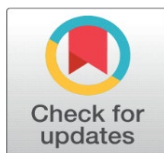
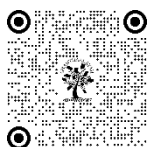


ENGLISH PROFICIENCY AS A KEY COMPETENCY IN MANAGEMENT EDUCATION: PERCEPTIONS, ASPIRATIONS AND APPREHENSIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of English proficiency in personal, academic, and professional contexts among management students, focusing on their perceptions, aspirations, and challenges. With data collected on their use of English in social interactions, academic performance, and career aspirations, the paper highlights critical insights into the perceived importance of English, identifies key apprehensions in speaking and writing, and proposes recommendations for enhancing English learning in management programs. The findings emphasize the need for curriculum improvements, specialized support programs, and targeted interventions to address language skill gaps and better prepare students for leadership roles in business.

Keywords: English Language Teaching, Business English, Speaking Apprehensions, Writing Apprehensions, Communication Aspirations

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected and highly competitive world, proficiency in English is considered as an asset crucial for employability. Spoken all around the world, English has become the global lingua franca, serving as the primary mode of communication in education, business, and international affairs. In the present day world, proficiency in English is not merely a skill but a necessity for academic and professional success. Rapid globalization and integration of modern information and technology in doing business has resulted to the growing importance of English proficiency. Multinational corporations (MNCs), corporate firms, and industries such as IT, banking, healthcare, and aviation prioritize candidates with strong English communication skills. Given this demand, business schools and management programs, who aims to produce industry ready graduates, emphasize upon building strong English proficiency skills among its students. For professional programs like Masters of Business Administration (MBA) and Bachelors of Business Administration (BBA), building English proficiency become a key component of professional training and learning. The

MBA program, a prominent educational pathway for aspiring business leaders, specifically focuses on equipping students with the managerial and leadership skills necessary to thrive in various industries. Central to these skills is the development of strong English competency which can significantly impact their career trajectories and success in the professional world.

Management students require a strong command of English because their future careers demand effective use of communication in corporate settings, leadership roles, and global business environments. However, despite its importance, many management students experience apprehensions related to their speaking and writing skills in English, which may hinder their academic progress and career aspirations. According to reports, an estimated 86% of employees and executives cite lack of communication skill as the main cause of workplace failure. To excel in any managerial role, a candidate must possess strong communication skill. Today, more than ever, an employee's ability to work, co-operate and co-ordinate well in a team is valued over his or her academic records. Working in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual environment calls for an effective use of English which creates understanding and harmony across all members. From handling conversations to difficult situations, from building strong relationship to building networks and fostering collaborations, English communication skills has become significantly crucial. English is not only important for personal and academic success but also for professional success and growth.

2. THE ROLE OF ENGLISH IN PERSONAL AND ACADEMIC GROWTH

English plays a pivotal role in shaping both personal and academic development. For students, proficiency in English enables them to engage in effective communication, critical thinking, and knowledge acquisition. It helps them access global academic resources, including research journals, case studies, and online learning platforms, which are predominantly available in English. Additionally, in classroom settings, students with strong English skills tend to participate more actively in teaching and learning interactions, presentations, group discussions, and debates, enhancing their overall learning experience.

In the context of higher education in India, English remains the dominant language of instruction in management programs. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 underscores the importance of 21st-century skills, including business communication, digital literacy, and professional writing, all of which rely heavily on English proficiency. Consequently, management students must develop their language skills to meet the expectations of academia and industry alike.

3. STUDENTS' ASPIRATIONS BEHIND LEARNING ENGLISH

For management students, learning English is primarily driven by strengthening career prospective. The corporate world seeks graduates who are industry ready, who can take on any managerial and leadership role through their effective communicative competence. Organizations want professionals who can express themselves clearly and confidently in English. For many students, English proficiency is a pathway to higher employability, better career prospects, and access to global opportunities.

Research indicates that English proficiency is closely linked to employability rates, salary growth, and professional advancement (Graddol, 2006). Many organizations, especially multinational companies (MNCs), international banks, and global consulting firms, require employees to interact with clients, draft reports, and negotiate business deals in English. Therefore, management students aim to strengthen their English skills to enhance their marketability and competitiveness in the job market.

Moreover, aspirations extend beyond employment. Many students aspire to pursue higher education, research, or entrepreneurial ventures, which necessitate a strong command of English. Standardized tests such as IELTS, TOEFL, and GMAT require proficiency in reading, writing, and speaking English, making it imperative for students to develop these competencies early in their academic journey. There are also studies that indicate that students aim to build English proficiency to elevate social status and influence social inclusion.

4. APPREHENSIONS TOWARDS ENGLISH SPEAKING AND WRITING

Despite recognizing the importance of English, many management students struggle with language anxiety, particularly in speaking and writing. These apprehensions stem from various factors, including lack of confidence,

limited exposure to English, fear of making mistakes, and inadequate training. Oral communication anxiety often manifests during presentations, interviews, and networking events, where students hesitate to express their thoughts fluently.

Similarly, students face challenges in business writing, such as drafting letters, emails, reports, proposals, and case analyses. Writing requires not only grammatical accuracy but also clarity, and coherence. Many management students find it difficult to organize ideas logically, use appropriate vocabulary, and structure their writing effectively. This gap highlights the need for targeted writing interventions and language support programs to help students overcome their anxieties and improve their communication skills.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to provide insights into the perceived importance of English in academic and professional settings among management students. Understanding student's perspectives help educators design language training programs that addresses specific needs and challenges. The study lays emphasis on identification of learner needs and see how learner needs are aligned with the curriculum design to match target efficiency. Identification of students' aspirations for learning English in management programs would allow for integration of practical language training through workshops, business writing courses, public speaking sessions, and industry-driven communication training to strengthen the skill development initiatives. The study will also examine students' apprehensions about speaking and writing in English, enabling educators to implement confidence-building strategies such as peer interactions, role-playing exercises, and personalized feedback to ward-off possible oral and written communication apprehensions. The findings of the study have broader implications for business education policies in management programs, as highlighting the need for a structured language support will not only strengthen the students' overall language skill development but also prepare the students to fulfil the linguistic demands of the corporate world.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This present study aims to fulfil the following research objectives:

- 1) To evaluate the perceived importance of English in personal and academic spheres among management students.
- 2) To find out students' aspirations behind learning English in their management programs
- 3) To identify management student's apprehensions (if any) towards speaking and writing skills in English.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research design to systematically analyse the perceptions of business management students regarding English proficiency. The quantitative approach enables objective measurement and statistical analysis of responses, ensuring a structured and data-driven evaluation of students' needs, aspirations, and apprehensions.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE SELECTION

The population of the study consisted of BBA and MBA students. Stratified random sampling method was used to identify the samples of this study. The sample consisted of 150 business management students enrolled in BBA and MBA programs.

DATA COLLECTION

The study relied on primary data, collected through an online survey designed to assess students' English proficiency, aspirations, and challenges. A structured questionnaire was used, consisting of closed-ended questions measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. This method allowed for standardized responses, facilitating systematic analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequency distribution and percentage analysis, to identify trends and patterns in students' perceptions. The analysis provided insights into students' self-assessed English proficiency, their perceived importance of language skills in professional growth, and the key areas where they experience difficulties.

6. FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

OBJECTIVE 1: PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH IN PERSONAL AND ACADEMIC SPHERES

Personal Importance of English

The survey results strongly confirm that management students recognize English as an important skill for personal and social engagement. 86.4% of students believe English is essential for effective communication in daily life, highlighting their awareness of its significance. However, while 94.3% acknowledge that improving English enhances their social interactions and relationships, actual usage in informal settings remains lower. Only 56.4% frequently use English in peer interactions, and 40% remain neutral, suggesting that despite recognizing its importance, many still prefer their native language for informal conversations.

Furthermore, while 69.3% express confidence in using English casually, 28.6% remain hesitant. This indicates a confidence gap that may root from a lack of practice opportunities or fear of making mistakes. A majority 69.3% actively seek practice opportunities to use English but 30.7% are neutral or disagree suggest that though majority seek opportunities to improve English skill, a significant number of respondents do not which may imply several factors such as the absence of an English-speaking environment, limited exposure or apprehensions in general.

Academic Importance of English

Students overwhelmingly recognize English as essential for academic success, with 84.2% agreeing that it is a critical skill in their management program. This aligns with their academic experiences, where 95.7% acknowledge that English proficiency is crucial for understanding lectures and course materials. This finding strongly supports the view that English proficiency directly impacts students' academic performance, classroom participation, and comprehension of business concepts.

Despite this recognition, some gaps exist in curriculum effectiveness. While 83.8% of students feel that their management program adequately prepares them for professional English usage, 15.4% either remain uncertain or feel otherwise. Similarly, 79% of students believe that their curriculum includes sufficient English language training for business communication, yet 21% indicate room for improvement. These figures suggest that while most students recognize the program's efforts, there is still a need to enhance business-specific English training to better align with the organizational demands.

7. OVERALL INTERPRETATION

The findings collectively indicate that management students view English proficiency as indispensable for both academic and personal growth. While students recognize English as essential for social mobility, networking, and academic success however, their practical engagement in English conversations remains inconsistent and a matter of concern. From the responses it can be understood that targeted interventions, such as informal English discussion groups, confidence-building activities, and peer interaction strategies, along with curriculum enhancements like specialized business communication modules and practical training in business writing, can strengthen their proficiency and bridge the confidence gap that affects their overall English proficiency.

OBJECTIVE 2: STUDENTS' ASPIRATIONS FOR LEARNING ENGLISH IN THEIR MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

Skills for placement opportunities (98.3%)

All most all students (98.3%) recognize English proficiency as a crucial factor in securing placement opportunities, particularly in Group Discussions (GDs) and Personal Interviews (PIs). These structured evaluation processes often test candidates' ability to articulate ideas clearly, engage in professional discourse, and demonstrate confidence. Given the highly competitive nature of recruitment in management programs, students aspire to refine their English communication skills to enhance their employability. This finding suggests the need for focused training sessions on GD strategies, mock interviews, and professional communication workshops to prepare students for placement success.

Networking skills (94.5%)

Networking is an essential skill for business students, and 94.5% of respondents believe English proficiency is vital in establishing and maintaining professional relationships. Effective networking requires the ability to engage in meaningful conversations, convey ideas persuasively, and build rapport with industry professionals. Whether at corporate events, seminars, or informal business gatherings, building networks and expanding professional connections are vital to navigate and sustain in the professional work environment. As students recognize that fluency in English can expand their professional connections hence, to support this aspiration, management programs must integrate networking simulations, business meet-ups, and professional etiquette training into the curriculum setting.

Personality development through effective communication (92.3%)

Personality development is closely tied to communication skills, and 92.3% of students believe mastering English will enhance their personal and professional growth. Effective communication fosters confidence, clarity, and assertiveness, all of which contribute to a strong personal presence in professional settings. This finding highlights the importance of integrating personality development modules within business communication courses, focusing on articulation, voice modulation, and body language, appearances and grooming to help students become more impactful communicators.

Fluency in writing English (91.6%)

With 91.6% of students expressing aspirations to achieve fluency in writing, it is evident that business writing remains a key area of focus. Writing well-structured reports, emails, proposals, and presentations is a critical skill in management. Many students likely recognize their current limitations in formal writing and seek opportunities to enhance their ability to draft professional documents. As business graduates are often criticised for their poor writing abilities, hence, business programs should emphasize structured writing exercises to help students develop their written communication abilities.

Leadership skills by mastering English communication (91.0%)

Leadership effectiveness and communication prowess are interconnected. The findings suggest that 91.0% of students believe mastering English will support their leadership aspirations. One main motive of business school's curriculum is to instil leadership spirit and potential among its students. As business leaders must articulate vision, inspire teams, and engage in high-level negotiations, all of which require strong verbal and written communication skills therefore, developing leadership skills become imminent. This result emphasizes upon the need for leadership communication training, persuasive communication, and executive presence coaching to strengthen students' leadership potential. Providing students with opportunities to lead discussions, deliver keynote speeches, and participate in leadership communication simulations will help them develop their leadership mettle.

Entrepreneurship skills for pitching business ideas (90.3%)

Entrepreneurial success heavily depends on the ability to pitch ideas convincingly, and 90.3% of students recognize that English fluency can help them present their business ideas effectively. Whether securing funding from investors, negotiating partnerships, marketing products to a global audience, or seeking collaborations, aspiring entrepreneurs must communicate with clarity and confidence. The ability to create job is the most celebrated aspect of any entrepreneur hence, in order to equip students with the necessary skills to articulate and sell their ideas successfully, management programs must incorporate pitch deck presentations, start-up storytelling workshops, and real-world investor simulations.

Confidence in using English in professional situations (85.7%)

Confidence in professional English usage is a priority for 85.7% of students, indicating a strong desire to overcome communication barriers in the workplace. Many students may feel hesitant when communicating with colleagues, clients, or superiors, especially in formal settings. Enhancing students' confidence can boost their competence and

accelerate their growth in any professional setting. Students must be exposed to real-world professional interactions through role-playing exercises, industry mentorship programs, and workplace communication training to strengthen their confidence. Encouraging students to participate in business meetings, client interactions, and industry networking events can significantly bridge the confidence gap.

Public speaking skills (84.7%)

Public speaking is an essential skill for business professionals, and 84.7% of students aspire to improve their ability to speak confidently in front of an audience. Whether delivering presentations, leading discussions, or speaking at corporate events, students perceive that strong public speaking skills can significantly enhance their career prospects. To support this goal, business schools can incorporate structured public speaking training, including TED Talk-style presentations, impromptu speaking challenges, and speech coaching workshops to ward-off students' apprehensions to public speaking activities.

Fluency in speaking English (82.6%)

A large proportion of students (82.6%) aspire to achieve fluency in spoken English, highlighting the importance of daily communication practice. Fluency in English is essential for personal as well as professional interactions. Effective workplace interactions, team collaborations, and cross-cultural engagements require strong fluency in communicative abilities. However, fluency cannot be developed through theoretical learning alone; it requires immersive experiences that inherently build fluency. Speaking labs, conversational practice sessions, and interactive discussion forums to group activities can help students develop their verbal communication skills.

Negotiation skills (80.6%)

Negotiation is a critical skill in business management, and 80.6% of students aspire to enhance their ability to navigate discussions effectively in English. Successful negotiations require clarity, persuasion, and active listening, all of which depend on strong language skills. Many students recognize that improving their English proficiency will enable them to negotiate better deals, resolve conflicts, and influence stakeholders. Business programs should offer negotiation training through role-play scenarios, mock deal-making exercises, and case studies on successful business negotiations.

The above findings indicate that management students have strong aspirations related to English proficiency, particularly in professional and leadership contexts. While their motivations range from placement readiness and entrepreneurship to networking and negotiation skills, the all-encompassing theme is their recognition of English as a gateway to career success speaks strength about the inclusion of a strong English communication course. Management programs must align their curricula with these aspirations by incorporating practical, skills-based learning experiences that build students' confidence and competence in business communication. Incorporating these aspirations behind structuring the business English syllabus will lead to the fulfilment of comprehensive learning needs of the students.

OBJECTIVE 3: ANALYSIS OF MANAGEMENT STUDENTS' APPREHENSIONS IN ENGLISH SPEAKING AND WRITING SKILLS

Oral and written apprehensions are one of the major reason for poor performance of the management students. There is substantive amount of apprehension that exist in students while communicating. Let us first identify the English speaking apprehension.

The results from the questionnaire indicate moderate to high apprehension in thought and organization. 68% of respondents reported feeling either neutral or not confident about their ability to organize thoughts when speaking in English, especially in formal settings like presentations and group discussions. When it comes to vocabulary, 59% of students expressed uncertainty in selecting appropriate vocabulary during conversations, highlighting a gap in their functional vocabulary for general and business contexts. Public speaking anxiety is an issue that requires to be addressed as it often hinders the growth of any professional. 30% of students reported feeling anxious or uncomfortable when required to speak publicly in English. An additional 15% indicated experiencing severe anxiety when presenting to large audiences, making public speaking a notable challenge.

All though, there are concerns involving fluency and vocabulary, but on the contrary, 74% of students feel confident in their pronunciation. This suggests that while students struggle with word choice and fluency, they are relatively comfortable with articulation and pronunciation. Though student's responses indicate that they are confident about their pronunciations, yet, there are multiple studies that reflect the poor pronunciation abilities of the second language

learners. Many students, when it comes to their communication abilities, do not admit that they require help or improvement highlighting a major cognitive bias often referred to as the Dunning-Kruger (1999) effect that is, “they don’t know that they don’t know.”

If we look at writing apprehensions, research indicates that there is equal or more apprehension towards writing than speaking. If we look in to the responses from the questionnaire, although the majority of respondents expressed confidence in their grammatical knowledge, 44% respondents were unsure of their grammar accuracy when writing in English.

When it comes to organizing thoughts in a structured way, 54% of students responded feeling apprehensive about structuring their ideas while writing, which impacts their ability to produce coherent and well-organized written text. On spelling and vocabulary concerns, 43% of students highlighted difficulties in selecting appropriate vocabulary during writing tasks whereas, 30% students has concern towards their spelling. A considerable 33% reported experiencing anxiety when working on formal writing assignments such as essays and reports. When it comes to writing apprehensions, Students generally exhibit hesitation regarding their writing skills, often while comparing their writings with their peers. Students often compare themselves with their peers unfavourably and this frequently impacts their confidence in writing. Having a strong teacher – student and peer feedback mechanism can help in installing confidence among the students.

8. CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

The responses very well suggest significant apprehension in both speaking and writing. This apprehension is reflective of the students’ underlying weaknesses in structured communication. One of the key issue in oral and writing apprehension is not just confidence but competence. Elevating students’ competence can result in to realistic assumptions towards their own English competence skills which, as a result, will invariably lead to fair confidence and competence.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Shifting from a need-based to a knowledge-based approach

A knowledge-based approach to language learning focuses on developing a deeper understanding of linguistic structures, discourse patterns, and professional communication strategies, rather than simply addressing immediate communication gaps. Research suggests that management students benefit more from long-term language competence rather than ad-hoc interventions (Ellis, 2005). This approach ensures that students acquire not just functional English skills but also a comprehensive linguistic foundation that supports advanced professional communication (Richards, 2015).

Incorporating practical language learning opportunities

Practical exposure to real-world communication scenarios enhances learning outcomes significantly. Studies indicate that interactive and experiential learning methods, such as role-plays, presentations, and simulations, improve both fluency and confidence (Kolb, 2014). Business communication scholars emphasize the importance of contextual learning where students engage in authentic tasks that mirror workplace communication demands (Dörnyei, 2009).

Add-On courses to strengthen speaking and writing abilities

Supplementary language courses, such as business writing workshops and public speaking training, can provide targeted interventions to address specific deficiencies (Hyland, 2016). Research supports the integration of modular courses designed to improve written and spoken proficiency, particularly in business education, where effective communication is a key employability skill (Bhatia, 2017).

Integrating technological assistance

Technological tools such as AI-based grammar checkers, speech recognition software, and interactive learning platforms can significantly aid students in improving their writing and speaking skills. Studies show that digital learning tools enhance self-regulated learning, provide immediate feedback, and foster engagement (Godwin-Jones, 2018). Additionally, adaptive learning systems have been found to support personalized language learning pathways (Kukulka-Hulme & Traxler, 2019).

Creating a more favourable ground for language learning

A positive and immersive learning environment reduces apprehension and fosters confidence in using English (Krashen, 1982). Research on language anxiety suggests that a low-stress, communicative classroom environment encourages greater participation and willingness to take linguistic risks (Horwitz et al., 1986). Encouraging peer interactions and mentor-guided practice sessions can further enhance learning outcomes (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012).

Reinforcing the Need for Needs Assessment

Needs assessment remains a critical tool in curriculum design and pedagogical intervention (Brown, 2009). By systematically identifying specific gaps in speaking and writing abilities, educators can design targeted interventions that align with students' academic and professional goals (Long, 2005). A well-structured needs analysis can bridge the gap between theoretical instruction and practical language use, ensuring that learners receive relevant and effective language training (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

10. CONCLUSION

The study emphasises the importance of English proficiency in management education and strongly advocates for a shift from a need-based to a knowledge-based approach to teaching English. Practical language learning, technological integration, and add-on courses can enhance students' speaking and writing skills. A supportive learning environment and continuous needs assessment are crucial for aligning the learning outcomes with the professional world expectations. Further, reducing apprehension and fostering confidence among students will go a long way in instilling leadership abilities among students. By implementing the strategies discussed in the paper can equip business school graduates with essential English communication skills, ensuring language proficiency and professional success.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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