

PROFICIENCY OF FIRST DEGREE STUDENTS IN ARTS AND SCIENCE COLLEGES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

Research
Paper

ABSTRACT

The present study aims at exploring the language proficiency of first degree students in Arts and Science colleges in terms of language related activities and certain variables. The sample of the study consists of 240 students from six Arts and Science colleges affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli. English Language Proficiency Tests prepared and validated were used to collect data. The survey method was used. The data were analysed by using percentage analysis, t-test, correlation and multiple regression. The study shows that the students studying in Arts and Science colleges are just average in their English language proficiency.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a door through which an individual thinks about the past, understands the present and predicts the future. Language is the flesh and blood of culture and no language is better than another. Every language helps in the preservation of the culture and civilisation of the people who speak the language and incorporates a system, which every individual has to learn (Fiayaz Ahmed, 1994, p. 6).

NEED FOR STUDYING ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Paul Verghese, C. (1989) has rightly pointed out that of all the languages in the world today English deserves to be regarded as a world language (p. 1). English has, undoubtedly a highly developed literature and it is rich in the quantity of thought and in the quality of style. It is rightly considered as the window to the world knowledge and the gateway to thought and culture.

English is a beautiful language, which is flexible and an easy vehicle for the transmission of thought. In the case of Indians, it has established historical associations and has made an impact on their cultural life. It is learnt as a second language and not as a foreign language in India. However, learning English in the Indian context has been considered as one of the major issues since independence.

The proficiency of students in using English language is reported to have deteriorated over the years. No

definite evidence is however, available to indicate whether present day students enrolled in and/or completing different levels of education are less proficient in the use of languages than those who completed education 15-20 years back. Irrespective of the expressed opinions, improvement in language skills of students is important, considering the significance of language proficiency for cognitive development and further learning.

It is also very interesting to note that only after two or three years of study, many of the students come to realise the necessity of mastering English. While participating in cultural or other competitions organised by the institutions or other agencies, almost all realise the role of the English language in winning name and fame from others. Many of the students do miss recognition or even appointment because of lack of general competence in English. At the time of placement interviews inside or outside the campus, almost all students who missed the chance of being recruited attribute the loss only to their poor English language proficiency.

Therefore, the author has worked out a research design to focus on the English language proficiency of the first degree students studying in arts and science colleges in terms of their language related activities and certain variables. On completion, this study would yield findings related to the level of attainment of the first degree students

Dr. Sherine Vinoca Snekalatha
Coordinator, ESD, Meston College of Education,
Royapettah, Chennai - 14.

In their English language proficiency and the factors that are responsible for the existing status. Hence, it would pave the way for identifying the magnitude of the assumed problem and thereby it would prompt the researchers and educational administrators to think of possible remedial measures to be taken up for improving the situation in the field of English language teaching and learning in arts and science colleges.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

PROFICIENCY OF FIRST DEGREE STUDENTS IN ARTS AND SCIENCE COLLEGES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

OBJECTIVES

1. To find out the level of English Language Proficiency of first degree students in arts and science colleges in Tirunelveli in toto and in terms of its dimensions - Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing, and to test the significance of the predictive nature of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.
2. To find out the significance of correlation between the English Language Proficiency of first degree students and the language related activities - Habit of Listening to English News (HLE); Exposure to Programmes in English (EPE); Oral Communication in English (OCE); Habit of Reading English Books (HREB); Communication in English through Writing (CEW), and their predictive nature.
3. To find out the level of English Language Proficiency of male and female first degree students in toto and in terms of its dimensions, and to test the significance of difference between these two categories of students.
4. To find out the significance of correlation between the English Language Proficiency of male and female students and the language related activities, and their predictive nature.

METHOD USED IN THE PRESENT STUDY

The survey method has been used for the purpose of investigating the chosen problem.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

All the students doing the three year degree course in the arts and science colleges in Tirunelveli district form the population of the present study.

From the arts and science colleges affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, six arts and science colleges have been selected at random, and 40 students have been chosen randomly from each one of them.

Research Paper

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Null Hypothesis – 1

First degree students in arts and science colleges are not high in their English Language Proficiency (ELP) in toto and in respect of its dimensions.

Table 1

LEVEL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY IN FIRST DEGREE STUDENTS

English Language Proficiency	Low		Average		High	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Listening	55	22.92	111	46.25*	74	30.83
Speaking	58	24.17	116	48.33*	66	27.5
Reading	60	25	97	40.42*	83	34.58
Writing	56	23.33	84	35	100	41.67*
Total	39	16.25	141	58.75*	60	25

* indicates the level of English Language Proficiency.

Null Hypothesis – 2

The dimensions of English Language Proficiency are not significant predictors of English Language Proficiency of first degree students.

Predictive Nature of the Dimensions of English Language Proficiency

The computer predictive nature of the dimensions are furnished below in the form of a multiple regression equation

$$ELP = 0.000 + (1.000 * \text{Listening}) + (1.000 * \text{Speaking}) + (1.000 * \text{Reading}) + (1.000 * \text{Writing})$$

Inference: The regression produces a perfect fit.

Null Hypothesis – 3

There is no significant correlation between English Language Proficiency of first degree students and their language related activities.

Table 2
CORRELATION BETWEEN
ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY
AND LANGUAGE RELATED ACTIVITIES

Language Related Activities	N	English Language Proficiency									
		Listening		Speaking		Reading		Writing		Total	
		CV	Rem	CV	Rem	CV	Rem	CV	Rem	CV	Rem
HLE	240	0.58	S	0.44	S	0.268	S	0.36	S	0.264	S
EPE	240	0.43	S	0.34	S	0.152	S	0.36	S	0.278	S
OCE	240	0.64	S	0.38	S	0.131	S	0.36	S	0.42	S
HREB	240	0.6	S	0.42	S	0.257	S	0.38	S	0.328	S
CEW	240	0.78	S	0.54	S	0.281	S	0.5	S	0.446	S

(Table Value is 0.129 at 5% level of significance for 238 degrees of freedom)

S = Significant at 5% level : Null Hypothesis is rejected

NS = Not Significant at 5% level : Null Hypothesis is accepted

Null Hypothesis - 4

The identified language related activities are not significant predictors of the ELP of first degree students.

Table 3
PREDICTIVE NATURE OF
LANGUAGE RELATED ACTIVITIES

Equation	R ² Value	Variable	Coefficient	P Value
$ELP = 55.662 + (7.293 * HLE) + (2.885 * EPE) + (2.245 * OCE) + (1.508 * HREB) + (2.616 * CEW)$	0.7	HLE	7.293	<0.001
		EPE	2.885	<0.001
		OCE	2.245	<0.001
		HREB	1.508	0.043
		CEW	2.616	<0.001

Inference: Not all of the independent variables appear necessary. The following variables appear to account for the ability to predict ELP: HLE, EPE, OCE and CEW.

Null Hypothesis - 5

Male and female students are not high in their English Language Proficiency and its dimensions.

Table 4
LEVEL OF ENGLISH
LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY
OF FIRST DEGREE STUDENTS IN
TERMS OF GENDER

English Language Proficiency	Gender	Low		Average		High	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
		Listening	Male	14	11.67	61	50.83*
	Female	41	34.17	50	41.67*	29	24.17
Speaking	Male	23	19.17	50	41.67*	47	39.17
	Female	35	29.17	66	55.00*	19	15.83
Reading	Male	26	21.67	43	35.83	51	42.50*
	Female	34	28.33	54	45.00*	32	26.67
Writing	Male	23	19.17	32	26.67	65	54.17*
	Female	33	27.5	52	43.33*	35	29.17
Total	Male	13	10.83	58	48.33*	49	40.83
	Female	26	21.67	83	69.17*	11	9.17

* indicates the level of English Language Proficiency.

Null Hypothesis - 6

Male and female students do not differ significantly in their English Language Proficiency and its dimensions.

Table 5
DIFFERENCE IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
PROFICIENCY OF FIRST DEGREE
STUDENTS IN TERMS OF GENDER

English Language Proficiency	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Calculated 't' Value	Remark
Listening	Male	120	22.92	3.19	4.03	S
	Female	120	21.2	3.4		
Speaking	Male	120	22.91	3.56	5.13	S
	Female	120	20.82	2.7		
Reading	Male	120	23.03	3.58	3.44	S
	Female	120	21.48	3.41		
Writing	Male	120	23.39	3.81	3.99	S
	Female	120	21.38	4		
Total	Male	120	92.25	10.3	5.85	S
	Female	120	84.88	9.13		

(Table Value is 1.96 at 5% level of significance for 238 degrees of freedom)

S = Significant at 5% level : Null Hypothesis is rejected

NS = Not Significant at 5% level : Null Hypothesis is accepted

Null Hypothesis - 7

There is no significant correlation between English language proficiency of first degree students and their language related activities with regard to gender.

Table 6

CORRELATION BETWEEN ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AND LANGUAGE RELATED ACTIVITIES WITH REGARD TO GENDER

Language Related activities	N	English Language Proficiency									
		Listening		Speaking		Reading		Writing		Total	
		CV	Rem.	CV	Rem.	CV	Rem.	CV	Rem.	CV	Rem.
Male											
HLE	120	0.566	S	0.498	S	0.215	S	0.320	S	0.239	S
EPE	120	0.575	S	0.369	S	0.190	S	0.308	S	0.320	S
OCE	120	0.728	S	0.398	S	0.188	S	0.285	S	0.385	S
HREB	120	0.671	S	0.395	S	0.223	S	0.381	S	0.320	S
CEW	120	0.872	S	0.564	S	0.237	S	0.443	S	0.435	S
Female											
HLE	120	0.621	S	0.407	S	0.277	S	0.358	S	0.260	S
EPE	120	0.281	S	0.338	S	0.273	S	0.340	S	0.188	S
OCE	120	0.576	S	0.373	S	0.265	S	0.414	S	0.446	S
HREB	120	0.564	S	0.478	S	0.243	S	0.312	S	0.311	S
CEW	120	0.776	S	0.600	S	0.255	S	0.525	S	0.443	S

(Table Value is 0.180 at 5% level of significance for 118 degrees of freedom)

S = Significant at 5% level : Null Hypothesis is rejected

NS = Not Significant at 5% level : Null Hypothesis is accepted

Null Hypothesis - 8

The identified language related activities are not significant predictors of the ELP of first degree students with regard to gender.

Table 7

PREDICTIVE NATURE OF LANGUAGE RELATED ACTIVITIES WITH REGARD TO GENDER

Gender	Equation	R ² Value	Variable	Coefficient	P Value
Male	$ELP = 59.678 + (9.815 * HLE) + (3.097 * EPE) + (1.603 * OCE) - (0.815 * HREB) + (1.483 * CEW)$	0.820	HLE	9.815	<0.001
			EPE	3.097	<0.001
			OCE	1.603	0.014
			HREB	-0.815	0.267
			CEW	1.483	0.011
Female	$ELP = 53.885 + (5.504 * HLE) + (3.588 * EPE) + (0.854 * OCE) + (2.719 * HREB) + (3.166 * CEW)$	0.726	HLE	5.504	<0.001
			EPE	3.588	<0.001
			OCE	0.854	0.371
			HREB	2.719	0.017
			CEW	3.166	<0.001

Inference: Male Not all of the independent variables selected appear necessary. The following appear to account for the ability to predict Total ($P < 0.05$): HLE, EPE, OCE and CEW.

Female Not all of the independent variables selected appear necessary. The following appear to account for the ability to predict Total ($P < 0.05$): HLE, EPE, HREB and CEW.

FINDINGS

1. The level of the English Language Proficiency of first degree students studying in arts and science colleges in Tirunelveli district is found to be average in toto and also with regard to its dimensions – listening, speaking and reading. Only in the case of the dimension – Writing, a good percentage (41.67%) falls under the high category.
2. Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing are found to be significant predictors of the English Language Proficiency of first degree students.
3. All the five language related activities (Habit of Listening to English News – HLE; Exposure to Programmes in English – EPE; Oral Communication in English – OCE; Habit of Reading English Books – HREB; Communication in English through Writing – CEW) are significantly correlated with the English language proficiency of first degree students in toto and in terms of its dimensions.
4. The language related activities – HLE, EPE, OCE and CEW are significant predictors of the English language proficiency of first degree students.
5. Male students are found to be average in their English Language Proficiency and in its dimensions – listening and speaking. A good percentage of them are found to be high in their reading (42.50%) and writing (54.17%) skills. But, female students are found to be average in their English Language Proficiency and in its dimensions.
6. Male students are found to be better (Mean – 92.25) than their female counterparts (Mean – 84.88) in their English language proficiency in toto. They are found to differ in the dimensions – Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.
7. All the five language related activities are significantly correlated with the English language proficiency of first degree students in toto and all its dimensions for both male and female students.
8. The language related activities – HLE, EPE, OCE and CEW are significant predictors of the English language proficiency of male first degree students. Similarly, the language related activities – HLE, EPE, HREB and CEW are significant predictors of the English language proficiency of female first degree students.

Research
Paper

IMPLICATIONS

The study reveals that the students studying in arts and science colleges in Tirunelveli district are just average in their English Language Proficiency. Similarly, they are average in the dimensions Listening, Speaking and Reading. They are reported to be somewhat high in the dimension - Writing. It is almost similar to what the people in the field of education believe in. It is explicit, as the finding shows, that the students of degree classes are poor in their oral communication in English and avoid all situations that demand one's communication in English. Further, as the study reveals, it is widely believed that the habit of reading is declining among the graduate students. Another noteworthy feature understood from the study is that the students' compulsion on the faculty members to give lectures in the mother tongue gets reflected in the identified low level of listening prevalent among them.

The investigation on language related activities has also given valid information for the cause of poor language proficiency among first degree students irrespective of gender and birth order. The first degree students seem to seriously lack in all the language related activities, though they are found to be significant predictors of language proficiency. Hence, the investigator recommends that the arts and science colleges should take necessary steps to introduce and promote the identified language related activities among the first degree students.

Continued on page 20