

Research Article

## **English Express: A Boot Camp Model**

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### **Abstract**

The English Express and boot camp model aims to highlight misunderstood concepts of language learning, but the content of the English language is not the focus. Ekalavya model of language learning is adopted in the present study to remove the anxiety of learners. The focus of Ekalavya Boot Camp is to challenge the participants in a manner such that the impetus for rising to a higher level of English language proficiency emanates from them: the effort to improve is purely of their own volition. Three boot camps were organised at a gap of two months to monitor the cycle of learning, and enable the students to speak freely and fluently in familiar and unfamiliar situations. A total of hundred fifty engineering students from a multi-sector state private University in Odisha participated in the boot camp. The paper discusses the impact of English Express boot camp in the present study.

**Keywords:** *English, speak, freely, confidence, boot camp, proficiency, language*

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## Introduction

The “bootcamp” model of learning is on the rise—learning via a focused, intensive period of time dedicated to learning one thing (Boot Camp Model of Learning, 2012). The English Express boot camp adopted the Ekalavya Model of learning which provides attention to noncognitive factors such as interest, engagement and motivation instead focusing on cognitive factors, or processes and outcomes of knowing, learning, and perceiving. The Ekalavyas qualities desirable are tenacity and resilience, especially in the face of adversity, rejection and resource-constraints, treating others with dignity, a learning orientation: open-mindedness, curiosity, challenging dogmas and fixed notions, humility (receptiveness to feedback, learning from mistakes and a sense of gratitude), collective, not individual, achievement orientation, working collaboratively with and helping others, initiative taking and self-discipline. English is viewed as a utilitarian necessity—the currency of communication for specific events: interviews, delivering, presentations, group discussions – where they are assessed or judged. Hence, efforts at enhancing proficiency in English emanate out of a desire at doing better in such (anxiety inducing) events, not for freely or joyfully using the language for naturally expressing themselves. There is fear of ‘not being good enough’: concern about pronunciation, intonation, accent, polish. General awareness and interest in a wide variety of areas: important to being able to initiate or jump into on-going conversations, is marked by their non-existence. The paper aims to create an environment where learners can rapidly transit to being completely unselfconscious of conversing continuously in English.

## Objectives

- To enhance the ability of the participants to have effective, impromptu conversations in English in real-life situations
- To express themselves without anxiety, in unfamiliar locales and in contexts that overwhelm them
- To improve the ability to address and connect with the strangers

## Methodology

A boot camp model of learning was experimented on hundred fifty learners of a State Private University in Odisha to express in English freely and fluently. Three intensive boot camps with an interval of one month were organised to train the students to acquire language skills in a short period of time. Each boot camp was of a thirty-hour duration. The students were removed from their comfort zones and regular classes. Continuous engagement and practice were planned to help the learners to come out of their cocoon of nervousness. The learners were exposed to a series of videos, group discussion and speaking before the camera activities. A high facilitator-to-student ratio allowed learners to get support on additional challenges when needed, thus enhancing the experience for students at all levels of mastery. Data collected from end-of-boot camp surveys show that students report high learning gains

and feel that the boot camp prepares them for solving language problems they will encounter in everyday speech.

### Boot Camp And Feedback Analysis

#### A. Boot Camp: Phase One

The boot camp helped the participants to express themselves freely. The boot camp used consistently a plethora of stimuli that stays true to non-cognitive pedagogy wherein ex-cathedra components are nil. Constant and prolific feedback to output produced by the participants was a motivating factor. The boot camp challenged the participants in a manner such that the impetus for rising to a higher level of proficiency emanates from them: the effort to improve is purely of their own volition. Highly eclectic areas they have never earlier had exposure and which dramatically widens their universe, three examples being: causative factors of the unrest in Hong Kong, the impact of Indian culture on South East Asia over the past 2,000 years and the sterling ‘Ekalavya’ qualities of Swapna Barman. All participants have rated their improvement in confidence level from first video cut to fourth video cut in a five-point scale. Most of the participants rate themselves above the average level in displaying significant improvement of their confidence level in group discussions, impromptu talks, peer interactions and public speaking. 100% participants assert that they understand easily what others say.

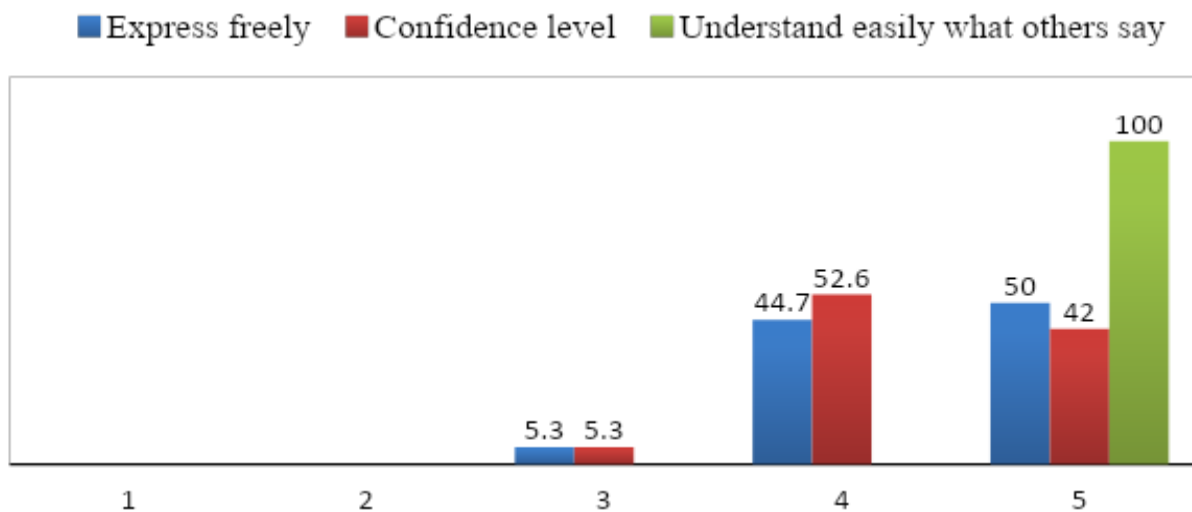


Figure 1. Student Feedback

#### VOX POPULI: THE VOICE OF THE STUDENTS

The paper shares the voice of the participants:

‘It was so inspiring.... it's extraordinary...just love it...’

‘It's the most interesting camp we have ever had. We have learnt a lot from here. It's really gonna help us in future’.

‘Yeah, I would definitely recommend to attend this boot camp. In fact, we would love to attend many more programs like this’.

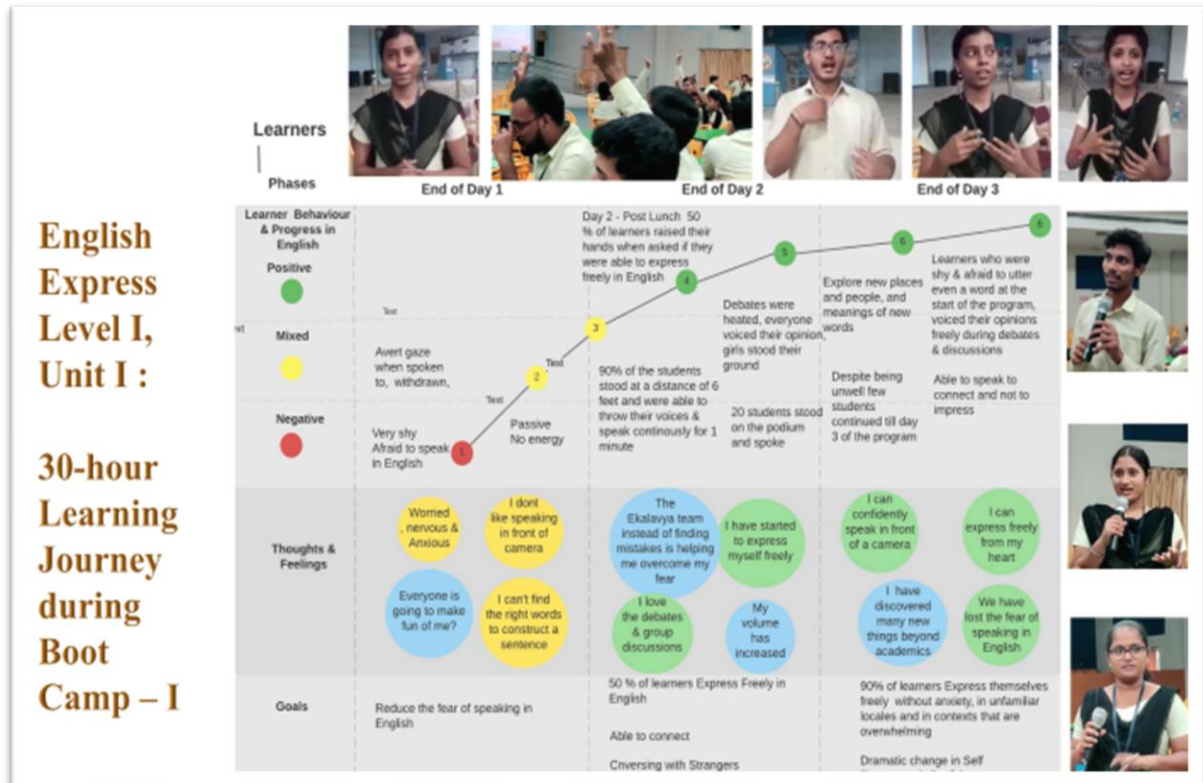
‘(Others) can understand how important this program was because they can see me in a change and my easier communication to them will make’.

‘It helped us how to overcome our fear and represent our point confidently in front of all’.

‘Everyone's participation, external experts’ coordination, (getting) personal feedback’.

‘No anxiety. No stage fears. Fluent English. Express yourself. Critical thinking. Telling about ourselves in less time’

‘I came to know a lot of things going around the world that I never cared of learning’.



**Figure 2. English Express Improvement Level**

(Source: English Express Report from the Ekalavya Initiative, 2020)

The training outline here which, together with the course materials freely available online under a Creative Commons License, should help to facilitate similar efforts by others. The first boot camp ends with the following questions for reflection:

- What are the skills that lend themselves particularly well to learning-via-bootcamp?
- Should a model for investing in yourself include attending bootcamps of this sort?

### B. Boot Camp-Phase Two

The second phase of the boot camp was organized at a gap of two months. Each participant showed 100% retention of the incremental capabilities acquired in the first boot camp phase: the rise to a higher orbit has been non-transient. The benefits that the learners have spoken of having accrued to them as a result of the first boot camp (e.g., ‘I can communicate without

any anxiety’) goes well beyond only their significantly enhanced abilities to speak in and converse in English. The impact has been foundational. 93% of participants express that they would like to be a part of the ‘Fauj-E’ volunteering framework of Ekalavya. In the Fauj-E’ volunteering framework, the participants take the ownership of their learning, and volunteer to take the responsibility of the communities around to build the confidence and enhance English language skills.

### **Improvements Experienced by Learners incremental to Camp # I**

#### **Using English naturally and effortlessly - without any anxiety or fear**

‘Now I can express myself in English as effortlessly as in my mother tongue’.

‘When our group works on assignments given by Ekalavya, I dissuaded others from conversing in their mother tongue’.

‘Earlier I would get stuck from time to time while speaking. Now, I can speak much more fluently and explain myself much more easily’.

‘Earlier I would need time to think the words I’d speak. Now I am able to express myself instantaneously and confidently’.

‘I am conscious of the words I use in my conversation and I make efforts to use words I’ve just come across’.

#### **Conversations**

‘Now I can converse confidently with strangers’.

‘Earlier, I would experience discomfort in conversations longer than one-two minutes. Now I can converse for any duration’.

‘My confidence level has increased even more. My fear of conversing in English has come down substantially’

#### **Other Significant Areas**

‘I am making new friends for the first time. All these years, my friends were only those from the same linguistic background. Now, I can converse with those whose mother tongue is different from mine. This has helped increase my circle of friends’.

‘Now, I can teach others. ‘I have understood that I learn more by assisting others learn’. (Internalising values, practicing leadership)

‘My ability to comprehend the spoken word has improved and hence, my listening is better. This is helping in my regular studies’.

‘Because of the assignments given by Ekalavya, I have understood the importance of keeping myself abreast of world affairs’.

### **C. Boot Camp-Phase Three**

The third phase of the boot camp has shown significant improvements in the speaking skills of the students, thereby, fulfilling the third objective of the programme, i.e., improving the

ability to address and connect with the strangers. The students who have completed all the three phases of the bootcamp, the impact has been foundational and transformative.



**Figure 3. Students Speak Fluently and Freely in the third Boot Camp**

At the end of the Boot Camp, the participants have demonstrated their ability to speak with and connect with audiences with zero anxiety they would never met with earlier. The students applied everything they had learnt, themselves, unassisted, designed and delivered sessions for the very first time, to audiences they had never met with earlier. Their being delirious with joy thereafter was a result of them being able to do so very successfully.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, the paper discusses the impact of non-cognitive approach to language learning through the English Express boot camp. The boot camp enhanced the self-esteem, sense of self-worth and confidence of the participants. There is a sharp increase in conversational English capabilities. The boot camp identified true ‘Ekalavyas’ who has committed to engage themselves in peer learning. This is a significant opportunity for educational organisations and recommendations made, if acted on, can yield the students tremendous benefits. Given the cumulative improvement displayed by learners, the researcher is certain that everyone of those who goes through the full complement of 90 hours (over the three Boot Camps) will far exceed the objectives set out at the commencement of this initiative.

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