



IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH IN CAREER

Madan Singh

Assistant Professor

Department of English,

Govt College Dhaneta, DisttHamirpur (H.P)-177001 (India)

Abstract: As an international language, English is becoming more important in both native and non-native English-speaking countries. This paper aims to find out the importance of English in workplace by conducting a survey among employees of different companies in India. The results show that the necessity of English language skills in workplace hasn't changed and the participants have reiterated the role of English as the influencing factor during interviews and at workplace. In addition, it has been found that poor English communication skills can hamper the attempts of finding a good job. Moreover, participants emphasized the need for in-house English training for improvement of skills required to perform their duties. Among all the skills, speaking has been considered the most important skill in workplace and majority accepted that they needed to improve their speaking skills and online training has been preferred by most of the participants as the favorite mode.

Keywords : Language, Skills, speaking, Workplace

Introduction

The role of English language in career advancement is undeniable in this era of globalization. Though English language proficiency is not the only criterion for career development, its importance in the corporate world is widely recognized. It is so obvious in countries like India how lack of English language skills affects the career prospects of many young graduates. Though low-paying jobs may not require advanced level of English proficiency, many organizations expect the graduates to possess intermediate level of language proficiency to carry out their responsibilities. Today many research reports emphasize the relationship between English and employability all over the world. Due to the globalised market, employees need to have day-to-day business dealings and communication with executives from different parts of the world. Activities like emails, online chat, business presentations require 'above average' language skills in order to have unambiguous and clear-cut transfer of information to all participants.

Many research studies conducted in various Asian countries have identified that English helps improve job performance and boosts the prospects of promotion. OjanperäMiina (2014) points out that poor English language skills slows down flow of effective communication, causes misinterpretation, create frustration and create barriers among the employees. In the corporate world, English is the most regularly used language and the knowledge of English has become one of the most important employability skills. Proper English does not mean only the ability to make grammatically correct sentences but also the other related skills for effective communication like presentation skills, convincing and negotiation skills and interpersonal skills using English.

Due to the global market, the requirements of English language is likely to increase every year and employees without adequate English language skills may find it very challenging to grow professionally.

Literature Review

According to the EF English Proficiency Index for Companies 2016, companies like Coca Cola HBC Russia, MMK, Swiss Technology group RUAG, Kaspersky Lab offer English language proficiency training courses to improve the proficiency of language skills. Education First offers the training programs through classroom teaching, via Skype and self-study programs. According to this report, after entering into strategic partnerships with EF, the companies witnessed striking improvement in their employees' English proficiency. According to AlinaLukash, Manager of Training and Development, Coca Cola HBC Russia that employees with high potential are identified and the company makes investments for the enhancement of skills including English proficiency. The Swiss technology group RUAG conducts regular English language evaluation for its workforce. Philipp Lutz, People Development Manager at RUAG Corporate Services is of the opinion that enhancing employees' English skills boosts the company's competitive position. The English language training initiatives by companies clearly point out the indispensable role of English for betterment of companies as well as employees.

According to a British Council report (Elizabeth J. Erling ,2014), English language skills are extremely rewarded in the labor market. It also emphasizes that skills in English have a constructive impact on economic growth. Another report by the Economist (2013: 3) presents that English language skills will augment the efficiency of employees in sectors like business process outsourcing and hospitality.

English at Work: global analysis of language skills in the workplace (2016) survey results reveal that English language skills are important for over 95% of employers in many non-native English-speaking countries. There is a plethora of English requirements in countries where English is not a native or official language, with 7% of job tasks requiring native-level English, 49% requiring advanced English, 33% requiring intermediate English and 8% requiring basic English. The results found that in every industry, there is a gap between the English language skills required and the skills that are actually available. Amusingly, there is no difference between large, medium-sized and small employers. Across all company sizes there is at least a 40% skills gap. The findings are founded on data from 5,373 employers in 38 countries that completed the annual QS Global Employer Survey.

TsedalNeeley, Associate Professor of Harvard Business School and the founder of the consulting firm Global Matters, in his article emphasizes that the need to synchronize tasks and work with customers and partners globally has expedited the move toward English as the official language of business no matter where companies are headquartered. In addition, he has listed out principal reasons of why companies have to consider English as a corporate standard; Competitive pressure, globalization of tasks and resources, M&A integration across national boundaries. If English is not given importance, companies may find it difficult to interact with customers, suppliers and business partners. Geographically dispersed employees of a company need to interact with one another to make important decisions and English becomes the natural means of effective communication. One can imagine the consequences caused by poor English skills of employees while making crucial decisions in business.

Towers Watson's 2009/2010 Communication ROI Study Report claims that efficient employee communication is a foremost indicator of financial performance and a motivator of employee engagement. Also, companies that are greatly effective communicators had a massive 47 per cent higher total return to shareholders. This exemplifies the need for effective communication in

English language at workplaces.

According to a study commissioned by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Government of Australia, English Language Proficiency (ELP) was interpreted as the ability to use English for different tasks relevant to different professional and vocational fields. The report informs that some university and vocational education and training providers have introduced subjects where ELP for the workplace is taught and assessed. This is a positive step forward in addressing employer apprehension concerning the communications skills of graduates.ChloeGan, HR Director of Arvato Systems, Malaysia says that employees with a reasonable standard of English can interact and connect with their colleagues more effectively.

In 1978, Johnson & Johnson (J&J), an American manufacturer of a wide range of health care goods, established a Japanese subsidiary, Johnson & Johnson K.K. (J&J K.K.). Because J&J K.K. has robust rapport with foreign enterprises, including its parent company in the USA, the ability to effectively communicate in English is very significant, especially for executives. In 2000, the medical company adopted a promotion policy based on TOEIC test scores. The score standards were set according to each job and category. Newly recruited employees are also given the TOEIC test to improve their English proficiency. The company has witnessed remarkable improvement in the English proficiency of employees which enables the company to be a more competitive player in the global market.

In fact, many organizations, such as Finnish Telecom giant NOKIA and German software company SAP, use English as their official language. Moreover, most governments and prominent educational institutions lay greater importance on English as a preferred means of communication.

This research work aims to deal with the following questions:

1. How important is the proficiency of English language for graduates to find suitable employment?
2. Which English language skills are considered important by the employees to perform their job responsibilities?
3. What kind of English training is required to improve their skills?

Methodology

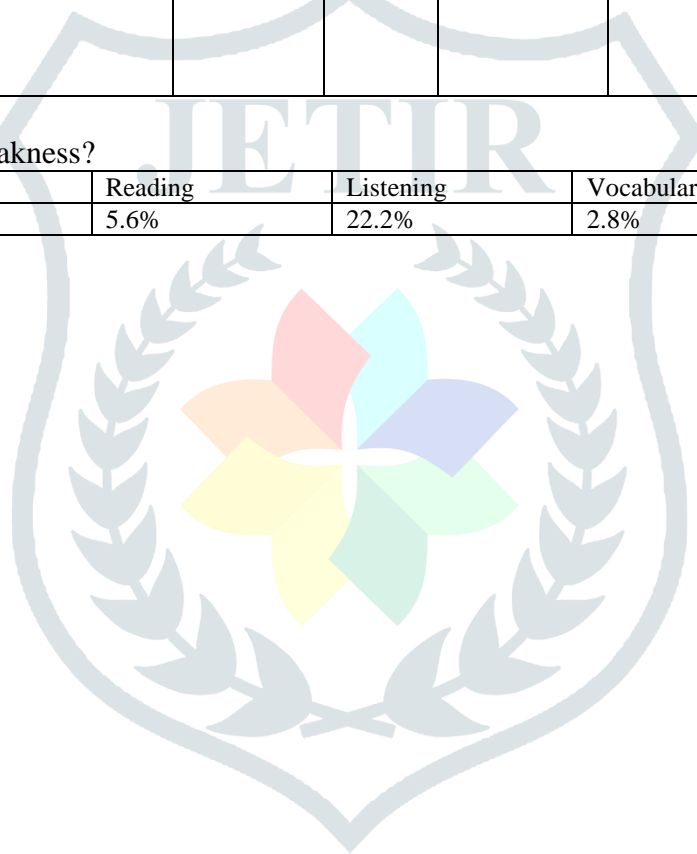
The target participants of this survey were corporate employees in order to understand their perspective of English language proficiency at workplace. The survey was sent to employees with one or two years of experience in any sector irrespective of their roles. Overall, 39 employees responded to the survey. The survey collected information such as gender, age, qualification, designation, industry. Among the participants, 39.5% of them were women and 60.5% of respondents were men. 71% of the respondents were aged between 20 and 30 and 23% of them were aged between 31-40 and 6% of them were between 41-50. As far as the qualifications of the participants are concerned, 40% of them were engineering graduates, 37% of them were arts and science graduates and the rest had other different qualifications. Moreover, majority of the respondents were from IT and ITES (Information Technology Enabled Services). The designations of the candidates were IT administrators, project managers, content writers, quality analysts, system administrators etc.

Survey Question	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Indecisive (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
1. Poor communication skills in English impair the chances of recruitment during interviews.	50	47.4	0	2.6	0
2. I am happy with my English language skills.	13.2	81.6	0	2.5	2.7
3. English language skill influences my career in many aspects.	60.5	39.5	0	0	0
4. English language skills are mandatory for finding suitable job.	50	44.7	3.2	0	2.1

5. I need to improve my language skills in some aspect	50	44.7	3.2	0	2.1
6. Language training programs are to be conducted in companies to improve quality of language skill	36.8	57.9	2.6	2.6	0
7. College education system must focus on English skills required for employability.	26.3	28.9	5.3	7.9	31.6
8. I was trained effectively by my English professors in college.	5.2	31.6	13.2	39.5	10.5
9. Companies must invest money on improving language skills that are necessary in my workplace	28.9	57.9	7.9	2.2	3.1

10. Which is your Area of weakness?

Speaking	Writing	Reading	Listening	Vocabulary
44.4%	25%	5.6%	22.2%	2.8%



44.4% of respondents chose speaking skill as their weakness or area of improvement. 50% participants were willing to spare their time and money for improvement of their language skills. It was agreed by 97.4% of respondents that lack of English language skills harm the opportunities of employment during interview discussions. All respondents have agreed that English skills influence their career in many aspects. 94.7% of participants agreed that English skills are mandatory in finding suitable jobs. 50% of the participants felt that they were not trained well by their professors in college and 55% of respondents wanted English for Employability to be included in college education system.

Written Comments of participants

The participants had the option of writing down their opinions with regards to English language skills. Participants conveyed that English is the language which helps them to communicate 10 wherever they go. Some said that one should be bold and confident enough to speak without worrying about the error and pronunciation. Today's IT industry requires a person to be able to communicate with the customers and stakeholders in English. On most occasions, they are required to give presentations or business reviews for business units outside India that call for better speaking and writing English skills. Undoubtedly, English skills play a mandatory role in today's world. Every participant agreed that English language skill is the backbone of each employee. A VLSI engineer pointed out that it's really important to have all the four (Read, Write, Speak & Listen) English skills to have a healthy work environment and to meet the functionality of the design in the field of Very Large Scale Integration and electronics. The absence of any of these above skills would result in an ambiguous design (design might be a circuit or a chip). Some participants reiterated the importance of English during interviews. Post globalization, communication in English is no more an option but a compulsory one. However strong an employee in his technical skills, he/she has to exhibit the strengths using language proficiency during the interview process. Moreover, one has to comprehend/interpret the interviewer's language/strong vocabulary used during the interview to test the candidate's proficiency in language. One participant said that once you reach a leadership position, the need for effective language skills becomes obligatory. A person may be good at the technical work but to sell the idea or product to the clients, English communication plays a crucial role. Some participants said that in countries like India, English skills are necessary for their survival in the corporate world. Companies prefer employees with better communication skills while sending them abroad for projects. Many respondents view oral communication skill as the most important one as they need to interact in English language every day. Moreover, English language training is not 11 offered in their companies but the participants showed interest in enrolling in such courses that would help them improve English skills.

Discussion

Fluent and proficient English speaking is considered important for many job profiles as most of the corporate communication happens in English in India. This ability to express ideas without ambiguity and the ability to comprehend are necessary for successful interview interaction. 97.4% of the participants have agreed that poor English communication skills harm the possibility of getting recruited during job interviews. Getting stuck due to lack of educated vocabulary could embarrass the candidate who is looking for a better job opportunity during the job interview. Using wrong tenses may confuse the interviewer and affect the communication process. A professional may belong to any field but the ability to use the right word at the right time will enhance the effective and convenient communication. In addition, all the participants of the survey have accepted that English skills affect their career in many aspects. Around half of all employers offer a better starting salary to candidates with good English language skills, which can also lead to faster headway through job grades and higher salary increases. The survey by QS and Cambridge English reports that the vast majority of employers in Ukraine (83%) along with 80% in China and 79% in Iraq offer additional benefits to employees who possess who language skills. David Malon (2012) says that competent communications happen when the maximum amount of a message is delivered and understood successfully at minimum cost. Effective business communications can be as simple as writing an effective email to guarantee that a business task is correctly allocated and performed, or as complex as how to negotiate a billion-dollar business 12 deal with individuals from a different cultural background. 94.7% of participants have agreed that English language training programs must be conducted by the companies and 86.8% of respondents said that the companies must invest

money on improving language skills of the employees. According to a Harvard Review article many multinational companies are directing English as the common corporate language in an effort to ease communication and performance across geographically diverse functions and business endeavors i.e. Airbus, Daimler-Chrysler, Fast Retailing, Nokia, Renault, Samsung, SAP, Technicolor, and Microsoft in Beijing. Many companies offer English training programs to their employees to improve their performance. Hence, employees with good business language skills will be entrusted with higher responsibilities and also can progress faster to a higher position with lucrative income. Top multinational organizations have started noticing the gap between the employees' language proficiency levels and the requirements of the companies. In Saudi Arabia, the government has made its policy known to international companies that they have to employ Saudis and help them improve their English language skills, and even fund such training courses. Researches have proved that if employees feel that their personal and professional growth are valued often have a strong sense of loyalty to their company, and tend to engage more productively with their work. The survey results show that among all the skills 'speaking' is considered the most important skill and around 44% of the respondents have accepted that speaking in English is their weakness. This result proves that oral communication remains the top skill at workplace. Oral communication is the ability to interact with others, to give and exchange information & ideas i.e. meetings, presentations, conversations. Oral communication skills need to be effective in order to solve problems, negotiate solutions or make decisions. 13 The participants prefer online training as the most preferred mode due to their busy schedule at the workplace.

Conclusion

This investigation was undertaken to understand the importance of English language skills required for performing responsibilities at the workplace by the employees working in various sectors. The results of the study have revealed that the employees are convinced that English language skills are required for getting a job and performing their responsibilities effectively. Irrespective of the technical skills an employee possesses, he/she needs to possess language skills in order to communicate to others effectively through emails, group discussions, presentations etc. In addition, the necessity of imparting in-house language training programs is emphasized by the employees preferably through online mode.

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