

A Study On Second Language Acquisition & English Language Proficiency

Dr.Rama Devi Amara¹,Sk.Rehena²

¹M.A, M.phil, Ph.D K.L.E.F, Vaddeswaram.

²Assistant Professor of English PVP Siddhartha Institute of Technology
Kanuru, vijayawada

Email : ¹aramadevi@kluniversity.in, ²jarina.2005@gmail.com

ABSTRACT : *Language Acquisition and Development Language of learning is an active process that begins at birth and continues throughout life. English Language learning has achieved prominence because of the global status of English. English Language Teaching is a systematic procedure or process that requires great efforts on the part of all the learners. For attaining that purpose, textbooks are the most prominent elements of teaching process for achieving the aims and objectives of a course. Language learning using Learning strategies refers to a set of tactics that people use in order to gain control over their own learning process. Nowadays, enhancing strategies in second or foreign language classrooms is one of the teachers' roles, since their mission is to facilitate the learning among their students and make their thinking process visible. In order to teach a second language (L2) effectively, educators must take into consideration the needs and biographies of each learner, as a result, they are able to employ methodologies that guide students in using strategies which enhance their L2 learning process. This paper helps readers understand the concept of such strategies to enhance language skills repertoire. The researcher has also examined and focused how textbook activities help in systematic teaching of English and also to students for mastering English language by adopting their own apt learning strategies. The teachers of English should also be equipped with upto-date knowledge of ELT to direct the learners.*

Keywords: *Textbooks, English Language Teaching, Learning strategies*

1. INTRODUCTION

Language ability is the major part of the requirements sought by all the entrance examinations. They measure English language proficiency in reading, listening and writing. Hence, the Pre-Test is prepared by the researcher to test the four language skills of the engineering students. The placement and other entrance tests comprises these aspects of language skills consisting of pronunciation, Sentence correction, Sentence Improvement, Sentence Formation, Completing Statements, Ordering of Words & Sentences, Analogies, Reading Comprehension, Antonyms, Synonyms, Idioms & Phrases, One word Substitute, Change of Voice and Speech, Listening Comprehension, Error identification, Critical reasoning, Analysis of Argument and issue, Paragraph Formation.

This study has covered a few of the above-mentioned aspects in the General Proficiency Test administered among the engineering students to evaluate their proficiency in English. The test covered--- Analogies, Reading Comprehension, Antonyms, Correction of Sentences, Sentence Completion and Analysis of Argument and issue (Annexure: 4). Topics such as Listening

Comprehension, Critical reasoning, Paragraph Formation are excluded from the tests are excluded as they require a lot of time to be filled in by the students. The researcher is allowed only 60 minutes/ 1 period to conduct the tests considering the busy schedule of the engineering students.

Mid-Research Activity

Hence, the Pre-Test is based on language skills and vocabulary components of English language—Pronunciation, Reading comprehension, Synonyms, Idioms& Phrases, Change of Voice and Speech. (Annexure:4)

Marks for different sections along with the time allotted for each section are given below:

Topics	Marks	DURATION
Synonyms	6m	10mts
Idioms & phrases	6m	5mts
One word substitute	6m	10mts
Change of voice	6m	10mts
Speech	6m	10mts
Total	30m	45mts

Pre-Test:

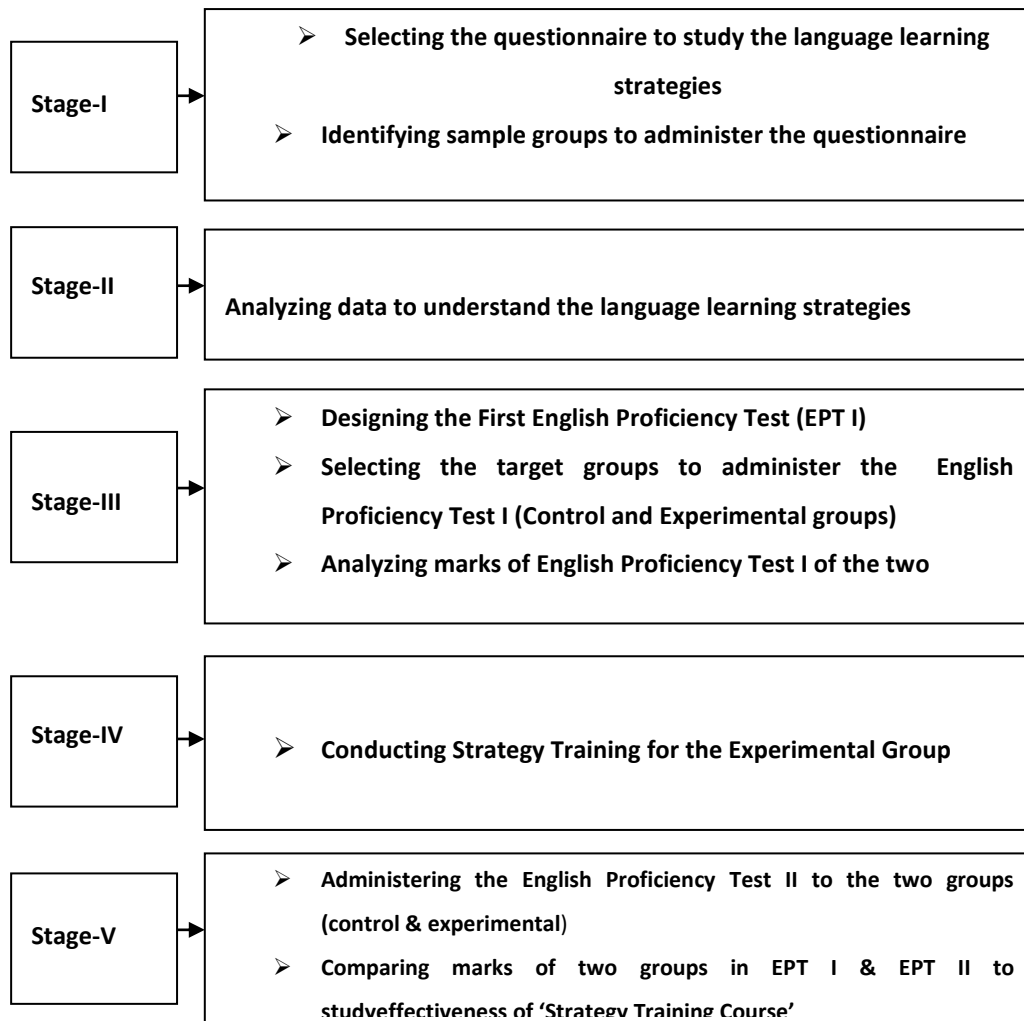
The Pre-test has covered all the four skills listening, speaking, reading and writing of English language. Thus, a trial is attempted by the researcher to expose the language ability standards among the experimental and control groups. The below table reveals the marks scored by the control and experimental groups in the pre-test. A brief summary of the findings is also depicted in this section.

Sources	Competency level	Control group		Experimental group	
		No	%	No	%
45 and above	Excellent	Nil	-	Nil	-
31-45	Good	2	7%	4	16%
16-30	Average	26	86%	26	84%
15 and less	Poor	2	7%	0	-
Total		30	100%	30	100%

Table

The results of the pre-test have emphasized the need for strategy training among the engineering students. The strategy training was given to the experimental group to compare and to check the improve

Strategy Training



The pre-test conducted among the control and experimental groups reveals that only a few of the engineering students have good command on language. The assessment result of their performance is discussed among themselves in groups. Later, the researcher decided to conduct training for the experimental group in their leisure periods such as sports and meditation classes with the due permission of the college authorities. The experimental group of students showed willingness and participated enthusiastically throughout the training sessions. Thus, the strategy training was given to the experimental group (Electrical Engineering) of P.V.P Siddhartha Institute of Technology situated at Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh. Altogether five activities were done for training five elements of Language. Therefore, the total training sessions to train for the experimental group are 4 periods of 60 minutes each.

POST-RESEARCH

The strategy training was carried out by the researcher for about 4 theory periods. Later, a post-test was conducted among both the control and experimental groups to find out the

effectiveness of the strategy training. The following topics were selected as the basis for the post-test

Post-Test

Topics	Marks	DURATION
Pronunciation	5m	5mts
Speech	5m	5mts
Reading comprehension	10m	10mts
Antonyms& synonyms	5m	10mts
Idioms	5m	10mts
Total	30m	45mts

The vocabulary elements are selected by the researcher keeping in mind the strategy training provided among the experimental group.

Analysis of marks scored by two groups in Post-Test:

The below table reveals the marks scored by the control and experimental groups in the post-test.

A brief summary of the findings is also depicted in this section.

Sources	Competency level	Control group		Experimental group	
		No	%	No	%
45 and above	Excellent	Nil	-	18	59%
31-45	Good	2	6%	10	33%
16-30	Average	21	70%	2	8%
15 and less	Poor	7	24%		
Total		30		30	

After a short time of strategy training sessions conducted to the experimental group, a post-test was administered among both the control and experimental groups to make comparisons and also to understand whether the strategy training was useful to the students. The results of the post-test proved the significance of strategy training among the engineering students. Further, the analysis of marks scored by the control and experimental groups are provided separately in the tabular form.

Analysis of Marks- Control Group in Pre-Test and Post-Test:

The post-test was conducted to 30 students of the control group belonging to the Electrical& Electronics Engineering branch. The number and percentage of students falling under the various levels of competence in English are provided in the table below.

Number and Percentage of Control Group in Pre-Test and Post-Test:

Sources	Competency level	Pre-test		Post-test	
		No	%	No	%
45 and above	Excellent	Nil	-	Nil	-

31-45	Good	2	7%	1	3%
16-30	Average	26	86%	20	67%
15 and less	Poor	2	7%	9	30%
Total		30		30	

The marks clearly indicate that there is hardly any difference in the percentage of Good and Average users of the English language from the two tests even after a period of one month of coursework in the classroom. Surprisingly the percentage of Average users is reduced while that of Poor users is increased.

Further, a comparative analysis was made by studying the averages of marks scored by the group in different sections of the two tests. The averages of the Pre-Test and Post-Test are presented in the below table.

Marks of Control Group in Four Sections- Pre-Test and Post-Test:

Scores	Pre-Test					Post-Test				
	I	II	III	IV	V	I	II	III	IV	V
45&above	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
31-45	3.0	8.5	5.0	2.0	9.0	2.0	3.0	10.0	10.0	6.0
16-30	3.3	6.8	3.5	4.6	5.7	1.4	2.6	2.8	4.0	2.2
15 & less	2.5	6.5	2.0	1.0	2.0	1.7	2.2	2.8	4.6	3.9
Total	8.8	21.8	10.5	7.6	16.7	5.1	7.8	15.6	18.6	12.1
Average	2.9	7.1	3.5	2.5	5.5	1.7	2.6	5.2	6.2	4.0

Therefore, the data given in the table reveals that the section wise scores of the two tests by the control group do not show any noticeable improvement and thereby the skills of the group have remained almost the same. Since they have already taken a similar test, the control group showed a slight improvement in a few sections.

Analysis of Marks- Experimental Group in Pre-Test and Post-Test

The number and percentage of students under the various levels of competence in the two tests are given in the below table.

Number & Percentage of Experimental Group in Pre-test and Post-Test:

Scores	Competency level	Pre test		Post test	
		No	%	No	%
45 and above	Excellent	Nil	-	19	59%
31-45	Good	5	17%	9	33%
16-30	Average	25	83%	2	8%
15 and less	Poor				
Total		30		30	

Analysis of the data from the above table indicates that:

There is a perceptible increase in the proportion of the excellent users in their performance in the pre-test compared to that of post-test. The percentage of excellent user category increased from zero to 57%.

- The percentage of good user category rose from 17% to 33%.
- The average users are considerably more in the pre-test than in the post-test. This may be due to improvement in their performance and may have fallen either in the excellent users 'list or good users' list. Hence, the percentage of average users decreased from 83% to 10%.
- Another observation is that strategy training has shown a considerable impact on the students.

Averages of Four Sections in Pre-Test & Post-Test by Experimental Group

The averages in all the sections were calculated. The table shows the averages of each section in the competence level category. The class average was calculated by scrutinizing the averages of each category vertically in the table.

Averages of Sections in Pre-Test & Post-Test by Experimental Group

Scores	Pre-Test					Post-Test				
	I	II	III	IV	V	I	II	III	IV	V
45&above	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	4.7	4.5	10.0	9.5	9.7
31-45	5.0	6.0	8.8	5.0	7.25	4.8	4.6	9.6	8.2	9.2
16-30	2.2	2.7	5.6	7.2	4.1	3.0	4.6	7.3	4.0	3.3
15 & less	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Total	7.2	8.7	14.4	12.2	11.3	12.5	13.8	26.9	15.7	22.2
Average	3.6	4.3	7.2	6.1	5.6	4.1	4.6	8.9	15.2	7.4

The data reveals that the class average in all the sections shows an increase after strategy training. They performed better in other sections of the post-test compared to that of the pre-test.

2. FINDINGS AND INFERENCES

The above data reveals that the performance of students belonging to the experimental group does show a positive feedback for the utility of strategy training. It can be presumed that the language skills of the engineering students would surely improve if strategy training is provided.

Analysis of Marks Scored by Control and Experimental Groups in Post-Test

60 students of both control and experimental group wrote the post-test. An analysis of data of both the groups in the two tests and a comparison with their own performance in pre-test was studied earlier. The below table is an attempt to study and compare the marks of the two groups.

Scores	Competency level	Pre-test		Post-test	
		No	%	No	%
45 and above	Excellent	Nil	-	19	59%
31-45	Good	1	3%	9	33%
16-30	Average	20	67%	2	8%
15 and less	Poor	9	30%		
Total		30		30	

It proves that the majority of the experimental group has fallen under the excellent and good users due to the strategy training. Analysis of the data reveals that the experimental group shows a better competence level in English than the control group when their skills are tested. The analysis that was made before the strategy training to draw the profile of the control and experimental groups revealed that there was no difference between them concerning English proficiency. Nevertheless, analysis taken after the strategy training depicts a diverse picture. Similarly, the comparative study of the competence levels between the two groups in the pre and post test shows a marked difference. These aspects are signs to confirm that the strategy training course is beneficial. Further, an attempt is made to compare the averages of the different sections among both the groups in their performance in Post- Test.

Averages: Four Sections of Post-Test – Control & Experimental Groups

Thus, the analysis of data reveals that the experimental group shows a better competence level in English than the control group in all the sections of the post-test. When an analysis was made to draw the profile of the control and experimental groups the data revealed that there were no predominant differences between the two groups. However, the analysis after the strategy training projects a different representation. There is a wide gap between the competence levels in all sections. The section wise difference between the control and experimental group is as follows:

Scores	Control Group					Experimental Group				
	I	II	III	IV	V	I	II	III	IV	V
45&above	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	9.7	4.5	10.0	9.5	4.7
31-45	2.0	6.0	9.8	9.0	3.2	4.8	9.6	9.6	8.2	5.2
16-30	1.2	2.7	3.6	4.2	2.1	4.0	4.6	7.3	4.0	3.3
15 & less	1.7	2.5	4.9	2.6	14.7	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Total	7.2	8.7	14.4	12.2	11.3	12.5	13.8	26.9	15.7	22.2
Average	3.6	4.3	7.2	6.1	5.6	4.1	4.6	8.9	15.2	7.4

These factors are indicators to prove that the strategy training course has been beneficial. From the above analysis, it is noticed that the performance among the control and experimental groups before strategy training is same and there is a difference in the post-strategy training. It is a clear indication that the training has been helpful.

Progress of Students:

The progress of the students is explained in the below table:

Early stage	Later stage
Students learned with others	Tried to learn individually
Needed coaxing	Tried to contribute voluntarily
Depended upon others	Contributed on their own
Completed the tasks slowly	Completed the tasks quickly
Comfortable in groups	Their participation independently increased

Thus, there was a marked difference in the students. They became more confident as their enthusiasm for learning the language increased.

Limitations of the study

The strategy training sessions conducted by the researcher is very short and the process of learning is a gradual process that requires different inter-language levels. Hence, the pre-test and the post-test conducted by the researcher are limited and may not be conclusively revealing the competence level of each student. Moreover, the strategy training has been done only at a micro level to a group of 30 students, so it may not be adequate enough to draw generalizations.

Scope for Further research

As mentioned earlier, the duration of the strategy training sessions is very short. So it can be presumed that a long period probably more than one year may help to draw definite conclusions about the developments among the students. Workshops on language learning strategies can be designed. The objective of such workshops would be to enable the students to approach the task of language learning with lower stress levels and more confidence. Research could be conducted to study the possibility of embedding language learning strategies training into the existing course material. There is immense scope to braid strategy training with self-learning material or e-learning material because both these use an interactive mode of learning in a one to another teacher-learner ratio. This increases the scope of learner autonomy with the guidance of the teachers.

3. CONCLUSION

The aim of the research is to study the usefulness of the strategy training course to improve the language skills among the students. The students were also made to realize the importance of adopting self-learning with the help of the learning strategies. The analysis indicates that the training in Language Learning Strategies has been beneficial. This research may help future researchers investigate these concepts with a larger group and develop other strategies of teaching and learning to enhance language skills.

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