

An Analytical Study of Acquiring English Communication Skills for Employability being Affected by Societal Factors and Own Personality Traits of Learners of Technical Graduates in India

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Abstract

English Communication Skills have proved to be an integral skill in employment skills. Students graduating in a wide range of disciplines face a number of difficulties in learning the English language especially when they focus on their areas of specializations. It has become a major issue. With reference to the page no 29 of India Skills Report 2023, the employment ratio of Bachelor of Engineering/Bachelor of Technology and Master of Business Administration was 57.44% and 60.1% respectively and the same was 55.15% and 55.09% in the respective fields in 2022 when Communication Skills were kept at the top (page no 9, India Skills Report 2022) in the list of key skills of Digital Age. English proved to be a game changer in terms of enhancing employability scope (Page 20, 21, 45, 47, 53, 54, 55; India Skills Report 2022) and a number of cities and states performed better with more focus on developing English Communication skills of university students. This study is primarily based on looking into social and affective factors affecting English language acquisition skills. It is absolutely relevant to the course developer, policy makers as well as academicians to understand what factors affect the language acquisition capacities of learners and necessary modifications can be initiated accordingly. This is an analytical study and it ascertains the significance of language affective factors from a rapid evidence assessment report submitted by EEF at University of oxford, Department of Education in July 2020 and a similar research project was conducted by Takayo Nitta at the University of Western Cape in South Africa on non-natives learning English and facing similar challenges in social, affective and cognitive areas. This is a qualitative study and secondary data is collected from the research project conducted at the University of Western Cape since learners were from a non-native country only where existing language learning culture is found to be utmost similar and problems are also identical.

Keywords: Affective factors, Digital literacy, Language acquisition, Language shock, Target language.

1. Introduction

English communication skills have gained more significance in the contemporary era. In fact, working on the communication skills is significantly important since all other skills depend on the same either directly or indirectly. This study has mainly collected information from “India Skills Report 2022 and 2023” which was published by Wheebox and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) is an institutional partner with Wheebox. English communication skills are utmost significant but overall personality development matters along with the development of a number of soft skills and domain specific skills. The employability proportion was mere 47.20% and 52.80% among men and women (page 32 of India Skills Report, 2023) respectively in 2023. The skills needed by 2030 in the market would be Data Literacy, Digital Literacy, Critical Thinking, Leadership Skills and Reasoning (page 33 of India Skills Report, 2023) and English is the most important being the foundation of all skills and globalized world. Social and affective factors affect the English Learning Skills both implicitly and explicitly especially in developing countries where English is not predominantly spoken which is the main purpose of conducting this research. A rapid evidence assessment report submitted by the Education Endowment on Foreign language learning and its impact on wider academic outcomes at University of Oxford, Department of Education in July 2020 also revealed a number of factors affecting English language acquisition skills. A research project titled “Affective, Cognitive and Social Factors affecting Japanese Learners of English in Cape town” was conducted at the University of Western Cape in South Africa discussed valuable outcomes on affective and social factors of non-native speakers learning English. With the reference to the seventh chapter (page no 136) of Economic Survey 2018-19 Volume I, the demographic dividend will reach its peak point around in 2041 which makes it essential to look into the base of all skills i.e. English Communication Skills which will be essentially important for developing all other soft skills and specialization skills in the globalized world. This study will immensely be beneficial. The study outcomes will enormously be beneficial to policy makers, curriculum developers, teachers, parents and academicians to work on the improvement of English communication skills to make students get ready for employment and make a huge impact on the society as a whole.

The whole research work is based on the psychological and social factors affecting the technical students in Indian society. As per India Skills Report 2023, the overall employability percentage is 50.3 and it was 57.44 percent in case of Bachelor of Engineering/Bachelor of Technology. As per the National Employability Test analysis conducted by Wheebox to prepare this report of India Skills Report 2023, it was observed that Mumbai ranked the top in maximum availability of talented youth with access to English and excellent critical thinking skills. With reference to a rapid evidence assessment, a report submitted by Education Endowment Fund at Department of Education at Oxford University, revealed that approaches to teaching a foreign language, influence of learning a foreign language on other aspects of attainment and the ways in which a non-native language can influence the overall academic attainment and language learning on being introduced as a medium of instruction and it was submitted in July 2020. This research led to the understanding of key findings in the literature with trustworthiness and it will result in making strategic decisions or future research programs and policy formulation. Gardner’s socio-educational model (1979, 1990, 1971 2001, 2004), Krashen’s Monitor Theory (Krashen 1987; Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991; McGroarty 1988; Richards and Rodgers 2001) and Schumann’s

acculturation model (Schumann 1978; Brown 198; McGroarty 1988; Ellis 1994) preferred to have a thorough study of cognitive, affective and social factors affecting learners considerably in their overall academic attainment along with learning English as a foreign language and second language.

The Gardner's socio-educational model preferred the study of a few variables of social psychology such as development of attitudes, relationships among the members and different ethnic, social or political groupings, characteristics of individuals which influence the development of interpersonal relationship (Gardner & Clement 1990:495) and feelings of learners about various groups. Learning a foreign language does not seem to be an easy task. It is not just about vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation but it is a matter of acquiring symbolic elements of different ethnolinguistic communities (Gardner 1979; 193). According to Ellis (1994), the ideas shared by Gardner and Schumann are quite similar as they referred the study of the extent to which a language learner exposes him or her to a Target Language (TL) group, secondly their willingness to adapt a new culture for learning a new language which is not a native language. The discussion on language development, according to Ellis (1994: 238) found a gap of an explanation of second language development. To bridge this gap, I analyzed Krashen's five hypotheses of second language acquisition. According to Gardner (1979: 197, 1990: 509), the cultural beliefs of a learner are linked to learning variables, for instance an individual's cultural expectation influences the second language acquisition process substantially. Gardner (1990:496-497) reviewed the research on the variables influencing their ways of learning English and those variables were divided into three clusters: (a) cognitive characteristics, (b) attitude and motivation, (c) personality attributes. Ellis (1994:473-474) argues that individual differences correlate with each other. The teaching strategies mainly have a great impact on the learner. An appropriate strategy of learning may reduce the learner's anxiety and boost self-confidence. Socio-perceptual perspectives, also known as ethnolinguistic vitality, are an integral part of perceptions of social culture and it was a theory given by Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977). Gardner with Lambert in 1972 proposed four components of the socio-education model and it included (a) social milieu (b) individual differences (c) Second language acquisition contexts and (d) learning outcomes (Gardner 1997).

This article is based on the discussion of affective factors such as self-confidence, anxiety, motivation and attitude), cognitive factors (learning strategies) and social factors (cultural factors affecting perceptions of learning). In technical courses, the knowledge gained by individuals is found to be so absorbing that the time does not permit such candidates to devote some time for language learning and become more centric on language acquisition with a narrow down approach. In one of the researches conducted by Tani Fukuchi & Sakamoto (2005: 337-346), it was revealed that people with a negative attitude towards learning English always face struggle and a positive self-image and high levels of self-esteem can be the keys to success. In general context, learning anything primarily depends on an individual's attitude and ground of self-perceptions. Learning a foreign language has become more common because of the global employment opportunities to be harnessed by people and rising scenes of cultural diversity emerged as motivators with a positive mindset.

2. Methodology

English communication skills are significant in any profession but a person appearing for an interview must be at an intermediate level to explain the areas of specializations with an ease in English (Page no 8 of the CEFR: Principles of good practice 2011:08, published by University of Cambridge). This study shall make a great contribution in terms of sharing the factors which mainly prove to be so influencing that despite being highly experienced trainers, some learners are unable to learn. Of course, teaching strategies of experts may not be fruitful for all the learners from different cultural backgrounds. Gardner (1997) discussed the history of learning strategies research and cites the work of Chamot (1990) as one of the significant learning strategies of taxonomy. Both Chamot and O' Malley in O'Malley and Chamot 1987 discussed three classifications of learning strategies: metacognitive, cognitive and social/affective strategies. Metacognitive strategies are referred to such strategies in which learners start analyzing, monitoring, evaluating, organizing and planning their learning strategies. In cognitive strategies, learning activities involve repetition, translation and noting with an aim of manipulating and transforming the materials of learning. In social strategies, learners look for the presentation of their oral skills by interacting more with native speakers.

The whole study in this article is based on the India Skills Report 2023 which signifies a wide range of factors affecting the overall employment ratio of 47.20% and 52.80 among males and females respectively. In this research article, I have collected enough information from India Skills Report 2023, a rapid evidence assessment report of July 2020 submitted at University of Oxford by Education Endowment Foundation to analyze the factors affecting individuals with better overall academic attainment with the support of English proficiency skills and a document published by the University of Cambridge under a title "Using the CEFR: Principles of Good Practice October 2011. Information for this research is obtained from secondary sources only to come out with the remarkable outcomes benefiting the society as a whole. The key areas looked into are both implicit and explicit instructional approaches, significance of teacher's teaching methods and overall experience, introducing English which is a non-native language as a medium of instruction, use of media platforms along strategy instruction and requisite use of technology as per the need of the candidates.

It is desirable to review the foreign language teaching methodologies and determine the effectiveness of such methods. The individuals with different backgrounds need to give more customized English courses. More commonly, the motivation which is there in the mind of the learners matters a lot. Gardner and Lambert (1959, Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:173) discussed a distinction between "Instrumental motivation" and "Integrative motivation". Instrumental motivation makes an individual learn English for a specific objective such as a job opportunity or academic requirement (Archibald 1996:526) and integrative motivation is all about the willingness to identify with another ethnolinguistic group (Ellis 1994:173). According to Gardner (2004:3), integrative motivation contributes more to second language achievement than instrumental motivation. The reason is that instrumental motivation motivates up to an intermediate level. People who are integrative have more language learning willingness and prefer to interact with native speakers and it is a kind of inclination towards ethnolinguistic perspective while learning English as a foreign language. According to Gardner (1997),

assessing the attitude of learners is an easy task by seeing their attitude towards the teacher and their attitude towards the course. Krishnan and Hoon (2003:233), also shared a third factor that is the attitude of learners towards other learners in the class. Finding a tough competition in the class and seeing other learners working hard also inspires few individuals to become more serious towards learning English.

3. Results

The results mainly include the extensive efforts made not only by the trainers but all the learners who come out with integrative motivation towards learning English. It is not so easy for faculties to match the level of all candidates in the class since backgrounds may not be verified in all cases. Certain bridge courses can be designed to meet the levels of such learners. First and foremost, things can be done here by working on group activities and maintaining an interest of candidates in learning English for long. Learners with a vision become self-driven and particularly learners enthused with integrative motivation become more successful in learning. As a whole, the attitude of learners towards their teachers, materials shared and other learners in the class influence their strategies as a cognitive factor. Following Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) ensures the candidates to be in uniformity in terms of measuring the quality of their English as a language. Language learning is not just learning grammar and pronunciation but also learning natural and effective vocabulary to identify with native speakers. Target Language (TL) culture is utmost. Consistent efforts can only ensure better quality in English because it reflects integrative motivation.

The outcomes of the study reveal the significance of implementation of such parameters which are determined on the basis of social and cognitive areas. The anxiety levels are self-controlled by the learners. Availability of natural and effective vocabulary enhances the level of self-confidence and information is delivered with a remarkable fluency. People from different cultures and backgrounds have invariably different barriers but most commonly, anxiety, self-confidence, past experiences, learner's response, materials shared, trainer's practical knowledge and many other factors affect a lot. Oral skills, particularly in this study, are more significant since English is considered to be an employability skill and most of the candidates who are very well prepared with technical information find it terribly difficult to perform due to language barriers. A complete switch from traditional teaching in the classroom to a live and hot discussion room can be a building block towards learning and improving the overall English communication skills of technical persons. More workshops of trainers with their positive mindset to learn will bring their interest of learning and improving every moment. Learning a language is a bed of roses but the same level in English for a long term seems to be quite challenging. Other areas which can be explored by the researcher in future are the other factors which are not covered in this research. A balanced approach of learning English as a language should be working on listening, speaking, writing and reading altogether. Conducting lectures on grammar skills cannot enthuse confidence in an individual to speak on an identified and unknown topic for a long time.

The areas of discussion are language acquisition skills of learners which are affected by a number of psychological and social factors. It is challenging for policy makers to determine the exact framework of policies of teaching English as a foreign and a second language but considering the cognitive and social factors can help to come out with desired outcomes. Conducting lectures of English language is an easy task but keeping all the participants engaged in each stage of discussion is not so easy for all academicians. Learners have to participate with no occupied mindset with past experiences. It should be from both sides. Sometimes, teachers may have false perceptions in the same domain. In technical domains, a balanced approach towards learning technical areas, leadership skills, analytical skills, professional skills, leadership skills can result in positive developments.

4. Conclusions

English has become a global language and especially in the era of globalization, it is given more significance in stages of preparing candidates for better employment opportunities. English is not only an employment skill but it affects the overall academic attainment of non-native speakers where it has been introduced as a medium of instruction. Advancement in technology has made it simpler by awarding an unending platform to improve English as a language significantly. In order to reach an intermediate level in English, Target Language culture is needed in the classroom. The teaching strategies once reviewed must be equipped with the advancement in terms of vocabulary for better oral skills as far as English is concerned to be learnt for employment purposes. But again, integrative motivation will make the candidate to maintain a certain level in English.

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