

Proficiency in Reading and Writing through ESP for General English Students

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Abstract

Language plays an important role in the scholarly development of a person. This is, because language learning is a skill and while learning it, the intellect of a person really needs to work seriously. Since the mid-1940s the world has experienced an incredible growth in technological fields and international commerce. English became the language for world communication and the learning of language became an unquestionable necessity for the learners. And the beginning of the new established movement from simply teaching these learners English as a Second/Foreign language (ESL/EFL) to teaching them English for Specific Purposes (ESP) was strongly apparent by the 1960s. While there is some variation in the arrangement and classification of the branches, most commonly these branches are all grouped under the general heading English for Specific Purpose (ESP), with English for General Purposes (EGP as a separate offshoot of ESL/EFL, usually employed only for exam purposes (Nunan 76).

Keywords: English language, Language Learning, English as Second Language (ESL), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Language and Communication

English for Specific Purpose (ESP)

ESP refers to language quest and instructions given on the specific communicative needs and practices of the peculiar social group. At the tertiary level the skills in English such as writing reports, reading scientific books, and taking part in academic discussion are not sufficiently mastered. (Astika 52) Hutchinson and Waters defined ESP as an approach of language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learners' reasons for learning. (Hutchinson and Waters 31) Stevens defined ESP as a special branch within the general category of second/foreign language teaching. The same principles apply no matter which language is being learned and taught. The vast demand of English made ESP more common than the others, but the principles are the same. Furthermore, he stated that a definition of ESP would be needed to distinguish between four absolute and two variable characteristics.

Dudley-Evans and St John modified this definition by putting forth this: ESP is designed to meet specific needs of the learner, ESP makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves, ESP is centered on the language (grammar, lexis, register) skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities. (70) As Petra opines, the language of ESP can be narrowed to the point of view of vocabulary, as it forms the essential part of the ESP course. Grammar of the texts in ESP will work according to the rules of General English, however, specific technical words, and semi-technical vocabulary will be necessary for the user in order to name things appropriately, e.g. the components of a car engine for the learners from the field of mechanics and basically preparing for an interview academically, etc. (112) As quoted in Dudley & Evans, “ESP has tended to be a practical affair, the most interest needs in investigating, preparing teaching materials, and devising appropriate teaching methodologies” (115). Teaching English at the tertiary level for the non-English Department is mostly concentrated on the need for the capability of reading relevant textbooks. The teaching of English is focused on the reading and writing skills which will reinforce the mastery of basic vocabulary and grammar. However, this shifts to give rise to other study skills such as note taking, group discussion, presentation and academic writing.

Reviews on Reading and Writing

Reading and writing are important for the learners, but they are not always covered extensively in the classroom, since, it is often believed that students could work on these skills on their own as their homework. However, this study has shown that it is good for students to improve these skills from direct input and guidance from the teacher. This is particularly useful for ESP students whose major academic focus is not on language but to improve the skills of those who might have weak reading and writing abilities. Reading is known to be a complex cognitive activity, and sometimes teaching reading skills present considerable difficulties. The length of words and sentences in written texts is one of the key difficulties: longer sentences and longer words are more difficult to understand. Authenticity of reading materials also presents serious difficulty to students, because no concessions are made to foreign learners who encounter non-simplified content. Reading authentic materials can be extremely motivating the learners and positive expectations of reading are often due to previous successful experiences. (Harmer 78) Writing provides learners with physical evidence of their achievements and they can measure their improvement. It helps to consolidate their grasp of vocabulary and structure and complements the other language skills. It helps to understand the text and write compositions. It can foster the learner’s ability to summarize and to use the language freely. (*englishmate.com*)

Description of the Study

The study provides skills and strategies required by the learners to anticipate English tasks required during their course of study, particularly the reading and writing task. It also gives

study skills involving English such as texts summarizing texts and free, controlled and guided writing.

Objectives of the Study

- To increase learners' ability to read and comprehend.
- To recognize and use various grammatical structures.
- To increase the understanding of vocabulary building.
- To develop basic writing skill.

Statement of the Study

- To examine the reading and writing skill of General English learners and the errors through error analysis by giving tasks and assessing their skill levels.

Need for the Study

There is an awareness among students about the language writing skill. They want to learn English in such a way that they can tackle their current needs to face the outer world. Generally, there is a growing discontent among learners as they feel that General English classes are not equipping them for career related skills and are dissatisfied with the content of the syllabus. As a first step it was decided to study the need of the learners in the field of language acquisition. So, the diagnostic test on reading and writing was administered to the learners to know their skill levels to enhance the writing and reading skills. Based on the needs analysis the tasks were prepared. It was a traditional class helping students with their needs while working on tasks.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to specifically find out the needs of the learners and track their errors in both reading and writing. The crux is to enhance the receptive and productive skill by giving them the tasks based on the lesson plan. The major focus will be to prepare the tertiary study for furthering their future career. This will help the learners use the language appropriately.

Location of the Study

A self-financing college in the northern part of Chennai, Tamil Nadu, is chosen as the location for the study.

Sample of the Study

Students who study non-English subjects at Undergraduate level are taken as the sample group for the study.

Hypothesis

The work is done based on the assumption that, if students were trained in a few selected areas they would be able to perform better during their job interviews. So, if General English students are given special training in certain areas of English language skills, it could enable them to handle their career needs better.

Methodology

The tasks are administered to the students through Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach. It is an interactive methodology that is used to teach the material designed by the researchers. In TBLT, language lessons are based on learning experiences that have an appropriate outcome, and in which there is a clear connection between the things learners do in class and the activities they will ultimately need to do outside of the classroom. (Nunan7)

Data Collection

A research was conducted in the college by the researcher with General English students with the intention of learning the English Language. Most of the learners wanted to acquire the skill for reading and the skill of writing as they considered English as a prestigious language. Reading and Writing will give them the confidence of mastering a foreign language. This would be helpful in the professional development for their future. The researcher facilitated the learners by giving them some hints on how to do the reading comprehension:

- Read the question to know the background of the passage.
- Read the passage to get its general meaning and then pause for a while to recollect and determine what the writer is trying to say.
- Go through the passage once more and note down the main points.
- You may come across words whose meaning you do not know. Try making a guess, very often the context will help you arrive at the meaning.

One of the indispensable needs of the world of learners is letter writing. The needs analysis showed the learners need these skills and it's the right time for the researcher to teach the concepts involved in letter writing.

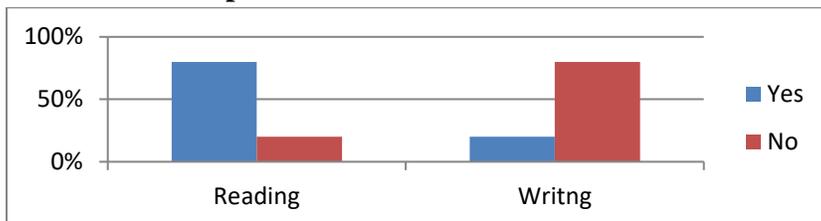
- Formal & Informal letter
- Letter started with the word *I am*.....

Data Analysis

Twenty-five learners are treated as subjects for this study. As only three months of time, was given, an enormous number of subjects could not be used. Also, a sample course was not possible. Tasks were administered for the First Year General English learners and the feedback was collected. Though most of the students admitted they needed specific skills, still confessed

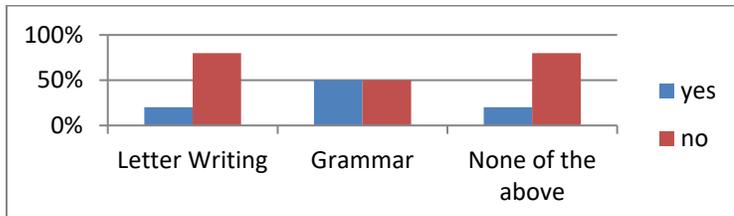
they did enjoy General English classes very much. The course content gave them an opportunity to read English Literature and broaden their minds. At last, when the survey was done with the first and second-year learners the following result was obtained for reading and writing skills. Apart from reading and writing, the learners were more interested in speaking which would be a further study for research.

Which Skill is More Important?



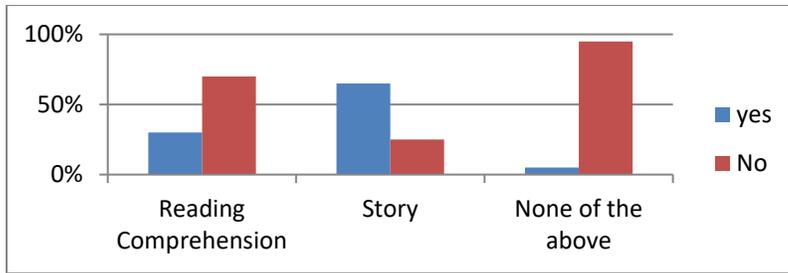
Skill	Yes	No
Reading	80%	20%
Writing	20%	80%

What Type of Activities Do You Prefer in Writing?



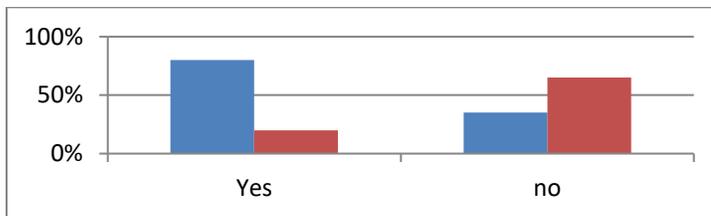
Activities	Yes	No
Letter Writing	20%	80%
Grammar	50%	50%
None of the above	20%	80%

What Type of Activities Do You Prefer in Reading?



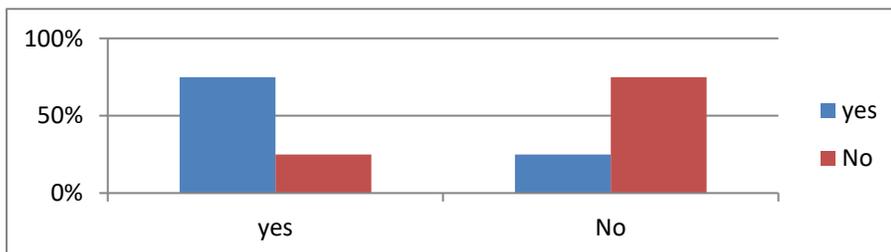
Activities	Yes	No
Reading comprehension	30%	70%
Story	65%	25%
None of the above	5%	95%

Writing is Easier than Reading



Yes/no	writing	Reading
Yes	40%	60%
No	35%	65%

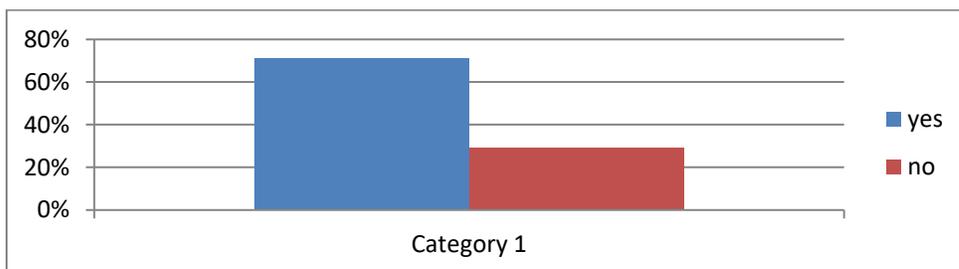
Can Reading and Writing Be Done Simultaneously?



Yes	No
75%	25%
25%	75%

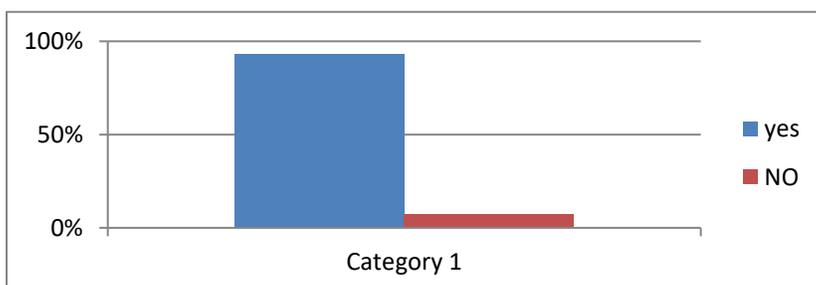
75%	25%
25%	75%

Is Reading Comprehension an Easy Task?



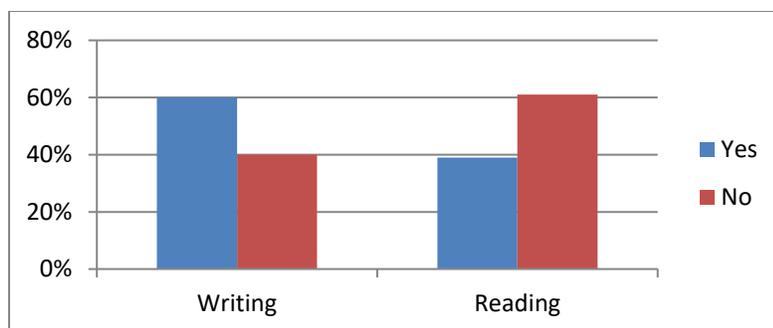
Yes	No
70%	30%

Do You Accept Grammar as a Part of Writing skill?



Yes	No
93%	7%

Between Reading and Writing which Skill Do You Prefer for Communication?



	Yes	No
Writing	60%	40%
Reading	39%	61%

Conclusion

These skills along with a General English course can be taught to the learners to enable them cope with their future job demands. Whichever texts students need to read can be used first as model for writing. Focusing on relevant features of a text also benefits student’s development of reading skills.

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