



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 2. Issue 4., 2015 (Oct. -Dec. )



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

SIGNIFICANCE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TO GENERATION Z IN INDIA

DEVYANI ROZARIO

JJT University, Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, India



ABSTRACT

This research paper highlights the significance of English language to young Indians. The process adopted was to meet students from vernacular schools located in urban and semi-urban areas and seek responses to a questionnaire designed to understand how English was taught in their school and why they felt it was important to learn English. The response to the questionnaire clearly presents the opinion of Generation Z also known as Gen Z (those born in 2000 upto present) about the importance of English language in their lives and the desire to acquire proficiency in the language. It very clearly brings out that this Generation looks at proficiency in Spoken English as a much required skill for higher education and better employment options. It also reveals the gaps in the education system that needs to be bridged if we truly want to empower this generation to keep pace with changing times.

The paper brings out the importance of Spoken English to Indians in the present day competitive scenario as superior communication skills actually becomes a differentiator in the context of employment. It brings out the need to create better systems to impart language education so that the student of today emerges as a confident adult, ready to face the world. It also brings out the need to impart spoken English skills in a different format, so that the student acquires proficiency in speaking the language. As a quick fix solution, schools can conduct special spoken English classes for students as it will help them not only in higher studies but also help them to go out of from school as more confident youth to face the world.

**Key Words:** Communication, Spoken English, Empowered, Generation Z, Professional development, Language skills.

©KY PUBLICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

English Language is gaining prominence as an important medium of communication in the present day context. Proficiency to communicate in English is considered as an important skill with globalization gaining ground in India as the language of business.

It is a well known that the quantum of knowledge in terms of books, research papers and the internet available in English is not comparable to any other language. The language of technology is also English. English is the language of the rich nations and this makes English more attractive to India as a country looking for growing business in the global market.

*The language of an economically strong community is attractive to learn because of its business potential. Knowledge of the language potentially opens up the market for producers to penetrate a market if they know the language of the potential customer. (Ammon, 1995)*

The view expressed by Ammon still holds good after 2 decades as we see a growing number of parents even in poor economic conditions striving hard to provide their children with education in English medium school.

David Graddol states *there are three kinds of English speaker: those who speak it as a first language, those for whom it is a second or additional language and those who learn it as a foreign language. Native speakers may feel the language 'belongs' to them, but it will be those who speak English as a second or foreign language who will determine its world future.*

The observation of David Graddol proved very correct as today English is the most widely accepted language in the world. With such wide acceptance of the English language in the world, it is only natural that in India too, the language has gained immense significance in the present day context.

Teaching English language to Generation Z also known as Gen Z, needs to be looked at in a different manner as these children are born in the age of technology and love the digital world and social media. They are confident and have no fear of the unknown- they are willing to explore. Teaching English language as it was traditionally taught is not relevant to this generation and we need to change and attune our teaching methods to meet their aspirations and to make learning more attractive and enjoyable.

Various studies have already been conducted in this area and various dimensions of what is lacking in the education system have been brought out.

#### **The Problem**

India is one of the countries with the highest number of languages spoken. Even within a language there are various dialects. A country with such a high degree of linguistic diversity requires a common language for communication within the country. While the government of India proposed Hindi as the official language, the southern states did not agree to this and hence English emerged as a common language that can connect the country. Therefore the constitution of India has recognized English as a language for official work along with Hindi.

The method of teaching in India is still the traditional one focusing on reading, writing and grammar. This does not capture the interest of the present day school students belonging to Gen Z. Speaking skills are often ignored. English is the second language in vernacular schools and though students learn English for 7 to 9 years in school, they are barely able to speak in English. This has resulted in the students coming out of school not confident enough to face the world.

Lack of skilled teachers, new methods for English Language Teaching to Gen Z in vernacular schools particularly, leads to poor learning levels in students. This not only creates apathy but also dislike for the language. Instead of learning, they just memorise their lessons without understanding them just to pass the exam rather than learning the language. These students also do not have a supportive environment at home for learning a new language like English as most of their family members generally do not know the language. Overall, there is no encouragement to learn English at school level but it becomes a necessity as these students go for higher studies particularly in science, technology, engineering and medical streams.

In such a scenario, it is time that we understood the need to empower our children to acquire Spoken English skills so that they do not find any difficulty while pursuing higher studies and also find a method of making English language learning interesting.

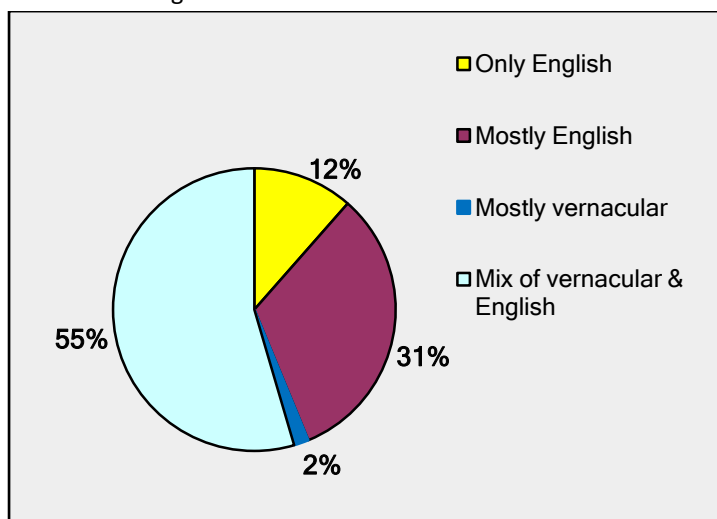
#### **The Process**

In order to know the aspirations of Gen Z particularly those studying in vernacular medium schools, as well as to understand the reasons for their inability to speak fluently in English, a study was conducted by

meeting the students and collecting their response to the questionnaire prepared for the purpose. The total number of students covered under the study was 480 from 13 schools (9 government schools and 4 government aided schools) from the cities of Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, NCR Delhi and Bhubaneswar. To validate the views expressed by the students about the teaching methods and the significance of English language in the present day context in the lives of students, a study was also conducted with 101 teachers teaching in the same 13 schools by meeting them and also obtaining their views with the help of a questionnaire.

**The analysis of the data from the questionnaire administered to the students revealed interesting facts as given below:**

- The students came from different family background. 49.8% came from families in which both parents did not speak English, in 34.8% cases one parent could speak in English and only in 15.4% cases both the parents could speak in English.
- 65% of the students responded that they had more than 40 students in their class, 27% said they had 30 - 40 students in their class and only 8% said they had 20 - 30 students in their class.
- 92% students stated they started learning English from class 1. English was compulsory upto class 10 in 64% cases while 25% stated it was compulsory only upto class 4 and thereafter it was optional. English class was held on 4-5 days in a week as per 96% of the students.
- 79% of the students responded that they had teachers exclusively to teach English in their school. However, to the question *which language does your teacher use during your English classes?* The answer reveals the following:



The majority of the activities in the English class were restricted to reading, writing or listening, while speaking was the least of all activities. The activities ranked in order of importance by students are as under:

Activity	% of Students ranking as top activity
Reading	92
Writing	84
Listening	81
Pronunciation	76
Grammar	66
Speaking	65

On the question with regard to teaching methods used in the English class, Teacher teaching words and students memorizing them was a major activity stated 87% of the students, followed by students copying from blackboard what teacher writes, students reading passages aloud or reciting poems. 84% students responded that teachers rarely or never used innovative methods like audio-visuals or visuals to teach English

in their class, though scientific research has proved that the human mind process images quickly and also retains the image for a longer time.

90% of the students reported that Grammar was taught by the teacher explaining rules and students copied from the blackboard and memorized what was taught. 67% students reported that the teachers never used games/quiz/pictures/role play/actions to explain a dry subject like grammar.

While 98% of the students liked learning English, but only 17% stated they could speak English fluently. 98% reported that they want to learn to speak fluently as they felt it was important to learn to read, write and speak English. The main reasons for wanting to learn English was that it would help in higher studies (97%); it is necessary in today's world (90 %) and it helps to get a better job (90%).

67% students stated that they wanted to study in English medium schools which bring to light the aspirations of the children to be able to speak in English. 89.4% responded that their parents felt proud of them when they spoke in English at home.

On the questions seeking factors influencing learning English, the responses show 87% of the students stated that parents /family create an impact and influence on the person to learn English, 79% responded that friends / neighbours also has an influence on a person to learn English. 74% felt that the place of residence (urban/rural) impacts and influences learning English.

An interesting fact that came to light while talking to these students is that some of them had already enrolled in Spoken English classes to acquire fluency in speaking English language as they felt it would help them in personality development and enhance their career opportunities. This reinforces the urgency of 'Gen Z' to be proficient in English.

**The analysis of the data from the questionnaire administered to the teachers revealed facts as given below:**

The study was conducted covering 101 teachers teaching English in the same 13 schools (9 government and 4 government aided schools) from which students were respondents. Interestingly, 44% of the teachers had less than 10 years of teaching experience while 56% had over 10 years of teaching experience but all, either had a degree to teach or were at least Post Graduates. Overall, 79% had received some form of training to teach English after they started teaching the subject. 76% teachers taught in classes that had more than 30 students.

To the question as to *Which Language do you use mostly to teach English?* The responses were as given below:

Answer	% of Respondents
Only English	8%
Mostly English	30%
Mostly vernacular	2%
Mix of vernacular & English	60%

83% stated that English classes were held on minimum 4 days of the week. The other surprising discovery was that the way English teaching was done in class. The responses are tabulated below:

Answer	% of Respondents
One teacher taught all subjects, including English	12%
One teacher taught all subjects, except English and vernacular languages	6%
Different teachers taught different group of subjects	30%
English teacher only taught English	52%

Again the findings on what is given most importance in the English class were very similar to the responses from the students. The majority of the activity in the English class is restricted to reading, writing or listening (70%), while speaking and pronunciation were the least of all activities. 64% teachers stated they rarely or never used innovative methods like audio-visuals or visuals to teach English in their class though scientific research has proved that the human mind process images quickly and also retains the image. Responses from teachers on teaching Grammar were very similar to the response from students. 90.4% of the

teachers responded that Grammar was taught by explaining rules; students copied from the blackboard and memorized what was taught. 67% teachers responded that they never used games/quiz/pictures/role play/actions to explain a dry subject like grammar.

On the question whether it was important to learn to read, write and speak English, every single teacher responded with a 'Yes'.

Responses from the teachers to the question 'Which of the following do you think will improve teaching and learning English in your classes?' was indeed an indicator to what is lacking in the system to provide better learning of English in schools. 94% of the teachers felt the need to have better access to resources such as textbooks and reading material. 92% felt the need to have fewer tests/examinations. 88% wanted better access to new technologies, such as DVDs or computers while 86% wanted training in new language teaching methodologies. Most interestingly, 86% felt there was need to improve their own level of English. The other responses were fewer students in class (86%), Starting English at an earlier age (85%) and more English classes per week (83%).

On the questions seeking factors influencing learning English, the responses show 90% of the teachers stated that parents /family create an impact and influence on the person to learn English, 82% responded that friends / neighbours also has an influence on a person to learn English. 79% felt that the place of residence (urban/rural) impacts and influences learning English.

### **Conclusion & Recommendations**

Students in vernacular medium schools have to study English as a subject for 7 to 9 years; however, the students still lack confidence to communicate in the language. Therefore, we find the number of students taking admission in English medium schools is multiplying over the last few years. Even the economically disfavored aspire to send their children to English medium schools so that they can have a better life. The responses from the students bring to light their aspirations to be able to speak fluently in English.

On the other hand, the responses from the teachers on what would help to improve English teaching and learning in their class was a reflection of what is lacking in the system of imparting English language education.

Based on the findings, the need of the hour therefore is to equip the students with the ability to read, write and speak in English, of which, speaking seems most significant. While the present education system provides for English as a subject practically from class 1 in most schools, the method of teaching does not give the confidence to the learners to speak. Once they learn to speak without inhibitions, they would be able to improve their overall language skills and emerge as confident individuals.

Teaching methods have to change to adopt use of visual aids as Gen Z is born in a digital age and that is what interests them. They are eager learners if we adopt the right methods otherwise they get easily bored.

It is acknowledged by both the students and teachers that English plays a very significant role in the lives of Indians as it is perceived that proficiency in the language provides better economic status. It is the language of trade and commerce and hence becomes a necessity for the nation aspiring for greater economic progress. The country progresses if there is inclusive growth covering all segments of the society.

While the government of India along with the State governments is working on changing the teaching methods in schools to introduce innovative techniques to teach English, it is a long drawn process. Gen Z needs special attention to inculcate spoken English skills apart from ability to read and write.

Therefore till such time the schools adopt new teaching methods, there needs to be a quick solution for Gen Z to learn English which has become the language of necessity.

Vernacular schools can hold Spoken English classes atleast for the students of class 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> to help them to speak in English fluently. The education department can devise online free English learning opportunities as well Television programmes or focused free programmes sponsored by the government – something like the Singapore's *Speak Good English Movement* for those keen to learn English.

The government can involve persons from the Society proficient in English language to voluntarily reach out to the students from vernacular schools and empower them to take on the world by teaching them

to speak fluently in English or encourage organizations such as *Teach for India* to cover all vernacular schools in the country with a customised English learning programme.

**REFERENCES**

- [1]. Ammon, U. *The German Language and the Real World: sociolinguistic, cultural and pragmatic perspectives of contemporary German*. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1995.
  - [2]. David Graddol. *The Future of English?* British Council 1997, 2000.
  - [3]. Reilly, Peter. *Understanding and Teaching Generation Y*. Mexico.
  - [4]. Daniel G. Kipnis & Gary M. Childs. *Educating Generation X and Generation Y: Teaching Tips for Librarians*, The Haworth Press, 2004.
-