

Review

English for Specific Purposes: College Students' Predilection and Attitudes

M. Muthaiyan¹ and Kannayya Kanchana²

¹Assistant Professor in English, SVS College of Engineering, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India.

¹Corresponding author's E-mail: englab.mk@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Government Arts College in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India.

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A person needs to communicate with his society so any language should be used that is English language as a global language. Language teachers are facing professional decisions to ensure effective language teaching and rely to a great extent on learner centeredness, learning centeredness and communicative language teaching. This paper addresses the issue of college students' preferences for the methodology of learning English language and the importance of proficiency that is placed on various language skills such as speaking and listening for communication. Research aimed at gathering data from students in the college of engineering and making informed decisions to improve the quality of language teaching and learning. This study strives to make changes in learning English among engineering students and develop their communicative language with peer groups. The implications of this research for language teachers is to find innovative ways of motivating learners to lifelong learning, negotiating with learners on their priorities for various activities in class, and incorporating activities that learners prefer for their betterment in second learning.

Keywords: Attitudes and Motivation, Communicative language teaching, Interest in Speaking, Second Language learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Each language teacher has to make professional decisions to ensure effective language learning. Several key concepts with an influence on effective language learning include learner-centeredness, learning-centeredness and communicative language teaching.

Learner-centeredness means active involvement of learners in their learning processes. Learning-centeredness means that learners are able to decide what and how to learn. Communicative language teaching involves real communication - carrying out

meaningful tasks and teaching meaningful (to the learner) language.

Teachers' decisions made during language instruction depend on various factors, the most important of which are the goals of a language course, the needs of the individual learner as well as learner methodological preferences and attitudes to the importance of various language skills.

This paper addresses the issue of learners' 'likes' and 'dislikes' of the methodology of learning a foreign

1 How do you like learning?	
A – Individually	33%
B - In Pairs	33%
C - In Small Groups	20%
D - In One Large Group	14%

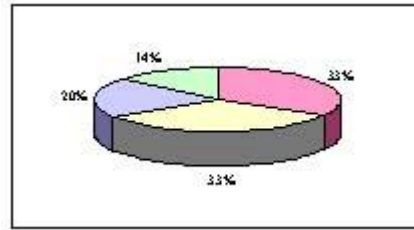


Figure 1.

language and the importance of proficiency that is placed on various language skills. The investigation aimed at gathering such data from students in the college of engineering and making informed decisions to ensure effective language learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As attitude is one of the key predominant factors for success in language learning, numerous studies have already been conducted in the field of language attitude (Alhmali, 2007). In addition, Saidat (2010) mentions that language attitude research has been considered in the previous 50 years because of the growing relation between the importance of the language use and the nature of individuals. However, the information concerning the language attitudes and communicative language teaching of college students, especially SVS College of Engineering students are not sufficient. For that reason, this study investigates the attitudes of EPP learners towards English language at engineering college in Coimbatore.

Definitions of Attitude

Researchers in the fields of psychology and education, especially language learning, consider several definitions of attitude which mention different meanings from different contexts and perspectives (Alhmali, 2007). Based on the theory of planned behavior, Montano and Kasprzyk (2008, p. 71) state,

“Attitude is determined by the individual's beliefs about outcomes or attributes of performing the behavior (behavioral beliefs), weighted by evaluations of those outcomes or attributes. Thus, a person who holds strong beliefs that positively valued outcomes will result from performing the behavior will have a positive attitude toward the behavior. Conversely, a

person who holds strong beliefs that negatively valued outcomes will result from the behavior will have a negative attitude.”

Research Data

Predilection, likes and dislikes

The learners' methodological preferences for learning English for Precise Purposes (EPP) were examined using a slightly modified questionnaire described in the reference.

There were 53 respondents to this questionnaire who by the time of administering a questionnaire had had 60 hours of instruction in the EPP course, i.e. the questionnaire was administered in the middle of the EPP course.

The learners' responses to six questions on their learning attitudes are presented and discussed in Figure 1. The questionnaire was modified in accordance with our settings.

The replies to the first question 'How do you like learning?' vary and are depicted in a pie chart. The third of learners desire learning individually, another third - in pairs. Work in small groups is a priority of the fifth of learners, and the remaining minority favors working in a large group. Thus, pair or small group work is supported by 53% of our learners, and 47% do not favor it. Pie chart demonstrates these findings. The data surprisingly contradict a learner-centered approach which has been widely advocated by a number of English language practitioners, who describe pair or small group work as indispensable. Lately pair work has been considered as the most effective way to develop communicative skills of interaction in the target language. Figure 2, Table 1

The responses to the second question on homework do not vary much: 93 per cent of learners support the idea of homework against 7 per cent who reject it (a pie chart above). It is noteworthy that basically the weakest students dislike the idea of doing homework. The amount of time spent on homework varies from meager half an

2 Do you want to do homework?
 Yes 93% No 7%

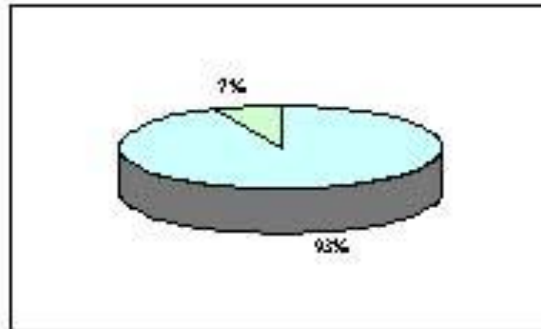


Figure 2

If 'Yes', how much time a week do you spend on doing homework?

Table 1

Hours		Hours	
0.5	2%	4	9%
1	23%	6	7%
2	40%	7	2%
3	17%		

Table 2

3 Do you like learning	a) by memory?	9%
	b) by problem solving?	37%
	c) by getting information yourself?	65%
	d) by listening to software or recording?	65%
	e) by reading and taking notes?	65%
	f) by copying from the chalkboard or overhead projector?	2%
	g) by repeating what you hear?	16%

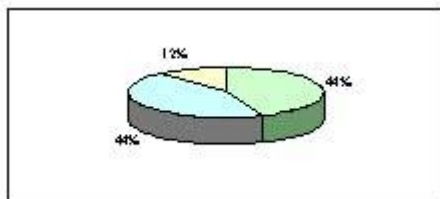
hour to extreme 7 hours a week. The percentage is presented under the pie chart and can be summarized as follows. Generally speaking, 80 percentages of learners spend between 1 and 3 hours a week doing their homework: 23 percentages - 1 hour, 40 percentages - 2 hours, and 17 percentages - 3 hours. Only two students, which make just 2 percentages, need either 0.5 hour or 7 hours to do their homework. The individual analysis of data revealed the tendency of slow learners and under-achievers to spend fewer hours on homework while fast learners spend more time on it. Table 2

The learning styles differ greatly for individual learners (question 3). Major priorities in the order of importance cover the following areas: 65 percentages prefers reading, taking notes and getting information themselves; 60 percentage favor listening to software or recording; 37 per cent like problem-solving tasks. Other learning styles, e.g. by memorizing (9 per cent) or by repeating what one hears (16 percentage) or by copying from the chalkboard /overhead projector (2 percentage) are in minority. Table 3

The issue of correction (question 4, a pie chart above)

Table 3

4	When you speak do you want to be corrected by your teacher and peer	
a)	immediately, in front of everybody?	44%
b)	later, at the end of the activity?	44%
c)	later, in private?	12%

**Table 4**

5	Which activities do you find useful?	
a)	role-play	9%
b)	language games	26%
c)	Projects	47%
d)	Songs	12%
e)	talking with and listening to other students	65%
f)	memorizing dialogues/conversations	9%
g)	writing summaries	35%
h)	Dictation	9%
i)	writing grammar exercises for peers	35%
j)	any other (specify)	15%

Table 5

6	Do you get a sense of satisfaction from	
a)	having you work graded?	None
b)	being told that you have made progress?	51%
c)	feeling more confident when using English?	42%

seems to bother learners. The same number of respondents prefers to be corrected immediately in front of their peers or later, at the end of the activity, which, all in all, makes 88 percentages. This fact contradicts the accepted among practitioners good practice of avoiding giving correction during or immediately after activities, basically to avoid learners' embarrassment. Only 12 percentages of respondents prefer to be corrected later but in private. Table 4

The learners' preferred and marked as the most useful activities (question 5) are ranked below in order of importance: speaking to or listening to peers - 65%; preparing and presenting projects - 47 %; writing summaries and designing grammar exercises for peers -

35%; language games - 26%. The least liked activities include songs (12%), role-plays (9%), and dictation (9%).

The question on testing has not been included in this list, so the raising this issue specifies by students has come as a surprise: 15% of students expressed a wish to write grammar tests once a week! As a matter of fact, students are tested twice during a course on EPP vocabulary only. Table 5

None of our students get a sense of satisfaction from having their work graded (question 6). However, half of them feel happy being told they have made progress, and 42% feel more confident when using English. 7% failed to tick either b) or c) answers.

Table: 6 - Importance of Proficiency in Different Aspects of Language in LSRW

	Unimportant	Important	Essential
Reading			
EPP Texts	-	16%	84%
Newspapers	13%	84%	3%
Magazines	47%	50%	3%
Books	44%	37%	19%
Speaking			
Presentations	6%	28%	66%
Formal Conversations	6%	47%	47%
Informal Conversations	-	72%	28%
Writing			
Summaries	6%	25%	69%
Formal Letters	16%	66%	18%
Emails	50%	44%	6%
Listening To			
Lectures	8%	61%	31%
TV/Radio	2%	61%	37%
English Speakers	7%	56%	37%
Translating			
From English	3%	44%	53%
Into English	-	31%	69%
Other Usage			
For Telephoning	47%	53%	-
For Studies	6%	41%	53%
For Traveling	15%	44%	41%
Grammar	3%	41%	56%
For Exams	-	12%	88%

Attitudes to Proficiency

These studies reveal that the majority of the educated Indian speakers of English prefer to use their own unique variety (as cited in Padwick, 2010). The importance of proficiency in different aspects of language was examined by administering a questionnaire similar to the one described in and suitably modified to our settings. Three ranking preferences - unimportant, important and essential - were offered as assessment of proficiency

significance. The learner responses are presented in percentage in the Table 6. Percentage is considered as a more tangible way of presenting statistical data.

To simplify comprehension of data given in the Table 6, the summary of prevailing preferences is provided in the Table 7. Learners' responses have been ranked in the order of chosen priorities and by adding 'important' and 'essential' scores.

As it has already mentioned, we had a comparatively small sample of respondents, who were doing a six

Table 7: Ranking Learners' Preferences

Language Usage	Important + Essential
Reading ESP Texts	100%
For Exams	100%
Speaking Informally	100%
Translating into English	100%
Translating from English	97%
Making Presentations	94%
Writing Summaries	94%
Speaking Formally	94%
Listening to Lectures	92%

The data in Table 7 is very straightforward. Learners know exactly what they want to learn by the end of the course.

examination. Therefore, the learners' responses are not open to a wide range of interpretations, i.e. what students want to achieve in different aspects of language. Learners' responses are substantiated by their short-term objectives of passing tests and exams. Although exam-oriented items in the questionnaire are scattered over all language skills, these items scored the highest ranking: reading EPP texts, writing summaries, making presentations got the maximum response. Quite understandably, the items of no immediate use like writing e-mails, listening to online teaching, watching TV, listening to lectures in English, speaking to native speakers of English, telephoning, reading newspapers and books, writing formal letters received lower rating. It is noteworthy that learners' positive attitude to the issue of translating has been overwhelming. Translating from/into English received the highest ranking although translation skills are not tested. Need in translation is felt by learners as major difficulty in language acquisition

The research findings show that students have a short-term approach to studying a foreign language. In our settings, learners are more concerned with immediate relevance to their current circumstances. Moreover, students are more concerned about getting good marks than developing language skills. The college mentalities for accountability prevail: learners do not seek to improve their knowledge, skills or competence. A major objective seems to be to pass a test or exam as well as possible and not to bother about prospective needs.

This attitude is partly substantiated by the fact of being away from the target language community, explained by Gardner, R. & Lambert. (1972). It explains why nearly half of learners are less concerned with a communicative approach to language learning and communicative tasks. Moreover, they are rarely motivated to carry out autonomous activities such as listening to watching

English channels on TV or reading authentic English newspapers, journals or books for professional purposes.

CONCLUSIONS

Three main conclusions can be drawn from this research. First, slightly more than half of the learners favor a communicative approach to perfecting their language skills by working in pairs / small groups, taking part in projects and practicing English by talking to their peers.

Second, given assignments 65% of learners prefer getting information themselves, listening to recordings in class and taking notes.

Third, a short-term approach to studying a foreign language prevails: learners seek passing their exams and getting good marks, and are not concerned with improving language skills and competence for the future usage.

The implications of this research for language teachers is to find the ways of motivating learners to lifelong learning, to negotiate with learners on their priorities for various activities in class, and to incorporate activities that learners prefer.

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