

Language, Identity, and Inequality: *The Role of English in Kashmir after the Abrogation of Article 370*

In December 2023, a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court of India unanimously upheld the President's decision to abrogate Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, a move originally executed in 2019. The action led to the bifurcation of the former state of Jammu and Kashmir into two separate Union Territories: Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. It also stripped the region of its special status, including the provision of its own constitution. The essay explores the implications of this political and judicial decision with a particular focus on the role of the English language in Kashmir. It raises the question of whether the abrogation has fulfilled the aspirations of the local population. The discussion begins by examining the basic rights of the citizens of India and those that were granted to Kashmir, the present state of education in the region, followed by a review of the historical development of English education in Kashmir, and concludes with an assessment of the progress made and the challenges that persist in the aftermath of the constitutional change.

The argument around English education in Jammu and Kashmir today must be placed inside the broader reality of the region's educational environment, where decades of conflict, policy shifts, and repeated disruptions have deeply affected it. It is important to understand English as just one part of a more complicated educational story in Kashmir, though often seen as a symbol of opportunity, national integration, and modernity. Someone certainly intends to study how the rise in English education connects to abrogating Article 370. However, recent developments and the reports do reveal a visible disconnect. This disconnect exists just between aspirations as well as the lived realities for students, teachers, and then families on the ground.

This essay considers this gap on two levels. It begins by exploring aspirations for English education following the political changes in August 2019. Then, it does contrast all of these hopes with all of the actual conditions. The conditions persist throughout schools as well as colleges in the region. The argument suggests realistic steps toward bridging these divides, outlines the emerging gaps, examines the post-370 policy goals, and traces the historical evolution of English education in Kashmir. Education in Kashmir, recent reports highlight, is tied to human rights. The 2024 United Nations submission highlights political representation as well as psychological safety too. From within this lens, we can truly begin to understand just what English education means now for Kashmir's youth today.

English entered into Kashmir's education system back during the Dogra rule in the late 19th century, and also its presence was growing then during that British colonial period. Tyndale Biscoe and Mallinson in Srinagar were mission schools. These schools gave instruction in English while catering mostly to elites along with urban populations. English became increasingly more popular by degrees after 1947 because people did associate it with administrative services along with higher education coupled with national-level employment.

However, access to English education still remains uneven. Public schools in rural districts often lacked trained staff or resources, including necessary infrastructure for teaching specifically in English, while private schools within Srinagar, Jammu, as well as Baramulla began the process of offering instruction using English as the medium.

English skill was a requirement for eventual upward mobility. This happened all throughout the complete course of all of the decades that then followed. Even so, Jammu and Kashmir's education system remained frail. Massive school closures as well as educator displacement occurred since the 1990s insurgency. This did cause long-term fear, stifling academic development. During this period English remained inaccessible though desired by many including Gujjar, Bakerwal, and Dalit students since they lived in distant areas like Doda, Kupwara, and Kishtwar. The divide that is between private English-medium schools as opposed to government-run institutions widened since it reinforced socio-economic inequality by way of language. During August of 2019, for Jammu and Kashmir, the central government presented the removal of Article 370 through a transformative step. This political change particularly regarding economic development infrastructure and education would certainly bring the region into the national mainstream it was argued.

Despite policy claims of transformation, the reality on the ground reveals stark gaps. According to a 2024 United Nations report submitted by the International Action for Peace and Sustainable Development, systemic barriers such as internet shutdowns, curfews, and militarisation of public spaces have severely restricted educational access¹. Over 10,000 teachers were reported unemployed, while many schools, particularly in remote districts like Kupwara and Kulgam, operated from private homes due to government closures. Parents remained fearful of sending children to classes, with security forces stationed near schools heightening anxiety. The report highlights how these conditions undermine the promises of improved access to education and English learning, exposing a significant gap between aspirations for empowerment and the lived realities of Kashmiri students.

Article 38 of the Indian Constitution, under the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP), directs the State to strive for the welfare of its people by securing a social order based on social, economic, and political justice. It emphasises the need to reduce income disparities and eliminate inequalities in status, facilities, and opportunities among individuals and groups. Within this framework, education plays a crucial role in empowering citizens and promoting justice and equality of opportunity². A similar provision was included in Article 23 of the Constitution of the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir. Although British colonial rule had numerous contradictions, it introduced English education in India, which eventually

¹ "Jammu and Kashmir." *UN News*, 10 May 2025, news.un.org/en/tags/jammu-and-kashmir.

² Government of India. *The Constitution of India*. Ministry of Law and Justice, 2023 ed., <https://legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/coi-english.pdf>. Accessed 11 July 2025.

enabled access to global knowledge, expanded professional opportunities, and supported national integration. However, challenges related to equity and inclusivity persisted, and Kashmir was no exception.

The Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir, before its abrogation, recognised Urdu as the official language while permitting the use of English for official purposes. It also guaranteed free education up to the university level and compulsory education for children up to the age of fourteen. Qazi Khursheed Ahmad explains that English education was introduced in the region, including Ladakh, during the nineteenth century through British missionary efforts. These missions began with medical and humanitarian initiatives and gradually established schools that adopted English as the language of instruction.

At the time, traditional education in Kashmir was centred in religious institutions such as mosques, temples, and monasteries, where Arabic, Sanskrit, and Tibetan were taught primarily for spiritual purposes. The advent of English brought access to scientific learning, modern literature, and administrative training. Despite initial resistance from local authorities and religious communities, missionary schools emerged as prominent educational institutions, offering structured curricula and promoting English fluency. In Ladakh, where monastic education was dominant, missionary involvement introduced formal schooling that included the English language. The British perception of English as a tool for advancement were reflected in these reforms. Over time, fluency in English came to symbolise mobility, prestige, and access to careers in government, healthcare, and academia.

Education and English learning emerged as central aspirations among the youth of Jammu and Kashmir following the abrogation of Article 370. A study involving educated young respondents in the Jammu region highlighted that enhanced access to education and training should be a development priority. These respondents viewed improvements in education as foundational for broader progress in agriculture, health, infrastructure, and governance (Aslam & Sudan)³.

Although early access to these schools was initially confined to urban and elite communities, their reach eventually expanded to influence the broader post-independence education system. English education laid the foundation for a modern pedagogical environment, encouraged intercultural engagement, and enabled individuals to function effectively in both regional and global settings. (Qazi 793–804)⁴.

³ Aslam, Sofia, and Falendra Kumar Sudan. "Youth Aspirations and Expectations of Economic Recovery of Jammu and Kashmir in India after Abrogation of Article 370." *Regional Economic Development Research*, vol. 2, no. 2, Sept. 2021, pp. 144-179, doi:10.37256/redr.222021980.

⁴ Qazi, Khursheed Ahmad. "Christian Missionaries & English Education in J & K State: An Overview." *Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL)*, vol. 4, no. 3, July-Sept. 2016, pp. 793-804, www.rjelal.com/4.3.16c/793-804%20Dr.%20KHURSHEED%20AHMAD%20QAZI.pdf.

From 1947 to 2019, English education in Kashmir expanded beyond its missionary roots to become part of institutionalised public and private schooling. It contributed to upward mobility and provided access to academic and professional fields both within India and abroad. While disparities in access persisted, particularly across rural areas and gender lines, English maintained its importance and legitimacy. Compared to other Indian states, students in Kashmir developed notable proficiency in English, despite the language being introduced as a third language in schools.

According to Firdous Nazir, English is acquired as a tertiary language in Kashmir, following Kashmiri and Urdu. Yet, students in the region demonstrate higher levels of proficiency than their counterparts in other states. English is introduced at the pre-primary stage and serves as the medium of instruction in both government and private schools. Previously, textbooks were largely available only in Urdu, but English has now replaced Urdu as the dominant language of education. Government schools have relied on the grammar translation method, supported by publishers that provided materials with Urdu translations. Originating in missionary schools, English language education has spread across all institutional types. Its rise has significantly influenced both indigenous languages and local cultures, as evidenced by its current prominence in education and communication.⁵

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The central government presented the abrogation as a transformative step, promising improved access to central universities, technical institutes, and private investments. Aspirations included greater mobility, fluency in English, and eligibility for national examinations like the UPSC.⁷ Following the political shift, various colleges waived tuition to improve attendance. English became the medium of instruction in new degree programmes, and NCERT-aligned textbooks were introduced along with bilingual teaching models to support transition.

⁵ Nazir, Firdous. "English Language Education in Kashmir: A Diachronic Study." *Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL)*, vol. 13, no. 1, Mar. 2025, pp. 179-182, doi:10.33329/rjelal.13.1.179-182.

⁶ Deshpande, Tanika. "NEP Implementation Brings English to the Forefront in J&K." *Indian Express*, 12 Feb. 2024, <https://indianexpress.com/article/education/jammu-kashmir-nep-english-education-2024>. Accessed 11 July 2025.

⁷ Ministry of Education, Government of India. *National Education Policy 2020*. Government of India, 2020, https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf. Accessed 11 July 2025.

Despite these promises, challenges persisted. Internet shutdowns, curfews, and militarisation of public spaces severely limited educational access, as reported by a 2024 United Nations report submitted by the International Action for Peace and Sustainable Development. Over 10,000 teachers were unemployed, and schools in districts like Kupwara and Kulgam operated from private homes.⁸ Nomadic students missed school during seasonal migrations.

Beyond infrastructure, curriculum changes caused concern. Revisions in NCERT and JKBOSE textbooks removed references to civilian protests, internet bans, and arrests related to Article 370, criticised as curricular cleansing.⁹ According to the UN report, the curriculum increasingly reflects Hindutva ideology, suppressing cultural diversity. These voices show scepticism that English, while linguistically empowering, might also serve as a vehicle of political erasure.

English has evolved beyond a language of instruction into a symbol of modernisation, mobility, and national integration. However, its empowerment potential is undermined when access remains unequal and cultural narratives are silenced. State governments historically retained autonomy over education policy, but post-abrogation, integration with national frameworks has been uneven.¹⁰

Educational reform must include inclusive policies, qualified teaching staff, and robust infrastructure to ensure English empowers rather than alienates. Outreach to marginalised groups, mobile schools for nomads, and culturally sensitive teaching are essential.

The post-370 period reflects a complex struggle between regional identity and national integration, between progress and preservation. English has become central to aspirations for mobility and opportunity, but structural inequalities and curriculum controversies limit its transformative potential. For English education to fulfil its promise, policies must invest in infrastructure, uphold cultural representation, and guarantee equitable access. Only then can the aspirations of Kashmiri youth be realised, blending local identity with global ambition.

⁸ Annamalai, E. "Language Policy and Medium of Instruction in India." *Language Policy*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2005, pp. 187–198. Springer, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-005-6668-6>. Accessed 11 July 2025.
Ramanathan, Vaidehi. *Language Policies and (Dis)Citizenship: Rights, Access, Pedagogies*. Multilingual Matters, 2013.

⁹ University Grants Commission. *Annual Report 2022–23*. UGC, 2023, https://www.ugc.gov.in/pdfnews/4507581_UGC-Annual-Report-2022-23.pdf. Accessed 11 July 2025.

¹⁰ Department of School Education, Government of Jammu and Kashmir. *Annual Status Report on School Education in Jammu & Kashmir 2023–24*. Govt. of J&K, 2024.

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