

**The relationship between Language Learning Benefits and Empowerment of Employees  
(Case Study: Isfahan Customs)**

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## The relationship between Language Learning Benefits and Empowerment of Employees (Case Study: Isfahan Customs)

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the relationship between language learning benefits and empowerment of employees in Isfahan Customs in Iran. The research method was descriptive and correlational. The study sample was 140 of employees who worked within the year of 2013 in Iran. The method selected was census. Data was analyzed by SPSS software. The result showed there was significant relationship between language learning benefits and empowerment. Results indicated that four sub components of language learning benefits such as academic, career – commercial , service – welfare and practical were highly correlated with empowerment of employees. Also there is significant correlation between sex, age and department and language learning benefits.

**Keywords** : language learning benefits, empowerment, employees.

### *1. Introduction*

Nowadays, the workplace has evolved. Organizations face a great deal of uncertainty. Hence, managers need to utilize their staff effectively in order to improve the efficiency and quality of work to achieve their goals.

In recent decades, to empower the staff is one of the employers concerns because they are busy with lots of jobs to do. So the employers should trust their staff. In fact, work conditions and the competition among organizations have encouraged the employers to empower their personnel.

In this way, empowerment of the employees is one of the most significant trends in development of human resources; and it has improved workforce and organizations.

The empowerment is a continual trend and its importance has also enhanced since the fundamentals of development in trade is to put up with social evolutions, technological outcomes and the demand for competitive environment. In fact, organizations need staff who can afford the best use of technology, be innovative and improve the products and services.( Smith, 2000)

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics(2007), increasingly, managers and leaders realize that the key to business growth and success is through developing the skills and knowledge of its workforce.”

With increased globalization of trade and business in a knowledge-based economy, the use of an appropriate language has become increasingly critical for the acquisition of competitive advantage. Language affects the ability of multinational organizations to function in the global market. In the context of the strategic environment within which a multinational corporation operates, language may be seen to derive its value through the functions it performs for the corporation.( Dhir, 2005)

The present study, therefore, for its basis has presupposed the relationship between language learning benefits and empowerment of employees in an organization. The above relationship,

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however, will be tested in the given statistics of Isfahan Customs in Iran.

Figure 1. is the conceptual model of the relationship between the variables that are followed in the present article :

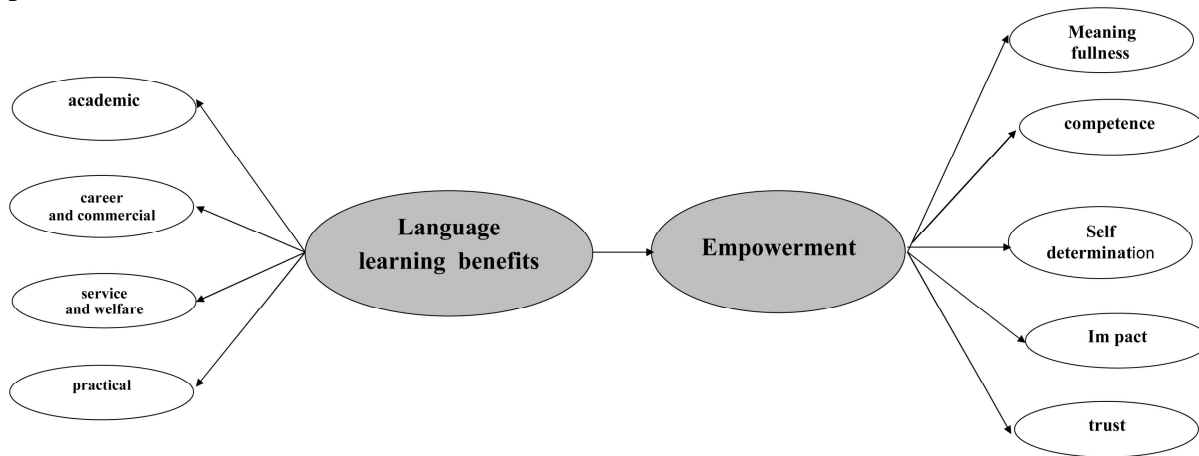


Figure 1. The Proposed Conceptual Model of the Relations between Research Variables

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 language learning benefits

Based on Dhir, the evolution of the knowledge-based economy, the globalization of business and economy, and the increasing diversity of the workforce are the challenges that corporate planners deal with in managing language programs. (Dhir, 2005)

Pollitt(2007) argues that the main characteristics a global manager needs are: flexibility; an acceptance of and lack of resistance to change; an understanding of differences and how to make them work to his or her advantage rather than be seen as a barrier to effectiveness; extreme patience; and, above all, a sense of humor. "With these personal qualities, supported by an in-depth understanding of the country and business context in which he or she is operating, and wherever possible, knowledge of the language, a manager will be successful," . Moreover, it is not only senior executives who need to be able to work in a foreign language. Sales and marketing personnel obviously need to be able to speak the language of their clients, but so, too, do professional and technical employees, plus secretaries, receptionists and telephonists. In today's business world, emails, faxes and international telephone calls are routinely used rather than letters, and such electronic communication brings employees at all levels much closer to their foreign counterparts. The companies need the language for general purposes (marketing improvement; opening up new markets) and Specific purposes (preparation for a known overseas posting; response to a specific contract tender).( Lowe,2007)

Thitthongkam et al(2011) argue that understanding the roles of foreign language will be beneficial because it assists understanding of conversations, communications and negotiations between practitioners and foreign customers. Practitioners can run businesses more smoothly with the use of foreign languages (Peh, 2005) and their foreign customers will feel more comfortable. In business administration, not only are speaking and listening skills important but also other skills including

reading, writing and negotiating (Stewart, 1973). Language is, seemingly, omnipresent and successful communicators apply principles of human behavior (Stewart,1973). Regarding writing skills, e-mail is omnipresent. When writing informal e-mails, efficiency is more important than proper spelling and grammar, because it is considered written conversation. Formal e-mails, especially in the case of a first contact, should have very high standards. Reports should also be free of mistakes. However, they should be synthetic and brief rather than in full text.( Didiot-Cook et al,2000). Communicating via the telephone requires both listening and speaking skills, and it is more difficult to conduct a conversation over the telephone than face to face: it is possible to help understanding through visual clues and other non-verbal stimuli, which are not available when communicating over the telephone. Perhaps predictably, reading appears as the second most important area of use of the foreign language. In view of the quantities of letters, reports, orders, etc. which are required to keep a modern business in operation, the ability to read a foreign language is bound to be important. Of greater interest, from the point of view of learning strategies, is the relative importance of writing skills as expressed by the perceived need to send letters, faxes, etc. in the foreign language. It would seem that writing, the most difficult of all language skills to acquire, is likely to be used more frequently than the oral interaction skills associated with receiving foreign visitors, travelling abroad, socializing, and participating at business meetings.( Swift et al, 1992,) . For the oral skills, presentation skills are crucial. Once graduates are on the job, meetings, negotiations and phone conversations are their most frequent tasks, although these skills are not always tested during recruitment. The impact of new technologies on language use is that the need for better communication skills increases, especially writing skills (particularly e-mail) and proficiency in English.( Didiot-Cook et al,2000)

Swift and Smith(1992) indicate the main reasons why learners wanted to undertake language learning: to learn a foreign language, to meet company needs, for personal/career development, in preparation for the Single European Market, general self-improvement, importance of specific target language to business needs and other reasons.

According to what mentioned, in organizations the most significant aspects of language learning benefits are academic, career and commercial, service and welfare, and practical.

Table 1: Dimensions of the variable language learning benefits and their features

Variable	dimension	feature	
Language learning benefits	academic	participation in global conferences and meetings	
		access to articles	
		reading books in English	
		access to information	
		the possibility to continue education in one's field of interest in abroad	
		to be aware of international events and news especially about career field	
			paying attention to customers
			Increasing the number of abroad customers
			getting customers' satisfaction in communication
			career progress due to easy access to well-paid jobs
			being able to read reports and job information in original texts

	career and commercial	understanding the high level technologies in career fields
		making global trade easy
		Possibility of faster and easier correspondence with counterparts
		Developing organizations in financial, commercial and cultural facets
	service and welfare	easy and fast contact with friends in other countries
		Job promotion to higher ranks
		providing easy travel to foreign countries
		familiarity with career and commercial culture of foreign countries
practical	working with computer easily	
	working with internet easily	
	communication through internet by participation in virtual conferences	
	self-improvement in social, career, and cultural aspects	
	achieving world standards in global trade	

### 3. Empowerment

As we move through the 1990s, increasing emphasis will be placed on participative management mainly because decisions are becoming more complex and managers will be required to integrate the knowledge of specialists in different functional and technical areas. Moreover, those that are entering the workforce today have higher expectations of being involved in management decisions. Finally, with the pressure of worldwide competition, organizations who wish to remain competitive must use the potential of all their members. (Nykodymand et al,1994)

Initiatives to involve employees in organizational decision making are as old as industrial democracy, which can be traced back to the last century and as recent as team building, participation, and total quality management. The latest variation on this theme has been termed "employee empowerment".(Hardy and Sullivan,1998). The concept of employee participation has been a focus for research and practice for many years. It has taken many different forms, evolving through the employee involvement and participative decision-making concepts into the contemporary empowerment perspective.(Greasley and et al,2005).

Tulloch (1993) argues that the notion of empowerment involves the workforce being provided with a greater degree of flexibility and more freedom to make decisions relating to work. This contrasts markedly with traditional management techniques that have emphasised control, hierarchy and rigidity. The meaning of empowerment has tended to be associated with the concept of power, thereby implying that power is redistributed by those in a senior position to those in more subordinate positions.(Greasley and et al,2005).

Empowerment is "A shared understanding between managers and employees that employees are trusted and valued partners. Because they are in the best position to assume responsibility for individual and team results, employees take action and make decisions that support the organization's goals. Managers acting as coaches align goals, measures, and resources in a climate of trust and open feedback."( Carroll,1994)

It is possible to identify two key aspects of empowerment : first, the psychological dimension which focuses upon how the individual perceives empowerment; and secondly the multi-dimensional

perspective which closely examines the role of managers and leaders. Psoinos and Smithson( 2002) argue that through psychological approach, the emphasis is upon perceptions and beliefs of power, competence, control and self-efficacy.(Greasley and et al,2005).

Thomas and Velthouse (1990) conceptualize empowerment as a set of four task assessments or cognitions that individuals make as they attempt to interpret their work situation. The four dimensions of empowerment include meaning, impact, competence, and choice. Meaning is described as the value of a work goal or purpose, judged in relation to an individual's own standards or ideals. (Siglera,and Pearson,2000)

(Spreitzer, 1995,Thomas and Velthouse, 1990)argue that recent theoretical work suggests that empowering managerial practices should foster a certain psychological mindset to lead to empowered behaviors. Seminal work by Spreitzer (1995a,b,1997) has helped define psychological empowerment as a global mindset including four cognitions reflecting a proactive orientation with regard to one's role in the organization. Empowered individuals:

- (1) find meaning in their work role;
- (2) feel competent to perform their work role;
- (3) have a feeling of self-determination with regard to specific means to achieve expected results; and
- (4) believe that they can have a real impact on organizational outcomes. (Boudrias and et al, 2005.

A very similar definition of empowerment was outlined by Lee and Koh (2001) who described these four dimensions as describing the psychological state of the subordinate:

- (1) Meaningfulness: the meaning of a value of a task goal or purpose judged in relation to an individual's own ideals or standards.
- (2) Competence: competence is an individual's belief in his/her capability to perform task activities skillfully.
- (3) Self-determination (or choice): autonomy in the initiation and continuation of work behaviours and processes.
- (4) Impact: the perception of the degree to which an individual can influence certain outcomes at work. (Greasley, 2004)

In Mishra (1992) studies one more aspect was added to empowerment and a total of five aspects of empowerment was formed. Empowered persons have self – confidence and are sure that they are treated fairly. They believe that final results of their work are judged fairly Woods & Whetten, though they are subordinate.(1997)

These aspects have also been mentioned in Kanger and Kanungo studies. (Kanger & Kanungo:1998) If employers can improve these aspects in their personnel, they can empower them satisfactorily. (5)

#### 4. Research Hypotheses

The aim of the present study is to investigate the relationship between language learning benefits and empowerment of employees in Customs of Isfahan Province. In this research the relationship between four different dimensions of language learning benefits namely academic, career – commercial , service – welfare and practical and four different dimensions of empowerment namely meaningfulness, competence, self-determination and impact in customs is examined.

#### *4.1 Major Research Hypothesis*

There is a relationship between language learning benefits (academic, career – commercial , service – welfare and practical) and empowerment of employees (meaningfulness, competence, self-determination and impact) in Customs of Isfahan Province.

#### *4.2 Secondary Research Hypotheses*

H1. There is a relationship between academic aspect and empowerment of employees in Customs of Isfahan Province

H2. There is a relationship between service – welfare aspect and empowerment of employees in Customs of Isfahan Province.

H3. There is a relationship between career – commercial aspect and empowerment of employees in Customs of Isfahan Province.

H4. There is a relationship between practical aspect and empowerment of employees in Customs of Isfahan Province

#### *5. Research Methodology*

The present study is a correlational research and its statistical population includes all full-time employees of Customs of Isfahan Province. The population was 140 people in the year of 2013, out of which a sample of 140 was selected using census method. Data collection was carried out by employing the questionnaire of language learning benefits developed by the researcher and the questionnaire of empowerment based upon Spreitzer and Mishra(1992). Data was graded based on Likert scale, scoring grade '1' option as "totally disagree" and grade '5' option as "totally agree". Using Cronbach's alpha, coefficients of questionnaires of language learning benefits (academic, career – commercial , service – welfare and practical), were given respectively as (/6), (/7), (/8)and (/0.6) and empowerment (meaningfulness, competence, self-determination and impact, trust) were given respectively as (/7), (/5) , (/8) , (/8) and (/6).

#### *6. Statistical Findings*

SPSS version 17.0 was used to assess the links between language learning benefits and empowerment. The findings obtained from the research are presented according to the sub problems and briefly interpreted as follows.

According to data of the table 2, means for language learning benefits is 3.9 and for empowerment 3.3. As seen in the table 3 the coefficient of correlation is 0/52 and Sig is 0/000 which is significant at 0.05 level so there is a significant relationship between language learning benefits and empowerment.

Table 4 indicates descriptive analysis relating to sub components of language learning benefits of employees. According to data of the table3, means for academic is 3.6 , for career-commercial 3.8, for service-welfare 3.7,and for practical 4 .

Table 5 showed Correlation between sub components of language learning benefits and empowerment. According to data four sub components of language learning benefits such as academic, career–commercial , service–welfare and practical were highly correlated with empowerment of employees.

According to table 6, there is a significant correlation between sex, age and department and language

learning benefits.

### 7. Discussion and Implications

Nowadays, the organizations have realized the importance of language learning as a crucial asset to access the benefits of competition in knowledge economy.

The development of an organizational culture that is conducive to the creation and application of knowledge, free flow of organizational information, and empowerment of its constituent members. Language plays a critical role in the formation of the organizational culture through its role in knowledge creation and application, flow of information, and functioning of the organization. (Dhir, 2005)

The main objective of this study was determined as relationship between language learning benefits and empowerment of employees in organization. The results of this study showed that there is significant relationship between language learning benefits and empowerment. This result goes line with the findings of Thitthongkam, Walsh and Bunchapattanasakda (2011), Swift and Smith (2007), Didiot-cook, Gauthier and Scheirlinckx (2000). Another result indicated that four sub components of language learning benefits such academic, career – commercial , service – welfare and practical were highly correlate with empowerment of employees. Also there is a significant correlation between sex , age and department and language learning benefits.

### 8. Conclusion

In modern age, organizations are much different from traditional organizations. In modern organizations the employees should have the ability to quickly solve problems and to be innovative. The employees empowerment is a new paradigm in management science. In Psychological empowerment, rather than giving emphasis to employers' role in allotment power among personnel creates an atmosphere of team working them so that they feel their job is meaningful, they can do it with competence and have a great impact on what happens in the workplace. Moreover, they can be autonomous and feel free in doing their work and also trust their colleagues.

Language abilities as a vital tool can be a distinguishing factor among organizations. organizations and their employees can benefit directly and indirectly from learning English. Those employees who have mastered English and used it in international organizations can benefit from it in academic, career-commercial, service-welfare areas. Each of these areas have great impact on employees empowerment, so there is a continual relationship between empowerment and language learning benefits. Hence, employees empowerment makes them work efficiently.

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## Appendices

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for scores on language learning benefits and empowerment

Variable	Number	Means	Std. Deviation
Language learning benefits	140	3.9	0.84
Empowerment	140	3.3	0.96

Table 3. Pearson correlation between language learning benefits and empowerment

Variable	Variable	Pearson correlation	Effect Size	Number	Significance Level
Language learning benefits	Empowerment	0/52	0/27	140	0/00

Table 4. Descriptive statistics relating to sub components of language learning benefits of employees

Components of language learning benefits	Number	Means	Std. Deviation
academic	140	3.6	1.07
career - commercial	140	3.8	0.76
service – welfare	140	3.7	1.10
practical	140	4	0.76

Table 5. Correlation between sub components of language learning benefits and empowerment

Variable	Variable	Pearson correlation	Effect Size	Number	Significance Level
academic	Empowerment	0/31	0/09	140	0/00
career - commercial	Empowerment	0/64	0/40	140	0/00
service - welfare	Empowerment	0/47	0/22	140	0/00
practical	Empowerment	0/44	0/19	140	0/00

Table 6. Correlation between language learning benefits and demographic variables (sex, age and department )

Variables	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	df	F	sig
sex	20.471	0.149	137	14.576	0.00
age	166.415	1.241	134	76.373	0.00
department	256.750	1.959	131	11.125	0.00