

English Language Proficiency Skills of Students: A Case Study of Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

English language is still considered as a second language with context to India. Students in India are usually introduced to English language in their primary school years depending on their area of residence. The English Language Proficiency Skill (ELPS) is the most sought out skill required by the graduates to succeed in their professional fields, because of its highly valued commodity in the international job market. To be at par with the competitive market scenario it is highly important to gauge the ELPS of the students enrolled in the technical universities to provide them with required assistance to enhance their skills for future requirements. This study provides insights about the necessary factors that influence the ELPS (writing, listening and speaking skills) of individual students, which will be beneficial for the teachers to identify the students who have greater need of attention, consequently respective guidance can be provided to them.

Keywords: English language skill, technical students, gender, second language

Introduction

Communication skill is the deliverance of information or message from an individual (sender) to another (receiver) and it is only successful when the receiver understands the message and sends feedback to the sender. Communication has played a vital role in the lives of human, since the beginning of human evolution and it is the verbal communication that differentiates us from the animals. Communication has also evolved with time and different types of communication are used depending on the context and nature of requirement. In this study importance of Technical Communication Skills, a form of formal communication, have been emphasized and factors which affect.

In our scope of study, we have evaluated the English Language proficiency skills (ELPS) of the first semester undergraduate students of an Indian university and have also analyzed the various factors which influence their proficiency skills. Having a sound English Language proficiency skill has become the important part, not only to excel in the academics but also to be an achiever in the job or global environment. English is the medium of communication in all work spheres and in the Undergraduate curriculum, students are ought to complete the basic course of Professional Communication Skills in their first year, which hones their speaking, reading, listening and writing skills. Since the medium of communication followed in

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the institution is in English, it becomes a necessary step to ensure that the students are able to understand everything and are also subsequently prepared for the future. Therefore, this study was conducted to find the factors involved which affects the English Language Proficiency Skills.

Literature Review

Socio-economic status

Parent's income, profession, place of residence along with many other factors comprises of the socio-economic status. Socio-economic status (SES) plays a role in determining the early education provided to the children and in what environment and social surrounding they had been raised and what values they acquired. Jayashree et al (2017) found that academic achievement is influenced by economic status and wards of high SES group performed better than the low SES group. They also found that the students of Urban Secondary Schools have significant higher academic achievement as compared to the students of Rural Secondary School. Abdul-Hamid (2020) found in his study that the SES does not influence the reading skills of the students, whereas, gender is the strong predictor for willingness to read in English. Farooq (2011) emphasized that the social class of parent is the dominant factor in the academic performance. In accordance to Farooq (2011), Rothstein (2004) agrees that the social class of parents are fundamental to the individual's educational and vocational decisions. Halsey, Heath and Ridge (1980) also found that the occupation of parents has a vital role to play in the lives of students in Technical Colleges. Whereas, Hill et al (2004) states SES of parents does not

affect student's academic performance but makes possible for both children from rich and poor families to compete with each other.

While it has been found that the general opinion has shown direct relationship between the high SES and high academic achievement but the contradictory opinion by Hill (2004) states that SES only acts as a facilitator in getting the education and is not the deciding factor for acquiring high language proficiency skills.

Age and Multilingualism

There is moderate to strong positive associations between proficiency in the language of education and early literacy, reading, spelling, mathematics, and general academic attainment among bilingual children (Prevoo, Malda, Emmen, Mesman, Yeniad, 2015). This finding can be applied to students having multi-lingual vocabulary which enhances their learning and cognition capabilities. Early introduction to education widens the scope of acquiring and absorbing new information and helps with faster learning.

Gender and Second Language Acquisition

It has always been a highly debated issue that male and female brain performs differently with regards to language acquisition. Though much of research has been done in this field with respect to the difference in learning, attention span and creativity still there exists multiple views in this regard. Studies have found that female brains can process language related tasks faster than males. Gurian & Stevens (2004) conclude that due to these difference girls outperform boys in reading and writing. Although several scholars (e.g., Wallentin, 2009) contradict the existence of differences in language proficiency among the males and females.

Whereas there have been relatedly very few studies done on the relationship between the computer proficiency possessed by the student and the language proficiency.

Method

We investigated the various factors that influence the ELPS of undergraduate students of technical university. The factors considered in this study that influence English language proficiency skill (ELPS) were Social Economic Status (parent's profession, education, income), gender, age at which introduced to language, board of education, computer proficiency and multilingualism. Fig .1 depicts the general model for ELPS (English Language Proficiency Skills), which comprised of Writing, Speaking and Listening Skills.

The research questions formulated to comprehensively study the skills are mentioned below:

- RQ.1. What is the impact of social economic status on the English Language proficiency skill (ELPS) of the students?
RQ.2. What is the impact of initial introduction to language at early age on the ELPS of the students?
RQ.3. What is the impact of board of education of student on the ELPS of students?

RQ.4. What is the impact of computer competency on the ELPS of students?

RQ.5. What is the impact of gender on the ELPS of the students?

RQ.6. What is the impact of multilingualism on the ELPS of the students?

Based on the research questions, following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: There is no significant difference between ELPS and student's Board of Education

H2: There is no significant difference between student's ELPS and his/her gender

H3: There is no significant difference between student's ELPS and Family Income.

H4: There is no significance difference between student's ELPS and Parent's Education.

H5: There is no significance difference between student's ELPS and Parent's Profession.

H6: There is no significant difference between ELPS and computer competency

H7: There is no significant difference between ELPS and age at which child is introduced to English language

H8: There is no significant difference between ELPS and student's multilingualism

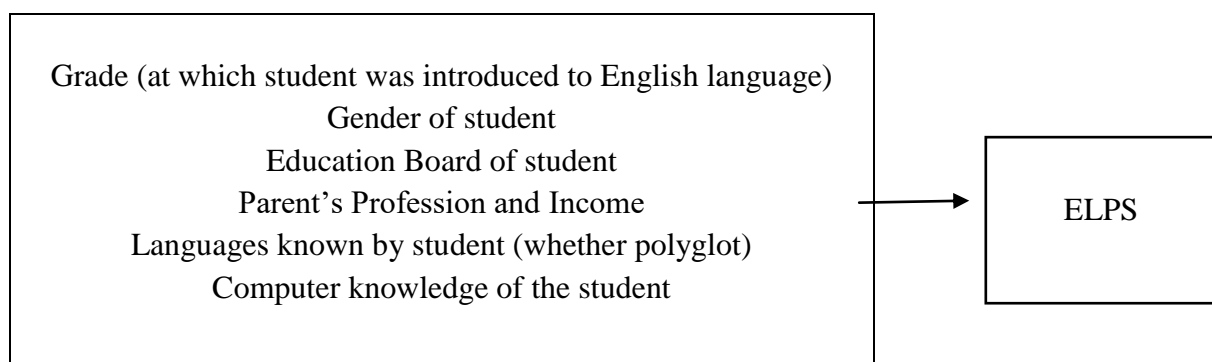


Fig. 1: General framework model for ELPS

Sample

A sample of students from first year English Language Laboratory course of the technical university was taken which comprised of 72 male students and 18 female students with mean age of 18.3 years ($SD=0.756$). The students were of different branches of engineering background and they were randomly selected.

Experimental Design

The flow for one shot case design (Fig. 2) starts with the experimental group and then treatment is applied on that group. After the treatment post-test is done on the same experimental group and based on that, inferences are drawn.



Fig. 2: One shot experimental design

In this research design the treatment is administered on the experimental group and after that, observations are made based on the post-test.

Tools

Data Collection

The demographic details of students were collected using the questionnaire along with the test sets provided to them. The online and offline test sets were administered to the students to evaluate the English language proficiency level of the students based on the standardized tests provided to them.

Offline test – It consisted of written examination to test their writing skills, which comprised of 7 questions and the time duration provided to complete was 90 minutes. The questions tested their grammar and sentence formations along with their understanding of given text and

their interpretations. For the evaluation of the oral skills, each student was given an extempore topic and was allotted 1 minute to contemplate about the topic and 1 minute to speak on that topic. The evaluation for the oral skills considered the fluency, knowledge, language and grammar and voice modulation.

Online test – Online test comprised of 31 questions and the time limit of 45 minutes was provided to each student. This test focused on evaluating their English language skill along with computer proficiency which was taken via an online test taking platform.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed by the help of IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) v/s 25 and descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data.

Result

Table 1. Results for online test with respect to the various dimensions of ELPS

Variable	Categories	Mean	SD	SE	t-value	F-value	P-value	Signi.
Education Board	CBSE	22.14	3.65	0.46		3.60	.017 <0.05	S
	ICSE	23.88	3.22	1.14				
	State Board	19.12	5.44	1.32				
	Foreign Board	25.00						
Gender	Male	21.46	4.35		-1.35		0.057 >0.05	NS
	Female	22.94	3.32					
Family Income	Below 4lk	19.97	4.13	0.66		5.07	0.003 <0.05	S
	Below 12lk	22.96	3.89	0.58				
	Below 20lk	23.33	2.52	1.45				
	Above 20lk	25.33	0.58	0.33				
Father's Education	Below matriculate	17.00	2.83	2.00		4.60	0.002 <0.05	S
	Matriculate	19.53	4.21	1.09				
	Highschool	19.33	5.05	1.68				
	Graduate	22.17	3.53	0.55				
	Post Graduate	23.82	3.84	0.80				
Father's Profession	Farmer	18.83	4.37	1.03		8.27	0.001 <0.05	S
	Business	20.94	3.59	0.84				
	Service	23.00	3.81	0.52				
Mother's Education	Below matriculate	18.6	2.19	0.98		3.53	0.010 <0.05	S
	Matriculate	19.89	3.72	0.85				
	Highschool	20.89	4.81	1.13				
	Graduate	23.22	3.15	0.61				
	Post Graduate	23.04	4.56	0.99				
Computer (Introduced in school)	Yes	15.66	1.96	0.22	4.23		0.45 >0.05	NS
	No	12.21	3.16	1.19				
Grade (Language introduced)	Nursery	22.54	3.99	0.50		4.69	0.012 <0.05	S
	Primary	20.25	4.22	0.86				
	Secondary	17.33	2.08	1.20				
Polyglot	2 Language	21.97	4.10	0.50		0.65	0.586 >0.05	NS
	3 Language	20.71	4.86	1.18				
	4 Language	21.00	3.60	2.08				
	5 Language	23.67	2.31	1.33				

* S = Significant, NS = Non-Significant

Table 2. Results for offline test with respect to the various dimensions of ELPS

Variable	Categories	Mean	SD	SE	t-value	F-value	P-value	Signi.
Education Board	CBSE	15.84	1.83	0.23		6.70	0.000 <0.05	S
	ICSE	15.81	2.19	0.77				
	State Board	13.38	2.75	0.67				
	Foreign Board	17.00	-	-				
Gender	Male	15.08	2.27		-2.72		0.079 >0.05	NS
	Female	16.64	1.75					
Family Income	Below 4lk	14.18	2.65	0.43		8.26	0.000 <0.05	S
	Below 12lk	16.28	1.36	0.20				
	Below 20lk	16.50	0.87	0.50				
	Above 20lk	16.67	0.58	0.33				
Father's Education	Below matriculate	12.00	1.41	1.0		4.48	0.002 <0.05	S
	Matriculate	14.03	3.08	0.80				
	Highschool	14.61	2.51	0.84				
	Graduate	15.72	1.66	0.26				
	Post Graduate	16.28	1.88	0.31				
Father's Profession	Farmer	13.50	2.99	0.71		11.53	0.000 <0.05	S
	Business	15.08	2.34	0.55				
	Service	16.12	1.45	0.19				
Mother's Education	Below matriculate	12.30	1.30	0.58		6.29	0.000 <0.05	S
	Matriculate	14.16	2.45	0.56				
	Highschool	15.64	1.84	0.44				
	Graduate	16.24	1.48	0.29				
	Post Graduate	15.93	2.44	0.53				
Computer (introduced in school)	Yes	22.24	3.82	0.42	4.11		0.82 >0.05	NS
	No	16.00	4.24	1.60				
Grade (Language introduced)	Nursery	15.71	1.99	0.25		4.45	0.015 <0.05	S
	Primary	14.96	2.52	0.51				
	Secondary	12.17	2.93	1.69				
Polyglot	2 Language	15.63	2.13	0.26		1.12	0.346 >0.05	NS
	3 Language	14.74	2.38	0.58				
	4 Language	14.00	3.00	1.73				
	5 Language	15.17	3.68	2.13				

* S = Significant, NS = Non-Significant

Table 3. Results for verbal test with respect to the various dimensions of ELPS

Variable	Categories	Mean	SD	SE	t-value	F-value	P-value	Signi.
Education Board	CBSE	16.62	3.34	0.42		11.54	0.000 <0.05	S
	ICSE	18.62	2.12	0.75				
	State Board	11.19	5.56	1.35				
	Foreign Board	21.00	-	-				
Gender	Male	15.33	4.49		-2.17		0.205 >0.05	NS
	Female	17.80	3.47					
Family Income	Below 4lk	13.66	4.53	0.72		7.08	0.000 <0.05	S
	Below 12lk	17.23	3.58	0.53				
	Below 20lk	19.39	3.08	1.78				
	Above 20lk	19.11	3.41	1.97				
Father's Education	Below matriculate	10.67	4.95	3.5		4.01	0.005 <0.05	S
	Matriculate	12.99	4.40	1.14				
	Highschool	14.76	5.07	1.69				
	Graduate	16.28	3.64	0.57				
	Post Graduate	17.70	4.37	0.91				
Father's Profession	Farmer	12.20	4.03	0.95		9.72	0.000 <0.05	S
	Business	15.82	4.58	1.08				
	Service	17.03	3.83	0.52				
Mother's Education	Below matriculate	9.90	3.34	1.50		6.66	0.000 <0.05	S
	Matriculate	13.16	4.10	0.94				
	Highschool	17.05	3.36	0.79				
	Graduate	16.72	4.24	0.82				
	Post Graduate	17.43	3.92	0.85				
Computer (Introduced in school)	Yes	16.26	4.05	0.44	3.41		0.17 >0.05	NS
	No	10.67	5.49	2.07				
Grade (Language introduced)	Nursery	16.53	4.15	0.52		4.12	0.015 <0.05	S
	Primary	14.65	4.50	0.92				
	Secondary	10.22	4.06	2.34				
Polyglot	2 Language	15.87	4.28	0.52		0.14	0.938 >0.05	NS
	3 Language	15.45	4.29	1.04				
	4 Language	15.56	7.50	4.33				
	5 Language	17.17	7.12	4.11				

* S = Significant, NS = Non-Significant

The results of the Table 1, Table 2, Table 3 clearly show that:

- There is a significant difference with respect to the board of education till class

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12th ($p < 0.05$) at 5% level of significance. Students from ICSE board outperformed students from CBSE and State Boards. Hence, the null hypothesis (H1) is rejected and alternative hypothesis accepted.

- There is no significant difference with respect to gender of the student ($p > 0.05$) at 5% level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis (H2) is accepted.
- There is a significant difference with respect to family income, father's profession, father's education and mother's education ($p < 0.05$) at 5% level of significance. The more the income and education level of the parents, students would have higher ELPS. Hence, the null hypotheses (H3, H4, H5) are rejected and alternative hypotheses are accepted.
- There is no significant difference with respect to computer proficiency ($p > 0.05$) at 5% level of significance. The computer knowledge does not aid with the ELPS. Hence, the null hypothesis (H6) is accepted.
- There is a significant difference with respect to the grade at which student is introduced to English Language at school ($p < 0.05$) at 5% level of significance. The earlier the student is introduced to the language in school, more proficient the student would be in that language. Hence, the null hypothesis (H7) is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted.
- There is no significant difference with respect to the multilingualism ($p > 0.05$) at 5% level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis (H8) is accepted.

Discussion and Conclusion

The social-economic status of student defines his English language proficiency and it is in alignment with the works done by Badiger et al (2017), Farooq (2011).

The better facilities on education front can be availed by those students who are entitled to basic amenities. And the students also imbibe from their surrounding and the people they interact and stay with. Educated parents provide better education opportunities to their wards. Whereas mother's profession is not related to the English language proficiency of the student, as in Indian context even if the mother is educated, she might or might not be involved in any job and she takes the responsibility of looking after her children and help them with their initial studies. The earlier the child is introduced to any language defines his level of responsiveness and assimilation of knowledge, as also stated by Preevo (2015). By the government initiation of spreading education to the rural parts of India it has become feasible for the children to obtain education at the early age and in our study also we found that the English language proficiency is not affected by the place of residence of the student. Whereas the board of education does have an impact on the performance of the student. The students who had completed their initial education from Foreign board excelled and ICSE and CBSE board students performed averagely and the students from State boards fared badly in the test.

The English language proficiency skill is not affected by the multilingualism, computer competency and the gender of the student. These factors do not influence the learnability and excellence in the English language proficiency skills.

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