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## A study on factors that affect the poor Business Communication in an organization

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### ABSTRACT

*Business communication means communication, which occurs within any institute regarding the communicative activities such as making speeches, delivering lectures, conducting staff meetings, writing letters, memos, and notices, reports, conducting meetings, presentation, seminars and workshops. When communication fails in the institute, all the above communicative activities absolutely collapse. Hence, at present, many organizations seem to have initiated effective measures to promote their communicative skills. The objective of the present study is to ascertain the prominent factors that result in poor communicative skills of the employees of the organization and remedy the pathetic situation. Methodology applied in this regard was based on primary and secondary data. Interviews, observation, testing and questionnaires were the tools of collecting primary data whereas the written documents of the institute such as formal letters, memos, notices, reports, minutes and agendas were used as secondary data. Samples were collected from the Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, the Regional Centre of the Open University of Sri Lanka, Anuradhapura, Bhiksu University of Sri Lanka, Anuradhapura, School of Nursing, Anuradhapura and Sri Lanka School of Animal Husbandry, Seppukulama. Incompetence in grammar, spelling, vocabulary, pronunciation and punctuation, poor knowledge in translation, poor listening and reading habits, not giving priority to oral proficiency were found to be the main reasons that adversely affect the poor communicative activities in an organization. Out of them, the most outstanding factors for the poor communication were found to be the poor listening and reading habits and ignoring speaking and writing skills.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Poor communication, oral proficiency, listening and reading habits*

## 1. Introduction

Business Communication means sharing of information between people within an enterprise that is performed for the commercial benefit of the organization. In addition, business communication can also refer to how a company shares information to promote its product or services to potential consumers<sup>1</sup>, which occurs within any institute regarding the communicative activities such as making speeches, delivering lectures, conducting staff meetings, writing letters, memos, and notices, reports, conducting meetings, presentation, seminars and workshops. When communication fails in the institute, all the above communicative activities absolutely collapse. Hence, at present, many organizations seem to have initiated effective measures to promote their communicative skills. Universities and other higher academic institutes have introduced professional English courses to combat this issue. However, it seems that the problem still remains unsolved without any solution to the prevailing issue. Hence, it is the duty of the academics and the authorities concerned to initiate effective measures to solve the problem.

At present, employees in many academic institutes learn English and get certificates, but they are very poor in their communication skills. Majority of them fail to speak and write in English. Not only the subordinate staff, but also the administrative and executive staff are confronted with this communicative barrier. Generally, this is a common problem in almost all such institutes throughout the island.

The objective of the present study is to ascertain the prominent factors that result in poor communicative skills of the employees of the academic organization and remedy the pathetic situation.

## 2. Literature Review

Adult learners are considered distinct from child learners primarily due to the work of Malcolm Knowles.<sup>2</sup> All adults follow various courses with a variety and range of experiences, both in terms of their working life and educational backgrounds. This impacts on how and why they participate in learning. While each student has individual learning needs, there are some characteristics that are common to adult learners. Adults are intrinsically motivated and increase their effort when motivated by a need, an interest, or a desire to learn. Adults learn at various rates and in different ways according to their intellectual ability, educational level, personality and cognitive learning styles. Teaching strategies must anticipate and accommodate differing comprehension rates of learners. Adults are goal-oriented and relevancy-oriented. They need to know why they are learning something. They have needs that are concrete and immediate. They are autonomous and self-directed. They are self-reliant learners and prefer to work at their own pace.

Krashen (1987), promoted the use of free voluntary reading during second-language acquisition, which he says is the most powerful tool we have in language education, first and second.<sup>3</sup>

Lydia White is both a researcher and educator in the field of second language acquisition (SLA). In 1989, she was involved in a very significant survey regarding Universal Grammar (UG) and Second Language Acquisition and later it became a standard textbook in many university level SLA courses. Through her book, she has made effort to explore the implications that the theory of Universal Grammar has had upon second language acquisition approaches as well. According to Lydia White, UG is not confined to First Language (L1); it applies to Second Language (L2) as well.

Students, who work in collaborative groups, also appear more satisfied with their classes according to Beckman (1990). Grouping can be categorized as small groups, large groups, common groups, and ability groups

Krashen (1985) emphasizes that the use of free voluntary reading during second language acquisition will immensely contribute to productive skills. He further says, "*I believe that it is the most powerful*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.businessdictionary.com>-25.12.2015

<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adult\\_learner](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adult_learner)-29.12.2013

<sup>3</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen\\_Krashen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Krashen)-03.06.2013

*tool we have in language education, first and second."* Without reinforcing receptive skills, it is really difficult to promote productive skills. Once, the learners are competent in their receptive skills, they are easily capable of enhancing their productive skills, which means the adult learners become competent in communicating effectively in English.

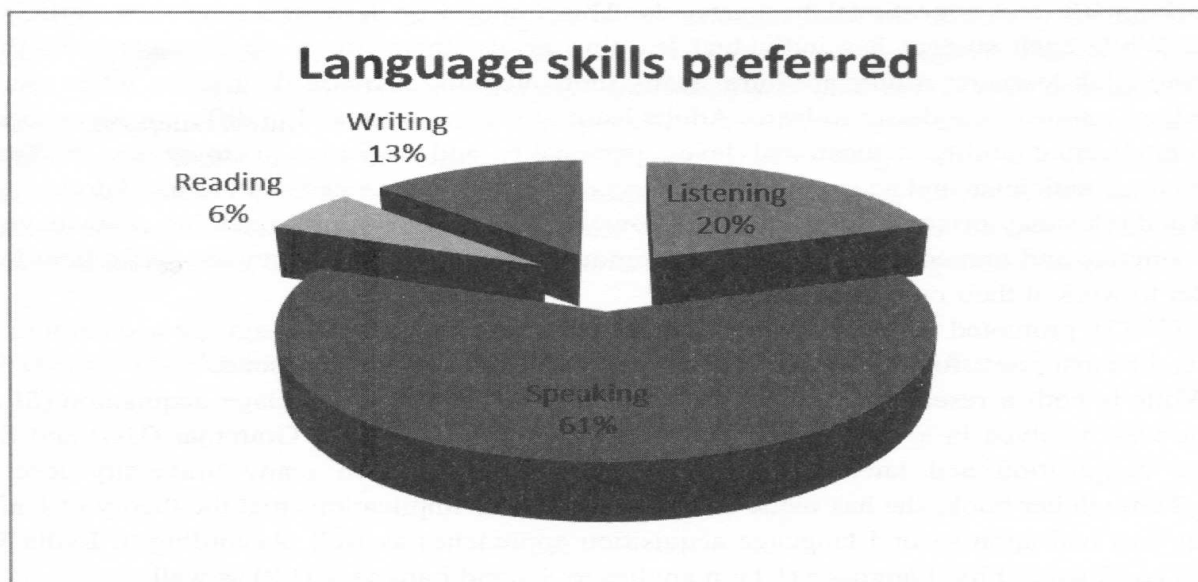
### 3. Methodology

Methodology applied in this regard was based on primary and secondary data. Interviews, testing and questionnaires were the tools of collecting primary data. Samples were collected from the Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, the Regional Centre of the Open University of Sri Lanka, Anuradhapura, Bhiksu University of Sri Lanka, Anuradhapura, School of Nursing, Anuradhapura and Sri Lanka School of Animal Husbandry, Seppukulama. 20 employees from each institute were selected as the samples so that the number would be 100. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were applied to analyze the data collected from the above institutes.

### 4. Data Presentation and Analysis

Questionnaires, interviews and testing were the tools that were used for collecting primary data for the study. Data collected under each tool is comprehensively discussed here. The respondents were selected from the institutes mentioned above. Through questionnaires, the following data were collected, which are instrumental in the present study. They are as follows:

Listening, speaking, reading and writing are the language skills, which are very significant regarding the present study. The respondents usually have different interest in them. 100 respondents from the above institutes were selected for the research and asked them to underline the most effective language skill, which contributes to communication. The questionnaire contained four language skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Their responses are indicated as follows.

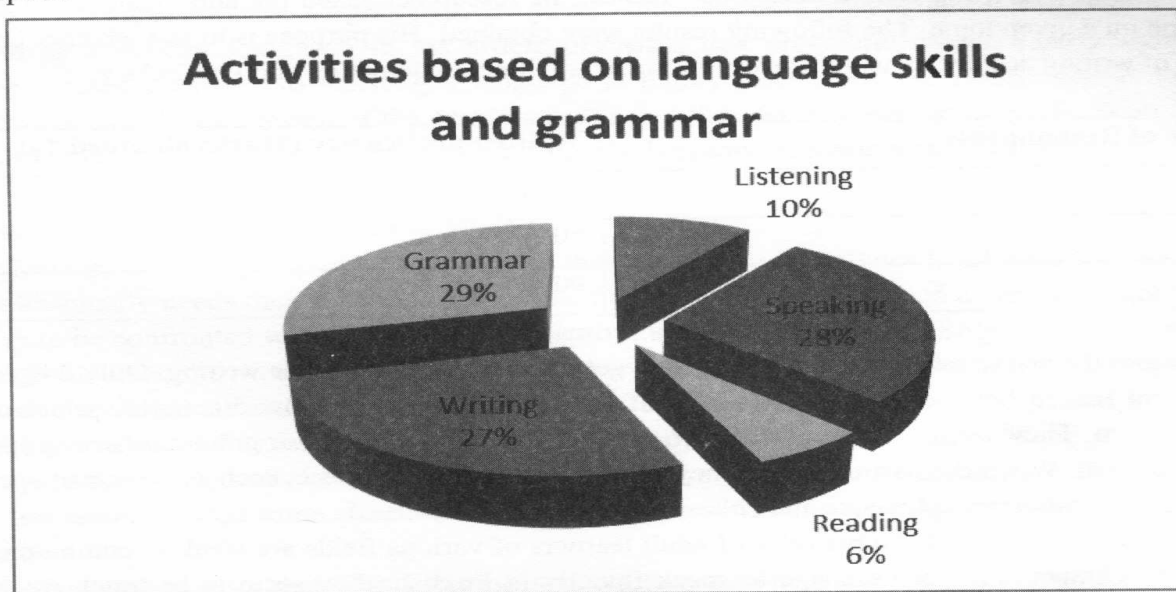


Sources: Primary Data

According to above figure, the majority employees seem to be more interested in improving their oral proficiency, which is 61%. Listening, occupies the second place that is 20% while writing comes third. It is only 13%. Only 06% seems to be interested in enhancing their reading skill. Here, the productive skills are speaking and writing and the receptive skills are listening and reading. It is through receptive skills, the productive skills are reinforced, but according to the figure, it seems that they are not much interested in receptive skills, which is totally 26% whereas it is 74% for productive skills. Without improving receptive skills, productive skills can never be reinforced. Through the response of the respondents, it is clear that that their need is to improve productive skills, but they do not know that

receptive skills contribute to enhance productive skills. Teachers should observe this weakness and initiate effective measures to motivate them to improve both listening and reading skills inside and outside the classroom.

The activities are usually based on four language skills, listening, speaking, reading, writing and grammar in a classroom. According to the present study, it was revealed that the majority of the adult learners (61%) want to improve their speaking skill. But, they point out that only 28% of speaking activities are done in the classroom by their teachers. This indicates that 72% of the activities are based on other language skills. The above figure shows it apparently. According to the information available here, it is clear that the need of the adult learners seems to have been ignored by the teachers. Instead of giving priority to oral proficiency in adult classrooms, more weight has been given to other language skills and grammar by their teachers. The following figure clearly show the amount of weight given to each aspect.



Sources: Primary Data

All 100 adult learners were interviewed to measure the oral proficiency and obtained the following results. When a person speaks or writes only, it is clear whether he is competent in the particular language. In general, it is only through productive skills, (speaking and writing) one's competence in a language can be measured. The other language skills such as listening and reading are also instrumental in communication. But, they are always behind the productive skills and reinforce one's oral and written proficiency. In other words, receptive skills are invisible, whereas the productive skills are visible and they are the real indicators that show one's proficiency in a particular language.

To measure these skills, they were asked some non-structured questions such as questions on personal information, their careers, respective subjects and fields of studies and interests. When the oral proficiency of the respondents was tested, the linguistic aspects such as grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, coherence and cohesion were also considered.

Majority of the adult learners seem to be weak in the above aspects, which immensely contribute to the effective communication. When the relevant table is closely observed, it is obvious that they are much weaker in their speaking skill. Hence, this results in their failure to communicate effectively in English.

Number of Respondents	Oral proficiency (Marks obtained %)
02	Between 75-100
26	Between 50- 74
72	Between 00-49

Sources: Primary Data

The above table indicates that only 02 respondents out of 100 have obtained higher marks; (between 75 and 100) as they are able to communicate in English. While speaking, they made a few errors, but they do not affect their communication very much. It was closely observed that they were

fluent in their speech. When the second category is considered, they seem to be weaker than the former. The number of respondents was 26% and their range of obtaining marks was between 50 and 74. They also managed to speak, but they made some serious grammar and pronunciation mistakes. Anyway, they were able to express themselves. However, the problem with the third category seems to be grave. Their number is also much higher when compared to the other two categories. It is 72%. That means only 28% of the adult learners can communicate in English. According to the above table, only 02% of the adult learners can communicate without any hesitation. Even the second category has some grammatical and pronunciation problems, though they are fluent in their speech. The reason for their poor knowledge is that they are not competent in grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, coherence and cohesion. This absolutely results in their failure to communicate in English.

Testing is another tool used by the researcher to collect data from the respondents. It is through testing that knowledge of writing can be measured. Hence, the researcher asked the adult learners to write a paragraph on a given topic. The following results were obtained. His purpose is to test whether they are capable of writing accurately using correct grammar, spelling, punctuation and vocabulary.

Number of Respondents	Written proficiency (Marks obtained %)
00	75- 100
24	50- 74
76	00-49

Sources: Primary Data

According to the above table, no one was able to get over 75 marks for their writing. Only 24% of the respondents scored between 50 and 74. 76% of the students scored below 50 marks, which is the weakest group. They seem to have more errors in their writing such as poor grammar, wrong spelling and punctuation. When the written proficiency was tested, linguistic aspects such as grammar, spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, coherence and cohesion were closely observed.

It is now quite obvious that the majority of adult learners of various fields are weak in communicating in English. Though some can manage to speak fluently in English, they seem to be much weaker in writing. It is very clear when the above table is closely studied. However, the students with good listening and reading habits come within the range of 50 to 74 marks. This indicates that the receptive skills contribute to the productive skills of the students.

In both speaking and writing, the major error they make is in grammar. It means they fail to speak or write grammatically. In other words, they are unable to form a correct sentence verbally or in written form. Adult learners are expected to learn the structures of the target language. The children usually acquire the relevant grammar of their native language since they are exposed to the speaking environment of the language. However, the adults do not get this opportunity as majority of them do not have any opportunity to acquire the language as the children do. Hence, they have to obtain the linguistic competence through the learning process alone. Once they are well-equipped with linguistic competence only, they can improve their communicative competence. The study shows that there is a vast gap between these two concepts, which absolutely, affects their failure to communicate in English.

## 5. Findings and Discussion

The researcher has so far presented the data, which he has collected from primary data. He has also analyzed them and now arrived at the final stage with a view to revealing his findings regarding the problem.

Through questionnaires, the following areas were investigated and as a result, more information was found regarding the failure of the majority of adult learners to communicate in English.

It was found in the study that applying language skills is very significant when acquiring or learning a language. The study reveals that many adult learners are interested in speaking and writing (productive skills) only, but they do not show much interest in listening and reading (receptive skills). It was revealed through the study that the teachers pay much less attention to listening and reading skills in schools. Much less adult learners are interested in receptive skills. Both good readers and good listeners

are good speakers and good writers. When a learner pays more attention to reading and listening skills only, he will spontaneously enhance his productive skills, speaking and writing. Krashen also confirms this fact. He admits that the use of free voluntary reading during second language acquisition will immensely contribute to productive skills. He further says, "I believe that it is the most powerful tool we have in language education, first and second."

According to the study, majority of the adult learners need to improve their oral proficiency. This was also revealed at the interviews with the adult learners. Van Lier<sup>1</sup> says that speaking is the most fundamental phenomenon of human skills because we do it constantly and we do not often stop to examine the processes involved.

It is assumed that grammar should be a compulsory component in the syllabus. Moreover, almost all the English courses consist of grammar. However, Julio Foppoli, who is an international teacher of English as a Second Language in his article discusses that pragmatic results clearly show that a grammar based approach to teaching a language is highly ineffective. He further admits that adult learners are usually well aware of the grammar rules, but they fail to communicate effectively. It is not grammar rules, which is more important, but using the language accurately is very important.

## **6. Recommendations and Conclusion**

Adult learners are a very important social factor that immensely contributes to all aspects of the society, which absolutely needs their potentials and skills. For this purpose, they need a very good command of English to be confronted with the future challenges of the globe. At present, English is used as a global language all over the world. It has become a new tool to the adult learners, who are involved in academic, professional and administrative activities. For this purpose, they are expected to possess a sound knowledge of English, with which they are easily capable of dealing with the responsibilities assigned to them. It has already been detected why they are weak in communicating in English and this study has recommended some effective methods and approaches to learn English without any hesitation or barrier.

The researcher suggests that first listening and reading activities can be introduced and thus both listening and reading habits are automatically reinforced. The teacher should provide the students with relevant listening and reading materials so that they can be used for communicative activities in the classroom. They will ultimately promote both speaking and writing (Productive Skills) of the adult learners.

It was also found that majority of adult learners hate reading comprehension passages and cloze passages in the present adult classrooms. Their point of view is that these activities are boring and ineffective. Hence, it is suggested that speaking activities can be based on such passages so as to get rid of that boredom. Through this application, both purposes are served with no any difficulties. The students, then, feel that they are more involved in speaking activities and automatically they improve their oral proficiency, which is their primary need.

He further suggests that after listening or reading, the students should write what they hear or read and later they should speak about it with their teacher or colleagues. Then only, both listening and reading activities will be effective and productive. Students should be encouraged to listen to radio programs and watch TV programs, which are conducted in English. They should also be encouraged to read newspapers, magazines, journals and books to improve their reading skill. After that, they are expected to present some programs they have already been familiar with to the class. This can be done on assignment basis. Teacher can make such programs compulsory for adult learners. Priority should be given to their interesting fields. This will improve their pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar, spelling and punctuation. Reinforcing listening and reading skills are the most effective phenomena for enhancing the oral proficiency.

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<sup>1</sup> [books.google.lk/books?isbn=0805854592...22.10.2009](https://books.google.lk/books?isbn=0805854592...22.10.2009)



It is a well-known fact that grammar is an essential component in a language when it is spoken and written. Therefore, it should be learnt as the learners like it. Almost all the adult learners want to learn grammar in the classroom. They want their teachers to use both native language and target language when grammar is taught. This is found to be a popular approach when learning grammar. Hence, it is suggested that all adult learners should be taught grammar using the bilingual approach in their respective classrooms.

It is further recommended that adult learners should be accommodated in ability groups, but their choice is to be in mixed ability groups according to the study. Since the majority of the adult learners are weaker in English, they want to depend on the gifted students. This is a great barrier for the clever students. The researcher really wants them to be in the ability groups and learn English. Anyway, only after a discussion with them, if they prefer to be in ability group, it is effective if they can learn in ability groups. It was found that backward students fail to keep pace with gifted students. If mixed ability concept is applied, it will adversely affect both gifted and backward learners. It is also suggested that they should be in small groups so that the teacher can easily identify their problems and help them. And the other advantage is that the students can make easy approach to the teacher. In common or large groups, this is not possible at all.

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