# ENGLISH LANGUAGE AS THE LINGUA FRANCA OF DIGITAL LIBRARIES: A STUDY

**Dr. Rajshri Gajghate**
Professor, Dept. of English,
Smt. Binzani Mahila Mahavidyalya,
Mahal, Nagpur.
Mob.No. : 8087170135
Email : rajshri2871@gmail.com

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*"Libraries will get you through times of no money better than money will get you through times of no libraries".*

- Anne Herbert

***Abstract :***

*In the digital age, the English language has emerged as the powerful medium of communication in academic, technological and global information systems. Digital libraries provide access to e-books, journals, databases and multimedia resources largely in English. This makes English proficiency a key factor in determining how effectively users can search, access and utilize digital library resources. This paper examines the dual role of English in digital libraries, as an enabler as well as barrier. English serves as a global lingua franca that enables access to scholarly content and supports global communication. On the contrary use of English language creates challenges for non-speaking English users. While English remains indispensable for global knowledge dissemination, digital libraries must balance it with linguistic inclusivity to ensure wider access.*

**Keywords** : library, books, learning, English, knowledge, language

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**Introduction :**

Age-old traditional libraries are becoming digital libraries due to rapid development of Information Communication Technology (ICT) and its impact. Leaving behind the book knowledge, digital library provides access to digital information collection. It includes structured/ unstructured text/ numeric/ graphical data, scanned images and graphics, audio and videos. Modern reader is more independent now who can access to these electronic formats from their PCs and search databases according to the requirements.

**Objective of writing the research paper :**

In the digital age, libraries have become dynamic knowledge and information centers and not mere storehouses of books. The main mission of libraries is to democratize access to

knowledge. Now the time has come when modern library and English language are closely connected. English has become the dominant language of digital knowledge. The main purpose of writing this paper is to study the various ways of acquiring knowledge through digital library in connection with English language and how English has been promoted by the digital libraries.

**Research Methodology :**

The descriptive method has been used for this paper. The primary sources, the critical views have been used for the purpose. The online websites, journals and books are referred for secondary data collection.

**Review of Literature :**

Many researchers have highlighted that most academic and professional content in the digital libraries are in English language**. Dr. S. R**. **Ranganathan** in *Five Laws of Library Science* said "Books are for use". in the 21st century, "books" are mostly English e-books and journals.

**UNESCO** report stated that 75% of scientific papers are published in English. Libraries must provide access to them for research.

**NDL** Study, IIT Kharagpur found that 68% of users accessed NDL mainly for English technical and research material. [1931][2005][2018]

**Singh and Sharma**, Study of Delhi Public Library found 40% of users came specifically to improve English for jobs and exams. [1982][2019].

**Dorris Lessing** called public libraries "the most democratic thing" because they give equal English access to all classes.

**Bourdieu** called English "cultural capital". libraries can democratize this capital by giving free access.

**Concept of Digital Libraries :**

Digital libraries play an important role in collecting, organizing and disseminating the information. With the advancement in technology the old, traditional physical spaces in the library has transformed into dynamic and virtual spaces where vast amount of digital content can be accessed, stored and managed. A digital library is essentially a collection of electronic documents and various resources that are stored in digital formats and made accessible through computers, networks or the internet. Unlike traditional libraries which are limited by their physical, digital library can store an almost infinite amount of content in various formats including text, images, audio, video and databases. This ability to hold diverse formats makes them valuable not only for academic or research purposes but also for the general public as

more inclusive access to knowledge.

One of the important advantages of digital library is the accessibility. People from across the world can access the library's resources without any constraint of place or time. This democratization of knowledge is very important in today's globalized world where the knowledge significantly influence the sectors like education, economic opportunities and societal development.

Digital libraries also offer such functions that allow users to search specific information quickly and efficiently. This capability is powered by metadata, indexing and other advanced information retrieval technologies which help in organizing content in more user-friendly manner. This feature significantly reduces the time spent searching for relevant resources compared to traditional libraries.

Another vital aspect of digital libraries is the quality of preservation. Physical books and documents are subject to damage over period of time, but digital content can be preserved perfectly. This is very important regarding such rare content which cannot be preserved physically. In this way digital libraries help in the preservation of human knowledge and cultural heritage.

With the evolving of digital libraries there is a transformative shift in management and dissemination of information. Their ability to offer broad access to diverse resources, combined with advanced functions and preservation potential makes them an invaluable tool in the digital age. As technology continues to evolve, digital libraries are likely to become even more integral to the way we access the information.

**Role of Digital Libraries :**

- Provide E-resources and databases. They provide access to e-books, e-journals and online databases, such as JSTOR, DELNET, NDL India.
- Digital libraries projects are also available such as National Digital Library of India and internet archives, which make rare books and manuscripts available globally.
- Digital literacy. The libraries provide digital skills to people, such as how to find , evaluate and use information online.
- Digitize old manuscript, local history and regional language books. They also archive websites, government documents and oral histories.
- Digital libraries have become learning hubs. They provide 3D printers and podcast rooms.
- These libraries also provide students space for online classes, exams and competitive exam preparations.
- Digital libraries lend e-readers, tablet and give access to various apps like Libby, kindle.
- They also curate content. They help in finding credible content.

- In research work these digital libraries help to check plagiarism, citation management, data visualization.
- They act as repositories to store college/ university research.
- Digital libraries have become partners with MOOC like SWAYAM, NPTEL to support online education.

**English as a language of modern Library :**

In the modern era, knowledge has become digital and language has become global. English has become *lingua franca* of almost all the areas such science, technology, education, business and technology. At the same time, digital libraries have emerged as the most powerful media for storing, organizing and providing excess to information.

A digital library is not just a collection of e-books. It is a place for students, researchers and job seekers to seek information from newspapers, journals, audio books and language software and from online classes.

The National Digital Library of India, British Council Digital Library and JSTOR are examples where most resources are available in English.

India is the country of many regional languages and digital libraries play a vital role. They act as a bridge between local learners who may not have an access to costly English books or coaching and global knowledge. Through free access, self-paced learning, and digital tools, digital libraries are democratizing English education.

English plays the crucial role in the structure and navigation of digital libraries, instruction, metadata, indexing and cataloging systems often use English as a default language. In many educational settings, in higher education, English has become synonymous with academic success. Proficiency with English often correlates with the student's ability to effectively use digital libraries, as a vast majority of academic databases, including JSTOR, which require English- language publications. This reliance on English places a significant emphasis on language skills as part of information literacy training. This necessitates a degree of English proficiency among users to fully engage with digital library tools and resources.

**Role of English in modern libraries in India :**

1. **Access to Global Knowledge Resources** : Most of the digital knowledge in the world is in English. 70-80% of research papers, e-journals and e-books are in English.

   - For example, **National Digital Library of India [NDL]**. it has 5 crore resources mostly in English from IITs, IIMs and foreign universities. It helps Indian students access MIT, Harvard lectures for free.
   - **INFLIBLINET /DELNET** provide English research journals to colleges.

2. **English Language Learning Centres :** Modern library run programs to improve

English skills, especially for students from regional medium backgrounds.

- **British Council Library, Delhi/Mumbai/Kolkata** is famous for spoken English classes, IELTS preparation, English book clubs, and British Council's "Learn English" app access.
- **American Centre Libraries** provide TOEFL, GRE English prep and conversation clubs.

3. **Support for Competitive Exams and Jobs** : All major competitive exams in India; UPSC, SSC, Banking, CAT have English sections. Jobs in IT, BPO and MNCs require English communication. As libraries provide English newspapers, English vocabulary books.

4. **Digital literacy in English :** Most computer software, coding languages and internet instructions are in English. Libraries teach how to use Google, email and job portals in English. Coding and AI courses are taught in English. They also teach how to use Government e-serves portals in English.

**Case studies about role of English in digital library :**

- Ahmed and Ahsan (2013) emphasize the English is the prominent language in scientific communication, with over 80% research publication is available in English.
- A study by Morrison (2010) highlights the challenges faced by non-native English speakers in navigating digital libraries.
- Liao, Finn and Lu (2007) conducted research on information-seeking behaviour among non-native English speakers in digital library environments. Their findings indicate that while users can often manage basic searches, they struggle with more advanced research techniques due to language barriers.

The role of English in digital library instruction and information literacy is significant, especially in globalized academic landscape where English dominates as the language of scholarship and digital communication. As digital libraries continue to expand their reach, there is growing need to integrate English language training into library instruction program to help users navigate these resources effectively. Addressing the linguistic challenges faced by non-native English speakers is crucial for promoting equitable access to information and enhancing overall information literacy in digital environments.

English has cemented its place as the global language, particularly in the field of digital libraries. As the internet and digital repositories have become more prevalent, English has emerged as the dominant language in which information is cataloged, accessed and disseminated. It is significant for academic research, cultural preservation and global communication.

However, the dominance of English in digital libraries also present challenges. It may marginalize non-English speaking communities, limiting their access to knowledge and

preventing the inclusion of diverse cultural perspectives. In India where English is not widely spoken or understood, users may struggle to access critical resources. Moreover, the focus on English language materials in digital libraries can lead to the under-representation of important works in other languages, creating a cultural and intellectual imbalance.

Efforts are now made to tackle this issue. Some digital libraries now offer multilingual interfaces or include materials in multiple language to ensure inclusivity and accessibility. However, English remains the predominant language especially in global repositories like Google Books, JSTOR etc.

English plays a pivotal role in digital libraries and development of information literacy, particularly in the context of academic and research environments. English is the global language of academic publishing and communication, it is central to navigating digital libraries, conducting searches and accessing scholarly content. However, for non-native English speakers, language barriers can limit their ability to fully engage with digital libraries and achieve information literacy. Enhancing the role of English in digital literacy instruction, while addressing the needs of non-native speakers, will lead to greater global information literacy and more equitable access to knowledge.

English is critical for effective dissemination of knowledge through digital libraries. It can either enable or hinder access depending on user language background. Libraries must balance English resources with multilingual support to achieve equity.

Digital libraries and English language are interdependent in the modern information society. English provides the content, and digital libraries provide the access. Together they remove the barrier of cost, distance and background. Digital libraries have changed the picture of English learning from a classroom-based activity to a self- learning process. Students in villages can now read Oxford Journals, practice IELTS speaking, and watch NPTEL lectures in English without a penny.

However, the challenges remain regarding lack of digital literacy, poor internet in rural areas etc. Therefore, future digital libraries must focus on bilingual support, training programs and simple user's interfaces.

**Conclusion :**

English language dominates scholarly communication of every field in digital libraries. But to be truly global, they must adopt inclusive practices for non-English speakers. This is just like investing in translation, local language content, and digital literacy program. This is especially crucial in India where the users are multilingual. Digital libraries can provide regional language support with the support of NDL and State digital libraries.

The relationship between digital libraries and the English language is not limited to books. It is about opportunity, employment and empowerment in a globalized world.

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