

Critical Need for Development of English Language among Intermediate Students in Andhra Pradesh: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

This article is a part of my major UGC Research Project on examining various reasons for a drop in fluency of English among students coming from Intermediate background and measures suggested to improve their fluency in English at college level.

Keywords: Emphasis on English language, Intermediate Students in Andhra Pradesh, Empirical Study, Professional Students, Various Subject Teachers, Engineering Students, Medical Students, Critical Need, Communication Skills, Technical Skills, Employability

I. INTRODUCTION

According to Stephen Krashen, an expert in the field of linguistics from the University of Southern California specializing in theories of language acquisition and development, a student can acquire proficiency in English as second language only when he is interested in the subject and uses the language as a medium of instruction. In the current global scenario, English has gained a lot of importance not only as a means of communication or as a subject of study but also in the process of recruitment. In this context, the present UGC Major Research Project entitled “Emphasis on English Language at Intermediate Level in Andhra Pradesh” (2013-2016) with a total grant of 4.7 lakhs, is on examining various reasons for a drop in fluency of English among students coming from Intermediate background in Andhra Pradesh and measures suggested to improve their fluency in English at college level. It also attempts to examine the role of English in a student’s career.

II. ORIGIN OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

In a student’s academic career, Intermediate is the turning point where his future gets decided. There is no doubt that majority of the students in Andhra Pradesh are eager to join professional courses like Engineering and Medical stream. One can’t find fault with them as there seems to be no other alternative. Some of the students may have a great love for literature but are not allowed to choose. They are not given a chance to pursue the course for which they have flair or aptitude. A student who is good at English in school tends to neglect English at Intermediate level by over-emphasis on science subjects and his parents too believe that only engineering and medicine courses would fetch him a good job.

Besides this, there are a number of other reasons for which the students may neglect English. It is aptly said that interests and hobbies must be cultivated only when young. An Intermediate student is taxed heavily by the regular syllabi and hardly gets time for relaxation. He feels burdened by his curriculum and shows no inclination for general reading or enjoying a good book. Whatever little time that he gets is spent on watching television, movies, playing video games or by lazily lying on a couch. Thus the idea of enjoying a good book has been lost.

One of the greatest linguists of all times, Noam Chomsky too asserts that language is natural and there are four major skills that a learner of a foreign language needs to master: listening, reading, speaking and writing. A language can be enriched only when all the four skills are simultaneously developed. If one is a good listener, he is a good speaker, and if he is a good reader, he is also a good writer. Another reason for not improving English could be, the exposure to English at school is very little only with an hour of English everyday and the rest of the subjects by teachers who happen to come from regional medium background.

III. INTERDISCIPLINARY RELEVANCE

It is commonly found with many of the English teachers from their long experience that the students at Intermediate level have forgotten all the English learnt for 10 years in school. In spite of this, some students are able to secure 90% in English at Intermediate level and others are effortlessly getting through it. At this point one needs to ponder on the point that ‘should competence level of a student be decided on the basis of marks secured’? It could be one of the reasons that the students have developed an attitude of indifference and negligence to English. That is the reason why they are not able to perform well or improve in English.

Besides, around 90% of students' performance in First Year of Engineering are not up to mark not only in written skills, but also in the other three skills (Reading, speaking and listening). So any engineering student with such indifferent attitude doesn't make an attempt to improve his fluency in written or oral skills. During the time of campus recruitment, he realizes the lacuna in him, and regrets the lack of the appropriate employable skills.

IV. REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE SUBJECT

Purple Leap in 2009 conducted a study on Employability Skill Index of Engineering Students and came out with dawning revelations. The study was conducted in 95 colleges across the country (15 colleges in A.P.) and 9000 students (600 in A.P.). It says that 36% of students fail on all major skill count- Communication, Problem solving and Technical Skills. Only 7% were found employable when all factors are considered. It says that Communication skill is a problem area especially to students in Tier 2 & Tier 3 Cities. 80 % of engineering students in A.P do not meet the qualifying criteria as far as their communication skills are concerned. And few, whose Communication skills are fine, but still not hired because they lack in technical skills or problem solving skills. Proficiency in Communication Skills is considered more a qualifying criteria than selection criteria for technical roles in industry.

The Purple Leap survey in 2009 also revealed that about 25 % of the student population, which fall in the 30-40% performance brand, can be trained to upgrade their skills to employable levels. These students will need focused training in Communication skills, Problem solving and Technical skills so that they may be brought to the employable pool. But 36 % of the rest had no chance of an engineering job, as they are "hard to train" as they are not able to meet the qualifying criteria in all three skills.

National Employability Report by Aspiring Minds states that "India has a sizeable engineering talent pool. It produces about five lakh Engineering graduates every year, but only less than one- fifth of the total number of them are fit to be employable, especially in IT service sector. It also says that the percentage of ready to be employed engineers for IT Jobs is dismally low at 2.68%. The report which covered more that 55000 engineering students, who graduated in 2011, highlighted the fact that the zeal to increase the number of colleges has impacted on the quality drastically.

According to Purple Leap Survey conducted in the year 2012, only one out of ten students graduating from tier 2,3and 4 Engineering colleges can be readily employable. It also pointed out regarding the huge gap between education and employability of the so-called Engineering graduates. One third of these graduates who have done academically well by securing 60% marks are unfit for employment even after being given proper training.

Companies today want candidates possessing the three critical skills- Communication, Problem solving and Technical Skills, and ready to start working from day one, because nobody wants to spend and money on training. So students will need to do all that they can to work on their skills and be industry ready. Just going to college and finishing their studies is evidently not enough. Andhra Pradesh has highest number of Engineering Colleges in the Country, but the percentage of pass is abysmally low. The pass percentage of final year of Engineering in Andhra Pradesh was 49% in 2006, 35 % in 2007, 29 % in 2008. According to Aspiring Minds National Employability Report, which is based on a study of more than 1,50,000 engineering students who graduated in 2015 from over 650 colleges, 80% of the them are unemployable.

A news- paper publishing the results of first year Engineering graduates of JNTU, recently has painted a very gloomy picture. It states that in 15 % of colleges, the pass percentage is only 60. In 34 % of colleges only between 40 to 60 percent of pass could be achieved. In 35 % of colleges the pass percentage is between 20 to 40. In the rest of 16 % of colleges, the pass percentage is less than 20. All this has been related to lack of qualified faculty, infrastructure and delay in admission process by the study conducted by a three member team appointed by the government, headed by former Technical Education Commissioner K.Laxminarayana, who in his report to the state Government opined that Engineering education will be at loss if steps are not taken to improve the academic quality and infrastructure.

V. SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

This study throws a significant amount of light on the reasons for the fall of standards at Intermediate level in English. A student with such indifference towards English usually doesn't have reasonable proficiency in it and faces difficulties in the final year and later as well. Therefore the situation prompts a change of attitude on the part of the policy makers of Intermediate Board. They need to realize the importance of languages which improves the students' communicative skills, inculcates and enhances soft skills. Similarly English should be given its due place in the entrance of EAMCET (Engineering and Medical Common Entrance Test) and other qualifying tests so that the students will start taking the subject seriously.

A. Its potential contribution to knowledge in the field of social relevance:

The academicians and people at the helm of affairs should give a little more thought while framing the curriculum, which would mould the students not as mere self-centered, automatons but as more civic and responsible human-beings, while developing the necessary life skills and employable skills. People are dehumanized with no Humanities as subjects in their curriculum. In this aspect the Western countries should always be remembered as they have realized this and inculcated social sciences in their curriculum.

B. Objectives

In the given scenario it appears as if so much of national resources are being wasted on these students who are unable to find a suitable job. It is high time that the policy makers and academicians realize that the conduit with which a student can express himself and become qualified, is the English language which is a pre-requisite for employment, but often neglected. Attempt has been made with the help of statistical analysis to find out various reasons behind a drop in the performance level of students in English at college level. A test of proficiency in English has been initially suggested after giving admission into professional courses. Finally a bridge course in English for first year students of Professional courses has been recommended.

C. Hypothesis

The students in the Intermediate level study English from examination point of view. They in spite of coming from English medium background are not performing well in English at the college level. By not including English as a component for EAMCET (Engineering and Medical Common Entrance Test) and other qualifying examinations is leading to indifferent attitude towards the subject by them.

VI. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The study has been conducted in some of the professional colleges of Visakhapatnam district by gathering information through questionnaires, personal interviews of teachers, parents and students. Students from 5 Engineering colleges 5 Intermediate colleges and 4 medical colleges have been selected, thus making a total sample of around 120 Intermediate students, 200 engineering students and 100 medical students. Around 50 teachers of engineering colleges handling various subjects are given appropriate questionnaires covering all the aspects of the problem of professional students. After a gap of two months, collection of the filled questionnaires and personal interviews are carried out. To analyze the data, some statistical tools that bring out the best results have been used. The tools used are descriptive statistics with frequencies and factor analysis. The software used to carry out statistical analysis is SPSS (Statistical Package for The Social Sciences)

VII. CONCLUSION: SUGGESTED BRIDGE COURSE

After considering the statistical report, I wish to suggest a bridge course to improve Listening, Speaking, Reading and Speaking skills of the students who are not fluent at English. It is an attempt made both through literature and language to improve LSRW skills at the first year of their professional courses. It will try to fill in the gap and help them to come on par with the students who are fluent at English. Before implementing this, I would certainly like to suggest that English also to be included in the entrance test of EAMCET (Engineering and Medical Common Entrance Test) and other qualifying exams before giving admission into professional courses by the respective Institution. This will certainly regulate and filter the standard of intake of the candidates into any professional course and make the Intermediate students more serious in their approach towards English.

Then I would like to suggest a test of proficiency in English for the students already admitted into professional courses by the Institution. This will certainly segregate the weaker students from the ones with fluency in English. The suggested bridge is meant for “not so confident in English” students to take up the course and fill in the gap in order to come on par with the regular batch of students. They will follow the course for 35 to 40 hrs in the first semester of their respective professional course for 3-4 credits. This bridge course has to run for only segregated weaker students and through the same I would like to bridge the gap between students, not so fluent at English with the ones who are fluent at English, following the regular course in English prescribed by the respective Institution. It will certainly prove to be helpful in meeting their requirements at the time of recruitment and later at various work places. It will contribute competency, efficiency, values and necessary life skills to the professional students and bring in a holistic development in them.

D. Suggested-Reading

A selection of fictional and non-fictional prose pieces from English and Indian Literature are chosen to introduce the students to different writings and induce the importance of values in life. The list includes different forms like short stories, novels, plays and autobiographies. The suggested writers are:

1) 17th Century-18th Century

Charles Dickens-Great Expectations,

- Thomas Hardy-The Mayor of Caster bridge,
- Lewis Carroll-Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland,
- Arthur Conan Doyle-The Hound of The Baskervilles,
- Rudyard Kipling-The Jungle Book,

2) 19th Century-20th Century

- Henry-Short Stories like Girl, Dream, After Twenty Years,
- H.H. Munro-- Short Stories like The Story Teller, Tea, The Threat
- Mark Twain—The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,
- Somerset Maugham-- Short Stories like Luncheon, The Rain, The Colonel’s Lady

– G.B. Shaw—Play -Pygmalion,

3) 20th century-- Present

– R.K. Narayan- Swamy and Friends,

– R.K. Laxman—The Distorted Mirror,

– A.P.J. Abdul Kalam—Wings of Fire,

– Khushwant Singh—The Mark of Vishnu and other Stories,

– Anita Desai-The Artist Of Disappearance,

Besides the above suggested reading, daily reading of the newspaper will be certainly helpful to the students.

- 1) Writing-Paragraph, Essay, Précis, Reading Comprehension, Letter Writing, Resume writing, emails, notices and minutes of the meeting.
- 2) Speaking and Listening-Practice listening to the news daily and speaking in English to others.
- 3) English Practice-Both in written and spoken communication in English, grammar play a key role. This umbrella term “grammar” includes many smaller components like tenses, subject verb agreement, prepositions, articles, conjunctions and the sentence structure. Thorough practice on all the above components will certainly make them confident to express themselves freely to others without hesitation.

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