

THE AFTERMATH OF COLONIALISM

Supremacy of English in Indian schools



APÓS O COLONIALISMO
A Supremacia do inglês nas escolas indianas

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Abstract

Over the years, a substantial body of literature has emerged that has discussed the centrality of English language for education in the Indian context in order to facilitate local as well as global preparedness. This paper analyses how English was introduced among Indians during the Colonial regime and the significance of English in present times as a subject of study and as the primary medium of instruction and communication in the context of schooling with special reference to an international school in India. Findings from the study reveal that the school not only places enormous emphasis on learning the language; it also promotes itself as an institution that offers better English language skills as compared to other public/private English medium schools and thereby grooms its students to become fluent in the language in order to face the world at large. This paper thus primarily seeks to understand how and why English, once considered to be a foreign language in India continues to be the lingua-franca of certain privileged sections of the society and how an international school in India continues to enhance the significance of English through its system of schooling.

Keywords

Colonial Regime; English Language; School Education; International School.

Resumo

Ao longo dos anos, surgiu uma substancial literatura que discutiu a centralidade da língua inglesa na educação no contexto indiano com fins de favorecer o preparo local, bem como global de estudantes. Este artigo analisa como o inglês foi introduzido entre indianos durante o regime colonial e o significado do inglês nos tempos atuais enquanto matéria escolar e como meio primário de instrução e comunicação no contexto de escolarização, concentrando-se especialmente em uma escola internacional na Índia. Os resultados do estudo revelam que a escola não apenas atribui enorme ênfase no aprendizado do idioma; ela também se promove como uma instituição que oferece melhores habilidades na língua inglesa em comparação com outras escolas públicas/privadas que possuem o inglês como língua de ensino e assim prepara seus alunos para se tornarem fluentes no idioma, a fim de encarar o mundo em geral. Assim, este artigo procura principalmente entender como e por que o inglês, uma vez considerada uma língua estrangeira na Índia, continua sendo a língua-franca de certos setores privilegiados da sociedade e como esta escola internacional continua a ampliar a significância do inglês através de seu sistema de escolarização.

Palavras-chave

Regime Colonial; Língua Inglesa; Educação Escolar; Escola Internacional.



Introduction

This paper draws on an ongoing ethnographic research combining field observations and 64 in-depth interviews conducted for eighteen months from September 2018 to February 2020 in an international school named Pushp International School (read PIS) located in Delhi, India, the capital city of the country¹. It also incorporates data from various other sources like education commission and policy reports respectively, in order to provide a historical background to the introduction of English in the Indian education system. PIS was established in April 2003 and is affiliated with the Cambridge Assessment International Examinations (read CAIE), is also recognised by the Association of Indian Universities (AIU)² and follows the Cambridge curriculum from Kindergarten up to 12th grade.³ This paper lays out descriptive analyses of Colonial and post-Colonial education policies concerned with the implementation of English as an academic subject as well as medium of instruction in Indian schools (government, government-aided, unaided); it also puts down ethnographic snippets and discusses the narratives that emerged from in-depth interviewing with major stakeholders of the school – administrators, teachers, parents as well as senior grade (10, 11 and 12) Indian students (interviewing foreign students and parents was not a part of the research objectives). The selection of senior grade students was done due to their longer duration of association with the school which enabled me to gather deeper insights about their experiences and aspirations from such kind of schooling. The

¹ Out of 64 interviews, only those which fit the scope and objectives of this article have been selected.

² Association of Indian Universities (AIU) is an organisation and association of major universities in India. It is based in Delhi. It evaluates the courses, syllabi, standards, and credits of foreign Universities pursued abroad and equates them in relation to various courses offered by Indian Universities.

³ The name of the School has been changed in order to maintain anonymity, as was requested by the authorities. PIS had its inception in the early years of this millennium – April 2003. It is affiliated with Cambridge Assessment International Examinations, a UK-based primary-secondary exam board following the Cambridge curriculum, and is also recognised by the Association of Indian Universities. It is governed by a private trust, comprising of members all of whom are Indians by origin and who also manage a chain of private schools within and outside India. The nature of its composition is co-educational, can be categorized as a ‘day school’ and does not offer residential facilities.

parents were all local residents of Delhi whose occupational backgrounds ranged across sectors such as family business, entrepreneurship, private school teacher as well as Government employee.⁴ This paper therefore, attempts to understand the significance of English in the Indian system of schooling with special reference to international schools.

Teaching of English as a compulsory subject as well as its usage as a medium of instruction continues to remain common to schools offering national and several state level curricula in India. There are three national education boards operating in India, along with state boards of education. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) is one of the national level education boards administered by the Central Government of India in public and private schools; the other is the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE) offered in private schools and is a 'Non-Governmental Board of School Education' according to the Indian Constitution. The third is the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), which functions under the Ministry of Human Resource Development of the Government of India, which is not only offered in public and private schools, but also several other academic agencies.⁵ While CBSE and NIOS recognise Hindi and English as official languages, CISCE recognises only English as their official language. The state boards, on the other hand, provide English, Hindi and regional languages as mediums of instruction in various schools depending upon their geographical location (rural/urban) and linguistic composition of the population. As a consequence of the emphasis laid on English, especially by the national boards, debates encompassing the domination of English as the primary

⁴ Of the 64 respondents, there were 19 administrative and teaching staff, 30 students, and 15 parents. The parents included 9 entrepreneurs and business persons, 3 homemakers, 2 public university professors, and 1 retired Government official who worked with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, India. There are no parents belonging to professional (private companies/corporate organisations) categories in this sample due to limited access provided by the school authorities, as a result of which I could not exercise free will in selecting respondents from diverse occupational backgrounds. Similarly, I was not allowed to conduct interviews with students of my choice and had to depend on the teacher representatives of each grade to assign students for the interviews. However, interviews and conversations with administrative and teaching staff were conducted without much restraints.

⁵ For further reference, see: www.cbseacademic.nic.in, <https://www.cisce.org/Default.aspx>, <https://www.nios.ac.in/default.aspx>.

medium of instruction in schools offering national boards along with simultaneous neglect of Indian languages have been ongoing ever since (Mahmood, 1895; Roy, 1993; Cohn, 1996; Ghosh, 2000; Annamalai, 2005 in Lin and Martin, 2005; Rao, 2008; Singh, 2017; Daniyal, 2020; Agnihotri, 2021).

English, as was once popularised by the colonizers under the pretext of modernity, continues to remain as the symbol of ‘power’, ‘privilege’ and ‘progress’ for the Indian elites (Annamalai, 2012, Pathak, 2013). Nonetheless, the ability to speak and communicate in English fluently and become a member of the English-speaking society has gradually become an aspiration for a much larger segment of the population, especially with the advent of neoliberal capitalism and globalization in the 1990s, during which English has become a valuable and desired asset (Muth and Suryanarayan, 2020). There are now low-fee charging English medium schools, coaching centres as well as non-governmental organisations in the public and private sectors which offer the language to be taught as an academic subject as well as to learn how to speak in it fluently (Highet and Del Percio, 2021a; 2021b) with the aim to reach out to the economically weaker sections of society. Therefore, the aspiration to be educated in English or become an English speaker is no longer restricted to a small cluster of an anglicised colonial intellectual-elite class often referred to as the *Bhadralok*, as was once the case in Bengal (Sinha and Bhattacharya, 1969; Bhattacharya, 2005; Chakravartty, 2018). Globalization and neo-liberalism have transformed the very nature of English, wherein, aside from being an academic subject and/or a medium of instruction in schools, it also symbolises ‘linguistic capital’ that ensures ‘social mobility’ as well as ‘personality development’ (Highet and Del Percio, 2021a; 2021b). Thus, while the socio-economically weaker section of society aspires for social mobility and personality development by mastering English, the privileged classes, on the contrary, aim to maintain their status-quo through their children’s English medium education (Sunyol, 2019; Highet and Del Percio, 2021b).

Until the 1990s, these socio-economically privileged classes were heavily attracted towards schools run by Christian Missionaries, commonly referred to as convent schools, with the belief that the quality of English was better compared to other private or public English-medium schools. Missionary education was introduced in India around 1600 A.D wherein

English education was imparted only by Christian nuns and fathers (Roy, 1993; Viswanathan, 2015). Those who could gain access to such schools after the end of imperial rule believed that the quality of English taught was much superior then, because the nuns and fathers were very well-versed in English, since it was their vernacular as well as the medium of instruction during their schooling. Moreover, this association of superiority with the language was derived from years of exposure to colonial ways of life and their ‘English culture’, which the English-educated Indians to date equate with modernization and thereby continue to identify the West as a “superior model of being and seeing the world” (Highet and Del Percio, 2021b: 4). However, over the years, convent schools have begun to lose their popularity as the Missionaries started to lack funds and resources to recruit well-trained English teachers, as a result of which people began to look for alternatives. Currently, the scenario has become such that the supply and demand for convent schools is experiencing a setback and international schools offering international curricula (for instance, International Baccalaureate (IB) and CAIE) and exposure have captured the attention of the privileged sections of society who can afford to gain access to international schools. (Ball, 2003; Ball and Nikita, 2014; Savage, 2013; Bussolo et. al, 2011).⁶

While there are various connotations associated with the term ‘international school’, there is a need to understand the distinction between ‘international education’ and ‘international schools’. According to Hayden (2006), ‘International education’ encompasses national and international schools along with international curriculum. ‘International education’ can be obtained in a national school which provides certain facilities that are deemed to be of international standard by the particular school or by organisations like the British Council. An understanding of ‘international schools’, on the other hand, could depend upon the diverse nature of its student population, the curriculum it offers, its marketing and advertising strategies

⁶ International Baccalaureate (IB) is a Geneva, Switzerland based non-profit organization founded in 1968, offering international curriculum, examinations, and qualifications. See www.ibo.org Cambridge Assessment International Examinations (CAIE) is an international curriculum, examinations, and qualifications provider since 1858, and is part of the University of Cambridge, UK. See: www.cambridgeinternational.org

along with competition with other national and/or 'international schools' and the philosophy that it propagates (Hayden, 2006). Alternatively, in a definition proposed by Bunnell (2019) and Bunnell et al. (2020), international schools have been understood as "[s]chools with a global outlook located mainly outside an English-speaking country, delivering a non-national curriculum at least partly in English" (Bunnell, 2019: 10; Bunnell et al, 2020: 4).

The idea that seems to be dominating the school education sector in India today is that in order to be globally viable or compatible, a global education can serve as pathways, and this could be an important reason for the post-2000 rise of international schools in India. The growth and influence of international schools in the country can be linked to a desire in people to become global not just by travelling across the globe but also by enabling their children to avail a system of education that is globally recognised. The knowledge, education, and other activities that a student is exposed to in an international school are believed to help them develop global perspectives through "outstanding transferable skills, including critical thinking, research and collaboration" (Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2020) and thereby shape them into globally aware citizens. For privileged Indian parents, selecting an international school signifies that their children can develop these above-mentioned attributes of which 'good' English is also an important component (Sunyol, 2019). In this case, good English-speaking skills becomes coterminous with 'good school' by which the parents mean that the teachers in these schools should have good 'communication skills' (Gilbertson, 2014), in comparison to other private/public schools, so that they can better interact with the students while helping them strengthen their grasp over the language. This idea of good English will be deliberated upon later in this article.

Against this background, this paper adopts a Bourdieusian theoretical framework primarily to analyse how English was introduced into the Indian education system and how such a language, once considered to be foreign and imperialist, has become the lingua-franca of certain privileged sections of society. Also, it raises the question of how an international school in India continues to enhance the significance of English as 'linguistic' capital (Highet and Del Percio, 2021b) through its system of schooling. Therefore, the

objectives of this article are to explore how English was introduced in India; how PIS tries to emphasize the language through its curricular as well as extra-curricular activities and how the colonial language continues to be a marker of distinction (Bourdieu, 1984) through such a system of schooling.

The beginnings of English education in Colonial India

Education in India prior to the arrival of the British was imparted by Brahmin priests as they were considered to be the only learned caste eligible to provide knowledge. These priests, who were also referred to as ‘Gurus’ or ‘Pandits’, provided both practical and spiritual knowledge as a part of their formal education. Formal education in the Vedic period (1000-600 BCE) was only meant for male children, who were taught by a ‘Guru’ (teacher) in his ‘Gurukul’ (house). Education in the medieval period (6th century A.D to 16th century A.D) was conducted in ‘patshalas’ for the Hindus, and in madrasas and ‘maktabs’ for the Muslims.⁷ Even in medieval times, only male children were sent to these educational institutions, where knowledge about the three ‘R’s (reading, writing, arithmetic) was offered in Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian (Ghosh, 2000).

One of the very first attempts to introduce Western (English) education in India with the intent of religious conversion was initiated by Charles Grant, who was the “Chairman of the Court of Directors to select Chaplains for Europeans in India” (Ghosh, 2000: 16) in the 1790s, by sending evangelists (missionaries) to India. Gradually, however, the intentions behind spreading English education in the country were not limited to religious and moral intentions alone, but also involved economic, administrative, and political objectives (Viswanathan, 2019). Along with religious conversion, the colonizers aimed to create a small group of English-speaking educated Indians, who would form a separate class of Indians, serving as mediators between the mass of Indians and the British. In this regard, Roy (1993) rightly suggested that “the

⁷ Madrasas and maktabs, according to Christopher Blanchard are “educational institution offering instruction in Islamic subjects including, but not limited to, the Quran, the sayings (hadith) of the Prophet Muhammad, jurisprudence (fiqh) and law” (Blanchard 2007: 2).

efficacy of English had also been acknowledged by colonial administrators from the very outset” (Roy, 1993: 42).

Officially, English became a medium of instruction in educational institutions in India as well as a subject to be taught after Thomas Babington Macaulay, who was appointed the President of the General Committee of Public Instruction by William Bentinck the Governor General of India, produced his Minutes on 2nd February, 1835 by emphasizing that,

“It seems to be admitted on all sides, that the intellectual improvement of those classes of the people who have the means of pursuing higher studies can, at present, be effected only by means of some language (English) not vernacular amongst them; In India, English is the language spoken by the ruling class. It is spoken by the higher class of natives at the seats of government. It is likely to become the language of commerce throughout the seas of the East” (Ghosh, 2000: 31-32).

As a result, Bentinck and his Council implemented a legislative Act on 7th March 1835 whereby the British Government would relocate its funds for education to the establishment of English language and literature instead of Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian, which, although still existed as mediums of instruction in some academic institutions, were beginning to lose their significance in comparison to English (Mahmood, 1895; Ghosh, 2000). As a result, the state of vernacular education in India began to suffer and was eventually on the verge of being destroyed. Thus, English was becoming a language of the rulers in India, who soon realized the benefits of the language as it helped them secure administrative posts in the British companies that were established in India. In this regard, reflecting on the Western project of class construction through English education, Kumar (1988) fittingly points out that,

Colonial education meant that its beneficiaries would begin to perceive themselves and their society as consumers of the knowledge supplied by the colonizer and would cease to see themselves as people capable of producing new knowledge.

Education was thus supposed to reinforce culturally what colonial policies were aimed at achieving economically. Colonial economic policies in India were aimed at creating a class of consumers of goods manufactured in the colonizer's home country (Kumar 1988: 454).

Postcolonial hangover in the school system

One of the first education commissions in India to review secondary education after independence, in 1947, was the Secondary Education Commission (1952-53), popularly known as the Mudaliar Commission, with Dr. A.L. Mudaliar as the Chairman.⁸ The Commission strongly advocated the use of mother-tongue or regional language as the primary medium of instruction in the Secondary stage of school, with special provisions to be made for the linguistic minority communities. ‘At least’ two languages were to be introduced in Middle school, though not in the same year, whereas English and Hindi were to be introduced towards the end of the Junior Basic stage. Finally, at the Higher Secondary stage, the two-language formula was to continue with one being the mother tongue ‘or’ regional language (Secondary Education Commission Report, 1953). In spite of the Commission’s encouragement of education in the mother tongue, it could not ignore the benefits of being well-versed in English along with other languages. It, therefore, recommended that

“In the case of the other languages - whether English or classical or modern Indian languages - the approach must be definitely practical. The students should be able to read them with comprehension and ease, speak them correctly so as to make themselves understood and express simple ideas and give easy descriptions in writing” (Secondary Education Commission Report, 1953: 75).

The languages would include the mother tongue as the regional language, Hindi as the official language and English as the international language, though not mandatory.

This was followed by the Report of the Education Commission (1964), also known as the Kothari Commission, with Professor D.S. Kothari as the Chairman.⁹ This Commission sought to revolutionise the existing models of education in the country by furthering the agenda of its preceding Commission. As the Indian government always put a lot of emphasis on the development of languages, learning English along with other international languages was always encouraged in order to enhance one’s knowledge of and about

⁸ The Commission was appointed by the Government of India by a resolution passed on 23rd December 1952.

⁹ The Commission was appointed by the Government of India by a Resolution that was passed on 14th July 1964.

the world. As a result, the state governments were asked to follow a ‘Three Language Formula’ which would include the study of a modern Indian language, which could include one of the many South Indian languages, Hindi, and English (Report of the Education Commission, 1964-66).

What followed from these Commissions were National Policies on Education in the years 1968 and 1986, which gave birth to the National Curriculum Frameworks (NCF) of 1975, 1988, 2000, and 2005, which were designed for primary, elementary, and secondary stages of schooling. According to these curriculum frameworks, Indian languages, together with English, had to be taught to children from primary grades in order to make them conscious about the world. The aim with which English education continued to be part of the school curriculum post-independence was to train the future generation to become multilingual (NCERT, 2005). The emphasis on English was further fortified by the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) Report 2006, which stressed English as a medium of instruction as well as a compulsory subject to be taught in schools (Rao, 2008). Under the garb of “access”, “opportunity”, and “disadvantage”, the NKC blatantly pointed out that “the time has come for us to teach our people - ordinary people - English as a language in schools” (NKC, 2006: 9) and that “adequate training” in the language is essential. Thus, “NKC recommends that the teaching of English as a language should be introduced, along with the first language (either the mother-tongue or the regional language) of the child, starting from Class I in school” (NKC, 2006: 32). The contents of the Report give a clear indication of the dominant position that English continues to enjoy over any other vernacular language, providing adequate reasons for “ordinary people” to aspire to be educated in the language and its advocates to keep promoting the same.

While English was already made a compulsory subject in schools offering Indian curricula, and its advocates were trying to highlight the present and future benefits of knowing the language, the country began to witness the emergence and growth of a new system of schooling (international schools) that was not so prominent prior to the 2000s. After the 1990s, private sector access to the Indian economy was granted as India introduced economic liberalization policies from 1991 onwards. The main objective behind economic liberalization for India was to reduce financial debts which it had incurred

due to loans taken from external sources like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Venkatanarayanan, 2015). As a result, social sector expenditures on gross domestic product (GDP) including education, were curtailed. This was followed by a reduction in government funded education (which included government and privately owned-government-aided institutions) and a simultaneous increase of unaided private sector involvement in education (Rani, 2008; Venkatanarayanan, 2015). Reduction in the allocation of government funds invariably led to a compromise in human (teachers, pupil-teacher ratio, curriculum design, pedagogy) and material (school infrastructure, textbooks and other facilities) resources affecting the quality of education, which also affected the academic performance of the students (Kingdon, 1996; 2007) thereby, affecting the reputation of government and government-aided schools. Such a situation gave the private sector a good opportunity to promote private unaided schools in order to fulfil the demands of unsatisfied parents (Rani 2008; Venkatanarayanan, 2015).

Dissatisfaction with the quality of education in government and privately owned-government aided schools has led to an increase in the demand by parents for schools with better infrastructure, facilities and academic performance. This gave rise to private unaided schools which promised to fulfil all kinds of demands raised by such unsatisfied parents. Thus, international schools in the 1900s were not much in demand and were mostly attended by the elite section of society (mostly comprising of expatriates, NRIs, diplomats, politicians, and foreigners) since private schools including the convent ones offering national curricula, were performing well and thereby keeping parents satisfied (Kingdon, 1996; 2007; 2017). However, today, with the increasing aspirations of local residents for their children's global mobility, international exposure, and English medium education (equivalent to the West), there is a growing dissatisfaction with the national education system as it is believed to be falling short of fulfilling such parental aspirations (Hayden and Thompson, 2008; Hayden, 2011; Prasad, 2013). As a consequence, the international school sector has been capitalising on this opportunity in the post-liberalisation era by promising to fulfil the rising aspirations of local parents and, thereby, attracting potential middle and elite social classes who are able to afford

such schooling for their children (Gilbertson, 2014; Sancho, 2016; 2017).

It is no longer unknown that international mobility of students and professionals has increased to a large extent as a consequence of which there has been a proliferation of international schools in India. In the opinion of the parents (interviewed for this research), English-medium education through international schooling is enabling their children to get educated through the means of a globally acknowledged language and curriculum, obtain internationally recognised qualifications (even in English) and thereby become ready for careers in the international job market not just India alone. As a result, these schools have gradually begun to lure more and more people by promising them with quality education (Kingdon, 1996; Tooley, et al. 2011), which is a key factor for parents who send their children to such schools offering international curricula and believe that it is far superior to what is offered by any Indian curriculum. And within the purview of quality education, there is the quality of English which schools such as PIS boast about providing. Therefore, Hayden and Thompson (2008) rightly pointed out that,

Lack of confidence in the national system is undoubtedly also one factor behind the growing number of aspirational middle-class families in those developing countries which do permit international school attendance by their own citizens, who choose to send their child to an international school for an English-medium education leading to a qualification. Such parents see the international school experience as providing a competitive edge which sets their children apart from, and at an advantage to, their peers in the national system (Hayden and Thompson, 2008: 47).

Command of English continues through the international school system

Fostering a sense of internationalism via the usage of an internationally accepted language is the minimum basic criterion of the curricular programme at PIS. Well, it must be noted that it is not really a distinctive aspect as far as education systems in this part of the world are concerned. The same has existed for centuries, to say the least. What I intend to bring out here is the seriousness, rigour, and vigour attached to English, something that may be absent in other scenarios. The English language and literature taught at PIS are prescribed by CAIE,

whose curriculum the school follows. The course outline and books for English are recommended by CAIE and published either by Cambridge University or Oxford University Press. At PIS, English is considered to be the first language as well as the preferred language for communication and the medium of instruction. The interviewees strongly believed that the quality of English imparted to the students of PIS is of much superior quality than what is offered by any other Indian curriculum because it is ‘international English’ and is much different from what is taught by the national education boards. Here, I would like to point out certain instances as well as interactions within PIS that demonstrate the meaning of international English in this context. During one of my field visits, the librarian showed me an English first language textbook to help me understand what the stakeholders meant by ‘international English’. The text was Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. On further introspection, I noticed that the textbook (unlike the ones prescribed by the national education boards) was not just about the original drama alone. It consisted of illustrations, explanations, short notes, Shakespeare’s biography, a list of popular films on *Macbeth* together with movie posters, amid other such details. Overall, the book appeared to be very demonstrative and self-explanatory. On another occasion, Vaishali (a student who was in the 12th grade when the interview was conducted) brought out an interesting dimension that relates to appearing for the internationally-required qualifying examination – the IELTS. She suggested that, “if you’ve done A levels you might not even require to give IELTS. But, if you are CBSE candidate you have to give IELTS because it’s gonna be compulsory for you.”¹⁰ This is because our level of board is quite tougher than CBSE. So our English is meant to be on quite a good level than CBSE”.

Further, special English language classes or English as a Second Language (ESL) programme are rendered in Junior school which focus on teaching English to foreign nationals whose native or primary language is not English. In these classes, every opportunity is utilized to allow learning and to

¹⁰ A-Levels refers to the eleventh and twelfth grades under the Cambridge Assessment International Examinations. IELTS refers to International English Language Testing System which is an internationally standardized exam to assess proficiency in English for those who did not have English as their mother-tongue. See, <https://www.ielts.org/>.

practice the composite of communicative language skills. Moreover, English as a First Language (EFL) is also offered to students whose native language is English as well as non-native English speakers who want to take up English as their first language in the School. The subject teachers who teach English at PIS are highly qualified degree holders of the language with strong communication skills and have also been trained through local and international workshops on the same. In many ways, learning the language then becomes a primary and essential credential, not only to facilitate interactions, but primarily to assert the fact that it serves as a ‘window to the world’ (Roy, 1993). While English language teaching is common to every curriculum in the Indian context in the present-day, one cannot discount the fact that its global acceptance and relevance makes it all the more essential. Further on, the above mentioned pedagogic practices followed in the School to make its students English-educated, offers satisfactory reasons for its stakeholders to believe that the kind of English taught at PIS is ‘international’ and superior to that offered by national boards.

To substantiate further, Mrs. Kukreja, the School counsellor, pointed out that “since parents are from a different class here (at PIS), children majorly speak only in English to each other. Plus, half of the students do not know how to speak in Hindi. So, everybody is forced to speak in English.” Here, the reference to parents of a ‘different class’ indicates that they belong to a privileged section of society who are able to afford such schooling for their children. Moreover, the culture of their homes is such that English is one of the dominant languages used to communicate at home, which automatically socializes the children from a very early age to speak in English. For instance, on a question regarding the languages spoken at home, a parent, Mrs. Agarwal, a homemaker, attested that usually they converse in Hindi at home, although her husband does talk to her in English when there is an argument between the couple. While her son talks in Hindi with her totally, the daughter replies back to her in English, despite her (Mrs. Agarwal) talking to her in Hindi. Her husband and son converse in English with each other all the time. As a result, these children are not very fluent in their vernaculars (such as in Hindi) and are indirectly forced, as a result of socialization at home and school, to communicate through a common medium, which for them is English. In a classic Bourdieusian

sense then, such schools preserve and generate the culture of the dominant groups (groups of privileged English-educated parents who send their children to such schools), which have a control over economic, cultural and social resources. Also, there is an attempt by educational institutions (like PIS) to favour those who have access to such resources by undergoing a screening process during the interviews for admission. This contributes to the reproduction of hierarchy among social groups and the simultaneous reproduction of a dominant hegemony (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Bourdieu, 1991; 1996) of not just the class(es) of people, but even that of a language. Bourdieu therefore, has rightly recognised the fact that a school (like PIS) has its own culture and that children who are prepared in that culture in their homes will perform better (Bourdieu, 1996).

In this context, I would like to present some more excerpts from interviews of parents that were taken during the period of this ethnographic study. Mrs. Lokhandwala, a hotelier, stated that emphasizing the English language, both speaking and reading, is one of the best ways to be globally competitive. On another instance, an entrepreneur named Mrs. Khanna pointed out that “for me, definitely, English speaking is a very important factor. If you are not going to be speaking the language properly, your options are very limited...Of course, it comes down a lot on your upbringing as well.” From these above mentioned quotes, one may understand that these parents associate the highest value with English not just as a compulsory subject in school, but much more as a medium of communication and now want their children to learn even ‘better English’ (through international schooling) in order to attain complete mastery of the same so that they can communicate confidently if/when they reside in any English-speaking country. Thus, according to Bourdieu’s theory of taste (1991), these parents are trying to “distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make” between themselves and parents of students attending schools offering national boards. Through their preference (‘taste’) for international schools, they make distinctions not just between the quality of schools and educational boards, but also the quality of English being taught in these schools (Bourdieu, 1991: 6).

Hence, one of the most frequently spoken languages in the homes of these students attending PIS is English and, no doubt, as pointed out by the School counsellor, the majority of

the students do not know Hindi in spite of being locals. According to the interviewees, the culture in their homes and, therefore, of such a School, is very different from those students' homes who attend schools offering Indian curricula. Herein comes the divide between a selected few who are able to attend schools like PIS and those who do not/are not able to. Thus, in the case of PIS, parents were very satisfied with the School because they felt that their child is growing up in an environment that is similar to their homes, wherein spoken English is given utmost importance. On this note, Katz (2012) further argued that,

Children as accumulation strategies are packed with resources that their parents imagine and hope will position them well in the market - cultural as much as political-economic - in which they come of age (Katz, 2012: 182).

So, these privileged parents have developed their own novel means to secure various advantages for their children, especially through the education system, and enrolling their children in an international school and acquiring proficiency in 'international English' definitely seems to be one of the many ways to secure such advantages.

Conclusion

In this paper, I discussed the emergence and spread of English as a compulsory subject as well as a medium of instruction in Indian schools. The aim has been to portray how the role and attributes attached with the language have changed across generations, resulting in the transformation of education from a much more localised form of learning to that of an international nature. The British introduced English with the aim of creating a class of English-educated intellectuals who would work for them and would help them to communicate with the masses. However, the seed that the Colonizers had sown only among a selected few started to grow and spread its branches, whereby a greater number of people got influenced by the benefits that such a language would reap. Thereon, English began to exercise its command right from primary school education and upwards. Although various Commissions and Committees have attempted and continue to attempt, through various policies, to end English's hegemony and give primacy to vernacular languages, its influence seems to remain intact. For instance, the Draft National Education Policy of

India (2019) attempts to emphasize the significance of Indian languages (although without much clarity) in order to strike a balance among all the languages spoken as well as offered in schools.¹¹ However, such an attempt might not prove to be very fruitful, since with every passing day the obsession with English medium education is growing stronger among parents who attach a greater benefit (materially and socially) to being educated in the colonial language than in any other.

Also, with the advent of convent schools, followed by international schools in the country, the primacy of English appears to be ever increasing. As has been rightly pointed out by McTaggart (2018), the language has become a ‘currency’ which the international school sector in India has been successfully able to generate a demand for in order to create a niche within the education system. Through its promise of internationalisation, which parents are very eager to provide to their children with hope of a better future, the international school sector in India is ever expanding. Hence, the essentiality of English vis-à-vis international schooling must be underscored, especially at a spatio-temporal juncture wherein privileged parents in India are re-strategizing their children’s futures, and international schools through their promise of ‘better English’, are facilitating in the process of global preparedness.

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¹¹ According to Draft National Education Policy (NEP) 2019, “When possible, the medium of instruction - at least until Grade 5 but preferably till at least Grade 8 - will be the home language/mother tongue/local language.” And “To leverage the enhanced language-learning abilities of young children, all students from pre-school and Grade 1 onwards will be exposed to three or more languages with the aim of developing speaking proficiency and interaction, and the ability to recognise scripts and read basic text, in all three languages by Grade 3. In terms of writing, students will begin writing primarily in the medium of instruction until Grade 3, after which writing with additional scripts will also be introduced gradually.” Pp. 80-81.

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