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# LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

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## Soft Skills for First Generation Students, Teachers and Professionals

M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.

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What I list here is based on my own experience as a first generation learner. It was very hard in those days, say sixty or more years ago, for the first generation learners whose parents are illiterates and poor, to go to school and continue and complete the school. Going beyond school to college was hardly ever thought of. Students from non-first generation learners' social groups would make fun of you for the way you wear your clothes, speak your idiolect, and use fingers and palm to eat your lunch, etc. Yet, with determination, one could overcome the hardships, obstacles, prejudice and discrimination. After all, always remember that prejudice and discrimination may never end.

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Soft Skills for First Generation Students, Teachers and Professionals

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- First Generation Learners (FGLs) – Not a new term.
- Once there were only mostly FGLs!
- So, not much attention was given then.
- Now, a political necessity to recognize and help this important segment of population – a delayed, but wise step.

### **Characteristics of FGLs - First Generation Learners**

The following characteristics are generally noticed. However, note that not all First Generation Learners may have all of these or even any of these characteristics.

- Inferiority complex, leading on to lack of participation, unwillingness and hesitation to be part of a group/team, internal conflict, satisfied with low level performance, ultimate defeat and self-destruction, etc. Fatalism.
- Difficulty with appropriate etiquette demanded in “city” contexts, Dress and Table Manners, etc.
- Difficulty with appropriate language.
- Difficulty with appropriate Nonverbal Communication.
- Lack of sensitivity to the context.
- Fear and hesitation. Fuming with internal anger.
- Finding one’s direction in career is hard for the FLGs, especially when they come from little educated or illiterate families.

### **Modern Office and FGLs**

1. Communication via English.
2. Appropriate Dress Code.
3. Appropriate facial expression.
4. Participation in group activities.
5. Keeping appointments on time.
6. Keeping the Desk/Table tidy.

7. Appropriate greetings.
8. Avoidance of body odor.
9. Toilet habits: frequency, cleanliness, etc.
10. Seating posture.
11. Gender relations.
12. Avoidance of hurtful humor, comments and gestures, etc.
13. An Exercise: Prepare an Office, provide scenes, enact a variety of Office Activities.
14. For this visit a variety of offices, both public and private, business, etc.
15. Practice with attention to details helps.
16. Develop sensitivity to context, learn from face and nonverbal expressions.
17. Develop skills in expression through language and non-language means.
18. Remember most of us came originally from FGLs families. Be sympathetic, do not mock at or mimic FGLs. Learn to love others!

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