

The Role of English Language Proficiency in Shaping Service Quality in Public and Private Organizations in India

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Abstract: English language proficiency plays a critical role in the quality of services delivered across sectors, especially in multilingual societies such as India where English often serves as the lingua franca for communication between clients, customers, and service providers. This review explores how varying levels of English proficiency among employees influence service quality in both public and private organizations in India. Drawing on empirical studies, theoretical frameworks, and sectoral analyses, the review highlights the multifaceted link between language skills and dimensions of service quality such as responsiveness, reliability, assurance, empathy, and communication. The paper also examines contextual factors including organizational training, customer expectations, cultural diversity, and policy influences. Findings indicate that higher English proficiency correlates positively with perceived service quality, customer satisfaction, and operational efficiency, particularly in service-intensive industries such as healthcare, tourism, banking, and education. Conversely, limited English skills are associated with miscommunication, reduced trust, service delays, and negative customer experiences. The review identifies gaps in current research, offers policy and practice recommendations, and suggests future research directions to deepen understanding of language proficiency as a strategic resource for service excellence in India's dynamic organizational landscape.

Keywords: English proficiency, service quality, public organizations, private organizations, India, communication skills, customer satisfaction, organizational performance, language training

1. Introduction

Language is more than a means of communication; it is a critical tool of service delivery, relationship-building, and performance in organizations.[1] In the Indian context, English holds a unique position due to historical, educational, and economic factors. It functions as the lingua franca across regions with diverse mother tongues and dialects. Public and private organizations alike rely on English for internal coordination, external communication, documentation, and customer-facing services.[2]

However, English language proficiency among employees varies widely across industries, regions, and individual educational backgrounds.[3] This variance influences service quality- a core determinant of organizational success and customer satisfaction. India's rapid economic growth has led to heightened expectations for service quality, particularly in sectors interacting directly with domestic and international clients such as banking, hospitality, healthcare, and government services.[4]

This review synthesizes existing research on the relationship between English language skills and service quality in Indian organizations. It aims to answer central questions:

- 1) How do different levels of English proficiency affect service quality outcomes?
- 2) Are there differences between public and private sector impacts?
- 3) What mechanisms and mediating factors influence this relationship?
- 4) What gaps exist in current literature, and what future directions should research pursue?

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Service Quality Frameworks

Service quality is often explained using established frameworks such as the SERVQUAL model, which identifies five key dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.[5] Among these, communication skill plays a central role in shaping how services are perceived by customers. Language proficiency, in particular, directly affects responsiveness, as clear and accurate communication enables timely responses and efficient problem resolution. It also strengthens assurance by allowing service providers to convey confidence, professionalism, and credibility during interactions. Furthermore, effective language use supports empathy by helping employees better understand customer concerns, expectations, and emotional states. When service providers are able to communicate clearly and appropriately, customers are more likely to feel valued and understood. In contrast, limited language proficiency can lead to misunderstandings, delays, and reduced trust, ultimately lowering perceived service quality. Therefore, language competence is not merely a supporting skill but a core component that influences multiple dimensions of service quality and overall customer satisfaction.[6]

2.2 Language Proficiency as Human Capital

Language proficiency is widely recognized as an important component of human capital. Human capital theory emphasizes that investments in employee skills, including language training, improve productivity and overall organizational performance.[7] In service-oriented environments, English proficiency supports clear and effective communication between employees and customers. It helps reduce errors, misunderstandings, and service delays,

which are common in linguistically diverse settings. Strong language skills also enable employees to build better customer rapport and trust, leading to improved service experiences. As a result, English proficiency functions as a strategic asset that enhances service efficiency, service quality, and customer satisfaction across public and private organizations.[8]

2.3 Communication Accommodation Theory

This theory suggests that speakers modify their communication style to match their listeners in order to gain acceptance and improve interaction. In multilingual service environments, such adjustment becomes especially important. The ability to adapt language use, including appropriate use of English, helps service providers communicate more clearly and comfortably with diverse customers.[9] This flexibility reduces misunderstandings and supports smoother interactions. As a result, language adaptation enhances mutual understanding, customer satisfaction, and the overall quality of service encounters in linguistically diverse organizational settings.[10]

3. Literature Review

3.1 English Proficiency in the Indian Workforce

India's educational system emphasizes English, yet actual proficiency levels vary. Urban workplaces often require high English proficiency, while rural and public sector contexts may have lower average levels. Several studies highlight disparities tied to socioeconomic and educational backgrounds.[11]

3.1.1 Educational Influences

English language teaching in India ranges from early adoption in elite private schools to later introduction in public schools, affecting proficiency. [12] Research indicates that learners from English-medium institutions generally outperform their counterparts from regional-language backgrounds in workplace communication.

3.1.2 Regional Linguistic Diversity

With 22 officially recognized languages and hundreds of dialects, linguistic diversity affects how employees acquire and use English. Employees in states where English exposure is limited may face greater challenges in service communication. [13]

3.2 Service Quality and Language Proficiency

Multiple studies show that English language skills significantly influence service quality perceptions among customers and stakeholders.

3.2.1 Private Sector Findings

In sectors such as tourism, hospitality, and retail, English proficiency has been linked to customer satisfaction and repeat patronage. For example, hospitality studies demonstrate that hotel staff with strong English skills receive higher ratings for responsiveness and assurance. [14]

In the banking and financial sector, English proficiency influences clarity of communication regarding products, compliance, and customer support- particularly for clients with higher education or international interactions. [15]

3.2.2 Public Sector Dynamics

Public services such as healthcare, transportation, and government offices often have more varied English proficiency among staff. Research suggests that lack of English fluency can lead to misunderstandings, procedural errors, and delays, negatively affecting citizen satisfaction. [16]

For instance, in urban hospitals, frontline staff with limited English may struggle with patient communication, impacting patient trust and perceived quality of care.

3.3 Mediating Factors and Contextual Influences

3.3.1 Training and Organizational Support

Organizations that invest in language training report improvements in customer interaction quality. Training programs that combine language skills with domain-specific communication scenarios are particularly effective. [17] *

3.3.2 Customer Expectations and Segmentation

Customers with higher education or from urban areas may expect fluent English communication. [18] Private sector organizations often segment customers and tailor communication strategies accordingly. [19]

3.3.3 Technological Mediation

Digital service channels, translation tools, and standardized scripts can partially mitigate language barriers, but human-English communication remains critical in nuanced service interactions.[20]

4. Research Methodologies in Existing Studies

Empirical studies use quantitative, qualitative, and mixed research methods to examine the impact of language proficiency. Surveys, interviews, and combined approaches help researchers understand how language skills influence communication effectiveness, service quality, and customer satisfaction across different organizational contexts.

4.1 Quantitative Approaches

Surveys that assess SERVQUAL dimensions together with self-reported English proficiency are widely used in service quality research. These instruments help capture customer perceptions and employee communication abilities. Statistical techniques such as regression analysis and correlation testing are commonly applied to examine relationships between language skills and service quality outcomes. Findings from these studies consistently show significant associations, indicating that higher levels of English proficiency are linked with improved service quality scores across different organizational settings.

4.2 Qualitative Insights

Interviews and focus groups with customers and employees reveal detailed experiences related to service communication. These methods highlight how practices such as code switching between English and local languages influence understanding, comfort, and overall satisfaction during service interactions.

4.3 Mixed Methods

Some studies combine customer service ratings with assessments of employee language proficiency to strengthen the validity of their findings. By using multiple data sources, researchers are able to triangulate results and reduce bias associated with relying on a single method. Customer ratings reflect perceived service quality, while language assessments provide insight into actual communication abilities. When analyzed together, these measures offer a more comprehensive understanding of how language proficiency influences real-world service interactions. Such integrated approaches help explain not only whether language skills matter, but also how and why they shape customer experiences and service outcomes.

5. Discussion

5.1 Key Findings

Across studies, three themes emerge:

- 1) **Positive Correlation**- Higher English proficiency generally aligns with better service quality ratings.
- 2) **Sector Variations**- Private organizations typically enforce higher English communication standards than public counterparts due to competitive pressures.
- 3) **Contextual Factors Matter**- Customer expectations, training initiatives, and organizational culture influence how language skills affect service outcomes.

5.2 Public vs. Private Sector Differences

Private sector organizations often provide structured language training and performance incentives linked to communication skills. Public sector entities may lack such programs, contributing to wider proficiency gaps.

Additionally, customer profiles differ: private sector customers may prioritize English fluency, while public sector customers may be more linguistically diverse, reducing uniform expectations.

5.3 Implications for Policy and Practice

5.3.1 Organizational Training Policies

Investing in English language development programs can lead to clear improvements in service quality and organizational reputation. When employees communicate more effectively, customers experience fewer misunderstandings and higher satisfaction. Training programs should be tailored to specific organizational contexts, as language needs differ across sectors such as healthcare, banking, and hospitality. Context-specific training helps employees apply language skills directly to their work

roles, making learning more practical and improving overall service performance.

5.3.2 Recruitment and Performance Appraisals

Recruitment criteria that include English proficiency, particularly for customer-facing roles, can significantly improve service interactions. Employees with adequate language skills are better able to communicate clearly and respond to customer needs. In addition, performance appraisal systems can incorporate language use as a competency metric, encouraging continuous improvement. This approach helps organizations maintain consistent communication standards and supports higher levels of service quality across public and private sectors.

5.3.3 Technology Integration

AI-based translation tools and scripted responses can assist service interactions by improving basic communication and consistency. However, they cannot fully replace fluent and empathetic human communication. Effective service delivery often requires emotional understanding, contextual judgment, and flexibility, which technology alone cannot provide. Therefore, digital tools should be used to support and enhance human language skills rather than substitute them. Strengthening employee language competence remains essential for delivering high-quality, customer-centered services.

6. Challenges and Limitations in Literature

Despite clear links between English proficiency and service quality, gaps remain.

6.1 Measurement Variability

Studies vary in the methods used to measure language skills and service quality, which makes direct comparison across findings difficult. Many rely on self-reported English proficiency rather than standardized or objective assessments. As a result, inconsistencies arise in evaluating actual language competence and its true impact on service quality outcomes.

6.2 Sector-Specific Research Gaps

Certain service sectors remain understudied in existing research. Areas such as emergency services, government helplines, and rural service environments receive limited scholarly attention, despite their critical role in public service delivery and frequent communication challenges.

6.3 Longitudinal Evidence Scarcity

Most existing studies use cross-sectional designs, capturing language proficiency and service quality at a single point in time. Longitudinal research that tracks the effects of language training over extended periods is limited, restricting understanding of how improvements in English skills influence service outcomes over time.

7. Future Research Directions

Future studies should:

- 1) Use **standardized assessments** of English proficiency alongside performance indicators.
- 2) **Explore longitudinal designs** to assess effects of language training programs.
- 3) **Investigate customer segmentation effects**, such as differences in language expectations across age groups and regions.
- 4) **Examine multilingual communication strategies** where English blends with local languages.
- 5) **Study technological impacts**, such as AI-driven customer service platforms, on language-mediated service quality.

8. Conclusion

English language proficiency significantly influences service quality in Indian organizations. Higher proficiency enhances communication clarity, customer satisfaction, and operational efficiency- especially in private sector contexts with intensive customer interactions. Public sector organizations face challenges due to diverse language backgrounds and limited training resources.

This review highlights the need for strategic language development initiatives, nuanced research approaches, and policy attention to English language competence as a key driver of service excellence. By acknowledging and addressing language barriers, Indian organizations can improve service delivery, customer trust, and competitive advantage in an increasingly globalized environment.

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