



ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AMONG STUDENTS ENROLLED IN PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMMES IN HARYANA

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Abstract

English language proficiency is not merely an academic necessity but an important skill required for overall personality development and career growth of the students. The present paper examines the proficiency of students, enrolled in professional courses in Haryana, in English language through a sample of 355 respondents. The responses were analysed using statistical measures of mean, standard deviation, t-test and one-way Anova. The results testify that female students exhibit significantly higher language proficiency than their male counterparts. Students from rural background have poor English communication skills and much needs to be done at school and higher education institution's level to improve their language proficiency.

Keywords: English language proficiency, Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing

1. Introduction

India is the world's fastest growing economy. Her demographic dividend opens a window of opportunity to drive the economy onto the path of higher growth. To capitalise this opportunity, the New Education Policy 2020 emphasises on skill development among youth. It supports development of critical thinking skills, communication skills, collaboration and creativity, highlighting communication as a foundational skill. In today's globalised, technology and information driven world, developing proficiency in English language is must for personal and professional success of a student. To succeed in their chosen careers, learners must put in a lot of effort to enhance their speaking abilities. (Al-Sheikhly et al., 2020; Graf et al., 2020).

English language skills refer to the ability to use the language effectively in day-to-day life. It includes listening, speaking, writing and reading

abilities. It is frequently spoken as a connecting language throughout the nation in India as well as internationally (Mohamed et al., 2016). In addition to being a language for communication with international business partners (Riemer, 2002), English is now widely utilized by employees in their day-to-day work (Warschauer, 2000). Successful exchange of information involves careful attention, communications process, an ability to manage pressure in a given situation, and the design of interpreting and understanding your own for the individual whom you're interacting with (Hawamleh et al., 2019).

Listening skill, the widely used method of communication, refers to the ability to comprehend and analyse the oral message. Listening often is the best way to learn a language. It is Speaking skill that gives an individual the ability to express one's ideas and emotions in form of an oral message. It requires vocabulary, knowledge of grammar, pronunciation

and intonation to be an effective speaker. Reading is the skill of comprehending the text and decoding the meaning of the words. It is considered as one of the best hobbies one may have. The art of presenting one's ideas and thoughts in form of grammatically correct structured text is referred to as writing skill.

Good communication skills are vital for academic and professional of students enrolled in professional courses. A student who is proficient in English language has better chances of being successful in job interviews, professional networking, engaging in discussions and handling cross-cultural negotiations. Oral communication is crucial for hiring and promoting employees as well as for ensuring their professional success (Bhattacharyya et al., 2009).

Development of these skills among the students may not be balanced. Good speakers may not be good listeners or those who are good at writing in English may not be good speakers. Past research has proved that the ability to speak does not ensure proficiency in rest of the three skills of English language (Powers 2010; Sawaki et al., 2009). These skills are different yet interrelated, with each skill adding to an individual's language proficiency. Moreover, communications will be of greater

significance if intellectual, physiological, and emotional elements are incorporated into an effective conversation (Kondo et al., 2020).

The objective of the present study is to investigate the presence of the four vital English communication skills among students enrolled in professional programmes in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Haryana.

2. Research Design

Data used in the study is primary in nature and is collected through survey method using a pre-designed questionnaire. Survey is an excellent mean to understand respondents' opinion. The sampling unit for the survey consists of students enrolled in professional courses, namely, B.Tech. and M.B.A. in different HEIs in Haryana.

The questionnaire consists of statements pertaining to the respondent's proficiency in four English communication skills: listening, speaking, writing and reading; their attitude towards English language and their perception regarding impact of English language on employability. The respondents were asked to fill the questionnaire on five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Table 1: Data Collected through Questionnaire

Survey method	Questionnaires Distributed	Questionnaires Received	Found Usable	Response rate
Primary	500	408	355	71%

Source: Author's compilation

The response to the questionnaire as given in Table 1 is 71% which seems to be satisfactory. Table 2 describes the demographic profile of the the 355 respondents in terms of gender (male or female), programme enrolled in (B.Tech. or M.B.A.) and area to which they belong (urban, semi-urban or

rural). There were 210 male and 145 female respondents of which 254 were enrolled in B.Tech Programme and 101 were enrolled in MBA. Majority students belonged to urban area (188) and least no of respondents are from rural background (49).

Table 2: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Demographics	Sub levels	Frequency	(%)
Gender	Male	210	59.2
	Female	145	40.8
Course	MBA	101	28.5

	B.Tech	254	71.5
Area	Urban	188	53.0
	Semi-urban	118	33.2
	Rural	49	13.8
Total No. of Respondents = 355			

Source: Author's compilation

Statistical techniques like descriptive statistics like mean and standard deviation have been used to analyse the data. Independent sample One sample t-test is used to evaluate if the calculated mean values are significantly different from the 3 which represents the neutral value on a five-point Likert scale. T-test and one-way Anova have been used to investigate the differences in mean responses across gender and area.

3. Results and Discussion

It is generally believed that proficiency in English language is a strong determinant of not only the academic success of students but also determines their professional competence. The present study examines the proficiency in English language of students enrolled in professional

courses in Haryana. Their language proficiency has been examined across four parameters, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing.

3.1 Listening Skills Proficiency

The listening skills of the students have been assessed with the help of the following six items measuring various aspects of listening in and outside the classroom setting: I can understand lectures delivered in English; I can follow English audio (podcast/lecture) at normal native-speaker speed; I can identify the speaker's main idea even if I miss some words; I understand technical terms related to my field when spoken in English; I can take meaningful notes while listening to an English lecture; I can easily understand different English accents.

Table 3: Listening Skills of Students

Statements (Listening)	Code	Mean	SD	t-Value	p-Value
I can understand lectures delivered in English	L1	4.32	0.559	44.330	0.000
I can follow English audio (podcast/lecture) at normal native-speaker speed.	L2	3.67	0.695	18.110	0.000
I can identify the speaker's main idea even if I miss some words.	L3	3.99	0.785	23.875	0.000
I understand technical terms related to my field when spoken in English.	L4	4.23	0.672	34.344	0.000
I can take meaningful notes while listening to an English lecture	L5	3.77	0.731	19.827	0.000
I can easily understand different English accents.	L6	2.91	0.978	-1.683	0.093
Overall Mean= 3.81 (0.660)					
t-value = 23.242					
p-value= 0.000					
Cronbach's Alpha= 0.943					
Note(s): SD= Standard deviation. p-value is significant at 1% level. Value in parenthesis shows standard deviation.					

Source: Author's compilation

The computed mean values of items L1 to L5 are significant at 1% level and are above the neutral value of 3, indicating that most of the students agree that they understand the lectures delivered in English (mean=4.32), follow audios in English (mean=3.67), identify the idea of the speaker (mean=3.99), easily comprehend technical terms in English (mean=4.23) and are able to make notes of lecture delivered in English (mean=3.77). The students find it difficult to understand English in different accents as the mean value is below three and is insignificant. The overall listening skills of the sample are satisfactory (mean= 3.81) and significant at 1% level. It may be inferred that students enrolled in professional courses in Haryana have satisfactory to good listening skills in relation to English language.

3.2 Speaking Skills Proficiency

Mastry in speaking skills is crucial to boost professional students' confidence and prepare them to face challenges posed by the dynamic business world. The speaking skills proficiency has been measured using six items denoting varied aspects of spoken proficiency of the students: I can express ideas clearly in English during class discussions; I can give presentation in English on a topic from my field; I can use appropriate professional vocabulary when speaking about my subject; I can answer questions spontaneously in English without long pauses; I can pronounce English words clearly so that native and non-native speakers understand me; I can handle social conversations in English on phone and personally with others.

Table 4: Speaking Skills of Students

Statements (Speaking)	Code	Mean	SD	t-Value	p-Value
I can express ideas clearly in English during class discussions	S1	4.16	0.903	24.280	0.000
I can give presentation in English on a topic from my field	S2	3.71	1.018	13.134	0.000
I can use appropriate professional vocabulary when speaking about my subject.	S3	4.05	0.844	23.392	0.000
I can answer questions spontaneously in English without long pauses	S4	3.60	0.772	14.712	0.000
I can pronounce English words clearly so that native and non-native speakers understand me	S5	3.69	1.041	12.544	0.000
I can handle social conversations in English on phone and personally with others.	S6	3.31	1.046	5.529	0.000
Overall Mean= 3.75 (0.879) t-value = 16.154 p-value= 0.000					
Cronbach's Alpha= 0.970					
Note(s): SD= Standard deviation. p-value is significant at 1% level. Value in parenthesis shows standard deviation.					

Source: Author's compilation

The results presented in Table 4 depict that students are highly comfortable participating in class discussions and using technical terms in English as evident from high mean values of 4.16 and 4.05 respectively which are significant at 1% level. Students feel comparatively less confident in giving presentations (mean = 3.71) and answering spontaneously without long pauses (mean = 3.60).

The respondents are found to be least comfortable in handling day to day conversations in English as reflected by the least mean score of 3.31. It seems they prefer using local language or their mother tongue while conversing in informal setting.

3.3 Reading Skills Proficiency

Reading skills are indispensable for growth of a student. The present study examined the reading skills of the respondents through five items: I can read and understand books in English related to my field; I read English newspapers, magazines, or

blogs and other social media platforms regularly for information; I do not need to translate English reading material into my native language to understand it; I can scan long texts quickly to find required information and I can summarize an academic article in English in my own words.

Table 5: Reading Skills of Students

Statements (Reading)	Code	Mean	SD	t-Value	p-Value
I can read and understand books in English related to my field	R1	4.37	0.810	31.770	0.000
I read English newspapers, magazines, or blogs and other social media platforms regularly for information	R2	3.61	0.851	13.466	0.000
I do not need to translate English reading material into my native language to understand it	R3	3.86	0.879	18.537	0.000
I can scan long texts quickly to find required information	R4	3.86	0.927	17.519	0.000
I can summarize an academic article in English in my own words	R5	4.22	0.767	29.890	0.000
Overall Mean= 3.98 (0.763) t-value = 24.299 p-value= 0.000					

Source: Author's compilation

The results depict that the students understand the text books and reference books in English and comfortably summarise the text given in English as evident from high mean values of 4.37 and 4.22 respectively. Students do not need to translate the study material in native language. But they are less inclined to read blogs, newspaper etc. regularly for information. The overall reading skills of the students seem to be highly satisfactory with a highly significant mean value of 3.98.

3.4 Writing Skills Proficiency:

Writing is considered as the most technical aspect of English language proficiency. One needs good vocabulary, knowledge of sentence structures and grammar to express his/her ideas in a way that may be explicitly understood. Four statements have been used to assess the writing skills of the respondent students as follows: I can easily write answers to questions in English; I can write professional emails and WhatsApp messages in English with correct tone and formatting; I am able to use English Grammar easily when writing in English and I can proofread and edit my own English writing to improve clarity.

Table 6: Writing Skills of Students

Statements (Writing)	Code	Mean	SD	t-Value	p-Value
I can easily write answers to questions in English	W1	4.23	0.777	29.696	0.000
I can write professional emails and WhatsApp messages in English with correct tone and formatting	W2	4.24	0.764	30.565	0.000

I am able to use English Grammar easily when writing in English.	W3	3.78	0.826	17.738	0.000
I can proofread and edit my own English writing to improve clarity	W4	3.83	0.986	15.886	0.000
Overall Mean= 4.02 (0.799) t-value = 24.012 p-value= 0.000					

Source: Author's compilation

The analysis of the responses exhibits that the students are highly comfortable in writing answers in English. They do not face much problem in attempting examinations. They also perceive that writing WhatsApp messages and emails in English is no a tedious job as the calculated mean values 4.23 and 4.24 are significant at 1% level. Students are not as comfortable with English grammar as evident from relatively lower mean value. The overall writing skills of the students are satisfactory reflected by statistically significant mean of 4.02 with corresponding t-value 24.012 and p-value 0.000.

3.5 English Language Proficiency across Gender and Area:

The study further dives deeper into the demographic nuances of the selected respondents to judge if the language proficiency skills vary across gender and area of residence of the respondents.

The findings of the study are an eye opener as evident from the results presented in Table 7. For all the aspects of English language proficiency, females have a significantly higher mean proficiency score when compared to their male counterparts. The highest proficiency of the girl students is in writing (mean = 4.67) followed by speaking (mean = 4.41), listening (mean = 4.23) and reading (mean = 4.14). All these scores are above 4, reflecting higher level of skill among female students. On the other hand, the mean scores for male students are significantly lower spanning from reading (3.88), writing (mean = 3.57), listening (mean = 3.53) and speaking (mean = 3.30). This further reflects that the schemes undertaken by government at central and state levels to empower women and reduce gender disparity have borne fruits as reflected in the relatively English language proficiency scores of the female students in Haryana.

Table 7: English Language Proficiency across Gender

Construct	Male		Female		t	p-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Listening	3.53	0.555	4.23	0.579	-11.392	0.000
Speaking	3.30	0.744	4.41	0.604	-14.887	0.000
Reading	3.88	0.781	4.14	0.709	-3.267	0.000
Writing	3.57	0.654	4.67	0.466	-17.568	0.000

Source: Author's compilation

The results presented in Table 8 reflect uneven distribution of language proficiency across the area of residence of the respondents. The students have been grouped under three categories based on the place of residence, namely, urban, semi-urban and rural. Findings of the study clearly outline that the students belonging to urban areas outperform the other students. Their English language proficiency skills are significantly higher for all the aspects of language proficiency. The students

from semi-urban areas have relatively lower mean scores when compared to the students from urban areas. Still their mean scores are more than 3 reflecting that their English language proficiency skills are satisfactory and may be improved with little more effort. Students from rural area need immediate help in improving their English language skills as the mean scores for all the four skill sets (listening = 2.87, speaking = 2.36, reading = 2.53 and writing 2.92) are lower than 3. Much needs to be

done at school level to improve the foundation of the students in English.

Table 8: English Language Proficiency across Area

Construct	Area			Fisher's one way ANOVA	p-value	Tukey's Post Hoc analysis	
	Urban	Semi-urban	Rural				
Listening	4.25 (0.49)	3.51 (0.25)	2.87 (0.42)	255.915	0.000	Urban	Semi-urban (0.746 at 0.00 sig. level) Rural (1.38 at 0.00 sig. level)
						Semi-urban	Rural (0.640 at 0.00 sig. level)
Speaking	4.27 (0.57)	3.51 (0.61)	2.36 (0.58)	217.773	0.000	Urban	Semi-urban (0.757 at 0.00 sig. level) Rural (1.90 at 0.00 sig. level)
						Semi-urban	Rural (1.14 at 0.00 sig. level)
Reading	4.53 (0.27)	3.72 (0.30)	2.53 (0.52)	785.501	0.000	Urban	Semi-urban (0.816 at 0.00 sig. level) Rural (2.00 at 0.00 sig. level)
						Semi-urban	Rural (1.18 at 0.00 sig. level)
Writing	4.36 (0.60)	3.93 (0.72)	2.92 (0.52)	100.190	0.000	Urban	Semi-urban (0.427 at 0.00 sig. level) Rural (1.44 at 0.00 sig. level)
						Semi-urban	Rural (1.01 at 0.00 sig. level)

Source: Author's compilation

4. Conclusion

English is lingua franca of the globalised world. It is important for students as it provides them access to education and career avenues around the globe. The present paper investigated English language proficiency skills among students enrolled in professional courses in Haryana. The results indicated that the students portray satisfactory listening, reading, speaking and writing skills in English. Female students exhibit significantly higher language proficiency than their male counterparts. Students from rural background have poor English communication skills and much needs

to be done at school and higher education institution's level to improve their language proficiency.

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