

Full Length Research Paper

Effect of proficiency in English on the performance of B. Tech students in group discussion

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The following study has been done to study the effect of proficiency in English on the performance of engineering students in group discussion. The hypothesis was framed in such a way that the higher the student's proficiency in English, the better will their performance be in group discussion. The first year students of Motilal Nehru National Institute of Technology were taken as respondents. Group discussion sheets were prepared and every student was marked by three examiners on six dimensions, each dimension consisting of five marks. Class test marks of the same students were also collected. Correlation between group discussion marks and class test marks was calculated and the correlation was high. The result showed that the students who have good proficiency in English have good self-efficacy and also perform well in group discussions. Previous studies have also shown that students who have low proficiency in English have low self-efficacy, and as such they fear to perform in groups and in public. Students who are well proficient in English Language perform better and are well settled in the global market because of their better thinking and expression capability.

Key words: Proficiency, group discussion, expression capability, good self-efficacy.

INTRODUCTION

English in India is a legacy from the British who colonized the country and their language permeated through some of the most important parts of the society: the government, the media, the education system, the legal system and gradually the social sphere as well. India is a vast nation and in terms of number of English speakers, it ranks third in the world after USA and the UK. An estimated 4% of the population use English and even though this may seem like a small number, that is about 40 million people. This small segment of the population controls domains that have professional and social prestige. Though it is closer to British English since it originates from that style, with the influx of globalization, American English has definitely had an impact on the youth as well as in the professional sphere. However, it cannot be classified as American or British English as it intermingled with other Indian languages and emerged with its own distinct flavor.

This has made several scholars realize that it cannot be

equated with either. In higher education English is the premier prestigious language and careers in any area of business or commerce, or within the government, or in science and technology require fluency in English. It is taught in schools, ranging from the most elite private schools to small government schools because only this language is an acceptable medium of communication throughout the nation. Other than the more formal sectors of administration, media and education, English has seeped into the less formal social sphere. It is certainly considered instrumental in terms of having access to information from all over the world and as a key factor for professional success; it is also very much a part of the educated middle and upper class personal life, especially of the youth in India. India, often called the land of diversity, is similar to the entire European continent. Each state of India, almost the size of a European country, has its own culture and language. Each Indian language is distinctly different from another. Most Indian languages have their own script - the scripts are distinctly different as well. As a matter of fact, out of a total of 25 scripts invented on this planet by mankind, 10 are from India. Therefore, for an Indian person traveling to another state

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in India, it is like going to a foreign country, for the respective local language becomes very much unfamiliar to the person concerned. De facto, English is the "common" language among most educated Indians today. When two Indians from different states meet, they invariably communicate with each other in English. Not every person in India can speak English. In urban areas, a higher percentage of people speak English while in the rural agrarian areas very few people speak English. 54% of India's population is less than 25 years of age—that is a whopping 550 million young Indians. Among young Indians, the percentage of English literacy is much higher. English skills are a must to get an entry into corporate India. In India, English skills are part of the social hierarchy. Practically, every person in the higher and upper middle class section of the Indian society is fluent in English. In fact, English fluency is kind of a prerequisite for the upward mobility in the class ladder. It is the language of all businesses, government and education. The entire university education in India is in English - very similar to what you find in the USA. Every computer user in India uses Microsoft Windows—English edition. Microsoft has provided support for Indian languages only from Windows Vista released in 2006 and not even 1% of all computer users in India use Indian languages for computers. The language has already been well established in the country and has acquired its own independent identity. With the number of foreign investors flocking to India and the growth of outsourcing, English has come to play a key role in professional relationships between foreign and Indian companies.

Familiarity with the differences between American and British English has definitely grown as much business communication is carried out according to the language style with which a client is comfortable. Though many may perceive the accent, terminology and conversational style as "funny", in reality it is just different English that cannot simply be equated with either American or British English. Indians are familiar with both types of English, but Indian English has acquired its own character in a country which is a melting pot of various cultures, people and traditions. Self-efficacy perceptions are judgments regarding one's capability to successfully perform specific tasks and behaviours (Saks, 1995). It is the belief in one's capability to organize and execute the course of action required to manage prospective situations (Bandura, 1999). In essence, self-efficacy is the confidence that one has in one's ability to do the things that one tries to do. Bandura (1986) earlier defined self-efficacy as people's judgment of their capabilities to organize and execute the course of action required to attain designated types of performances. It is concerned not with the skills one has, but with the judgments of what one can do with whatever skills one possesses. Thus, perceived self-efficacy is a significant determinant of performance which operates partially independently of underlying skills (Bandura, 1986). It involves a generative capability in which one

must organize cognitive, social and behavioral sub-skills into integrated courses of action (Saks, 1995). Efficacy belief varies in level, strength and generality and these dimensions prove important in determining appropriate measurement. In academic settings, self-efficacy instruments may ask students to rate their confidence in solving specific problems, performing particular reading or writing tasks, or engaging in certain self-regulatory strategies. Social indexes are also used to ask students to express their confidence of success in various social situations (Pajare, 2002). Most investigations on self-efficacy in academic settings have sought to determine the predictive value of self-efficacy belief on varied performance. This is why Bandura (1996) argued that the stronger the self-efficacy, the more likely the person is to select challenging tasks, persist at them and perform them successfully. Academic achievement depends heavily on the students' personal conviction of being in charge of their own fate. The high achievers did not ascribe their fate to luck or to the vagaries of chances, but rather to their own personal decisions and efforts (Richardson et al., 1998). In the same vein, students who rarely experience success in the classroom and perceive themselves as academic failures often develop a syndrome that includes a variety of self-defeating motives. For example, such students are far more apt to develop an external locus of control, they are low in self-regulated learning strategies and they have low levels of self-efficacy and low motivation (Richardson, 1998).

Frank et al. (2003) said that prior determinants such as ability and previous performance attainments help to create self-efficacy perceptions and are also strong predictors of subsequent performance. Waldman (2003) asserts, "that it is important to note that academic self-efficacy beliefs vary according to subject matter, in that students may have high self-efficacy in one subject but not in another: mathematics self-efficacy is independent of writing self-efficacy, depending on their mastery and vicarious experiences in each subject". "Since people are generally more interested in performing activities in which they have high self-efficacy", according to Ren (2003), "it can be inferred that students with high self-efficacy will be more likely to take advantage of what is around them (for example, electronic information)". If they are familiar and feel comfortable with electronic information (Internet, electronic journals, CD-ROM database, etc.), they will use them, and if they feel that learning through these electronic information resources will enhance their academic performance, they will learn about them.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

In this study an attempt is being made to assess the performance and confidence level of B. Tech students in group discussion, according to their proficiency in English

and self-efficacy.

HYPOTHESIS

The higher the capability of a student to speak and write in English, the higher will be his performance and confidence level in group discussion.

METHODOLOGY

Tools for the study

The following tools were used in the present study: group discussion marking sheets where the individual students were marked. Class test marks of all the students were also collected. They were marked by three different examiners. Three examiners marked each student separately on different group discussion marking sheets in order to avoid biased results.

Participants

Eighty three first year B.Tech students of Motilal Nehru National Institute of Technology, Allahabad were selected for the test. The ages of the participants were between 18 to 20 years. The students were from both English and vernacular mediums background.

Procedure

At first, the class test marks of each student were collected from the three different examiners. The maximum marks of the test were 30. The questions asked were on Basic English Grammar and the group discussion sheets were prepared. There were six dimensions in the question papers, each of 5 marks like vocabulary, syntax, subject knowledge, compatibility, presentation and body language. The students were randomly divided into groups consisting of six participants each. They were all given a similar topic and each group was given some time to think and 15 min time to carry on with the discussion. While they were performing, three different examiners were marking them simultaneously. The examiners did not know the students before, so that bias could be avoided.

RESULTS

After the collection of data, the marks of the three examiners were averaged for the group discussion. Then the marks of the group discussion and class test were tabulated on a sheet and the correlation between the two was calculated. The correlation was calculated to be 0.98, which implied that the correlation between the two marks in class test and performance in group discussion is very much significant.

DISCUSSION

In this study, the correlation between efficacy in English and performance in group discussion is very high and therefore significant. Previous researches have indicated

that the perceived self efficacy levels in students have an effect on their performance and achievement. Here, the findings can be explained in the light of Vang Mary, Montanez and Marcel's joint project on "Self efficacy and performance in English Language learners" (2010-03-05T10:56:23Z [http://minds.wisconsin.edu/oai/request/oai ...](http://minds.wisconsin.edu/oai/request/oai...)). Their results had shown that self efficacy, reading and learning vocabulary were found to be a significant predictor of growth in reading and vocabulary. Moreover, self efficacy also had a significant impact on English Language learning students' performance. In the present study, it was observed that almost all the students have performed well in group discussion and they also had good proficiency in English. The similar findings were also reported by Kristen Lockwood (1994 - 2009) <http://mathforum.org/>.

Finally, the present study can also be explained and related to Malaki and Zangani's (2007) study on Iranian EFL students. Their study also revealed between English Language proficiency and achievement in English speaking and writing subject. Thus, the present study effectively showed that if a student has high proficiency in English, he will perform well.

IMPLICATIONS

According to previous research findings, the results gathered from the present study, high proficiency in English appears to be a significant factor in the performance and achievement of students in their lives. So keeping this view in mind, schools, colleges and authorities need to be aware of the fact that English Language training should be effectively imparted to the students.

Previous studies have also shown that students who have low proficiency in English have low self efficacy, and as such they fear to perform in groups and in public. Students, who are well proficient in English language perform better and are well settled in the global market because of their better thinking and expression capability. In addition, the results of the present study also indicate other necessary implications for teachers. Teachers must implement effective steps to help students to have good command over English Language so that they can achieve success in life.

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