ABSTRACT

The growth of the Customer Service Industry has seen a rise in the demand for new recruits with excellent communicative skills. Communication has become vital to business growth since our economy has firmly based itself on information, rather than manufacturing. With the outsourcing boom, companies and organizations want staff who can speak English in order to communicate within the international marketplace. With reference to the present context and keeping in mind the growth of the customer service industry there is a need for professional training in communication skills. There is also a need for cross cultural training to be able to cater to Indian customers with different cultural backgrounds and also international customers from different cultural backgrounds.

The young Indian learners with career aspirations will view this study as an immense help and as a point of reference for enhancing their communicative skills in the Customer Service Industry. The study will help learners bridge cultural differences and hence enable them to understand what they are trying to communicate especially with reference to the business sector. The focus of language learning must involve much more than just passively encoding text. Language learning cannot be defined as an individual cognitive act, but rather as a social practice especially in the business scenario.

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the needs in the Customer Service Industry:
   - Better communication skills for customer retention
   - Communication tips for handling complaints thereby keeping customers happy
   - Training to equip job aspirants with key skills for Customer Service jobs
   - Kinds of communication skills required to de-escalate situations or to calm irate customers
   - Ways and means to build great customer experiences and thereby increase customer loyalty index
   - Develop more strategies to increase customer satisfaction

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- Techniques for email communication
- Communication tips for improving internet customer service
- Ways of communication to complete restore customer confidence after things go wrong
- Kinds of communication involved in various sectors like sales, emergency response services, and telecommunication services etc.

2. To identify the constraints:
   - Cultural
   - Social
   - Economic
   - Political
   - Personal

3. To identify the soft skills in the Customer Service Industry:
   - Mother tongue influence
   - Sentence structuring
   - Intonation
   - Rate of Speech
   - Correct usage of words and sentences

4. To develop and design the materials

For this study both a quantitative and qualitative analysis was done and the tools used for the former were questionnaires and for the latter unstructured interviews, personal observations and daily notes. Being in the customer service industry for eight years has enabled me to make a very detailed and thorough qualitative analysis. The quantitative analysis only strengthens the observations made qualitatively. The study aims to highlight the importance of communicative skills in the customer service industry. The analysis of data of the study and the research findings will not only benefit career aspirants in the customer service but also employers, employees, trainers especially the soft skill trainers and also material designers and developers.
The methodology used for the study is mainly qualitative and quantitative. The various tools employed for the purpose are in the form of questionnaires, unstructured interviews, personal observation and daily notes. The quantitative data for this study has been mainly derived from the questionnaire and the qualitative data has been mainly derived from unstructured interviews, personal observation and daily notes.

A sample population of 500 was taken into account for the study. The process of sampling has been done in such a way that by studying this sample the results can be fairly generalized with respect to the population from which the units were chosen. While sampling there are four groups that usually constitute a sample model. This model comprises of a theoretical population which refers to which population the study needs to be generalized to, the study population which refers to which population can be accessed, the sampling frame which refers to how the population can be accessed and lastly the actual sample which refers to the population in the study.

In this study the sample includes respondents who are associated with the customer service industry. The respondents are from the telecommunication sector, retail sector, insurance and banking sector, BPOs, travel and tour sector, hospitality sector, emergency services etc. They are employees, employers, trainers, trainees, new recruits, students who have business communication as a subject and teachers. A majority of the respondents are already working and have been in the customer service industry for a relatively long period. The student and teacher respondents are very few in number. The responses elicited from them were more theory based than practical and hence would not contribute much to the study. More focus was given to the respondents who have served or are still serving in the customer service industry.

Factors like age, gender, educational status and total work experience have been considered. As training is seen as crucial the respondents have also been asked whether any training or course in business communication has been undertaken.

The first chapter of the study is an introduction which provides a description of the context or setting. It highlights the observation that speaking English is not enough but training learners to be able to communicate in the language is of utmost importance. It describes the need for learners to be exposed to the culture of the target language for better understanding of the context of conversation. Lastly, the chapter stresses on how the advent of technology has made learning easier.
The second chapter is a review of the literature related to studies in business communication and communicative skills in the customer service industry. This chapter defines language and language learning. It also defines communication and its various aspects including communication theory, types of communication and barriers to communication. This chapter looks at the cultural aspects of language and communication and also discusses the various factors involved in business communication.

The third chapter discusses the methodology adopted which is both qualitative and quantitative and also the tools used like questionnaires, unstructured interviews, personal or direct observation and daily notes.

The fourth chapter includes the analysis of the data both qualitative and quantitative. It also deals with the interpretation of the data according to the responses received from the respondents.

The fifth chapter is a conclusion of the data analyzed and the research findings. It also discusses about the suggestions that can be incorporated.

The data collected for this study has been from the people who are closely associated with communication and the customer service sector. The first page of the survey consists of the personal profile of the respondents. Both the qualitative and quantitative data reflect the importance and need for good communicative skills in the customer service industry, with emphasis on the soft skills involved in communication.

A similar study on other sectors or industries like the automobile industry, the aviation industry and other upcoming fast track industries is highly recommended. Although statistical methods have been used for the quantitative analysis of the study another method that can be applied is the chi-square test. The use of structured interviews can also help in attaining uniformity in the way that respondents respond to the questions. A study on communicative skills with emphasis on personality development would make a good topic for further research.