

English Majors' Attitude toward Fluency in English and Ways to Develop

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Abstract

English Majors, who are trained thoroughly in the interpretation of literatures in English are tomorrow's English language teachers in India. By and large they are unaware of principles, strategies and techniques of English language teaching, which is a branch of applied linguistics. The sense of correctness in interpretation of literary texts influences them to be accuracy-conscious when they become ESL teachers. The study aims at unearthing their attitude toward fluency vs. accuracy controversy in the acquisitional process of English through a questionnaire prepared on a two-point Likert scale and administered to 181 English Majors in a leading 137-year-old autonomous college in Madurai, South India. The study is based on the theory that fluency takes care of accuracy in learning to communicate in L2. It validates the hypothesis that English language learners are more interested in improving their fluency than achieving accuracy. Some strategies to enhance fluency are discussed at the end of the article.

Keywords: Accuracy, Acquisition Strategies, Competence, Complexity, Proficiency

1. Introduction

English language teachers in India are always unanimously divided in their opinion on their focus of teaching the English language: Accuracy or fluency. A casual look at English language teaching-learning materials used at all levels unambiguously betrays a bias in favor of accuracy. Of course, it is pedagogically convenient to them in terms of teaching, testing and grading. Since textbooks and question papers are heavily content-oriented, memory-based and grammar-focused, rubrics for evaluation are accuracy-based. Primarily, this paradigm holds good for literature curriculum. After all, English language teachers in India are the products of English literature curriculum. The vast majority of English teachers are unaware of English language curriculum as such. They always imagine that they can exploit literature for teaching and not learning the language. Besides, State Recruitment

tests test the candidate's level of grammatical and literary accuracy in English because question papers are set by accuracy-obsessed English teachers.

Caught in the vortex of this not-yet-explicitly-articulated conflict discourse between accuracy and fluency, students are psychologically pulled toward accuracy and this helpless situation makes them guilty that they might make mistakes whenever they attempt to express themselves in English. They become nervous and anxious while using English both inside the class and in their daily lives. Consequently, they become accuracy-conscious. Accuracy is related to the learning and practicing of all the four language skills, grammar and vocabulary. In fact, learners' attempt to use English fluently is always hampered by the fear psychosis of accuracy. Contrary to this academic pandemonium, most of them would like to know pathetically from teachers and English-users how to use English fluently, especially

in speaking and writing. Of course, they are oblivious to the fact that speaking is preceded by listening and writing by reading. If they invest time on listening, they can speak English fluently independent of teachers and texts. Similarly, if they spend time on reading in English preferably challenging texts, they can become fluent and fast readers. Of course, grammar and vocabulary, which are common requirements for the acquisition and practicing of all four macro skills, can be enhanced while listening and reading. It is quite common that learners approach their teachers for strategies and sources to improve their fluency. Sadly, teachers, who are supposed to be what has almost become a cliché expression 'facilitators,' are unable to provide students with acquisition strategies.

The present study aims at crystalizing the English Majors' attitude toward fluency and identifying and articulating the strategies for improving learners' fluency in the use of English for both academic and employment purposes. The following questions are being addressed in the study: 1. What are the English language learners' attitude toward the fluency-accuracy dichotomy? 2. What constitutes fluency? 3. How does accuracy act as a barrier to improving fluency? 4. What are the strategies to be adopted by ESL learners to improve their fluency? The study aims at validating the hypothesis that English language learners are more interested in improving their fluency than achieving accuracy.

It is not uncommon that some learners achieve high levels of fluency while others do not. To explain the reason, we need to define 'fluency' first. The term is sometimes inclusive of its opposite, accuracy. So, someone who is accurate, grammatical and idiomatic is fluent. However, communicative approach methodologists have adopted the term to describe classroom activities that are designed to promote negotiation and communication of meaning rather than the practice of forms. Brumfit⁴ therefore proposes the distinction between fluency and accuracy as a basic methodological distinction. According to him, fluency is "natural language use". Comprehension and production of language may resemble native-speaker-like or not. It involves several concepts like mutual intelligibility, communicative effectiveness, idiomaticity, coherence, accent and other suprasegmental features in speaking, flow of expression with minimal "pauses and hesitations"¹⁵.

Regarding teaching speaking, Thornbury¹⁶ defines speaking ability as referring to students' ability in expressing their ideas in spoken form including fluency and accuracy in pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. Brown and Yule³ say that one of the main purposes of teaching speaking is to enable students to communicate information effectively. Ebong and Sabbadini⁹ list three advantages of using English songs to improve speaking: words in songs help learners associate the number of syllables and stress; they learn English pronunciation unconsciously, and songs provide endless examples of weak syllables. Hammerly¹⁰ emphasize the need for balancing fluency and accuracy by arguing one should not be lost at the cost of the other. Krashen and Terrell¹² warn that correcting errors directly in classroom would be counter-productive since it discourages communication. Interestingly, Housen, Kuiken and Vedder¹¹ add a third component to second language proficiency in addition to fluency and accuracy. It is complexity. The CAF triad is a complement to the traditional four skill model and sociolinguistic and cognitive models of L2 proficiency (Bachman¹; Bialystok²; Canale and Swain⁷). Skehan^{14,15} introduced a proficiency model that brought together CAF dimensions for the first time.

2. Method

A simple questionnaire constructed on a two-point Likert Scale was administered among the English literature students of the institution where the author has been working for three and a half decades. It was administered online through Google Form. The rationale for the choice of English Majors is that they mostly become English teachers at schools, some at colleges where these school teachers are produced and a miniscule minority joins other service sectors such as, journalism, content writing and administration. The total number of respondents is 181 and out of which 130 is undergraduate students and 51 are postgraduate students. The questionnaire consists of 15 statements that elicit participants' attitude toward fluency, accuracy and effort to improve their fluency. Efforts to improve one's fluency are as important as their attitude toward fluency and accuracy. Of course, positive attitudes are favorable to learning. Yet, positive attitudes alone are insufficient.

3. Findings and Discussion

Teachers may attach more importance to accuracy since they believe that accuracy cannot be sacrificed at the cost of fluency. Their intention is not without some valid concern, of course. However, they need to be sensitive to learners’ needs and accordingly they should devise strategies to improve fluency first and accuracy next. Figure 1 shows that 65% of participants honestly think that fluency matters to them. At the same time, 35% of

them are convinced by their teachers’ philosophy that accuracy matters.

Teachers’ attitude and affirmation always influence the learners at primary and secondary level as far as language learning is concerned. However, tertiary level learners do beg to differ from their teachers as far as their needs are concerned. Figure 2 affirms the philosophy of teachers that accuracy is more important than fluency. A whopping majority of them inculcate in learners the importance of

Fluency is more important than accuracy while using English

181 responses

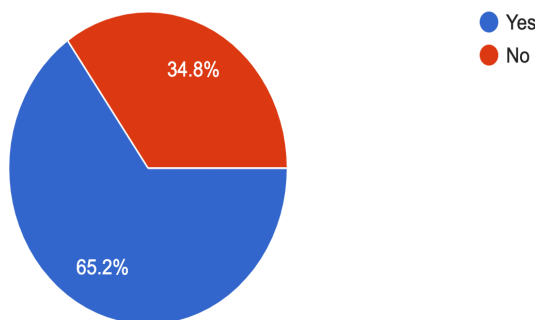


Figure 1. Fluency is more important.

My English teachers emphasize the importance of accuracy

179 responses

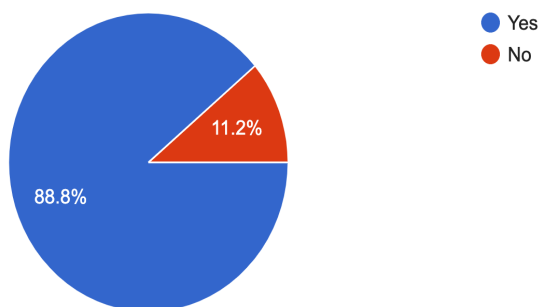


Figure 2. Teacher’s emphasis on accuracy.

accuracy whereas a majority of learners are anxious about enhancing fluency as shown in Figure 1. Perhaps learners would wish to speak or use English as fluently as their teachers. After all, teachers are their first role models as far as fluency is concerned and therefore, learners do not question teachers' authority and accuracy. So, they may logically think that if they (can) speak English as fluently as their teachers, they will automatically become accurate as well.

Students feel anxious and nervous while they focus on accuracy in their use of English. In fact, it acts as a barrier to their use. Many learners hesitate to participate

in classroom discussions or to answer teacher's question in the class fearing that they may go wrong in their expression even though they take a stand in discussion or they can respond to the question. They are worried about how fellow learners and/or the teacher would think of their expression. Figure 3 supports this fear generated by much importance being attached to accuracy. Accuracy can be improved only by using English. The traditional strategy of learning English as a code first and then using it later as a mode has not worked so far. Learners learn a kind of linguistic knowledge instead of communicative competence. On the other hand, learners should first

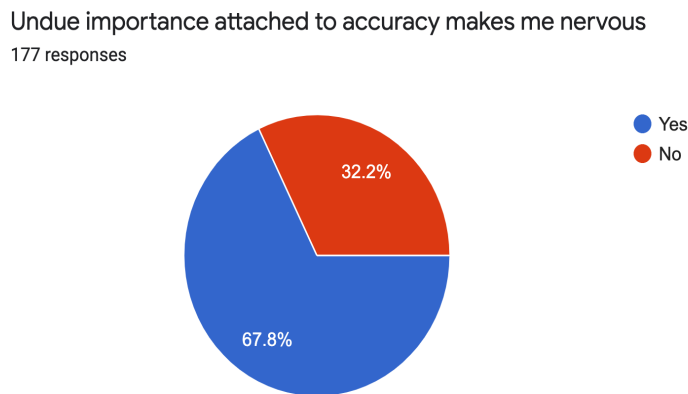


Figure 3. Accuracy causes nervousness.

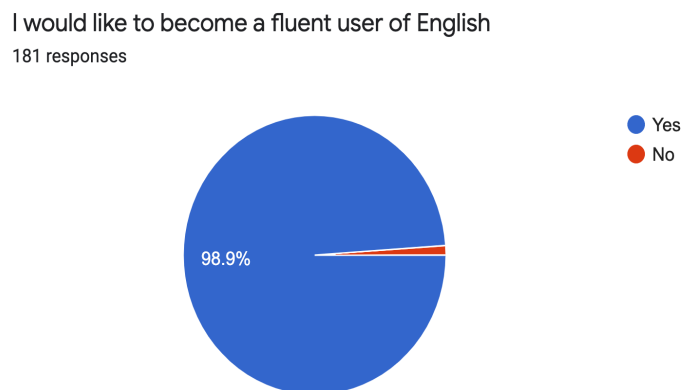


Figure 4. Becoming fluent English users.

become users of the language and as they use it, they can unconsciously and implicitly acquire correctness and accuracy.

It is not a piquant situation in India where every student wishes to become a fluent speaker of English, but they are unable. They would like to read English texts fast, speak English fluently in all circumstances and write examination answer in their own English. However, reality is entirely contrary to their wish. Thus, there is a huge deficit between what wish to do and what they can do or do. Many complain that they are unable to score marks on examinations and score high in entrance tests, to read comprehension passages fast and to speak fluently to the satisfaction of the interview committee members and ultimately, they blame it on their poor or low proficiency in English. Their wish is manifested in Figure 4 wherein almost all (99%) wish to become fluent users of English. It is an eye-opener to all college English teachers. Whatever curriculum prescription and teaching strategies may be, students' needs should be the sole aim and objective of English language curriculum. Curriculum should be learners' need-based and not teachers' belief-fronted. Whether it is supported with literary pieces and grammar items, the ultimate aim should be to facilitate learners becoming fluent users of English. It is up to teachers to make accuracy a built-in component of fluency-encouraging curriculum.

How can learners become fluent users of English? Some teachers and researcher believe that fluency is

related only to speaking and accuracy is important to reading and writing. They may be correct or incorrect in their views. However, the central questions are how to enable learners to become fluent. What is the role of teachers and learners? Can teachers be held responsible for it? Definitely no. Teachers should design activities and strategies for learners to use English. Learners do believe that they can learn English by using it. In fact, almost all the participants as shown in Figure 5 wish to do so. They do not want to be dependent on teachers who, they know pretty well, cannot possibly use any wand to perform miracles making them to speak English fluently overnight. Learners are adults and they are ready to take up the responsibility for the ownership of acquisition. They would like to learn English not by accumulating knowledge of its structures, but by using it in authentic contexts. Hence, teachers are expected to be designers of tasks that promote communicative competence. They should constantly encourage and motivate learners with multiple strategies for increasing their fluency in the use of English without making much ado about accuracy even though they fear that faulty interlanguages might be fossilized if accuracy is neglected at the cost of fluency.

At the same time, it is the learners' responsibility to use English on a daily basis. Learners should not assume that their learning of English is always supervised, guided and guarded by teachers within the four walls of the English classroom. They can learn the use of English in subject classes by observing how subject teachers use English to

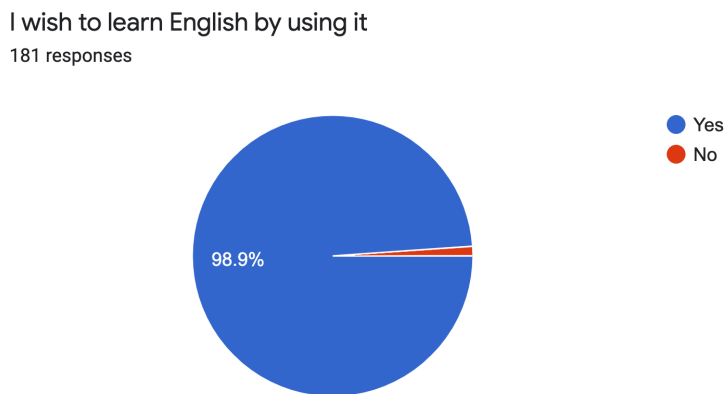


Figure 5. Learning English by using English.

teach the different branches of their chosen discipline and by reading domain-specific books in the library. They should also make use of all opportunities to use English in their personal and social life daily. They should exercise their will power to use English. It is surprising to learn from Figure 6 that 30% of the English literature students do not use English on a daily basis. If they do not use English in their daily lives, there is no hope for them to socialize in it. English is not only a means of communication but also socialization. Once they become English teachers, they are expected to use it everywhere and anywhere to serve as a source of motivation to their learners. English should not be confined to classroom

alone. It happens right now. Many English teachers converse with students in L1 outside the classroom. It means that they speak only 'textbook' English and it is the main source of demotivation for students.

It is really sad and bad that nearly 44% of the English literature students as shown in Figure 7 do not read English newspapers. When they do not read them, they cannot be expected to read plays and novels, essays and short stories, leave alone poetry. Unless they use English for reading, they cannot use it for writing. Reading precedes writing. The Kothari Commission of 1964-66 describes as 'the library language'. Unfortunately, many students do not have the habit of visiting the library during leisure hours.

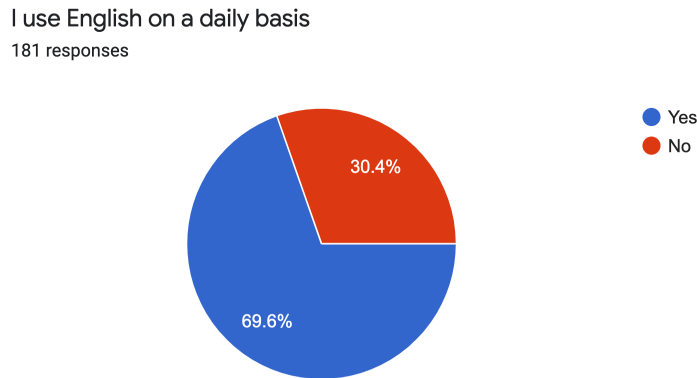


Figure 6. Daily use of English.

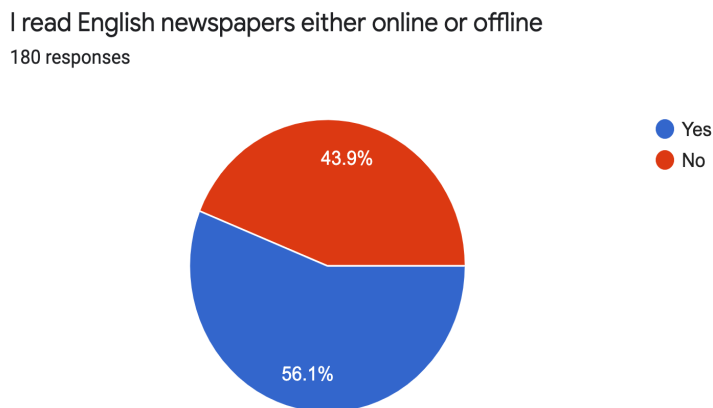


Figure 7. English newspaper reading.

The habit of reading in English should start at home. They have the option of reading English newspapers either online or offline. English dailies provide them exposure to different ‘registral’ variations used to report international subjects, local social events, culture, sports, science and technology, formal writing, film features and so on. Their linguistic-communicative gain is enormous in addition to familiarizing themselves with what’s happening around them through newspapers. Teachers should exploit this rich non-conventional resource to enhance students’ reading and writing skills. They can start their classes with some reference to newspaper reports so that learners may be motivated to read them at leisure in libraries. Reading English newspapers are a gateway to reading books and journal articles borrowed from the library.

Listening precedes speaking. It is natural in the sense that all children first listen to L1 from mothers and others in their immediate environment. Children who cannot listen can not speak L1. ELLs, who do not invest time on listening to English, have no hope of improving their speaking skill. Listening to lectures in the classroom is insufficient for social life. Teachers should not be satisfied with students listening to their lectures. They will never learn speaking at all. Listening to lectures is restrictive and students cannot be expected to focus on listening to the same theme and topic for more than 16 minutes. They may hear but not listen. There should be variety in content that they listen to. Watching English news channels is

ideal for students to pick up spoken English on a variety of events, accents and visuals. Teachers should recommend national and international English channels for students to view. Of course, there is a perception that visuals may act as a barrier to effective listening. Students may face it initially, but eventually they can overcome it. From Figure 8, it is clear that more than 50% of participants do not watch English news channels.

Twenty-first century learners are often characterized as visual learners. It is no wonder that 80% of them watch English films and series on OTT platforms as shown in Figure 9. Film is one of the powerful means of spreading English as an international language. Technology and the pandemic have created innumerable online opportunities not only for academic purposes but also for entertainment. Mostly, youths are familiar with OTT platforms for watching films and particularly English films. They can pick up conversational English with many different accents and dialectal variations without being consciously taught. Teachers can make references to quality English films in their lectures so that students can view them at leisure.

To overcome the interruption created by visuals and subtitles, it is equally a good strategy to listen to English songs. Simple, poetic language easily appeals to their emotions. They are forced to listen to the words repeatedly until they understand. Music is an added value for them to stay focused on the song. Students get

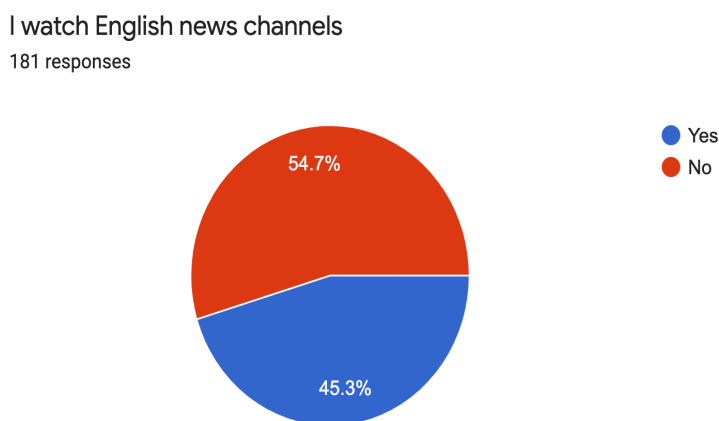


Figure 8. Learning English through watching English channels.

I watch English films and series on OTT platforms

180 responses

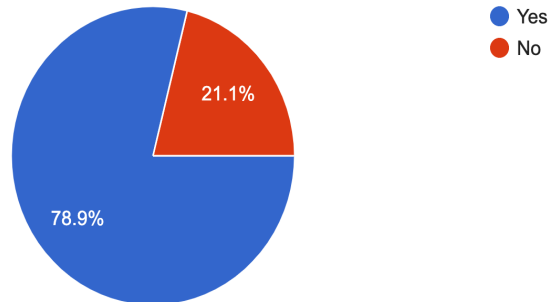


Figure 9. Learning English through watching English films.

I love listening to English songs

181 responses

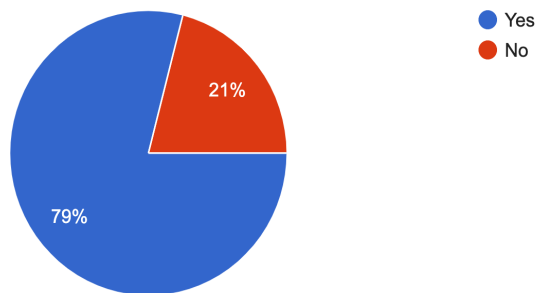


Figure 10. Listening to English songs.

a chance to listen to the native speaker directly and songs add feeling and rhythm to language. To speak well, they need to master their pronunciation first. Mastering is not speaking like the native speakers, but speaking confidently and intelligibly. There are three major components of speech: Fluency of speech, accuracy of pronunciation and grammar. Unintelligible pronunciation causes plenty of problems for the listener. English song is a medium that can interestingly motivate learners to enhance their fluency. Moreover, students feel happy listening to songs. Figure 10 shows that 80% of them love listening to English

songs. Usually, Indians love songs. They learn everyday language and colloquial speech when they listen to songs often. Songs contain several useful vocabulary, phrases and expressions. They become familiar with the sounds of English in terms of rhythm, tone and beat. Moreover, their confidence level increases while they sing songs and singing eventually helps them overcome inhibition in speaking.

Speaking starts informally in all our childhood lives. It starts with close friends who understand each other, ignore mistakes committed by each other and encourage

each other. Interlocutors feel comfortable and confident. It is quite heartening information to learn from Figure 11 that 87% of the participants speak to friends in English only. It is, in fact, very difficult in bilingual/multilingual society because learners would feel like using L1 more often than English only. It may be due to the fact that the institution where the participants are students is a leading urban college where even students from rural areas feel like talking to friends in English only. It is a good attempt to try monolingually as far as possible. Their speech may be hampered with several pauses and

hesitations due to lack of adequate vocabulary, but they increase their confidence level at least. Only when they try to speak English, they will realize their shortcomings or limitations.

English is an academic language to all students at tertiary level since it is the medium of teaching-learning. One of the indispensable tools for their study in addition to books is dictionary. Unfortunately, only 40% of students alone use dictionaries every day. This data as shown in Figure 12 contradicts the earlier claims on reading newspapers daily, watching English films and listening

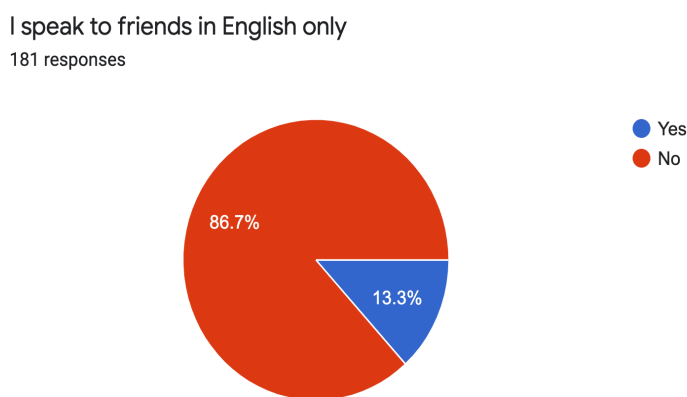


Figure 11. Conversing with friends in English.

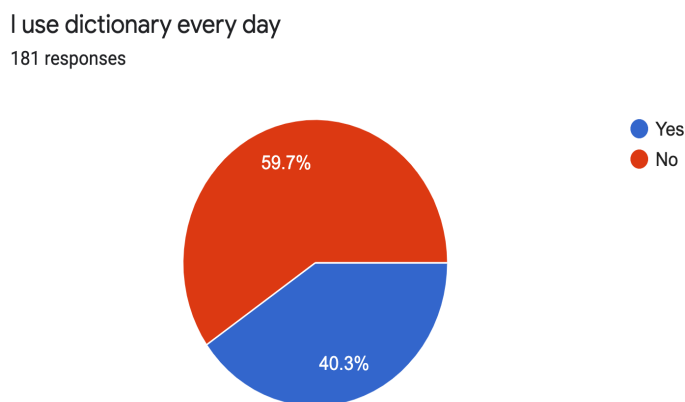


Figure 12. Every day dictionary use.

to songs since these activities call for the effective and frequent use of dictionaries for comprehension. Dictionary is a powerful source of English language learning for speaking, reading, comprehension and writing. Students consult dictionaries to learn the features of speaking, levels of usage and grammar. It is an indispensable companion to ELLs. Teachers should inculcate in them dictionary skills. In addition to defining words, dictionaries provide information about their pronunciation, grammatical forms and functions, etymologies, syntactic peculiarities, variant spellings, collocations, antonyms and synonyms. Since many students are not aware of these uses, they assume that dictionary provides meaning alone.

Mobile technology is ubiquitous. It is no longer restricted. It is transforming how the present-day youths communicate, socialize, play and shop. These changes mount pressure on the traditional modes of language learning like formal teaching-learning in classroom. Before the pandemic started, even kids had known the multiple uses of mobile phone other than talking. Children now have learnt the educational value of their smart phones during the COVID-19 pandemic and therefore each child belonging to the middle class appears to have a mobile phone of their own. It is very rare that a college student does not use mobile because online classes and online semester examinations have become the norm rather than the exception. Mobile users therefore have access to online dictionaries, English language learning apps, social media and YouTube. These features are highly useful to students to learn English on their own.

Almost all English channels provide you short new items, debates and discussions live and recorded through Twitter. Students can listen to English songs and watch English films. They no longer require the gadgets like TV, tape recorder and CD player that were fashionable till a few years ago. They need will power and commitment to learning English. Figure 13 attests the fact that the present-day learners are tech-savvy and tech-mania. 98% of them say that mobile phone is facilitating their use of English. They can chat with friends in English, send recorded messages in WhatsApp and even video-record their conversations. Technology has taught them that the sky is the limit! Thus, mobile technology presents us with amazing opportunities to re-design the way English is taught and learnt.

Reading other than what is prescribed in the curriculum outside the classroom complements and supplements classroom activities. College students are expected to be independent learners. They realize the potentials of learner autonomy and it goes with responsibility. They cannot afford to blame it on others if they fail to meet the standards. Voracious reading is likely to improve their fluency and accuracy while using English. Silently, they observe and are influenced by how English is used by several writers in the field. Each subject has technical vocabulary, peculiar idiomatic expressions and preference for certain syntactic structures like the passive voice construction in Science disciplines. Thus, reading enables learners to acquire both fluency and accuracy. However, a significant 28% of students as in

I believe that my mobile facilitates my using English

181 responses

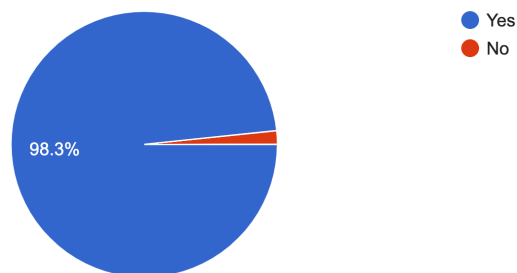


Figure 13. Mobile phone facilitates using English.

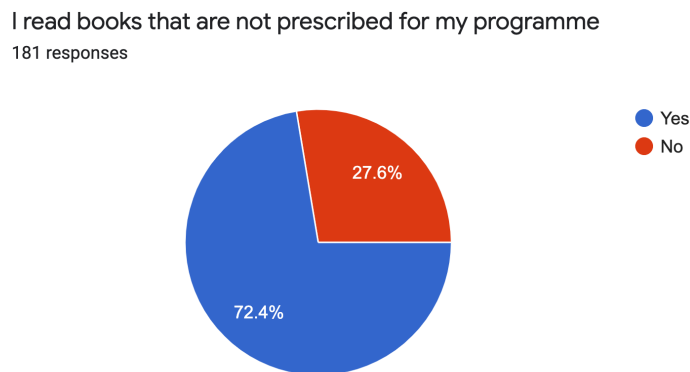


Figure 14. Extra reading in English.

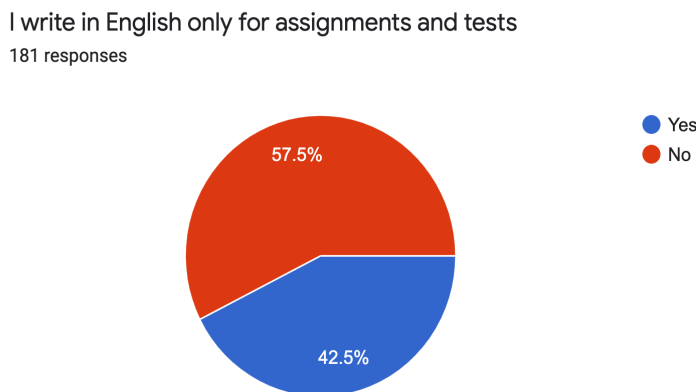


Figure 15. English only for assignments and tests.

Figure 14 agree that they are not reading anything other than the prescribed texts. Of course, the same technology acts as a threat to their academic activities and language learning effects. Students tend to spend their precious time on the social media. In fact, chatting/texting has emerged the third media of communication in addition to speaking and writing.

Writing is the most complex and tough skill to learn. It is not used in everyday life as much as speaking. It is meant more for academic purposes than for social purposes. However, students absolutely need this skill to demonstrate their learning output for grading and certification. Students do not normally exercise this skill

unless they are asked to do so. For example, students write only for assignments and tests for continuous internal assessment and essays for summative examinations. They are writing ‘examination’ essays. Mostly, they memorize and regurgitate on examinations. They do not respond to the questions impromptu. Figure 15 shows that 42% agree to it. Of course, their honesty needs to be appreciated. The remaining 58% say ‘no.’ They may largely constitute postgraduate students who write academic articles for conferences and project reports and others who might mistake texting for writing.

The objectives of teaching English as a second language can be to gain either fluency or mastery over English. Ever

since English was institutionalized as a course of study, the former objective has been relegated in favor of the latter. It is inferred from practice that convenience seems to be the yardstick to arrive at this academic-pedagogic decision in the sense that it is convenient to design literature-based and grammar-oriented curriculum, teaching methodology, testing patterns and objective grading. Theoretically, researchers and practitioners of ELT highlight the importance of fluency (Skehan^{14,15} 1996, 1998; Krashen and Terrell¹² 1983; Canale and Swain⁷ 1980). Of course, there are some researchers who advocate a balance between fluency and accuracy (Hammerly¹⁰ 1991; Housen et al.,¹¹ 2012). To comprehend the controversy better, we need to comprehensively assess the basic differences between accuracy and fluency in terms of five dimensions: working definition, purpose, materials, activities, and issues.

Accuracy is defined as the mastery of rules or linguistic competence - grammar, spellings, sentence structure, punctuation, choice of words and abbreviations - excluding the ability to speak or write or read fluently. It focuses on the use of correct forms where utterances do not contain errors that might affect the phonological, syntactic, semantic or discourse features (Bryne⁶ 1988). Users of a language should exercise the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences and to clearly articulate themselves either in speaking or writing. They should use the language that is appropriate to the situation or the context.

On the other hand, fluency is characterized by how well and how easily users communicate their ideas. They should have the ability to produce written and spoken language with ease. In other words, they should be able to speak with a good, but not necessarily perfect command over grammar or vocabulary or spoken features. In fact, the term 'fluency' is derived from the Latin word that means "to flow". It means the ability to get across communicative intent without too much hesitation or too many pauses that act as barriers to successful communication (Crystal⁸ 1977; Bryne⁵ 1986; Nation¹³ 1989). It also means decoding and comprehending at the same time while listening and reading. In speaking, the users are comfortable to understand and to be understood by other interlocutors. In other words, it refers to the ability to speak/write/read accurately, quickly and appropriately. Speakers and writers communicate

ideas effectively while producing continuous speech and writing without causing comprehension difficulties or breakdowns in communication.

As far as purpose is concerned, accuracy aims at helping learners to achieve accurate perception and production of sounds, words and sentences. On the other hand, fluency focuses on helping learners practice language in listening, speaking, reading and writing activities spontaneously.

Teachers and designers of language curriculum who attach importance to accuracy choose texts that are usually composed of discrete items such as words and sentences. They do not care for how these items are used in real life. Moreover, the target items are usually practiced independent of contexts or situations. On the other hand, fluency-targeting texts are usually whole pieces of discourse - conversations, stories, narratives. They would be used in real life. For example, dialogues are spoken, articles and written stories are read. In other words, authentic materials from real life are used.

Activities that are employed in accuracy-fronted classrooms draw learners' attention to a particular target item with predictable output in the mind. Teachers assess learners' performance on the basis of how few language mistakes are committed. In other words, errors are corrected. Moreover, tasks do not stimulate real-life situations. Contrarily, fluency-oriented tasks draw learners' attention to communication of information and expression of ideas without predictable output in the mind. Learners' performance is assessed on the basis of how well ideas and information are articulated or comprehended. Unless errors interfere with communication, learners' errors are not corrected then and there. Tasks often stimulate real-life situations. Besides, fluency tasks build confidence, provide learners with a chance to use English repeatedly, permit learners to express what they wish to talk about, give learners space for negotiation of meaning and produce a positive effect on classroom dynamics. In a nutshell, fluency focuses on a process, not a product.

The main issue involved in accuracy is the adverse impact of immediate correction. Correction of errors as soon as learners commit discourages learners from using the language. On the other hand, if it is not corrected as often done in fluency-focused classes, errors are likely to be, in the words of Nation, 'fossilized'.

When accuracy and fluency are perceived as binary oppositional terms, three more terms emerge in the discourse. They are appropriacy, proficiency and communicative competence. Appropriacy is characterized as the correct structures employed to carry out communicative functions and sociolinguistic competence [how language is used in specific cultural contexts]. Proficiency means both fluency and accuracy. Communicative competence includes four types of competence: linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic.

Pedagogically, ESL teachers should be conversant with concepts such as fluency, accuracy, proficiency, appropriacy, linguistic competence, communicative competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence and their implications to teaching English as a second language in specific cultural contexts. They should first resolve if their teaching aims at facilitating learners' communication or developing learners' knowledge about English and if they should consciously promote communication at the expense of accuracy. They should be balanced in their approach wherein language courses should focus on successfully producing communicatively competent users without neglecting linguistic accuracy so that there may not be too many wrong interlanguages. Teachers should therefore undertake action research on how learners can attain reasonable fluency and at the same time a high level of accuracy. Learners should ultimately acquire the ability to listen, speak, read, and write English accurately and to comprehend, speak and write fluently. When communication is emphasized, linguistic accuracy need not suffer. Teachers and tasks should ensure that linguistic competence develops as learners communicate. Enhancing communicative competence need not generate linguistic incompetence and vice versa. An ESL classroom is inevitably a bilingual classroom and its aim should be to produce functional bilinguals. Communicative competence is therefore the criterion of an ESL classroom and accuracy necessarily becomes a less important byproduct.

Becoming fluent in English is a long-term process. Hence, there are no short-cuts. Learners should use English on a daily basis as much as possible both in the class and outside of it. Frequent touch with English is more crucial than hours of study about it. English should never be treated as curricular requirement,

but a necessity for social uplift, economic liberation, cultural enrichment and successful communication and socialization. Learners should therefore listen to English wherever possible and whenever learners get a chance to listen. They should cultivate the habit of reading English dailies with the assistance of dictionary. They should also practice thinking in English about any conceivable experience, theme and topics that concern their daily lives even while they are walking or jogging, carrying out housework and even dreaming! They can watch videos and listen to podcasts in English on their mobile phone about any topics they enjoy.

Being fluent or becoming fluent does not mean focusing on speaking alone as often (mis)understood. Rather, learners should balance all the four micro-skills of English language learning: Listening, speaking, reading and writing. They should focus on vocabulary and grammar. They should not adopt an imbalanced approach since it will weaken them in other skills. In fact, they cannot pick up speaking without listening. Children first start listening and then speaking. School children are first exposed to reading and then writing. Hence, all the four skills should be equally focused. To start with, they can spend a day per week for a skill. For example, they can focus on listening for a week. Listening has almost become synonymous with watching these technology-driven days. Visuals may be deterrent to listening for some learners, but they should not deter learners' effort to listen as long as they are committed to enhancing listening skill. Having listened to good English, learners cannot but start speaking English without compulsion or inhibition. It is a natural process. Similarly, they can spend a week on reading so that they will start writing in reaction to what they have read. In the due course of time, learners become users and once they become users of English, they go into an integrated skill mode of using English without explicitly being aware of artificial division of language into four skills.

Learners should have regular partners for their English language use. Daily newspapers, weekly magazines, professional journals, academic textbooks, fictional writings borrowed from library for aesthetic reading prove to be a good partner as far as reading and writing are concerned. On the other hand, they should have regular speaking partners for speaking at least once a week online or offline. Social media has become a boon for most of them. Their mobile has the features of chatting

and talking through recorded voice through Instagram and WhatsApp. Almost every other student is interested to improve their spoken English. They should therefore resolve to talk ONLY in English to each other either they meet in person or on phone. As peers, they need not be or will not be conscious of committing errors or correcting them. Talking in English with each other boosts their confidence level.

They should read, watch and listen to English as used in used in different contexts such as social, academic, cultural, aesthetic, educational and professional. They can pick up conversational English by watching English movies and listening to English songs so that they can self-learn how English is used in informal contexts. However, such English cannot be used for writing academic articles and examination essays which require formal English. So, they can improve formal English by watching news programs/channels that host debates and discussions in English. Experts from different walks of life participate in such discussions. They can also listen to formal academic lectures on the relevant domain topics delivered by professors from world-famous universities that are available in YouTube. Learners should therefore diversify their English input. They can be formal and informal, conversations and speeches, serious debates and comedy talks, motivational talks, literary and non-literary, scientific and journalistic and views and news on contemporary issues.

In bilingual societies, English language learners cannot and therefore should not negate their L1. They learn English along with L1. In fact, their classrooms at all levels from primary to university are bilinguals. However, they should start thinking in English at some point of time. It does not come naturally. Learners should learn to think in English. It requires step-by-step process. First, they should think with individual words. When they talk in L1, they should start thinking about English equivalents. When they read the Bible in L1, for instance, they should try to recall or learn English equivalents. Bilingual dictionaries and bilingual bible are of great use. They should constantly ask themselves if the equivalents are satisfactory or correct, near-appropriate or domain-specific. Second, they should start thinking in phrases and sentences. It is not a question of translation at this stage, but using English to think at the sentence level. Third, they should translate local stories, proverbs, jokes and myths from L1 to English. Fourth, they should

think the entire stretch of conversation in their heads in English. They are bound to make mistakes, but they need not be bothered or anxious since no one is there to know the errors. They should not be bound by (text) books or classroom curriculum. They should think in English anytime, anywhere.

Lack of appropriate vocabulary is often a powerful deterrent for most learners to express their responses in English. They need not wait for vocabulary to be acquired first and English to be used next. Whenever they run short of vocabulary, they should say things with the different known words that may be circumlocutory but creative. Using known vocabulary is better than waiting for yet-to-acquire vocabulary. Lack of vocabulary that causes pauses and hesitations is a big barrier to English fluency. Very often, learners have an idea that was perceived and conceived in L1, but they are not able to express them in English. When they struggle for a particular word, they can try to substitute it by thinking of alternative ways to express the same. For example, they can describe the object or action in simple words even though they do not get a single word. It may be 'assassination,' (killing people for political gain) or 'camel' (animal that lives in the dessert and has a long neck) and others do understand. In fact, it is creative! Similarly, they can start translating L1 idioms in lieu of finding equivalent English idioms. However, they will come to learn English idioms in due course and they need not feel ashamed of this translation method at initial stages. As discussed above, thinking in English is advisable but it is unavoidable to think in L1 initially in bilingual situations.

Talking to oneself is another sensible strategy. Before they start talking to others, they can start talking to themselves! They are the speakers and they are the audience. They speak and they listen to themselves. They can do it when no one is around them. It is an excellent and encouraging way to communicatively develop one's fluency and to psychologically build confidence. There is indeed no pressure to be perfect and no audience at their side to detect their 'mistakes.' They can proceed to answering a question by imagining that someone had asked them a question. This strategy may sound funny but is very effective.

Learners should not be obsessed with grammar and mistakes. English is only a second or foreign language to most learners in India and it is natural for expression to be unidiomatic and ungrammatical. Obsession with rules

(accuracy) will create nervousness and anxiety and they, in turn, will affect performance (fluency). Being conscious of accuracy and being afraid of committing mistakes will act as mental blocks. Psychologically, they may feel embarrassed to speaking perfectly and write flawlessly. The watchword is that communication is more important than perfection and expression is more important than errors.

Finally, learners should embrace the philosophy that they should keep learning English only using English. Knowing English is not being or becoming intelligent. It is a colonial hangover to equate English with intelligence. They need not be intelligent to speak or write English. What is required is dedication, determination and practice. They should have the will power not to stop until they become fluent. They should not believe in intermittent way of learning and using English. Becoming fluent in English a skill; a skill can be learnt for use; therefore, English can be learnt by using it and for using it.

4. Conclusion

ESL learners are basically ESL users. For learning to become acquisition, learners should first be users. Fluency should be the guiding principle of ESL programs and classes. Teachers should design tasks that promote fluency as part of acquisition of communicative competence in the classroom and should suggest skill-specific strategies of acquisition for the beginners and integrated skills-strategies for other levels of learners. Once learners become fluent, they can always self-learn to be accurate in expressions. Grammar and vocabulary need not be taught as discrete items. Rather, they should be developed through communication. Learners should focus on involving in tasks outside the classroom that might promote the use of English for study and life. They are lifelong learners of English as a second language.

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