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India's choice between progress and parochialism

Technological Disruption vs Cultural Nationalism:

- India is caught between technological advancements and cultural nationalism.
- The government focuses on global tech leadership, but its language policies, like the push for Marathi and rejection of English, pose risks.

English and its Role in India:

- English is one of India's official languages and a medium for higher education, law, and healthcare.
- However, only 10% of Indians have access to English, creating a divide between students in private schools and those in government schools.

Global Competitiveness:

- Countries like Israel, China, South Korea, and Vietnam treat English as an economic necessity, not as a cultural issue.
- These nations prioritize English to integrate into global economies and tech sectors, which benefits both local industries and citizens.

English as Economic Infrastructure:

- Nations like China and South Korea have incorporated English fluency into their education systems to improve global competitiveness.
- For example, China's Gaokao exam includes English, and South Korea's educational system emphasizes English for research and development roles.

Vietnam's English Proficiency Strategy:

- Vietnam's National Foreign Language Project (NFLP) aims for 70% English proficiency among high school graduates.
- This plan aligns with their goal to become a middle-tech manufacturing hub by 2045.

AI and Future Jobs:

- English proficiency is a key barrier to employment in tech sectors, where English dominates research and collaboration.



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- Without English fluency, India risks missing out on high-growth sectors like AI and data analytics.

India's Education Policy:

- The National Education Policy 2020 allows flexibility for non-Hindi States like Kerala and Tamil Nadu to prioritize English, leading to better STEM outcomes.
- States focusing on Hindi first tend to lag in educational progress.

India's Workforce and Global Future:

- By 2050, India is projected to account for 23% of the global workforce, but without English skills, this potential could be wasted.
- English proficiency is crucial for India's growth in AI, cybersecurity, and green energy, the future job engines.

Conclusion:

- India must treat English as essential infrastructure for economic progress, rather than a cultural or ideological debate.
- Learning from countries like Vietnam, India has the potential to transform its language policies for global competitiveness.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/indias-choice-between-progress-and-parochialism/article69327286.ece>