and commerce. As a global language, English serves the purposes of the multi-national companies' needs and it is being used as a tool of communication between one business organization and the other. Using the latest technologies in business, the mode of communication such as emails, letters, documentations, video, fax, telephone, etc. are mainly done in English. Graddol (1997) says, "About 80% people use English while they are in Europe. Not only in Europe, it is also used in global business which is happened under the control of World Trade Organization (WTO).

## The Internet

The widespread of English as an international language and with the advent of the internet as a mode of fast communication channel which has no boundaries, both are mutually enforcing novel trends and bringing tremendous changes in this age of globalization. Since the inception of the internet, it has brought drastic changes and revolutionized the ways of people's communication and their learning of their English language in the global context. The internet has become an important linguistic medium as computer-mediated communication which is one of the main factors of globalization. The internet has become essential for every aspect of human life including the learning of languages. In 1960s, a new term 'global village' was coined by McLuhan (1962) and he further says, "Electronic communication will unite the world because "the medium is the message".



**Fig: Global Internet Usage**

It is a well-known fact that English has attained the status of a global language. It is true in the case of internet usage also. The above chart unveils that there is no other language that is widely used for internet purposes than English. It shows that majority (56%) of the internet sites are designed in English, whereas in the other languages, the internet sites are designed with a low percentage i.e., 6% and below. So it is evident that English is the international language that is used even to design the websites and to browse the internet.

## Travel and Tourism

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As travel and tourism is related to both national and international levels, English is the language that is commonly used by all the international travel and tourism departments, agencies and companies. To travel to a foreign country, one must know the language of the others to communicate with the people of that country. So there should be a common language for the tourists to visit any country around the world and English as an international language serves the purpose. The international travel agencies also aim at recruiting people who can communicate well with the international tourists in English.

#### Press and Media

In the field of press and media, English is used as the primary language of the world due to the fact that it is the language used internationally by a majority of speakers. The world leading newspapers and magazines are printed in English and most of the news broadcast their programmes on the television in English. There are some television channels such as Discovery, Animal Planet, National Geographic, etc. help the learners improve their English. By watching the programmes in English on the TV, the learners not only improve their active vocabulary and understand English well but also develop their passive vocabulary gradually. There is a lot of impact of the media as well as the press on the young generation learners of English and most of them follow these English channels to improve their language skills. Even children can pick the English language very fast by watching the channels in English and by reading some story books, comics, cartoons, detectives, novels and so on.

#### Entertainment

English plays a vital role in promoting entertainment through movie, television and music industries. The most famous and the biggest world-wide famous television, music and movie industries have their basic foundation in Hollywood in the United States where they use English as their medium of communication to convey their message. Their main purpose of using English as their primary language is to promote their programmes or movies to all the parts of the world to make it understood by most people in the world. Due to the busy and tireless work, people are strained and feel stressed in these present days. So, movies or some entertainment programmes are made in English to entertain such kind of people. There are also some entertainment programmes in English like cartoons, movies, TV shows, comics and moral stories which entertain the children and improve their English language skills. There are also channels that telecast some valuable information for both the children as well as the adults like Discovery, National Geographic, Animal Planet, BBC, CNN, Star Movies, AXN, to name a few. Children not only learn the English language but also enrich vocabulary and great knowledge about the subjects that have been discussed. As music, television and music are the three which play a key role not only in entertaining people and gaining more knowledge but also in enhancing their English language skills.

Therefore, it is evident that English is used in all fields predominantly as a main or official language. The importance of English language increases day by day across the world. So the need to learn English language and use it as a foreign or second language for various purposes is essential today for everyone irrespective of regions, countries and contents.

## Conclusion

In this paper, the importance of English as a global language has been comprehensively discussed and some statistical data has also been given as evidence to prove that English is the only language that is internationally spoken and accepted language. First of all, the importance of English in the field of science and technology has been thoroughly discussed. Then, the importance of English in education has been discussed in detail. Later, the scenario of the international job market has been extensively discussed. Furthermore, the use of English in business has been highlighted. Hence, the essence of English for business organizations to use English as medium of their communication in order to continue their business relationships and promote their business has been clearly discussed.

Furthermore, the impact of the English language on the internet has been discussed and it has been proved that there are many websites using English as their medium of communication. Then, the importance of English in travel and tourism has been elaborated. Moreover, the importance of English in press and media has been discussed comprehensively. Finally, the impact of English on entertainment has been analyzed and here the use of English by the Hollywood-based television, music and movie industries has also been highlighted.

Even though there are certain fields that are not mentioned, it seems that English plays a dominant in those areas also. The interesting trend in the twenty-first century is that some of the biggest economies such as China, Japan, Russia, France and Brazil are focusing on English language after realizing the value of English at global level.

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author, Parupalli Srinivas Rao, has a vast experience of teaching English at various levels. He has been specialized in ELT and has authored 10 books and published several research papers related to ELT. He has attended several national and international ELT conferences and also presented some papers in them.

He has been on the Editorial board for seven international English journals including *American Research Journal of English and Literature* (, *Research Journal of English (RJOE)*, *ELT Vibes*, *ACADEMICIA (SAARJ)*, *Alford Council of International English and Literature Journal (ACIELJ)* and *Trans Asian Research Journal (TARJ)* and *International Journal of English and Studies (IJOES)*. He has also done several projects including a project done for the *National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE)*, Government of India and another one for King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia. He has attended several in-service training programs in ELT. He has taught English in India, the Republic of Maldives and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for 27 years. At present, he is working as Lecturer in English at English Language Centre, King Faisal University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He is very much interested in research activities and preparing study material for Undergraduate and Master's Degree courses. He is a member of ELTAI, the prestigious organization for English language teachers.

The author did his M. A. (English) from Osmania University in 1991. He also completed his PG Diploma in Teaching English (EFL University) and later he did B. Ed., M. Ed. and M. Phil. from Osmania University. In 1999, he did PG Diploma in Functional English from Andhra University. He did *Cambridge CELTA* in London in the year 2008. He also completed two onsite ELT courses, namely, *Pronunciation for Language Teachers* and *Teaching Grammar in Context* from University of Edinburgh, UK in 2008. At present, he is pursuing his Ph. D. in ELT.