

A study of Importance of English Language Proficiency in Hospitality Industry and the Role of Hospitality Educators in Enhancing the Same Amongst The Students

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Abstract

The study is undertaken to understand the importance of English language skills in the Indian hospitality industry, and the gaps therein. It studies the challenge as it exists in Pune city, and how AISSMS College of Hotel Management & Catering Technology has attempted to address the issue(s).

The study aims at gathering primary information by means of questionnaires. It sheds light on the gap between existing and desired standards of English proficiency. It also highlights the attempts by the three important stakeholders in order to address the issue. Though, attempts are made from the industry, teachers and students, it is recognized that joint efforts need to be made to tackle the problem collectively and from all sides. It is an urgent calling for innovative teaching learning practices and encouraging sound development initiatives and commitment.

The primary data is across the cross section of Pune hoteliers, teachers and students of the college. The findings reflect the importance of English as the universal medium of communication, and its importance in rendering quality service and importantly,

Keywords: English Language Proficiency, Communication Skills, Hospitality/Hotel Management, Hospitality Career, Teaching and Learning

INTRODUCTION

India is witnessing a transition. This evolution spans all facets-economic, political, socio-cultural and technological. The globalized and liberal outlook adopted in the late 1990s has further fuelled the growth. India has not been untouched by the developments around the world, and this is evident in various sectors. The Indian Hospitality and Manpower Resource development are the two facets covered by this research.

India has a heritage which is deep rooted in hospitality. All Indians are instilled by the underlying thought "Atithi Devo Bhava", which equals guests to God. This belief is also supported by Indian mythology. The story of the friendship between Lord Krishna and Sudama highlights the fact that despite the class difference, how Sudama, under severe deprivation of worldly resources, is immensely hospitable to his friend and guest Lord Krishna. While doing so, he is not only hospitable but genuinely warm and selfless. Owing to this conditioning, in general Indians demonstrate the shared trait of being hospitable people. This is also one of the reasons why Indian Hospitality is considered one of the finest in the world.

The Indian Hospitality has evolved over the years. The preceding decade and a half has been note-worthy. It has witnessed a few new advents. Noteworthy features include emergence of International Hotel Management

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Companies, Increased competition, Balancing rate tariffs, and Employee Orientation. The traveller, his awareness, expectations and sensitivity to service has also heightened. He looks for a standardised and customised experience with the hotel of his choice, despite geographic spread-over across the globe.

The current scenario is the one where the traveller looks for a Glocal experience. The employees of hotels play one of the most crucial parts in providing this experience. The emphasis is on employing human resources who will successfully provide the level of services leading to guest delight. There are certain competencies that are required. Personality, communication, attitude, technical know-how, to name a few. It has also been an observation that English language communication amongst the hotel employees is also a crucial requirement, and hence a factor considered for employability.

It is vital to assess the importance of English language proficiency, identify the areas that employees lack and attempt to bridge the gap. This is possible when the stakeholders of the Hospitality Industry – hotels, academia and potential employees come together and address the issue. This study is an attempt to address the same.

SCOPE

This purview of research paper is restricted to AISSMS College of Hotel Management & Catering Technology, Pune. The college is one of the premier hotel management colleges in Pune, Maharashtra. Pune attracts students from various states of India, especially from smaller towns in Maharashtra. Many of the students who seek admit into HMCT colleges in Pune, are not as well versed in English language. It has been observed that English communication skills and employability have a close connect. The paper attempts to address how the industry, academia (teachers and students) can come together to address this issue.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Kostic Bobanovic, M., (2011), stated that communication is an important element of hospitality industry. Good oral and written communication skills are the highly rated skills crucial for hospitality practitioners at different levels. The author studied the importance of desired co-operation of language/hospitality teaching program

in contributing positively towards development of the hospitality industry. He identified the gaps that exist in reading, writing, speaking, listening and understanding. Also, American English was found to be more preferred than British English. The research concluded that the need to address weakness in communication skill and invest substantiate effort in improving the same, is critical for sustainable development.

Suzana Ab. Rahim, (2011), exposed the need of learners to hospitality real-place requirements in terms of communication skills. It is pertinent that employees (existing and potential), employers and educators have a consensus of what are the competencies that are required to be instilled in learners to prepare them for the hospitality industry. The author has studied and supported the fact that students who are likely to pursue a career in Tourism and Hospitality work force must realize that communication skills are seen vital to the work force. “Soft” skills, particularly communication skills in English will make students more employable. She concluded that a mismatch exists between the required skills as against the ability. It is imperative to identify and bridge the gap.

Cui Yuexia, (2014), observed the substantial changes in the relationship between teaching and learning in college English teaching. The author advocated the dominant role of students, their high interaction and active participation in the teaching-learning process. The paper commented how English has emerged as the language of the world, owing to the leading role the USA and the UK play in the global economy, military affairs, culture and other fields. Particular stress was laid on the process of learning. “Teaching” of teachers is important, but “learning” of students has more impact on students’ comprehension and practical abilities. The author summed that college education is an important phase in promoting students’ English abilities. It is recommended that reforms are required in overcoming English teaching and learning shortcomings.

Zhong Weixuan, (2014), discussed English Classroom Management-its evolution and reforms. The features of modern English teaching were studied. The author strongly advocated that the teaching-learning process should be goal oriented, student centred and language-use targeted. It includes reforms in three aspects. These are: special environment, relax control and language practise and simulated communication. It was commented that

teaching has undergone a fundamental shift from static to dynamic flow, which makes it more difficult to organize, manage and control. A suggested class size of twenty five was deemed ideal. The paper concluded that teaching management is creative work as it integrates science and art. It is important to pay attention to class room management for improving the quality of teaching.

Antje Lumma-Sellenthin, (2012), explored the relation of students' attitude towards learning communication skills and customer care performance. The author studied the medical students and their attitude towards patients' care effectiveness based on their proficiency in communication competency. The importance of communication competence in the chosen area of work in the service industry is deliberated upon by means of the research. It is commented that the students do not recognize communication skills as an important part of academic education and do not perceive a need to improve their communication skills. It was identified that learning strategies are preferred in a group setting that involve practical training and critical reflection. It was found that female students were more receptive to learning communication skills. They were noticed to be keener and faster in grasp. Also, students exposed to traditional teaching showed less interest in furthering their communication skills, than those exposed to modern teaching-learning process. The author analyzed and suggested that positive learning attitude is largely dependent on the students' good self regulatory skills.

Silvia M. Bigatti, (2012), detailed multicultural instruction in higher education. He commented about the uncertainty about the nature of multicultural pedagogy and practise. He highlighted the goal of multicultural teaching is to create a safe and caring classroom environment (Gay, 2002), with the underlying belief that students will learn more when they have an opportunity to share their own experience and perspectives (Gay, 2004b). It promoted social justice and democratic principles (Bennett et al, 2003; Nieto, 2004). Teachers and students alike have the opportunity to recognize and combat their own prejudices (Bank, 2005, Gay, 2002). Fostering an inclusive climate in the classroom and a sense of community among faculty and student learning with a variety of teaching and assessment (Gay, 2004b) was identified as most desired.

Xianmei Sun, (2012), commented that English is the language of the world. With the fast progressing of modernization, international communication happens more frequently. Owing to the importance of the English language, the author studied English teaching and learning as a strong foundation to the language competency. It was seen that teachers lay a lot of emphasis on the language, but neglect speech. In doing so, competence of the language application and intercultural communication is not developed. This leads to separation of learning and use, leading to what is described as "deaf English" and "dumb English". This in turn defeats the primary purpose of communication, which is to express ourselves. It is advocated that English should be learnt in a way that the learner is able to "speak" than "read". It was suggested that changes be made in the teaching mode, syllabus and students' role in problem solving.

Jizhen Huang, (2012), studied assessment of learning. The learners' perception towards the prescribed English course was assessed. Positive attitude was found as it developed the students' language competence, enhanced their cross cultural knowledge and promoted learning autonomy and motivation.

Dina Mostafa Weheba, (2007), stated that learning is a core activity in higher education institutes are committed to sustaining and environment which fosters and supports active learning process. The author studied students learning and enhancing motivation, allowing better attendance and awareness. The supposed connection between teaching quality and staff research was proven as negative, in terms of student experience. The paper recommended how the teaching system can be developed for monitoring, analyzing and reporting results.

OBJECTIVES

- 4.1 To determine the relationship between English communication skill and employability in hospitality industry.
- 4.2 To establish the gap in desired and actual communication standards.
- 4.3 To identify the measures to be undertaken by the colleges to address the problem.
- 4.4 To gauge the need and motivation of students towards enhancement of English language.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Collection of Data

The primary data required for the research was collected using the following technique:

- Data collection tool: Questionnaires

In order to cover the objectives, three different questionnaires bearing straight forward and relevant questions were drafted and handed over to the concerned sample to obtain their responses.

Sample Design

The nature each of the three distinct respondent groups is more or less homogeneous in nature.

Three distinct respondent groups were identified:

- Hotel HR / Training heads
- Faculty members of AISSMS College of Hotel Management & Catering Technology
- Students of AISSMS College of Hotel Management & Catering Technology

Sample Population	Sample Method	Sample Size
Hospitality HR specialists	Random	10
Faculty members of AISSMS College of HMCT	Census	30
Students of AISSMS College of HMCT	Cluster Random	48

The sample size was 88 respondents in all. The data was analyzed by using basic statistical tools.

Apart from the above mentioned tools the relevant secondary data for the research was collected from journals, books & internet.

LIMITATIONS

1. This study is purely based on the information sourced from students and teachers of one Hotel Management college in Pune.
2. The study is conducted in the current scenario and the opinions, perception and expectations of the respondents may differ with time.
3. The study is purely on the basis of the sample. The sample's limitations in terms of their maturity, understanding and exposure may be carried forward in the study.

DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

It is a known, documented and practised fact that Communication skills is an important pre-requisite for a career in the Hotel Industry. English language, being the language of the world is accepted as the formal medium of communication. This fact is accepted and endorsed by hoteliers, academia and aspirants alike.

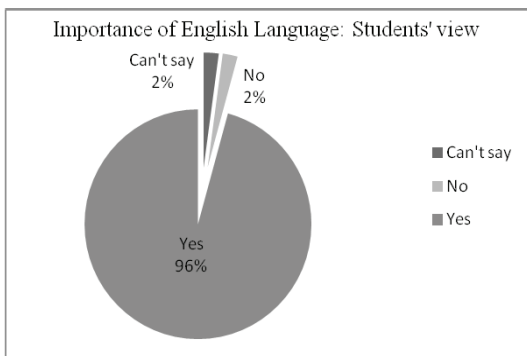
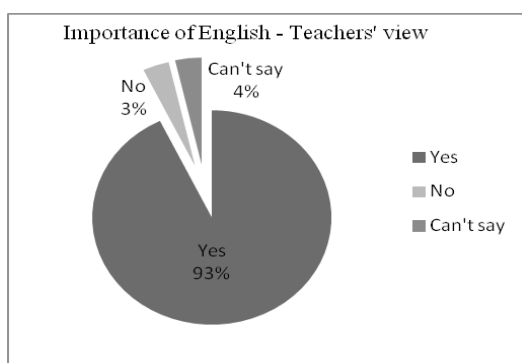
The study highlights the importance of English language at not just entry level, but spanning the entire career of hoteliers. The surveys succeeded in bringing to the fore, certain gaps pertaining effective guest service that need to be addressed. The study also revealed that though students deem English communication as a very vital attribute, most are unable to constructively spend time and effort in improving it. English speaking also leads to confidence of the students. Hence, for success in their chosen field, the issue of internalizing English language needs to be addressed jointly by the industry, academia and students.

Hoteliers Agreed Completely on the Following Parameters

Interaction with associates	Importance of English communication in a career in the Indian Hospitality Industry	English language proficiency is crucial	Offer your support to the college in its initiatives to improve employability
Yes	Yes	Placement, Promotion, Personal Branding	Yes
100%			

The hoteliers surveyed are HR / Training heads of five star hotels in Pune. They all unanimously agreed that English language communication is very important in a career in hospitality. It is required to optimise placement, promotion and personal branding. They all also were magnanimous in agreeing to lend support to the college in its initiative to improve proficiency in the language in order to make students of Hotel Management more employable.

Hotel Management College’s teachers’ and students’ opinion that English communication is one of the critical pre-requisites for pursuing a career in Hospitality.

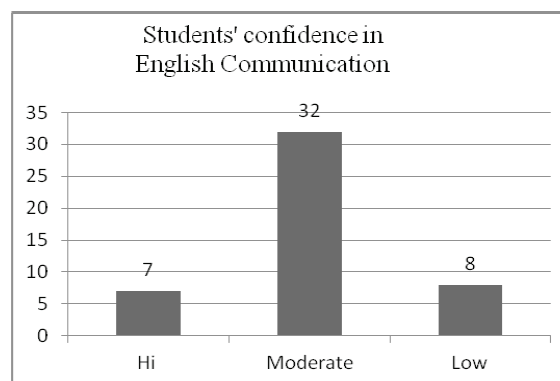


The teachers at the college have worked in the Indian hotel industry for an average of 5.5 years. They are qualified to gauge the importance of English language. A staggering average of 94.5% teachers and students agree that the language has a very critical role in a career Indian Hotel industry. Hence, it is a clearly known and understood fact that English language is a pre-requisite to a career in Hospitality industry.

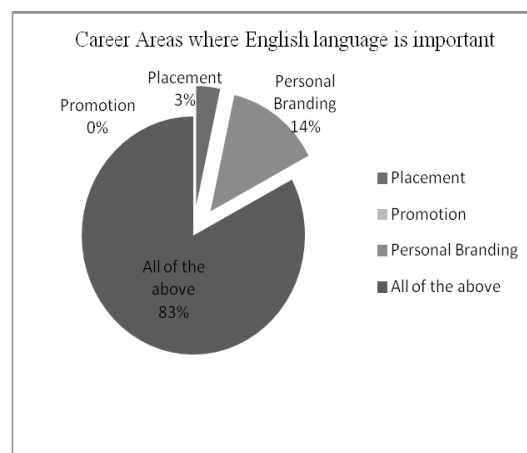
Students' Confidence Level in English Language

As close to all students believe that the language is important, it was found that owing to the language, 68%

have moderate level of confidence. 17% shared that their confidence while communicating in English is low. This means that altogether 85% students, despite understanding its importance, lack in English communication skills. It reflects that there is a scope to improve the language the time they are in college, and through their career in order to improve their confidence levels.



Areas where English Communication is critical in Hospitality career.



Human Resource heads and the academia unanimously agree that English communication helps in securing job placement, promotions and build a personal brand. So, it is an essential pre-requisite during all stages for a successful innings for a career in hospitality.

Hotel Management students lack in the following communication areas

(Communication gaps –scale of 5, it being the lowest)

i. Hoteliers’ perception

	Spoken English	Body Language	Personality	Confidence	People skills
Average score	2	2	3	2	2

ii. Teachers' perception

	Spoken English	Body Language	Personality	Tone & Confidence
Average score	2	2	3	2

The above charts reflect the perception of hoteliers and teachers of the areas in their opinion that fresh graduates / students lack.

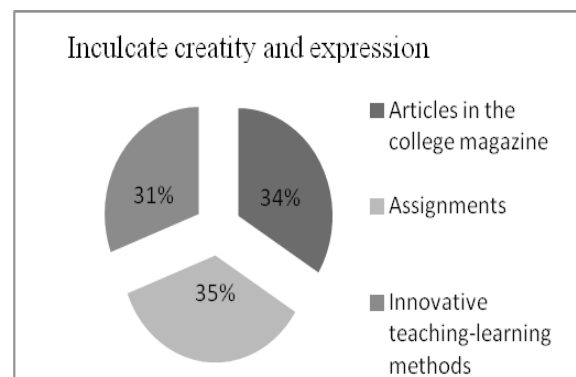
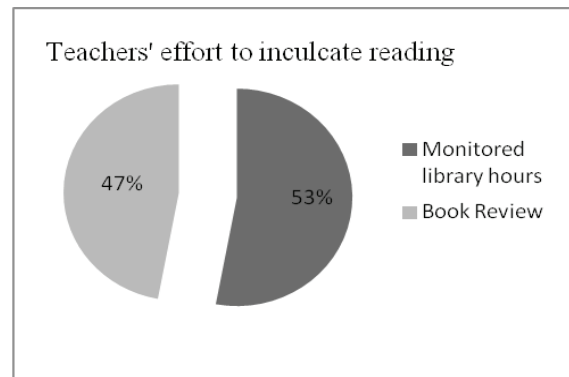
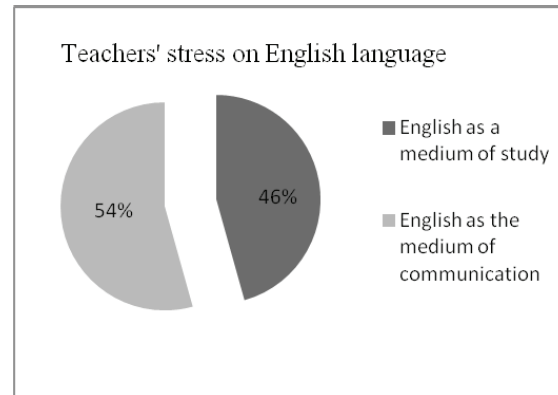
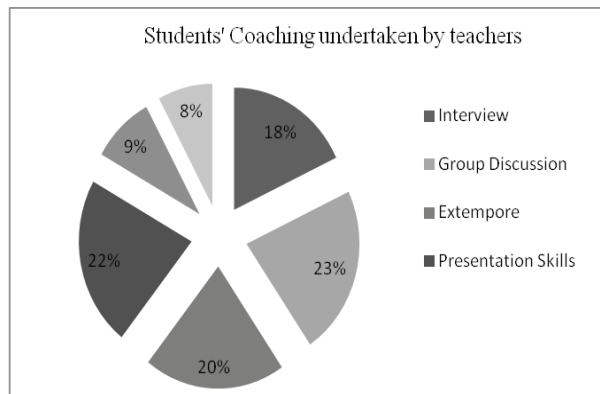
Translating 5 as the highest desired score equalling with 100% weightage, it is observed that the current standards for crucial attributes of Spoken English, Body Language, tone and confidence stands at a dismal 20%. Both the groups recognize that personality / grooming scores higher with an average of 3 or 30%.

Rectification and improvement of deficit areas rectified at college level.

	Yes	No	Maybe
Hoteliers' Perception	89%	0%	11%
Teachers' Perception	100%	0%	0%

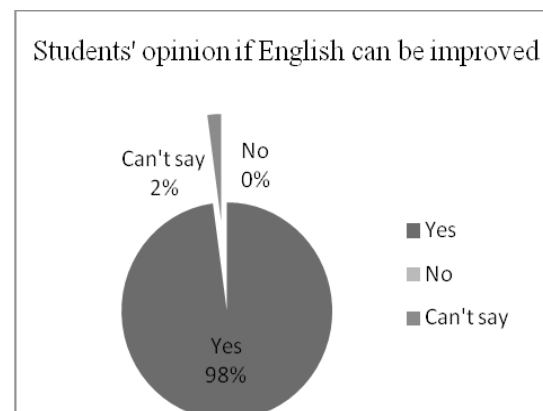
The industry and academia agree that there exists a lacuna of desired English language proficiency. The industry and academia also agree that the same can be addressed and worked on at the college level.

Measures taken by the college to bridge the gap.



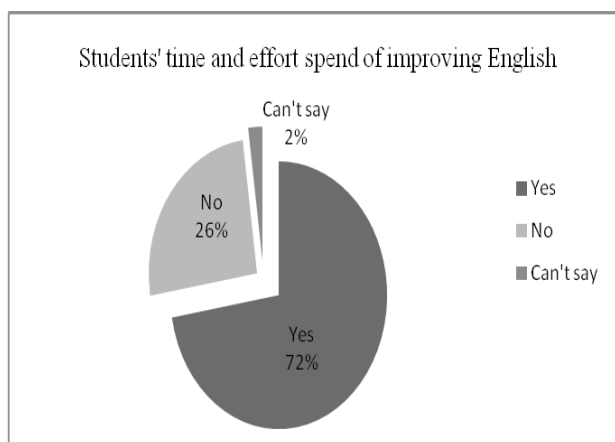
The above charts signify the measures taken by the college to encourage English communication skills.

Students' opinion if English can be improved.



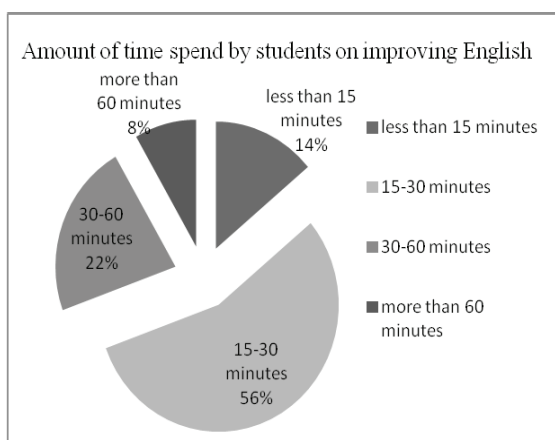
Most of the students believe that English speaking skill can be improved. This is a positive and reflects a possibility of implementation, as it is backed by the need / importance of the same.

Students' actively invest time and effort in improving English.



It is interesting to note that 98% understand the importance of English in hospitality career and believe it can be improved. But only 72% invest constructive efforts and time in improving the same. A substantial 26% are unable to actively do anything about it.

Time spent in a day in improving the language.



Quantifying the time spent on daily activities towards improving English, majority (56%) of the students invest 15-30 minutes, followed by 22% who spend 30-60 minutes towards the same. It is observed students spending more than hour and less that 15 minutes fall in minority. The engagement span can be understood to be an upto 30 minutes.

Amongst the activities preferred by students in order to improve English, listening to news on TV is the most preferred initiative in order to improve English, followed closely by reading. By clear majority, English speaking classes are the least preferred.

Challenges Faced by Students in Investing Concentrated Efforts

Of the challenges that deter students from spending time and effort on improving their English, lack of time was rated the major deterrent. It was also recognized that lack of monetary resources and support were the least challenging.

Suggestions & Recommendations

Based on the responses received from the hotel industry HR heads, faculty and students of AISSMS College of Hotel Management & Catering Technology, Pune the following suggestions are made:

1. The importance of English communication in the Indian Hospitality is crucial. It is critical at all levels that spans the entire career.
2. There is a gap that needs to be addressed by the industry and academia can provide inputs to plus these gaps-namely, English proficiency, use of body and tone, confidence and personality.
3. Students need to be motivated and seek activities that help improve their communication skills.

Conclusions

The findings of the research can be concluded as under:

1. All the hoteliers and Hotel Management teachers and students vehemently agree that English language proficiency is a pre requisite for a career in hospitality.
2. There exists a deficiency in attributes of fresh graduate students, fluency in language which and the supporting confidence, personality and body language that negatively affects impact.
3. Industry and academia are willing to and should work together to improve English communication levels of HM students in order to meet the industry requirement.

4. Students' confidence and performance is largely dependent on English language proficiency. They need to be motivated and guided in order to meet industry standards.

Future Scope for Research

1. A training module can be formulated for students pursuing degree in Hotel Management. This would be in line to meet the needs of the industry and aims at employability of fresh graduates.
2. Training needs can be assessed and training imparted accordingly.
3. A mechanism can be in place in order to measure the success of training undertaken.

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