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## **The Spread of English Language in Asian Countries: A Review Paper**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper is a systematic review of relevant works done by authors on the spread of English language in Asian countries. The work employed a secondary data information to review both strength and weakness of academic activities in this field. The work identified and evaluated existing literatures on the origin and spread of English language in Asia, focusing on the 20<sup>th</sup> -21<sup>st</sup> century progress and development. Furthermore, the review explored challenges faced by learners of English language from Asian countries and possible actions to mitigate against these issues. Subsequently, the work identified gaps in the reviewed literature and made adequate recommendation for a complete study and understanding of the said phenomenon for research and academic purpose. Among gaps identified is the need to focus on English Language learner experiences, its impact on indigenous languages, and also, looking into the effectiveness of multilingual education programs. The study conclude by making recommendations on possible ways to enhance the spread of English language in Asia and also, the need to be holistic in research and documentation of the knowledge and experiences .

The Spread of English Language in Asian Countries

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### **Introduction**

The English Language is now widely recognized as the world language, and the majority of developing nations view it as essential to their economic progress (Teo, 2015). Asia now boasts more English speakers than any other area in the globe as a result of the English language's widespread use as a lingua franca and as a required subject in many Asian nations' basic education systems; to ensure successful communication amongst individuals from diverse Asian societies, speakers of English as a lingua franca in Asia must, nevertheless, develop not only communicative competence but also intercultural communicative competence, given the rich cultural diversity of Asian societies (Lwin, 2016). As the 21<sup>st</sup> century progresses, numerous Asian societies are embracing cosmopolitan ideals, leading to significant transformations in their education systems; these reforms aim to align education with the demands and opportunities of the modern world (Lee et al., 2014). Across the continent, educational institutions are adapting to foster 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication. This shift reflects a recognition of the importance of preparing students for a globalized and technologically advanced society. Through these reforms, Asian countries are striving to cultivate innovative thinkers and problem solvers capable of thriving in the interconnected and rapidly changing landscape of the modern world (Lee et al., 2014).

Understanding the spread of the English language in Asian countries is imperative due to the profound transformations occurring in their education systems and societal structures. As these nations increasingly adopt cosmopolitan ideals and revise their educational system to cultivate globally relevant skills, the role of English proficiency becomes pivotal. Investigating the spread of English in Asia will shed light into the evolving landscape of language education, cultural integration, and economic globalization within the continent. This article intends to present a review of the existing literature, discover the gaps and challenges, and proffer solutions and recommendations to enhance the spread of English Language in Asia.

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### **Review of Existing Literature**

According to Chang (2011), the historical roots of English in Asia can be traced back to two distinct migration patterns. The first involved movement from England to territories like Australia and America, with Asia serving as a passageway on these routes. The second, more impactful migration, was driven by colonization. This colonial expansion established English as a second language in numerous Asian and African nations. In Southeast Asia, Chang (2011) highlights British colonialism as a key factor shaping the use of English. Former British colonies like Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong, along with the Philippines which fell under American control after the Spanish-American War, all demonstrate the lasting influence of colonialism on the English language's presence in Asia today.

Bolten (2008) proposes a framework for categorizing English use in Asia based on historical influence. This framework identifies two main circles: the outer circle and the expanding circle. Outer circle countries, typically former British colonies like India and Singapore, have adopted English as a second language. This widespread use stems from the colonial period and continues to influence government, law, education, and media even after independence.

Bolton (2008) highlights the resulting bilingual situation, where people comfortably switch between English and local languages in everyday conversations.

Wang (2013) explores the historical underpinnings of English use in China. Wang argues that China's long history of trade and cultural exchange, exemplified by the Silk Road and maritime routes, laid the groundwork for early contact between Chinese and English. These initial interactions likely involved individual Chinese merchants conducting business with English speakers abroad (Wang, 2013).

Building on this historical context, Low & Ao (2018) examine the linguistic landscape of Southeast Asia, particularly within the Association of South Eastern Nations (ASEAN). They highlight the region's unique characteristic of having countries from both the outer circle (former British colonies) and the expanding circle (countries with no colonial history of English speakers). This confluence creates a situation of rich linguistic diversity, where both established and emerging varieties of English coexist alongside a multitude of ethnic languages (Low & Ao, 2018).

Furthermore, Pan et al. (2021) investigates the specific case of China and the evolving nature of English use there. They distinguish between two contrasting terms: "Chinglish" and "China English." "Chinglish" carries a negative connotation, referring to grammatically incorrect or awkward English heavily influenced by Chinese language structures and cultural references. In contrast, "China English" offers a more neutral perspective on how Chinese people speak English. It acknowledges the development of a unique English variety that reflects the interplay between standard English and Chinese culture. This variety serves as a tool for effective communication among English speakers within Chinese society (Pan et al., 2021).

Proshina (2008) examines the case of Russia, a nation with no colonial history of English speakers. Despite this, English reigns supreme as the foreign language of choice in schools, valued for its role in cultural exchange and international business communication. Interestingly, Russia acknowledges the rise of "World Englishes," where the language takes on localized forms. This is particularly relevant in the Russian Far East, where communication with neighboring non-native speakers necessitates the use of mutually intelligible varieties of English. Proshina (2008) highlights a shift from a focus on traditional forms like British and American English to include exploration of World Englishes such as Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand varieties.

Young (2008) explores a similar phenomenon in South Korea, another Asian nation without a colonial past linked to English speakers. Despite this lack of historical connection, South Korea mirrors Russia's intense focus on English language learning. This emphasis is driven by the South Korean government's belief that English proficiency is a critical factor for achieving economic success and global competitiveness in the modern world (Young, 2008).

Carpenter (n.d.) explores the deep-rooted presence of English in Japan. English language learning has been a prominent feature of the Japanese education system since the 1950s, with mandatory classes starting in middle school and initiatives for even earlier introduction. This emphasis extends beyond schools, reflected in the popularity of private after-school cram schools that often focus on English exam preparation. The demand for English education creates opportunities for native English speakers to find work in Japan, highlighting the economic value placed on proficiency (Carpenter, n.d.).

Furthermore, Carpenter highlights the significant impact of English on the Japanese language itself. The widespread adoption of English words has led to the emergence of "hybrid words," where elements from both languages combine to create new terms. This phenomenon, referred to as "hybridization," is so extensive that estimates suggest over 10% of Japanese vocabulary now originates from English. Carpenter (n.d.) argues that this borrowing has fundamentally altered the nature of Japanese, demonstrating the enduring influence of English on the nation's language and education system.

Bezborodova and Radjabzade (2021) highlight the prominent position of English within Central Asia, surpassing other foreign languages. They argue that English goes beyond facilitating cultural exchange; it plays a critical role in education. Driven by globalization and internationalization, English has become a widespread medium of instruction across all educational levels in Central Asia. Furthermore, it has established itself as the preferred language for research and academic discourse within the region (Bezborodova & Radjabzade, 2021).

Reeve (2023) examines the unique language policy of Kazakhstan, which stands out from other Central Asian nations. Unlike its neighbors with a singular focus on their national language, Kazakhstan recognizes both Kazakh and Russian as official languages. This stems from Kazakhstan's significant ethnic Russian population who view Russian as central to their identity. The government strives for a balance, promoting the Kazakh language and culture while acknowledging the identity needs of its Russian citizens. Moreover, with an eye towards global competitiveness, Kazakhstan has implemented a "trilingual" education system. This system incorporates English language learning from a young age, ensuring students become proficient in Kazakh, Russian, and English (Reeve, 2023).

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## **Challenges Faced by English Learners in Asia and The Marginalization of Asian Scholarship in English-Dominated Academia**

Rahmah and Sari (2018) examined the complexities of mastering spoken English, particularly for learners in Asia. They emphasize the need for ample exposure, effective communication strategies, and extensive practice. However, achieving fluency can be hindered by several challenges. These include low confidence, limited communication skills, inadequate vocabulary, and a lack of overall fluency (Rahmah & Sari, 2018).

One significant obstacle is hesitation during speaking, often rooted in fear of making mistakes, embarrassment, and potential criticism. These anxieties are especially prevalent in regions where English is not widely spoken and opportunities for immersive practice are limited. The authors highlight that learners in much of Asia, where English might only be encountered in classrooms or media, often face these challenges more acutely (Rahmah & Sari, 2018).

Ha (2013) raises concerns about the marginalization of Asian scholarship. The pressure to publish in English journals can overshadow research published in local languages. This potentially limits access to valuable knowledge and hinders a comprehensive understanding of Asia's unique cultural and intellectual perspectives. Furthermore, reliance on English-speaking students can restrict scholars' understanding of local contexts and indigenous knowledge systems. Language plays a crucial role in capturing these nuances, and an overemphasis on English can create a blind spot.

Larsen's (2019) study examines the case of South Korea, highlighting the challenges associated with achieving fluency despite a strong emphasis on English learning. Students often view English as a means to pass exams rather than a valuable communication tool. Moreover, increasingly diverse classrooms can lead to conflicts, and the lack of standardized teacher qualifications, both Korean and foreign, hinders the effectiveness of English instruction.

The situation in Kazakhstan, explored by the Eurasian Research Institute (n.d.), exemplifies another challenge. Despite prioritizing multilingual education with English as a core component, proficiency levels remain low. This suggests a gap between policy and implementation. The trilingual education model incorporating Kazakh, Russian, and English, while well-intentioned, seems to be facing practical difficulties that require further investigation.

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## Gaps in the Literature and Recommendations for Future Research

The reviewed literature offers a valuable look at the rise and influence of English across Asia. However, some areas could benefit from further investigation. Prominent among these areas is a need for more focus on English Language learner experiences, its impact on indigenous languages and looking into the effectiveness of multilingual education programs.

### More Focus on Learner Experiences

Majority of the studies reviewed primarily address the large-scale factors shaping English use in Asia. While these offer valuable context, a deeper understanding of the learner experience, particularly in regions with limited English exposure, is crucial. Future research could look into:

- **Strategies to Help Learners Overcome Challenges:** What strategies can effectively address anxieties and build confidence among Asian learners of English?
- **Impact of Limited English Language exposure:** How does limited access to immersive English environments impact language acquisition?
- **The Role of Technology:** Can technology and online learning platforms play a role in facilitating English language learning in Asia, and if so, how?

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## Impact on Indigenous Languages

The studies of Ha (2013) and Bezborodova and Radjabzade (2021) acknowledged the potential marginalization of Asian scholarship due to the dominance of English in academia. However, a more comprehensive analysis is needed to understand the impact on indigenous languages. Here are some potential areas of exploration:

- **Language Shift and Endangerment:** How is the dominance of English affecting language shift and potentially endangering indigenous languages?
- **Promoting Multilingual Education:** What strategies can be implemented to promote multilingual education that fosters proficiency in both English and local languages?
- **Indigenous Language Terminology:** How can terminology and knowledge systems be developed in indigenous languages to address marginalization in specific academic fields?

### Effectiveness of Multilingual Education Programs

While the studies of Reeve (2023) and the Eurasian Research Institute (n.d.) touch upon multilingual education initiatives, a more focused analysis is needed to assess their effectiveness:

- **Longitudinal Studies:** Are multilingual education programs achieving their goals of English proficiency alongside local languages? Longitudinal studies can provide valuable insights.
- **Teacher Challenges:** What challenges do teachers face in implementing multilingual education programs, particularly in classrooms with diverse linguistic backgrounds?
- **Teacher Training:** How can teacher training programs be improved to equip educators with the necessary skills to navigate the complexities of multilingual classrooms?

By addressing these gaps, future research can provide a better understanding of the role and impact of English in Asia. This knowledge can inform effective strategies for language learning, education policy, and knowledge dissemination in the region.

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## Conclusion

The widespread adoption of English in Asia presents a fascinating case study in the interplay between language, globalization, and national identity. While English proficiency unlocks doors to economic opportunity and international collaboration, it also raises concerns about the marginalization of indigenous languages and cultural knowledge. Moving forward, Asian nations must strive for a balanced approach that leverages the benefits of English without compromising the richness of their linguistic heritage. By coming up with multilingual education models and promoting inter and intracultural understanding, Asia can ensure its successful integration into the globalized world while preserving the unique voices of its people.

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