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REVIEW ARTICLE

ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMPETENCY: NEED & CHALLENGE FOR ENHANCING EMPLOYABILITY IN INDIAN GRADUATES

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ABSTRACT

In the age of global communication English is more universally and widely circulated among the masses and is accepted as universal language which can connect people in every corner of the world. Article 343 declares Hindi as an official language, in a country of 125 crore population more than 50 % speak Hindi and 17% of the world's population resides in India whose 25% of the language constitutes the world language, so overcome the language barrier of language diversity English is used as a common language of communication. The English language competency in Indians varies because of the indifferent educational background and the socio-economic circumstances which obstructs the use and interest in the language. Though English is taught as a mandatory subject from primary level to the secondary and even in higher education still, it is a challenge of developing proficiency and interest which is the primary need of a time. According to a scholar, English will inevitably remain an important language because of our past association and because of its present importance in the world. The paper aims to justify the need and highlight the challenges faced by students in developing English language competency in India, despite recognized exigent for the development of economical and intellectual growth for self and country for accessing opportunities in an increasing global world.

KEYWORDS

Language learning, Universal language, Proficiency, Education, Communication

1. INTRODUCTION

English language has been adopted as a common medium of communication in India despite having 22 official languages and 1652 mother tongue spoken on the basis of regional distinctness. In 1835 Lord Macaulay, through his famous 'Minute on Education', inflicted English on Indians without an indication that its roots will be deeply ingrained and would become a primary language in a country where Sanskrit, the language of God is a pride of every Indian. The British left long time back, but their contribution in Indian education system cannot be completely overlooked. It was heartfelt need of a common language which could connect the people across globe and can be acclaimed as Universal Language. English because of historic reasons became universal and circulated widely, as Secondary Official Language.

Having recognized the importance of English as an instrument of knowledge dissemination as well as commerce as well as maintenance of international relations, a provision was left to extend the use of English language in the Article 343 on Official language of the Union, for all the official purposes of the Union even after a period of fifteen years, with a proviso that the President may, during the said period, by order authorize the use of the Hindi language in addition to the English language and of the Devanagari form of numerals for any of the official purposes of the Union with the view that millions of people could not be educated in a completely foreign language English which was a magical and mystical word for the people who fail to communicate in foreign language [1]. A scholar perceived, in 1700s, English became the official language of administration and many educated Indians learnt the language as it helped them to go up

the career ladders. The influence of English grew unabated even after the British left India in 1947. Today, English language plays a vital role in higher education, media and administration of private and government organizations. English has become a powerful agent for change in India [2].

It is recognized that learning and education should be conducted in a regional language as an individual can work effectively and fulfill their aspiration in their native language i.e. their mother tongue. India houses about 1.1 billion people with a population growth rate of 1.6% a year. As per Census 2001 statistics, India is administratively organized into 35 entities, each as big as many independent nations. There are 28 States and seven Union Territories, broadly set up on the linguistic principle. Currently, India has 51 Cities, 384 Urban Agglomerates and 5,161 Towns (2,843 in 1951) in India, with about 26.1% of its total population. However, most Indians still live in rural areas and in small towns with different linguistic practices, and with scanty knowledge of English. Indian languages are linguistically categorized into primary branches:

1. Indo Aryan Language family (Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi)
2. Dravidian Language (Telgu, Tamil, Kennada, Malayalam)
3. Austroasiatic Language (Laddakhi, Several NE languages)
4. Tibeto Burman Language (Khasi, Munda)
5. Andamanese language (Onge-Jurawa) [3].

Each family is diversifying from each other and transition is difficult so, to connect generations for 400 years learnt English which is contracted as universal language as is spoken by 1000 million people of the world either as native language, as secondary language or as a foreign language.

After the world has dwindled and become global village it becomes prerequisite to develop competency in English language, which holds the feature of connecting people to bridge the gap for those who endeavor to settle in other countries and supports international commerce, of science, and of technological advancement. In the present scenario competency in English language and employability equate to each other. The demanding job market looks for the competent candidates who possess communicative skills along with qualification, aptitude and personal attitude while appearing for job interviews. Proficiency in English language upgrade the student's eventuality for employment retention and career enhancement and perceived as a tool to produce positive business outcome around the world. While educational opportunity and literacy have long been key elements in programmes committed to human development (e.g. Street 2001, UNESCO 2005), the increased status of English within a global economy of languages has meant that English language education has also begun to be promoted as an important factor in international development programmes [4].

2. ENGLISH COMPETENCY- NEED FOR SOCIO ECONOMIC GROWTH

In recent works exploring the relationship between development and language education, development is defined as the process of reducing poverty while also expanding people's choices, with its ultimate aim being to increase participants' control over their own development. The precise nature of this conviction appears to be that English language education will provide skills which will allow both individuals and institutions to engage actively with the type of contemporary society which is emerging in this current era of globalization [5]. Globalization is the reason of providing unmatched opportunities to the students, focusing more on developing skills along with the subject knowledge. Education is a process of empowerment and enlightenment, focusing on the growth of body, mind and soul of a learner, instead of making them acquainted merely with the theoretical concepts. It is important to upgrade the teaching pedagogy to meet the requirement of the job market. English has left indelible print on the Indian psyche to felicitate the understanding of the global market.

With the advent of industrialization, the perception of society has changed, people are demarked in a class as elite, middle and weak class on the basis of their educational background. It is presumed that people who opt English medium private schools are elite or middle class and economically weaker section of the society opt for local regional schools. The similar situation is well portrayed in a Hindi-language comedy-drama film directed by Saket Chaudhary Hindi Medium. The film tells the story of a couple who aspire to give their daughter the best education. The plot deals with social themes including education, parenting, class, social mobility, and language.

The 8th Schedule recognized Hindi and English and other 21 languages as the official language. According to 2001 Census, 2.3 lakh Indians took English as their primary language, more than 86 million listed it as their second language and another 39 million as their third language. The data indicates English speakers in India at the time to more than 125 million and Hindi was the most spoken language 551.4 million [6].

English Proficiency is a need of an hour to meet the societal and professional requirements. India has initiated a prodigious task of developing the economy, for which it is essential that the youth of the nation must possess the knowledge of scientific branches as without scientists, engineers and technicians progress is impossible. It is important that the young generation should be capable of contributing in making India a developed nation, in which English language play a major role, being the store house of scientific knowledge. The entire spectrum of science and technology can be better understood through this language. India is expanding rapidly and to keep pace with the adventurous period of globalization necessity in English Language is indelible.

Now, at every nook and cranny, people connect the objective of learning English with Self Esteem & Employability and to make the essentiality of English language accepted by the people movies are directed that highlight the similar issues. A movie directed by Gauri Shinde English Vinglish where, a housewife and caterer Shashi are usually mocked by her family for not knowing English. Her attempt to learn the language helps her rediscover herself and reassert her value as a mother and as a wife. In the present society an individual's status is in line with the fluency in English language.

A Yash Chopra film 'Jab Tak Hai Jaan' projects an ever-increasing need of English language skill for being employable. Katrina Kaif learns to play guitar from Shah Rukh Khan in exchange of English lessons. His career ascends from selling fish in a South London market to becoming a waiter, and finally a bomb disposal expert in the Indian army.

From movie to real life, English language competency is a status symbol and requisite for improving employment prospects. It is the language of better education, more exciting opportunities and competitive advantage across the world. A researcher found that individuals who were more likely to have training in English earned significantly higher wages and gained better occupational outcomes than those who did not, even when the level of overall education was controlled for [7]. Riding the crest of globalization and technology the global language of communication or the 'lingua franca' of the world, English dominates the world as no language ever has. English competency is essential for any country to benefit from commerce, access the science, technology, and innovation and exert influence in world. English has gained the status of influential factor of socio-economic transformation of an individual and society.

3. ENGLISH PROFICIENCY: MAJOR UNEMPLOYABILITY FACTOR

English can undoubtedly be treated as a tool of development. It is considered as a crucial, vital element in deciding employability quotient of an individual. Employability is related to the attributes of an individual required to enter, stay and progress in the world of work ensuring that 'key competencies', careers advice and an understanding about the job are embedded in the education system to remain employable. In most surveys conducted among the employees, communication skill in English has been identified as one of the primary set of youngsters of India in finding job. Between 2017-2018 country witnessed marginal increases in unemployment signaling stagnation in job creation from 17.7 million last year to 17.8 million in 2017 and 18 million next year. In percentage terms, unemployment rate will remain at 3.4 per cent in 2017-18. It is impossible to imagine a better India with such a big number of unemployed youths in the country [8].

>60% of the 8 L engineers graduating from technical institutions across the country every year remain unemployed (Source: AICTE)

~39% employers state that attracting and finding quality talent is one of the most challenging aspects

~90% of jobs are skill-based, only 2% of the population (in the 15-25 age group) is currently enrolled for vocational training (vs.60-80% worldwide).

The data reveals that an enormous gap exists between required skills and employability parameters in Indian graduates. It is the high time to believe that employability does not stand for getting job, but it is the possession of relevant skills required to be in market demand. Academically and technically efficient graduates fail to qualify job interviews or could not opt foreign universities for further studies merely because of lack of linguistic aptitude in expressing thoughts effectively. The employability studies of India indicate the alarming critical situation of the Indian workforce. The Skill Map-India, 2017 is an endeavor to identify the skills most in-demand in order to work towards a robust employment ecosystem in the country.

TOP Skills in Demand	%
• English Comprehension	18.71%
• Quantitative Ability	2.83%
• Deductive Reasoning	11.66%
• Inductive Reasoning	8.56%
• Agreeableness	6.42%
• Information Gathering and Synthesis	6.31%
• Extraversion	5.28%
• Emotional Stability	4.28%

The analysis unveils that top eight enviable skills and traits include 1 soft skill, 4 cognitive skills and 3 personality traits:

- English Comprehension has topped the chart with 18.71% demand. This signifies that English language communication is a much-needed skill across job sectors

- Fairly high demand is observed for deductive (11.66%) and inductive (8.56%) reasoning
- Out of the personality traits, Agreeableness tops with a demand of 6.42%

The statics of English-speaking ability in Indian graduates is generally accepted in the range of 30% capable of speaking English in a varying degree [9].

1	Lack Of Spoken English Understanding	70.44%
2	Poor Communication Skills	47.18%
3	Lack To Comprehend Basic Level Of Spoken English.	58.27%

In 21st century English language competency is undoubtedly a core and the most demanded employability skill or a "survival skill" for students to sustain in the job world. Narayanan, Vice Chairman of Cognizant Technology Solutions and Chairman of the NASSCOM, in an interview a researcher stated, communication and soft skills and ability to learn on their own and work in teams are very important for those who join the industry. Most students are not industry ready because they lack communication skills.

The latest report has frequently quoted, 47% graduates in India are not employable for any industry role. Their lack of English language and cognitive skills were identified as the major obstacles to their suitability in the job market [10].

English language helps in participating in global trade and supporting the world and economy through establishing call centers in India. "India is expanding rapidly and to communicate with the world. Any meaningful development must aim at the full realization of the human potential and a maximum utilization of the nation's resources for the benefit of all [11]. The contribution of people in making socio economic growth requires communication, dissemination of information, sharing of knowledge, acquisition of skills for which. It is significant to observe that language is a major contributory factor for the socio-economic growth of an individual and nation.

4. ENGLISH COMPETENCY: THREAT FOR EMPLOYABILITY

India has a large, young population in a growing economy: which is a strong combination for ensuring continued development for the country. However, Research conducted by the National Skills Development Corporation indicates skills gaps in functional, vocational and workplace skills, as well as soft skills, with English featuring as a core skill. One of the 5 Indians report having the ability to speak English comprised of 40% who can converse fluently in English and 16% who can converse little in English. 89% of individuals having bachelor's degree can speak English as compared to 56% of those who have completed secondary schooling (10-14) years schooling 11% who have completed 5-9 years and less for those who have less schooling [12]. Despite the fact that proficiency in English language is the only medium of connecting people around the globe or making progress in the life there are significant challenges faced by the learners in developing competency in English language. English is inseparable part of Indian curriculum, still the deteriorating level of English proficiency is seen among Indian students. According to the Census 2001 reported 0.2% Indians English as their mother tongue or as Secondary Language. Developing proficiency in English language is a biggest challenge for the Indian students because they are not ready to abandon their native language, which maintain their identity related to their background that results in that they fail to develop their acceptability and interest while learning and adapting English language. India's asset, that is, its young population - is in danger of becoming a liability. A survey conducted for 303 employers across the country by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) in 2010 found that a majority of graduates lacked adequate soft skills necessary for their employment in the industry [13]. By a conservative estimate, more than one-third of the millions that graduate each year are unemployable and hence, there is an urgent and growing need for social skills, leadership skills, team playing skills and multi- tasking skills in the field of engineering. There is a growing mismatch between the required labor force and the available skill set. Research in ELT methodologies is a new

phenomenon in India as British Council has introduced professional development programs for English teachers working in schools [14]. Though there have been many conferences and workshops on new methodologies of language teaching, the reality of classrooms presents a different picture:

- Lack of training for English professors.
- Students of different levels in the same class.
- Number of students in each class (60 per class).
- Lack of time to complete the prescribed syllabus.
- More importance on written exams (traditional method in India).
- Pressure on teachers to produce high pass percentage in final exams.
- Lack of quality text books.
- Use of workbooks that compile the exercises from previous university question papers.
- Lack of support from college managements.
- English being treated as yet another subject to study.
- Irrelevant syllabus design.
- Lack of relevant methodologies [15].

English cannot be considered native language, despite the fact that appx. 99.8% of Indians are familiar of the language either through the medium of instruction or as the subject taught in school. In secondary schools 65% English is taught either as First/ Secondary Language, which ends at making students least interested towards English, as many courses are offered in Hindi or regional language, and students are given choice of language to appear in examination. It is essential that teachers need to be proficient in teaching and developing interest in English, a secondary language.

It is widely reported that students do not attain knowledge and proficiency in English at school and college level so they fail to express themselves effectively or which they could not grab job opportunities. The prime responsibility lies with the teacher to make student capable and competent to communicate effectively and could retrieve information of the world. English as a second language gives wider exposure to various experiences. Teachers transfer their limited knowledge of English language to the learners with limited understanding. Through conventional methods of teaching emphasis is laid only on practicing grammar rules which focuses on developing writing skill, and pronunciation checked during classroom teaching works on developing reading skill ignoring speaking and listening proficiency which is the utmost demand of the present world. A scholar says, English is no longer some remote but a powerful mystery, lying hidden in the world of textbooks and examination [16].

Certain forms of discourse in higher education are commonly viewed as a sign of preparation and analytical skill, and students may be misjudged as underprepared, linguistically or cognitively limited. The presumption of deficit in human beings who fail to conform to expectations and standards that are commonly associated with a dominant culture is one of the key factors accounting for dropout rates from kindergarten through postsecondary education. It is believed that educators who seek to support learning among diverse groups of students need to be increasingly imaginative about instructional practice [17].

Traditional methods of teaching learning obstruct student's interest towards English language learning. Teachers are not aware enough to practice effective strategy of teaching English to the students of diverse level of understanding. Bilingual method of teaching is adapted in teaching that spoils the fluency and continuity of the language, as more emphasis is laid on the mother tongue with the objective to make the content easier for the learner. The alertness of the learner towards the mother tongue destructs the sounds of the English words which end in poor pronunciation. A researcher observes, the most serious problem in the teaching of English in our country is the appallingly small quantity and atrociously poor quality of English to which our learners are exposed [18]. Grammar Translation Method is opted to make students understand the content in native language. The student's power of thinking and the proficiency in communicative skills get obstructed because the student becomes used to of translating the information and then transferring. In the light of the value attached to the ability to use English in the era of globalization, more importance should be given to speaking, an aspect that has received the least systematic teaching in many language curricula [19].

Direct Culture is used while teaching English language in private schools where on English is used as a medium of communication. Many times, students face difficulty in understanding words and their meanings. But this method encourages the students to create English learning environment and develop interest for the language.

Another problematic issue that may have potential contribution to the poor performance of the students in learning English is that the teachers are not familiar with the latest developments in ELT pedagogy. The English teachers are not aware of the concept of CALL (Computer Aided Language Learning) which could support in making learning of language interesting. It is surprising that since childhood student learn English in the form of subject with the aim to qualify marks still most students cannot speak the language with intelligible accuracy. In schools/ colleges teachers focus on completing the syllabus in a defined time focusing on the result instead of developing skill. Since, childhood from primary to secondary to higher education could not continue giving the potential undergraduate an adequate foundation in the use of English.

Earlier English was treated as a library language but now the perception has completely changed, which dropped many challenges before the learners and educators of diverse culture. It is essential to overcome them and shape them accordingly to make students global market ready.

5. SUGGESTIONS & RECOMMENDATION

A scholar writes, it is highly desirable to know exactly what one is hoping to achieve. If this can be clearly seen, then the best way of getting to work usually becomes evident. We ought, therefore, to consider carefully what we are trying to do when we are teaching English [20]. Educators are puzzled by how pedagogically they could enact their respect for students of diverse educational background. It is essential to bridge the gap between the classroom-based learning and the skills required to compete the competitive world. Need assessment is necessary in teaching English for specific purpose and to understand need and expectations of learners to enhance employability skills.

The close observation suggests that the present students are digital natives. They are highly connected with technology in their routine life with the use of social networking tools and chatting software that connects them with their peers and teachers. Therefore, technology can influence and enhance students learning experience.

It must be obligatory for the teachers to share facts about language proficiency required by the companies from the initial stage so that the students could generate their interest for the language.

The prime duty of the teacher for creating intrinsic motivation in students which could not be avoided who need to have an attitude of teaching. It is important to have well organized programme, good textbooks, better students- teacher ratio which help in motivating students in developing skills required to fulfill the requirement to be employable continues to be a top concern among employers. Educators must boost the confidence of the students in participating in various activities to explore their speaking skills.

Students must be evaluated not on the theory basis but should be assessed on the communicative skills as well which will develop confidence in students for getting job opportunities, which is the utmost essential ingredient to a successful career.

In India there is no policy formulated towards the policy of teaching and learning of English. English is made a compulsory subject at school level but when the students seek admission in university; only pass marks in English are considered sufficient and English takes the place of optional subject.

English curriculum must be upgraded time to time focusing on developing the employability skills. Language should be a compulsory part of English curriculum. Students must be trained to face the industry challenge. Along with the theory classes' students should be made participate in group discussions, debate, speech etc. English must be treated similarly as Science and Mathematics.

ICT acts as a crucial means of educational enhancement. The access of

technology appeals the context development and the teaching pedagogy. Technology holds the allure not only of improving education and economic competitiveness, but also of allowing a nation to leapfrog to modernity [21].

It appears that the actual problem leading to these challenges may have its roots from primary through secondary school levels. One would think that with a good primary level background, the secondary school level. A mastery of written and spoken language is highly desirable, yet its teaching and learning is beset by a myriad of problems at the secondary school level [22].

The mentioned observations will be more likely to result in empowering students and making teaching learning process interesting

6. CONCLUSION

To end the subject discussed here deals with the need of developing proficiency in English language in a multilingual country-India where students are used to of their mother tongue, as it gives them comfort in sharing their information. English is treated as the subject which they have to study as part of curriculum but, they do not get enough opportunities to speak English in or outside the classroom which results that students do not feel the necessity of learning English. The paper reassessed approaches used to teach students, which need to be changed as per the need of the time. To meet the requirements of the global market English should be opted actively as a medium of communication throughout the world. Instead of focusing Reading and Writing in conventional method of teaching students must be trained for effective Listening and Speaking Skills.

English language is not only the vehicle of our heritage it is the greatest jewel in that heritage. If we celebrate the English language, we do not do so with any sense of its superiority to other languages spoken in our community but only to recognize that English is the foundation of our heritage and the one language that we all have in common. It involves us all. It is a heritage so rich and diverse that is not possible to sum it up, but the English language is important for everyone. Salman Rushdie puts it best, What seems to me to be happening is that those people who were once colonized by the language are now rapidly remaking it, domesticating it, becoming more and more relaxed about the way they use it-assisted by the English language's enormous flexibility and size they are craving out large territories for themselves within its frontiers [23].

On the basis of the above observations, it can be safely stated that English has a bright future in India. Generations will come and generations will go, but English will live in India. Before it is too late it is essential to rethink and revise our educational policy as par the requirement of the industries so that more number of students could be employed, and India could be counted as the Developed Skilled Nation.

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