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Reforming Beliefs

INDISPENSABILITY OF ENGLISH FOR EMPLOYABILITY**Dr. Arun K Behera****ABSTRACT**

This paper discusses how English acts as a binding language across the world. The advent of English as a force in the third world countries is dealt with in detail, including aspects like economic and financial growth of the third world countries. Moreover, the impact of the rise in educational and awareness levels, combined with the growth in per capita income on the employability of the citizens of the third world countries has also been taken up. Growing desires of the people, coupled with a deep - rooted need to have an improved standard of living has been touched upon. Attempts have been made here how these factors play a vital role in employability. The economic and cultural change in the third world countries and how it has impacted the employment opportunities, plus the reasons why English plays a vital role in all these are also covered in the paper. I have tried to deal with the attitudinal change in the government organizations and their role in adding to the burgeoning employment opportunities and the accompanying importance of English.

Keywords: English, employability, opportunity, indispensability

Introduction

In recent times, the world has gradually become a global village. Accessibility amongst countries has become easier, intercontinental relations have increased, and international economies have come up more rapidly. With this gradual metamorphosis of the world into a global village, one striking aspect comes out very vividly - the importance of English. It has become the language of commerce, politics, trade, economics, development - indeed, it is the singly language that has gained in importance as the fallout of the apparent shrinkage in the size of the world. Needless to say, this is due to the fact that one common binding factor was required to ensure that communication channels were transparent and unambiguous amongst all the people concerned.

Reach of English

The reach of English is evident even amongst the third world countries. Majority of the people in these countries belong to the lower middle class. This stratum of society is gradually growing in awareness and nurturing a desire to raise its standard of living. Consequently, the economies of Korea, India and Africa, to mention a few, have been growing steadily in the recent past. In addition to the higher levels of awareness, better standards of education have contributed to this development, which has resulted in an increase in the per capita income in these countries, as seen in South Korea where it has risen from \$350 in the 50s to \$2,900 in the 80s. While agriculture has remained the major source of income in the developing countries, the increase in the per capita income is evidence of economy where employment opportunities are now available in a variety of occupations, thereby bringing about a gradual decline in the high levels of unemployment in these countries. This has been the result of the growing aspiration amongst the people for a better lifestyle. No more is there just one breadwinner in the family; double income families are the norm, with more stress being laid on the education of the next generation, leading to better employment.

English and the Middle Class

People know that this is the only way to rise above the lower class or lower middle class and look forward to a brighter future. Due to this concept of more income required to fulfill these various desires and needs, there is also an increase in the number of people seeking employment in the developing countries. The aspirations and desires of this segment of people are not to reach for the skies; they just want to improve their present living conditions. And they are completely aware that better employment opportunities require better educational qualifications in general and improved knowledge of English in particular. *Employability*, as the Chambers' dictionary defines it, *is the quality in a person that makes him or her employable or eligible to be hired for a particular job*. And, as we are all aware, the employability of a person improves with better levels of the knowledge of English.

English and the Employment Opportunity

One of the varied employment opportunities that are opening up in the third world

countries is tourism. In the case of our country, from being known as *the land of snake charmers and elephants*, India is today recognized as a culturally rich country with a rich heritage. This realization, coupled with the suitable marketing of our country's many wonders, has given an impetus to the tourism industry in India. The milling tourists have given rise to employment opportunities in the form of travel agencies and guided tours, which require a decent level of English to cater to the Multitude of international tourist from various countries.

Employment opportunities have also come up due to the increased sale of consumer goods in the developing countries. This has manifested itself as the fast - expanding 'mall culture'. Malls catering to the brand - conscious public have come up everywhere and are continuing to do so. The opening up of the economy has also led to the influx of various reputed foreign brands striving to establish a foothold in the burgeoning third world markets. In addition to various international brands, international supermarket chains like Walmart are also making an entry into the developing countries competing with the existing chains like Food World, Spencer's and Big Bazaar, all of which have no started outlets even in small cities.

English in the Developing Countries

Other consumer goods stores making a name for themselves in the developing countries are Shoppers' Stop, Crossword and Pantaloons, to name a few. These consumer stores have presented the local populace with tremendous employment opportunities. There is scope for employment as salespersons, marketing desk jobs, liaison, and so forth. However, there is a basic qualification required amongst those wishing to be employed in these sectors of the economy. And that is working knowledge of English. Given the nature of the jobs and the profile of the customers that these outlets cater to, it is imperative that the prospective employees have sound knowledge in those areas pertaining to their area of work. This is required as most of the products in such chains are imported from various parts of the world. Uniformity in packaging language has been established by the exporting countries by ensuring that the labeling is in English. For better communication between the retailer and customer, suitable levels of English are required on the part of the salesperson. In the case of FMCGG items, the sales person need to be able to verify various aspects of the products like the expiry date, constituents of food items and so on in order to cater to the queries from the customers. Thus, the level of English

knowledge would need to go beyond mere mechanical understanding and include a higher level of comprehension.

English in the BPO Industry

Another area where more and more employment opportunities are opening up today is in call centres. Today, almost 2,00,000 jobs have been outsourced to India through call centres. The primary population working in call centres belongs to the lower middle class where the employees are not very highly qualified or educated and are required to work as an economic need in the family. Ironically, despite their social and educational backgrounds, these very employees, by virtue of their job description, are required to interact primarily with people residing, outside our country, understand their queries and problems and be able to provide the right solution to them. Thus, this includes not just appreciable levels of English knowledge but also a decent level of comprehension of different accents.

English in the PSUs

The growing employment opportunities have been added to with the entry of multi-national corporations in to the third world countries. These MNCs naturally, due to their very nature of operations, expect decent levels of English amongst their employees. With the opening up of the economy even government companies like PSUs today have regular dealings with foreign companies through collaborations, exports, technological consultancy, etc. All of these require extensive communication in English to ensure the success of the partnerships and profitability of the company. The market has also today changed from being a sellers' market to a buyers' market, where the customer is king. Hence, presenting the right image of the company is absolutely essential when interacting with the various foreign partners of the company.

English is equally important in other job profiles in PSUs. These key areas include Public Relations, Purchase and Training, in addition to Marketing. All these aspects of work involve extensive use of English in fairly proficient levels. Thus, even PSUs, which normally have a central method of recruitment of officers test the knowledge levels of the aspirants in English in the private sector too. English language skills are expected from those seeking employment and the same is assessed through interviews and group discussion among the candidates.

Conclusion

Keeping the above in mind, it can thus be reiterated that English is an absolute necessity to ensure employability. Better language skills in English will certainly increase employment opportunities and provide more avenues, thereby enhancing the standards of living. When more and more people belonging to the middle class from the developing countries equip themselves with the English skills, they will surely get better jobs and create a better society. It is therefore felt that the employability skills of English has a direct bearing on the society.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Arun K Behera is an Assistant Professor of English in Sri Sathya Sai University, Bangalore. He has over 22 years of experience in various capacities such as Hod, Principal, Senate member, Board of Studies member, IGNOU coordinator, NSS Program Officer etc. Dr. Behera has published five books, edited *Expression*, reviewed *A Little Book of Language* and published 50 articles. He is in the review panel of IJEE and IJEL and editorial board of IJSSE and IJEE. He has been conferred Bharat Excellence Award and his bio-note has appeared in *Asia Pacific Who's Who*, *Asia's Who's Who* and *Famous India's Who's Who*.