



## Factors that affect learning Business English Skills: A Survey on the performance of Post Graduate students in Business Studies

J. Ebina Jeniffer and J. Sundarsingh\*  
Department of English, Karunya University, India.

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received: 24 March 2014;

Received in revised form:

25 April 2014;

Accepted: 6 May 2014;

#### Keywords

Business English,

Language competency,

Language skills,

Assessment.

### ABSTRACT

Having realized that the students at post graduate level need to have language skills to communicate effectively in professional context, the present paper has attempted to identify the communicative capabilities of Business students by conducting a survey on their business English knowledge level. The study used a well-defined questionnaire containing questions related to business letters, reports, memos, emails, minutes of meetings, telephonic conversation and presentations, testing the communicative competency of the respondents. The test was conducted to assess the language skills of the students after they finished a specific course in Business English. Students performance was evaluated and presented through a graph. The assessment outcome mainly focusing on the factors that affect the learning of business English is discussed.

© 2014 Elixir All rights reserved

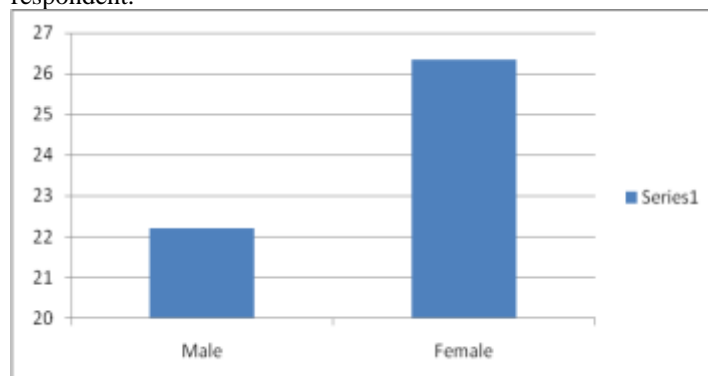
### Introduction

Where there is learning there are always few factors which affect the learning process. "Learning is affected by many conditions both internal and external to learners. Aptitude, personality, attitude, motivation and cognitive/ learning style are factors among others, impacting on a learner's second language acquisition." (Carrasquillo, 1994) Learners are not very conscious of these factors but their influence determines one's success. Not only in second language learning but also in learning Business English by the Post-Graduate Management students, the researcher has observed few factors which affect the learning, irrespective of branch of study of the students. The learning impediments are experienced by both students learning English as second language and business language skills. "English for Business Purposes/ Business English (EBP/BE) is currently the area of greatest activity and growth in the field of ESP. Like English for Science and Technology (EST), ESP is an umbrella term." (Dudley- Evans & St John, 2008). This stands to be the main reason for selecting Business students as the target audience for the survey. As mentioned earlier, factors affecting learning and their influences determine one's success. Hence it is very important for an ESP teacher to recognize those factors and help the learners to achieve success. This paper discusses the survey conducted among the MBA students who had completed their Business English course. The aim of the paper is to find the success of Business English course offered by the School of Management. From the result obtained it is noted that few criteria affects the learning process and few helps them in learning Business English. Some of the factors which affect learning Business English are social and family background (place where the learners are brought up and their family job & status), gender (in a heterogeneous classroom there is always a difference in performance among the two genders), medium of education in school and college and the last but not the least the learners Under Graduate degree.

The survey was conducted among 40 final year M.B.A students, who had completed Business English course in their curriculum. Among 40 respondent 20 were female respondent

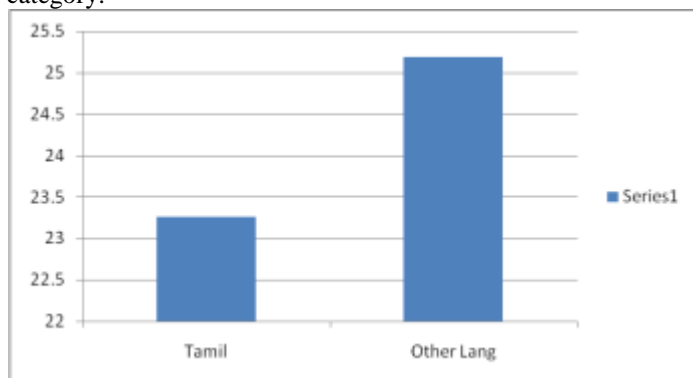
and 20 male respondents. The questionnaire was carefully prepared to test the knowledge acquired by the students from the Business English paper. Questions focused only on four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) were included in the questionnaire. Personal details of the respondents like gender, under graduate degree, mother tongue, medium of education in school and college were also included to know what affects their learning and which criteria helps them in acquiring knowledge. Students actively participated in the survey and cooperated very well by not omitting any of the questions asked. All the questions framed were statement questions for which the answer could either, be yes or no. considering the students who doesn't know the answer or who were not sure of the answer, another option 'not sure' was also provided. For every correct answer 2 marks, for every wrong answer 0 mark and for every not sure answer 1 mark was given. Total marks scored by each individual respondent are calculated out of 40 marks and the answers are coded numerically in a spreadsheet. For analyzing the survey statistically, the differences in performance of the individual respondents are shown in graphical representation using MS Excel Spreadsheet.

The first comparison was made among the male and the female respondent. From the result obtained it is clearly seen that female respondent performed better than the male respondent.



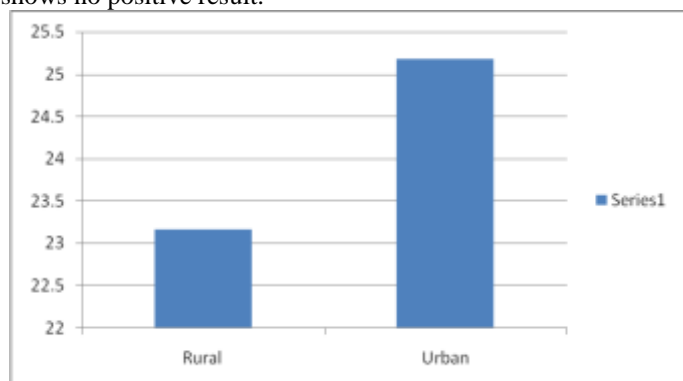
Top score was scored by a female respondent and the least score was scored by a male respondent, on an average basis female respondent performed better than the male respondent. This graphical display not only shows female candidates in a classroom perform better but it also clearly states that the female respondent has acquired the business language skill in a much better way. This doesn't mean male candidates in a classroom have not acquired the skills which simply mean they need to focus much more in the skills to excel in the competitive business world.

The second graphical display represents the performance of the respondents from different mother tongue. Respondents having Tamil as their mother tongue were grouped into one category and respondents of other Indian languages as another category.



Respondents of other Indian languages as their mother tongue performed comparatively better than Tamil speaking respondents. This difference could be for various reasons but what I think it could be is being born and brought up in the state Tamil Nadu these learners tend to make excessive use of mother tongue during the learning process, this factor had affected their process of learning the skills. All the four skills work only when the learners use it in day to day life, when learners learn the theory part of the skills and they don't use it in a practical way there is no point in learning the skills. Learning becomes complete only when it is used in an effective manner. On the other hand other language speakers studying in the Tamil Nadu state are forced to speak in English, since they cannot converse in their own mother tongue. This helps them to perform relatively better than the other group.

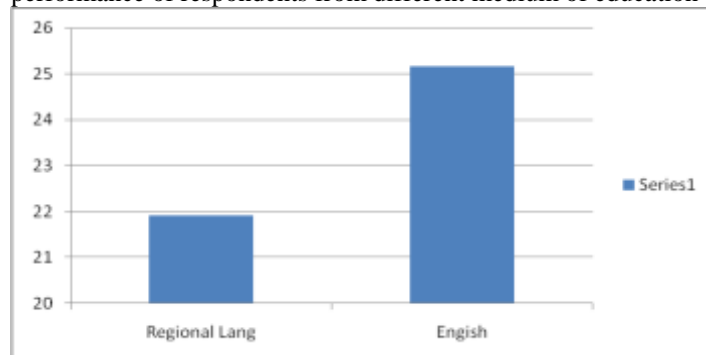
The third graphical display below projects the performance of rural and urban respondents. The place of birth and brought too plays a vital role in learning process, especially in learning communication skill. As said earlier learning becomes complete only when it is used in an effective way. When an opportunity is not given for the students to converse in English their learning shows no positive result.



From the above graph it is clearly shown that respondents who were brought up in the urban situation perform much better

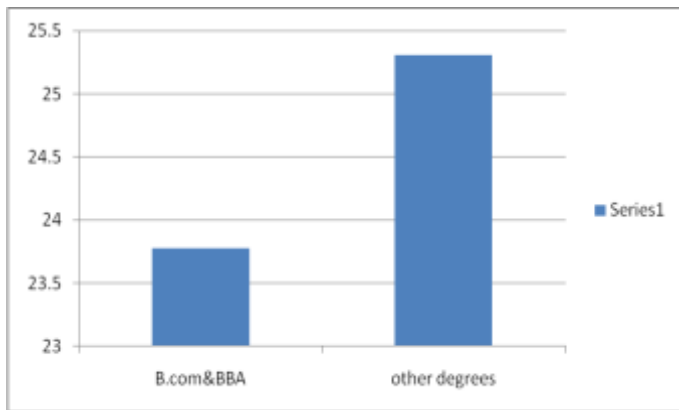
than the respondents who were brought up in a rural set up. It is because in a rural area students were not given any opportunity to converse in English outside their classroom. When they enter the real world all that they hear is their own mother tongue and they were forced to speak only in their mother tongue because in most of their cases they were the first generation learners. Being the first generation learner English sounds like an alien language, they take maximum time in learning because every word in English is new to them. Even Dr. Madhavi & Pettela in their research article "Teaching English as a Second Language: Factors Affecting Learning Speaking Skills" have mentioned being brought up in a rural background affects learning by saying "Rural background of the learners where English is generally not used is another cause affecting the leaning process. Most of the learners coming from rural background are first generation learners of English Language. Their parents being farmers and uneducated, they lack guidance from their elders in this aspect." On the other hand students from the urban set up were given maximum exposure to the English language. The world outside their home uses many English terms knowingly or unknowingly in their conversation, by this way even from their very beginning of the learning process they were exposed to many English terms and learning becomes easy since they already knew many terms.

The fourth graphical display projects the differences in performance of respondents from different medium of education



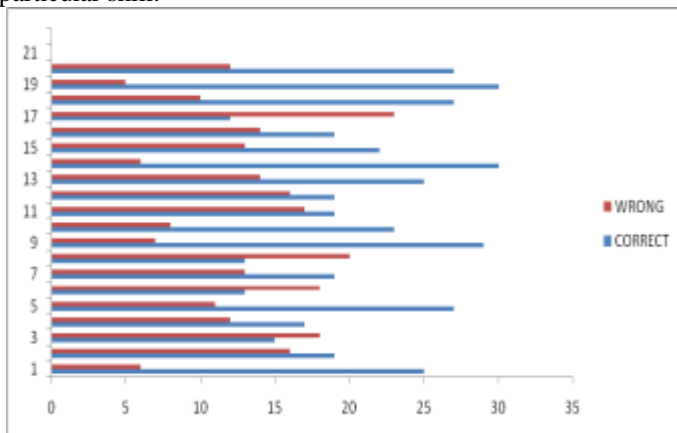
Respondents from English medium education performed extremely well when compared with the respondents who had done their early stage of learning in regional medium of education. This is mainly because students from English medium schools were forced to speak only in English inside the school premises by this way even many of the first generation learners speak good English by the time they finish their school education. Learning becomes successful because students use what they learn, they learn listening skill and speaking skill in the class and they use it even outside the class with their friends and staff. Another reason is students from English medium learn all the subjects in English except their second language which they learn in their regional language. By this way they were provided maximum exposure to the English language. On the other hand students from regional language medium of education does not have maximum exposure to English language. Except English subject they learn all the other subjects in their regional language. Unlike English medium school students they were not forced to speak in English. In some school even English subject is taught in their mother tongue, lack of exposure to the English language lies as an important factor in the differences among the two groups.

The fifth graphical display below projects the differences in performance of the respondents from B.Com & B.B.A background and respondents having other undergraduate degrees.



Students from other undergraduate degrees such as B.Tech, B.E, B.A & B.SC performed fairly well when compared to the respondents who did their undergraduate degree either in business administration or commerce. Though the former group of respondent was small in number and without any business communication prior course during their undergraduate degree performed fairly well and plays a perfect role of a competitor to the student from the business background. It is also to be noted that most of them are from either B.E or B.Tech, when looked into the courses studied by this group, it is found that they had studied a general English paper and a communication lab which gives the reason for their good performance. Comparing arts colleges with engineering colleges, the latter group pays much attention to the communication skills, this lies as an important factor for the engineering students to perform better even without much business knowledge.

The sixth graphical display below projects the correct and the wrong answers given by the respondents of the business management. This graph is specially drawn to know in which of the four skills respondents lack and need more attention, so that it may help the staff and the students to focus more on that particular skill.



From the above graph it is observed that students of Business Management have done fairly well on the whole and to an extent they are successful in learning the Business English skills, but when given a closer attention to the graph for few questions respondents had given maximum wrong answers. For questions 3, 6, 8 & 17 maximum respondents had given the wrong answers, which created a curiosity to look into the questionnaire to know what those four questions have in common and regarding which skill were those questions asked. After examining the questionnaire it was found that those four above mentioned questions were either on letter, report & memo. All these three have one thing in common; they are all

questions regarding writing skill. Hence from the above pictured graph it is clearly seen that students lack writing skill compared to other three skills. ESP staff and students need to focus more on the writing skill to call themselves successful in teaching and learning.

### Conclusion

The following are the factors which affect the Business English learners in acquiring the communication skills,

- i. Mother tongue influence: Since the respondents of other Indian languages as their mother tongue are forced to speak in English in and out of the campus they had performed fairly well when compared with the Tamil speaking respondents.
- ii. Native place: The place of birth and brought up also lies as an important factor, respondents from an urban set up had performed comparatively better than the respondents from the rural set up. It is because respondents from the urban area have maximum exposure to the English language and from the very first day of learning they use few English terms in their conversation even without their knowledge. Whereas on the other hand respondents from the rural set up does not have exposure to the English language in the world outside their school.
- iii. Medium of education: Medium of education in school and college plays a vital role in acquiring the communication skill, respondents from the English medium background performed extremely well when compared to the respondents from the regional language medium, it is because students from English medium school learn all their subjects in English except their second language subject and they were forced to speak in English inside the school premises. On the other hand regional language medium students learn all the subjects in their mother tongue except the English subject and they are not trained to speak in English in the school.
- iv. Under graduate degree: Respondents from the B.Tech & B.E had performed well when compared to the respondents from B.B.A & B.com major, this could be because the former group of students had communication lab in their under graduate program this helps them to acquire Business English easily and in a better way

While observing the performance of the students it was found that out of all the four skills respondents have performed fairly not well in the writing skill. The respondents need to focus more on that particular skill and the staff has to focus on teaching the writing skill in a better and in an interesting way, which will help the learners to acquire the skill successfully.

### Bibliography

- Dudley-Evans, Tony, and Maggie Jo St John. *Developments in English for specific purposes: A multi-disciplinary approach*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Print.
- Carrasquillo, L. Angela. *Teaching English as Second Language a Resource guide*. New York: Garland Publishing 1994. Print.
- Brown, James Dean. *Using Surveys in Language Programs*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Print.
- Latha, Madhavi B, Pettela Ramesh. *Teaching English as a Second Language: Factors Affecting Learning Speaking Skills*. IJERT. 2012 September; 1(7): 1-6.
- Madrid, D. *Internal and External Factor Affecting Foreign Language Teaching and Learning*. Actas de las 11 Jornadas de Estudios Ingleses. Universidad de Jaén (1995): 59-82.