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A STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF BUSINESS ENGLISH ON MANAGEMENT STUDENTS

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Abstract

English language has been recognized for its global reach and hence has become the language for international business. Technological advances have expanded the horizons of international relations. But still, there are many business professionals who are excellent in their technical skills but fail to achieve professional success because they lack the basic communication skills in the English language. Organizations suffer when they are filled with employees who miscommunicate owing to their lack of competency in English. In international business small incidents of miscommunication might lead to huge losses in business as well as in trade relations. Any problem in communication translates to business losses. Communication skills are regarded as very important for a management graduate but it is often found that students are very good at technical subjects but lack fluency in the English language when it has become an absolute necessity for placements. It helps one to face interviews confidently and secure jobs in multinational companies. The present study examines the scope of having Business English as a credit course in B School curriculum, thereby increasing the employability skills of the management students and grooming them for the corporate environment.

Keywords: International relations, Business English, curriculum, communication skills, employability

Introduction

Globalization has expanded the horizons of international business. A typical organizational set up consists of employees from diverse cultures. Communication enables them to exchange ideas and share information and work towards organizational goals. Employees with highly specialized skills command little respect unless their ideas are communicated effectively to its intended audience. Communication plays a crucial role in business operations and also in the successful career of employees. Management graduates are expected to possess good communication skills.

Recruiters focus on this quality when they come for campus placements. Since English is the official language of communication, proficiency in English is one of the sought after skills in the modern workplace. But, on the contrary, the industry is quite disturbed about lack of the same. The paper attempts to seek a solution to this problem through Business English.

Business English comes under the category of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and is lexically and stylistically different from General English. It is used in a restricted linguistic context and usage as it is the language used in Business. Its focus is on presentations, reports and proposals, negotiations, claims, adjustments and many other types of communication activities pertaining to the business.

Objectives:

The study aims to:

- a. collect student perceptions about Business English.
- b. assess how Business English helps management students in their placement.

Methodology:

A sample survey was conducted through questionnaires to students of an autonomous B School in Hyderabad, India where Business English is offered as a credit course. Secondary data was collected from the review of the literature.

Literature Review

Every year, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) in the USA conducts a survey of its employer members about their hiring plans and the skills that they look for in new recruits. They have different parameters to highlight other employment-related issues that may influence the future job market and this survey comes out as the Job Outlook Survey. According to the Job Outlook survey 2018 on the attributes, employers seek in a candidate's resume, Communication Skills (Written) and (Verbal) occupy the top third and sixth position with 80.3% and 67.5% respectively.

According to the study, the skills that are highly in demand are organizational skills (87%), verbal communication (81%), teamwork and collaboration (78%), problem-solving (60%), tact and diplomacy (59%), business writing (48%), and analytical skills (45%)

Agarwal.S and Chitanshi. J (2009), made mention of some surveys that stressed the importance of correct language and right communication skills for a successful career. Communication is a critical component of business education (Arnett, McKendree, Fritz, & Roberts, 2008; Hiemstra, 2001; Russ, 2009; Zhao & Alexander, 2004). Many researchers are of the opinion that business students need to be proficient in written communication skills (Pittenger, Miller, & Allison, 2006),

technological communication skills (Thomas, 2007) and oral communication skills (Crosling & Ward, 2002).

National Knowledge Commission observed that “command over the English language is perhaps the most important determinant of access to higher education, employment possibilities, and social opportunities.”

Data Analysis:

Exhibit 1: Areas that showed improvement

The first question of the survey required the students to rate the areas that showed improvement in their performance after attending the Business English course on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the least and 5 being the highest.

1. confidence level
2. communication skills
3. listening skills
4. reading skills
5. writing skills
6. fluency in speaking
7. body language
8. vocabulary
9. voice modulation

Upon analysis, the two factors that showed improvement are Fluency in Speaking and Communication Skills. At least 50% of the students who enrolled in the course came from Tier 2 towns where not much exposure was given to them. The UG courses were taught in the vernacular and hence they feared the idea of speaking English. The different activities in the Business English Courses primarily aimed at making them confident speakers of the language. This might have helped them in improving their fluency in the language. Also, since English is the medium of instruction at the B School, interaction with faculty members gave them the needed exposure of the language. This must have resulted in Factor 1 which is fluency in speaking. The second factor is communication skills. As part of their curriculum they were made to do individual and group presentations, write emails, undertake group projects, do listening exercises in the Communication Lab, training in GDs and Mock interviews. This might be the contributing factor for their improvement in Communication skills.

Exhibit 2: Motivation to attend Business English Sessions

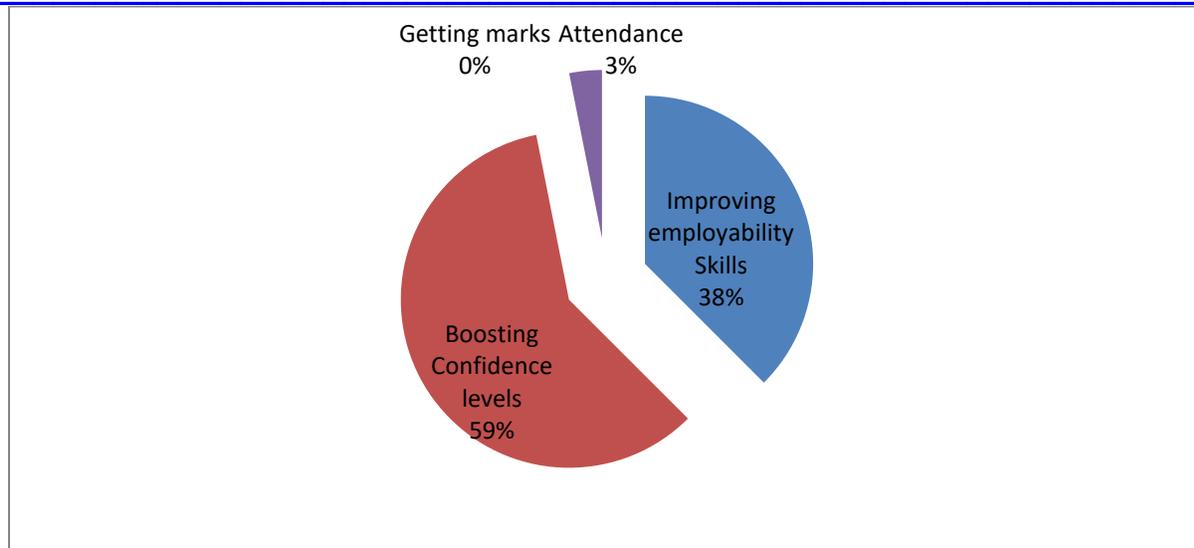
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The above diagram shows that 59% attend the Business English Sessions as it boosts their confidence levels. Most of the students are nervous when it comes to speaking in public and expressing their ideas. These sessions provide a platform for ideation and slowly make them come out of their shells. 38% feel that the motivation to attend the Business English sessions is to polish their employability skills. Communication skills are essential for career growth and these sessions make students industry ready. Only 3% come for attendance and nobody attends the sessions only for marks. This shows the take away from the sessions is much more than marks.

Exhibit 3: Business English helped in better performance in core Management subjects

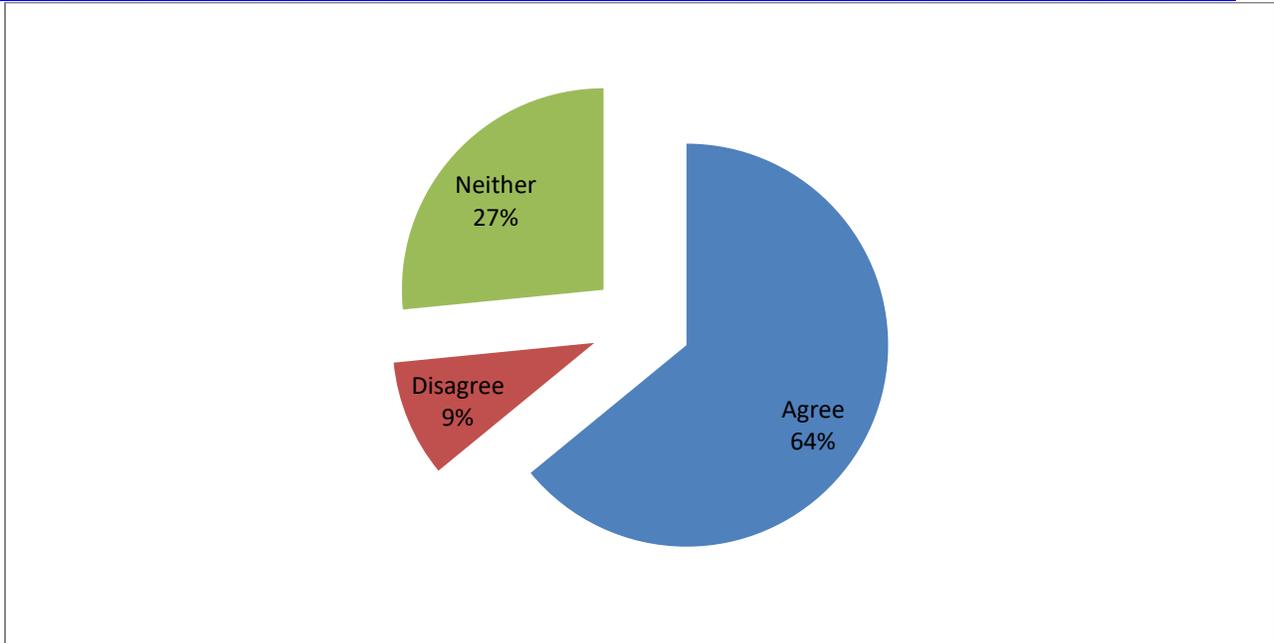
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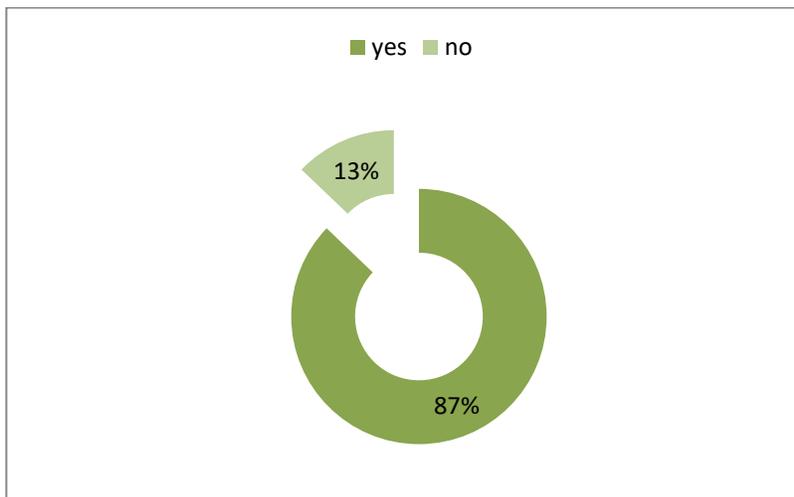
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64% of the respondents agree that Business English helped them to perform better in core management subjects. The medium of instruction at PG level is English and various assignments and presentations have to be done in the English language. The different modules covered in Business English improve their oral and written communication. 9% disagree and probably this group consists of students whose communication skills are above average. 27% are neutral in their opinion.

Exhibit 4: Fair chance of placement



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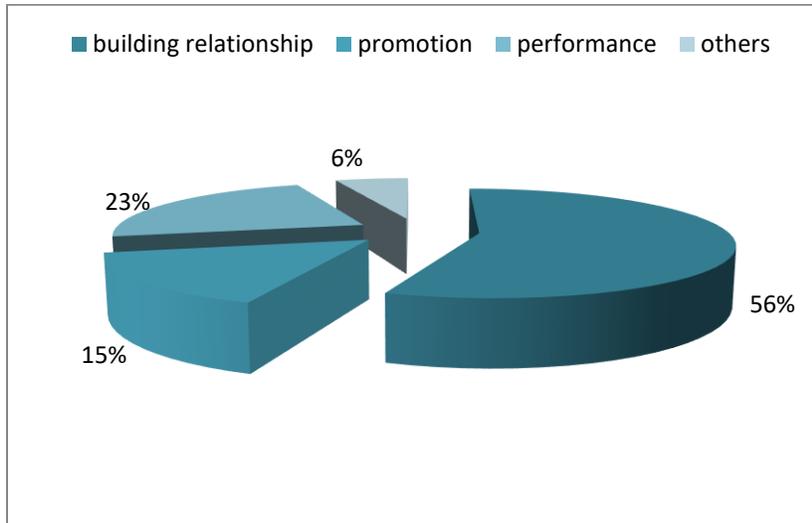
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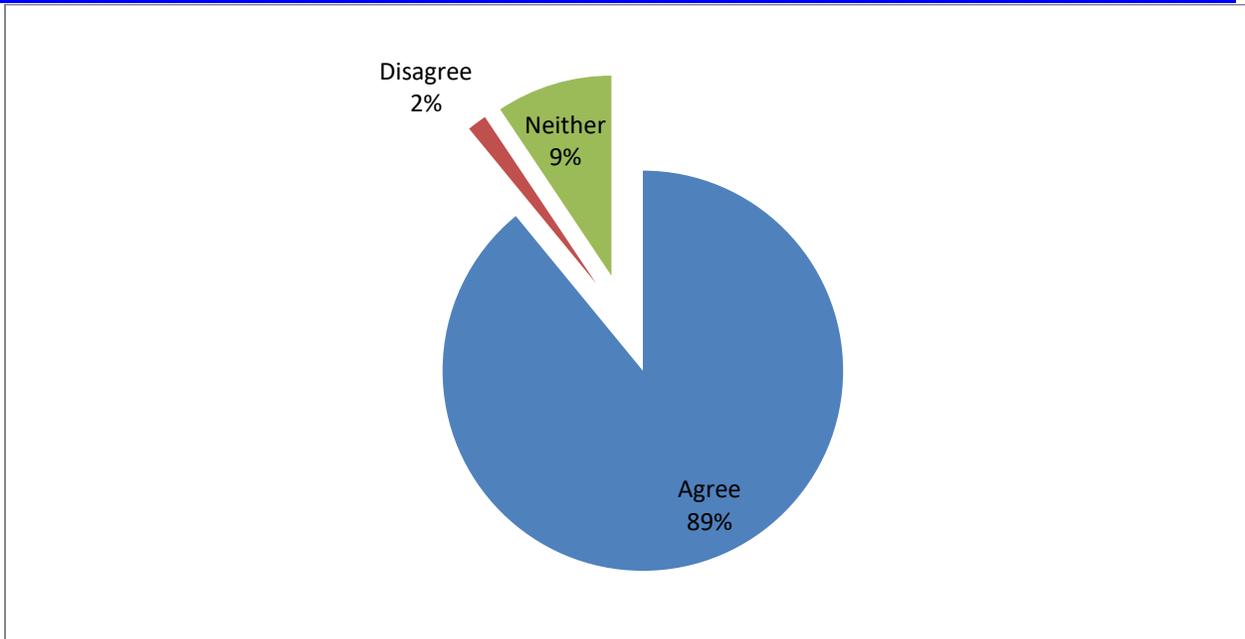
When asked about Business English as a tool for enhancing employability skills, 87% responded positively. They felt that the Business English Course would give them a fair chance of getting employed. 13% did not agree with this.

Exhibit 5: Impact of Business English in future performance



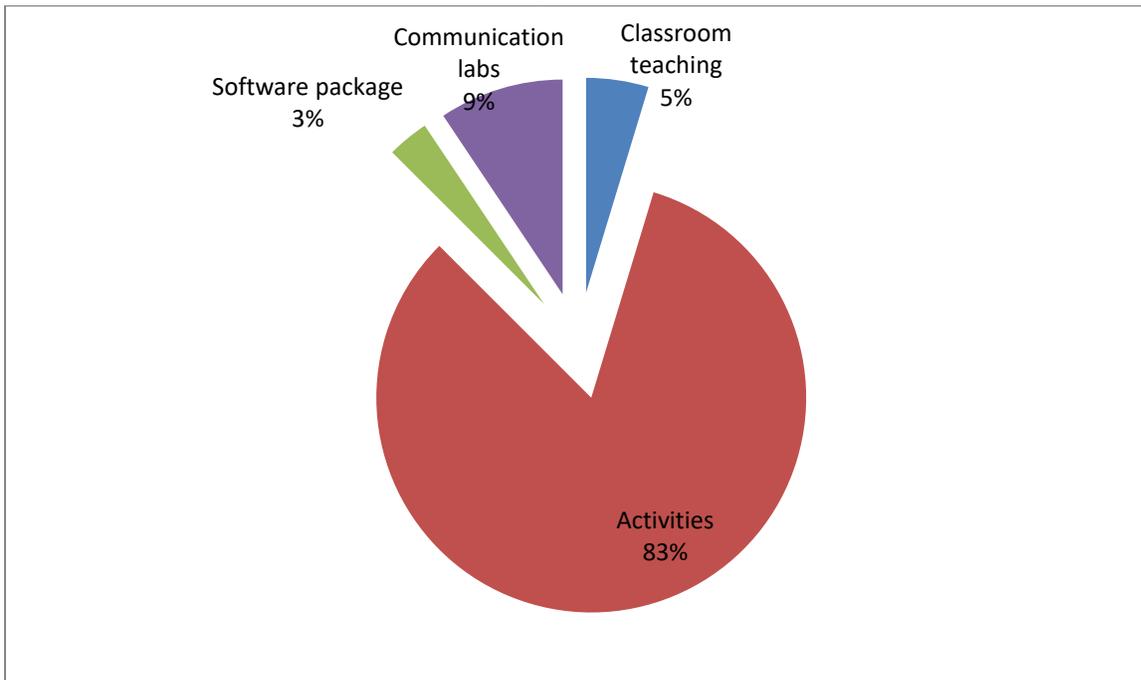
Respondents were asked to choose how the foundations laid by Business English in their PGDM program would help them once they take up a job. In other words, what impact it has on their performance. 56% felt that it would help in building relationships i.e networking which is very important for a manager. 23% stated that it would help them in job performance, followed by 15% who felt it would get them promotions.

Exhibit 6: Business English should be a part of the B-School Curriculum



The figure shows that the majority feels that Business English should be a part of the curriculum as it helps them to communicate well. It is not enough if it is taught in the first year but it should continue as a course of study until the end of the program.

Exhibit 7: Ideal way to teach Business English



Finally, respondents were asked to suggest what they think as an ideal methodology of teaching Business English. 83% felt that it should be taught through activities. The trainer should only be a facilitator. The idea of Communication Labs was advocated by 9% probably because it would help them in pronunciation and vocabulary building. 5% wanted classroom teaching and 3% felt that Business English can be learned with the help of software packages.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the data it can be concluded that majority of the respondents are in favor of having Business English as part of the B School curriculum. The course equips management students with liberating confidence. It will be an advantage in interviews and gives more opportunities to widen career prospects. The repercussions of any lackadaisical approach towards this course are manifested in the poor performance of students in placement interviews and once they enter the corporate world. The Study can be expanded by conducting surveys in B-Schools across A.P. Interactions with B School faculty members and industry experts will add value to the study.

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