



UGC MINOR RESEARCH PROJECT

The Problems Faced by Students from the Vernacular Background in the Acquisition of General Proficiency in English.

FINAL REPORT

MRP(H)-0038/12-13/KABA095/UGC-SWRO

Submitted To:

**UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION
South Western Regional Office, Bangalore**

**Principal Investigator :
Kalpana.R
Associate Professor,
Department of English,
Government First Grade College,
K.R.Puram
Bangalore -560036**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The topic, “The Problems faced by the students from the Vernacular Background in the acquisition of the General Proficiency in English” is one of the most important topics in English Language Teaching today.

The focus of the study are under graduate students from the Kannada medium background. The colleges chosen were four rural and four urban all affiliated to the Bangalore University. Two categories of students namely the B.com and the B.A students were selected, the rationale being both these categories of students can opt to answer all the other papers barring the General English paper itself in Kannada. The teaching as well as the learning situations in both the contexts are same yet paradoxically different due to certain obvious reasons.

It is a very common thing to hear about the students failing in English while having cleared the other subjects, sometimes in flying colours. In case of those who manage to clear the paper, it has to do with the general proficiency levels which are very dismal. The paradox is that English is offered as a part of the curriculum and they would not have spent less than twelve years in studying English as a subject up till their PUC. The project is broadly divided into five chapters, namely:

1. Background to the Study and its Scope.
2. The Research Methodology.
3. Analyses and Findings.
4. Implications.
5. Conclusions.

The research methodology was to get the written samples through the questionnaires. The researcher’s understanding is that objective type of questions are inadequate to test linguistic competency. To test this, questionnaires containing objective type of questions were circulated. It was corroborated when the questionnaires were analyzed.

While examining the samples, it was found that it was just a shot in the dark strategy that most of the students had followed and that the questions were not answered with any real understanding of them. This was proven by the fact that when the same question was repeated, worded differently of course, the answers given were diametrically opposite to the one required. The two answers (the same answers required for two different questions worded differently) selected were contradictions of sorts.

Therefore the questionnaires expecting paragraph answers were circulated. Out of the eight questions given, they were supposed to answer six and these were from their syllabus just to ensure readiness to answer the questions. Two out of eight questions were of a general nature about their impressions of English as a subject and their expectations of their English teachers.

The analyses and findings were shocking, in a way not highly unexpected. It is common knowledge among the English teachers that the proficiency levels are bad among the students from Kannada medium background but, the corroboration of it by way of samples are indeed disheartening for any English teacher teaching at the under graduate level.

The analyses was done using the factors such as the number of questions answered, the total number of sentences used, the content covered, the range of vocabulary, the Grammaticality and the analytical understanding of the student. The comparative study of the outcome between the B.Com and the B.A students was also done. Right from the number of questions covered to the content, inadequacy was the hall mark. The number of questions attempted ranged between 3 and 4 in 80% of the cases. Any information they had at the moment passed off for content and was found to be highly irrelevant to the questions asked. The spellings of even a simple word like friend were found to be incorrect in a number of cases not to speak of the grammatical aspects, their usage of which showed minimum intelligibility.

Of course the commerce students fared better than their B.A counterparts and they also showed a bright prospect for improvement for the obvious reason of more exposure to English. The situations for them is conducive and encouraging with prospects of campus interviews and a high probability of getting decent jobs by dint of studying practical subjects like Accountancy, Costing and Income Tax. The teachers teach the other subjects in English also in addition to following the bi lingual teaching, in the heterogeneous composition of students who opt to answer the core subjects in both English and Kannada languages. In many cases, the teaching is imparted in English only.

On the other hand, majority of the Arts students (majority here conveniently means over 90%) answer the core subject papers only in Kannada. Their exposure to English is only during the English class. Bilingual teaching is followed wherein, in some cases Kannada is used more than English to drive home the meaning of the lessons. Learning by rote and regurgitation are the only alternatives for the students whose range of vocabulary is not even a register of one hundred words. Even with this minimum register of vocabulary, they can't write correct spellings. There is a blackout in the final year where they do not have to study English at all. So at the end of their graduation they will be back in square one.

This raises important questions on the qualitative aspects of education, the poor prospects with low proficiency levels and low employability quotient considering that English is a highly empowering language in the present day globalized world. The ethics of the entire educational system stands to be questioned when a student who has passed B.A, scoring good marks, due to the low proficiency level is only in a position to find a cab driver's job in a call centre (ferrying perhaps people less qualified than him but with immaculate English acquired from studying in the English medium). Such has been the experience with a student in the researcher's own college. It is no stray or isolated example by any stretch of imagination. It is a representative example and only fact finding committees specially constituted will be in a position to ascertain the magnitude of the problem.

An important finding has been the debunking a myth that the urban students in the same situation are better off than their rural counterparts.

Chapter 4 focuses on aspects of curriculum designing, the implications of bi lingual teaching and critiquing the existing evaluation patterns to ascertain their share to the current plight which is anything other than dismal for the aforementioned group of students especially the Arts students.

Chapter 5 covers aspects such as the root of the problem and gives recommendations of the possible immediate as well as long term solutions. It has to be reiterated once again that the root of the problem lies elsewhere at the primary level with the largesse of the examination system seeing the students through year in and year out. But passing the buck will not yield any tangible results at all. The immediacy of the problem necessitates immediate solutions which makes it imperative to switch over to ***need based curriculum designing***. This will at least ensure some learning howsoever rudimentary and will stave off the possibility of the students enrolling for the spoken English classes after their graduation to once again master the ***basics*** of the language if nothing more.

The most important and serious implication is for the future of teaching itself with increasing numbers of such students venturing for higher studies and who show the same proclivities of not really learning but qualifying. They become instrumental in perpetuating the vicious system which has already become a reality.

The study also focuses on the teachers' perspective on what it means to teach English to the Arts and the Commerce students from the Kannada medium background. Though it is the same subjects, there are variations even at the teaching level with the teaching strategies adopted differing in the case of both the Arts and Commerce students dependent on the varied competency levels.

A few representative ,ironically the best among the poor samples have been scanned and included in the project report . The formulations have been made after taking into consideration the opinions of the practising teachers and many with long years of teaching experience. As an incidental activity, this research has also focused on the

reading and the listening competencies while generalizing upon speaking competency.
But the main thrust is on examining the writing samples.