

**ASSESSMENT OF PROFICIENCY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AMONG
SENIOR SECONDARY STUDENTS IN KASHMIR
(A case study of district Baramulla and Srinager)**

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to investigate the proficiency level of English language among higher secondary students in Kashmir division regarding their nature of the institution. In recent years, English language teaching in a developing country like India, has taken a new dimension. In the era of information technology, communication skills, particularly in English, have assumed vital significance. In order to learn English as a second language and develops proficiency in the language, the student must acquire all the four skills namely speaking, reading, listening and writing. In this study questionnaire was prepared which consisted of two parts. Part 1 was designed to elucidate personal information and part 2 was to illustrate the linguistic data which was designed to test the student's knowledge of all the four language skills namely speaking, listening, reading and writing. The study reflects that students enrolled in missionary schools have a higher proficiency level followed by private schools and government schools. This is because of the fact that the medium of instruction in missionary and in some private schools is an English language from the beginning while as in the government school's medium of instruction was Urdu which was recently changed into English but did not show worthy results in language proficiency.

Keywords: *ELT students;
English language proficiency;
language skills; language
system; link language;
vocabulary; syntax.*

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Introduction

In the words of Bloch and Trager, a language is the study of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group operates. In this era of globalization and information and technology, English has a special and predominant role in the communications sphere of the world. Jawaharlal Nehru said, “English is our major window on the world”. This means English gives us glimpses of various developments taking place in the world. It provides us the distilled essence of modern knowledge, in the field of human activity.

We know it well teaching of any subject is a social and cultural activity. First of all we should know how English is a link language. In my opinion, a link language is one by which a man belonging to any social, national and international strata to express himself in a better way.

English as a link language occupies a very important place in our social activities, especially in the academic domain, English has occupied a unique position and almost all the students want to learn this language to have a better future. However, it has often been realized that many students in the developing countries remain deficient in their abilities to

communicate in the spoken and written mode, although they have received several years of formal teaching of English (Widdowson 1972:15). This struggle continues right up to the university level and even students are seen to opt for a private course in the hope of improving their proficiency in English language.

2.0 English Language Proficiency:

It is the ability of students to use the English language, to make and communicate meaning in spoken and written context while completing their program of study.

2.1 Language system:

The language system refers to the specific aspects of language comprising vocabulary, grammar and communicative function and teaching such aspects of language is called a teaching language system. These aspects of the language are described below:

2.1.1 Teaching Vocabulary:

Vocabulary is a word or set of words consisting of a single word, compound words and idiom and teaching vocabulary means teaching such items. Words may be about content or function, active or passive. While teaching vocabulary, it is suggested to focus on



active vocabulary since these words are the requirements of learners for day to day communication (Sharma, 2010). Teaching vocabulary entails teaching all aspects associated with it regarding word meaning, word use, word formation and word grammar. (Wang 2013)

2.1.2 Teaching Grammar:

Grammar comprises the aspect of syntax and morphology and grammar teaching focuses on the pattern of language and practice of these rules. There are two approaches used to teach grammar, namely deductive approach and inductive approach. In deductive approach, there is a direct and explicit explanation of grammatical structures, whereas in inductive approach, there is no direct explanation of grammatical explanation, but it “favors induction or the learners' discovery of the grammatical rules through tasks” (Ellis as cited in Dang & Nguyen, 2013, p. 113). Hence, it is also called indirect, explicit grammar instruction which is considered to “have great contributions to enhancing learners' rule comprehension” (Dang & Nguyen, 2013, p. 119). But, Azar (as cited in Ezzi, 2012) recommends the application of grammar based teaching instead of adopting any of them to benefit from the advantages of both

approaches. In the practice of grammar, different grammar exercises can be conducted like awareness, controlled drills, meaningful drills, guided, meaningful practices, free sentence composition based on structure, structure based discourse composition and free discourse (Sharma, 2010).

2.1.3 Teaching Communicative Function:

Communicative function refers to communicative goal or purpose for the fulfillment of which language is used. Communicative function comprises requesting, ordering, asking for permission, etc. Language is for communication. Therefore, to teach language means to make learners communicatively competent. This means teaching language should enhance learners' communicative competence which comprises the grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence by the help of which learners become competent in handling any of the communicative situations.

2.2 Language Skills:

Modes or manners in which language is used are called language skills that comprise listening, speaking, reading and writing. These skills are grouped into receptive skills and productive skills.



Language Skills

Receptive skills	Productive skills
A: Listening	A: Speaking
B: Reading	B: Writing

2.2.1 Teaching Listening Skill:

Listening refers to the learning ability to comprehend the speaker's pronunciation, grammar and meaning along with their accent and teaching listening skills refers to teaching listening comprehension which comprises identifying words, constructing information and their utilization (Sharma 2010).

2.2.2 Teaching Speaking Skills:

Speaking is the ability to use the oral language appropriately and effectively in learning activities. The goal of teaching, speaking skill is communicative efficiency. Learners should be able to make themselves understood using their current proficiency to the fullest. They should try to avoid confusion in the message due to faulty pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and to observe the social and cultural rules that apply in common situations.

2.2.3 Teaching reading skills:

It is one of the language skills in which learner constructs the meaning from written text. It is the complex skill requiring the coordination of interrelated source of information (Anderson, Hebert, Scott and Wilkinson 1985).

While reading, reader interacts with a text, decodes it and construct a meaning. Teaching reading skills to aim at making learners practice the skill of reading and to provide language exposure that is useful for the acquisition of language.

2.2.4 Teaching Writing Skills:

Writing is the process of conveying through written symbols. The ability to put together a piece of writing that conveys meaning clearly and accurately is an essential functional skill.

The main purpose of teaching writing skill to learners is for language processing which is the learner's act of thinking in the target language that helps them to understand its construction better (Sharma 2010)



3. Method:

3.1 Sample:

The sample of this study was taken from various higher secondary institutes of Baramulla and Srinagar district of Kashmir division. The sample comprised of a total number of 300 respondents from which 100 belongs to missionary schools, 100 belonged to private schools and hundred belonged to government school. Approval was taken from the head of the institutions to furnish the data and participants was matched on certain variables like age, education and gender.

3.2 Instrument:

The questionnaire is one of the important tools for data elicitation. A questionnaire was prepared which consisted of two parts. Part one was designed to elicit personal information about the student which included items such as the student's background, their schooling at the high school level (govt. Private, missionary), economic background, educational qualifications, their parents and so on. The other part was prepared for the elicitation of linguistic data which was designed to test the student's knowledge of all the four language skills, namely reading, writing, speaking and listening.

In the present work, four separate schedules (each one for each skill) were prepared and the students were tried out in the field through a pilot study.

A brief description of the four sections covering these skills is provided below

3.2.1 Speaking Section:

The speaking section measured the ability to speak in English. The speaking test took around 15-20 minutes in the form of an interview. The interview was more like friendly conversation which typically covered some aspects of past, present and future situations. The speaking test contained three sections. The first section comprised of an interview during which respondents were asked about their hobbies, interests, and other general topics like sports and family. In the second section candidates were asked to read the given passage. The third section involved a picture story which a learner had to describe in his/her own words. The responses of the students were recorded using a tape recorder.

3.2.2 Listening Section:

The Listening section aims to measure the learner's ability to understand English. Conversational features of the language were



stressed, and the skills tested included vocabulary and grammatical constructions that are frequently used in spoken English. This section included two subsequent monologues. In the first case the monologue was immediately followed by questions to check their Extensive/Intensive listening. In case of the second monologue, the students were asked to read the questions first and then listen to the recording to ensure that students listen with some definite purpose. This test takes approximately thirty minutes. The listening material was recorded on a cassette tape which the student heard only once.

3.2.3 Reading Section:

The Reading section was devised to measure the ability of the learner to read and understand short passages. Students were asked to read two short passages on different subjects and answer several questions about each passage. The questions in this section assessed the comprehension of main ideas, factual information stated in a passage, and vocabulary. It also included a cloze type of question so that respondent pays close attention to the meaning of each sentence. This he/she does by choosing a word that fits semantically to measure the learner's comprehension at a deeper level. It was one

hour duration.

3.2.4 Writing Section:

The writing section was designed to measure the ability to write in English, including the ability to generate, organize, and develop ideas, and to support those ideas with examples or evidence. The writing test included writing summary of a given passage, essay based questions and report based questions. The responses of these were elicited on separate sheets. Time allotted for this test was 1 hour and 30 minutes.

4. Result:

After collecting the data from a survey method, it was converted into numbers before transferring to an excel spreadsheet so the data was codified and then quantified. The quantitative data was captured in a software program called a statistical package of social sciences (spss) version 14.0 for its final analyses and tabulation purposes.

Table first shows that significant difference in English language proficiency among learners in terms of nature of the institution.



Nature Of Institution	Reading	Writing	Listening	Speaking	Grand Mean
Missionary Schools	3.45	3.33	2.39	2.61	11.78
Private Schools	3.36	2.9	2	2.04	10.3
Government School	2.48	2.67	1.36	1.39	7.89

5. Discussion:

The above table shows that ELT students of government institutions were less proficient than that of missionary and private institutions in each of the skills and aspects of language.

In reading aspects: Government higher secondary students mean (M=2.48)

Missionary higher secondary students mean (M=3.45)

A private higher secondary students mean (M=3.36)

In writing aspects: Government higher secondary students mean (M=2.67)

Missionary higher secondary students mean (M=3.33)

Private higher secondary students mean (M=2.9)

In listening aspects: Government higher secondary students mean (M=1.36)

Missionary higher secondary students mean (M=2.39)

Private higher secondary students mean (M=2.0)

In speaking aspects: Government higher secondary students mean (M=1.39)

Missionary higher secondary students mean (M=2.61)

Private higher secondary students mean (M=2.04)

In overall Government higher secondary students mean is 7.89 which is less than missionary students mean (11.78) and private higher secondary students mean (10.3)

6. Conclusion:

After analysis of all the items of proficiency test and discussion made, a conclusion can be drawn that the English proficiency of ELT students of senior secondary level education in government schools of Baramulla and Srinagar district is very poor. Therefore, ELT teachers are recommended to adopt the effective methods and techniques so as to enhance the learner's proficiency level of English language.



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