

# The English Exchange

A report by the



**Publishers  
Association**

# Introduction

Humanity's relationship with the English language is enthralling and complex. Since its inception in the 5th century with the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain<sup>1</sup>, it has risen to influence our culture, playing a pivotal role in global societal evolution and scientific progress. It has the power to unite or divide people across the world through business, education, travel, the arts, and politics. It can be the difference between success and failure, between rich and poor.

While there is no official universal language, English, for good or ill, is the world's most influential voice<sup>2</sup>. While it does not have the most native speakers (Mandarin, Hindi and Spanish each have more<sup>3</sup>), over 400 million people speak it as their mother tongue, and over 1.5 billion list it as their second language<sup>4</sup>. The importance of learning English across Asia and Africa has helped spread its usage, while the internet has increased its influence even further.

The impact of English is felt deeply on both a macro and a micro level – major progress hinges on world leaders negotiating around climate change, the global economy, and human rights, while a child's opportunities can be influenced by their level of access to learn English. The language, in its 160 plus guises<sup>5</sup>, has impacted a huge proportion of the global population over the centuries, sometimes without us even realising.

But this dominance is not a simple story. The very survival of some languages has long been challenged by the increase in English adoption, particularly as the behemoth of globalisation continues grinding forward. According to the United Nations, the world loses two languages a week and it is estimated that up to 90% of the world's c.6,000 languages will disappear in the next one hundred years<sup>6</sup>. The history of the English language is also controversial, with uncomfortable associations with colonisation and racism.



**No other language has the power to unite and divide like English, and with this come great challenges, as well as opportunities."**

**Nigel Newton CBE,**  
President, Publishers Association  
and Founder & Chief Executive,  
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

## 400m+

people speak English as  
their mother tongue

## 1.5bn+

list it as their second language

Our English Exchange polling across four countries reveals a complicated global relationship with English. Around three quarters of respondents in China (71%), United Arab Emirates (78%) and India (75%) say they feel that English is used too much across the world. However, paradoxically, all respondents acknowledge how beneficial it has been to them professionally and socially.

At the Publishers Association, the English language continues to fascinate us and we are driven to better understand the complex relationship people across the world have with English and what this means for our sector, society and global progress on the big issues facing us.

We are grateful to a number of partners with whom we have collaborated on this project, each bringing a different view of how English has enriched – and challenged – society over time, providing insights and evidence to add colour and context to this report.

Our thanks to the English Speaking Union, the National Literacy Trust, the Association of Authors' Agents and the British Council for their contribution and time.

Our hope is that this project starts an ongoing discussion around the future opportunities for the English language and ultimately, how it can be used as a force for good in an increasingly polarised society.

#### Our thanks to



The world loses two languages a week

At this rate

**90%**

of the world's 6,000 languages...

...will disappear in the next one hundred years

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## Chapter 1

# English and research, learning, and business

For much of the world, the English language has long been the foundation for learning and progress across a vast range of fields. Researchers across the world use English as the primary language for communicating their work and subsequently, many academic journals and conferences require that papers are written and presented in English.

This includes disciplines such as science, technology, engineering, and medicine (STEM), as well as social sciences, arts and humanities. Scientific journals, in particular, are being published in English at a higher proportion than any other language<sup>7</sup>, showing a long-standing influence.

“The English language comprises a lexicon drawn from across the world and its presence on the international stage helps to establish a global vocabulary that invites participation and collaboration, from the simplest conversation online to the most significant scientific discovery.”  
Jonathan Douglas, CEO, National Literacy Trust

With this come advantages, including easier sharing of information and ideas, the acceleration of scientific progress, and better collaboration. However, there are often challenges that can accompany these benefits.

### A benchmark in science and research

For many researchers around the world, being published in English can be seen as a mark of high-quality work, with many non-native English speakers taking pride in appearing in English language journals and books. So connected is the English language to prestige that, within the academic field, it has long been perceived that one should “publish in English or perish”<sup>8</sup>.

A timely example is the ground-breaking speed at which the Covid-19 vaccines were developed and distributed throughout the world. English was central to that unprecedented global collaboration, which led to the scientific breakthroughs that enabled the world to open up again after the pandemic.

“The English language comprises a lexicon drawn from across the world and its presence on the international stage helps to establish a global vocabulary that invites participation and collaboration, from the simplest conversation online to the most significant scientific discovery.”

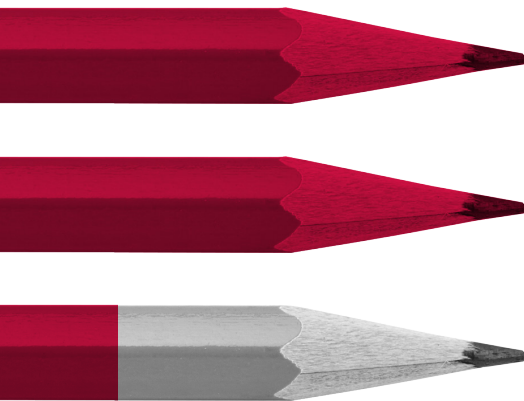
Jonathan Douglas,  
CEO, National Literacy Trust





**The most practical language in the world is unquestionably English. English is the second language with the highest global demand for instruction. English predominates in commerce, science, tourism, and popular culture whether we like it or not."**

— Respondent,  
India, English Exchange polling



Over two-thirds of respondents agreed that knowing English was useful for their personal education

However, this dominance of the English language, and the need to publish results in English, meant that some geographical regions did not participate in the process, where perhaps they could have.

For example, one recent study found there was low participation across Africa in biomedical research on Covid-19. The publication cites problems with English language proficiency and scientific writing skills, limited access to scientific and medical literature, and also prejudices against African authors in the editorial boards of international journals as major factors explaining this lack of involvement.

A 2017 study compared the effect of language on the number of article citations in six natural sciences journals from five countries that publish papers in either English or other languages<sup>10</sup>. The articles published in English had a higher number of citations than those published in other languages once the effect of journal, year of publication, and paper length are all statistically controlled.

It is commonly understood that the dominance of English in global academia can be exclusionary; especially for scholars who are not native English speakers, are less fluent or do not speak it at all.

They may face challenges in publishing their work and participating in academic conferences, which can hinder their careers. It can also mean that valuable research, ideas and perspectives from non-English speaking countries might not be as widely disseminated or recognised, limiting the impact of many valuable contributions.

Alongside this, many research grants and scholarships require academics to apply and publish their work in English, which, while it means the work may be more widely shared, reviewed and built upon, can also create barriers and limit our thinking.

### **English at the heart of global education**

In education, English plays a central role for many people around the world from a young age. Our research, conducted across China, United Arab Emirates, Germany, and India, found that over two-thirds of respondents agreed that knowing English was useful for their personal education. This was particularly prevalent in United Arab Emirates (86%) and India (81%)<sup>11</sup>.

"The most practical language in the world is unquestionably English.

English is the second language with the highest global demand for instruction. English predominates in commerce, science, tourism, and popular culture whether we like it or not.” Respondent, India, English Exchange polling<sup>12</sup>

Education in English is often seen as the ‘gold standard’ and the UK is the world leader in exporting educational textbooks and materials, contributing £354 million to the UK economy in 2021<sup>13</sup>. The United Arab Emirates, Hong Kong, Qatar, and South Korea are the largest importers of UK-produced school materials in the world. According to research from the British Council, an estimated 1.5 billion people across the globe are currently learning English, enabling one in five people on the planet to communicate with each other more easily<sup>14</sup>.

However, its dominance can also have a detrimental impact on emerging economies or sections of society where English is not the main language and where people cannot access English-language curricula. Whilst learning English can help many people progress in their lives, it can also be seen as the language of ‘the elites’, where only those able to afford private education or buy English books can learn the language, accentuating class divides and stifling learning and career opportunities<sup>15</sup>.

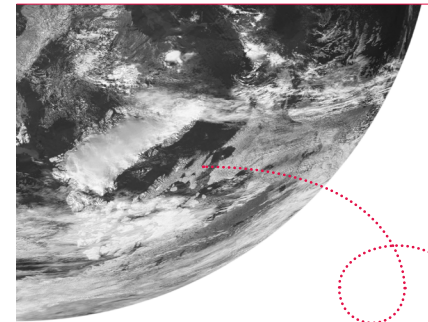
The dominance of English and its reputation for being a gateway to a

better future also causes challenges for local cultures and identity. For example, English is compulsory in China’s education system all the way up to postgraduate entrance exams, whilst Mandarin is only compulsory up until undergraduate entry.

Structures such as this can place English in a privileged position even above a nation’s own local languages, generating growing anxiety about how this will impact personal and national identities<sup>16</sup>. So long as English language and learning is tied to status and power, it can threaten to devalue local language and culture. With this in mind, it is understandable that our research found 71% of Chinese respondents agreed English was used too much across the world<sup>17</sup>.

### The role of English in business

Outside academia and education, the impact of English continues in the world of business. It is estimated that speaking the language enables approximately a fifth of the world’s population to communicate with each other more easily. Our research, conducted across four countries, found



# 1.5bn

people across the globe are currently learning English



**“Anyone who knows English can get anywhere in the world.”**

— Respondent,  
Germany, English Exchange polling



Learning English can increase the earning power of individuals by around

**25%**

that each consistently associated English with being a universal language above anything else<sup>18</sup>. All four also say that it is the most useful language to know, with United Arab Emirates agreeing the most ardently with 84%, followed by India (79%), Germany (73%), and China (61%).

English is often considered to be the default language for international commerce and is the primary language within industries such as finance and technology. Proficiency in English is seen as an important skill for success in business circles, where it is also often used as a second language. Our research found that over two in three respondents across all four countries agreed that English was a useful skill in their country in the world of work<sup>19</sup>.

English also has a crucial role in safety-sensitive industries; for example, some level of English proficiency is required across shipping and aviation

(it is known as ‘the language of the skies’) to ensure all ships and planes have the ability to communicate with each other, avoid fatal disasters, and respond to emergencies. It is the only official working language of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) connecting 13 member countries, and the European Free Trade Association.

The British Council commissioned a report investigating the link between learning English and economic development in five countries; three where English was linguistically linked due to colonialism (Bangladesh, Nigeria and Pakistan) and two where it was not (French-speaking Cameroon and Nigeria.)<sup>20</sup>

First, the report found that learning English can increase the earning power of individuals by around 25%. Second, researchers found a link between even a moderate competency and higher levels of investment from countries such as the US and UK. In the three countries, investment from English-speaking countries accounts for 33–41% of total Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). By contrast, largely French-speaking Cameroon and Rwanda had significantly less; with only 2% per cent and 1% respectively of their total FDI coming from English-speaking countries.

Another paper investigating the role of language within the flow of international trade and FDI found that if both countries in a pair speaks



English, bilateral imports are 95% higher than if they don't<sup>21</sup>. English as a common language also increases inward FDI flows for host countries.

### English in the age of the internet

English has also had a significant role to play in the development and adoption of technology in everyday life across the world. It is the most widely-used language on the web, with almost 60% of internet pages written in English<sup>22</sup>. The second most widely used language – Russian – accounts for just 5% of web pages.

This extensive reach and influence enables people from different geographies, cultures, institutions and industries to learn, research and work together more fluently, whether in person or virtually. The power of the English language to enable change is currently unchallenged.

But with this come considerations around dismissing or indeed missing the many valuable contributions and exchanges that sit outside the English language.

Our research found that the majority of people in four very diverse countries believe that the English language is the most useful language to use when trying to communicate globally. However, the research also found a correlation between the utility of English in their country and concerns about its dominance. For example, in Germany 68% agreed English was a useful business skill to have in

their country and 31% felt that it was used too much across the world. By contrast, in India, where 79% agreed that English was a useful business skill to have, 75% felt it was used too much in the world<sup>23</sup>.

While the role of English will most likely continue to gain momentum across education, academia and business, it does not have to be at the expense of other languages. It should be possible to support, practice and celebrate other languages alongside the growth of English, with each generation encouraged to learn other languages and use their own alongside it.

# 68%

of Germans agreed that English was a useful business skill to have in their country

# 79%

of Indians agreed that English was a useful business skill to have in their country

# 60%

of all internet pages are written in English

## Chapter 2

# English, diplomacy and humanitarian efforts

There is no greater role for the English language than to try and achieve world peace. It is central to resolving global conflicts through diplomacy and negotiation, while enabling agility, collaboration and compassion during political and humanitarian crises. It provides “opportunity and access<sup>24</sup>” in many different ways for people around the world.

### English as a driver for improving international relations

In a peacekeeping context, English has emerged as the vehicle that enables nations to communicate more easily with each other and find common ground. It continues to be the great connector in diplomatic circles. Michael Connolly of The British Council highlights that there is, “often an expectation that countries come to the table to talk together in English” and as such, English plays an official or working role in most international organisations and major political gatherings. It is one of the six official languages of the United Nations; alongside French, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Spanish. For the G7 – seven of the largest and most

developed economies in the world – English is an essential communication and bargaining tool, driving cohesion and progress among members.

English is also central to the workings of other major global unions and multi-lateral organisations, including the Association of South East Asian Nations, the Commonwealth, the Council of Europe, the International Criminal Court, the World Trade Organisation, the European Union, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

English has also aided the historical treaties that have helped shape the modern world, such as the Treaty of Versailles to end the first World War in 1918, the Fourth Geneva Convention in 1949, and more recently the Kyoto Protocol (1997) and the Paris Agreement which was signed by 196 parties in 2016 to tackle climate change.



**If we understand each other better, using English as the vehicle, then we will become truly global citizens”**

—  
Annabel Thomas McGregor,  
Director of Education,  
English-Speaking Union





**Hundreds of millions, if not billions, of people around the world see English as vital for opportunities in education and employment – personally, in communities and nationally.”**

–

Michael Connolly,  
Head English for Education Systems,  
EU Europe at British Council

Alongside these world-changing milestones, English can provide accurate, reliable and digestible information to audiences on a daily basis. The BBC is prevalent here, with data showing that almost 500 million people across the world use the broadcasters' channels each week, including over 350 million who use the BBC World Service to understand more about political events and news, alongside a diverse range of more in-depth features, analysis and cultural content<sup>25</sup>.

### **Humanitarian efforts, essential health and English**

English can be essential for communication with those living in or near current war zones or in isolated places. Through the Language for Resilience programme, developed in response to the Syrian refugee crisis, the British Council highlights the contributing role English, among other languages, plays in developing resilience in five areas; supporting native languages, promoting social cohesion, accessing education, dealing with trauma and strengthening education systems<sup>26</sup>.

Today, the British Council is supporting the Ukrainian government in the development of language policy in the country, and providing professional development opportunities for 3,000 English language teachers in Ukraine through its online teacher community. It's also working with more than 1,000 Ukrainian English teachers and 30 teacher educators on training programmes hosted in Poland and Romania, providing a teacher development programme focused on creating trauma-sensitive learning environments, managing challenging behaviours, and making classrooms safer spaces for English language learners. The aim is that the training will be adapted and passed onto other teachers in their mother tongue, sharing knowledge and tools that will benefit all teachers in Ukraine.

The organisation also helps rural communities in Romania, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia deal with high unemployment and the impact of de-population due to the exodus of local men leaving to seek work. For example, in Romania the programme seeks to enhance young people's English skills, important to the development of the local eco-tourism industry and the prosperity of local communities.



In Asia, the British Council's English and Digital for Girls' Education (EDGE) programme provides girls with basic English skills and teaches them to use computers. This helps to develop skills and create knowledge which can enable the girls and their communities to see and consider life choices, including returning to education or job opportunities, rather than marriage or pregnancy at a young age<sup>27</sup>.

English is also used to educate, inform and counsel people across the world in public health campaigns that focus on universal issues and challenges, requiring widespread access to information. English is used to promote vaccination, HIV/AIDS prevention, and other health initiatives. During the Covid-19 outbreak, the World Health Organization published many resources in English to help people stay informed and take appropriate precautions<sup>28</sup>.

However, the hegemony of the English language can also prove a hindrance, particularly in humanitarian efforts where the people needing support or the different organisations looking to provide it do not speak English well or at all, risking important information being missed or lost in translation.

According to Translators Without Borders, "situations where interviews with community members pass through three or four languages are not uncommon. An international aid worker may speak in English, a national staff member interprets into the national language, and then a local school teacher interprets into the language of that village, and back again. This approach multiplies the potential loss of information in translation and lacks proper quality assurance."

There can also be challenges translating humanitarian concepts into other languages from English as there might not be direct translations for some words and concepts, causing confusion. The use of English within international organisations can also isolate local language speakers, excluding them from key decisions where their contribution could be essential.



**This approach multiplies the potential loss of information in translation and lacks proper quality assurance."**

— Translators Without Borders







**“In future English will continue its role as a unifier, but there will likely be a shift to a multi-language approach, and for young people to have the voice and English skills to give them an opportunity to participate more in life.”**

—  
Annabel Thomas McGregor,  
Director of Education,  
English-Speaking Union



### English in relation to local languages

The dominance of English across so many essential facets of human interaction and progress can also lead to the erosion of local languages and dialects in everyday life. There is no clearer example of this than in The Commonwealth, where English is the native language of just over half of the citizens across its member states.

This undoubtedly provides a common platform for communication and understanding between people from different backgrounds and cultures, promoting cooperation and collaboration within the 54 Commonwealth countries. However, the popularity of English is often at the expense of local languages, which has an ongoing impact on politics and diplomacy across The Commonwealth and beyond.

In many cases, these languages are not spoken outside of the home and as English becomes more prevalent – through education and government adoption, as well as more young people choosing to speak English as a first or second language – native languages and dialects are gradually disappearing and dying out. Linguistics experts across the world are warning that 50% of today’s spoken languages will be extinct or seriously endangered by 2100<sup>29</sup>.

While the spread of English can undoubtedly offer a range of economic, societal, and political benefits including greater opportunities for relationship-building, discussion and joined-up action, it often also seems to come at a cost to the world’s linguistic diversity.

The English-Speaking Union (ESU)’s global work takes place in some of the most isolated places in the world. For example, their current work via the Mongolian International ESU branch with nomadic tribes focuses on helping improve their English skills, specifically to ensure young people there have broader opportunities and help them advocate for their communities on a world stage.

ESU’s Annabel Thomas McGregor is clear that, “in future English will continue its role as a unifier, but there will likely be a shift to a multi-language approach; with more focus on home languages not being ignored alongside a recognition of the global importance, and opportunities, created through English language skills, giving young people a voice to participate more in their global future.”

### Rejections of English

All this being said, English has also been rejected at times, particularly in recent history within some of the decolonisation efforts of the last two centuries. Indeed, several former British colonies rejected English after independence, choosing to return to their native tongue. Tanzania, for

example, removed English as a joint official language in 1967, keeping Swahili as its sole national language.

The Malaysia National Language Act of 1967 disestablished English as a joint official language, giving sole status to Malay. In contrast to this, there have been instances where English was adopted by countries that were colonised by other European nations. In 1996, for example, Algeria opted to make English its chief foreign language in schools, replacing French in clear resistance to its own difficult colonial past<sup>30</sup>.

The complicated relationship between English and colonisation continues to this day, leaving a difficult legacy for those trying to marry history, progress and politics. While the majority of Anglophones in English-speaking countries tend to give language little thought at all – often unaware of the advantages afforded to them simply by being born in a country where English is the mother tongue – there is rising concern, particularly in the UK and the United States, about the unstoppable rise of English and how it could, in fact, limit opportunities for English-speaking natives, while curbing their opportunities to understand other cultures and ideas, and to learn additional languages<sup>31</sup>.

In terms of the future, author of *English as a Global Language*, David Crystal, talks of his belief in the, “fundamental value of multilingualism, as an amazing world resource which presents us with different perspectives and insights, and thus enables us to reach a more profound understanding of the nature of the human mind and spirit”, sitting alongside “the fundamental value of a common language, as an amazing world resource which presents us with unprecedented possibilities for mutual understanding, and thus enables us to find fresh opportunities for international cooperation”.

As humanity navigates seemingly evermore polarised and complex political, environmental and humanitarian events, the potential for English to be a connector that operates alongside the myriad of other global languages, becomes more essential by the day.



**fundamental value of multilingualism, as an amazing world resource which presents us with different perspectives and insights, and thus enables us to reach a more profound understanding of the nature of the human mind and spirit”**

—  
David Crystal,  
Author of *English as a Global Language*



## Chapter 3

# English, the arts and technology

The English language has been at the heart of furthering and celebrating the arts for centuries, connecting people all over the world. Whether music, literature, film or television originates in English – or is translated into it – the English language is a global messenger for sharing ideas and inspiration. English is one of the world’s most important storytelling methods and as long as it remains the most communicated language across the globe<sup>33</sup> and the internet, which is central to the spread of culture around the world, its power and influence will continue.

Most importantly, the English language enables ideas to reach a wider audience. Translations, subtitles, and voiceovers ensure that culture can be shared and understood better between religions, communities, and geographies. Because English can connect so many people to each other, we can be more open to different cultures.

“By knowing English, we can communicate anywhere.” Respondent, UAE, English Exchange polling

There are undoubtedly challenges too, that come with the widespread use of English. There is a long-standing and ongoing debate about how indigenous arts have been over-looked and replaced over centuries.

Some argue English is responsible for widespread loss of cultural identity in colonised or just smaller countries as younger generations adopt English and, by proxy, some of the behaviours and values that come from the country that brought it there. This can result in people disregarding local art, customs and traditions, instead being drawn into ever-greater globalisation.

### English as a driver for improving international relations

Today, the widespread use of English combined with the speed with which technology can share information, means that fake news travels more easily, culture wars break out quickly, plagiarism is more commonplace and a single moment can cancel a career.

A thorough understanding of literacy and language helps people survive and thrive in an increasingly digital world,



**By knowing English, we can communicate anywhere.”**

– Respondent, UAE, English Exchange polling





equipping upcoming generations to better understand and navigate their future.

National Literacy Trust's Newswise programme with The Guardian Foundation focuses on working in areas with low literacy levels and high levels of economic disadvantage, to develop young people's critical literacy skills so that they can recognise fake news, negotiate the way opinions and facts are represented in the media and form their own opinions based on reliable sources. Such sophisticated understanding of language is key to advancement – whether professional or personal.

The role of the British Empire in establishing English as one of the most dominant forces in the arts, particularly in the wake of two 20th Century world wars, is also a much-debated issue.

The use of English was accelerated by British, American, Australian and Canadian soldiers being dispersed across the world, often staying in communities for many months or years and bringing their culture and language with

them. Alongside this, technological developments have ensured it became more commonplace to listen to, read, discuss and enjoy English-speaking content across the world.

The spread of radios and record players meant that English music, poetry and plays were shared where they had not been previously heard, increasing the influence of western culture that still exists today, particularly that of the United Kingdom and United States following their successive rises to 'global superpower'.

The BBC World Service started broadcasting in 1932 but long before this, the evolution of the printing press - starting in the 15th Century - has meant that millions of books have been translated into and distributed in the English language, as well as establishing newspapers as a staple of daily routine and culture.

### English at the heart of film and screen

Across every genre, English has played or continues to play a role as facilitator, helping people experience different art forms in cinema, film, and television. Hollywood's first talking picture film, *The Jazz Singer*, released in the late 1920s wowed audiences with actors speaking in English, at a point when the US-based film industry was already producing 80% of global films<sup>34</sup>.

However, alongside the long-term success of English-led entertainment,

When *The Jazz Singer* was released

**80%**

of all films produced globally, were in English and made by the US film industry



over the last 20 years there has been a significant rise in the prominence of foreign films and TV dramas not performed in English, as more content is sub-titled or translated then shared with wider audiences.

While only 11 non-English films have ever received nominations for the Academy Award for Best Picture, there are growing numbers of nominations across multiple categories and awards. In 2020, the South Korean film *Parasite* was awarded the Oscar for Best Picture, becoming the first non-English-language movie to win in the category<sup>35</sup>.

English translations, subtitles and voiceovers were also central to the growth of Bollywood between the 1940s and 1960s<sup>36</sup> and to Nollywood in the early 2000s, making films more accessible to countries and cultures all over the world. These two major film industries often use English as a symbol of social status; as a character in a recent Bollywood hit says, “English isn’t just a language in this country. It’s a class<sup>37</sup>.”

In television, the exponential growth of genres such as Nordic-Noir, Japanese anime and the popularity of original content from countries such as France, South Korea, and Spain demonstrates the role English plays, not only in exposing audiences around the world to content they would not otherwise have seen, but creating commercial opportunities for developing creative industries to expand and flourish.

### The language of the storyteller

If the English language is the world’s storyteller, its most famous playwright’s impact is still felt at least as strongly as it was in 1623, when the First Folio edition of William Shakespeare’s plays was published. This categorised his works into comedies, tragedies and histories and in 2023, to mark its 400th anniversary, this ground-breaking document is housed at the British Library in London and a year of celebrations are underway<sup>38</sup>.

Many of The Bard’s greatest works continue to influence writers, lyricists and directors, with his plots used as the foundation for more modern classics such as *West Side Story*, *The Lion King*, and *Ten Things I Hate*



**English isn’t just a language in this country. It’s a class.”**

—  
Line from a  
Bollywood film



**Only 11 non-English films have ever received nominations for the Academy Award for Best Picture**

# 78%

of those surveyed around the world by the British Council, said they had experienced Shakespeare's plays and...



said they understood Shakespeare's work

*About You*<sup>39</sup>. Not only this, he created new words and tropes that are fully embedded into modern English, including 'bandit,' 'dwindle' and 'green-eyed'<sup>40</sup>.

But the reach of Shakespeare extends so much further; 2016 research from the British Council found Shakespeare's popularity is still very high, with 78% of those surveyed around the world having experienced his plays and 69% understanding his work. In fact, the research showed that the person young people outside the UK identified most with British culture was Shakespeare<sup>41</sup>. It is estimated that 50% of children across the world have studied his output<sup>42</sup>

and visits to Shakespeare's England – the area around Stratford-upon-Avon – contribute £500 million to the British economy each year<sup>43</sup>. He is synonymous with the English language and arguably its greatest ever ambassador.

Some of the other biggest-selling and most shared books in the world were also written in English and still have powerful cultural, global influence; *The Hobbit* (J.R. Tolkien), *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (J.K. Rowling) and *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* (C.S Lewis) have all sold well over 80 million copies each<sup>44</sup> and been translated into a multitude of languages, to be enjoyed by young and old across the world.

Our research shows that people across The United Arab Emirates (70%), India (70%), and to a lesser extent China (31%) and Germany (21%), say they like to read books for enjoyment in English, showing that it remains the language of storytelling centuries after Shakespeare's first works<sup>45</sup>.

# £500m

contributed to the British economy each year from visits to Shakespeare's England, Stratford-upon-Avon



### A musical and theatrical powerhouse

The power of English is also clear in music, particularly when you consider the value of the most successful music industries. The United States' industry alone is worth over \$15 billion and the UK music industry, the second biggest exporter in the world and the biggest in Europe, is worth £4 billion to the UK economy<sup>46</sup>. Elsewhere, many of the world's most successful recording



observing life through a wide linguistic and cultural lens leads to greater creativity and innovation.”

Rosemary Salomone,  
Author of *The Rise of English*

In 2018, UK theatre earned almost

**£1.3bn**

of revenue from 34m tickets  
to 62,924 performances

**£4bn**

each year is contributed to the UK  
economy from the UK music industry

artists record mainly in English, alongside their mother tongue. Examples include the hugely popular South Korean K-Pop band BTS, whose net worth is USD \$150 million, and AI-generated girl group Eternity, which both sing predominantly in English<sup>47</sup>.

Due to the fact that the concept of musicals was American-led, most of the world's leading musicals are developed, written and performed in English, although the grand dame *Les Misérables* - based on the novel by French author Victor Hugo - has been translated into 21 languages to be enjoyed by audiences across the globe<sup>48</sup>.

*The Lion King* is the highest-grossing theatre production ever on Broadway in New York<sup>49</sup>, while *The Mousetrap*, based on Agatha Christie's novel, has been on stage in London continuously since 1952. In 2018, UK theatre earned £1.28bn of revenue from 34m tickets to 62,924 performances, the vast majority of which were in English.

### The future of the arts

The dominance of any one language can create obstacles. An ongoing challenge for the arts is to increase inclusivity and diversity, ensuring

under-represented stories are told and voices are heard. This means the role of the English language in helping everyone around the world tell their stories is more important than ever.

Beyond the economic benefits of speaking multiple languages in a globalised world, author Rosemary Salomone cites studies that show learning new languages improves overall cognitive function. In addition, she argues, “observing life through a wide linguistic and cultural lens leads to greater creativity and innovation<sup>50</sup>.”

As long as English remains the main channel through which so many people experience art, books, music and film from other cultures, its greatest and never-ending role is to enable learning and expression, encourage collaboration, celebrate differences and ultimately bring about positive change.

## Chapter 4

# English and publishing

In its simplest form, publishing exists to help bring ideas to life; connecting writers and readers to the stories that matter most to them, all around the world. English has long played a pivotal role in the success of the industry, not only because the language underpins the global knowledge economy but it also facilitates trade, prosperity and societal progress, bringing millions of people together in moments of connection, intimacy, creative imagination and self-discovery.

In the UK alone, publishing had a market value of £6.6 billion in 2021, employs over 36,000 people and supports another 70,000 jobs across academic, education and consumer sectors<sup>51</sup>. On a global level, the UK is the largest exporter of books over the past three years with a trade value of over \$5 billion, followed by the USA in second place<sup>52</sup>. This in part is due to the prominence of English as a connecting language and today the publishing industry serves more readers, researchers, teachers and learners in more ways than at any time in history. The sheer volume of new publications is growing exponentially,

with publishers tasked with finding new and innovative ways to help different audiences find and enjoy what they want.

English has been instrumental in the industry's global growth and influence. From parents reading to their children to teachers delivering classes, from academic lecturers and researchers to book clubs, publishers are active partners in reading, learning and escapism in all its forms across the world. Without a doubt, English is central to much of this success, playing a key role in our personal experiences, civic society, and the wider global economy.

### Soft power and levelling up

Culture, values, and education are the fundamental currencies of 'soft power', but all rely on the quality and attractiveness of content. And whilst opinions and policies will change over time, the UK's competitive edge across culture and education in particular, ensure the country continues to exert influence across the world. The role of publishing – and English within it – cannot be underestimated as global

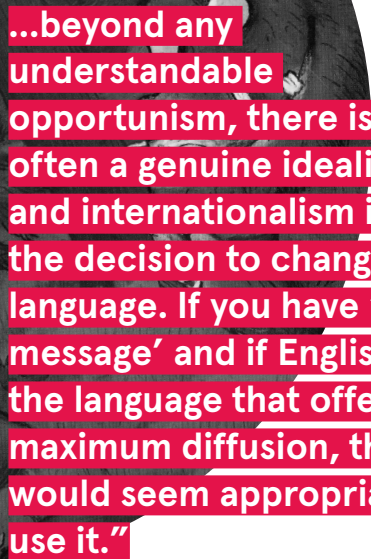


# £6.6bn

was the market value of UK publishing in 2021, supporting 70,000 jobs







**“...beyond any understandable opportunism, there is often a genuine idealism and internationalism in the decision to change language. If you have ‘a message’ and if English is the language that offers maximum diffusion, then it would seem appropriate to use it.”**

—  
Tim Parks,  
Author and academic

When compared to original scripts and screenplays, book adaptations attract on average...

**44%**

more in UK film box office revenue and nearly...

**3x**

more ticket sales for theatre productions

values, commerce and culture have shaped laws, politics and perspectives around the world for centuries.

At its core, publishing is a ‘foundational industry’ that underpins the success of many others across every sector and industry imaginable. Its indirect economic impact, particularly in terms of scientific discovery and the growth of the knowledge economy, is often more powerful argument than the industry’s direct impact<sup>53</sup> and its reliance on the English language in securing this power is clear.

Alongside academic and business successes, culture plays an equally essential role in maintaining the UK’s soft power. Renowned writers such as Austen through to the present day, ensure that English language storytelling transcends borders, embeds in cultures and takes on a life of its own, ensuring publishing as an industry continues to inspire and influence.

Fiction produced in English is also a compelling example of the economic and social influence that publishing has beyond its direct impact.

Celebrated across the world, consumer or ‘trade’ books play a significant role in underpinning other creative industries such as film, television and screenplays. So, even if someone has not read an English novel, they have most likely been exposed to English language stories through other means, whether that’s Neil Gaiman’s *Sandman* TV series or Julia Donaldson’s film, *The Gruffalo*. Research shows that when compared to original scripts and screenplays, book adaptations attract on average 44% more in UK film box office revenue (and 53% more globally), 58% higher viewership of high-end TV productions and nearly three times more ticket sales for theatre productions<sup>54</sup>. This highlights the potential for work created in the English language to travel across genres and geographies easily.

In his 2016 New York Review piece titled, ‘Why Write In English?’ author and academic Tim Parks explains why writers often choose English as their vehicle to share thinking. He writes “...beyond any understandable opportunism, there is often a genuine idealism and internationalism in the decision to change language. If you have ‘a message’ and if English is the language that offers maximum diffusion, then it would seem appropriate to use it.”

### The role of English education publishing

Learning English continues to be a significant draw for thousands of foreign students each year,

contributing some £28.8 billion annually to local and regional economies in the UK alone<sup>55</sup>, as well as continuing to cement the English-led curriculum, education and materials among the world's most sought-after. Outside of the UK, education is still seen to be the country's core attraction and strength, with two in five young people (39%) in the G20 saying it is an attractive place in which to study, second only to the USA<sup>56</sup>. We also found this to be true in our research, with 77% of respondents from the United Arab Emirates and 76% of those from India saying they read educational books in English to learn more about a subject matter<sup>57</sup>. Respondents also felt strongly that knowing English is useful for people in their country for education, with those in the United Arab Emirates and India agreeing most strongly (82% and 81% respectively), closely followed by those in Germany (71%) and China (67%).

Many of the students who travel to English-speaking countries to partake in further and higher education taught in English, continue to contribute

directly to those countries through tuition fees and by living there. In the process, they form personal and professional relationships and in turn enrich the community and country they live in. In the year ending June 2022, there were 486,868 sponsored study visas granted for higher education in the UK – the highest annual number on record<sup>58</sup>.

In the United States, data from August 2022 shows that international students contributed \$28.4 billion to the economy, with every three international students leading to the creation of one U.S. job opportunity<sup>59</sup>. In 2019, international education delivered over \$37.4 billion to the Australian economy<sup>60</sup> and the subsequent fiscal gap left when borders closed for a significant period due to the pandemic, has caused huge financial pressures for the country.

### English, publishing and the internet

The role of English, since the advent of the internet in the 1990s and followed by rapid digital modernisation within the industry, has undoubtedly had a seismic impact on publishing. With

# £28.8bn

is contributed each year to local and regional economies in the UK, from foreign students learning English

# 486,868

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60% of the world's internet content being written in English, people all across the world now have access to a wealth of books, content and materials in a huge range of formats, enabling people to come together to discuss, debate and celebrate their professions, interests and passions<sup>61</sup>. This was particularly apparent during the Covid-19 pandemic, where escapist fiction sales shot up while education and academic publishers made their resources freely available to help combat the virus and its effects.

Technological changes have also reinforced and enhanced the role of publishers in enabling platforms, with the advent of new models such as self-publishing, custom printing and open-collaborative publishing, ensuring more content in more languages than ever can be created, discovered and shared.

But this expansion can also be deeply problematic; the English language enables free speech to be threatened; extreme views or harmful content to be shared more easily; essays and research to be faked at scale. This poses huge challenges for the publishing industry around access, copyright and quality control.

### Ensuring diversity

The appeal and accessibility of the English language through publishing poses challenging questions about what needs to be done to ensure its dominance delivers benefits, rather than harms, for all people.

As a conduit between cultures, perspectives and societies, publishers need to be even more committed to representing all different authors, readers and learners, whether or not their work originates in the English language, bringing new perspectives and challenging the status quo. Catherine Clarke of the Association of Authors' Agents comments that "The role of English is to continue the spread of ideas and stories into other cultures, but it's a two-way process and it's only healthy when it works that way. Historically, English is a powerful tool for sharing, but it needs to be used responsibly."

This needs to be supported by an authentic focus on diversity and inclusion inside the industry. To encourage all types of people to join the sector and to rise to the top, ensuring that publishing becomes more globally aware and attracts new talent to appeal to a broader audience around the world. Clarke continues that, "English is a powerful connector, demonstrated by the fact that large-scale industry events – such as the London Book Fair that welcome



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—  
Catherine Clarke,  
President, Association of Authors' Agents



**Through the hard work of everyone in the publishing industry, we have made great progress in moving the dial when it comes diversity, inclusion and equality.”**

—  
Dan Conway,  
CEO, Publishers Association

thousands of people, are held entirely in English. This undoubtedly gives publishers and authors who work in that language an advantage, in terms of communication. But that needs not to be exploited – it should be used to share best practice, encourage debate, and help other cultures spread their ideas and stories too.”

In January 2023, the Publishers Association launched an industry-wide Inclusivity Action Plan to support greater equality, diversity and inclusion within the workforce. Although the 2022 survey showed an increase in the diversity of those working in publishing, there are still areas which need to be improved on, in particular those from lower socio-economic groups<sup>62</sup>.

Dan Conway of the Publishers Association said: “Through the hard work of everyone in the publishing industry, we have made great progress in moving the dial when it comes diversity, inclusion and equality. Since the launch of our first plan in 2017, we have seen significant inroads across many characteristics, but there is no time for complacency<sup>63</sup>.”

### **A blended approach**

Publishers across the world are a diverse ecosystem of skilled people who produce, package and deliver an unprecedented and growing array of high-quality content for global audiences. It is an industry of risk-takers and trailblazers, always searching for new thinkers and storytellers, so the latest thinking can be shared with the world, whatever language that is in.

A continued commitment towards a more representative industry, an understanding of where English is best placed to benefit people, but equally where other languages need to be given a platform, are key to enabling English to be the force for good through academic, education and consumer publishing, today and beyond. This is where the industry must continue to bridge the gap between ideas and understanding.





# Conclusion

As global society continues to become more polarised<sup>64</sup>, the English language, in all its forms, faces a series of long-term challenges to ensure that it is a driver for good across the world.

The preservation of the world's many languages has to be prioritised alongside English. While there are considerable benefits that come with the use of a common language, which is often English, it should not mean that other languages suffer and disappear. The next generation needs to be encouraged, and their linguistic journeys facilitated, to make sure non-English speakers have opportunities to progress using their own language. While those in English-speaking countries must not lose the opportunity to investigate and learn other languages from around the world.

Equally, English should be an enabler rather than a barrier to the sharing of information across academia and science. Technology, such as developments in AI, should be used to bridge communication gaps where required, further encouraging research in a range of languages. This extended access to insight – and an

ongoing commitment to ensuring that knowledge and opinion is available to all – will help create better societal outcomes for everyone on the planet.

The role of English in furthering creativity and an appreciation of other cultures has also never been more important. As the world communicates more than ever through the lens of the arts, English can help bring new ideas and greater understanding, ultimately helping local cultures and traditions to thrive alongside globalisation.

Finally, English should open doors across the world for everyone; not just those with privileged access to education and resources. Currently, it can be life-changing in good and bad ways; for the fortunate ones it offers opportunities beyond geographical and established class systems, for the less lucky, it can be a barrier to making progress. Our role – as connectors, storytellers, and publishers – it to ask the right questions of the English language and continue to work with partners around the world in the spirit of shared communication and endeavour.



**Our role – as connectors, storytellers, and publishers – it to ask the right questions of the English language and continue to work with partners around the world in the spirit of shared communication and endeavour.”**

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# Research Methodology

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The online consumer survey was sent to 5,211 adults across United Arab Emirates, India, Germany and China, representative of age, gender and region.

The research comprised 13 single or multiple-choice questions and was intended to help us understand audience attitudes towards the English language in those respective countries and what it brings to individuals, as well as society itself.

Research was conducted by YouGov in all regions in December 2022.



# The English Exchange

A report by the



**Publishers  
Association**