

Facilitating the Development of English Language Skills

among the Online Learners at the University Level

A Psycholinguistic Approach

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By

Shanmugayogini Ravindran

Student No: FGS/04/01/04/2007/003

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Abstract

The study is on the first year, first batch students of Bachelor of Business Management (BBM) Online learners of University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka. Business English is one of the compulsory components for the award of the BBM Online degree. The BBM online students get admissions to the course on the basis of their performance in the main subjects. They come from different school, family, and socio, political environments. Their English language proficiency in each skill varies from each others'. English language proficiency includes both receptive English (listening, reading) and expressive English (speaking, writing). In order to follow and perform well in their BBM online Business English course the learners need to have or upgrade their competency in all four skills viz listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Hence it is indispensable that the participants who are less proficient in all four skills need to develop all four skills in English language. As the online learning is mostly self learning the participants are very much in need of assistance in learning them. Thus the need for the study on facilitating the development of English language skills emerged. Among the one hundred students who showed interest in the course, only eighty six of them registered. The online learning and teaching mode and the technology were totally new to the learners and staff. As the learners are at the threshold level in English, learning it on their own with the modules provided along with a few face to face sessions is a herculean task. Added to these and other personal reasons, during the beginning of the first semester there have been drop outs in the number of BBM online learners. Till the end of the first year first semester only fifty students participated actively. Due to this the sample for the study was fifty BBM online learners.

This research was conducted in Sri Lanka by following a quantitative and qualitative research methodology. The study examines how the online learners could be facilitated to develop their proficiency in English language skills. Evidence was collected from the first year first batch BBM online learners, their parents and staff. The findings from the data revealed the fact that the BBM online learners should be facilitated to develop the English language skills. Based on the findings and analysis a blended mode of integrated English language writing skills model is presented as a facilitating mode to support the development of English language skills among online learners. Hence the integrated English language writing skills model - a hybrid of in-class and online learning- was perceived and demonstrated as an effective language support. The thesis recommends that the BBM online learners should be facilitated to learn English language skills.