

Language Proficiency of Students in English at the Secondary Stage

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Abstract

English language has gained much importance in the present era of educational and professional advancement. The study of English as a language and gaining proficiency in communicating through it has become inevitable especially for students. At every stage of academic activity a child has to acquire certain linguistic skills in English, even though it is being taught as a second language in schools. Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing skills in English language together comprise of the communication skills in English language. Hence language proficiency can be acquired by learning, knowing, using and practicing these skills in English.

KEYWORDS : Language proficiency, students in English, Odisha, India

INTRODUCTION

Broadly speaking language is a means of expression. We express our feelings and thoughts through it. According to Gray language may be regarded as, “any means of expression emotional and mental concepts by any living being or beings whatsoever and communicating them to or receiving them from other living beings.” Since is a means or medium of expression, it has a character of universality. In short we can say that language is a form of communication, which involves two elements- the ideas or experiences which we want to communicate and the words that we use to convey these ideas or experiences.

All in all, the education in universities should be done with English for three reasons. First, students who know English are able to find their favorite job related with their field. Second, they can communicate with others internationally. Third, as a major language English makes accessing information easy for students. In my opinion, internationally, people need one common language. For many years, English has been the common world-wide language, and it will be in the future. For this reason, if your want to follow trends, new gadgets and technology, modernization of the developing world, you have to know English whatever age you are in.

REVIEW OF RELATED LETERATURE

A review of related literature is an essential aspect of investigation. The term “review” means revision or “glance over” or “refer back on”. It implies locating, studying and evaluating the reports of relevant researches, study of published articles, research abstracts as well as reports of casual observation and opinion that are related to the individuals’ planned research project (Agarwal, 1998). According to Mouly, “the review of related literature promotes a greater understanding of the problem and it is crucial aspects and ensures the avoidance of unnecessary duplication.” As John W. Best (1986) pointed out, “review of related literature is a valuable guide in defining the problem, recognizing its significance, suggesting data gathering devices, appropriate study design and sources of data”. The survey of related studies serves multiple purposes. It helps the investigator to acquaint with correct knowledge in the area of research. It furnishes the

tried methods, techniques, priorities and importance about the similar related past studies and to help in the formation of hypotheses for the new study. By studying the works of other investigators, one can avoid futile and irrelevant topics, vain efforts and ineffective approaches already discarded by his/her predecessor. So the investigator has attempted to collect relevant information related to the work from literature available in the field.

Investigator : Harish Shukla. (2004)

Title : Communication in English : Problems faced by Hindi Medium Students in Technical Institution.

The objective of the study was i) To identify the problems of communication abilities of the students studying in different technical institutions, particularly engineering colleges. The methodology used was the interview method, 30 students (sample) of the technical institutions of Indore city were contacted to collect data. The findings were 1) Lack of proper guidance, lack of exposure to formal environments, family background of the students, lack of educational facilities, economic and social status, lack of confidence are some of the causes for English communication problem.

Investigator : Farooque, Umer, S.L.P (2005)

Title : English Language Competence of Teachers' and Students' achievement in English medium Primary Schools of Kannur District, University of Mysore, Mysore.

The objective of the study were (1) To measure the English language competence of teachers in different school subjects (2) To measure the achievement levels of students of standard-IV in English, Mathematics and E.V.S. (3) To find out the relationship exists between English competence of teachers and achievement of students. (4) To find the difference based on the following background variables in terms of the English language competence of teachers' (a) sex, (b) Type of school (Govt. and C.B.S.E affiliated Schools), (c) Experience, (d) medium of study. (5) To find the difference in achievement levels of students on subjects with respect to the variables, (a) sex, (b) mother's occupation, (c) father's occupation. (6) To identify the difficulties of teachers while transacting different subjects, through English as the medium of instruction. (7) To find the relationship between transaction difficulties and language competence of teachers. The method used was as follows:

The samples 833 students from 13 schools in Kannur District of Kerela and 108 teachers from the same schools were drawn using suitable sampling technique, Interview Schedule developed by the investigator for identifying Transactional difficulties of the Teachers were well employed. Hence the findings were : Every English medium school in Kannur District was found to function with a good number of teachers who were not found to have adequate proficiency in English language. The existing qualifications of the teachers were found to help the teachers in acquiring good English language proficiency. There was felt a need of in-service programmes to overcome the transactional deficiencies. There was found a significant positive correlation between teacher's English language proficiency and learners' achievement.

Investigator : Joseph, P.P. (5005)

Title : A Comparative Study of difficulties in English learning faced by different categories of school students in Bhopal, Barkatullah University, Bhopal.

The objectives of the study were (1) To ascertain the difficulties in English language learning being experienced by students of Class-V and VI studying in English and Hindi medium schools in Bhopal. (2) To identify the levels of difficulties between

difference groups of students studying in English and Hindi medium schools and to assess variation of difficulty level among the groups. (3) To analyse interpret and diagnose the factors influencing the level of difficulty between school students. (4) To make an evaluation of the findings and to draw conclusions about the difficulties in English learning as perceived by students themselves Teachers, Parents and School administration. (5) To suggest viable measures for improvement of English learning among the students of the target groups.

The samples of 800 students, 80 Teachers, 20 administrators and 400 Parents have been drawn from 20 randomly selected schools from the Bhopal city using suitable sampling techniques. Scholastic Achievement Tests and Questionnaire for students, teachers, administrators and parents have been used. His findings were as follows:

The induced method of teaching in English designed, developed and implemented by the investigator has been found effective in bringing desired changes among the students as evident through the 't' value. Perceptions of students, teachers, administrators and parents on difficulties. English language learning and remedial measures have been studied analytically and systematically.

Investigator : Meenakshi, H.Verma (5005)

Title : Learner's Attitude and its Impact on Language Learning.

The objective of the study was to find out learners' motivational level, anxiety level, their involvement in a language learning class, their confidence level, their perception about the language classroom and language teacher and their perception about the curriculum. A questionnaire was administered to collect data from 350 students pursuing different professional courses in different English medium universities in Uttar Pradesh, India. 150 from B.Tech, 100 from BBA, 100 from BCA were randomly selected for the survey. The findings were : (1) In B.Tech, 78% of students gave preference, but they don't want to write an exam. 30% of students wanted English should continue to be taught in all four years of engineering. 100% of students needed good English to appear and qualify in an interview. All of them want an informal class with formal real life activities such as mock interviews and seminars. (2) In B.BA, 94% of students put communication skills on priority and they prefer to study communication strategies in business. 72% of students give priority to spoken English as they need to carry out their business assignment with different people. 92% of students prefer communication skills. (3) In BCA, 98% of students prefer technical knowledge over English language or communication skills. 2% were not able to give their specific opinion.

Investigator : Chelvi, S. (5007)

Title : A study on English language proficiency in Students of Engineering Colleges in Kanchipuram District, Tamil Nadu.

The objectives of the study were (1) To find the level of English Language Proficiency (ELP) in total and in respect of its dimensions Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing (LSRW) of the students of Engineering Colleges in Kanchipuram District. (2) To find the significance of relation between the identified language related activities (Habit of Listening to English News – HLEN; Habit of Exposure to Programmes in English EPE; Habit of Reading English Books – HREB; Communication in English through Writing – CEW), of Engineering College Students and their ELP in total and its dimensions. (3) To find the significance of difference in ELP in total and its dimension of

the students of engineering colleges in terms of gender, birth order, year of study, branch and medium studied. The method used for the study was in the following manner.

The investigator having chosen the target population as the second and the fourth year engineering students has worked out the strategy to include the students of EEE, ECE, IT/CSE and mechanical branches. The investigator took 426 B.E. students studying in EEE, ECE, IT/CSE and Mechanical branches of engineering college in Kachipuram district, using stratified random sampling technique. The tools used for the study were “Language Related Activities” and “English Language Proficiency Test” developed by the investigator and the supervisor. The investigator has used the statistical techniques such as percentage analysis, ‘t’-test, ANOVA, correlation and regression analysis.

The findings were : 1) The level of ELP of engineering college students in Kanchipuram district is found to be average in total and also with regard to its dimensions – LSRW. 2) Among the five languages related activities the Oral Communication in English (OCE) is found to be significantly correlated with the ELP of engineering college students in total and with all its dimensions – LSRW. 3) Female students of engineering colleges are found to be better than their male counterparts in their ELP and in one dimension – Speaking.

Investigator : Hemamalini H.C. (5008)

Title : English Language Anxiety in Relation to Achievement among the High School Students.

The objectives of the study were (1) To know the extent of English language anxiety among the High school students of Ramnagam City. (2) To know the relationship between English language anxiety and the level of English achievement among the High school students of Ramnagam City.

Sample was elected through multi-stage Sampling technique. At the first stage 8 schools were selected through stratified sampling technique. At the second stage a total of 150 students representing both boys and girls were selected through random sampling technique. English language Anxiety scale and school records were used as tools for the research. The findings were : (1) A significant negative relationship was found between the English anxiety and English Achievement of high school students. (2) The study revealed the very high anxiety is the cause for low English achievement among the high school students.

Investigator : Ajith Jaya, C.N. (5009)

Title : A study on the teaching and learning of English as a second language at the degree level in the arts and science colleges affiliated to MS University, Tirunelveli.

The objectives of the study were (1) To study the English language teacher’s opinion about the teaching and learning of English as a second language at the degree level. (2) To find out the level of perception of teachers towards ESL curriculum with regard to aims and objectives, curriculum, method of teaching, acquaintance with A.V. Aids, classroom activities, teacher’s views on evaluation, teacher’s difficulty, professional development, self-assessment and curricular support for teacher’s and assessment of teachers about students. (3) To study the opinion of the first degree students regarding the teaching and learning of English as a second language. The methodology used was, a survey was conducted by administering questionnaire to both ESL teacher’s and students. The data were collected from 925 undergraduate students and 81 English language teachers of 15 Arts and Science Colleges affiliated to M.S.

University. The questionnaire aimed at eliciting responses regarding the ESL curriculum meant for the under graduate students. The investigator has used the statistical techniques such as percentage analysis, 't' – test, ANOVA And correlation analysis.

The findings were : 1) Regarding the specialty of the ESL curriculum, 35.80% of the teachers say that it promotes creativity and critical thinking About 34.57% of the teachers say that it suits only for high achievers and 34.57% of the teachers also say that it suits only average achievers. 30.86% of the teachers say that it suits all categories of learners. (2) The perception of teachers teaching English in arts and science colleges affiliated to M.S. University towards ESL curriculum with respect to aims and objectives, curriculum, method of teaching, acquaintance with A.V. Airds, classroom activities, teacher's views on evaluation, teacher's difficulty, professional development, self assessment and curricular support for teachers and assessment of teachers about students is moderate. (3) About 52.24% of the students feel that at the end of the course they will be able to communicate confidently in English. About 76.97% of the students claim that at the end of the course they will be able to write competitive examinations in English.

Investigator : Usha Bright. (2010)

Title : The Influence of Listening, Reading Comprehension on the Skill of Speaking of the Students Studying in the Teacher Training Institute of Kanyakumari District.

The objectives of the study was to find out the level of Listening, Reading Comprehension and Speaking Skill of the students studying in Teacher Training Institute with regard to background variables-gender, locality of institutions, birth order, year of study, medium of study at higher secondary level.

A sample of 751 teacher trainees is selected by using simple random sampling procedure and survey method was followed. The researcher adopted the research tools such as Listening Comprehension Scale developed by Dr. S. Chelvi (2007) and reading Comprehension Scale developed by Dr. S. Chelvi (2007), for data collection.

The finding were : (1) No significant difference is observed in the listening comprehension and in the speaking skill of the students studying in teacher training institute with regard to gender, locality of institution, order of birth, year of study, medium of study, listening to English news, T.V. programmes, speaking in English, reading English news/ magazines/ story books/ articles and writing letters. (2) There is significant difference in the reading comprehension of the students studying in teacher training institute with regard to gender and locality of institution but there is no significant difference is observed in the listening comprehension and in the speaking skill of the students studying in teacher training institute with regard to order of birth, year of study, medium of study, listening to English news, T.V. programmes, speaking in English, reading English news/ magazines story books/ articles and writing letters. (3) There is significant correlation between listening comprehension of the students studying in teacher training institute and speaking skill. (4) There is significant correlation between reading comprehension and speaking skill.

NEED OF THE STUDY:

Knowledge and proficiency of mother-tongue is found in almost all students but we cannot deny the fact that they need to be equally proficient in English language. It has been widely experienced by students that they lack confidence and efficiency while communicating through English both in secondary and higher education levels. Students

of Odia medium schools have a phobia of English in classroom especially during English class as they need to communicate in this language. Future job prospects and higher education demands proficiency in English but it is usually seen that students studying English as first language in schools are better performers in the above fields than those studying English as a second language. At the higher secondary stage students are unable to fit themselves in classroom transactions due to a sudden shift in medium of instruction from Odia to English. Therefore, Secondary school education should help in resolving the issue considering all obstacles and aspects of communication skills in English language.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:-

“LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY OF STUDENTS IN ENGLISH AT THE SECONDARY STAGE”

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The objectives of the present study are as follows:

- 1) To assess the language proficiency in English of secondary school students.
- 2) To assess the reading comprehension skill and writing skills in English in the classroom.
- 3) To study the problems faced by secondary school students in English class.
- 4) To suggest measures to improve language proficiency in English among students.

METHODOLOGY

According to Best and Kahn (2007), “The term descriptive research has often been used incorrectly to describe three types of investigation that are different. Perhaps their superficial similarities have obscured their difference. Each of them employs the process of disciplined inquiry through the gathering and analysis of empirical data, and each attempts to develop knowledge. To be done competently, each requires the expertise of the careful and systematic investigator. A brief explanation may serve to put each one in proper perspective.” The method of research which concerns itself with the present phenomena in terms of conditions, practices beliefs, processes, relationships or trends invariably is termed as “descriptive survey study”. According to Dr. Y.P. Aggarwal (2008) descriptive research is devoted to the gathering of information about prevailing conditions or situations for the purpose of description and interpretation.

The Descriptive Survey Method was followed for the study.

SAMPLE

A sample of 30 students of Std. IX was selected randomly from 5 schools. It included 15 girls and 15 boys. By random sampling, 6 students were selected from each school including 3 boys and 3 girls. The whole process of sampling was done through simple random sampling technique with blindfolded lottery system.

Structure of sample pool

Sl.No.	Name of the Schools	No. of Students
1	Nuabozar High School	6
2	O.G.P.C. High School	6
3	Satsang High School	6
4	Khan Nagar High School	6
5	C.R.R.I. High School	6

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

1. Self- made tools was used :

- 1) Writing test
 - 2) Reading comprehension test
2. Questionnaire

Description of Tools

1. Self-made tests consisted of English language proficiency tests on reading and writing the total mark assigned for the tests was 50 (reading 20 + writing 30) comprising of 50 objective based questions. Appendices are attached herewith in support of these tools used for the study.

Writing test-This consisted of 30 objective based questions including sentence forming, usage of various forms of parts of speech & completion of sentences.

Reading comprehension test – A close –test on reading was conducted where students were required to go for intensive reading of a passage given to them. The piece of prose had missing words (blanks) in between the sentences which the students were required to fill up. This can be done by understanding the contextual meaning of the passage.

2. Questionnaire – A questionnaire was used to fulfill the objective of studying the problems faced by the students in English language. 31 no. questions were framed in total. Questions 1-3 were intended to know about the attitude or view of students towards English language. Questions 4-17 involved questions on their understanding level and ability of various aspects of English language like reading writing & grammar. Questions 18-22 were on their attitude, participation and performances in various competitions and exams on English language. The remaining 9 questions were on the teacher and teaching – learning process.

DATA COLLECTION

The researcher started the field activities by the official permission of the concerned supervisor. Five schools were to be visited with test materials and questionnaire. At first it was difficult to conduct the required activity due to shortage of time allotment by the Headmasters but gradually by establishing a good report with the school staff members it was possible to manage to get some time every day for 10 working days of the schools. At first the questionnaires were distributed to 6 students of class 9th selected randomly from their class. 6 students from each school were given the questionnaires and to fill them up with honesty and authenticity. The students were very co-operative in almost all the schools. After collecting the questionnaires from them the next day reading and writing tests were started to be conducted for those 6 students of each school. It was not possible to conducted both the tests on the same day each time due to shortage of time. Therefore it took a few days to conduct these tests.

STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES USED

Percentage, Mean and S.D. were used as computational techniques for the study.

DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

In the present chapter, attempt has been made for analysis of data in accordance with the objectives stated earlier.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

The participants of the study were both boys and girls who were students of Std. IX. Their age was within 13-15 years. They were all students of Government Highs

which are predominantly Odia medium schools. English is taught to them only as a second language.

Table – 4.1
Background information of students

Gender	No.	Av. Age	Mother Tongue
Boys	15	14	Odia
Girls	15	14	Odia

The participants were students comprising of equal number of boys and girls. They mostly spoke in Odia as it was their mother-tongue. An average age of 14 was suitable enough to allow them to respond efficiently to the study conducted by the researcher on them.

ASSESSMENT OF READING COMPREHENSION SKILL OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS.

One of the objectives of the study was to assess the reading comprehension ability of the students of secondary level. For this the investigator administered a self-made reading comprehension test in English. The scores of the students were calculated out of 20 marks.

Table No. 4.2
Mean and SD of students in reading comprehension test.

No. of Students	30
Total Score	20
Mean	9.4
S.D	1.8

Table No. 4.1 shows the mean score of the sample on reading test calculated to be 9.4. This score was even below the half of the total score. Therefore, the average score indicates the performance level to the below half of the total score. The scores obtained were subjected to statistical analysis i.e.; Mean, S.D.

The S.D. from the mean score is 1.8 which shows that the scores of students vary from each other.

ASSESSMENT OF WRITING SKILL OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

To fulfill the objective of assessing writing skill of students, a set of writing test was administered on the students. The test consisted of 30 questions related to basic level writing skills. The scoring was estimated and assessment was done using statistical tools like mean and S.D. The assessment of writing skill was based on basic level sentence formation and sentence completion type test items.

Table No. 4.3
Mean and SD of writing test

No. of Students	30
Total Score	30
Mean	13.53
S.D	5.38

Table No. 4.2 above shows various estimates for assessing the writing proficiency of students in English. The mean score was estimated to be 13.53 which was below half of the total score. The average performance level was below 50 percent of the total score.

ATTITUDE OF STUDENTS TOWARDS ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The table 4.4 below reveals various attitudes of secondary school students towards English as a language. It reveals various emotional and psychological thought processes during acquisition of language skills in English both in and out of the classroom.

Table – 4.4
Attitude towards English language

Attitude	Yes (%)
Like English language	100
Reading is easy	30
Writing is interesting	77
Sentence formation	40
Comprehend texts easily	67
Fear of English tests	73
Like English Grammar	86
Read supplementary books in English	30
Translating odia – English is easy	33

Although the responses to the questionnaire revealed a 100 percent likeness towards English language, but only 30 percent find reading easier than writing whereas 77 percent find writing more interesting than any reading activity. 40 percent students can make sentences on their own and 67 percent think they can comprehend texts on their own. But still 73 percent have fear towards tests in English language.

It was quite encouraging to find that 86 percent students like to learn English Grammar. A less number i.e. 30 percent students read supplementary books in English like magazines, story books, newspapers etc. Only 30 percent find translating of words and sentences in odia English as easy. This would probably lead to incorrect sentence formation while writing in English.

PROBLEMS FACED BY STUDENTS IN ENGLISH CLASS

To satisfy the objective of finding out the problems faced by secondary school students, in English class, a questionnaire was used for them. Table 4.5 reveals various issues related to English language proficiency of students.

Table – 4.5
Problems and activities in classroom

Problems and activities in classroom	Yes (%)
English class is interesting	70
Like English Teacher	83
Use of teaching aids	40
Opt for private tuitions in English	90
Scope of doubt clearance	90
Attempt to clarify doubts	40
Refer to dictionary while reading	37
Participate in literary activities	40
Summative test scores in English (≤ 60)	100

As per the responses of the students to various questions of the questionnaire table 4.5 reveals that 70 percent students find their English class interesting and even 83 percent students like their English teachers. But only 40 percent teacher use teaching aids or instructional materials while teaching every chapter of English. An increase in audio visual aids can probably make the class more interesting and more receptive for students which was not being done.

The quality of teaching or other intervening variable may be questioned as 90 percent students opt for private tuitions. Only 40 percent students attempt to clear any difficulty in language skills whereas 90 percent feel they get enough scope for it in the classroom. Only 40 percent participate in any literary activity in English. 37 percent students refer to dictionary for comprehending meanings of words while reading English books.

All students revealed that their performance in the last summative test in English was below 60 percent scores in English as a subject.

MAJOR FINDINGS

The present study was conducted to assess the writing and reading comprehension abilities of secondary school students, in English language. The findings of the study were as follows :-

- The average score of students in reading comprehension was 94 which was below half the total score and it was found that students were not much efficient in it.
- The S.D. of reading and writing tests scores 1.8 and 5.38 respectively which shows high variations in their scores, among the students.
- Writing at its basic level including sentence formation and completion was found to be at an average score of 13.5 which is below half of the total score of 30.
- A maximum number of students i.e. 77% find writing activities in English interesting than reading activities.
- A few students (only 40 percent) make an attempt to clarify their learning difficulties in the classroom.
- Teaching aids should be used more and in a better way, to enhance the linguistic skills of students, which was not being done. Only 40 percent students affirmed the use of teaching aids during English class.
- Very few students i.e; 40% participate in literary activities in English as they have fear towards them.
- The score of all students in the last summative in English was below 60% of total score.
- The psychological factor of fear of English exams, ruled over 73% students.
- A better scope for doubt clearance in class itself was felt by 90% students but only 40% make an attempt to do so.
- It was found that 83% students liked their English teacher.
- Texts in English could be easily comprehended by 40% students without the help of any other person.
- As a result 33 percent students could translate from odia to English easily whereas the rest 67 percent find it difficult to do.
- Only 30 percent students indulge in supplementary reading activities in English language.
- Reading is easier as compared to writing in English according to 30% students.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

On the basis of the above findings the investigator is intended to put suggestions to eradicate the problems in attainment of language proficiency in English among secondary school students.

- Well defined language learning policies should be framed for secondary school students.
- Well balanced approach towards both silent and loud reading in a manner so that students can comprehend the texts according to their own pace of reading.
- Teachers should be trained and motivated to use more instructional aids including blackboard work to boost writing skills among students.
- The Psychological factor of fear towards English language and its tests should be eradicated gradually by assigning students with more reading and writing tasks both at home and in school.
- Writing answers to the questions of texts book contents should be done by the students with least help of teachers. Rather analytical question should be given to enhance creative writing skill of students.
- Language laboratories or ICT labs should be set up for exposing students to reading and writing skills in English through programmed instructions.
- Special linguistic classes and language text materials should be arranged for developing language skills in English.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The present study was examined by the supervisor and experts the following suggestions were given for further study related to the present study.

- A larger sample of students can be included for the study.
- Teacher's competency in language skills can also be included in the research.
- Language text books in English can be evaluated which are meant for secondary school students.
- Other language skills like listening and speaking can be included in this type of research.
- A Gender based study of language proficiency in English can be conducted as a comparative study between male and female participants.
- Creative writing and speed of reading can also be brought under the scope of study.
- The same study can also be conducted for primary as well as Higher Secondary Level.

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