English Language Teaching Research Partnerships (ELTReP) Award programme 2012–2016

Explorations: Teaching and Learning English in India

Issue 8: Assessing learning (2)

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Explorations: Teaching and Learning English in India

Issue 8: Overview

Assessing learning (2)

All three papers in this issue of *Explorations: Teaching and Learning English in India* investigate the professional practice of assessing learning. This professional practice includes designing tasks to measure learners' progress and applying appropriate assessment criteria in appropriate ways. Through this professional practice, teachers can use assessment effectively to monitor learning and use data from assessments to inform teaching.

In her examination of current forms of assessment of speaking and communication skills in engineering colleges in Andhra Pradesh, **Swathi Chikkala** finds considerable variation and inconsistencies between methods of assessment used and suggests that a more standard approach would support the future employability of candidates. **Khaleeq Ahmad** and **Prachi Agarwal** present teacher and learner perceptions of a recently implemented international examination and identify the need for training for teachers to manage such examinations effectively. **Maruthi Kumari Vaddapalli** demonstrates the effectiveness of self-regulated instruction in preparing learners at college level for writing assessment and in developing their writing skills in general.

About the authors

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About the English Language Teaching Research Partnerships (ELTReP) Award programme

India has a long tradition of educational research but results of this have not always reached the wider world. Through a range of programmes, British Council India places considerable emphasis on encouraging and supporting inquiry. A key strand of that work between 2012 and 2016 has been the English Language Teaching Research

Partnerships (ELTReP) Award programme. The programme aimed to facilitate high quality, innovative research to benefit the learning and teaching of English in India and to improve the access of ELT policy makers, professionals from India and the United Kingdom and the global ELT community to that research. All writers contributing to the eleven issues of *Explorations: Teaching and Learning English in India* were selected and supported in their research by the ELTReP Award programme.

All three papers in this issue have been written by practitioners in the field, whether teachers, lecturers, educational department personnel or other roles that involve day-to-day contact with the teaching and learning of English. The researchers, many of whom will be seeing their work published for the first time, have designed and implemented their studies and present results which in each case are innovative and thought-provoking. Each paper reflects the creativity, detailed awareness of context and practical suggestions of a wide range of writers, from different backgrounds and working in different situations.

We very much hope you enjoy *Explorations: Teaching and Learning English in India* and that you feel the insights the papers provide into a variety of educational environments are applicable to your own context, wherever you may be working.

Acknowledgements

The opinions expressed in the papers in this issue are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent or reflect the views of the British Council.

1

Current oral language assessment in professional colleges and its impact on student performance

Swathi Chikkala

1. Introduction

Assessing oral language skills was given little value for many years in India. However, with the increasing awareness of the importance of oral language proficiency in English, schools and colleges in India began introducing forms of assessment of speaking skills a decade ago. This has resulted in technological institutes in India giving importance to English language instruction for their undergraduate students in view of the relative value of employability, as employers mainly recruit candidates with excellent communication skills in English. The curriculum of English in engineering colleges in India has incorporated oral language assessment and students are now expected to communicate better than before. However, it can be claimed that there are no standard assessment criteria used for oral assessment and this lack of criteria could be one of the main reasons for the inadequate skill acquisition in learners. Since there has not been much research done on the efficacy of assessment procedures used by teachers in engineering colleges, there is a great need for more research on current testing methods and to find out how effective the methodology and criteria used by teachers in engineering colleges are.

Speaking has always been considered a necessary skill to obtain access to global resources. It becomes even more crucial in India, the IT hub of the world, and to students who are ready to enter the corporate world as employees. This is where the problem arises, as companies are keen on recruiting ready-made graduates who do not require any training in skill development after recruitment. However, the fact that only 10 to 25 per cent of graduates can be readily employed by these companies is a cause for concern. This substantiates the disappointment felt by the companies, who feel that graduates do not live up to corporate expectations, and emphasises the need to acknowledge the importance of speaking skills. This in turn supports the need to frame an effective system of teaching and learning where the skills that are taught match with corporate requirements. This involves an appropriate approach to assessment where there is a need to use standard oral assessment criteria and methodology in engineering colleges to improve skill acquisition.

There is therefore a need to consider the reasons for disappointment of the companies and poor placement percentages. There are a number of reasons that can be considered as possible factors influencing poor speaking skills. One of the reasons is the mother-tongue influence that invariably affects English language. For instance,

if the state of Andhra Pradesh is taken into consideration, the influence of the mother tongue, Telugu, is incessantly present and is prominently observed in the accent, pronunciation and stress of speakers using English. Another reason is the system of education at primary and secondary levels, where the students can choose between English-medium and Telugu-medium instruction. This proves to be a problem to students from a Telugu-medium background because in professional courses education is delivered through the medium of English. These conditions hamper the smooth process of attaining proficiency in the English language. To understand the problem in the specific context of engineering colleges in Visakhapatnam, the majority of students are from rural and urban areas. Though most of them come from an English-medium background, they are not comfortable conversing in English as they are not accustomed to using the language except in formal contexts, and as they step into college they are expected to participate in group discussions and give presentations in English. While they are still coming to terms with the unfamiliarity of these activities, it would benefit them if they were introduced to standard parameters that are accepted globally to present themselves as good speakers or communicators. This is the gap that exists in the present scenario, as the students are not given any orientation about the language skills which are required. This is the result of the absence of any standard assessment criteria in colleges where assessment parameters are set by individual faculties. This situation is one of the key reasons for the sad state of recruitment of graduates into the corporate world, as students are required to excel in language skills that would assist them in succeeding.

In this context, this study is quite relevant as the main purpose of the proposed research is to investigate the current English language assessment methods in professional colleges in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. The study also aims to find out whether teachers use any standard assessment procedures and to recommend the use of standard assessment applying the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

2. Research questions

The study aims to find out whether teachers use any standard assessment criteria and to answer the following questions:

1. What assessment criteria are used by teachers in different engineering colleges? Is there any uniformity in approach?

2. What assessment tasks or methods are used by teachers? How does assessment actually happen?

3. What is the impact of the current assessment criteria used on student performance? How can existing assessment criteria and methodology be improved?

3. Literary review

There has been a surge of researchers documenting the increasing importance of oral communication and issues related to its assessment in India. In fact, research on oral communication in terms of its pedagogy and assessment has been an ongoing interest among linguists and educators in Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom. Oliver, Haig and Rochecouste (2005) have investigated issues relating to the challenges secondary school teachers and pupils in Western Australia faced in oral assessment. Their results reveal that incorporating oral language tasks into their pedagogy presents a considerable challenge for teachers because of a curriculum biased towards developing writing skills. Teachers also revealed that they do not have the skills to assess oral language, even though they acknowledged the importance of their students' communicative competence both within the school environment and outside it. Students involved in the study were also aware of many weaknesses in their communicative competence and that these were not being addressed in the classroom. In the summer of 2005, in Princeton, Internal Assessment Studies (IAS) conducted the process of assessing the competence of undergraduate students in two areas: critical thinking and oral communication. One of the primary research results was that student performance fell below the expected targets.

However, to the best of my knowledge, research in oral communication assessment in Visakhapatnam, particularly at the graduate level, has been modest, and very little research has been carried out in this area in Andhra Pradesh. In view of this, studies in the area of oral assessment, especially among technical institutes, definitely deserve more attention.

4. Methodology

The research was carried out in three phases. Phase one involved studying the assessment criteria used by teachers in different colleges and collecting data by visiting colleges. Phase two involved observing assessment methods, studying the methods of assessment used and interviewing second-year students to analyse the speaking skills of the students. Phase three involved data analysis.

To elaborate on the methodology, the research involved teachers and students of engineering colleges in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. The researcher visited seven engineering colleges to collect data on the current oral assessment criteria and methods of assessment used in these colleges. Data was collected through questionnaires (see Appendix 1) and interviews (see Appendix 2). The focus was also on finding out teachers' awareness of the CEFR and the necessity of following standard assessment criteria.

The data for this study was collected through questionnaires and interviewing teachers and students. Before approaching the students, information on the current oral assessment practice was gathered from teachers. The syllabus for oral skills and the criteria used to assess these skills were examined. This was done through interview, where questions about the curriculum and oral skills were asked. The purpose of this was to form a baseline understanding of the syllabus and assessment criteria and whether they had been framed according to the standards of the students registered in that college. Then the teachers were given a graded questionnaire that described their students' oral skills in the first and second years. This was to identify whether the teachers had noticed any progress in skill acquisition. The teachers were required to answer the questionnaire keeping in view any difference in language proficiency that they may have noticed in the majority of first- and second-year students. The questionnaire required the teachers to try to imagine their students in the situation described and assess how well they could perform in the target language in the setting described and rate their ability (0 to 5 – where 5 is the highest score that represents good language skills and 0 is the lowest that represents poor language ability) as follows:

0: cannot do this at all

1: can do this poorly

2: can do it with difficulty

3: can do this relatively well

4: can do this well

5: can do this fluently

Statements given in the questionnaire are related to the day-to-day contexts where students are expected to interact in intelligible language. A similar questionnaire was given to first-year and second-year students to analyse oral skills. These questions were again based on the day-to-day situations students encounter. Twenty first- and second-year students were then interviewed in order to understand the assimilation of the skill and identify any improvement. The questions concerned their awareness of the importance of oral communication, the role it plays during placements and in the workplace, their familiarity with the assessment criteria if any and so on.

5. Findings

The study aimed to find out whether the teachers use any standard assessment procedures. Data collected from seven engineering colleges shows that oral skills assessment is undertaken through varied components, different assessment criteria are used and there is no uniformity in the approach. The data collected from the engineering colleges was analysed in terms of differences and similarities in the oral skills components, assessment criteria and awareness

of CEFR or any other standard assessment model. This comparative analysis showed that the components that are designed for oral skills are almost similar in most of the colleges. However, there is a considerable difference in the oral assessment criteria and methodology used by the colleges and it was noted that approximately 50 per cent of teachers are not aware of the CEFR or follow any standard assessment criteria. There is a remarkable difference in student performance based on the assessment parameters used by these colleges. For instance, the students who have been informed clearly about the assessment criteria and are aware that a standard criterion is followed for assessment perform better than the students who are not aware of the parameters.

The study revealed that the components for oral assessment are almost similar in all the colleges that have been visited. For instance, the most common components are JAM (Just A Minute session), group discussion and development of presentation skills and interview skills. However, there is a considerable difference in the assessment criteria and methodology where there are no set parameters used to evaluate a student's performance. In fact this variation in judgement exists among teachers at the same college. For instance, during the interview session where teachers were questioned individually regarding their assessment strategies, they produced varied sets of parameters. In two colleges, teachers used parameters such as content, communication skills and body language, while in the remaining five colleges, teachers added parameters such as facial expressions, organisation skills, fluency and so on. This discrepancy exists within and outside the institutions. Since there are no common parameters, the assessment too differs considerably. A teacher's assessment based on content and communication skills may not be complete as compared to the assessment based on wider parameters. Since the parameters for the assessment are set by individual faculties, the variation in students' performance is starkly evident. This invariably reflects in their fourth year during the time of placements, where the students are unable to use the skills that they have developed appropriately during the group discussions and interviews.

The findings can be understood by answering the questions raised in the research objectives. The first objective was to explore the assessment criteria used by the teachers in different engineering colleges and whether there was uniformity in approach. It was identified that different colleges use different parameters to test oral skills and that in a few colleges there is no similarity within the faculty of the same department. This does not come as a surprise, as institutional departments rely on the discretion of the teachers in evaluating the students. Results show that there is no uniformity in the criteria used for the assessment of oral communication and that the faculties of different colleges evaluate students' performance on a general basis. It is quite alarming that in a few colleges there are no parameters, and the evaluation is done based on the overall impression that a student creates on the examiner. However, the most common parameters in such cases are content and language. If a student speaks relatively well about a given topic (for instance, JAM), he or she is graded based on the information produced and intelligible language and vocabulary.

The second question pertains to the assessment procedure, tasks and methods used by teachers. This study showed that the assessment criteria are usually framed at the department level. However, not many colleges adhere to the system of assessment according to a set of parameters for individual oral skills components. Assessment is carried out based on the understanding of the teacher without any set criteria to rely on.

The third question concerns the impact of the present assessment criteria on students' performance and how the entire existing assessment criteria and methodology can be improved. Data showed that the absence of common prescribed assessment criteria definitely has an impact on the performance of students as they are not familiar with the assessment requirements to focus on. This also has an impact on the scores, as there is a considerable difference in evaluation by faculty without any prescribed parameters to fall back on. It was observed that there is a need for uniformity in

oral skills assessment. Also, the awareness of the standard criteria will prepare the teachers and the students to gear up for the campus placements. The criteria should be framed based on the requirements of the industry and since the same companies visit the colleges in Visakhapatnam for recruitment, it would equip the students with better knowledge of the companies' needs and help them perform better.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The study found that there is a considerable variation in the assessment criteria and methodology of oral skills assessment. Since there is a substantial difference between effectiveness of current assessment criteria, it is useful to recommend standard assessment criteria and assessment methods suitable for the engineering curriculum to enhance reinforcement of oral competency of students to render them employable. The uniformity in selecting standard assessment criteria would benefit the students immensely, as the same companies recruit them from different colleges. It would be useful to develop a common instrument to assess oral skills to render the students employable.

The research findings will definitely benefit the engineering colleges as they will be able to revisit their curriculum and incorporate better methods of assessment, in turn benefiting teachers and students. It is definitely important for universities offering professional courses such as engineering to understand and improve the current system, and this research will assist in helping the universities follow suitable and appropriate assessment methods and criteria.

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Appendix 1: Teacher Questionnaire 1 – Speaking Skills

Instructions:

Read each statement carefully, try to imagine your students in the situation described, and then assess how well they could perform in the 'target language' in the described setting. Rate their ability (0 to 5) as follows:

0: cannot do this at all

1: can do this poorly

2: can do it with difficulty

3: can do this relatively well

4: can do this well

5. can do this fluently

		1	2	3	4	5
1.	Can introduce themselves and say what they are studying					
2.	Can communicate a basic message on the phone					
3.	Can give directions on how to reach a destination					
4.	Can say what they plan to do during the weekend					
5.	Can describe a place that they have visited					
6.	Can give three reasons for the choice of e.g. a course of study or a place to visit					
7.	Can refuse an invitation to go to a restaurant or a film and give reasons					
8.	Can say what they did yesterday					
9.	When they meet someone, they can initiate (start) a conversation					
10.	Can return a faulty item to a store, describe what the problem is and ask for a replacement					
11.	Can call a doctor's office to make an appointment and explain the problem in general terms					
12	Can praise or criticise a film, a play or a person					
13.	Can contrast two cities in the world on the basis of lifestyle and culture					
14.	Can complain about a dish and express displeasure in a restaurant					
15.	Can argue and express their opinion if they do not share someone's opinion on a serious matter					

Total score: _____

(**Note:** A similar questionnaire was given to students to assess their speaking skills.)

Appendix 2: Interview questions

2a: Interview questions for teachers

1. How important is the skill of speaking for engineering students?

2. Do the students realise the importance of the skill?

3. What components are taught under speaking skills?

4. Is the syllabus framed according to the needs of the industry? Are the students familiar with the skills required?

5. Which speaking skill components are assessed?

6. Is there a standard assessment criterion that is followed?

7. If yes, what are the criteria?

8. Do you feel that there should be standard assessment criteria prescribed for all engineering institutions?

9. Are you aware of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)?

10. If yes, do you feel that it can be used in assessment?

2b: Interview questions for students

1. How important is the skill of speaking for engineering students?

2. Where do you score yourself on a scale of 1–5 in communication skills?

3. What components are taught and assessed under speaking skills?

4. Do you think the components are relevant to you? If yes, how?

5. Are you aware of the requirements of the corporate sector from graduates? If yes, please give some details.

6. Are the parameters of assessment given to you before evaluation?

7. If yes, what are the common parameters for the oral components?

2

The role of CBSE ASL in enhancing the speaking and listening skills of students

Khaleeq Ahmad and Prachi Agarwal

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to investigate the role of CBSE Assessment of Speaking and Listening (ASL) in enhancing the listening and speaking skills of the students of Delhi schools where English is taught as a second language. It also tries to investigate any problems faced by teachers as well as by students in ASL.

ASL was introduced in 2012 as a pilot project in 120 schools of Delhi and adjoining areas by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), New Delhi (India), in collaboration with Trinity College, London, to formally assess the listening and speaking skills of an estimated two million students studying in CBSE schools in classes 9, 10 and 11. After revision, the ASL, based on the six levels of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe website: *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*: *CEFR*), was formally introduced in all CBSE schools globally from the 2013 session to assess the listening and speaking skills of students in a formal end-of-term examination.

Before the introduction and compulsory implementation of ASL in 2013, no system of formal assessment had been in place in classes 9, 10 and 11 to assess the listening and speaking

skills of students in CBSE-affiliated schools. In the English language classroom, these skills were left to be informally assessed (or developed) by teachers in regular classroom practice. Considering the increasing demand for oral communication in English globally, CBSE decided to introduce regular formal assessment in listening and speaking skills. CBSE describes the purpose of the ASL in the following way:

> The overall purpose of the test is to help improve and standardise students' communicative skills. The assessment of speaking and listening skills in English language in the term-end Summative I and II as well as in all the formative assessments necessitates teachers to consciously work on these skills in the regular classroom transaction. This also calls for students to develop these skills during the course of the language learning.

> Any learning that takes place has to be practised and measured against a set of pre-determined standards specific to a particular class. It is imperative that students learn and practice in class, in whatever they are expected to be tested in. (Central Board of Secondary Education, Assessment of Speaking and Listening Skills: Guide for Teachers: 3)

The ASL for Summative Assessment (SA) – II is conducted in a window period from 15 November to 15 December every year, but usually extended up to 31 January for classes 9 and 11. (Class 10 is dealt with separately in a circular 27/2013 dated 29 April 2013 issued by CBSE.) Therefore, classes 9 and 11 only have been considered for this study.

The full ASL examination is divided into two parts: a listening examination and a speaking examination. Candidates undertake the ASL speaking test in pairs and it is compulsory for the examiner also to audio-record every examination. Each test lasts exactly eight minutes for class 9 and ten minutes for class 11. Candidates undertake the listening test as a whole class. Candidates record their responses on an answer sheet while the audio is played through a public address system. Class 9 ASL is mapped to B1 level of the CEFR, and class 11 ASL is mapped to B2 level of the CEFR.

The speaking exam consists of four different stages, with a slight variation of the time slots in 9 and 11 as follows:

- **Stage 1**: Introduction (30 seconds for candidate A and 30 seconds for candidate B): not assessed

- **Stage 2**: Topic presentation (by candidate A, 1 minute)
  - Interaction (with candidate A, 1 minute)
  - Topic presentation (by candidate B, 1 minute)
  - Interaction (with candidate B, 1 minute)

- **Stage 3**: Problem-solving task (a discussion between A and B only without examiner's intervention, 2 minutes)

- **Stage 4**: Interaction (both A and B together with the examiner on the problem-solving task, 1 minute). (CBSE website: op. cit.)

The examiner asks questions only from the bank of question-stems provided for the examiners in the handbook. These question-stems conform to the CEFR level B1 and B2 for classes 9 and

11 respectively. In the listening test there are four tasks at both levels. These task types include instructions, messages, vox pops, short conversations, presentations, lectures, debates, etc. from real-life situations such as TV programmes, social life, family, school courses, advertisements, school functions, school projects, etc. Worksheets are given to be read in advance by the candidates and all the tasks are played twice on a PA system or read aloud by the teacher. The listening test lasts for 60 minutes.

Both the researchers have been working as examiners, examiner-trainers and master-trainers for ASL since its inception, and during the training sessions have been discussing various aspects of the ASL, including problems faced by teachers and students in their experience of the ASL process. We have been receiving a number of queries regarding conducting the ASL and its teaching in the classroom. Most of the teachers wanted to know especially how and when listening and speaking skills can be taught in regular classroom teaching. Most of them stated that their coursebooks did not offer them much scope of teaching these two skills; it seems that most teachers take their coursebooks as the final words on teaching. The implications of the coursebook on their teaching appear to be in that they always follow whatever is written in their coursebooks and try to 'teach to the book' (Richards et al., 1985: 38).

As a result of increasing queries and doubts of teachers and students about ASL, the researchers felt a need to study the role of ASL in enhancing the speaking and listening skills of the students in Delhi schools where English is taught as a second language.

2. Research questions

- Does CBSE ASL play a role in enhancing the listening and speaking skills of students in classes 9 and 11 where English is taught as a second language?

- Do teachers and students experience any problems in taking part in ASL?

3. Research methodology

To make the research study a manageable task, a total number of ten schools were randomly selected for the field study. Tools were developed to assess the role of ASL in schools where English is taught as a second language. The tools mainly included questionnaires for students and teachers and interview questions. An interview section was included to make the research more authentic and for one-to-one interaction with teachers and students. Most of the items and questions to be used in these tools are based on the discussions, queries and feedback received from all the stakeholders during both formal and informal talks and during ASL training sessions with teachers of English and with the principals of schools where English is taught as a second language.

In order to obtain unbiased and impartial results, 'with scientific methods objectively, not subjectively' (Nunan, 2010: 2), a comprehensive research methodology was chosen which included the following tools:

- questionnaire for students (Appendix 1)
- questionnaire for teachers (Appendix 2)
- interview with the students (Appendix 3)
- interview with the teachers (Appendix 4)

The questionnaire for students consisted of 16 items with 'yes' and 'no' options. A total number of 30 students were given the questionnaire to record their responses in ten randomly selected schools in Delhi where English is taught as a second language. Three students each from these ten schools were randomly picked to get their views on ASL and problems faced by them. The questionnaire for teachers consisted of 17 multiple choice items with four options to mark along with two descriptive items. A total number of 20 teachers were given the questionnaire to record their responses in ten randomly selected schools in Delhi where English is taught as a second language. Two teachers of English were randomly selected from each school to ensure that data on ASL was authentic and extensive and to identify problems faced by teachers in the administration of ASL.

The interview questions were asked to nine teachers and 27 students in a one-to-one interview recorded on MP3 recorders. These interviews were conducted in randomly selected schools in Delhi where English is taught as a second language to find out and record the views of teachers on ASL and to record problems faced by them in conducting and teaching of ASL. The interviews were administered as soon as the candidates and examiners finished their ASL examination.

4. Findings

Complete collated findings of the data collected are presented in Appendix 5 and Appendix 6. After analysis of data collected, the researchers had enough evidence to show that ASL does have a 'role in enhancing the listening and speaking skills of the students in Delhi schools' in the fact that one hundred per cent of students agreed in saying that:

- ASL is beneficial for them
- their teachers motivate them to speak in English during regular classroom teaching
- sufficient practice was given to them in the classroom before ASL was formally conducted for the current session.

Similarly 80 per cent of teachers said that they speak in English 'most of the time' in the classroom while 20 per cent said that they speak English 'only sometimes'. None of the surveyed teachers opted for the choice of 'always' or 'never' for speaking in English in their regular classroom teaching. When asked if they ask their students to be careful about their listening and speaking skills in English as a regular classroom practice as required in ASL, 100 per cent of the teachers agreed, with 35 per cent doing this daily, 25 per cent weekly, 25 per cent monthly and 15 per cent occasionally. Similarly, 100 per cent of students agreed that their teachers motivate them to speak in English and 78 per cent of students asserted that their teachers speak in English in the classroom.

Ninety-seven per cent of the surveyed students agreed that pair and group work to enhance listening and speaking skills was organised in the

classroom and that before the ASL exam sufficient practice was given in the classroom. Eighty-five per cent of teachers said that they frequently organised pair/group work while teaching English in the classroom.

In another response, 90 per cent of students have asserted that they not only like ASL but also try to speak in English at home. Another 87 per cent of students agree that ASL has given them confidence in spoken English.

Students added that they get opportunities to speak in English in the classroom (70 per cent), the same percentage of students agreeing that they understand English whenever their teachers speak in English. Seventy-three per cent of students want ASL to be continued in future and 60 per cent of students said that listening and speaking activities are organised in their classroom by their teachers while teaching the coursebooks and that they feel confident in speaking in English and that their classmates can speak in English with them.

As far as problems are concerned, teachers seem to be facing more difficulties than their students as regards ASL. The researchers found that the pressure of their syllabus does not allow teachers to conduct listening and speaking activities in their regular classroom teaching, as it is too content-packed. Nevertheless, most of the teachers still manage to do so.

Seventy-five per cent of teachers said that the authorities/CBSE have not provided them with time slots in the regular timetable to really teach listening and speaking skills for the preparation of ASL by adjusting or reducing some part of the syllabus. They have a limited number of periods (220) in an academic session of 12 months (CBSE Secondary Curriculum 2016–17 Volume I Main Subjects: xxxiii) and the timetable and the outlined syllabus have already detailed everything to be taught in the specified timeframe. In this timeframe, no time period for conducting or preparing for ASL – an average of 20 days – has been specified.

Large or overcrowded classrooms are a common phenomenon in India, and 50 per cent of students complained that their class was overcrowded. During the interviews teachers revealed that a large class may mean as many as 120 students in a single classroom.

Eighty per cent of teachers agreed that the teaching of listening and speaking skills is an essential part of ELT. However, only 55 per cent of the surveyed teachers asserted that they were already teaching these two skills before the introduction of ASL, while 40 per cent of them started teaching the two skills only after the introduction of ASL. When asked about the seriousness shown by their students in learning listening and speaking skills, only 30 per cent of teachers agreed that the students have started taking listening and speaking skills seriously after the introduction of ASL, whereas the majority of students said they are not only confident in spoken English but also try to speak in English with their friends and at home too. In contrast to this view, 60 per cent of the teachers said that their students have not started taking the two skills seriously even after the introduction of ASL. This may be a real concern for CBSE and the other authorities concerned with school education.

Only 30 per cent of teachers agreed that their students' listening and speaking skills have developed since the introduction of ASL, while a majority of them (60 per cent) agreed that 'ASL alone can't change the situation until fundamental changes are made to the syllabus'. Fifty per cent of the teachers again chose the same option when asked if they felt that after the introduction of ASL students were more confident in expressing their thoughts in English. Fifty per cent of teachers feel that ASL is necessary but not in the present form, while 30 per cent of them accept it as it is.

Thirty-five per cent of teachers are in favour of the introduction of ASL from Class 6, with 50 per cent believing that it should be introduced from Class 6 but should be adjusted in the syllabus by reducing the text of prose lessons, such as stories, thus giving more room to the listening and speaking skills to be taught in regular classroom teaching.

As regards training, only 50 per cent of the teachers stated that they had been fully trained by CBSE/another agency, while 50 per cent had had no training to teach the listening and speaking skills as per the requirements of ASL. Fifty per cent of the trained teachers had only participated in a one-day (six-hour) training session.

Almost all the teachers spend 15 or more than 15 days in conducting ASL. During these days they cannot teach their regular classes as they are busy in ASL throughout the day.

Teacher responses to items 18 and 19 in the questionnaire, which required open-ended description of problems or suggestions for improvement, and the results of interviews with teachers and students reveal that teachers are not happy about the way ASL is used and that ASL in its present form is not very helpful for their students. They believe that the teaching of ASL should be made part of classroom teaching and a specific number of periods should be allotted for teaching of listening and speaking skills in the same way as periods are allotted for teaching of reading and writing skills. They feel through their experience of ELT that language has to be meaningfully used in its natural context during classroom teaching and since they are aware that 'learning strategies and communication strategies are those conscious or unconscious processes which language learners make use of in learning and using a language' (Richards, Platt and Weber, 1985: 274) in their classroom, most of them have expressed their inability to teach listening and speaking activities in their classroom owing to the fact that their syllabus has too much content and is based only on reading and writing skills. In cases where they try to devote time to teaching listening and speaking skills, the stories and other prose lessons are left untaught, which is not acceptable to the authorities.

Many of the teachers also think that since, out of a total of 100 marks awarded to students, ASL carries 20 marks and requires 20 days of study time, the syllabus may be adjusted (preferably by reducing prose lessons such as stories and other prose pieces in coursebooks) in order to enable

effective teaching of ASL in the regular classroom. This point becomes all the more pertinent if CBSE wants schools to conduct ASL smoothly as per the standardised format.

Similarly, as mentioned above, most of the teachers say that they are either not trained at all or partially trained, while ASL like other communicative examinations such as GESE or IELTS is quite technical in nature. Schools require fully trained examiners for the smooth conduct of ASL as per the specifications.

5. Recommendations and suggestions

Based on the findings of the research, the following recommendations and suggestions may be made.

CBSE says, 'it is imperative that students learn and practice in class, in whatever they are expected to be tested in' (*Central Board of Secondary Education Assessment of Speaking and Listening Skills: Guide for Teachers*. CBSE website: op. cit.) but it has allocated no time for the teacher to really teach these two basic skills. Most of the teachers believe that ASL activities (here, to practise listening and speaking) are not part of their coursebooks. They believe that fundamental changes have to be made in the ELT syllabus and their coursebooks should be redesigned in such a way that these include ample listening and speaking tasks as part of their syllabus and are incorporated in their regular timetable and also included in the stipulated 220 periods in a session of 12 months. What they believe about their coursebooks has also been pointed out by Buck and Alderson while they advocate 'providing suitable texts' for listening for students (Buck and Alderson, 2010: 154).

The coursebooks may be redesigned in such a way that ELT teachers 'let students … learn to speak by speaking' (Woodward, 2010: 95). CBSE should restructure the syllabus and curriculum to cater for the development of listening and speaking skills.

CBSE should ensure that every school has a well-equipped language laboratory for the effective

teaching of listening and speaking skills in English before ASL is conducted at the school, as many teachers advocated the establishment and use of a language laboratory in interviews.

Teachers should be appropriately trained to conduct and teach ASL because, as mentioned above, it is a 'standardised' test and requires effective training (CBSE website: op. cit.). Therefore, for the sake of uniformity and standardised results, CBSE needs to train all teachers of English uniformly and in a timely way. Otherwise, there is all possibility of some students being assessed in an unfair way.

In many schools the researchers met several part-time teachers who were not trained at all but were examining the candidates for ASL. This practice should be stopped, and only trained teachers should conduct ASL. Authorities should ensure that full-time teachers are available in all schools to conduct ASL.

As a conclusion, the researchers would like to reassert that ASL is, no doubt, a beneficial practice for students to enhance their listening and speaking skills. Nevertheless, it has to be modified as per the requirements of teachers and has to be made part of the syllabus. ASL should continue in its present form, but only after 20 per cent of the syllabus is reduced.

The present research has identified the views of teachers and students on the application of the assessment system (ASL) on English language in schools where it is taught as a second language. Both the researchers hope that their views will be studied impartially and will be included in any further assessment design.

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Appendix 1: The role of ASL in enhancing the listening and speaking skills of students: questionnaire for students

Tick the appropriate column: (YES/NO)

S. No.	Problem	Yes	No
1	ASL practice in the class has been sufficient		
2	Teachers speak English in the class		
3	Teachers motivate students to speak in English in class		
4	I am confident about speaking in English		
5	ASL has given me confidence in spoken English		
6	I try to speak in English at home		
7	I understand whenever the teacher speaks in English		
8	I like the ASL examination		
9	I get opportunities to speak English in school/class		
10	My classroom is overcrowded		
11	ASL is good for me and it should be continued		
12	Pair/group work is done in class		
13	Listening and speaking activities are organised while teaching the coursebooks		
14	I was given sufficient practice in ASL before the exam		
15	I hesitate because I may not speak correctly		
16	My classmates can speak in English with me		
17	Do you have any other comments? Please specify		

Appendix 2: The role of CBSE ASL in enhancing the speaking and listening skills of students: questionnaire for teachers

1. While teaching in the classroom, I speak in English

   a. always

   b. most of the time

   c. sometimes

   d. rarely/never

2. While teaching in the classroom, I organise group work/pair work

   a. always

   b. frequently

   c. I can't say

   d. never

3. I take care of the listening and speaking skills of my students in my class as required by ASL

   a. almost daily
   b. weekly
   c. monthly
   d. very occasionally/never

4. My syllabus allows me to conduct listening and speaking activities in the classroom as required by ASL

   a. yes

   b. no

   c. no, but I still manage

   d. yes, but I can't manage

5. The authorities/CBSE have provided me time slots in the regular timetable for the preparation of ASL by adjusting the syllabus

   a. yes

   b. no

   c. I don't know

   d. time slots already existed

6. I feel that teaching of listening and speaking (LS) is an essential part of ELT
   a. yes
   b. no
   c. I don't know
   d. I know, but if I spend time on LS I can't complete my syllabus

7. After the introduction of ASL in classes 9 and 11

   a. I have started teaching listening and speaking

   b. I am thinking about starting teaching listening and speaking

   c. I have no time to teach listening and speaking

   d. I was already teaching these skills before the introduction of ASL

8. After the introduction of ASL, students have started taking listening and speaking skills seriously as a part of their syllabus

   a. yes, all/almost all of them

   b. no, but very few of them

   c. there is no change in the situation

   d. they were already taking them seriously

9. I agree that the listening and speaking skills of students have improved since the introduction of ASL

   a. yes

   b. can't say

   c. no, one month of precious study time (15 Nov–15 Dec) is just wasted

   d. ASL alone can't change the situation until fundamental changes are made in the syllabus

10. I feel that after the introduction of ASL, students are more confident in expressing their thoughts in English

    a. yes

    b. no

    c. can't say

    d. ASL alone can't change the situation until fundamental changes are made in the syllabus

11. I feel that after the introduction of ASL, students are more confident in listening to and comprehending spoken English

    a. yes

    b. no

    c. can't say

    d. ASL alone can't change the situation until fundamental changes are made in the syllabus

12. I think that ASL

   a. is necessary

   b. is necessary, but not in the present form

   c. is not necessary, we were already teaching listening and speaking

   d. a complete waste of time

13. I feel that ASL should be introduced right from class 6

   a. no

   b. yes

   c. no, it will be a waste of time

   d. yes, but should be adjusted in the syllabus

14. I was fully trained by CBSE/other agency to conduct ASL

   a. yes

   b. no

   c. I don't know

   d. I received training but I do not feel I was fully trained

15. For how many days/hours were you trained as an ASL examiner or ASL Trainer?

   a. a few hours (less than six hours)

   b. 1 day (six hours or more)

   c. 2 days

   d. 3 to 5 days

16. Who trained you to be an ASL examiner?
   a. a master trainer
   b. one of my colleagues at school
   c. my principal/vice principal
   d. I don't know

17. Approximately how many working days have you spent in taking ASL in both terms, i.e. SA1 and SA2 together?

   a. 5 to 10 days

   b. 10 to 15 days

   c. 15 to 20 days

   d. more than 20 days

18. Do you face any other problems in teaching listening and speaking skills or in conducting ASL? Please specify below in a few sentences.

19. Do you have any suggestions to modify or improve the present form of ASL?

Signature: _____ Name: _____

School: _____

Email ID: _____ Mob no. _____

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Appendix 3: The role of CBSE ASL in enhancing the speaking and listening skills of students: interview questions for teachers

S. No.	Item
1.	Are you happy with the way ASL is used in your school? What changes, if any, would you like to suggest in the present pattern of ASL to make it more effective?
2.	Do you think that ASL is a good way to enhance and assess the listening and speaking skills of your students?
3.	Have you undergone training for conducting ASL? Was it satisfactory?
4.	If yes, were the resource persons capable of addressing your concerns or difficulties regarding ASL?
5.	Given your present syllabus and timetable, are you able to take up listening and speaking activities in your regular classroom teaching easily?

Appendix 4: The role of CBSE ASL in enhancing speaking and listening skills of students: interview questions for students

Q. No.	Item
1.	Do you believe that communicative skills in English are necessary to learn English successfully?
2.	Do you think that ASL is beneficial for you to enhance your listening and speaking skills in English?
3.	Do you get enough opportunities in your school or classroom to speak in English?
4.	How many periods does your teacher give to ASL activities in your weekly timetable?
5.	Do you feel that you require more practice and more activities in listening and speaking skills during the classroom interaction?

Appendix 5: Students' responses (n=30)

ROLE OF CBSE ASL IN ENHANCING THE LISTENING AND SPEAKING SKILLS OF STUDENTS

■ Yes   ■ No

	Yes	No
1. My classroom is overcrowded.	14	16
2. Pair/ group work is done in the class.	29	1
3. My classmates can speak in English…	20	10
4. Teachers speak English in the class.	25	5
5. Teachers motivate students to…	30	0
6. ASL practice in the class is/ was…	30	0
7. Listening and speaking activities…	20	10
8. I was given sufficient practice in…	29	1
9. I am confident in English speaking.	20	10
10. I get opportunities to speak…	23	7
11. ASL has given me confidence in…	26	4
12. I understand whenever the teacher…	21	9
13. I like the ASL examination.	27	3
14. I try to speak in English at home.	27	3
15. I hesitate because I may not speak…	24	6
16. ASL is good for me.	30	0
17. ASL should continue in future too.	22	8
18. Any other, please specify…	0	0

Appendix 6: Teachers' responses (n=20)

Question 1: While teaching English in the classroom, do you speak in English?	always	most of the time	sometimes	rarely/never
	0	16	4	0
Question 2: While teaching English in the classroom, do you organise pair/group work?	always	frequently	I can't say	never
	1	17	2	0
Question 3: Do you take care of the listening and speaking requirements of your students to meet SL requirements?	daily/ almost daily	weekly	monthly	very occasionally/ never
	7	5	5	3
Question 4: Do you think your syllabus allows you to conduct listening/speaking activities in the classroom to meet ASL requirements?	Yes	No	No, but I still manage	Yes, but I can't manage
	3	2	15	0
Question 5: Do you think the authorities have provided you with time slots in the regular timetable for preparation of the ASL by adjusting some part of it?	Yes	No	I don't know	Time slots already existed
	2	15	3	0
Question 6: Do you think that teaching listening and speaking (LS) is an essential part of ELT?	Yes	No	I don't know	I know, but if I spend time on LS I can't complete my syllabus
	17	0	2	1
Question 7 After the introduction of ASL in classes 9 and 11 I feel………..	I have started teaching listening and speaking	I am still thinking about teaching listening and speaking	I have no time to teach listening and speaking	I was already teaching these skills before the introduction of ASL
	8	1	0	11
Question 8 After the introduction of ASL in classes 9 and 11, do you think students have started taking LS skills seriously as a part of their syllabus	Yes, almost all of them	No, very few of them	There is no change in situation	They were already taking them seriously
	6	12	2	0

Question 9 Do you agree that the listening and speaking skills of students have improved since the introduction of ASL?	Yes	No	No, one month of precious study time is just wasted	ASL alone can't change situation until fundamental changes are made in the syllabus
	5	3	0	12
Question 10 Do you think that after the introduction of ASL, students are more confident in expressing their thoughts in English?	Yes	No/can't say		ASL alone can't change situation until fundamental changes are made in the syllabus
	3	6	1	10
Question 11 Do you think that after the introduction of ASL, students are more confident in listening and comprehending spoken English?	Yes	No	Can't say	ASL alone can't change situation until fundamental changes are made in the syllabus
	2	5	1	11
Question 12 Do you think that ASL …?	is necessary	is necessary, but not in its present form	is not necessary, we were already teaching LS	a complete waste of time
	6	10	1	3
Question 13 Do you think that ASL should be introduced from Class Six?	Yes	No	No, it will be a waste of time	Yes, it should be adjusted in the syllabus
	2	2	1	15
Question 14 Do you think that you were fully trained by CBSE/other agency to conduct ASL?	Yes	No	I don't know	Yes, but not fully trained
	11	5	0	5
Question 15 For how many days/hours were you trained as ASL examiner or ASL Trainer?	A few hours	1 day	2 days	3–5 days
	7	10	3	0
Question 16 Who trained you to be an ASL examiner?	A master trainer	One of my colleagues at school	My principal/ vice principal	I don't know
	13	4	1	2

Question 17 Approximately, how many working days have you spent in taking ASL in both the terms i.e. SA1 and SA2 together?	5–10 days	10–15 days	15–20 days	More than 20 days
	4	6	4	6

3

The effect of Self-regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) instruction on improving the paragraph writing skills of engineering students

Maruthi Kumari Vaddapalli

1. Introduction

Keeping in view the fact that rural and urban students at engineering colleges find writing a comprehensible, organised and meaningful paragraph quite challenging, this study focuses on finding out whether Self-regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) instruction is an effective way of helping students improve their paragraph writing skills. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of an adapted model of SRSD in the planning and organisation of writing.

To date, only a little research has been undertaken on the effectiveness of SRSD strategy with EFL/ESL learners, and most research on SRSD has been conducted with students with learning disabilities. This strategy instruction was piloted to determine the efficacy of SRSD with EFL/ESL learners at university level. This instruction was expected to help students automatise certain mechanical elements of the writing process by simplifying the writing task, thus reducing the cognitive load of students, which in turn assists them to focus more on language. The focus of the research was on planning and organisation and pre-writing tasks and it is very interesting to find out to what extent strategy instruction was effective.

Many graduating engineers of all disciplines from engineering colleges of Andhra Pradesh seek jobs in various multinational companies. Most of these graduates either find it difficult or fail to succeed in finding a placement and one of the main reasons is lack of effective writing skills. For example, the training and placement cell at colleges where the researcher works frequently complains that students fail to succeed in getting jobs mainly because of poor performance in the writing component of the recruitment tests of various organisations. The press has also reported similar issues.

Many entrepreneurs and educationists with the support of the state government of Andhra Pradesh have established engineering colleges offering technical education to all sectors of the community. There are 318 engineering colleges in Andhra Pradesh, which offer admission to over 100,000 students. However, many students who enrol in these colleges are either from villages where there is no English-medium instruction or from cities with some English language proficiency. As most multinational companies in their selection process also require engineering graduates to prove their writing skills, the curriculum of Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University emphasises paragraph writing skills. Of all the four skills of listening, reading, writing and

speaking, students from these colleges in general struggle really hard to produce an effective piece of writing.

2. Literary review

2.1. What is writing?

As writing is a complex process that includes pre-writing, drafting and revising, writers need to formulate their thoughts, organise ideas and produce comprehensible texts, keeping in mind the conventions of spelling and grammar. In order to produce a good piece of writing, successful writers use several techniques and strategies for planning, organising and composing texts. Skilled writers usually establish goals and continually revise and refine their texts during the process of writing (Flower and Hayes, 1980). Nevertheless, even expert writers frequently complain about the difficulty of planning, organising and composing their work (Zimmerman and Reisemberg, 1997). In contrast to skilled writers, struggling writers do not utilise the strategies and techniques that could enable them to write more effectively. They are not aware of the features of effective writing, use an inefficient writing approach, lack prior planning, have difficulty in creating content, seldom revise their work and possess an unrealistic sense of self-efficacy (Harris and Graham, 1996; Graham and Harris, 2005).

2.2. Self-regulated Strategy Development – an overview

SRSD instruction, developed by Graham and Harris in 2005, has been proved to be very effective in developing the writing skills of struggling writers. SRSD is a flexible, integrated, instructional approach which makes learning effective. Even though much research has been undertaken on the effectiveness of SRSD on young learners, very little research has taken place in finding out the efficacy of SRSD in improving the writing skills of undergraduate level students.

SRSD is an instructional model that assists students in learning strategies of planning, drafting and revising that skilled writers employ. It has been proved to be very effective in developing the writing skills of struggling writers. It supports the development of cognitive and self-regulation skills that are essential to writing and has been demonstrated to be an effective and useful procedure for teaching brainstorming, organising writing and content generation as well as editing and revising texts (Graham and Perin, 2007). It involves six stages: developing background knowledge, discussing the strategy, modelling the strategy, memorising the strategy, supporting the strategy and finally independent performance. However, the stages of SRSD are flexible and they can be modified and adapted by the teacher based on the needs of the classroom (Graham and Harris, 1999).

1. Developing background knowledge: This is the first stage of SRSD instruction. Teachers identify the skills students will need to use a strategy and assess whether they possess these skills.

2. Discussing the strategy: This is the second stage of SRSD instruction where learners discuss how and when they might use a strategy to accomplish their writing tasks and goals. This stage gives learners an opportunity to talk about the benefits of being a good writer and discuss challenges they may face during the process of writing. Learners at this stage talk about how to use the strategy and its progression.

3. Modelling the strategy: At this stage learners think aloud and do self-talk, and the instructor takes the students through all the steps involved, sets goals for the students and models the strategy more than once with different samples.

4. Memorising the strategy: Learners remember if strategies are composed of multiple steps, like a checklist. When the checklist is in the form of a mnemonic, it is easier to remember.

5. Supporting the strategy: Using the strategy as many times as possible and offering feedback and encouragement to the students is the focus of this stage. As learners become familiar with the strategy, the teacher monitors the use of the strategy and offer support when needed.

6. Independent performance: At this stage learners should be able to use the strategy independently without any help.

Zimmerman and Reisemberg (1997: 76) found that Self-regulated Strategy Development is a flexible model that enables learners to plan, monitor and modify their writing to enhance the quality of the text they create. Previous research shows that the techniques of SRSD are effective for automatisation of mechanical elements such as planning and organisation (De La Paz and Graham, 1997). When students automatise mechanical elements of the writing process, it becomes easier for them to concentrate on more complex elements of writing such as grammar, vocabulary and the task itself.

3. Research statement

This research study aims to find out:
- how teachers at engineering colleges develop the paragraph writing skills of their students

- how effectively engineering students perform in paragraph writing

- how effective SRSD instruction is in helping students to improve their paragraph writing skills.

4. Research methods

The study took place at two engineering colleges in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. All the participants in the study were teachers of English and Year One students on the engineering course of electronics and communication and computer science and information technology. The subjects for this research were from both English- and Telugu-medium backgrounds.

The researcher first visited three colleges in the first semester of the academic year 2014–15. She had earlier sought permission from and observed the paragraph writing instruction in each college. From a quiet corner, the classes were videotaped in order to analyse classroom instruction methods. Although the researcher visited three colleges altogether, the actual SRSD instruction could happen only in two colleges

with which the researcher is associated. A classroom observation was carried out in the third college visited to understand how writing instruction was taking place, but videotaping was not possible. Technically, therefore, this study took place in its full sense at only two colleges and two experimental groups have been used for this study. Before the study began, the students were asked to write a paragraph on a given topic. This was considered a baseline (diagnostic). After SRSD instruction, the students of the two classes were asked to write a paragraph and the assessment of these paragraphs was considered as Test 1. During the whole semester, the teachers of SRSD were asked to maintain the treatment whenever there was an opportunity for paragraph writing instruction. At the end of the semester, the teacher of these classes included a paragraph writing task in the final exam which was considered as Test 3, which was conducted in September 2014. From both groups, three weak, three average and three strong paragraphs were selected from the diagnostic, mid-term and final exams. These paragraphs were then analysed to see if SRSD instruction was effective.

4.1 SRSD instruction

An adapted model of SRSD instruction was used as a classroom intervention in the college where the researcher teaches. The experimental group received SRSD instruction for two hours per week for a period of two months. Students who received the strategy instruction had written a paragraph during the instruction period and this was considered as an intermittent probe. The paragraphs were graded and compared with the baseline probe to find if the strategy instruction had helped in improving the paragraph writing skills of the students. Since the class comprised both English-medium and Telugu-medium students, the results helped in identifying whether the SRSD technique was more effective with English- or Telugu-medium students.

Strategy instruction
The classroom intervention took place with the two experimental groups selected with 45 students in each class. The teachers teaching these classes were given detailed instruction on how to introduce the strategy development in

their classes. The researcher had three one-hour individual sessions with the teachers to discuss the implementation procedures of the strategy instruction.

The strategy instruction involved four stages.

Stage 1 (2-hour session)
The teachers gave an overview of the parts of a paragraph using an adapted textbook model. The students were asked to identify the parts of the opinion paragraph. The purpose of this procedure was to automatise paragraph elements. In order to do so, the students were introduced to an SRSD model by using a mnemonic 1-2-2-1. The elements of the paragraph were taught as abbreviations: TS for topic sentence, SP1 for supporting point 1 and D for details, SP2 for supporting point 2 and D for details and C for conclusion. The teachers asked students to write and recite all the elements in small groups and as a class until it was apparent that the paragraph parts had been automatised. The whole process took two hours of class instruction.

Stage 2 (1.5 hours)
A simple rubric for assessment was introduced to the class. The components of the rubric included topic relevance, organisation, vocabulary and grammar. Although all the components of the rubric were discussed, emphasis was placed on organisation corresponding to the 1-2-2-1 model. A number of diagnostic paragraphs written by students who were not participating in the study were distributed to the class, and students were instructed to evaluate the paragraphs in terms of the rubric, focusing on organisation. After they had given marks to the sample paragraphs based on the rubric, students were asked to set a goal for the mark they would like to achieve in the upcoming quiz. The teachers discussed the importance of motivation. The students said that setting a goal gave them a specific target for learning.

Stage 3 (1 hour): Collaborative writing
Teachers modelled brainstorming (mapping) on the board. The students were then asked to apply this technique in their group to a different topic that had been assigned. Following brainstorming, the teacher elicited students' ideas and wrote them as notes on the board. Then, in collaboration, the students and the teacher constructed the paragraph orally following the 1-2-2-1 formula.

Stage 4 (2.5 hours)
The teachers reviewed the parts of the paragraph noting that the students had difficulty with two of the parts. A second model paragraph from the writing book was analysed to reinforce the strategy and to clarify difficult elements. The students completed another collaborative paragraph with their groups with limited support from teachers. The students completed a test immediately after the strategy training in the next class. The final internal test was two weeks after Test 1. The Test 1 paragraphs were marked and returned to the students. The syllabus allowed no further instruction at this point in time. The final internal test included an opinion paragraph two weeks after Test 1. The final test (Test 2) paragraph was considered as a maintenance probe.

By the end of the semester, the diagnostic paragraph – the paragraph writing task just after the SRSD instruction (Test 1) – and the actual paragraph written in the internal test (Test 2) were assessed based on the following criteria: topic relevance, organisation, vocabulary and grammar. From all three tests, three samples of writing at three different levels (weak, medium and strong) were selected for the data analysis. The total number of words was calculated and their mean was obtained. Two different teachers graded all the tasks using the four criteria. The score range was from 1 to 5. The mean scores for each element were also calculated to see the effectiveness of strategy instruction. The paragraphs were expected to have six elements: the topic sentence, supporting statement 1, details for supporting statement 1, supporting statement 2, details for supporting statement 2 and conclusion.

5. Findings

5.1. Writing instruction methods at colleges visited

College 1: The teacher at this college wrote the keywords on the board, for example 'paragraph writing', 'supporting statements' and 'conclusion', and explained to the students what those words meant. The teacher asked students to read the sample paragraph given in the textbook and then explained the meaning of what was written in the paragraph. The students quietly listened to the teacher. There was absolute silence in the class. The teacher also explained how important it is to improve writing skills and asked a couple of questions:

- What are the parts in a paragraph?

- Is paragraph writing important?

The students raised their hands to answer the questions and the teacher randomly picked a couple of students to answer and then praised the students. The class ended.

The students of this class were not given any opportunity to participate actively in class. The whole 40-minute instruction was totally teacher-centred with a great deal of explanation about the importance of paragraph writing.

College 2: Interestingly, the researcher's visit to the second college also showed a mostly similar way of instruction except that students were not asked to read the sample paragraph in the text. The teacher talked about topic sentences, supporting sentences and conclusion. Students repeated when the teacher asked them to repeat the meaning of these terms.

College 3: The visit was not any different from the other two. The teacher in this college also spent all the 40 minutes reading the instruction material in the textbook and explaining the terminology. The students were not given any opportunity to write a paragraph.

The class observation proves that the teachers still follow traditional methods of teaching, giving little opportunity to students to learn by doing. In all the three classes observed, the students were mere spectators.

After the classroom observations, SRSD intervention took place in only two colleges to find out the efficacy of this technique in improving paragraph writing skills of engineering students.

5.2. Assessment results for students before and after SRSD instruction: total number of words used

Figure 1 represents the averages of the total number of words in paragraphs of the three tests of the three different samples of learners. The averages of the total number of words used in the diagnostic test were 51.6 (weak), 63.3 (medium) and 95 (strong). The mean scores of the test after the SRSD instruction were 76.3, 84.6 and 102.3. The final internal test score averages tend to be 85 for weak samples, 94.6 for medium samples and 112.3 for the strong samples. The results show that all three levels of learners have shown a considerable improvement in the total number of words written. Since the mechanical elements of the paragraph are automatised, the strategy instruction helped the students focus more on their writing and they could produce longer answers. It is interesting to note that stronger students were able to write much longer answers than the weaker students.

5.3. Assessment results for students before and after SRSD instruction: use of different elements of paragraph writing

Figure 2 shows the students' performance in using the different elements of an opinion paragraph. The SRSD instruction helped students use a mnemonic 1-2-2-1 to automatise the mechanical elements of a paragraph. The total number of elements was six. It is interesting to observe that the mean scores went up to 5 in Test 2 from a 3.5 in the diagnostic for weak paragraphs. Similarly both the medium and strong paragraphs showed a remarkable improvement in the number of elements. The mean scores for medium paragraphs were 4.1. 5.2 and 5.4 respectively, and 4.6, 5.1 and 5.5 respectively for the strong paragraphs. Results also show that there is great
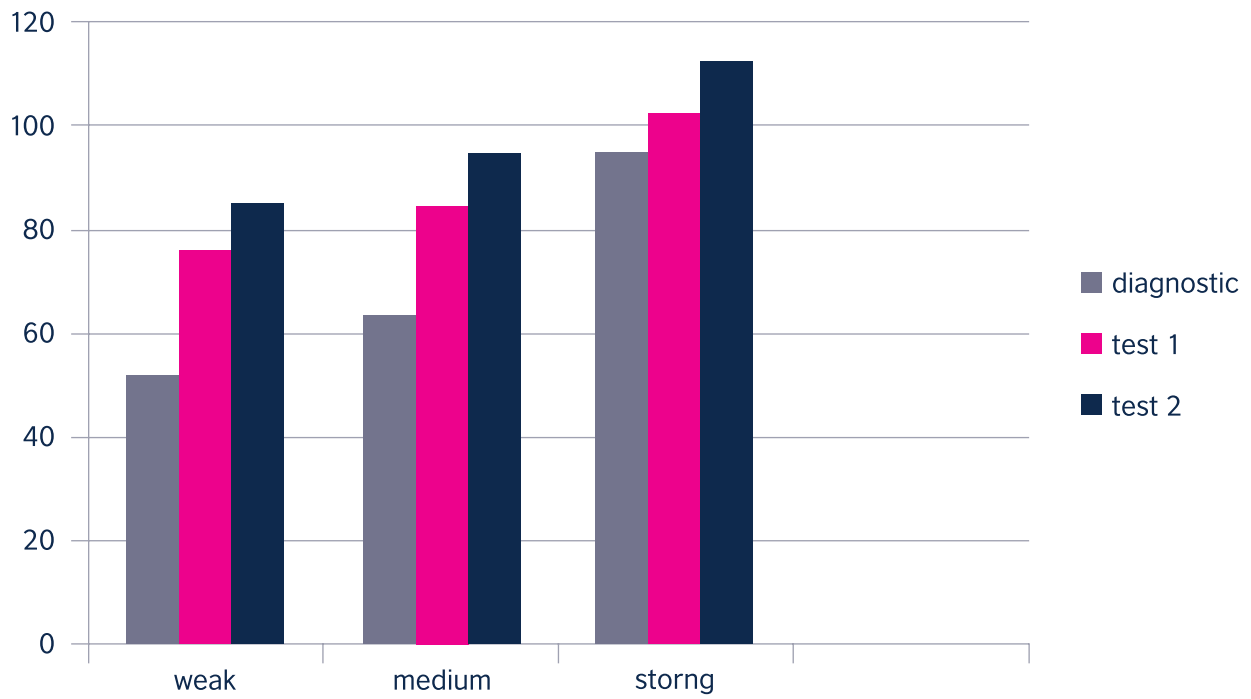
Figure 1: Total number of words used and number of students (n=9)
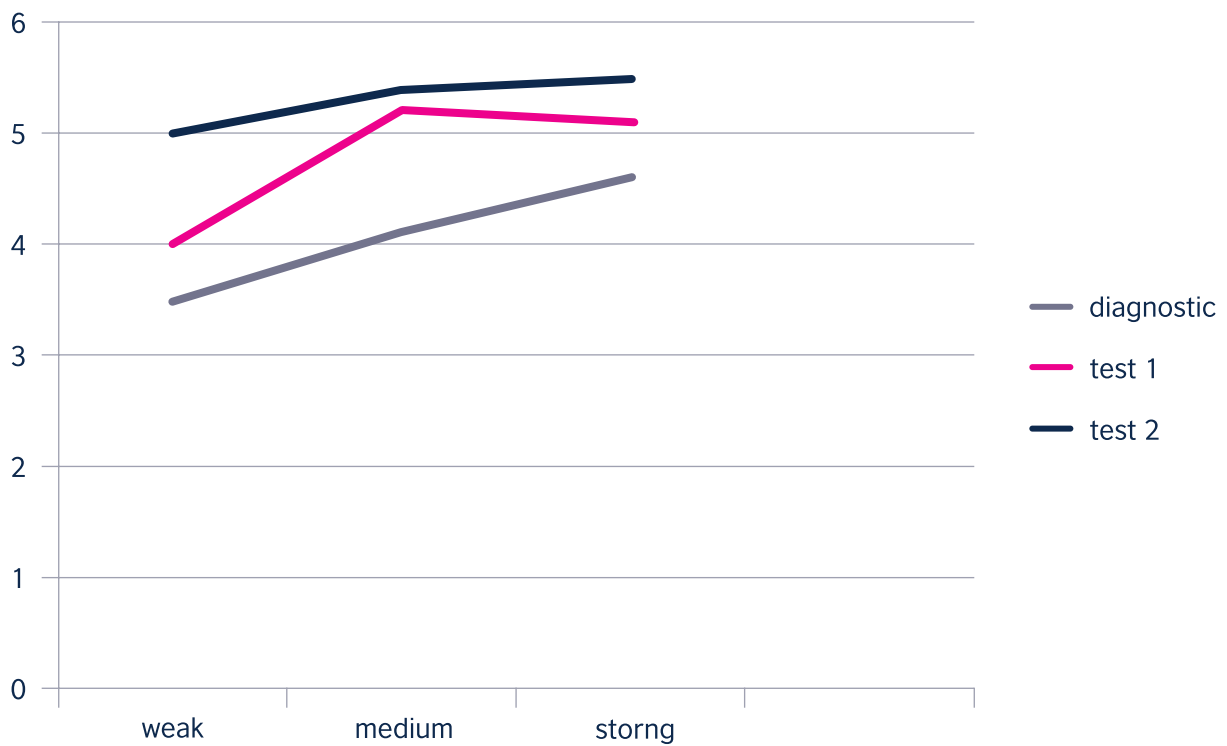
Figure 2: Use of different elements of paragraph writing and number of students (n=9)

Table 1: Assessment results of the three tests (n=9)

	Diagnostic	Test 1	Test 2
Topic relevance	2.5	3.2	3.5
Organisation	2	3.3	3.8
Vocabulary	3	3.5	3.9
Grammar	3	3.6	3.8

improvement in the number of elements used by the students of all levels. Weak- and medium-level students showed greater improvement than the stronger ones.

5.4. Assessment results of the three tests during the SRSD instruction

The assessment results of the paragraphs of all the three tests are shown in Table 1. On a five point scale for each criterion, the students' scores are as in Table 1 above.

The results show that the students improved in all the criteria. However, there was a significant improvement in the organisation of their ideas in terms of cohesion and coherence. In the diagnostic test, students could hardly connect their ideas and there was very little logical organisation. However, by the end, after learning to use the mnemonic, they were able to put their ideas in an organised and logical manner. Hence, there were many examples of use of linkers such as 'in addition', 'not only but also', 'despite', 'finally', etc.

The average score for topic relevance in the diagnostic test was only 2.5. However, it increased to 3.2 in Test 1 and 3.5 in Test 2. The average score for organisation was only 2 in the diagnostic test and it increased to 3.3 in Test 1 and 3.8 in Test 2. The average score for vocabulary was 3 in the diagnostic test which shows that the students had some vocabulary but they had difficulties in organisation of their ideas. It is also interesting to note that the scores for grammar were also higher than topic relevance and organisation. The mean for grammar in the diagnostic test was 3 and it increased to 3.6 and 3.8 in Test 1 and Test 2 respectively. The results show that there was a considerable improvement by both the English-medium and Telugu-medium students.

The results of this research show that SRSD has helped students to improve their skills in many areas such as the total number of words, the total number of elements, their organisation of thoughts and ideas, vocabulary and grammar. This conclusion has been made based on the final score of the students in Test 2 using a rubric that assessed on the criteria of topic relevance, organisation, vocabulary and grammar. It shows that SRSD helped students to gain more confidence in writing as they have written longer paragraphs and better paragraphs after the strategy instruction. The writing was longer, as we can see an increase in the number of words used by the students and they were more effective because of the improvement in students' organisation, vocabulary and grammar.

It was also observed that students were using SRSD techniques of thinking and planning in writing Test 1 and Test 2 whereas, while writing the diagnostic test, they started writing as soon as the topic was given.

6. Discussion and reflections

Data shows that greatest improvement in the writing of the students was found in organisation of their ideas. There was greater evidence of use of topic sentence, supporting sentences and details. In their diagnostic test, students merely wrote a few sentences with very little logical organisation of ideas. However, by the end of SRSD instruction, they had shown a great improvement. The average scores obtained in the assessment prove that they have made an effort to understand the writing process quite consciously with the help of SRSD instruction.

This study suggests that if students are helped in automatising the mechanical elements of writing, they will be geared to using higher-order thinking

skills in writing more content in an organised way. Scores for topic relevance improved in the writing samples of the students and provide some evidence of using higher-order thinking skills and organisation of ideas.

The SRSD instruction will pave a way for both teachers and students to use a simple yet useful strategy to cope with the difficulties involved in the writing process. For newly qualified teachers, the SRSD approach can be handy to help their students who struggle with writing. The teachers in the colleges visited for the baseline were mainly active and the students were totally passive, which means the teachers need to use more effective teaching techniques to improve their ways of teaching. It is also recommended that teachers teaching in engineering colleges be offered appropriate training in teaching writing so that they are more equipped with techniques for supporting students' writing skills.

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