

# ASSESSING READING, WRITING AND ORAL PROFICIENCY OF ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN INDIA /STATE UNIVERSITIES

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## ABSTRACT

A language is a systematic means of communicating ideas by the use of sounds, gestures, signs or marks. It is the code used to express oneself and communicate to others. It is the mental faculty or power of vocal communication. Any means of communicating ideas, specifically human speech, and the expression of ideas by the voice and sounds and articulated by the organs of the throat and mouth is a language. This is a system of combining words to create meaning used by a particular group of people. Language is something specific to human, that it to say, it is the basic capacity that distinguishes human from all other living beings. Language, therefore, remains potentially a communicative medium capable of expressing ideas and concepts as well as moods, feelings and attitudes.

**Keywords: Reading, English, learners, teaching**

## INTRODUCTION

English language learners (ELLs) students who are still developing proficiency in English represent a large and rapidly growing subpopulation of students in U.S. classrooms. Accordingly, they are also a key group of students to consider when designing and administering educational assessments. The guidelines in this document are designed to be of use to test developers, testing program administrators, psychometricians, and educational agencies as they work to ensure that assessments are fair and valid for ELLs.

Every educational system has certain objectives which aim at bringing about desirable changes in pupil. In order to bring about those changes, the institutions arrange learning experience. The success of learning can be judged only in terms of the changes brought about by this experience. This is a learning experience and evaluation. Thanks to the globalization in all the fields, it necessitates the learning of a language which is international. Undoubtedly, English has become a world language rather than the language of only the English speaking countries such as the UK and the USA because the number of the people who use English as a means of communication exceeds much more than the number of the people who speak it as their mother tongue. In the case of English in India, more than two centuries, India has been directly and indirectly had influence of the language , English on all the fields, such as Education, Medical

Science, etc. Text materials relating to the subjects of Science, Engineering and Technology as also Medicine are available only in English. Moreover, all over India, there is no single language to unite the whole country. Since, in India, several languages are spoken and also one set of people are reluctant to learn one common Indian language, we have to borrow a new non-Indian language. Considering the above facts, learning English, the universal language, as a Second Language, becomes inseparable branch as also unavoidable in Indian education system.

## **COMMON FACTORS AFFECTING TEACHING/LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE**

Majority of the students are coming from village and also their parents are farmers and uneducated. If the nature fails, the survival of the farmers will be questionable. Hence, the students are mentally discouraged due to the family conditions. In the second category, the students are having enough background in basic education since their parents are educated and they do not depend on the nature much. Many of the students from second category are joining in English medium schools and hence, they do not find much difficulty in pursuing their higher education. Moreover majority of the families of second category are dwelling in towns and cities and hence, they have easy access of quality education. But, the first category of students are scoring good marks the examinations conducted. It proves that they are having good writing skill in English.

The only thing is that they have to be given training in oral English communication also. Hence, a common programme for English Language Teaching must be framed in the pre-schooling itself.

## **LEARNING A LANGUAGE**

Each language is structured differently, and the different structures offer users different suggestions to meaning. so when we learn our first language, our brain / mind 'tunes into' the way the particular ll works, and we learn to pay attention to particular cues to meaning that are most helpful. When we meet a new language, our brain / mind automatically tries to apply the first language experience by looking for familiar cues. Part of learning a foreign language is developing new understandings about the particular cues to meaning that the new language offers, and that differ from those of our first language.

The transferability of knowledge, skills and strategies across languages depends closely on how the two written languages work.

## **ROLE OF A TEACHER**

As said by Sir Philip Sydney, teaching is the end of all learning. A teacher's primary role is not only to enable the students to understand what he is intending to say or teach. It is also the duty of the teacher to understand what the student wants and says. In teaching-learning process, two things play the vital roles; one is the delivering capacity of the teacher and the other one is the receiving capacity of the students. Without the two aspects, the teaching-learning process will not be a successful one. Teaching-learning

process is just like making sound by clapping. Without two hands we cannot clap. Like that without a right teacher and the students, the teaching-learning process is meaningless. Teaching should be a worthy of learning a concept deeply and broadly.

Teaching should facilitate the students to face the world which is full of political, social, international as well as personal controversies, without fear. It should give self-confidence to the students. By the effective teaching, the students should be enabled to go for right choices, judgments and also decisions individually. In the process of teaching-learning, the teacher should try to understand the students first. Then only, he can enable the students to understand him or his teaching. Theory with practice on some of the teaching topics, may enable the students to understand the concept easily. Success of a teacher in his/her attempt in enabling the students to understand what is the concept taught by the teacher, depends on the methods he/she applies. The teacher may be a good, but the students' physical problem may lead him to ignore the teaching. Or sometimes, the background of family of the students may drive him to be dull. Hence, the teacher should take into account everything .

At the school level, the teaching-learning process is checked up the teacher by repeated class tests and examinations. Based on the result (marks scored by the students), different methods are adopted to improve teaching in case of negative result. At the college levels also the same traditional (Macaulay) method of examinations is used. The only difference is the volume of syllabus prescribed for the colleges students will be more than that of the school level. As Carl Rogers said, the teacher should first forget that she/he is a teacher. Instead, she/he must possess the skills of a facilitator of learning-genuineness, prizing and empathy.

## **TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE**

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), U.S., defines English language proficiency in this way: A fully English proficient student is able to use English to ask questions, to understand teachers, and reading materials, to test ideas, and to challenge what is being asked in the classroom.

Four language skills contribute to proficiency as follows:

1. Reading - the ability to comprehend and interpret text at the age and gradeappropriate level.
2. Listening - the ability to understand the language of the teacher and instruction, comprehend and extract information, and follow the instructional discourse through which teachers provide information.
3. Writing - the ability to produce written text with content and format fulfilling classroom assignments at the age and grade-appropriate level.
4. Speaking - the ability to use oral language appropriately and effectively in learning activities (such as peer tutoring, collaborative learning activities, and question/answer sessions) within the classroom and in social interactions within the school. Hence, the teacher should keep in mind while teaching English as a second language to the students.

## LITERATURE REVIEW OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

The following is a review of the literature that supports content-based language learning. The articles and books reviewed here cover recent literature as well as a number of key contributions that date as far back as the late 1980s. There are many commonalities between the earlier works and those of more recent origins since the authors grapple with similar concepts. These early inquiries into content-based language learning offer insights and discuss educational benefits in the areas of learning strategies, thematic teaching, sheltered instruction, collaborative learning, use of comprehensible input and concept development.

The foundational literature is preoccupied with identifying areas of interest, while the more contemporary resources approach these issues more pragmatically. More recent texts read as "how-to" manuals for the classroom teacher. A number of additional themes emerge within this body of literature. Common instructional strategies are repeatedly cited as sound practice for the content-based language learning classroom. The development and use of native language is seen as advantageous to both learner and teacher. The learner builds cognitive resources and gains cultural knowledge, while the teacher is able to activate prior learning and build background knowledge. Under the umbrella of comprehensible input, the use of appropriate materials and visuals, modified language and scaffolding are discussed. While commonalities do emerge, the field is divided regarding direct instruction.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN INDIA

It is interesting to note that India, a multilingual nation, is the third largest English speaking country after US and UK.. In India, it is increasingly being perceived as a 'must know' language. It has now become a ladder for upward social mobility and 'a window to the world'. According to Timothy J. Scrase, " English is an international language. You feel humiliated if you cannot speak English. People think you are dumb." The above quote makes it crystal clear that English as a language in India enjoys a respectable position. The language which is given such importance, the history of its origin should be unfolded.

### STATUS OF ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE IN STATE SCHOOL

Concentrating the research work on West Bengal, it is found that the status of English in West Bengal schools is not good. In most of the state schools, not much importance is given to English. Just to enhance the quality of education, the three language system was introduced in most of the schools. According to the recommendation given by the education ministers in the conference held in 1957, there should be English present as a compulsory language in both primary and higher level as students should be given adequate knowledge of English so that they can receive education in university level because the students who do not have a good English base find it difficult in coping up with the university level syllabus. According to an interview taken of Ms. Shinjini Ghosh, a student of, St. John's Diocesan Girl's higher secondary school, West Bengal, " The status of English in state schools in West Bengal is not good.

Most students of state boards have problem to communicate with students of other boards because of their fluency in English. In my school more preference is given to Bengali or Hindi up to class 8. From 9

onwards we are given an option to opt for English as our first language but still the faculty is not so good and more emphasis is given on Bengali or Hindi as first language.

The time period when it time to make the base of English strong, at that point we have English as our vernacular or second language and Bengali or Hindi as our first language. In my opinion, there should be more emphasis on English because now this language has got a worldwide acceptance as the common language which everybody understands." According to a research, it was found that in 1993, there were nearly 42.26% of primary schools having Hindi as their medium of instruction and only 4.99% having English as their medium of instruction. In the year 2002, there were 46.79% of primary schools having Hindi as their medium of instruction and 12.98% as English as their medium of instruction. In this data, it is seen that Hindi was more used as a medium of Instruction than English for primary schools but the same rate is seen in upper primary and secondary level of state schools. In 20002, 41.32% of secondary schools had Hindi as their medium of instruction and 25.84% of secondary schools had English as their medium of instruction.

But now a days, English has taken the importance of other vernacular languages which they had in earlier days. It is interesting to note that the number of states which offer education at primary and upper primary levels through the medium of languages other than some states the majority increased their language.

### **IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN STATE SCHOOLS**

The language, English occupies a huge space in the area of languages. This language is presently, very much in demand. People even go to English spoken classes, held by some tutorials for learning English. More than having the interest to learn a new language they simply want to show their class and upgrade their status. English has become such a language which reveals the status of the person and the people who cannot speak proper English are looked down upon. Therefore, it is important to have a good grip over the language and a good knowledge of that language.

Further English is like clapping. Nothing happens from one side. It has to be a two way process. There should be encouragement from the guardian's side and enthusiasm from the student's side to learn the language. Certain family still has a negative perspective towards English. They feel that there regional language is being neglected and so they prefer their children to study in state schools so that he or she has a good knowledge about their own state language but they fail to understand that now a days learning English is more important than learning their own regional language because other people may not understand that local language. But every literate people is expected to know English so to communicate properly with other people. Like if a person comes to Assam or West Bengal to pursue higher studies, it cannot be expected that he will know Bengali or Assamese language.

So the common language in which he can think of speaking is English which more or less a number of people will understand. In fact in India, still the other vernacular languages can help to communicate but it will not suffice in western states like US, UK, America, etc. They people understand only English plus

without English one cannot get a good and higher education because in most of the colleges and universities the medium of communication is English. Students belonging from state schools face problem in communicating and understanding text materials which are in English.

### **MERITS OF ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE IN STATE SCHOOLS**

English is such a language which has been mandatory to be taught in all schools as first language. But at the same time it is not fair to look down upon the regional languages. As India is a land of culture, there should be importance of their local language. As the researcher has taken the state schools of West Bengal, so the sources and interview taken of students will only be regarding the state board schools of West Bengal.

The first merit which was founded from the sources is that schools having regional language as their first language give more importance to that language. They prefer their Indian language more than they prefer western languages. This gives respect and increases the respect of local languages to foreign languages.

Secondly, having local languages as first language means preserving the culture of the country and not totally adapting the western culture. The schools which has English as second language preserves the rich language culture of its old local language.

Now a days Shakespeare is given more importance than Rabindranath Tagore. Earlier, the interest taken on the poems of rich literary Bengali works of Michael Madhushudhan Dutta, Jibanananda Das, Jatindromohan Bagchi, Sukanta Bhattacharya the interest has shifted to western poets like Wilfred Owen, Robert Frost, Robert Browning, John Claire and others. There are even famous Hindi Poets like Surdas, Kabir, Tulsidas, Harivansh Rai Bachchan, Mahadevi Verma, Sumitranandan Pant, Jaishankar Prasad whose poetries are losing its importance is exhausting now a days because of the influence of the western culture and its languages.

Thirdly, having local languages as first language means it promotes regional interests. promotion of regional interests means it promotes the culture of the region through different scriptures.

Sociologically the identity of the people residing there is restored. Many people are known through the local language, like, in Bengal, the people residing there, most of them are called Bengali as per the language prevailing there. It is hence their identity.

Fourthly, it restores the integrity of the region. recognizing the regional language means promoting the basic human rights of the people and allowing them to exercise those rights. For example, East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) fought against West Pakistan because they opposed the East Pakistanis to communicate in their own language, Bengali. These languages are the identity of the people. through different language we understand from which state a person belongs.

The different language of different states beautify the country. It is interesting to note that how languages are interlinked. Like for example, Oriya is a mixture of Bengali and Hindi Language, Assamese is almost same as Bengali with few variations, Marwari is a type of Hindi language but with different style of

speaking and so on. It is quite obvious that English should not be a second language in state schools but everything has a positive side too. It is just the wait for everyone to open their eyes and see things from a broader mind and perspectives. Then even in the worst of the things, there will be a tinge of spark of at least one good thing.

## **DEMERITS OF ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE IN STATE SCHOOLS**

Everything in this world has an advantage as well as disadvantage. In this topic too, it can be seen from the other angle. Other local regional language, though having many valid reasons to be the first language in state schools still English should the first language.

The inconvenience caused to the students if English is the second language are jotted down below.

Firstly, it is a great barrier in communication. Students from state board schools do not have a good grip over English and even if they can write they are not comfortable in speaking. This causes hamper in communication. these students cannot exchange words or ideas with other people because of their lack in English knowledge.

Secondly, it causes problem in higher education. many students of state school aspire of becoming something eminent in life. But due to lack of this language they fail to do so because most colleges and universities have English as their medium of instruction and have books written in English. Though students are taught English as a subject but then it can't enhance their knowledge if all the subjects are written and taught in Bengali or Hindi.

Thirdly, it causes problem in language. It is quite obvious that if a person does not have a good grip on the respective language then definitely he will fall short of words while expressing his views thus leading to inappropriate language.

Fourthly, as English is considered as the second language in some state schools, not much attention is paid towards the subjects in state board schools. Still some of the well established schools in West Bengal like South Point, The BSS school, Carmel, St.Lawrence, etc are English medium though they have English as their second language. the students of these schools have a grip in English but in government schools like Kamala girls high school where the medium of communication is Hindi or Bengali, there the students are not affluent in English and most of them cannot speak English. they only have a subject English but all other subjects are taught in the vernacular language which in either Hindi or Bengali in West Bengal.

## **ORAL PROFICIENCY AMONG ESL LEARNERS**

English language proficiency standards need to capture the full range and complexities of methodologies that blend language and content learning. To this end, we must expand the coverage of current English language proficiency (or development) standards to bring them into alignment with practice. In addition, we must ensure that English language proficiency standards dovetail academic content standards to create a continuous pathway to academic success for our English language learners.

Language proficiency assessment, in large part, has not remained apace with changing teaching practices for our English language learners. We need to retool existing language proficiency assessment measures to match the pedagogical shift to content-based instruction. English language proficiency standards guide the development of test blueprints, task specifications, and English language proficiency measures. Thus, language proficiency standards are the first step in the construction of reliable and valid assessment tools. We must create rigorous language proficiency standards as the anchor of a sound assessment system for English language learners.

There are very few studies that specifically focus on self-assessment of oral proficiency by ESL learners. In a longitudinal case study by Yuh-Mei Chen (2008) conducted at a university in southern Taiwan twenty-eight ESL students learnt to self-assess oral performance in English by comparing student assessment with teacher assessment. This study showed that through feedback and practice, participating students make significant progress in learning to assess their own oral performance and this helped students to achieve desired learning outcomes. Not only the teacher but most of the students agreed that it was a beneficial learning practice. It should be kept in mind that results of several self-assessment studies can be contradictory because the outcome is influenced by the use of the monitor (Blanche, 1988).

This does not mean that self-assessment practices do not benefit the learners. In fact, self-assessment accuracy helps learners to become autonomous and they would not have to depend entirely on the teacher's opinion to appraise their progress. Also it would enable them to make teachers aware of their individual learning needs. Oral proficiency is a student's ability to speak a language in real-life settings, outside of the classroom. At this juncture one needs to make a distinction between proficiency and fluency. Oral proficiency describes how well you can speak a language in the real world, regardless of your textbook, grades, or class goals. While other language skills such as writing are also important, if you want to study or work in a place where English is spoken, you will need to be able to communicate effectively. On the other hand, language fluency refers to the ability to be fluent or fluid in language use and is not sufficient for language proficiency.

One can then use what one has learned to measure one's progress and set one's learning goals based on how one hope to use English in the future. A student's ability to engage in conversation, understand written or spoken text, and present information orally or in writing is developed over a number of years of learning a language. Each person is unique, and even in immersion programs, not all students attain the same level of proficiency in the same period of time. However, all students should be able to increase their proficiency each year if they are in a high-quality language program taught by a fluent and capable teacher. So, assessing language proficiency is a critical component of program evaluation. An even more important reason to assess language proficiency is to provide students with accurate feedback on their developing abilities in the language. While grades may be based on many

non-linguistic factors, such as attendance, mastery of specific grammar points, or completion of homework, language proficiency focuses only on what a student is actually able to do with the language.

### **Learning English for School**

If you are interested in studying internationally in an English-speaking country, you will most likely be required to meet a minimum level of proficiency in the English language. And because it is spoken so widely across the world, speaking English can help you communicate even in non-English-speaking countries.

Some of the best colleges and universities in the world are located in English-speaking countries such as the US and the UK. These colleges and universities use English as their medium of exchange. Learning English can help you to obtain a world-class education that will benefit you for the rest of your life. ELS Language Centers provides academic and intensive English programs to help you ace the entrance exams and feel comfortable while learning at one of these institutions.

There are programs out there to help you improve your English for your academic career, focusing on listening, reading, writing and speaking. Many of these programs can also prepare you for the TOEFL exam so that you'll be ready. Other programs take it one step further and help you achieve your academic goals while you learn English. Take Full Sail University, which not only offers English learning, but combines it with a music program or they have a pre-enrollment program for those interested in pursuing art and design.

There are many types of English programs out there, so be sure to do the research to find the one that best aligns with your academic needs.

### **Learning English for Medicine**

If you are a medical professional, you know that patients come from all over the world and speak a number of languages. Today, more and more people speak English, either as a first or second language, and so it is becoming more and more necessary for medical professionals to learn English. With English skills, you will be able to communicate with more of your patients and their loved ones, as well as fellow medical professionals who speak English.

Medical English courses are unlike normal intensive English programs. You should already have mastered general (conversational) English before enrollment, as these courses are designed to teach English used in a hospital or clinical setting. Your conversational English should be at an intermediate or advanced level, and you should have a thorough understanding of anatomy, physiology, and your own medical concentration.

So whatever your reasons for learning English, it is bound to benefit you for the rest of your life.

The Master of Education in English as a Second Language program at Worcester State University helps you become a highly trained educator who is ready to meet the challenges of teaching English Language Learners in today's diverse schools. Our program is designed for individuals with an initial teacher license in ESL and leads to a professional teacher license in ESL. With classes available in the late afternoons and evenings as well as online, our convenient program is designed for working professionals like you.

## CONCLUSION

For teachers of ELL students in U.S. public schools, the goal of helping their students attain English language proficiency is inherently complex. Proficiency is often referred to as if it were a uniform state attainable by most students in a specifically defined time frame. This notion of a one-dimensional, global language proficiency is, however, only a theoretical construct. Attaining language proficiency is not a neat process—language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) can be acquired at very different rates with spikes and plateaus during the learning. So, when is a student considered proficient in English? An ELL student does not need to be as fluent as a native speaker to be considered proficient. Rather, an ELL student needs to be proficient enough to participate in regular classes conducted in English without requiring significant English language support. Furthermore, the proficient ELL student should have a good chance of success in those classes. During the language acquisition process, immigrant children often achieve conversational fluency within one to two years, but their ability to reach gradeappropriate academic proficiency can take up to five years or longer. For these children, language can generally be divided into social language and academic language. Jim Cummins (1979) identified this linguistic phenomenon as basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). The complementary relationship between academic and social English language skills supports the structure of an English Language Proficiency test called for in NCLB. In general, the content areas of reading, writing conventions, and writing represent academic skills, and those of listening and speaking represent social skills.

Accurately assessing these two aspects of English language skills, academic and social, provides a clear picture of a student's overall English proficiency. A student's level of language proficiency is directly related to his or her success in regular classrooms.

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