



An Experimental Study Of Second Language Acquisition Through English Literature Among Indian Engineering Undergraduate ESL Learners

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ABSTRACT

The present study examines the efficacy of English literature as a pedagogical tool for developing second language acquisition (SLA) among Indian engineering undergraduate English as second language (ESL) learners. In Indian higher education, engineering students are required to possess strong English communication skills for academic success, professional growth, and global employability. However, despite prolonged exposure to English, many learners continue to demonstrate inadequate communicative competence. This research adopts an experimental design involving a control group and an experimental group to examine whether literature-based instruction is more effective than traditional ESL teaching methods. A sample of 80 first-year engineering students was equally divided into the two groups. The control group was taught using conventional language teaching methods, whereas the experimental group was exposed to selected English literary texts, including short stories, novels, and plays. Pre-test and post-test scores measuring reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, and speaking skills were statistically analyzed. The

findings reveal a significant development in overall language proficiency among students who received literature-based teaching. The study concludes that English literature plays a vital role in developing linguistic competence, communicative skills, and cultural awareness among Indian engineering undergraduate ESL learners.

Keywords: Experimental Study, Second Language Acquisition, English Literature, ESL Learners, Engineering Undergraduates, Indian Context

1. INTRODUCTION

English plays a crucial role in Indian higher education, particularly in professional disciplines such as engineering, where it functions as the medium of instruction, academic discourse, and professional communication. Engineering graduates are required to communicate effectively in English in academic contexts, multinational businesses, and worldwide information networks. Despite studying English for more than a decade, many Indian engineering undergraduates struggle with fluency, accuracy, and confidence in using English for real-life communication.

Traditional ESL teaching in engineering institutions focuses on grammar, exam-oriented learning, and technical communication skills. Such approaches frequently fail to improve natural language learning and communicative skills. As a result, students may have theoretical knowledge of grammar but lack the ability to utilise English effectively in real-life situations.

According to recent studies on second language acquisition (SLA), meaningful language exposure through authentic texts can greatly improve language acquisition. English literature provides a useful substitute for traditional ESL pedagogy because of its rich language input, emotional depth, and cultural backgrounds. Literary writings such as short stories, novels and plays present language in real-life situations and encourage learners to engage cognitively and emotionally with the text. This study experimentally examines the role of English literature in developing SLA among Indian engineering undergraduate ESL learners.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Second language acquisition (SLA) research has extensively examined the correlation between literature and language acquisition. Krashen's Input Hypothesis emphasizes the importance of comprehensible and meaningful input for language acquisition (Krashen 20). Krashen believes that learners acquire language naturally when they are exposed to input slightly above their existing competence level. English literature, when appropriately chosen and scaffolded, provides such input.

According to Collie and Slater, literature provides authentic language, cultural enrichment, and personal participation, making it a valuable resource for language learners (Collie and Slater 5). Lazar highlights that

literature-based teaching fosters both verbal competence and interpretive abilities (Lazar 14). Carter and Long argue that literature helps language learners by providing models of conversation, stylistic diversity, and pragmatic usage (Carter and Long 2).

Literature-based teaching approach develops vocabulary learning, reading comprehension, and writing skills, according to a number of international empirical studies. Extensive reading studies show that learners who are exposed to literary texts enhance their fluency and lexical understanding. By promoting interaction and performance-based learning, drama-based teaching has been demonstrated to develop speaking and listening skills.

Researchers have identified the gap between technical knowledge and communicative competence among engineering graduates in the Indian context. Inadequate English proficiency has a detrimental impact on employment chances, according to studies on employability skills. There is a dearth of experimental research that focuses exclusively on engineering undergraduates, despite some Indian studies suggesting that literature can help develop language proficiency. This study fills a research gap by presenting empirical evidence using an experimental design.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the efficacy of English literature in developing second language acquisition among Indian engineering undergraduate ESL learners.
2. To compare the language proficiency of students taught through literature-based teaching and conventional ESL approaches.
3. To investigate the impact of literary texts on reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills.
4. To evaluate vocabulary and grammatical development through literature-based teaching approach.
5. To study learners' perspectives towards learning English through English literature.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. To what extent does the use of English literature contribute to the development of second language acquisition among Indian engineering undergraduates?
2. Does the development of language proficiency differ significantly between literature-based and traditional ESL instruction?
3. How do literary texts affect vocabulary and grammar development?
4. What are the perspectives of engineering undergraduate ESL students on literature-based language learning?

5. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

H1: Engineering undergraduates taught using English literature will demonstrate much higher language proficiency than those taught using traditional ESL approaches.

H2: Literature-based teaching develops vocabulary development and grammatical accuracy for ESL learners.

H3: Exposure to literary texts significantly develops speaking and listening skills of engineering undergraduates.

H4: Engineering undergraduate ESL learners exhibit a positive outlook towards learning English through literature.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1 Research Design

The study employs an experimental research design with a control and experimental groups. This methodology enables the researcher to compare the efficacy of literature-based teaching and traditional ESL teaching methods.

6.2 Sample

The sample consists of 80 first-year engineering undergraduate ESL learners selected from an Indian engineering college. The students come from diverse linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds. The sample is randomly divided into two groups:

- Experimental Group: 40 students
- Control Group: 40 students

6.3 Tools for Data Collection

The following tools are used for data collection:

- Pre-test and post-test to evaluate overall language proficiency
- Vocabulary and grammar tests
- Speaking assessment rubric
- Listening comprehension test
- Student attitude questionnaire (Likert scale)

6.4 Treatment

For one academic semester, the experimental group is taught English through a selection of literary texts, such as short stories, novels and plays. Activities in the classroom include oral presentations, role-playing, dramatisation, group discussions, guided reading and creative writing. The control group adheres to the recommended ESL curriculum, emphasising technical communication and grammatical teaching.

6.5 Data Analysis

The significance of differences between the two groups is determined by analysing quantitative data using statistical techniques such as mean scores, standard deviation, and t-tests. Qualitative data from questionnaires is analysed descriptively.

7. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The pre-test findings reveal that both groups had comparable levels of language ability at the beginning of the study. However, post-test results reveal that the experimental group performs significantly better than the control group. The experimental group shows greater improvement in vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, reading comprehension, and oral fluency.

The findings prove the hypothesis that literature-based teaching approach develops SLA by providing contextualised language input and opportunities for meaningful interaction. The development in speaking and listening skills can be attributed to drama-based activities and group discussions. Additionally, students report feeling more confident and motivated when speaking English.

8. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study have important implications for ESL teaching in engineering education. To encourage comprehensive language development, engineering English curriculum should incorporate English literature. Teachers should select relevant literary texts and design interactive activities that encourage student participation. Literature-based teaching approach can bridge the gap between second language acquisition and professional communication skills.

9. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study has only a small sample size and is restricted to a single institution. The duration of the intervention is limited to one semester. Future studies may include a larger sample and a longer duration to validate the findings.

10. CONCLUSION

The experimental study concludes that English literature plays a significant role in developing second language acquisition among Indian engineering undergraduate ESL learners. Exposure to literary texts enables learners to engage with authentic language use, thereby strengthening vocabulary knowledge, grammatical accuracy, and communicative competence. The findings further indicate that literature-based pedagogy promotes learner engagement and contextual understanding of language. In light of these results, the study advocates the systematic incorporation of English literature into ESL curricula in engineering education as a means to develop overall language proficiency and enhance employability.

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