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ENGLISH LANGUAGE: A TOOL OF HARNESSING SOFT SKILLS AND CUSTOMIZING PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

English is dominantly used against the backdrop of multilingualism across the globe. So, several factors contribute in the rise of English language at global level and utility; and instead of other innumerable reasons, its own attributes define it as lingua franca because of its multifaceted applications and tremendous role. The most important factors, which de/construct the standardization of English, are social, commercial, professional, corporate, educational, institutional, and religious exchange of ideas and ideals inside and outside of the multicultural and multilingual societies and nations. People, who work and belong to any of these fields, need an apt and smooth tool for their self-presentation and rich performance. English language, due to its multipurpose and multi-tasking attributes, appears not only to be an apt tool for harnessing soft skills but it also customises one's dynamic performance in inter-cultural multilingual organisations. This research paper attempts to find and establish the parameters that help to harness soft skills and customise one's performance in multilingual and multicultural organisations. The hegemony of English language stems from the heart of its functionality and evolving paradigms. English language nurtures modern technologies; it facilitates multilingual speakers and works as a bedrock for one's multidimensional development in professional world and thriving globalization.

Key words: English language, Multilingual, Multicultural, Soft skills, Performance

"One language sets you in a corridor for life. Two languages open every door along the way." Frank Smith

English language occupies a tremendous status quo in the contemporary era due to its evolving paradigms of means and motives. The attributes which revitalise, dignify and standardize today's life-style, also define and refine one's socio-political, educational, commercial and professional growth. People, who belong to or work in any of these fields, need an apt and smooth tool for their self-presentation and rich performance in the contemporary cut-throat competitive world. English language, because of its multifaceted and multi-

tasking attributes, appears not only to be an apt and smooth tool for harnessing soft skills but it also customises one's performance in multifarious and multilingual organisations. This research paper explores and examines the parameters that help to harness soft skills and customise one's dynamic performance in multilingual and multicultural organisations in the era of globalization.

Free from socio-cultural or regional barrier, English language works like a binding principle in the professional world; therefore, the peculiarities of English language themselves emerge as a heightening tool of harnessing soft skills and customizing performance. Here, it is very essential

to recall the words of a prominent novelist, Raja Rao who theorises the multitude of beliefs towards it: "English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We can not write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will someday prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it. The tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression, even as the tempo of American or Irish life has gone into the making of theirs." (P vi)

Therefore, today when we are having exchange of ideas at global level, export and import in education and business, and in many other things; we need to acquire such a language which can beget global relationship and communication successfully. It is a very deep observation that: 'as many countries so many languages' but this collocation remains as a determinant at a global communication level. Hence, sometimes the selection of language becomes crucial and determines the relationship between two agents, societies, dealers or nations. One always needs a flawless language, free from regional and cultural barriers, to achieve one's objective or mission. Such language must exude richness, clarity, comprehension in communication inside and outside the country. In this regard English language, which is regarded as the language of intellectual make-up today, unanimously occupies its pivotal importance in our multicultural world. It is used as a legitimizing tool for perpetuating status quo by its users across the globe indisputably. The influencing and functional paradigms of English language determine its status and role in innumerable fields as well. Nowadays career building is premised on the assumption that English is bedrock for doing and living smartly. Many of the reputed institutions keep running English language as the hallmark and mile stone for their students and learners in order to excel their professional communication and behavioural grooming.

Knowledge of a language is undeniably part of one's cultural heritage. Because it is obvious that,

"a good portion of one's identity as a member of a cultural group comes from being able to speak the group's language. Much of our cultural knowledge is expressed to us in that language."(Baker 201)

Hence, since cultures and languages are entwined and do not evolve separately, the development of a society is also interlinked with the development of language and culture since neither of them can thrive in the absence of language.

The need of English language arises in all walks of lives today in the era of globalization. The horizon of success can be acknowledged through various applications of English in all walks of lives. It can be seen as a tool of soft skills, representation, team building attributes, customizing transdisciplinary skills and required growth in learners. Global utility, need and relevance of English elevate its standard as a global language. It is one of the flawless master keys to disperse our thoughts in front of the world smartly. The frontiers of thoughts can establish their space nationally and internationally.

English language is considered by a number of reputed institutes and language practitioners to be bedrock for the growth of students, learners, practitioners and businessmen. Soft skills primarily comprise listening, speaking, reading and writing skills of a person irrespective to time and place. In India, like many other countries, there are number of engineering universities and colleges where soft skills are imparted to the learners under various modules and syllabi. Besides listening, speaking, reading and writing, soft skills also focus on personality development, professional communication and behavioural grooming. In modern multicultural global scenario, English language, which begets different innumerable opportunities, appears as a pivotal tool for its exponents. These exponents, be a businessman, entrepreneur, administrator, engineer, doctor, scientist, teacher, employer and many more can refine their journey of accomplishment.

Here, the present research paper will examine how English language harnesses soft skills and as well as customizes one's performance better than any other language in the contemporary cut-throat competitive intercultural world. Hence, it is

very important to notice Chaudhari's demonstration of contemporary relevance of English:

"Skills are not born; surviving skills are not borrowed; employability skills do not occur itself; they are part and parcel of practice and thoughtful efforts; they may be servant of practitioners; they flourish in the practitioners as leaves flourish on the trees. Training directs employability skills and practitioners develop cluster of surviving skills. Selection of language and language proficiency in communication revitalize surviving and employability skills as well as identity; and along with these the dynamism of individual weaves individual's durability and adroitness in performance and workforce." (P 366)

The above quote attempts to exemplify the intensive and potential role of language in developing skills, whether it is soft skill or hard skill. The selection of language and its practice generate adroitness and richness in performance for its users on one hand and on the other it fetches a good number of opportunities because "English is to be regarded as the most international of languages..."(Quirk 21) Like a catalyst it builds local and national, cosmopolitan and global varieties of communication and relationships; it trains for completeness of life in un/professional world. It helps its users to cater intended content to accomplish performance and cultivates values; and sometime all of them simultaneously. Cluster of traits and values are bestowed upon its practitioners axiomatically because its contemporary relevance carries wizardry of global worth and functional success. Regardless to any field, English language, among dozens of languages, happened to be very vital tool for customizing one's performance.

Every language is part of culture; it has been a vital means of transmitting culture. It serves, and reflects cultural, social and contemporary needs. Behind every culture there is society, behind every society there is man, behind every man there is language and the journey from culture to language involves entire success and failure of man and society. One's language and performance determine one's professional identity sometime partly sometime whole. For instance, today in multicultural and multilingual backgrounds where

people from different parts of the different countries with different dialects, culture and society want to share, exchange and connect, then, they have no choice except a language known to all. The success of their gathering, exchange, mutual relationship, etc., depends on their success of communication. One should never ignore English because "It was a language for religion, a language for law, a language for the court, a language for the fields, a language for war, for work, for celebration... a language for all seasons." (Bragg 105) In such case one should always choose an appropriate language without distinguishing its origin but realizing the success of his or her communication in the chosen language. A language of multilingual people should be preferred due to its ubiquitous attributes in usage and performance as one can see that English language has become standard-common language among multilingual people and countries. Because the practice which builds one's identity and value-evolves one's whole paradigm from culture to literature, water to bread, belief to art and place to palace. A person's "identity" becomes a transparent window of one's belief, morals, custom, nature, culture, literature, society and knowledge because identity and value do not come from isolation or a single thing.

In today's multicultural global scenario one needs not only to generate these attributes inside but also to be understood genuinely among multilingual people outside. English, among the different languages, reasonably remains a language of every mouth and that can serve any evolution that has concern with any walk of life without any geographical hindrance and socio-cultural obstacles. Besides constructing identity and breeding different opportunities, English language appears to be a strongest tool for its multilingual exponents. These exponents, be an administrator, a businessman, entrepreneur, engineer, doctor, scientist, teacher, leader, employer and many more who can refine their journey of accomplishment through English. David Crystal, a renowned authority on English language, presents a lively and factual account of the rise of English as a global language and states, "In many cases, its standing is less certain, coexisting with other local languages in a relationship which

shifts with time and social function. But in all cases, it can be argued, the population is living in an environment in which the English language is routinely in evidence, publicly accessible in varying degrees, and part of the nation's recent or present identity". (P 66) Here, my point of focus is just to highlight that if English language can play a role in a nation's recent and present identity, it can also construct an individual's identity without any obstacle.

English language bears its own magnetism of several influential factors in individual's pragmatic domains. These pragmatic influential factors can be: Professional drive, Personal prospect and Conversational prosperity. These factors cultivate values and expand identity across the globe. It also helps one to build one's strong undeniable showmanship as well as to enrich one's outcome during one's stint instantly. As Rashmi Sadana points that "Knowing English fluently provides innumerable social and economic advantages, but—and this is key—it always exists alongside Hindi or other Indian languages...since English in Indian society is no longer a language of colonization, it must be viewed in the context of other Indian languages in order to grasp the profound effects of linguistic identity on modern Indian life. It is not enough to say that English is a language of privilege, which it is, among other things."(P 25) We can see that English is a language which imparts privilege among other things which create one's own achievements, worth and values. English language as global culture facilitates its users at every step of life globally.

Language plays the role to the ideas as father to the child. For cultivating and spreading values one needs a medium- a language of every mouth, a special language that can reach to the largest people easily and smoothly. It is true to accept and understand that "Our mental climate will always foster plants that do not flourish in England or America; and such plants, just because they are somewhat exotic, add to the charm of a garden. All lovers of English will, therefore, encourage them to grow in the world-wide garden of English" (Dustoor 126). And this charm may include different unseen values- in the quality of smoothness, standard, usefulness and importance. Due to its prerogative

over other languages and ubiquitous use, English furnishes us and nurtures our ideas; and due to same reason it seems to excel and transcend a person's holistic value at local, national and global level; and above all it provides its exponents a tremendous platform for the cult of self-expression and cultivating values worldwide.

One can find that language has its own culture and culture has its own language. Both, language and culture exert latent power over us like the moon over the tides. Today everyone is certainly affected by the language used in their practical lives. Because of cultural diversity and different community orientations one can only relish English language to improvise oneself a unique means of social control that helps him to understand and spread values successfully. A person may use English terms while speaking Marathi not because his English is stronger but because English is considered a language of prestige and worldwide practice. So, one can customize one's prestige, performance and value through English language. The practitioners of English language can experience that "All the more remarkable then that it has taken such a worldwide hold. For outside the core speakers, it is estimated that upwards of three hundred million have English as a second or third language essential, as in India and Singapore, to enter into many of the central processes of society. There is yet another batch who uses English as the preferred adoptive means of communication. Many from different languages now speak to each other in English rather than in either one of their own languages." (Bragg 262)

Language and culture are integral parts of each other. They are inseparable threads of discipline of profession, performance and human world. In this context the precursors of (English) language should acknowledge that, "No language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture; and no culture can exist which does not have at its centre, the structure of natural language." (Tirumalesh 126) Very often a cross-culturally efficient person's cognitive behaviours and characteristics are not limited but are open to growth beyond the psychological parameters of only one culture. Gleason indicated that "languages are not only the products of cultures, but also are the

symbols of cultures.” The development of a language frequently affects its associated culture, and cultural patterns of cognition and custom are often explicitly coded in language. For Hudson culture “is the kind of knowledge which we learn for other people, either by direct instruction or by watching their behaviour. Since we learn our culture from those around us, we may assume that we share it with them, so this kind of knowledge is likely to play a major role when we use language.” (78)

English is used in India against a backdrop of multilingualism with several regional languages and dialects, all of which are native to India. But fortunately and positively English language is styled to suit our needs. But sometime, “a foreign language is used for absorbing the culture of another nation; a second language is used as an alternative way of expressing the culture of one's own.” (Naik 299) Any individual seeking socio- economic advancement at the local or global level will find an asset and an opportunity in English. That is why- where English is used as a first language, it serves various purposes, but where its use is as a second language, it serves specific purposes because it is an advantage of English language that it is not confined to any particular region of any country; instead, it has a cosmopolitan nature catering to a composite culture worldwide. Shivendra K. Verma underlines the relevant presence of English in India that, “At the national level, English continues to serve as our ‘window on the world’; it will continue to provide access to the growing fund of knowledge in science, technology, social sciences and humanities and thereby function as the ‘language of development’ and ‘upward social mobility’.” (P 97) So, the present paper tries to reveal that how one's performance and values are cultivated and developed through the reception, perception and usage of English language in multilingual and multicultural society. Kailaspathy and Ananttha Murthy have argued that, “English with most Indians is still a language of official public affairs, of intellectual and academic debate. They do not use English for their most intimate purposes- to think and feel, bless and curse, quarrel and kiss.” (TLS Oct. 5 1964 p. 646) English language has developed its own wizardry of performance in spoken and written forms. This is true and worthy to

notice that “Certainly young Indians are writing more and more a very Indian English. The language must be adapted and refashioned to suit our needs and purposes.” (Nambisan 35)

Multi-Identities and elevated status of English across cultures came at a price. “In any natural history of the human species, language would stand as the preeminent trait. To be sure a solitary human being is an impressive problem-solver and engineer.” (Pinker 16) An eminent Indian novelist, Vikram Seth in his novel *A Suitable Boy*, captures one's perspective towards English in a conversation between a farmer and another Indian:

'Do you speak English?' he said after a while in the local dialect of Hindi. He had noticed Maan's luggage tag.

'Yes,' said Maan. 'Without English you can't do anything,' said the farmer sagely. Maan wondered what possible use English could be to the farmer. 'What use is English?' said Maan,

'People love English!' said the farmer with a strange sort of deep-voiced giggle. 'If you talk in English, you are a king...' (P 501)

Here, Vikram Seth seems to disclose and disseminate the latent power and worth hidden in a language through his characters in his novel. These dialogues attempt to reveal relevance, need and charm of a language that can enlarge one's paradigms of skill and professional grooming.

Kachru said, “By the 1920s, English had become the language of political discourse, international administration, and law, and it was associated with liberal thinking. These roles, and such an attitude toward English, maintained its power over local languages even after the colonial period ended.” (7-8) The best reasons for calling English an Indian language may be said to be the feel of the educated Indian for the English language and the bidirectional pattern pressure exerted by the Indian languages including English on one another arising out of the need of communication involving these languages. The educated Indian feels at home with English in the same way as any other Indian language he controls as a second language.

English is used for the government documents, law courts, the media, etc. Since

insufficient funds are often problematic, it is important to “determine in some fair and realistic way what segment of the population needs to know English, which English, to what level of proficiency and for what social objective.” (Kaplan 145) Even students who have studied together, for their goal and ambition, all time will have varied mastery of the language or remember different things but “The pressure to use English has grown as universities and colleges have increasingly welcomed foreign students, and lecturers have found themselves faced with mixed-language audiences.” (Crystal 112) There are many reasons for the government policy to install English as the “associate official” language and for the continued use of this language in India. But the most significant basis for its support is the sociolinguistic reality that language is “... not only a means of communication but also an instrument of empowerment - social and cultural, but more significantly, economic and political.” (Harish 76)

In science, the dominant nature of English can be viewed in two ways. On the one hand, its use as a common language in scientific publishing allows for ease of information storage and retrieval, and for knowledge advancement. On the other hand, English can be seen as something of a *Tyrannosaurus rex* – “a powerful carnivore gobbling up the other denizens of the academic linguistic grazing grounds” (Swales 373). Scientists face a great deal of pressure to publish in visible (usually international) journals, most of which are now in the English language, leading to a self-perpetuating cycle in which English is becoming increasingly important and routinely relevant.

English reaches children and students through various ways other than the teachers and classrooms. Their acquaintance with English needs to be kept as a base and the teacher has to build on it. “There is at least one characteristic that is common to every successful language-learning experience we have ever known, and that is that the learner is exposed one way or another to an adequate amount of the data of the language to be learned” (Rutherford 18). Language cannot be separated from sound. I can even say that language is sound. When we talk or when we sing we use our throats to make sounds. The throat is the center of

creating the sound. Unless we are able to make sounds and to hear them properly we cannot communicate in a language, even if that is the mother tongue or a foreign tongue. As we know that: “Learning style is the biologically and developmentally imposed set of characteristics that make the same teaching method wonderful for some and terrible for others.” (Dunn & Griggs 3) Learning strategies are defined as “specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques- such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task- used by students to enhance their own learning.” (Scarcella & Oxford 63). So learning a language should fulfil one’s need because the aptness of language is one thing that makes people believe in the truth of your story. The social significance of this fact for Liza Doolittle was far reaching and worldwide. As Higgins said: “You see this creature with her kerbstone English: The English that will keep her in the gutter to the end of her days. Well, sir, in three months I could pass that girl off as a duchess at an ambassador’s garden party. I could even get her a job as a lady’s maid or shop assistant, which requires better English.” (Shaw 28).

John Wain expresses that Indian English became lingua franca and states that, “If English is not the language in which they lisp their first words, it is still acquired very early.” (*Encounter* May 1961, p.7) “If a language is a truly international medium, it is going to be most apparent in those services which deal directly with the task of communication – the postal and telephone systems and the electronic networks. Information about the use of English in these domains is not easy to come by, however. No one monitors the language in which we write our letters; there is no one noting the language we use when we talk on the phone. Only on the Internet, where messages and data can be left for indefinite periods of time, is it possible to develop an idea of how much of the world’s everyday communications (at least, between computer-owners) is actually in English.” (Crystal 114)

However, the impact of English literature on pre- and post-independence Indian literatures is immense. “...there is also the widespread use of English in journalism- a fifth of all newspapers are

English language: dailies; and in academic publications- a third of all Indian publishing is in English." (Rajan 17) It shows no sign at all of slowing down of its practitioners and the same thing is practically used and routinely demonstrated in all aspects of life.

English has interacted with Indian languages in the minds of bilingual speakers and with the Indian society in which it continues to be functionally used. It has, as a result, undergone the inevitable process of acculturation, and given rise to a sub continental variety of English across the globe. Naik also pointed that English is used so perfectly that "it became verbal skin, rather than a coat." (Naik 1982, p. 299)

One can experience that some are born in English; some achieve English; and some have English thrust upon them. The global spread of English has also encouraged and promoted globalisation. One observes that English is a phenomenon which lies ceaselessly at the heart of globalisation. The time has come when we need to modernize and restructure the curriculum in the light of the new needs of learners of English in India today. Besides harnessing inter-cultural and cross-cultural relationships, it begets various opportunities with desirable performances.

Numerous local causes, such as ideas in life, literature and science, new association of people and tribes, in the course of time, requires a language irrespective of caste, culture and community. English is poised to grow into all paradigms of contemporary life and professions which would enable it to become a world language and strengthens its practitioners. Today we can see English as a social behaviour because almost all paradigms of life, means and performance are infested with English as a global culture. One can say that one must not choose language by its origin but one must choose a language by its attributes and performance for the sake of effective communication and professional competence.

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