

Knowledge of English Language: A Key to Success!

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'Those who speak English fluently earn up to 34% more than those who don't speak the language, a recent report has found, confirming the link between an education in English and the scope of employment opportunities'

Source: Times of India dated 06/01/14

The above news published in The Times of India proves how knowledge of English has become a must for getting an access to the better job opportunities. The number of so called convent (many times the meaning of convent is not clear to the people) or English medium schools and spoken English schools that are mushrooming at the nook and corner of our country gives a testimony of escalating popularity of this language. But despite several efforts, students especially from the small towns and remote areas find it very difficult to cope with the changing scenario. Several students find it more feasible to express their viewpoints in writing rather than speaking. So the aim of my research paper is to study various factors related to the knowledge of this language and its impact on the person's social, psychological, financial and personal success or failure. My paper also focuses on the difference between the academic English and general English due to which the students find them in dilemma.

Key Words: access, opportunities, express, success, failure, dilemma

Objective of the Study:

- 1) To differentiate between Talent Vs knowledge of English
- 2) To study general English and the academic English
- 3) How English affects the psychology and personality of an individual?
- 4) To find out the role of school and college in shaping a person's personality
- 5) How helpful is our education system in this regard?

Hypothesis:

My teaching profession gives me a great exposure to meet and interact with a wide variety of multidimensional learners. So my research work is based upon the instances I often come across while teaching and an interview that I conducted on a small group of 100 students, along with the help of other studies conducted on the same issues.

Introduction:

The news of a 3rd year student of IIT Mumbai who'd committed suicide because he was not proficient at this language raises several questions at our extensive education system. As we all know that getting admission in the IIT Mumbai is a no child's play but the boy's talent seems to go in vain in the absence of knowledge of English. There are many more such ill-fated stories that stun and flummox us. In the present perspective, communication skills matter immensely for the success of an individual: be it the profession of a doctor, engineer, teacher, entrepreneur or any other profession, without expressing oneself effectively carving a niche in his field is not possible. Here it is very important to comprehend the difference between the general and the academic English. **According to Wikipedia**, 'English for academic purposes (EAP) entails training students, usually in a higher education setting, to use language appropriately for study. It is one of the most common forms of English for specific purposes (ESP).' In language training, teachers help the learners with their vocabulary, grammar along with the four skills reading, writing, listening speaking including pronunciation. Whereas **British Council** defines General English courses are designed to improve every aspect of the pupils' which contributes to their overall progress and moves them closer to achieving their language goals. But several complexities arise when the language training provided to the learners in schools lacks practicality. Since they are not expertise at general English, they find it very difficult to cope with the academic English as well.

To collect my students' point of view about the significance of English in employability, I interviewed 25 selected students of BTech of different branches and 25 students of MBA and 50 from Architecture department, and asked them several questions regarding knowledge of English and how comfortable they feel while using this language as a medium of communication. In the end, I got very surprising result for 80% students had excellent knowledge of this language because they had done their 10+2 from the renowned schools but still 20% of those students had fear of public speaking or were suffering from stage phobia. However the remaining 10% students' writing skill was not so impressive whereas the remaining 5% could understand the language but was not able to speak fluently and rest of the percentage despite their bright academic records, could neither understand nor could speak English properly. But all the students unanimously agreed that for a better and promising career, it's vital for them to have the knowledge of English. Fortunately they all were in their first year and as a teacher I've enough time to work to improve their communication skills that include all the four skills i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Role of Schools in Student's Life:

As we all know that school education plays a pivotal role in laying the strong foundation of our personal and professional life but if we make a comparative study between education system of the pre primary and primary levels of the government schools and the reputed public schools, we'll find a drastic difference between them. Especially teaching of English has become a worldwide phenomenon and people even from the remote areas also, aspire their wards to get English education so that they don't lag behind to find jobs in this competitive era. So for the students who even don't speak Hindi properly at home should not be expected to acquire proficiency without proper and correct teaching pedagogy. The state governments of our country have also made it a point to introduce English as a subject from class 1st but the major problem with these government schools is the medium of teaching English is either Hindi or their mother tongue spoken at the state level which is helpful up to certain extent. Moreover translating a sentence from Hindi to English cannot make them fluent and acquiring correct pronunciation will also be a mammoth task. Another worthwhile practice is the teachers especially the language trainers appointed in such schools should be trained with the right kind of teaching methodology that not only enables them to teach this foreign language effectively but even the students from different background also will feel at ease while learning this language.

Now it's believed that for an impressive personality, knowledge of spoken and written English has become compulsory and this becomes more evident to see how the people of different ages flocking to such personality development centers that proclaim to make a novice at this language expert in just 80 hours which probably never happens. Internet is also jam-packed with such content and several companies from different countries find not only India but the entire South Asian continent a promising market for running their business. But a very few learners cope with such courses and remaining are left isolated like aliens. Hence I'd like to focus on how our schools can help and motivate the children to learn this language very smoothly.

A child spends almost 6 to 6:30 hrs in his school and with the apt teaching methodology, it's not very difficult to make him understand and speak English fluently. Though in the beginning a child's mother tongue can be used as a medium of learning and explaining a foreign language and gradually he starts connecting himself with it without using his native language. Now a day's course is designed in such a way which is not only specific but also is equipped with precision, accuracy and according to the need of the learners. Now schools emphasize more and more on learning and over all personality building for which pupils are given exposure to linguistic atmosphere.

The NCF 2005 lays stress on the use of child's mother tongue as a medium of learning at the primary level. It has stated that it should be the effort of the Indian educational system to teach English to every Indian child and to ensure that she/he gains a sufficiently high level of proficiency in it and not suffer discrimination for lack of it. The teaching and learning of English today is characterized by the diversity of schools and linguistic environments, and by systematically pervasive classroom procedures of teaching a textbook for success in an examination. The emphasis should be on teaching language use in meaningful and often multilingual contexts. For the majority of our learners, what is needed is a basic or fundamental competence in the target language.

Increasing number of public schools proves that people prefer private schools to the government schools so government schools should be paid more heed to by making them lased with all the modern technologies and better trained teachers so that people who are unable to bear the expenses of privates

schools, can get the assurance of getting a learning atmosphere in their nearby government schools. As **Mr. R C M Reddy, the Chairman FICCI, New Delhi focused on the employability skills along with the 5 basic Life Skills at school level.** In the present scenario existence without the education of life skills is very intricate. According to **Wikipedia, "They are a set of human skills acquired via teaching or direct experience that are used to handle problems and questions commonly encountered in daily human life."** Like life skills, employability skills also enhance the competence in the learners so employability skills must be preceded by life skill based education since this training will help them in their personal and professional lives. So along with introducing good English Literature, the students should be trained at grammar basics such as comprehension, essay writing, application writing, resume writing and passage writing etc. Not only this should they be encouraged to enrich their vocabulary which will make them fluent.

David Graddol who has authored a book '**English Next India**' writes how status of English is changing entirely in India as knowledge of this language is significant for higher studies and employment. The increasing number of technical, management and professional colleges and escalating opportunities for the young learners in different fields has let them know that impressive communicative skills can usher them the way to their goals.

A State of the Nation Poll carried out by the Indian TV Channel CNN, in August 2009 found that 87% feel that knowledge of English is important to succeed in English Edge: 'Earn 34% more than others'

Those who speak English fluently earn up to 34% more than those who don't speak the language, a recent report has found, confirming the link between an education in English and the scope of employment opportunities.

"Men who speak English fluently earn wages about 34% higher and men who speak a little English earn wages about 13% higher than those who don't speak any English," the report said. According to the report, only 20% of the Indian population can speak in English, and only 4% would be considered fluent. Where one lives is a key determinant in accessing English medium education, it found.

Source: Times of India dated 06/01/14

Many of the universities now provide co-curricular courses in English communication and in soft skills to ensure that their graduates are employable. Moreover this is a hard thing to do but it is the aim of almost all the universities and professional colleges to get most of their students crack their campus interviews. Since good campus selection makes or mars their reputation. Even the larger employers are also working minutely with such universities and colleges to find their new recruits. But still we've a large number of colleges that do not provide such courses or facilities, or do not have the qualified staffs which compels students to run from pillar to post (finishing schools) to bridge the gap

Larger Indian businesses are already partnering with government departments to help improve the English and employability skills of both students in colleges and those in Class 10–12. In this context, the contribution of British Council is remarkable. **The Delhi branch of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), for example, worked with the Municipal Corporation of Delhi to implement a pilot programme in Delhi schools.** Many large companies have similar relationships with local colleges, helping ensure that students acquire communication skills before they graduate.

Much of the 'talent pool' crisis in India at present relates to the number of graduates who apparently lack 'employability skills'. NASSCOM, the IT-BPO industry organisation, complains about the 'low employability of existing talent with only 10–15% employable graduates in business services and 26% employable engineers in technology services'. (Google.com)

Employability skills:

This world has converted into a global village as jobs are available everywhere be it the US, New Zealand, Australia or South Asia; people easily migrate from their native places to the other lands just to find better opportunities and promising careers. Hence knowledge of a foreign language like English has become very significant. Even students and employees know the changing scenario very well and they are leaving no stone unturned to adapt themselves to it. Since we're discussing employability skills, it's very important to understand its absolute meaning.

Employability Skills can be defined as the transferable skills needed by an individual to make them 'employable'. Along with good technical understanding and subject knowledge, employers often outline a set of skills that they want from an employee. These skills are what they believe will equip the employee to carry out their role to the best of their ability.

..It is clear that employability is not a top priority for many teaching staff in Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies (LLAS). After all, lecturers in Higher Education have many other priorities in their academic life.

Author: John Canning

The above quote from John Canning's research proves that professors who are expertise in Language and linguistics can do lot more to make the students capable at spoken and written English but they have very less time in a class of 50-60 students and lots of other responsibilities related to their jobs makes it difficult for them spend sufficient time with the learners.

However most of the professional colleges have established language labs for creating a better understanding in the students but what I feel that it is not that successful. As such labs focus more on the pronunciation and the native accent (American or British) of the learners that become monotonous after a certain span of time.

What do the employers want?

The Book 'Future of English in India', and Research by World Bank and The Florida and Connecticut Universities reveals that 13% to 34% increase in wages results with better communication in English. In each Metro like Mumbai, Bangalore, Delhi etc. almost 500 centres train Nurses, Drivers, Peons, Courier Agents and House Maids in English for Higher Wages.

Lack of the English Language knowledge is a bottleneck in both Admission & Placement in Technical & Professional Colleges all over the Country. Those, who have good communication skills, are readily

selected in Campus Interview at high pay packages than those who lack communication skills. Undergraduates & Graduates with good English easily get jobs at BPO's and Banks.

Source: 'ET, July-Aug. 2013 article 'No Full Stop in India'

The foremost quality that an employer wants from his prospective employees to have excellent knowledge in communication and interpersonal skills. They should know how to handle the phone calls without any hesitation or problem as Consultancy Company's work is conducted through telephonic conversation. The other expectations of an employer are one's dealing with his peer groups, problem solving quality, being confident but polite, having self motivation, making presentations, taking initiation, being a creative and analytical thinker so on and so forth. But on the top of these important qualities, fluency in English is a vital thing without which one cannot convince his prospective employer.

Conclusion and Suggestions:

The recently published book 'The Half Girlfriend' authored by the well known Indian novelist and columnist Mr Chetan Bhagat also portrays a young man from Bihar grappling with his poor communication skills. This young man *Madhav* represents the psychology of the youth of our country that has passion and courage to dream but still feels frustrated and alien because of the lack of communication skills. So I would conclude my research paper with the following suggestions:

- 1) The major concern with the government schools is lack of learning environment and absence of students from the school. So first of all, government should deal with these two problems so that better results can be drawn. Technical and more practical teaching pedagogy should be introduced to train the students at this language. Even the scientific research also proves that it is much easier for the children from 5-14 years learn the second language with little efforts.

While quantitatively India is inching closer to universal education, the quality of its education has been questioned particularly in its government run school system. Some of the reasons for the poor quality include absence of around 25 percent of teachers' every day. States of India have introduced tests and education assessment system to identify and improve such schools.

- 2) After schools, it is the duty of universities and colleges to ensure that their students are competent in English as mere more and more enrollments won't solve the purpose.
- 3) English course which is designed for the college students should not only be for passing exams or scoring grades, it should be premeditated to enable the students utilize their knowledge in their day to day life.
- 4) Proficiency at English language can be developed if curriculum design, assessment practices and course delivery is integrated through a variety of other methods such class room teaching along with language labs.
- 5) Since language lab may play an effective role in inculcating the nitty-gritty of this language in the learners but there should be a regular check to enhance the effectiveness of such methods.
- 6) More and more emphasis should be given on mock interviews and practice of English from the very beginning of the classes.
- 7) One more hindrance that I come across as an English teacher is that students sometimes take communication classes for granted which create problems not only for the teacher but for the

students as well since gradually they lose vigour in their language classes. So there's a need to make the students' presence in communication classes compulsory. Recently I got an opportunity to attend a meeting of English professors that was conducted by Uttar Pradesh Technical University at Lucknow (UP). The chief guest at the meeting was a professor of Cambridge University and the main agenda of the meeting was to discuss the problems of our students related to general and academic English. Several training programs such as student exchange programmes and training programmes for English professors were proposed at the end of the meeting which is a welcoming step.

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