

English Language Proficiency in Prospective English Teachers

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Abstract

The present study attempts to know the level of English language proficiency in prospective language teachers. In addition, it also aims to compare different language skills and investigate into the common problematic areas of English grammar. To meet the objectives, required data were collected from 24 (twenty four) university students of B.Ed. opted English as a method paper. For this investigation an English language proficiency & communication test was prepared & administered by the researcher which includes Speaking, Reading, Vocabulary, Grammar & Writing task. The obtained data has been analyzed qualitatively as well as statistically by using Mean, Median, Standard deviation, Z-score and small sample t-test. The result indicated that the status of prospective teachers is not as satisfactory as it should be, the most difficult dimension in English to learn is grammar specially sentence structure. The difference is not significant in English language proficiency of male and female prospective teachers.

Key Words: Language proficiency, Language skills, Communication, Prospective teachers

Background of the Study

Although English is the second most widely spoken language in the world, however the importance of English is not just in how many people speak it, but in what it is used for. It is commonly used as a medium for news and information in all over the world. Three quarters of all messages are sent in English. 80% of computer data are processed and stored in English, more than half of the newspapers published in the world are in English. Even in many countries where English is a minority language, there is at least one newspaper in English. Speakers from a variety of native languages use English to communicate with one another in a wide variety of situations and for a wide variety of purposes. It is the language of international business, international air

traffic control and also an official language of many professional and international organizations including the United Nations.

In India also English has acquired a high social value as compare to different regional languages and mother tongue. In a survey research by Jacob (2013) 80% of the informants want to speak in English, 93% admitted that it is useful when looking for a job and 63% are of the opinion that English carries higher status than Hindi in India. Knowledge of English is seen to be the key indicator of economic prosperity and prestigious lifestyle. Parents expect their children to get the best type of education and they conclude that it is possible only through English medium. So, we find that the English medium schools are opened everywhere in the

country. As we all know India is a country of multilingual & multicultural societies, that means it is a country where people are of different languages and different cultural backgrounds; that is why learning languages especially the English language has become more and more important and an integral part of our life. Majority of Indians grow up with their mother tongue and acquire a second language in their schools, so the role of language teacher plays an important part in second language development of every student.

In recent years the demand for learning a second language English has risen steadily and the parental demand for English has sky rocketed as it is the only tool for international communication. Besides, English is also the language of science, medicine, library and information technology, hence it can be predicted that a country might lose their superiority if they are not competent in international link language i.e. English. For this the development of English language proficiency (Stern, 1993 defined the term as developing both cross-lingual skill and intra-lingual skills such as LSRW) is now an important educational goal in many countries of the world so as to India. To meet this goal or developing the English language proficiency it is important to have teachers with sufficient competency in English because teachers not fluent in the language will only produce poor quality students. In the words of Reddy (2012) not having a good teacher of English is a common experience of all the students. The teachers of English are either not trained properly or they are the teachers of other subjects. Even the materials and methodology used in their training programs are outdated. It is the same limited experience that is shared as such. Though there are institutes like EFLU (The English and Foreign Languages University), RIEs (Regional Institute of Education), ELTI (English Language Teaching Institute) and IASEs (Institute of Advanced Studies in

Education) to train teachers, they are hardly enough for the large demands of the Indian teacher population.

The situation today is the problem of many students even in higher education is that they don't have good command in English languages, they cannot perform their best, can't draw out the potential within just because of a language problem. To find out these problems Eliyas (2011) analyzed the errors in English and revealed that students commit more errors in syntax, lexis, and spelling and tense respectively. They committed the least errors in miscellaneous while Btoosh (2011) concluded that the intralingual errors are the most frequently occurring errors in English which reflects learners little exposure to L2. The study indicates one of the main reasons for the poor standard of English, which is lack of adequate opportunities for students either to listen or speak in English. They listen and speak English only in English-classes; outside the classroom they neither get enough exposure nor enough opportunities to improve themselves. This naturally reduces their use of English and results in a poor competence in the language. So the teachers are expected to train students not only in numbers and letters but also in soft skills that would increase their employability lately when they enter in the field of employment. Yeddi (1997) found that 79.7% of secondary school teachers considered reading and writing skills as major aims of English language teaching (ELT) and 20.3% of the teachers checked speaking only. But in the words of John Hay craft, "To be able to use the language, to convey thoughts, intentions, wishes, information, etc. a person needs a mastery of various skills of language."(Siddiqui, 2017). Similarly NCERT(2006) recommend

ed in its position paper 'National focus group on Teaching of English' that all teachers should have the skills to teach English in ways appropriate to their situation and levels, based on their situation and levels and based on a knowledge of how languages are learnt. Therefore, it is necessary to equip the prospective English teachers with necessary language skills and profound proficiency, instill enthusiasm and to develop the right attitude so that they can fulfill the desired objectives of second language teaching.

Here it is of worth mentioning that the recent scathing critique about the quality of education has far-reaching implications for teacher preparation programs in all academic disciplines. Certainly, acceptable proficiency levels of the prospective teacher in all basic skills including vocabulary and grammar will be a major concern of second-language educators. In this connection understanding the current status of English language proficiency and attainment of different language aspects in prospective English teachers will prove helpful to support their continued development of English language as well as the development of English language proficiency in their students.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were-

1. To study the levels of English language proficiency in prospective English teachers.
2. To compare the different skills of English language acquisition in prospective English teachers.
3. To investigate into the common problematic areas in English grammar.
4. To compare the English language proficiency of male and female prospective teachers.

Hypothesis

Keeping in view the objective no. 4 the following hypothesis was formulated-

1. There is no significant difference in the English language proficiency of male and female prospective teachers.

Research Methodology

Considering the objectives, hypothesis and the nature of data the Descriptive Survey method is used for the present investigation. Purpose of this study is to study the level of English acquisition as well as problems related to writing skills & grammar which is identified with the help of questionnaire filled by student teachers and data were analyzed with the help of mixed approach of both Qualitative and Quantitative.

Population & Sample

All the prospective English teachers of Chhattisgarh pursuing B.Ed. from any university are the population of this study. The sample consists of 24(twenty four) randomly selected university students of B.Ed. opted English as one of the method papers drawn from Chhattisgarh.

Tools & Techniques

The tool used for the present study was self-constructed by the researcher named as "English Language Proficiency and Communication Test" designed to measure the current level of English language proficiency of prospective English teachers. It includes variety of tasks related to Speaking, Reading, Vocabulary, Grammar & Writing. The test was of 50 marks (10 marks for each of the skills included) and prepared in the supervision of language expert and educationist. Grammar task consists of articles, determiners, tense, voice, speech, preposition, subject-verb concord, sentence structure, punctuation, etc.

Procedure of Data Collection & Analysis

To meet the objectives oral & written test have been conducted. To test the speaking

ability 24 topics were chosen & distributed among students randomly using lottery method; time allotted to each student was 5 minutes. Speaking task was assessed by panel of three experts of English language & the criteria for scoring were pronunciation, accuracy, fluency, comfort & linkage of thoughts. The average of marks given by the three was taken as speaking score. After that, written test was conducted to study the other skills of English language like reading, vocabulary, grammar & writing.

The analysis was done qualitatively as well as quantitatively. For quantitative analysis different statistical techniques like Mean, Median, Standard deviation, Z-score and small sample t-test were used. Performance on the assessment test is interpreted in terms of the proficiency level; percentage analysis was done for comparative attainment of different

language skills and problematic areas related to grammar.

Results

1. Levels of English language proficiency and communication in prospective English teachers.

For this the students' scores were converted into Z- scores to normalize them and make the data more meaningful. After that the distribution of scores are divided into five categories named Very Poor, Poor, Average, Good and Excellent. Categorical distribution of proficiency is based on Z-score. The following table shows the descriptive of prospective teachers' proficiency, in which maximum number of students (50%) are average, 25% are below average, 16.7% are good and only 8.3% are Excellent in English proficiency.

Table-1: Level of English language proficiency

Proficiency Levels	No. of Students	Percentage of Students
Very Poor	00	00
Poor	06	25
Average	12	50
Good	04	16.7
Excellent	02	8.3

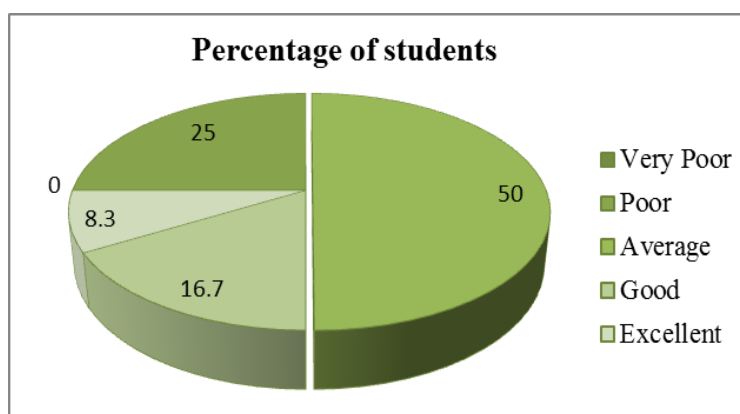


Figure-1: Level of English language proficiency

2. Comparison of different skills of English language acquisition in prospective English teachers.

Table-2: Different skills of English language acquisition

English Skills	Max. Score	Min. Score	Mean Score
Speaking	08	04	5.71
Reading	10	08	9.38
Vocabulary	10	02	7.33
Grammar	09	02	5.33
Writing	08	04	5.67

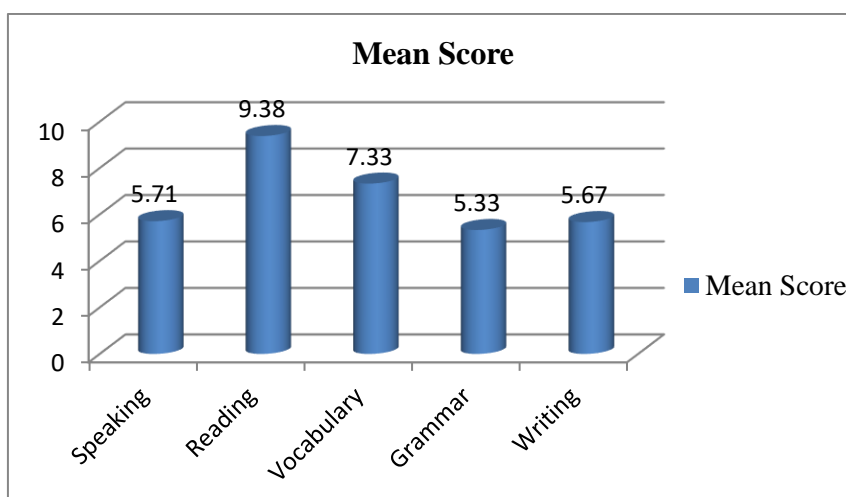


Figure-2: Different skills of English language acquisition

Average score of students in different language skills indicates that the most difficult dimension in English acquisition is grammar. After that the level of difficulty decreases respectively in writing, speaking, vocabulary and reading; thus reading is the easiest one among all the skills of English language.

3. *The common problematic areas in English grammar.*

Grammar test included 10 different areas of English grammar and out of them five more problematic were identified on the

basis of errors committed by prospective teachers. It is observed that students commit maximum no. of errors in sentence structure (72.92% in this study) and after that in voice, tense, speech, punctuation and others (articles, determiners, prepositions, subject-verb concord etc.) respectively. The finding is consistent with the result of Eliyas (2011) in which students committed maximum error in syntax. Difficult areas of grammar in descending order with related to error percent are as follows:

Table-3: Problematic areas in English grammar

Problematic areas of grammar	Percentage of errors
Sentence Structure	72.92
Voice	70.83
Tense	62.5
Speech	54.17

Punctuation	41.67
Others	19.79

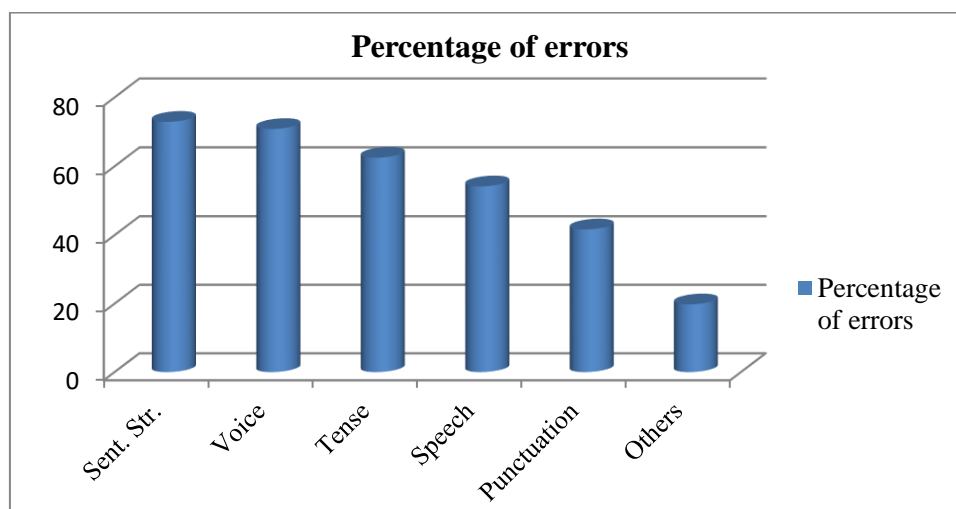


Figure-3: Problematic areas in English grammar

4. English language proficiency & communication of male and female prospective teachers.

Since the distribution was normal so the small sample t-test has been used to test whether the difference between English proficiency of male and female prospective teachers is significant or not. Here the t-value obtained is 0.79 which is

less than the table value 2.07 at 0.05 level for the df 22. So the null hypothesis is not rejected and it can be interpreted that there is no significant difference in English language proficiency of male and female prospective teachers.

Table-4: English language proficiency of prospective teachers

Variable	Comparative Groups (Gender)	Mean	SD	df	t-value	Result
English language proficiency	Male	33.88	4.63	22	0.79	Not Rejected @ .05 level
	Female	32.29	4.03			

Discussion of Results, Implications of the Study & further Suggestions

From the result there is a perception that prospective language teachers are not as proficient as it is desirable & the status indicates the lacuna in present teacher preparation program either in selection of candidates or in the process of equipping them for teaching profession. The test can be conducted in order to provide diagnostic information that can support teachers in their further language and professional development. Here it is

remarkable that the move must not meant to embarrass or demote teachers but only to provide them the feedback needed to take the next step in their language learning and professional growth. There should have a provision for re-training program for the teachers who failed in the proficiency test.

Grammar is a difficult and important part of English acquisition so the content area should be designed to provide adequate activities in functional grammar for the teacher trainees to carry out in the

classroom. The task-based treatment of items like nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, types of sentences, sentence patterns, articles, prepositions, modals, tense, voice, degrees of comparison and reported speech will go a long way in sharpening the communicative skills of both the trainees and children. These activities will enhance the skills of trainees which they have already acquired. Among the activities some may be at students' level to facilitate the classroom teaching and some of trainees' level to enrich their application of grammar. It is expected that the trainees will not only experience a great pleasure in executing the activities but also eliminate the fear of grammar in their students.

Of all language skills writing and speaking are comparatively hard to learn and reading is the easiest one supports the findings of Valsamma (1994) that there

were two factors of reading ability vocabulary and verbal comprehension but even if children did not achieve a high level of word knowledge they could comprehend the given passage; may be because reading skills are transferable across languages from the more familiar and the more practiced one irrespective of whether it is L1 or L2 (Sabharwal, 1992, p. 80). So the curriculum of English language as well as English teaching should be designed in such a way to help the learners develop these skills in English. For this purpose exercises and activities can be merged into their teaching that concentrate on different skills. It will not only help them to revise and consolidate what is already known but also to develop and extend the knowledge of English further.

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