

A Brief Study of English Language Proficiency: Employability

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Abstract

English is a compulsory ingredient of a successful personality. English proficiency is a key factor for employment success and advancement and also for opening doors to economic opportunity. Proficiency is best practiced through reading and writing. Non-native speakers of English have to practice the sounds of English how they are accented or stressed in their usage. Vocabulary knowledge is the single most important area of language proficiency. English is as important as the core subjects in the curriculum designed.

Key words: English Language Skills, Fluency, Proficiency, Accuracy, Employability, sounds of English, EST

1. Introduction

English has come to be the international language and the language of global communication, due to various reasons which are political, economical and technical. Globalization has made English a compulsory ingredient of a successful personality as it is an important tool widely used in international communication all over the world.

In the globalised context there is economic competition among the countries in the world irrespective of developed or underdeveloped. Employers in the present global market need people who have international experience as well as good qualifications accepted and recognized all over the world. But high proficiency in spoken and written English is regarded as the principal prerequisite qualification. So, English is still the number one language in the entire world. It is not only for the employment but also for the students wishing for higher studies especially in the countries where English is a native/official language.

It is well known that the role of English skills/proficiency is significant to play in driving export economies, attracting foreign investment, boosting service exports, and enabling international business and cultural links.

Objectives

- Energising students to focus on the importance of English language proficiency
- Enabling students to develop competencies to acquire internationally intelligible English
- Refreshing students to acquire proficiency, fluency and accuracy in English
- Motivating students to develop and enrich their English language skills/proficiency.

2. Rationale

The 2013 study, [the third edition of EF’s English Proficiency Index](#), ranks 60 countries and territories around the world by adult English proficiency. As the report notes:

- *“Today, English proficiency can hardly be thought of as an economic advantage at all. It is certainly no longer a marker of the elite. Instead it is increasingly becoming a basic skill needed for the entire workforce, in the same way that literacy has been transformed in the last two centuries from an elite privilege into a basic requirement for informed citizenship.”*

The 28 top-ranked countries on the 60-country EPI ranking for 2013.

Very High Proficiency			High Proficiency			Moderate Proficiency		
Rank	Country	Score	Rank	Country	Score	Rank	Country	Score
1	Sweden	68.69	8	Poland	62.25	18	Slovakia	54.58
2	Norway	66.60	9	Hungary	60.41	19	Argentina	54.43
3	Netherlands	66.19	10	Slovenia	60.19	20	Czech Republic	54.40
4	Estonia	65.55	11	Malaysia	58.99	21	India*	54.38
5	Denmark	65.15	12	Singapore*	58.92	22	Hong Kong SAR*	53.54
6	Austria	62.66	13	Belgium	58.74	23	Spain	53.51
7	Finland	62.63	14	Germany	58.47	24	South Korea	53.46
			15	Latvia	57.66	25	Indonesia	53.44
			16	Switzerland	57.59	26	Japan	53.21
			17	Portugal	57.52	27	Ukraine	53.09
						28	Vietnam	52.27

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Among the 28 top-ranked countries on the 60 country EPI ranking, India is in the 21st place/rank indicating moderate proficiency.

- *97% Of Engineers In India Can’t Speak English; Less Than 20% Are Employable For Software Jobs:* *Aspiring Minds, a leading employability credentialing firm, has revealed that only 18.43% of all engineering graduates are eligible for a software engineer’s job in India (trak.in/tags/business/2015/08/11)*
- *Lack of English language skills burden job seekers:* *A command of the English language has turned into a basic requirement for a majority of professional job vacancies in Yemen. Those who lack either spoken or writing skills are reporting extreme difficulties in finding suitable employment (yementimes.com/).*
- *“English proficiency is the most essential means of opening doors to economic opportunity for immigrant workers in the United States,” said Brookings researcher Jill Wilson.*

All these reports say that low proficiency in English or lack of English language skills has been considered a barrier to academic success, entry of employment and workforce accomplishment.

It is evidently known that English communication skills are an important pre-requisite for a career at national or international level. English proficiency is a key factor for employment success and advancement as English language is the window to the world and it is widely accepted as the formal medium of communication.

3. Review of Literature

Literally speaking all the below cited statements endorse that English language skills or proficiency is a key factor for employment success and advancement:

- Communication skills in English have been identified as indispensable workplace tools for success in business (Hynes & Bhatia, 1996).
- More importantly, communication skills in English play an even more significant role as technology increases the speed of efficacy of messages.
- Business communication studies have cited the numerous hours managers spend communicating with others (Krizan, Merrier and Jones, 2002), the time managers devote to writing correspondence and reports (Ober, 2001), and their ability to earn higher salaries if they have strong writing skills (Fisher, 1999).
- As Thomas N. Huckin and Leslie A. Olsen, state: “Scientists and engineers may be technically brilliant and creative, but unless they can convince co-workers, clients, and supervisors of their worth, their technical skills will be unnoticed, unappreciated, and unused.

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Good English Communication skills are indispensable in the present globalized context and in all spheres of life such as workforce, official meetings/dealings, seminars, presentations, social gatherings, etc.

4. Characteristics of English Language:

To learn a foreign/new language, one should distinguish the features/ characteristics of such language. The basic features/ characteristics of English language are given here for better understanding:

- Phonology (the sound system-phonetics)

- Morphology (the structure of words-inflected forms)
- Syntax (the combination of words into sentences-grammar)
- Semantics (the ways in which sounds and meanings related)
- Lexicon (dictionary of words-vocabulary)

In addition to the above said features/ characteristics of English language, the ESL students/learners ought to know that there are several English dialects or varieties. The **pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar** of American native speakers of English are not identical to the **pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar** of British speakers of English. In fact, within Britain itself there are varieties of spoken English that are to a large extent mutually unintelligible.

The variety of English that is used by educated, middle-class people from the south of England is sometimes called Standard English or BBC English or Oxford English. The phonology of this variety is called Received Pronunciation (RP).

It's important to note that the spelling of a word is not always an accurate guide to how it is pronounced. Similarly the pronunciation of a word is not always helpful when working out how that word should be spelt.

There are 26 letters in the English alphabet but there are many more sounds in the English language. This means that the number of sounds in a word is not always the same as the number of letters.

5. Fluency, Proficiency and Accuracy in English:

As a second language learner, one should be fluent, proficient and accurate in English. It means ability to speak or express the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate smoothly and effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, and professional topics.

Study the definitions taken from the dictionaries for better understanding:

Fluency:

- The ability to speak easily and smoothly; *especially*: the ability to speak a foreign language easily and effectively (merriam-webster.com/dictionary/)

- Able to express oneself easily and articulately (oxforddictionaries.com/)
- able to speak or write a specified foreign language with facility (collinsdictionary.com/)

Proficiency:

- the ability to do something well because of training and practice (oxforddictionaries.com)
- advancement in knowledge or skill : progress (merriam-webster.com)
- having great facility (in an art, occupation, etc); skilled (collinsdictionary.com)

Accuracy:

- the ability to work or perform without making mistakes (merriam-webster.com/dictionary/)
- The quality or state of being correct or precise: (oxforddictionaries.com/)
- faithful measurement or representation of the truth; correctness; precision (collinsdictionary.com)

In general, proficiency equates with fluency, but there is a distinction between both of them. It is possible to be fluent without being highly proficient, as it is also possible to be highly proficient without being fluent. When it comes to second language learning, a few major aspects of fluency lay in the prosody of the language, pronunciation, and the timing of dialogue. Fluency is impossible to attain without engaging in dialogue with a fluent speaker of the language. Proficiency, on the other hand, is the primary focus on your ability to understand and communicate precisely in the language. Proficiency is best practiced through reading and writing.

6. Implications to Hone Proficiency in English

One who wants to acquire language proficiency has to study the rules of such a language – labelled as grammar, phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicon. So, here are some implications for enhancing proficiency level.

a. Practice of the language Skills

In order to be fluent, proficient and accurate in a language like English, one ought to undergo practicing the four language skills-LSRW since English is a skill-oriented subject. The four major skills of language learning, listening, speaking, reading and writing provide the right key

to success. Teaching- learning of English language while ensuring focus on all these four skills provides a platform for the learners to hone their proficiency in the language well.

b. Pronunciation

English is an unphonetic language. The sounds of English are not uniform and phonetic as it has been influenced by so many languages, for example, Latin and German, etc. In English language there is no one-to-one relationship between the letters of the alphabet and the sounds they represent. The 26 letters of English alphabet represent 44 sounds in the Received Pronunciation of England (R.P), a variety of speech.

Non-native speakers of English have to practice the sounds of English how they are accented or stressed in their usage, for which there is a system-phonetics or IPA symbols given below for better understanding:

Table of IPA Symbols

Vowels	
Diphthongs	
Consonants	

c. Vocabulary

Vocabulary that is the basis for learning language means a number of words that one knows how to use. English has the largest vocabulary of any language. An important part of language learning is acquiring new vocabulary that is central to English language teaching- learning process. Vocabulary knowledge is the single most important area of language proficiency and is of concern to all four language skills. For enhancement of vocabulary it is inevitable to learn the word-power such as: Word Roots, Word Formation, Prefixes and Suffixes, Synonyms and

Antonyms, Homonyms, Homophones, Homographs, Study of Word Origin, One-Word Substitutes, Idioms and Phrases, Collocations, analogy, Words Often Misspelt-Confused/Misused, Business Vocabulary, Technical Vocabulary.

d. **Grammar**

Generally speaking students feel that English is a difficult language having complicated grammar rules to master. But it is true that for effective communication there is a need of essential principles of grammar or syntax. Language is supposed to be a big highway, the words are the cars and trucks, but the grammar is the road signs and markings that tell the cars and lorries where to go and how to drive. Thus the rubrics of grammar, such as usage of parts of speech, auxiliary verbs, use of articles and word order for the expression of complex tenses, aspect and mood, as well as passive constructions, conditional sentences interrogatives, etc. are necessary for those who desire to master over the language and to enhance the proficiency level.

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7. Academic Institutions To Play A Vital Role:

It has been reported that some academic institutions particularly engineering and technical institutions neglected the teaching of English communication since it is not a core subject. Therefore the students are badly affected with poor performance in language skills and proficiency in English. Ultimately, it makes them to lead unemployed and unsuccessful life, losing all the prosperous opportunities. So, here are some recommendations to academic institutions:

- Academic institutions should focus on the teaching of English providing necessary equipment and facilities for the students in order to acquire proficiency in English, keeping in mind English is as important as the core subjects in the curriculum designed.
- Institutions have to hire well qualified and trained faculty especially in EST (English for Science and Technology) in view of preparing and training the students to be proficient in English language skills that the companies/employers need in the current industry or business.

- Teachers of EST should encourage students in higher education to spend time in the environment of English-Speaking- such as conferences, seminars, group discussions, symposiums, debates, role plays, etc.

8. Conclusion

One who acquires good proficiency in English can work at an advanced level in an English-speaking environment, easily understand almost everything heard or read, summarise information from various sources of spoken and written forms, and also can express oneself spontaneously, very confidently and accurately.

In conclusion, it is very clear that English language plays an eminent role in globalised context. It is widely acknowledged as a valuable life and employability. English proficiency is a key factor for employment success and advancement as English language is the window to the world and it is widely accepted as the formal medium of communication.

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