Chapter V

Conclusion

It is now an established fact that ever since English became a global language and the most preferred medium of communication in all the major spheres of human activity, it has triggered unprecedented and the irreversible changes that impact the life of humans all over the world. The world has now shrunk in size and become a global village as a result of the global connectivity in space and time that has been supported by advancements in science and technology. Now we are witnessing regular trans migration of people across states, countries and continents. These developments seem to have increased people’s aspiration for higher education and consequently there is an increase in the demand for higher education. The second most significant change seen is the demand for people who are proficient in both spoken and written English.

It is also well known that underlying these changes at the global level is the globalization of trade and commerce and the setting up of multinational corporations which hire people for both selling products and offering services. Consequently, we witnessed the creation of millions and millions of new kinds of jobs all over the globe. However, these jobs also created new conditions for employment. These jobs are being offered to those who are tech savvy and proficient in both spoken and written English. Incidentally, it would be prudent to highlight the fact that though jobs are available in plenty those who get employed are very few because their proficiency in spoken English has turned out to be an employability factor. Though in the job market there is a huge number of technically qualified people who possess the requisite technical skills and expertise in their respective domains waiting to be employed are only 20% of them get selected in their placements and job interviews. This fact is conspicuously felt in choosing managerial aspirants in business industry and multinational companies. It is also well known that on account of the availability of global connectivity and faster modes of transportation, more and more universities in USA, Canada, and other European countries have opened their doors for admission to post graduates courses especially in management education. A similar phenomenon is seen in India. We find more and more undergraduate students, irrespective of the disciplines in which they have obtained a bachelor’s degree are now seeking admission to post graduate courses like MBA in Finance,
HR, Marketing etc, the reason being the multidisciplinary nature of the management course curriculum. Another intriguing fact closely related to increase in the demand for admission and the increase in number of management colleges is that there seems to be a simultaneous increase in the number of commercial English teaching institutes offering short term courses in spoken English, business English, English for air hostess, English for engineers, English for technical writing etc also. Underlying all these developments is the fact that English has become an employability factor in the job market and also the most preferred medium in higher education.

In view of the foregoing, this researcher was convinced that there is a felt need for investigating whether English is really an employability factor and if so to what extent. Secondly, having taught soft skills and business communication skills in management colleges, the researcher is quite convinced of the fact that there is always a heterogeneous group of students in the English class who possess a wide spectrum of abilities in spoken English. Though these students have undergone a course of compulsory instruction in English as a second language for fourteen years and are expected to possess a reasonable proficiency, the truth is that not all of them can speak English spontaneously and coherently even for five minutes and quite a good number of them fail to draft letters, memos, agenda etc in grammatical English. It is this awareness that prompted the researcher to take up this empirical study.

The empirical study was taken up with the main purpose of investigating whether the spoken English communicative competence of managerial aspirants undergoing a post graduate course in management would meet the standards expected in job interviews. Therefore the study was done with the following objectives:

1. Investigating whether spoken English competence is an employability factor in job interviews, and to ascertain the suitability or readiness of MBA students in terms of spoken English `competence for job interviews

2. Investigating whether there is a difference in their spoken English competence between the urban students and the suburban students and between male and female students of the group as well as to characterize the spoken English competence of MBA students
3. Examining whether there is a cause-effect relationship between the students’ current competence in spoken English and their socio-economic and educational background

4. Evaluating the efficacy of the soft skills course normally given to first semester students of MBA

I. Consequently, the study made an assessment of the spoken English competence of a group of 308 students studying MBA in management colleges situated in and around Bangalore. These students had also undergone a compulsory course in soft skills during the first semester of the course. This was done with a view to be able to predict whether the students in the target sample will come out successful in job interviews.

These students were administered a test of spoken English proficiency. The components of the test were adapted from Business English Certificate Vantage test papers and the descriptors of proficiency in spoken English were taken from the same as the benchmark for assessing spoken English competence of the students in the target sample.

The details are given below:
(a) The listening test focused on listening for writing short answers, identifying topic content, context, function etc and understanding a conversation and discussion. The listening test was assessed for 30 marks. There were thirty items in the test and each correct answer was given one mark. From an analysis of the results it is found that among the 135 suburban group students, 96 students (50 male and 46 female) got classified as poor listeners and 39 students (4 male and 35 female) got classified as average listeners. On the other hand among 173 urban students (63 male and 51 female) got classified as good listeners and among the male students of the urban group 15 were categorized as poor and the 36 were categorized as average. Among the female students there were no poor listeners and only eight girls were categorized as average. From this it can be inferred that the urban group have had moderately good exposure to good English speakers and suburban group have had very little exposure to good English speakers.

(b) The speaking test was assessed according to the following analytical criteria:
(a) Grammar and Vocabulary, (b) Discourse Management, (c) Pronunciation, (4)
Interactive Communication. Each component carried 5 marks and total test carried 20 marks. The following descriptors were used while assessing the spoken English.

- Good speakers use grammatical and lexical forms accurately and appropriately.
- Good speakers produce spoken utterances which are relevant and coherent.
- Good speakers produce comprehensible utterances with proper stress and clarity in the articulation of individual sounds.
- Good speakers takes active part in developing the discourse.

From an analysis of the findings it is learnt that among 135 suburban students only 21 male and 48 female students were categorized as good speakers and an equal number of 33 male and female students were found to be poor speakers of English. On the other hand among the 173 urban students 112 male students and 59 female students got classified as good speakers. Only two male students were classified as poor and among the female students none were classified as poor speaker. From this it can be inferred that the urban students have had prior experience of speaking English both inside and outside the English classes whereas the suburban students may have had some spoken English practice only in the English class.

Considering the fact that the target population was a heterogeneous group comprising students from both suburban and urban areas who have received fourteen years of instruction in compulsory English in different kinds of schools and colleges. They were also given a socio economic and educational survey questionnaire with a view to examining whether there is a cause effect relationship between their current spoken English competence and their educational environment. The spoken English data and demographic details were statistically analyzed with the help of a qualified statistician. From an analysis of the statistical data it was found that urban students in the target sample had performed better than their peers from suburban group.

The students’ responses for socio economic and educational questionnaire were also subjected to statistical analysis. Secondly, their proficiency test scores and their demographic details were also analyzed statistically using correlation, multiple regression and factor analysis with a view to explaining whether there is exists a cause effect relationship between their current spoken English competence and their educational environment. From this it was found that the poor performance of the
students from suburban colleges is attributable to the acquisition-poor-environment (APE) in which these students had learnt English over a period of fourteen years. The environment from which these students may have come seems to conform to the description of ‘acquisition poor environment’ (APA) as defined by Tickoo (2009:225-238). According to Tickoo acquisition poor environment ‘is one where English (which he terms other language) is taught in the classroom without getting any reinforcement from life outside. Secondly, the shape, size and organization of classrooms, lack of educational resources, teaching materials, and under qualified or untrained teachers make a significant contribution to make the learning environment even poorer. The demographic details given by the suburban students also prove the point. Naturally, it was lack of exposure to good models of spoken English and inadequate opportunities for communicating in spoken English that led to their poor development of spoken English competence.

On the other hand their urban peers were able to put up a relatively better performance because they happen to come from acquisition-rich-environment for English. Even the demographic details provided by the urban sample undoubtedly say that the urban students come from an environment in which these students get a great deal of reinforcement from the members of the family and the environment outside in which they interact with other people. From this it can be concluded that there is definitely a cause- effect relationship between the spoken English skills of the target sample and the socio economic and educational environment in which they have studied English. The findings of the study also indicate that there is a significant difference in the scores of the urban students and suburban students in their spoken English proficiency test. Consequently, the null hypothesis that ‘there is no relationship between the students’ performance in spoken English and their socio economic and educational environment is rejected. Further, the null hypothesis that there is no difference in spoken English performance between urban and suburban students also stands rejected. It should also be noted that even the soft skills course to which that management students had been exposed to also did not enable them to perform well in the spoken proficiency test. Therefore the null hypothesis that the soft skills course given to first semester students does not enhance their communicative competence in spoken English is proved true to a great extent in case of suburban students. However, the researcher is unable to draw any inferences about the impact it may have had on urban students.
It has already been stated that, the target sample was administered a proficiency test in spoken English and the components of the test were taken from BEC vantage test papers and proficiency descriptors listed in the test paper were taken as the standard bench mark for assessing the proficiency of the students in the target sample. From the findings of the statistical analysis it is learnt that the difference between the scores of the urban group and suburban group in all the components of the test-listening, grammar and vocabulary, discourse, pronunciation, interactive communication and the total score is highly significant. The results show that the urban students are way ahead of the suburban students in their spoken English proficiency. Therefore, it can be inferred that the students from the urban sample match with the descriptors specified for ‘good’ variety of spoken English as defined in the BEC vantage test papers. Hence, the null hypothesis stands proved only in the case of urban students.

II. The researcher also made a survey of the opinion of the HR managers of five companies with regard to the role of spoken English proficiency as an employability factor in job interviews. From this survey the researcher realized that good spoken English proficiency is one of the first important criteria in selecting an employee. It was also made clear by the HR managers that even though a prospective employee displays an excellent knowledge of his domain unless his spoken English skills are good enough to facilitate his communicative ability even such candidates are not selected. From this, one can infer that the newspaper reports that only 20% of the graduates and post graduates, who pass out of the university, possess the requisite skills and are eligible for employment are true.

III. Further, with a view to evaluating the efficacy of the soft skills course given to MBA aspirants in the first semester the researcher made a comparative study of the syllabus of the soft skills of VTU, Bangalore University and Christ University. It was found that the soft skills course generally given in institutions of business management studies only provide a list of topics like emotional intelligence, interpersonal relationships, communication skills, presentation skills, group discussion skills, team management, leadership, stress management, time management and corporate etiquettes. Of the topics listed here only three topics-communication skills, presentation skills and group discussion skills are related to spoken English communicative ability. Moreover, the syllabus does not specify how these topics have to be transacted in class nor do the syllabi make any provision for in-depth teaching of topics related spoken communicative ability. It should be noted
here that, any MBA class is a heterogeneous group of students comprising students coming from a multilingual and a pluri cultural environment. Quite a few of them have come from an acquisition poor environment. Consequently, in the absence of any instructions in the soft skill course syllabi of VTU, Bangalore University and Christ University as to how the classroom teachers have to teach these topics mentioned above, the students who are not so proficient do not derive any benefit from such a soft skills course curriculum. On the other hand those students who have come from acquisition rich environment will be able to learn even with only scholarly lectures in the classroom without any reinforcement in the form of communication games, debates, group discussions, role plays, extempore speaking etc. Even granting that in some colleges such practical activities are also conducted, it is only the students who come from acquisition rich environment, who volunteer to participate and also dominate the activities because of their confidence in their ability to speak English fluently. On the other hand, those students who may have come from an acquisition poor environment lack confidence and back out from such communicative games and activities because they know that they do not have the vocabulary needed for social interaction and an acceptable pronunciation.

Furthermore, it is to be noted here that there has been a lot of advancement in science and technology which has modernized the teaching of spoken English. It is well known that in the last two decades the world has witnessed an ICT revolution which has reached classroom teaching in the form of multimedia projectors and other technical gadgets which have made the teaching and learning spoken English much easier and effective. It is also known that more and more people are making attempts to benefit from online teaching and virtual classrooms some of which are also available for small price cost all over the globe. But education institutions in India have neither upgraded their language laboratories nor have they made provision for training their teachers in using multimedia, smart classrooms and online resources. Consequently, it is being noticed that whereas the graduates and post graduates who passed out of the universities in the last five years have yet to upgrade their skills and the students who are passing out now are much better equipped because of the availability of these resources both is the colleges and outside. Therefore, there is an urgent need to upgrade both the syllabi and the infrastructural facilities for teaching spoken English at all levels. There is also an urgent need for rethinking and revising the objectives of teaching English in India at all levels.
Limitations and Scope

The present study with a select chosen sample form of specific and particular educational limitations may be extended for a study covering larger sample and across different disciplines. Communicative competence and spoken English levels of the students of management studies have only been assessed in this study. The speaking competence and the need for honing employability skills have become the need of the hour. Thus it is suggested that studies can be undertaken to find the needs of the student community in higher education across different disciplines. In such research studies may focus on the writing ability of the sample that is likely to be chosen. Such research studies also may focus on the need for a detailed course of language studies at the said level which will be more need based and focus on the development of two productive skills namely speaking and writing.