

A Study on Factors Influencing English Communication Skills of Higher Secondary Schools in India

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Abstract

English is the language of the world. It is widely used as an official, library language, 'lingua franca', medium of instruction etc. The most of the sectors such as media, information technology, research and development, education, public administration, banking and others prefer to use English for their business purpose. Hence, it becomes the business language. One side, there is huge demand for English speaking professionals for multinational companies (Cook, 1991). The English communication skills are badly required at any level. They are paid well. On the other hand, the students face a number of challenges while learning English language. The proposed study aims to identify the key factors that influence the English language learning process and analyzes them to improve the overall success ratio of English communication skills. The study deals with the school education system in India. The study is significant as it will be beneficial to the various stakeholders such as students, teachers, parents and educational institutions to the great extent.

Keywords: Indian English, English Communication, School Education, English in India

I. Introduction

English is the language of the world. It is widely used as an official, library language, 'lingua franca', medium of instruction etc. The most of the sectors such as media, information technology, research and development, education, public administration, banking and others prefer to use English for their business purpose. Hence, it becomes the business language. One side, there is huge demand for English speaking professionals for multinational companies (Cook, 1991). The English communication skills are badly required at any level. They are paid well. On the other hand, the students face a number of challenges while learning English language. The proposed study aims to identify the key factors that influence the English language learning process and analyzes them to improve the overall success ratio of English communication skills. The study deals with the school education system in India. The study is significant as it will be beneficial to the various stakeholders such as students, teachers, parents and educational institutions to the great extent.

II. Background of Study

English is widely used as the medium of instruction (EMI) in several countries of the world. India is one of the prominent countries in this regard. The then British empire reiterated the need of English in India. As a result, they established convent missionary schools through which English was taught. It was continued and grew in India till date. The Indian students learn English as a second or third language. The Kothari Commission and other committees implemented three language formulas: 1- State Language/English, 2-National Language (Hindi) and 3-English/State Language (Nunan, 2015). Due to the increasing demand, English continued to be taught and learnt in school and colleges till date. The rising number of English schools and colleges indicate the fact. It is used in media, literature, law, science, research, technology and governance as well. The present study is significant due to the wider scope of application in this regard.

III. Scope and Significance of Study

The Government of Maharashtra made English compulsory subject from Class I with effective from 1st June, 2000. The government realized the crucial need to initiate the educational reform by providing ample practice and opportunities to learn and practice English language skills so that the students would improve English communication skills leading to increase in the overall percentage of employability of graduates in the long-term. One side, English speakers have good job opportunities and career prospects due to globalization, privatization and localization. However, the students face many challenges while learning and practicing English in their schools and colleges. English perceived as a subject in schools and college rather than a communication skill.

India is a developing economy. It is imperative to provide quality and affordable education for all. However, there are a lot of factors responsible influencing the teaching and learning English language. The

National Education Policy 2020 underlines the ‘outcome-based education.’ The proposed study aims to identify the psychological, social, economic, and technical factors influencing English Language Learning in Indian schools..

IV. Objectives of Study

The present article has the following objectives:

- a. To study the present scenario of teaching and learning of English language in Modern India
- b. To identify the major challenges related to teaching and learning English language of school education system in India
- c. To provide feasible solutions to overcome the existing challenges for betterment of school education system in India

V. Problem Statement

English is learnt and taught as a first or third or foreign language in India. It is used as a medium of instruction to the great extent in India right from school to higher education levels. India is a country with unity in diversity. It is a multi-cultural, multi-religious, multi-linguistic country wherein English language is used with multiple purposes. In addition, varieties of methods, curriculum, boards, and learner styles make it more complex. There are a number of factors influencing the motivation, engagement, exposure while learning English communication skills. The present article seeks an answer to the question: What are the major factors influencing the English Communication Skills of Higher Secondary Schools in Indian context?

VI. Review of Literature

These are the legal implications involved in planning and execution of educational reforms in India. The United Nations’ Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization published a case study in 2021. It underlined the Indian education system as one of the largest systems in the world. Education is the subject covered in the concurrent list as per the provision of Indian Constitution. It means education is the combined responsibility of central and state governments in India. It is observed that they differ in setting priorities, providing facilities, funding, teacher-training, and quality education for all. The growing population has growing demand for schools and colleges in Pune. It becomes challenging to provide the best facilities, quality teachers and maintain quality to cater the diverse needs of society. The defective methods, overcrowded classes, lack of refresher training and innovation make the teaching-learning monotonous process altogether.

Anderson and Lightfoot (2019) in their study demonstrated that English is learnt and practiced as a foreign language in Asia. The Indian students have already learnt their mother-tongue. Naturally, they come across a lot of linguistic barriers in the form of mother-tongue influence (MTI). The basics and rules of grammar learnt in the mother-tongue are used for the target language like English. Consequently, the Indian students tend to make mistakes in terms of sentences construction, spellings, pronunciation etc. The learning process between two languages is overlapped at multiple times which highly influence the teaching and learning, overall grasping, interest of students.

According to T. Vijaya Kumar and Dr. I. S. Malekar (2017), the role of teachers is crucial in developing the interest about particular subject, topic or a concept. His / her creativity, way of interaction, understanding students defines the overall acceptance by students. If teaching method is innovative, interactive and informative, students are likely to pay more attention and follow the teacher in the class. Teacher should play the role of a guide, friend and philosopher to create healthy discussions in the class. However, lack of attention towards students lead to lose interest in learning English.

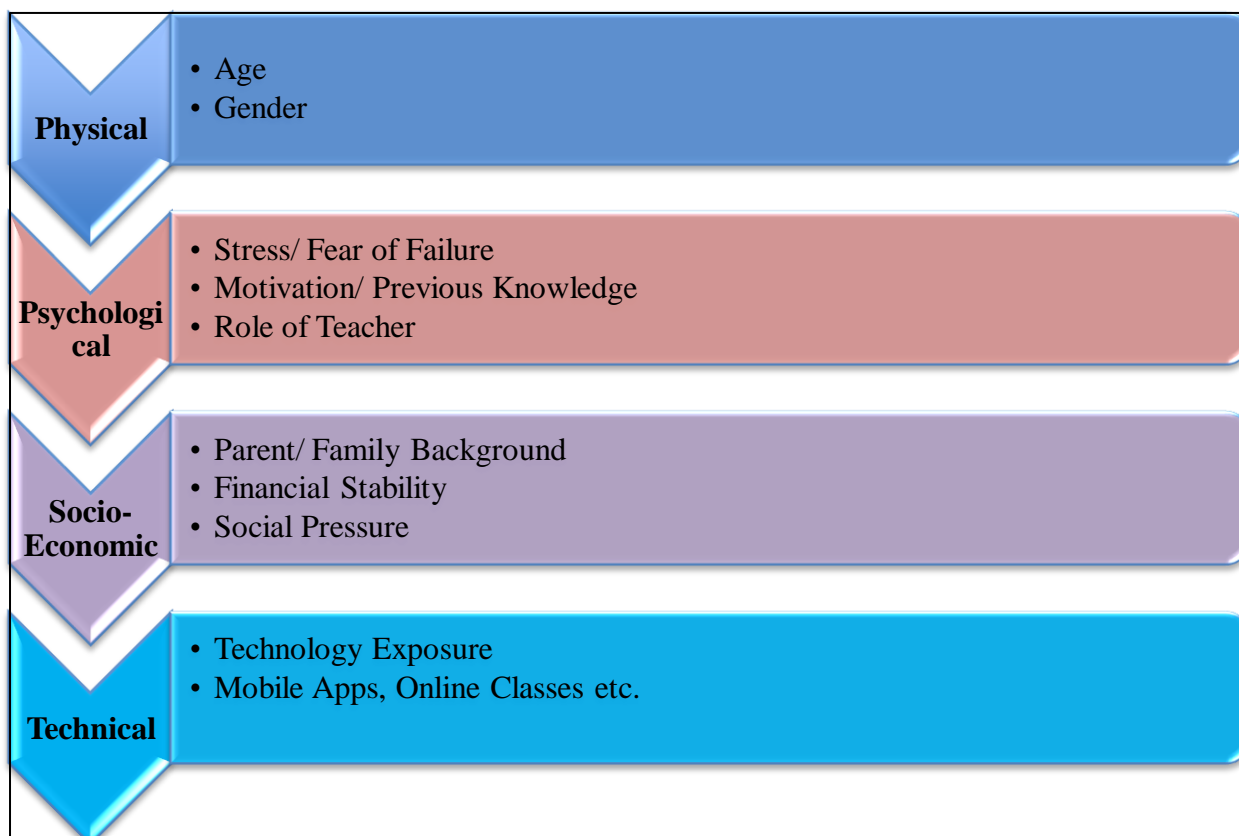
In terms of socioeconomic and linguistic backgrounds, Indian English learners are heterogeneous, and no one can control them. They also have a direct impact on the performance and language acquisition of students. The first prerequisite for acquiring linguistic competence is exposure to English (Schneider, 2007). For illustration, the usage of literary works in language classrooms, which necessitates instructor explication and interpretation in English, might be a barrier for students from rural areas who receive regional medium teaching in schools to learn English for college communication. This is primarily due to a lack of relevant and understandable input as learning experiences.

Dr. Sekar (2017) in his research article stated “Parents are an important stakeholder in their children’s (higher) education and therefore they have an important role to play in providing education to them. English language learning is a combined effort between the institution, parents, and students. Parents are expected to participate and be highly involved in their children’s education. In fact, it is parents who choose the medium of instruction for them. Students are most successful when their parents take an active role in their education. Unfortunately, many parents’ educational background is not sound enough to keep track of the progress of their children in education. Parental cooperation and participation contribute a lot in monitoring the teaching-learning process and provide feedback to curriculum planning and implementation.”

VII. Discussion and Analysis

English is not the mother-tongue for the Indian students. It is acquired only after learning mother-tongue or state language. Hence, there are multiple factors influencing on the students of secondary school students in India. Some of the major factors are explained as below:

Figure 1: Factors Influencing English Communication Skills



(Source: Author Interpretation)

- **Physical Factors:** Those students who have physically and mentally fit are likely to listen, grasp and learn English well than those who have challenges in terms of vision, hearing, speech competencies. The age factor is also detrimental at times. The girls are more sincere and serious about the studies and learning than boys.
- **Psychological Factors:** The teacher-student relationships, level of interactions, moods, mentality, stress, anxiety, and inferiority complex play a significant role during the teaching-learning process of English language. If the student has previous knowledge about any topic, concept, he/she can relate it closely leading to retain in his memory. If teacher is approachable, helpful, cooperative and flexible in approach, students are likely to follow him/her showing interest in learning. The rude, strict behaviour restrict the scope in this regard.
- **Socio-Economic Factors:** Family, parents, grandparents, neighbours, relatives have been teaching students informally. Depending on the background, the success ratio of learning is defined. In addition, the sources of income, spending capacity, parent support and social status quo influence the learning and growth of a student in school days. For example, rich parents may prefer to join their children to extra classes whereas poor parents may not afford it.
- **Technical Factors:** Technology has revolutionized the teaching-learning process across the globe. The smartphone, mobile applications, social media, online classes have gained the momentum. The technology provides ample opportunities to the students to learn through games, activities, quiz etc. Those who don't have these platforms lose interest and restrict to the traditional methods of learning.

VIII. Findings of Study:

After reviewing the existing literature in the form of article case studies International report government databases, The researcher has summarized some of the major findings of the study as below:

- The teaching and learning of the English language in India have involved certain implications since several decades. These implications make the teaching learning somewhat challenging for the teacher, students and parents as various stakeholders of the Indian school education system.
- In case of teachers, the lack of training, poor infrastructure, over-crowded classes, exam-oriented focus, outdated syllabus, technology limitations, defective methods of teaching English, lack of interactive sessions are some of the negative factors influencing the performances, motivation, engagement of school students.
- India is a country with diversity. It is also applicable to the Indian education system by and large. Naturally, Indian students learn English as a foreign language. Therefore, the face several challenges in terms of mother tongue influence and overlapping the learning inputs received. Hence, both linguistic and psychological factors restrict the scope of learning English to the great extent. It is difficult for the teacher to provide a variety of experiences for different styles of learning and kinesthetic, visual, audio within the same time-frame.
- It is also observed that deviation and involvement in differences of opinion between the state and Central Government have a long-term impact on the Indian school education system. The various boards such as State, CBSE, ICSE, IGCSE, IB have different priorities and syllabus evolution patterns in the country. At times, there is a question mark in terms of equivalence and recognition.
- The role of parents has been changing from time to time in providing support and grooming them. If they practice English in home and use it in their day-to-day conversations, the children can learn it as ease. However, non-English speaking families have certain constraints in this regard.
- It is the technology which can bridge the rural-urban, male-female, rich-poor gaps existing in India bringing all of them in the main flow of society. It provides equal opportunities of learning and practicing English communication skills. The smartphone technology can be the best way to learn online, download mobile applications, watch YouTube videos etc.

IX. Conclusion:

All of the above discussion shows that English language acquisition is somewhat challenging to Indian school students due to a number of factors. They include physical (age, physical and mental fitness), psychological (stress, anxiety, motivation, previous knowledge etc.), social (family, parental support, environment), economic (family income, sources of income, financial stability, spending capacity etc.) technological (devices, techno-savvyness, exposure, online access and opportunities) etc. Though these challenges exist, it is possible to overcome them through proactive involvement of teachers, practice and preparation of students, extensive support of parents and out-of-the-box thinking by educational institutions. Technology can integrate all of them for better and interactive teaching-learning process of English communication creating win-win situations for all.