Application of CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) in Testing the English Language Proficiency Level of Polytechnic Students

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ABSTRACT

In these gadget-driven days, our hunger for electronic devices and technology in every field of human life is growing fast. Several technological devices have been developed and updated in the last few decades. Among them the mobile phone has brought satisfaction in human life. Especially among students it is a very popular tool; they cannot imagine their life without this device. Though parents and teachers are against students carrying mobiles into the classrooms as they distract students from their learning, students are still carried away by its applications. Mobile phones have revolutionized the world with their impressive database over the globe. There are, however, a few possibilities of turning this craze for using mobile phones for learning language and testing their communication skills. This study is an attempt to assess English language skills of students and to motivate the learners to improve their language through mobile applications for language learning. This paper discusses the benefits of using mobile phones for learning purposes, particularly for improving technical students' English language skills through the British Council English Score*, which is an online tool for testing English proficiency level in alignment with the Common European Framework of Reference (**CEFR**), a globally recognized language proficiency standard. I conducted the English proficiency test with the final year polytechnic students using the British Council app. The paper concludes with the findings of the test and some recommendations.*

Keywords: Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL); Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR); Assessing English Communication Skills.

Introduction

In today's world everyone is promoting the use of ICT in education for better teaching-learning process. The researcher feels that students are already using much of their time using computers and mobiles. They are also fascinated by using these devices. We can explore and experiment with a variety of technologies already at hand in the lives of students. There should be a leap frog e-learning through m-learning, it's time to share innovative ways of learning with and through mobile technologies and using them to achieve educational goals. Smartphone performs several functions of computer with a touch screen interface having internet access with a large storage. Students can access the digital technology with the help of Smartphones while travelling or waiting. The mobile phone has become basic need of students, so we can turn this obsession of

using mobile for learning English language. We spent several hours researching and testing educational learning apps recommended by educators, teachers and parents. The researcher tested students' English proficiency through class tests and noticed some students were poor in vocabulary; some were poor in grammar, some in reading comprehension. After that, the researcher provided learning materials to students. Then, after three months, the researcher gave another test and the results of the test are analyzed in this paper. This shows how technology is instrumental in developing language skills.

The phase of undergraduate study plays a vital role which determines students' further education and careers. Students need to assess themselves and be assessed by teachers to know their level of language for further improvement. The nature of assessment determines their learning. The impact of assessment on the language learning process has been focused by a number of researchers (Crooks, 1988: Heywood, 1989: Newble & Jaeger, 1986). Kumari (2017) has shown the same thing by assessing English communication skills of BA and B. Com. students.

The result of globalization is the entry of multinational companies and electronic gadgets in India. These companies require management skills for effective functioning of their organizations. Major management functions are planning, organizing, delegating, controlling and coordinating. All of these functions need effective communication skills. To achieve their goals, professional organizations focus on soft skills. All the required soft skills require the basic skill of communication. Every professional organization expects effective communication skills in their employees. One has to fulfill employer's expectations during one's professional life.

Importance of English proficiency for technical students

Communication may be oral or written; it involves all the skills of language: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Communication plays a pivotal role in an organization, whether it is a business enterprise, an industry, or an academic institution. All managerial or administrative activities like planning, organizing, recruiting, decision making, coordinating, writing reports, giving instructions, and reading brochures involve communication. Communication serves as an instrument to measure the success or growth of an organization. English language proficiency is the basis of effective communication. The various types of communication not only help an organization to grow, but also enable the communicators to develop certain attributes. It is regrettable that, though most professionals are well aware of the importance of communication, they do not develop their skills to good effect in their sphere of work. The higher your position, the greater is your need to communicate. Very soon the polytechnic students will enter careers where they need to be aware of the vital role of communication skills.

The role of Smartphones in learning a language

The Smartphone performs many of the

functions of a computer, having a touchscreen interface, Internet access, and an operating system capable of running downloaded applications. A mobile app is a computer program designed to run on a mobile device, such as a smartphone. Students can use these functions to learn languages. Some useful apps are: Duolingo; Memrise; Busuu; BBC Learning English; Hello English; Learn English; English conversation practice; Drops; Ankidroid; Beelingua app; Fluent forever; Translate; and IELTS apps.

Data collection

About a hundred students were randomly selected from last year's batch of Mechanical Engineering, Civil Engineering, Electronics and Telecommunication Engineering, and Computer Engineering from A.G. Patil Polytechnic Institute, Solapur to assess their Vocabulary, Grammar, Listening and Reading skills in English.

The British Council English Score, an English language exam for students, teachers and job seekers (with the globally recognized CEFR scale for describing English language proficiency), was used to conduct the test and collect the data.
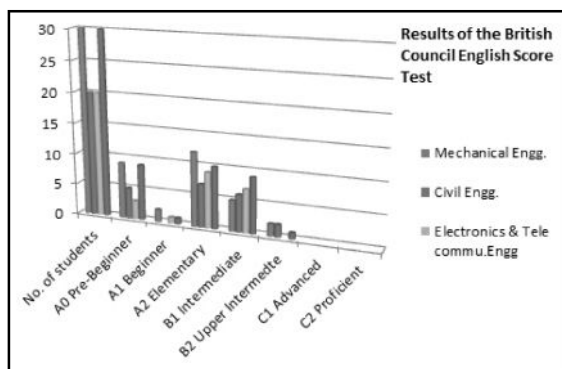
The selected students were given detailed explanations about the test by the researcher. Having downloaded the British Council English Score app on their mobiles, all the selected students took the test by following the instructions given on the app and recorded their score with level and analysis given by the app. The scores obtained by the students were analyzed for providing further assistance to the students for improvement.

Results and data interpretation

The results of the scores obtained are given in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Results of Scores Obtained by the Students on the
British Council English Score Test

Branch / Group	No. of students	No. of students Placed at A0 level pre Beginner	No. of students Placed at A1 level Beginner	No. of students Placed at A2 level Elementary	No. of students placed at B1 level Intermediate	No. of students placed at B2 kevel upper Intermediate
Mechanical Engg.	**30**	09	02	12	05	02
Civil Engg.	**20**	05	-	07	06	02
Electronics and Tele- communications Engg.	**20**	03	01	09	07	-
Computer Engg.	**30**	09	01	10	09	01
TOTAL		**26**	**04**	**38**	**27**	**05**

Figure 1. Results of Scores Obtained by the Students on the British Council English Score Test

The results show that the number of learners with proficiency in English at each of the levels was: the Pre-Beginner (A0) level (26), the Beginner (A1) level (04), the Elementary (A2) level (38), the Intermediate (B1) level (27), and the Upper Intermediate level (05). It may be noted that no learners achieved Advanced C1 or C2 level. The Beginner level students need to be improve their English skills by practising more in all levels. Elementary and Intermediate learners have to take extra efforts to become proficient in the language; they have to improve their LSRW skills along with vocabulary and grammar. Overall, the students showed a lot of enthusiasm in taking this test and later were determined to make use of mobiles as a tool for learning the language.

Findings of the Study

The key findings of the study are as follows:

1. The learners with pre-beginner and beginner level English proficiency were 30%, while those at the Elementary level were 38%; students with intermediate and upper-intermediate levels were 27% and 5% respectively.

2. The learners came from a family background where most of the parents do not speak, read or write English.

3. Inadequate vocabulary knowledge was reflected in their poor performance in the test.

4. With the dominance of the mother tongue at home and in the neighbourhood, the students took less effort in learning English.

5. They lack confidence and motivation in speaking English, though they have a basic knowledge of English.

6. There is greater focus on mathematics and technical subjects in technical education than on English.

7. Learners do exam oriented study.

8. There was inadequate provision in the language laboratory; the language learning software should be regularly updated and utilized properly.

Suggestions to improve the communication skills of students, teachers and job seekers

1. With self-motivation, students should make conscious efforts to communicate only in English.

2. They should learn words through situational contexts.

3. They should read English newspapers daily to get acquainted with new vocabulary while also updating themselves in current affairs.

4. They should develop technical vocabulary.

5. They should be exposed to online learning apps for improving their

communication skills.

6. The focus should be on language learning rather than on completion of syllabus.

7. Students should be encouraged to maintain a diary and write in it a few new words and new phrases that they come across every day.

8. They should be good listeners to become good communicators in English. They should listen more than they speak. Listening helps them to become familiar with the rhythms of English.

9. They should also read aloud to improve their pronunciation and listen to native speakers of English.

10. They should watch movies and TV programs in English through which they can learn vocabulary, idioms, and pronunciation.

11. Talking to oneself in English narrating one's actions in English can be an effective way of improving spoken English.

12. Qualified and trained English teachers should be provided in educational institutions and they should be encouraged to undergo professional training courses, workshops, and seminars to update themselves.

13. Students should spend sufficient time for improving their English proficiency on a daily basis.

Conclusion

It is always a challenge to acquire and master one's proficiency in English. There are good sources to teach the students English language skills and test them. Teaching without testing the students and their ability, their needs, and their proficiency will be a waste of time. When there are excellent digital tools available on the internet, they should be used so that they will be instrumental in bringing about good outcomes in respect of English language proficiency. Thus the study proposes app-based English learning for polytechnic students.

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