



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

English

EFFECTIVE UTILIZATION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LABS OF VIT UNIVERSITY, VELLORE: A CASE STUDY COMPARISON OF CONVENT AND NON-CONVENT STUDENTS

KEY WORDS: Convent education, Non - convent education, English fluency, VIT English Language Lab

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ABSTRACT

English is a growing global language and getting to be the universal medium of connection across all the countries. Statistics show only about 30% of Indian population speak English. Students are admitted from various strata of society, the overarching theme being their intelligence. However, one of the important criteria for student admissions has been English medium education base. This study compares and reports the English-speaking skills and communication fluency of a group of 40 students from convent and non-convent background who are pursuing various engineering degrees at VIT University, Vellore and how the English language labs of VIT University has developed various courses and programs to bridge the gap. This has been gathered by one to one interactions with students as well as conducting group written assessment tests.

BACKGROUND

This study explores the English-speaking skills of a group of students from convent and non- convent background studying in VIT University, Vellore. This study also brings out detailed analysis of the answers provided by the two test groups as well the one to one interactions with the students. English has been relegated as the second language in non-convent schools, whereas today, the very same language is used as a tool to access higher education in other countries, access to the best jobs globally, better communication channels, be it to explain technicalities of a project or to put forth an idea or even to obtain a handsome salary teaching the language itself. Students from non-convent education though technically very sound, lose out on many opportunities as they lack the relevant level of mastery over English to explain the questions asked though they possess the knowledge. The medium of schooling, local language versus English creates a wedge among students seeking class marked educational credentials¹. Pedagogical competence of English teachers is also to be taken note of, to a large extent.

VIT English language lab and the education system of the University recognize that English is the business language and it has become a necessity for people to speak in English. Teaching English and trying to increase the proficiency and fluency of the language of the students are not possible just by relying on the traditional methods of teaching, namely textbooks and courses will not give the desired results. Hence, they have set up English language labs which have innovative methods, "on the ground", "on the face", "hands on experiences" and "classroom activities" techniques which help students comprehend the enormity of acquiring fluency and a degree of mastery in English. The team of English professors relentlessly drives the students towards improving their English-speaking skills, breaking down the barriers to communication and growth.

**Review of English Literature
Origin of English in India:**

Our mother language being Sanskrit, if it was left to Vasco Da Gama, we would all have been speaking French today but thanks to the British colonizers, of course all the torture and shortcomings, brought the Queen's English to India. Many of the Indian men and women marrying the British gave birth to the Anglo-Indian community. The educational institutions set up by the English nuns and fathers hired these Anglo Indians to teach at schools thus further evangelizing the language while ensuring the right accent. One of the early pragmatic reasons to learn English in British India was it opened posts in the Supreme court of Calcutta. One of the other reasons was it gave access to European Science². It is estimated that the number of people who converse in English over the world is about two billion and increasing at a rapid pace. UN has recognized five official languages and English tops the list. English has evolved to be the language of Science and Technology. In India, with the numerous languages we speak across different states, English serves as a link language in the country.

Creative way of learning English:

One of the creative, easy and faster ways to learn English is to watch English movies be it American or British. Given a recommended list of movies below. Also gives a very important lesson that no matter what, if you set your mind you can gain proficiency and fluency in English.

My fair lady – An age-old classic, many easy dialogues with tongue twisters.

The king's speech – what better way to learn pronunciation and couple of exercises thrown in to master the fluency along with the king.

Notting Hill – Learn differences between American and British accents.

METHODOLOGY

Sample Group: Engineering Freshmen

Sample Size: Twenty students from the convent educated and twenty from non-convent educated were identified. First an assessment which included three tests on English followed by an interview was done. The test was for half an hour and the interviews took about 15 – 20 minutes each to be able to give the students time to write and share.

A) Test: A test has been conducted on the two groups consisting of 20 students each: The test was for 50 marks and they were evaluated on three different criteria:

- **Written test** (25marks) based on writing a composition on a random topic, filling the blanks with the suitable preposition and correcting the sentences
- **Public speaking test** (15marks) to check their confidence and fluency of the language
- **Communication skills** (10marks) to check their listening and communication skills

Graphical Representation of the Results

Fig 1. Written test – Convent vs Non-Convent Students

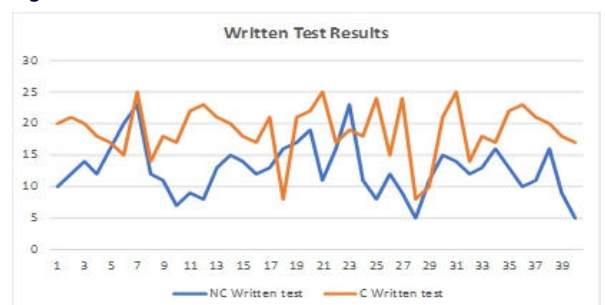


Fig 2. Public Speaking – Convent vs Non-Convent Students

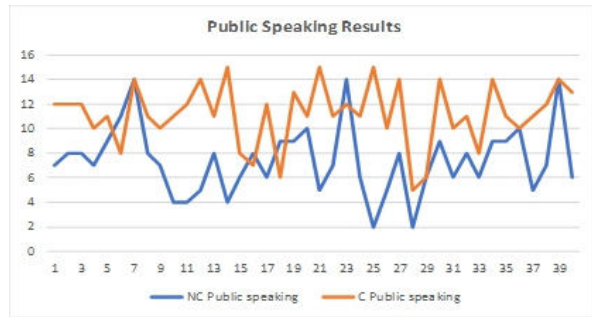
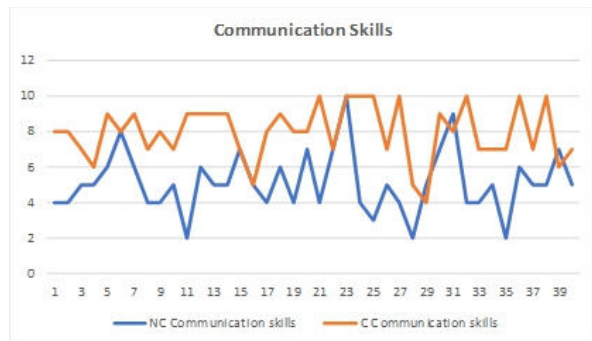


Fig 3. Communication Skills – Convent vs Non-Convent Students



Results: Based on the above information we can conclude that students from the convent back ground have an upper hand in English language, not only do they possess fluency but also have more confidence in speaking English and knowledge of the subject. We have observed that they have accepted the language and do not hesitate in grasping new words or sentences, but don't miss some of the blue spikes in all the above three figures above where there have been some non-convent students who have a good command on the writing of the language, some have taken the extra time to hone their skills, some have improved due to the VIT English language lab during the intervention period of two months.

B) Results of Interviews

Students are unaware of how proficient they are in English Language:

The focus has never been to gain fluency in English but more used as a medium of instruction. Neither are there any assessments done at the pre-university levels nor any self-evaluations conducted by the schools or colleges. Hence students are not aware of their level of proficiency in English.

English is restricted to classrooms and the subjects many a times are taught in the local language:

Many of the students from the non-convent education background said that the teachers teaching English in the English period would explain the meaning in the local language and converse in the local language too as the same way other technical subjects. Not much importance was given to English as a language. One recurring example that many cited was in English hour in a non- convent school it was taught in Hindi.

Research by many literary scholars confirm this fact that in convent English medium school students and teachers frame talk about English text in English while in non-convent school English teach frames talk about English text in English and Hindi, and uses Hindi to provide exegesis on the text³.

Students come with diverse English ability levels:

Many students felt that their city, family, friends, school, and college influenced their English skills.

Students increasingly show affinity to learning and honing their Business English skills to compete:

All the students irrespective of their backgrounds were motivated and encouraged and understood the importance of fluency in English in today's world. They were appreciative of the VIT English language lab and the professors were committed to increase the standards of English fluency in students.

Students agree that fluency in English is important in today's world:

From the answers given by the students the importance of mastering English to be able to gain edge in the global scenario was important.

Non-convent educated students agree that it is embarrassing to speak English amongst other English-speaking students and professors:

Due to the lack of conversations in English among friends, in school, at home the confidence levels are much less and hence students hesitate and feel embarrassed to communicate in English at the university.

Some feel shy of their accent which is very locally defined from their city of origin or their mother tongue:

Some of the students are aware and feel embarrassed of the local accent they carry when they speak English as it is obvious.

VIT English language labs a Boon:

Students are encouraged and motivated by the English professors of VIT English language labs as just not courses but are various applied methodologies such as language learning software, Pronunciation kit, Communication kit, etc., to teach and boost confidence.

Top key reasons on importance of fluency in English as listed by the students interviewed:

Global Business Language: Wider communication, interaction and cultural unity.

Students acknowledge English as the business language and all its benefits of learning and having fluency.

VIT Student Exchange Program: Gives them the required impetus to apply and fare better for the VIT Student exchange program.

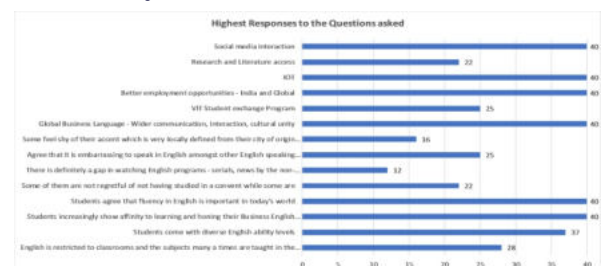
Better employment opportunities in India and Global.

IOT is the new age interconnection and networking of almost any device to make life very simple. To be in the forefront of IOT and bag good projects by students, English is a must to be able to understand customer requirements and meet the deliverables.

Wide research and literature access.

Social media interaction.

Fig 4. Graphical Representation of the answers given to the interviewer by Convent and Non-Convent Students



CONCLUSION

The intent of this study was to investigate and understand the English fluency of students from different educational backgrounds and cities. Shinnie Antony in the book Indian English provides a guide to pronunciation and grammar, also slang and sayings⁴. This read will help students understand exactly where they are making errors while speaking. Their comfort and

willingness to learn the language. It is undeniable that fluency in English is required to give the necessary confidence and standing in the institution and society.

The VIT English language lab is focused on the fluency, vocabulary and grammar, diction and to some degree orthography. It is highly recommended to understand the student before mentoring. Understanding student profile will be very useful because the concerned faculty will have a thorough understanding of the student before he / she begins to train⁵. Post this VIT labs provide the necessary tools and guidance to gain confidence and represent the individual self. They firmly believe that developing teacher student networking, enhances professional development and employability and propelling students towards the adventurous growth of globalization and be an integral and important part of the global workforce. Also creates a positive impact on college reputation. With the interventions provided, the progress is laudable in English proficiency and improves fluency greatly among the students.

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