

The Effectiveness of a Strategy Training Course in Enhancing Language Skills of Indian Engineering Students

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Abstract—In the contemporary professional landscape, engineers are confronted with the dual imperative of not only excelling in the core subject expertise but also possessing linguistic competence to remain competitive in the global job market. The current employment scenario is marked by raise in demand but decline in the number of qualified professionals graduating from colleges. Graduates are now expected to embody the qualities of techno-managers, adept at multitasking in their roles. Relying solely on technical skills has proven inadequate for many individuals. Recognizing the evolving job market requirements, it became apparent that students must excel in communication, particularly English communication skills, to thrive professionally. Effective communication fosters the development of confidence, astuteness, and outward skills in students. Language acquisition is a lifelong, active process that commences at birth. Textbooks play a crucial role in achieving the objectives of a course, serving as prominent elements in the teaching process. Language learning, facilitated by learning strategies, involves a set of tactics individuals employ to take control of their learning processes. In today's educational landscape, teachers play a pivotal role in enhancing strategies in second or foreign language classrooms. Their responsibility extends to facilitating learning among students and making their thinking processes visible. Effectively teaching a second language (L2) requires educators to consider the unique needs and backgrounds of each learner. By doing so, they can employ methods that help students in utilizing strategies to enhance their L2 learning experience. This paper provides insights into the trailblazer learning strategies that augment the language skills repertoire.

Index Terms—English language teaching, learning strategies, self-learning and communication

I. INTRODUCTION

The globalization of English has had a significant impact, necessitating learners from diverse social and regional backgrounds to expand their English language skills. This shift in focus, from the product of teaching to the process of learning, has become crucial in addressing the evolving demands of English language acquisition. The increasing recognition of the procedure of learning has sparked interest in understanding how learners acquire a language. This acknowledgment underscores the prominence of exploring effective learning strategies and approaches to cater to the needs of a linguistically diverse and interconnected world.

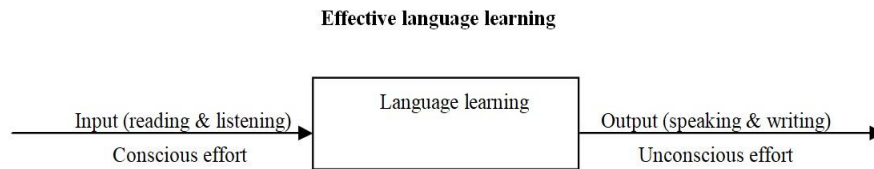


Figure 1.

Kausar Hussain (2004) emphasizes the fundamental aspect that learning a language involves both receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing). The acquisition of productive skills, such as speaking and writing, necessitates active engagement in production tasks (p. 122).

In the natural acquisition of language, listening plays a pivotal role, akin to one's mother tongue. Conversely, in second language acquisition, reading assumes a major role. Reading allows learners to invest time in extracting knowledge from texts, and subsequently, writing activities based on their reading can further enhance language skills. Producing spoken language poses challenges for English learners, requiring awareness of fluent speech characteristics, including reduced forms, slang or idioms, fixed phrases, collocations, and the pace of speech delivery. Effective conversation practice in the classroom should encompass these elements to avoid sounding overly formal and unnatural. Real communication should be introduced and practiced within the learning process to prepare students for spontaneous communication in foreign environments.

Speaking is a crucial form of communication, as expressed by Rudyard Kipling (1923), highlighting the powerful impact of words. Therefore, the art of speaking should be approached carefully to avoid sounding bookish and unnatural. A good language learner is likely to exhibit a personal learning style and positive learning strategies, making the training in language learning strategies (LLS) a valuable approach to enhance language competence. The application of strategies is believed to influence the quality of learning, and explicit training in LLS can bridge the gap between actual and expected competence levels, fostering learner autonomy.

In the Indian context, web-based English language learning has become available, presenting an opportunity to leverage technology for language education. Proficiency in the English language is crucial for professional success, as effective communication is a key skill. Learners with self-confidence, high motivation, a positive self-image, and low anxiety levels are better equipped for success in L2 acquisition. Proficiency in English extends beyond basic interpreting skills to encompass discussing various topics, drafting letters, and expressing thoughts effectively.

Improving English proficiency requires more than superficial learning; it necessitates advanced-level learning. English Language Teaching in colleges involves organized curriculum and instructional methods to achieve predetermined learning outcomes. While systematic exposure is provided in schools, informal learning, both inside and outside the college, can be equally effective, if not more so, for language acquisition.

What do we have in common between teaching and learning?

1. In teaching, the individual teacher is involved. Methodology does not lie outside the individual.
2. Learning involves individual learning processes.

Both the points represent the individual cognitive readiness to learn and also involved in cognitive activity naturally differs from person to person. It also stresses the fact that learning involves the interaction of existing knowledge (be it attitude, content, worldviews, languages) within coming new knowledge. This activity naturally differs from person to person.

The Essential Profile of Engineering Students in India

Engineering students at the tertiary level exhibit a diverse range of abilities, achievements, and learning capacities. Therefore, it is essential to establish a need-profile for engineering students concerning the acquisition of the English language. This profiling aids in identifying their challenges effectively.

The chart below illustrates that students enrolling in engineering courses in India come from two distinct backgrounds, each with varying English language learning capacities. Upon completing their secondary and Intermediate Board examinations, they gain admission to engineering colleges based on their performance in entrance exams. As revealed by the admission data under study, students entering the engineering stream have diverse backgrounds, with some originating from rural areas and others from urban environments.

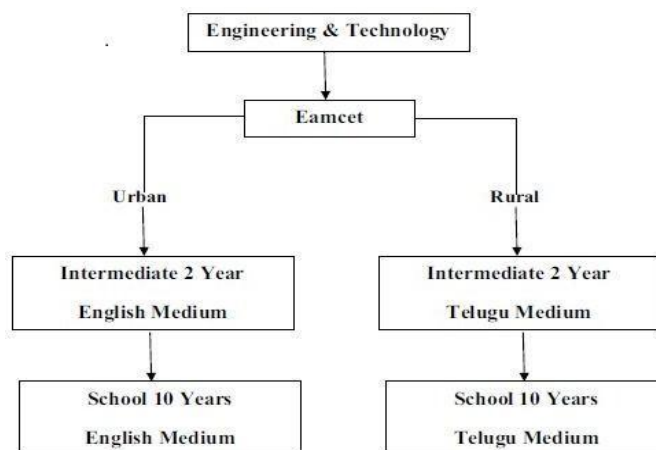


Figure 2.

Urban and Rural

The students also display a combination of languages, specifically English and Telugu (the regional language). Notably, there is a significant disparity in their proficiency levels, a common occurrence in tertiary education across various disciplines in India. Proficiency in English is crucial for engineering students, given that the medium of instruction in Indian engineering colleges is English. This extends beyond lectures, as textbooks, reference materials, and other subjects are also presented in English, making it both an academic and library language.

Within the classroom setting, students require English for various purposes:

- Listening: Understanding lectures, guest talks, and seminars.
- Speaking: Responding to questions in class and engaging actively in seminars.
- Reading: Engaging with textbooks, reference sources, and academic journals.
- Writing: Taking notes, generating study notes, finishing assignments, crafting reports, and taking exams.
- In professional situations, English is necessary for:
- Communicating with superiors and colleagues (Listening and Speaking).
- Extracting information from memos, reports, and technical manuals.
- Writing letters, memos, and reports (Harmer, J, 2007).

An examination of the English Language Teaching (ELT) environment in Indian engineering colleges is conducted to comprehend the circumstances under which both English instructors and students operate. English is used as the language of instruction, and it is noted that elements such as students' native language background, insufficient prior English training, their age, and proficiency levels have an impact on their vocabulary proficiency. It is apparent that while considerable emphasis is placed on students acquiring language skills as per the syllabus, there is a lack of attention to employing learning strategies that facilitate self-learning.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Malley and Chamot (1990) emphasize the importance of directing attention to the language learning process itself. They suggest that learners should comprehend the language learning process, understand the nature of language and communication, be aware of available language learning resources, and recognize specific strategies to enhance their vocabulary, grammar knowledge, and proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing (p. 20).

Rubin (1975) provides a definition for learning strategies as "the techniques or devices that the language learner may use to gain knowledge" (p. 43).

Hosenfield (1984) notes that the list of strategies employed by successful readers includes certain learning strategies like planning, grouping, reviewing, or assessing learning, which can also be applied in language learning (p. 17).

According to Jack C. Richards (1989), over the last thirty years, learners have assumed a central role in the language learning process. The traditional notion that good language teaching involves controlling the learner and that an effective teaching method guides the reluctant learner through the learning process has been reconsidered, giving way to a greater appreciation of the learner's contribution.

Anderson (2003), a Cognitive Psychologist has identified that Declarative Knowledge and Procedural Knowledge would help in learning a language. The structured reviewing helps in shifting information from the at the skill level, information is more readily accessible and less likely to be forgotten after a period of inactivity.

There is significant potential to integrate strategy training with self-learning or e-learning materials, as both involve interactive modes of learning within a one-on-one teacher-learner relationship. When strategies are trained, the learners move away gradually from dependence on the teacher to dependence on their own learning patterns. The advantage of such an approach to learning a language is that language is internalized and is used with greater confidence. A learner can follow the above learning strategies to improve his language.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

The design serves as the comprehensive framework for the research program. The rationale behind selecting the Pre-test and post-test single group design is rooted in the researcher's expectation that the experimental group's students will attain a mastery level in LSRW skills. To assess the achievement of objectives and the success of the experiment, the researcher aims to compare the observed frequency and expected frequency of a group, specifically in terms of an 80% score in each skill. The choice of a single group pretest and post-test design is employed for this purpose.

Variables, in research terms, refer to the conditions or characteristics that the experimenter manipulates, controls, and observes. In any experimental study, there is at least one dependent and one independent variable. In this study focused on enhancing language skills, the independent variable is represented by the language skill training program developed by the researcher. The training program includes written and oral tests, each with specific training components and various activities for students to complete either individually or in a group. The primary goal of the research, centered on language learning, is to assist students in improving language skills through diverse learning strategies. To gauge language proficiency development, achievement tests are administered. Consequently, the dependent variable in this study is the students' achievement, measured in scores on skill tests created by the researcher.

Research Tools

The current investigation utilized various research instruments, including classroom observation, questionnaires, interviews, pre-tests, post-tests, and surveys. The study adhered to the following appropriate measures:

- Collected information was analyzed to make a determination regarding the development of a strategy training course.
- Administered a pre-test to both the control (Group-A) and experimental (Group-B) groups of engineering students to assess their proficiency in English.
- Conducted a post-test exclusively for the experimental group to evaluate their enhancement in language skills.
- Analyzed the results of these tests to gauge the effectiveness of the strategy training course.

Design of present research

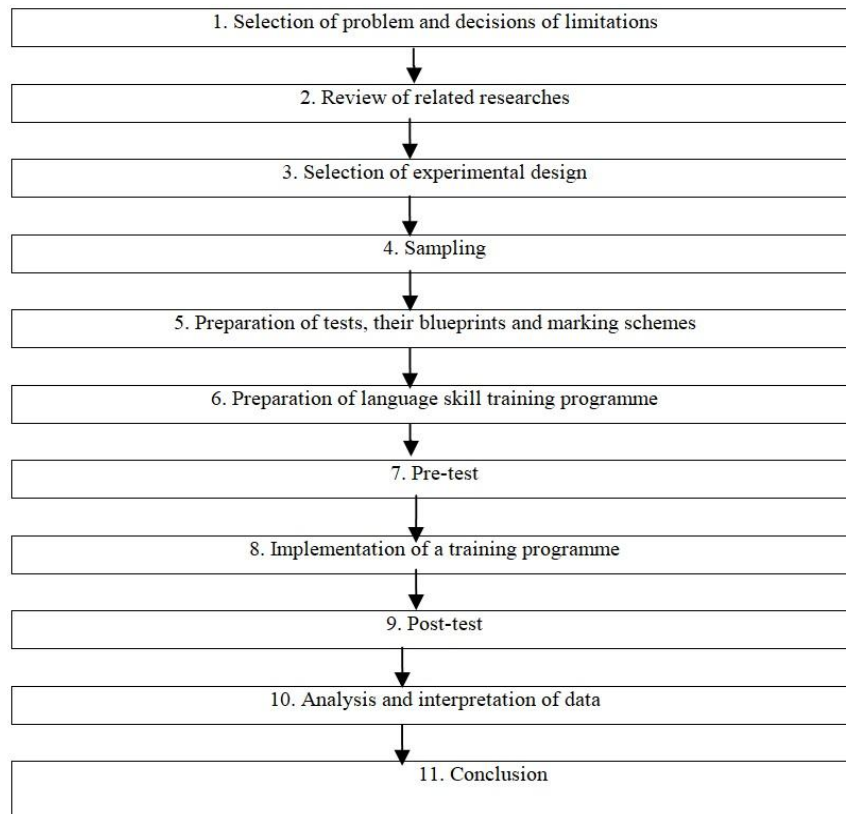


Figure 3.

Development of a training programme

The initial phase in the creation or formulation of a training program involves identifying the need and determining the task at hand. Once the task is established, the selection and arrangement of content, as well as language learning strategies, are also determined. The entire program is outlined in the flowchart below.

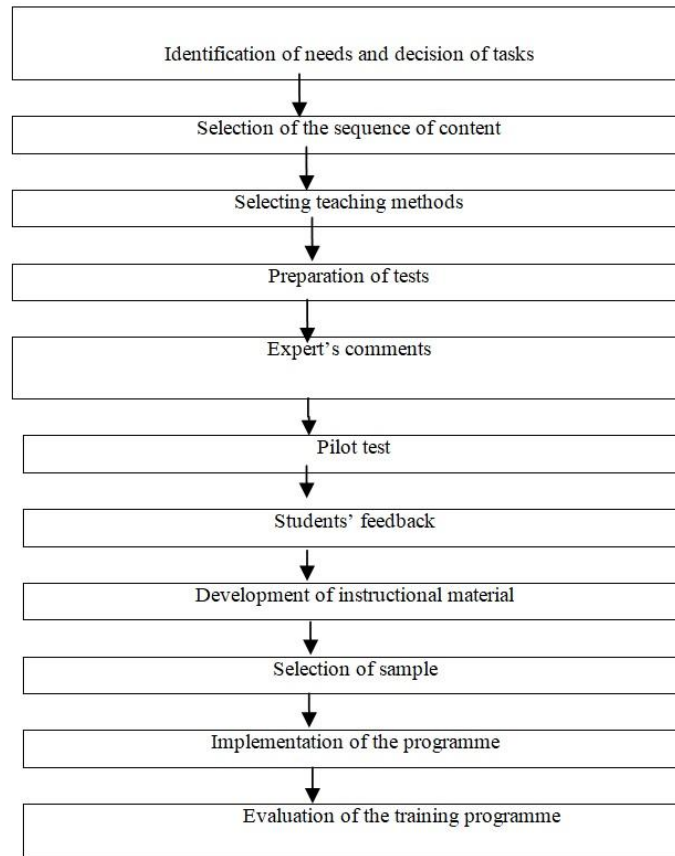


Figure 4.

Strategy Training

These are the stages in strategy training programme.

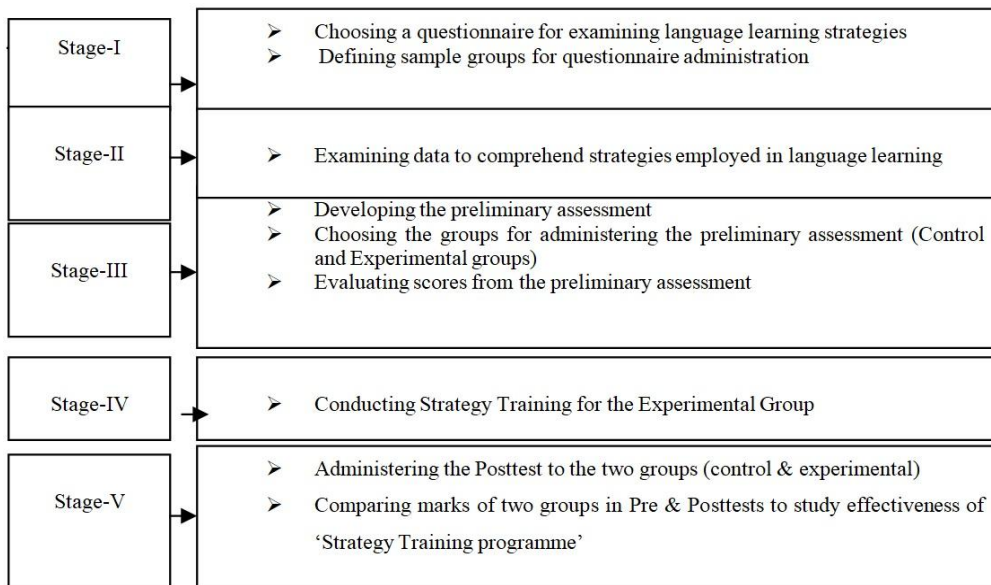


Figure 5.

IV. PRE-TEST

Proficiency in English language is a crucial component of the requirements for engineering students assessed by all entrance examinations. These exams evaluate English language competence through the utilization of memory strategies, employing four distinct sets.

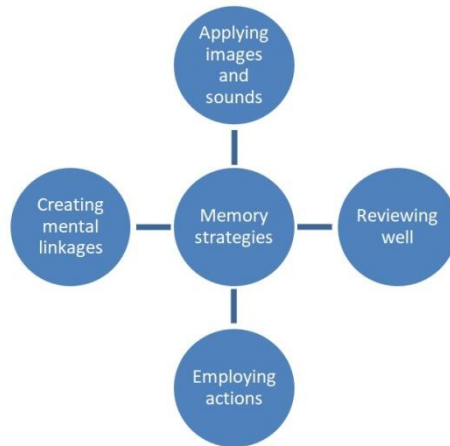


Figure 6.

The concurrent utilization of meta-cognitive strategies and affective strategies empowers students to employ memory strategies more efficiently. Therefore, Memory Strategies embody straightforward principles such as organizing information, forming associations, practicing, grouping, and reviewing. Given that language learners often encounter challenges in memorizing extensive information for achieving fluency, these Memory Strategies enable them to store verbal material and subsequently recall it during communication (Oxford, 1990). Consequently, the researcher has designed a Pre-Test to assess the four language skills of engineering students. This test aligns with the language skills covered in placement and other entrance exams, encompassing sentence correction, Pronunciation, sentence enhancement, sentence construction, word and sentence arrangement, statement completion, analogies, comprehension of written passages, antonyms, idioms and phrases, synonyms, single-word substitutes, transformation of voice and speech, listening understanding, error detection, critical reasoning, argument and issue analysis, and the creation of paragraphs. The Pre-Test, administered to engineering students, focuses on evaluating their proficiency in English and is constrained to duration of 60 minutes or one class period, recognizing the demanding schedules of engineering students. Hence, the preliminary assessment focuses on language abilities and vocabulary elements such as pronunciation, synonyms, idioms and phrases, reading comprehension as well as Change of voice. This table provides time and marks.

TABLE 1

Topics	Marks	DURATION
Synonyms	10m	12mts
One word substitute	10m	12mts
Speech	10m	12mts
Idioms & phrases	10m	12mts
Change of voice	10m	12mts
Total	50m	60mts

Pre-Test

The pre-test comprehensively addressed all four language skills: LSRW skills in the English language. In an effort to assess language proficiency standards among both the experimental and control groups, the researcher conducted a trial, the results of which are presented in the table below. This table illustrates the scores obtained by the two groups.

TABLE 2

Sources	Competency level	Group-A		Group-B	
		No	%	No	%
50 and above	A+	Nil	-	Nil	-
35-50	A	7	14%	14	28%
16-35	B	36	72%	36	72%
15 and below 15	C	7	14%	0	-
Total		50	100%	30	100%

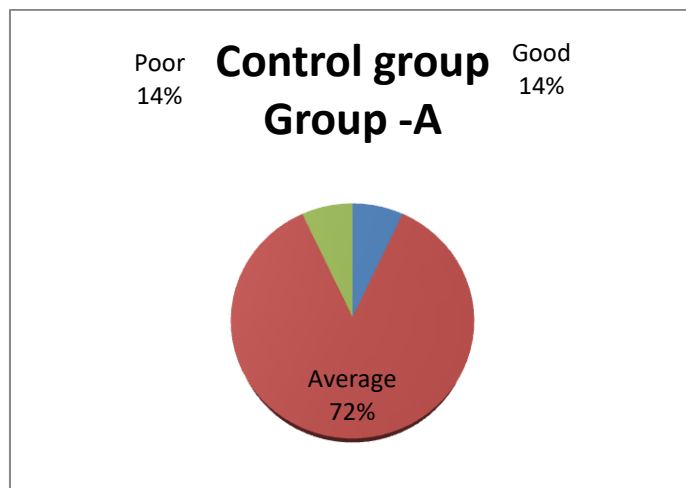


Figure 7.

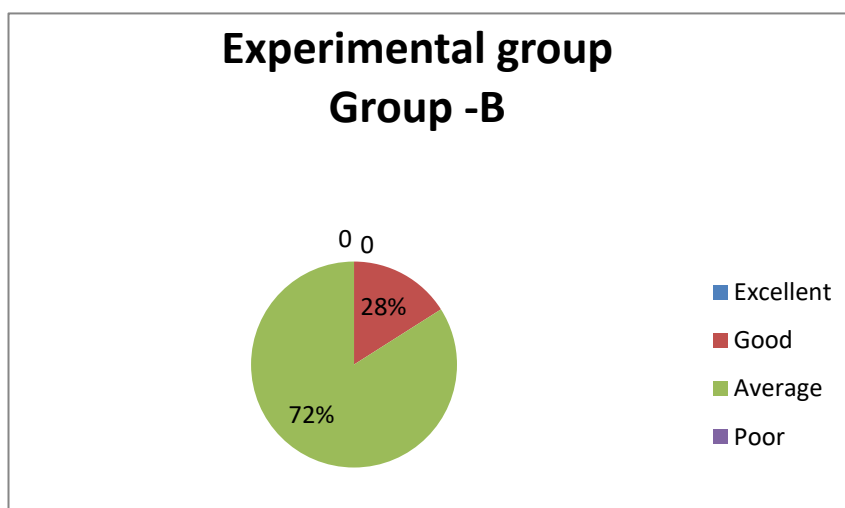


Figure 8.

The results of the preliminary assessment highlighted the crucial need for incorporating strategy training for engineering students. Acknowledging this requirement, the researcher administered targeted strategy training to the experimental group with the goal of evaluating and improving their performance. The pre-test results, when analyzed for both the control and experimental groups, indicated that only a limited number of engineering students exhibited a strong command of the language. Participants discussed their assessment results in group sessions. Subsequently, the researcher opted to organize training sessions for the experimental group during their free time, including activities like sports and meditation classes with the requisite approval from college authorities. The experimental group, comprising students from the Electrical Engineering department at P.V.P Siddhartha Institute of Technology in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh, displayed eagerness and active participation throughout the training sessions. The strategy training encompassed a total of five activities, each targeting a specific element of language. Consequently, the experimental group underwent a total of four training sessions, each lasting 60 minutes.

V. POST-TEST

The researcher implemented strategy training over approximately four theory periods. Afterward, a post-test was administered to both the Group-A and Group-B groups to evaluate the effectiveness of the training. The post-test focused on the following topics as the basis for assessment: Pronunciation, Speech, Reading Comprehension, Antonyms & Synonyms, and Idioms.

TABLE 3
POST-TEST

Topics	Marks	DURATION
Antonyms& synonyms	10m	12mts
Idioms	10m	12mts
Reading comprehension	10m	12mts
Pronunciation	10m	12mts
Speech	10m	12mts
Total	50m	60mts

The researcher carefully selected vocabulary elements, taking into account the strategy training offered to the Group-B.

Study of Scores Achieved by Both Groups in the Post-Test

The table below displays the marks obtained by both the Group-A and Group-B groups in the post-test. Additionally, a succinct finding is provided in this section.

TABLE 4

Sources	Competency level	Group-A		Group-B	
		No	%	No	%
50 and above	A+	Nil	-	28	56%
35-50	A	7	14%	15	30%
16-35	B	31	62%	7	14%
15 and below 15	C	12	24%		
Total		50		50	

After the experimental group underwent a short series of strategy training sessions, both the control and experimental groups took a post-test. This test aimed to compare the groups and evaluate the impact of the strategy training on the students. The post-test outcomes highlighted the significance of strategy training for engineering students. Additionally, a detailed analysis of the scores from both groups is provided in table format.

Study of Scores achieved by Group-A in Pre-Test and Post-Test

The post-test was administered to 30 students in the Group-A, all belonging to the Electronics and Communication Engineering branch. The table below presents the number and percentage of students categorized under different levels of competence in English.

TABLE 5
NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF CONTROL GROUP IN PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST

Sources	Competency level	Pre-test		Post-test	
		No	%	No	%
50 and above	A+	Nil	-	Nil	-
35-50	A	7	14%	6	12%
16-35	B	36	72%	30	60%
15 and below 15	C	7	14%	14	28%
Total		50		50	

The marks indicate that there is minimal difference in the percentage of students with Good and Average proficiency in English between the two tests, despite a month of classroom coursework. Notably, the percentage of Average users has declined, while the percentage of Poor users has risen.

Furthermore, a comparative analysis was performed by assessing the average marks scored by the group in various sections of the two tests. The averages from both the Pre-Test and Post-Test are detailed in the table below.

TABLE 6
SCORES OF GROUP-A IN FOUR SECTIONS- PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST

Scores	Pre-Test					Post-Test				
	I	II	III	IV	V	I	II	III	IV	V
50 and above	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
35-50	3	8	5	2	9	2	3	10	10	6
16-35	3	6	3	4	5	1	2	2.8	4	2
15 and below 15	2	6	2	1	2	1.7	2.2	2	4.6	3.9
Total	8	20	10	7	16	4.7	7.2	14.8	18.6	11.9
Average	2.6	6.6	3.3	2.33	5.3	1.5	2.4	4.9	6.2	3.9

Therefore, the data in the table reveals that the section-wise scores of the two tests for the Group-A show no significant improvement, indicating that the group's skills have largely remained the same. However, due to their prior experience with a similar test, the control group did show slight improvement in a few sections.

Study of Scores achieved by Group-B in Pre-Test and Post-Test

The table below provides the number and percentage of students categorized under various levels of competence in the two tests.

Number & Percentage of Experimental Group in Pre-Test and Post-Test:

TABLE 7

Scores	Competency level	Pre test		Post test	
		No	%	No	%
50 and above	A+	Nil	-	19	59%
35-50	A	5	17%	9	33%
16-35	B	25	83%	2	8%
15 and below 15	C				
Total		30		30	

The examination of data in the provided table reveals a distinct rise in their performance from the pre-test to the post-test. It is increased significantly from zero to 59%, and the good user category saw an increase from 17% to 33%. In contrast, there is a notable decrease in average users in the post-test, potentially attributed to improved performance leading them to transition into the excellent or good user categories. As a result, the percentage of average users decreased from 83% to 8%. Noteworthy observations suggest that the strategy training has its impact on the students.

Average Scores of Four Sections in Pre-Test & Post-Test by Group-B:

Calculations of averages for each section were conducted, and the table illustrates the averages categorized by competence level. The overall class average was determined by examining the vertical averages within each category in the table.

Averages of Sections in Pre-Test & Post-Test by Group-B

TABLE 8

Scores	Pre-Test					Post-Test				
	I	II	III	IV	V	I	II	III	IV	V
50 and above	----	----	----	----	----	5	5	10	9	9
35-50	6	7	9	6	8	5	5	9	8	8
16-35	3	3	6	8	5	4	5	7	5	4
15 and below 15	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----
Total	9	10	15	14	13	14	15	26	22	21
Average	4.5	5	7.5	7	6.5	5.1	4.6	8.6	7.3	7

The data shows that the class average in all sections increased following the implementation of strategy training. Students performed better in various sections of the post-test compared to the pre-test.

VI. FINDINGS

The data indicates that the performance of students in the Group-B offers positive feedback on the effectiveness of strategy training. It is reasonable to conclude that the language skills of engineering students would likely improve with the implementation of strategy training.

Study of Scores achieved by both groups Group-A and Group-B in Post-Test:

A total of 60 students, including those from Group A and Group B, participated in the post-test. An earlier analysis compared the data from both groups across the two tests and evaluated their performances relative to their own pre-test results. The table below aims to further examine and compare the marks of the two groups.

TABLE 9

cores	Competency level	Pre-test		Post-test	
		No	%	No	%
50 and above	A+	Nil	-	29	58%
35-50	A	1	2%	19	38%
16-35	B	30	60%	2	4%
15 and below 15	C	19	38%		
Total		50		50	

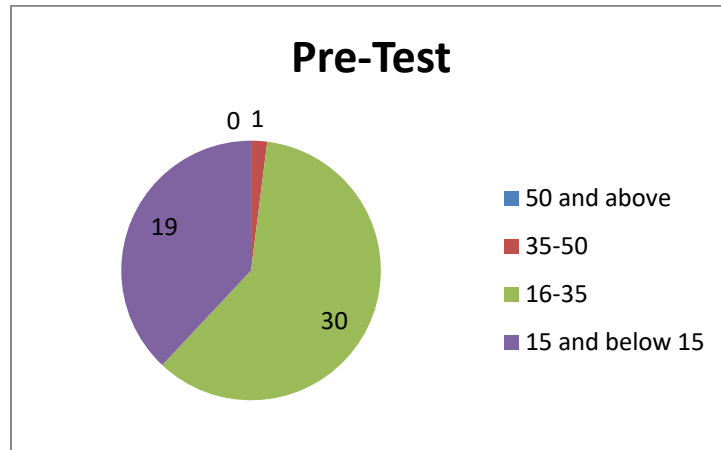


Figure 9.

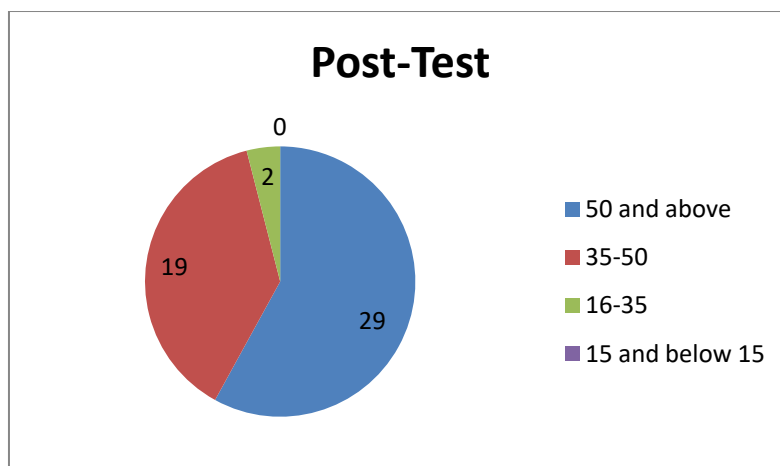


Figure 10.

The data provides evidence that a significant portion of the experimental group has achieved excellence and proficient skills attributed to the strategy training. Upon analyzing the data, it becomes apparent that the experimental group demonstrates a heightened level of English competence compared to the control group when their skills are assessed. The pre-training analysis profiling both control and experimental groups showed no notable difference in their English proficiency. Nevertheless, the post-training analysis presents a contrasting scenario. Additionally, a comparative examination of competence levels in the pre and posttest between the two groups indicates a noticeable disparity. These results affirm the positive influence of the strategy training program.

Average Scores: Four Sections of Post-Test – Group-A & Group-B:

Upon scrutinizing the data, it is evident that the experimental group showcases a higher level of English proficiency in all sections of the post-test compared to the control group. Despite the absence of significant differences during the initial profiling of the control and experimental groups, the subsequent analysis following the strategy training reveals a clear distinction. Significantly, there is a substantial disparity in competence levels across all sections. The sectional contrast between the control and experimental groups is outlined as follows:

TABLE 10

Scores	Group-A					Group-B				
	I	II	III	IV	V	I	II	III	IV	V
45&above	----	----	----	----	----	9.7	4.5	10.0	9.5	4.7
31-45	2.0	6.0	9.8	9.0	3.2	4.8	9.6	9.6	8.2	5.2
16-30	1.2	2.7	3.6	4.2	2.1	4.0	4.6	7.3	4.0	3.3
15 & less	1.7	2.5	4.9	2.6	14.7	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Total	7.2	8.7	14.4	12.2	11.3	12.5	13.8	26.9	15.7	22.2
Average	3.6	4.3	7.2	6.1	5.6	4.1	4.6	8.9	15.2	7.4

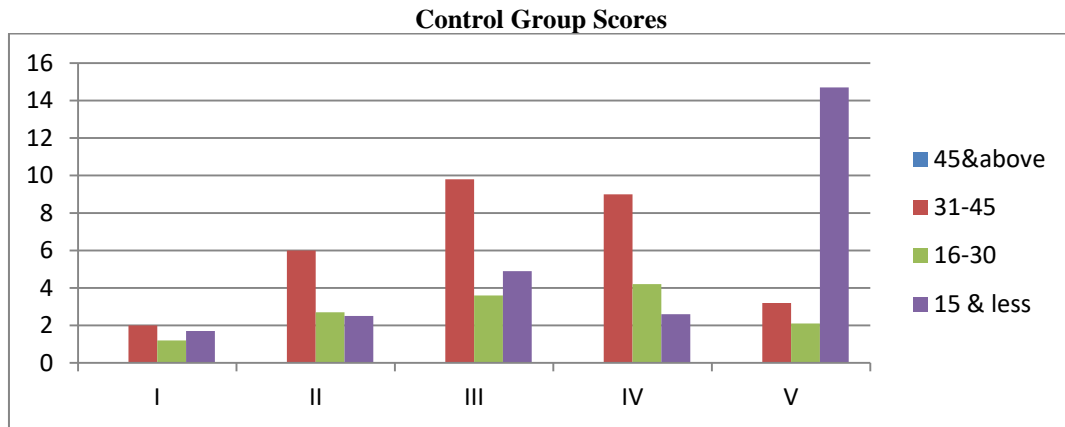


Figure 11.

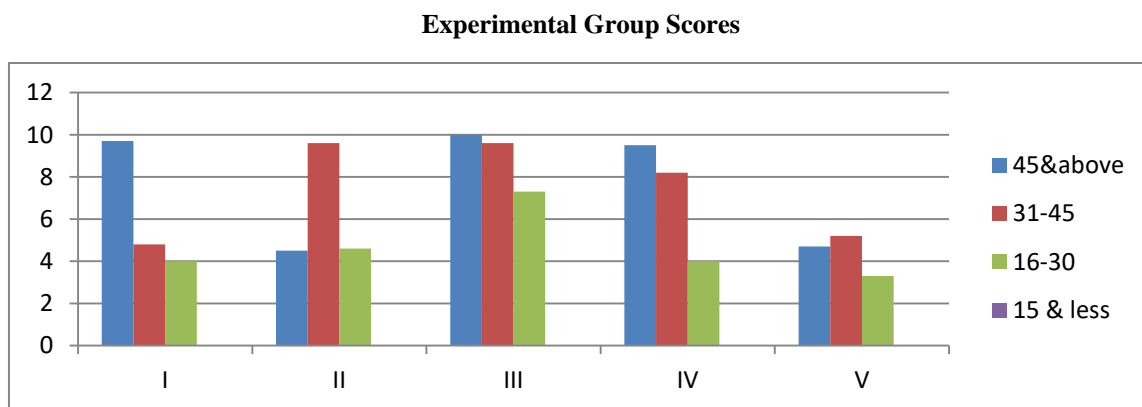


Figure 12.

These factors serve as indicators affirming the effectiveness of the strategy training course. Based on the above analysis, it is observed that the performance between the group-A & group-B was similar before the implementation of strategy training, but there is a noticeable difference in the post-strategy training results. This disparity strongly suggests that the training has proven to be beneficial.

VII. CONCLUSION

The objective of this research is to assess the effectiveness of a strategy training course in enhancing language skills among students. The study aims to instill an understanding of the significance of self-directed learning through the utilization of learning strategies. The findings underscore the vital role of classrooms in fostering pragmatic competence. While students recognize their responsibility in promoting pragmatic behaviors, there is a notable deficiency in the requisite skills. A majority of students believe that teachers play a pivotal role in introducing them to future opportunities. Language classes, in their view, should not solely focus on improving test scores, which primarily assess memorization, but should also guide students in identifying language weaknesses and exploring available resources. However, due to tight academic schedules and the emphasis on grades, overcrowded Indian classrooms struggle to offer personalized instruction for each learner. Nevertheless, society expects employees to be well-prepared to meet the demands of their profession and community.

The analysis suggests that the training in Language Learning Strategies has proven to be advantageous. This research could provide insights for future investigations involving larger groups and the development of additional teaching and learning strategies to enhance language skills. The advancement of the students' progress is delineated in the table below:

TABLE 11

Initial phase	Advanced Phase
Students engaged in collaborative learning	Attempted independent learning
Required encouragement	Voluntarily contributed to learning
Relying on peers	Contributed autonomously
Slowly finished tasks	Completed tasks at a faster pace
Preferred group settings	Independently increased their participation

Consequently, a noticeable transformation occurred in the students as they gained confidence, and their enthusiasm for learning the language grew. The training played a pivotal role in enabling students to undertake language learning

tasks with reduced stress levels and heightened confidence. Further research could explore the feasibility of integrating language learning strategies training into the current course material. There is substantial potential for intertwining strategy training with self-learning materials or e-learning resources, given their interactive nature in a one-to-one teacher-learner proportion. This integration enhances the learner autonomy scope under the able guidance of teachers.

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