



Perceptions of Students in Learning English

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Abstract

This research was conducted to study the average perception of the students regarding students' English language proficiency at the degree level in Gadag, Karnataka State, India. The participants were 195 students belonging to UG Level. Data was collected through questionnaire. To analyze the significance perceptions of students about English language proficiency, the data is collected and analysed in the form of the tables and graphs. The findings of the study revealed significant perceptions regarding partial command over English language; use of English in and beyond classroom; expressing views fluently in English; students' listening, speaking and reading skills.

Keywords: English language, proficiency in English, students perceptions.

Introduction:

Today's world considers English as a global language because there has never been a language so widely spread or spoken by so many people as English. It makes news daily in many countries and is adopted by many countries. It has a special role to play in the countries where it has been accepted as the official language and is being used as a medium of communication.

Statistics collected by **David Crystal** (1997: 61) shows that nearly 670 million people use English with fluency and competency. This figure is steadily growing ever since 1990. English now holds a dominant position in every sphere of human activity. It is a very significant input in all the developments in the world. It has reached the present day status primarily because of two main factors the expansion of British Empire in the 19th century and the emergence of the United States as the leading economic power of the 20th century.

The demand for English has been sweeping almost all the fields of national life like politics, international relations and media, communication, travel and education. Most of the earlier scientific innovations were made in Britain and are now continued in America.

The advancements in Science and Technology and their use of new terminology have been showing an immediate impact on the language, adding thousands of words to the English lexicon. As these innovations come down from the English-speaking countries, those who wish to update their knowledge and learn about new inventions need to learn English well. This need has resulted in a dramatic increase of the expository material in the English language. Besides all the dictionaries, encyclopedias and books of knowledge are written and printed in English. Hence, the access to new knowledge is only through the English language.

Another widely quoted statistics is: about 80 percent of the world's electronically stored information is currently in English. This includes two kinds of data: information stored by the individual firms, organizations and libraries etc., and the information made available through the internet. This is so because the first protocols devised to carry data on the Net were developed from the English alphabet. It is an accepted truth that if one wants to take a full advantage of the internet and World Wide Web, it is possible only by learning English; because most of the browsers are still unable to handle multilingual data presentation. Thus, the English language provides the chief means of access to high-tech communication and information. This makes us to conclude that English will retain its role as the dominant language in the modern world. Further, it continues to remain as the world's language for international communication as the whole world is heading towards the formation of a global village.

Proficiency in English language refers to the ability of a student to have command over the spoken and written skills to carry out successful communication while “completing their under graduation”. According to Blagojevich, Ruiz and Dunn (2004) English language proficiency refers to the learner's ability to use the English language accurately and fluently to enable him/her to communicate views, ideas and information without any difficulty in all the academic fields i.e., social studies, language and art. Wilson and Komba (2012, p. 2) state, “Language proficiency is the overall ability of an individual in language and a test of proficiency is organized basically into listening, reading, writing and speaking skills. Students' command over English language not only enhances their chances of academic achievements, but also guarantees their better jobs in the market because employers always prefer those graduates who are fluent in English. Thus, students wishing to achieve high academic results and enter the domains of power are required to make extra efforts to obtain proficiency in English language.

Learning English language has always been a challenge for a majority of L2learners. The research shows that students' lack of motivation, inferiority complexion, stress and fear of committing errors are the major reasons for their learning and acquiring the language skills. Majority of the classrooms are teacher-centered and students hardly find any chance to practice English in the classroom.

The current study is an attempt to fill the gap in the research carried out in the area of English language teaching and learning in karnataka. The main focus of this study was to assess UG students' perceptions about students' English language proficiency and their awareness about English language teaching and learning situations. The study further attempts to investigate the factors affecting it.

Hence, this study will try to accomplish the following objectives:

- 1) To explore UG students' proficiency in English and the factors affecting it.

Review of Literature

E L T being a widespread field and a 'globally-controlled-discursive practice' a lot of research has been done relating to the perception of teaching and learning English. It is not possible to provide a complete review bringing in all those studies or researches that have been carried on so far. However, an attempt has been made to review some important studies undertaken in India and abroad, so as to gain necessary information and acumens to form the theoretical background, research design etc. for the present study. Thus the subsequent studies have been reviewed for the purpose of the study.

1.7.1 Jayashree, S. 1989

Identification of the difficulties in Teaching and Learning English as a Second language among the High School Students. M. Phil, dissertation, Edu. Alagappa University.1

This study tries to find the difficulties in the teaching and learning of English as a second language among the high school students, with the following as the major objectives –

To find out

1. The difficulties in teaching English as a second language to high school students.
2. Whether the male and the female teachers experience the same degree of difficulty.
3. The relationship between teaching experience and teaching difficulties.
4. To identify the impact of socio-economic status in learning English.
5. Whether the place of study (rural schools / urban schools) influences the learning.
6. Whether sex of the learners influences the learning of English.
7. Whether students experience more difficulty in learning English prose or English grammar.

Using seminar and questionnaire as tools for collection of data in its methodology and involving more than eighty English teachers, the study arrives at a number of major findings which include the learners' improper listening skill and inattentiveness in the class, their weak cognitive skill, lack of interest, poor vocabulary strength, weak motivation etc. out of which the difficulties arise in the teaching and learning of English.

1.7.2 Misra, J. N. 1968.

A Study of Problems and Difficulties of Language Teaching at Secondary Level.Ph. D. Thesis Edu. Sagar University.2

The objectives of this study were -

1. To understand the importance of English in the all-round development of children.
2. To diagnose the causes of deterioration in the standard of language of students of Higher Secondary school classes.

3. To understand and identify the practical difficulties of teachers in teaching languages.
4. To suggest means of improvement of the standard of language of students.

Tools used in the study for collection of data were questionnaire, interview, observation and study of records. The study was conducted in Madhya Pradesh. Questionnaires were sent to 1000 teachers of the state while interview was held with 500 of them and 150 classrooms were observed.

Findings of the study include the following -

1. About 66 % teachers found difficulties in teaching prose - the main problems related to explanation, paraphrasing and meaning of words.
2. More than 50% teachers preferred to use Translation Method.
3. 25% teachers believed in the Direct Method and made use of it.
4. Only 32% teachers encouraged students to develop reading ability.
5. 60% teachers felt that the facilities for general reading were inadequate.
6. In teaching poetry more than 60% teachers experience difficulty in developing appreciation.
7. 10% teachers find difficulty in paraphrasing of poems and the meaning of words.
8. There are problems of pronunciation.
9. Short and weak memory of students causes weakness in speaking.
10. Home background of students influence learning and teaching.
11. Shortage of time and lengthy syllabus stands in the way of effective teaching of English.
12. Lack of practice of teaching composition hampers the development of the writing skill of good English.
13. More than 60% teachers did not use drilling.
14. The present examination system tests only knowledge and memory of students.

1.7.3 Dasgupta, N. 1975

A critical study of the vocabulary in English of the students of class VI (usually 12+) reading in the non-English medium schools of Meghalaya and the influence of socio-economic background on the actual vocabulary. Ph.D. thesis, education, G.U.3

This study examines the impact of the socio-economic background of students on learning vocabulary in English in a non-English medium situation in Meghalaya and advocates the needs for preparation of vocabulary lists aimed at fulfilling the learning needs of students of varied socio-economic backgrounds so as to reduce the gap between the expected vocabulary and the actual vocabulary that is acquired. The study established that the socio-economic background had a strong bearing on the achievement level of students in learning vocabulary.

The findings revealed that upper socio-economic group students had richer vocabulary than those of the lower socio-economic group i.e. there was correlation between higher socio-economic status of students and richer vocabulary acquirement. The major educational implication of this study is that vocabulary lists prepared carefully and with a consideration of learner needs in view of varied socio-economic backgrounds are sure to prove instrumental in improving educational and communicational practices in schools.

1.7.4 Bhattacharyya, R. 1976.

A critical study of the Present Teaching of English in the Secondary Schools of Greater Shillong. Ph.D. Thesis.4

The work undertakes to study the educational qualifications and professional equipment of the English teachers of the Secondary Schools of Greater Shillong, their work load, financial status, views and opinions on various aspects of teaching of English and evaluate their performance in actual classroom situation. The ultimate purpose of the piece of work, as the investigator asserts, was to ensure better teaching of English by way of suggesting some practical measures for improvement of the situation.

The major findings of the study are as follows:

On Teachers' Professional Qualification

Majority of the teachers were graduate with a very small percentage of them being post-graduates and undergraduates. Only 30.36% of them were trained, number of trained teachers being higher in urban areas than in rural areas. Again, of the trained teachers, only 56.47% had English as method subject in B.Ed. or B.T. 5% of the teachers possessed other professional degrees/diplomas like diploma in English teaching and diploma in Montessori Method etc.

On work load

Majority of the teachers taught other subjects besides English. The teachers were used to doing correction work, conducting of class test, utilization of the Tiffin time and off periods in correction work, spending time on lesson planning, doing other extra academic work and making themselves accessible to students beyond class hours. The investigator discovers similarity of the workload of the English teachers of Meghalaya with those of the Madras State.

Teachers' views and opinions

As the findings of the study reveal teachers are divided on their views as regards the objectives of teaching English. Whereas 69.64% view development of the practical command of English as the chief objective of teaching English 6.07% regard appreciation of English literature as the main objective. Besides, urban teachers are more in favour of the former aim unlike their rural counterparts who advocate the latter.

On Methods of Teaching

62.5% of the teachers favoured Direct Method with occasional use of mother tongue, 12.14% without mother tongue and 25.36% favoured the Translation Method where the rural-urban variation is negligible. Only 15.71% used teaching aids, majority ensured pupils' comprehension before going for the next lesson, majority are happy with the syllabus, performance of all teachers is satisfactory, female teachers perform better and trained teachers perform better than the untrained teachers.

Methodology of the Study

The present study has adopted the objective and descriptive method for describing the problems of learning and prescriptive method for prescribing measures. The Questionnaire is one of the key sources for data elicitation.

Data Analysis

The student's perceptions have been classified and Statistical analysis is done. The statistical analysis is depicted in the form of percentage analysis in tables.

Students Perception in Learning English Language

Attribute	%
Students have full command over English language	32
Students have partial command over English language	36
Students have to speak English in English class only	42
Students face problems while expressing views in English fluently	67
Students use English when find an opportunity to do so.	23
Communication in English has always been a problem for students	83
Students cannot improve English despite best efforts.	35
Students easily understand in English	44
Students easily comprehend whatever they read in English.	22
Students can write correct English.	30

The above Table shows that 32% of the students have command over English Language and 36% of them opined that they have partial command over language, whereas, 67% of the students have problems in expressing their views in English and majority of the students i.e.83% of them have difficulty in communicating.

Factors affecting students proficiency in learning English

Attributes	%
Students always use mother tongue other than English in discussion and asking questions.	36
Students feel shy and lack confidence while speaking English.	48
Activity based teaching arouses students' interest in learning English	69
Teachers encourage students to learn new English vocabulary	41
Teacher uses different methods to improve students' English language skills	34
English teacher usually uses language other than English while teaching	72
School and classroom environment is conducive for learning English	40
There are more than 40 students in the class	79
Students belong to educated families	21

The above Table depicts that 36% of the students use Mother Tongue i.e.L1 in asking and discussing. 9% of the students have expressed that students centric teaching and learning creates interest in learning the language. It is also found that majority of the English Teachers use other language in teaching English.

The findings of the study highlights the fact that majority of the students lack proficiency in English language and have partial command over it. The main reason behind this deficiency is the lack of practice because the results show that students practice English neither inside nor outside the school nor with teachers.

Recommendations :

In the light of the conclusions drawn out of the findings of the study, the following suggestions are given to promote and facilitate students' English language proficiency:

- Keeping the students' low proficiency in English at the higher secondary level in view, it is imperative that they need to be exposed to all the four language skills and raise their awareness by highlighting the international status of English language.
- Teachers should encourage students to communicate in English not only inside and outside the classroom
- Teachers should create such an environment inside and outside the classroom where students feel no hesitation to communicate in English language.
- Students should be encouraged to listen to BBC English, CNN, English documentary and other TV programmes. They may discuss with friends and class fellows what they listen to.
- Teachers should encourage students to develop extensive reading and writing habits for improving their reading and writing skills because good reading habits can enhance effective learning of English.
- Teachers should encourage students to use only English language in the classroom while discussing any topic with their class fellows and other friends to improve their speaking skill.

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