



English Medium Instructions on English Language Proficiency

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: 10.9734/ARJASS/2017/37756

Editor(s):

(1) Alina Georgeta Mag, Department of Private Law and Educational Science, "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, Romania.

Reviewers:

(1) P. Moodley, South Africa.

(2) Rou-Jui Sophia Hu, Cheng Shiu University, Taiwan.

Complete Peer review History: <http://www.sciencedomain.org/review-history/21900>

Original Research Article

Received 27th October 2017
Accepted 12th November 2017
Published 14th November 2017

ABSTRACT

This research study is designed to examine the effect of English language as a medium of instruction on English language proficiency (skills) of Students during the four years of study in the degree programme. In Sri Lankan universities most of the degree programmes have been conducted in the English medium with the aim to improve the English language proficiency among students as well as the learning and achievement level towards the globally acceptable employment competencies.

The respondents were 174 undergraduate students of the Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) Programme of the Faculty of Commerce and Management (FCM) of the Eastern University, Sri Lanka (EUSL). A questionnaire pertaining to students' perception was used as research instrument. Using descriptive statistics, the study found that there is a statistically significant score gain in all four of the English-language skill areas. The most gain occurred in the area of writing, followed by reading, listening and then speaking. Results from questionnaires indicate that, students' different perceptions regarding language ability and the problems associated with the use of English for instruction. Students generally do not feel that studying in English causes problems for them, and they rate their ability in speaking listening, reading, and writing as good to excellent.

Keywords: *Medium of instruction; language proficiency; student's perception.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

The language is no more a linguistic phenomenon but a socio-political reality, of which the economy is an integral part [1]. Internationalization of education and the desire to compete globally has led to the growth of English-medium instruction (EMI) in higher education around the world [2]. Knowing that English is the language of knowledge and international relations, the universities in Sri Lanka had introduced English as a medium of instruction for most of the degree programmes in addition to the science and mathematics based programmes. English medium instruction in higher education is a significant educational trend [3,4]. Historical decisions along with considerations of future needs of a country often influence language policy decisions when it comes to the medium of instruction [5], and these decisions are often closely linked to the economic concept of globalization [6,7], with EMI believed to offer graduates the best opportunities for academic advancement and training as future workers [8,9]. Tertiary education in many of the Middle East Gulf States (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) often takes place using English as the medium of instruction with the rationale behind this being that while learning the content students will also improve their language skills thus making them better able to compete in today's global economy.

The internationalization, marketization, and globalization of higher education are also key factors influencing the growth of EMI in non-English speaking cultural contexts [8]. By teaching courses in English, an institution has the ability to attract international students and faculty members while offering its own students and teachers the opportunity to participate in an international research community where a large amount of scientific research is published in English [3]. According to [3], "the need to teach some subjects in English, rather than the national language, is well understood: in the sciences, for example, up-to-date textbooks and research articles are obtainable much more easily in one of the world languages and most readily of all in English" (p. 45).

1.2 Research Problem

English has long gained a prominent role and status worldwide [10]. Crystal [11] believes that

English is a dominant language in many continents. It is the main language of books, newspapers, airports, air traffic control, international business, academic references, science, technology, medicine, diplomacy, sports, international competitions, pop music and advertising. As is widely agreed, English is the international language of the era and it is a widely recognized medium of communication in international arena with specific reference to business, science, politics, and academics. Today the role and status English has gained in a fast globalizing world, especially in the field of higher education, is outstanding. The reason for this, according to Coleman [6], is that while the global status of English is a motive for its adoption in higher education, using English in higher education is boosting its global spread. Although it has been challenged with counter arguments and opposing views [12], the common argument is that English is the language of science and business, and so the medium of education should be English if the aim is to prepare students for an international career. It is argued that the field of higher education has already undergone the influence of globalization and become a global market due to the increase in demand for English speaking graduates.

This being the case, students are now seen as customers of a million dollar economy, which seems to be growing due to such factors as rising education fees, increasing mobility of international students, and the resulting increase in the number of English-medium programs and competition between them.

According to [13], there is a commercial rationale behind English-medium higher education, as well as cultural and political dimensions.

That is to say, shifting to instruction in English and thus becoming international would offer institutions the opportunity to attract international students and teaching staff and so increase their academic prestige, to apply for international research funds, and to increase their graduates' chances to find jobs in the international market.

The current situation vis-à-vis English-medium education at tertiary level education settings poses some serious issues. First, most undergraduate and graduate course programs offered only in English-medium. Second, despite the growing interest in and positive attitude towards English and despite the continuing

policies on behalf of the government to support and encourage English-medium instruction at secondary and higher education, learners' poor level of academic accomplishment in English-medium courses has been a major issue of controversy. Such dispute is in fact because despite its widespread use in most higher education contexts, little is known about the effects of English-medium instruction on student learning. In other words, as most disciplinary courses are in English-medium, it becomes difficult to see what happens to students' content knowledge when they have no longer access to instruction in their first language. Finally, except for those international and local students who seek to continue their educational or professional careers abroad, most graduates may not need to use English in their professional careers after graduation.

Studies of attrition of second language show that productive skills (speaking and writing) are more vulnerable to loss than receptive skills, that motivation is implicit in both language learning and attrition, and that the type of instruction may affect retention and acquisition [14]. A variety of research, as noted above, has been done in relation to EMI, but little of it has actually explored the effectiveness of EMI in relation to increasing language proficiency. Researchers suggest that it is time to examine more closely the broader educational context in which learning takes place with a focus on how medium of instruction affects proficiency in English Language [15]. Further, in Sri Lanka few research studies have been conducted to examine the effects of English Medium Instruction on English Language Proficiency of the students in the Universities. Hence, the clear knowledge gap is explicit. This knowledge gap becomes a problem to planners, policy maker and the administrators. Therefore, this research study examines the problem and attempts to fill this knowledge gap.

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions are advanced in this study.

1. What is the level of perceived English Language Proficiency of students in the BBA Programme?
2. Whether Gender, year of study, religion has impact on English Language Proficiency of students in the BBA Programme?

1.4 Objective of the Study

The specific objectives of this study are given below. These objectives have been derived from the research questions and purpose of the study.

1. To identify the level of perceived English Language Proficiency of students in the BBA Programme?
2. To examine the impact of Gender, year of study, religion on English Language Proficiency of students in the BBA Programme?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 What is Language Proficiency?

When discussing learners' proficiency in a language, various terms have been used including, "ability," "proficiency," and "competence." The traditional use of the term "language proficiency" refers to "general knowledge, competence, or ability in the use of a language" [16]. Thus, being proficient may be defined as "having sufficient command of the language for a particular purpose" [17]. This fits with what Bachman [16] refers to as communicative language ability whereby the user must have both knowledge of the language and the capacity to use it competently within a given context [16]. This competence can be looked at in terms of proficiency within different skill areas of listening, reading, writing and speaking [17].

2.2 English Medium Instruction

Learning a second language may be influenced by a number of factors including the environment, the motivation of learners, and the instructional techniques used. Theories underpinning the rationale for English-medium instruction as a means for learning a second language are influenced by assumptions that second language acquisition is similar to first language acquisition. These beliefs support a naturalistic process for language learning in which learning takes place effortlessly and automatically, provided there is sufficient exposure to the target language and the learner is sufficiently motivated. These views contrast with the belief that learning is a conscious activity and that knowledge about the language is necessary in order to acquire it.

Beliefs concerning the learning and teaching of a second language as a conscious or unconscious activity influence pedagogy and practice [18].

The view that knowledge of rules and structures is learned through explicit instruction and practice is influenced by a behaviorist philosophy [19,20]. The philosophy that learning is a matter of conditioning, habit formation and environmental influence led to the decontextualized teaching of grammar and structural practice through drills with methods such as Grammar-Translation and Audiolingualism.

A contrasting viewpoint is that learning may not be due to explicit teaching of the language, but may instead be an unconscious activity. By providing meaningful second language input, acquisition will occur naturally as it does in first language acquisition [21]. Language learning will occur in natural settings with interaction and language input. There is no need for explicit focus on the language itself and its rules and structures Pedagogy should be meaning oriented rather than form focused and there should be little direct explanation of grammar, focused practice or error correction. This thinking was also a reaction to behaviorist methods that were unable to produce second language learners who could actually use, and function in society with, the second language. This led to a search for new methods of teaching and learning second languages that would promote fluency and the ability to communicate in the second language.

The intermediate stance between learning as a conscious or unconscious activity holds that meaningful input is necessary, in addition to a focus on the form, in order to increase proficiency [18]. As English-medium instruction seems to be based on the idea that learning will take place in a context in which the target language is used as the means to deliver content, theories and methods related to meaningful input and exposure to language need to be cleared.

In order to provide effective instruction in the academic language needed for success in the content areas, teachers must be prepared to integrate academic language teaching into the teaching of the disciplines [22].

3. CONCEPTUALIZATION

Following conceptual framework was developed based on literature survey. This conceptual framework highlights the Language Proficiency and its dimensions.

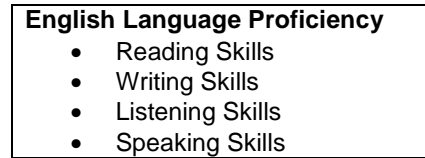


Fig. 1. Figure conceptual model

4. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to empirically investigate the assumption that language proficiency increases when content delivery takes place in English.

Researcher applied quantitative methodology for this study. Thus, survey method has been adopted. Reading, writing, listening, and speaking have been identified as measurable dimensions of English Language Proficiency for the purpose of questioner development. Furthermore, the questionnaire was used to collect the data from the study area.

4.1 Sample Selection

Eastern University, Sri Lanka is one of the 17 universities in Sri Lanka located in the district of Batticaloa. It has five faculties. Faculty of commerce and Management (FCM) is among them. The FCM has 6 special degree programmes which is a 4 years programme. Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) is one of them. This study is limited to the BBA programme. The total numbers of students of the programme amounting to 379, thus 200 students of 04 academic years (Batch) were considered as the sample based on stratified proportionate random sampling method, and the questionnaires were distributed accordingly.

4.2 Data Collection Methods and Instruments

This study was carried out based on primary data. Structured questionnaire was used to collect data. The Questioner comprised of statements on dimensions. Hence questioner was given to the 200 students in the Faculty of commerce and Management.

Likert scale of 1-5 which ranges from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree” was applied in the questionnaire to identify responses. The numerical values were given for the purpose of quantification of variable as follows:

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree.
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

selected for this study. It consists of 200 students from those 04 year study Programme as per the Table 2. Hence 174 students were responded to the questionnaires and the response rate of this study is 87%.

4.3 Data Presentation, Analysis and Evaluation

Data has been presented using tables. Meanwhile descriptive analysis was used for data analysis. Hence under the descriptive analysis, mean and standard deviation were derived from the analysis of 174 samples. Independent sample t-Test was run to test whether or not Gender has impact on English Language Proficiency. ANOVA was run in order to determine whether or year of study and religion have an impact on English Language Proficiency. Statistical package of SPSS 22.0 has been used for this purpose. Furthermore criteria shown in Table 1 were adopted to evaluate mean values. This was established to determine the degree English Language Proficiency.

Table 1. Decision rule for univariate analysis

Range	Decision attributes
$1 \leq X_i \leq 2.5$	Low level
$2.5 < X_i \leq 3.5$	Moderate level
$3.5 < X_i \leq 5.0$	High level

Source- Formed for this research

5. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

5.1 Sample Profile

The Faculty of commerce and Management of the Eastern University Sri Lanka have been

5.2 Descriptive Statistics

Univariate analysis was carried out for evaluating the attributes of variables as individually based on the responses. Here, the frequency, mean values and standard deviation of variables were considered for analysis. Mean values have been distributed based on Likert's scale which represent "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" of between 1 to 5. Meanwhile mean values were evaluated based on the established evaluative criteria which range from "Low level" to "High level".

5.3 Findings and Discussion of English Language Proficiency (ELP) in the Faculty of Commerce and Management of the Eastern University Sri Lanka

This section provides findings and discussion on English Language Proficiency ELP in the Faculty of commerce and Management of the Eastern University Sri Lanka in order to meet the first objective of this study. It is the examination of the English Language Proficiency.

The data presented in Table 3, revealed that except speaking skill all other proficiency skill dimensions have shown the mean values higher than 3.5 which indicated higher level whereas the mean value for speaking skill was between $2.5 < 3.5$ indicating a moderate level. It has shown that the mean value of 3.84 and Standard

Table 2. Sample and response rate

Year of study	Gender	Number of students	Proportion	Number of sample selected	Number of respondents	Response rate
1 st Year	Male	35	10	20	16	80%
	Female	51	13	26	23	88%
2 nd Year	Male	44	12	24	21	88%
	Female	60	16	32	30	94%
3 rd Year	Male	39	10	20	17	85%
	Female	51	13	26	23	88%
Final Year	Male	47	12	24	18	75%
	Female	52	14	28	26	93%
Total		379	100%	200	174	87%

Source-Data analysis

Deviation as 0.59 through the analysis of survey. In addition to that, most of the respondents expressed the common opinion regarding the English Language Proficiency (SD = 0.59).

Table 3. Summary of the findings on English language proficiency

Dimensions of ELP	Mean	Std. deviation
writing skills	4.02,	0.59
reading skills	3.96	0.63
listening skills	3.93	0.72
speaking skill	3.45	0.78
English language proficiency	3.84	0.59

Source-Data analysis

Univariate analysis was performed to find out the results. This explores that the level of each dimension of English Language Proficiency (Writing, Reading, Listening, and Speaking) in the Faculty of commerce and Management of the Eastern University Sri Lanka.

Findings confirmed based on the Univariate analysis that the writing skills of the students has the mean of 4.02, reading skills has the mean value of 3.96, listening skills has the mean value of 3.93 and speaking skill has the mean value of 3.45. This finding reveals that the students reading BBA programme of the Faculty of commerce and Management of the Eastern University Sri Lanka are having high level of English Language Proficiency since the mean value of English Language Proficiency construct

is 3.84. It clearly shows that the Faculty of commerce and Management of the Eastern University Sri Lanka use effective and explicit instruction and practices at a high level to motivate the students to involve in improving the level of English Language Proficiency.

5.4 Findings and Discussion of Whether or not Gender, Age, Year of Study and Religion have Impact on English Language Proficiency

This section presents the details of responded entities. Thus, gender, year of study and religion has been described in detail.

5.5 Independent Sample t-Test

Independent sample t-Test was carried out to verify whether or not Gender has impact on English Language Proficiency.

5.5.1 Gender * English language proficiency

The Table 4 indicates that 72 males have a mean value of 3.35 and SD as .323 and 102 females have mean value of 3.76 and SD as .400 in English Language Proficiency.

The Table 5 shows Levene's test for equality of variances, and indicates that variances for respondents does not differ significantly (p-value, 0.656>0.05) from each other. Then 'Equal-Variance Assumed' assumption was taken and t-test for equality of means was carried out to compare average values between respondents.

Table 4. Gender * English language proficiency cross tabulation

Variable	Respondent	N	Mean	Standard deviation
English Language Proficiency	Male	72	3.35	0.323
	Female	102	3.76	0.400

(Source: survey data)

Table 5. ELP (Independent sample t-test analysis - Gender)

Variance assumption	Levene's test for equality of variance		t-test for equality of means		
	F	Sig.	T	Df	P-value
Equal variance assumed	0.198	0.656	-1.271	171	0.205
Equal variance not assumed			-1.311	123.33	0.191

(Source: survey data)

As the p-value from the t-test for equality of means ($p=0.205$), is greater than the significance level 0.05, and it was concluded that there is sufficient evidence to say, at the 5% level of significance, that “there are no significant differences in English Language Proficiency between male and female students of the BBA programme of the Faculty of commerce and Management of the Eastern University Sri Lanka”.

This study was conducted in the Eastern University Sri Lanka and data were collected from among students of the BBA programme of the Faculty of commerce and Management. The learning part undertaken by the students are more toward mind and less towards physic. Both genders have been considered equal in the assignment of tasks. Therefore, the findings revealed the equal concern and practice, hence both gender reveal the same perception towards English Language Proficiency.

5.5.2 Difference in English Language Proficiency (ELP) among year of study groups of respondents

ANOVA analysis was carried out to verify the difference and results are given in the following Table 6.

F statistics for the differences in ELP among year of study groups is 6.121 with an associated p-value of 0.000. As the p-value is less than the significance level 0.05, it can be concluded that there is sufficient evidence to say at 5% level of significance, that “there are significant differences in ELP among different year of study groups of students of the BBA programme of the Faculty of commerce and Management of the Eastern University Sri Lanka”.

As there are four year of study groups mentioned in the questionnaire, it is essential to figure out the actual year of study groups which differ significantly among those all four in terms of ELP. To find out the differences in detail, Post-Hoc analysis and Test of Homogeneity of

Variance were carried out. The results of the analysis are presented in the Tables 7 and 8.

Homogeneity of Variance Test was carried out to check whether the variances of different groups are equal or not. The result of the test is indicated in Table 7. As the p-value is greater than 0.05 ($p\text{-value} = 0.128$), it can be concluded that the variances are equal. Hence, Equal variance assumed and Post-Hoc analysis was carried out to find out the actual differences. Scheffe Test was selected under the selected assumption.

The results of the Post-Hoc Analysis are presented in Table 8. It has been found out from the in-depth analysis that, there are significant differences between the Year of Study groups 1st Year and ‘4th Year’, and 2nd Year and ‘4th year’. Students who are 4th years of study are more perceive (by 0.391 on average than 1st Year students, by 0.369 on average than 2nd Year students) to acquire language proficiency than the students who are between 1st to 2nd years of Study. However, there are no significant differences in ELP among other years of study groups.

A difference in years of study group was revealed in this analysis. Accordingly, students in the 4th year would have had considerable willingness and positive perception towards language proficiency. The experience in learning in the English medium could have given them a confidence in performing any relevant assignment. Students in this year of study group might also own personal and social identity as a result of superior qualities. Generally senior students considered to be high in status as they wanted to be a model in the organization. Therefore they try to take more effort to show their talents and obtain better results.

5.5.3 Difference in ELP among religious group of students

ANOVA analysis was carried out to verify the difference and results are given in the following Table 9.

Table 6. ELP (Analysis of Variance - year of study groups)

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.379	3	1.126	6.121	0.000
Within Groups	55.018	170	0.184		
Total	58.397	173			

(Source: survey data)

Table 7. Test of Homogeneity of variance – ELP (Year of study group)

Levene statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1.910	3	170	0.128

(Source: survey data)

Table 8. Post-Hoc analysis – Year of study groups

Year of study (I)	Year of study (J)	Mean difference (I-J)	Sig.
1 st Year	2 nd Year	-0.021	0.995
	3 rd Year	-0.154	0.234
	4 th Year	-0.391	0.006
2 nd Year	1 st Year	0.021	0.995
	3 rd Year	-0.132	0.159
	4 th Year	-0.369	0.003
3 rd Year	1 st Year	0.154	0.234
	2 nd Year	0.132	0.159
	4 th Year	-0.237	0.100
4 th Year	1 st Year	0.391	0.006
	2 nd Year	0.369	0.003
	3 rd Year	0.237	0.100

(Source: survey data)

F statistics for the differences in ELP among different Religious Group of students is 44.413 with an associated p-value of 0.000. As the p-value is less than the significance level 0.05, it can be concluded that there is sufficient evidence to say at 5% level of significance, that "there are significant differences in ELP among students with different Religious Group of students of the BBA programme of the Faculty of commerce and Management of the Eastern University Sri Lanka".

There are four different categories of Religious Group of students mentioned in the

questionnaire, and thus it is essential to figure out the actual Religious Group of students which differs significantly among those all four in terms of ELP. To find out the differences in detail, Post-Hoc analysis and Test of Homogeneity of Variance were carried out. The results of the analysis are presented in the Tables 10 and 11.

Homogeneity of Variance Test was carried out to check whether the variances of different work Religious Group of student's categories are equal or not. The result of the test is indicated in Table 10. As the p-value is less than 0.05 (p-value = 0.000), it can be concluded that the variances are not equal. Hence, Equal variance was not assumed and Post-Hoc analysis was carried out to find out the actual differences. Games-Howell Test was selected under the selected assumption.

The results of the Post-Hoc Analysis are presented in Table 11. It has been found out from the in-depth analysis that, there are significant differences between the students who are Christian and those who are Budist, the students who are Christians and those who are Hindu, and the students who are Christian and those who are Muslims. Students who are Christians are more willing, perceive positively and ready to acquire English language proficiency than students of other religious groups. However, there are no significant differences in ELP among students who are Budist, Hindu, and Muslims.

The outcome of this data analysis revealed that there are significant differences in ELP among different Religious Group of student's categories of students of the BBA programme of the Faculty of commerce and Management of the Eastern University Sri Lanka.

Table 9. ELP (Analysis of variance – Religious group of students)

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	18.001	3	6.000	44.413	0.000
Within Groups	40.396	170	0.135		
Total	58.397	173			

(Source: survey data)

Table 10. Test of homogeneity of variance – ELP (Religious group of students)

Levene statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
24.019	3	170	0.000

(Source: survey data)

Table 11. Post-Hoc analysis – Religious group of students

Religious group of students (I)	Religious group of students (J)	Mean difference (I-J)	Sig.
Budist	Hindu	-0.07611	0.897
	Muslim	-0.08424	0.860
	Christian	-0.77201	0.000
Hindu	Budist	0.07611	0.897
	Muslim	-0.00863	0.996
	Christian	-0.69590	0.000
Muslim	Budist	0.08424	0.860
	Hindu	0.00863	0.996
	Christian	-0.68727	0.000
Christian	Budist	0.77201	0.000
	Hindu	0.69590	0.000
	Muslim	0.68727	0.000

(Source: survey data)

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Universities are focusing on to the world class status and the programs offered by them are transferrable across relevant higher education institutions and even across countries. These could be possible by conducting the programmes and courses in the English medium. The students who excel in English language would enjoy the efforts taken by the institution and by them at the maximum. Therefore, identifying their level proficiency and their perception towards English Language Proficiency is very important.

This study on the effects of English Language Instruction on English Language Proficiency of the students of the BBA programme of the faculty of Commerce and Management of the Eastern University Sri Lanka reveal that, the English Language Proficiency Skills are at high level. Further, the study revealed that except speaking skill all other proficiency skill dimensions have shown higher mean values.

The influence of the demographic factors of the students revealed that, there are no significant differences in English Language Proficiency between male and female students of the BBA programme of the Faculty of commerce and Management of the Eastern University Sri Lanka". But it revealed that "there are significant differences in ELP among different year of study groups of students of the BBA programme of the Faculty of commerce and Management of the Eastern University Sri Lanka". Accordingly, students in the 4th year would have had

considerable willingness and positive perception towards language proficiency than students from the other years of study. Further, there are significant differences in ELP among students with different Religious Group of students of the BBA programme of the Faculty of commerce and Management of the Eastern University Sri Lanka". Students who are Christians are more willing, perceive positively and ready to acquire English language proficiency than students of other religious groups. It is to be noted that the overall English language proficiency is at high level, speaking skills among students at the moderate level.

Considering the findings of the study the following recommendations are made;

1. As the speaking skills of the students are at the moderate level more practical methods of instructions to be adopted to motivate and encourage the students.
2. Except students in the 4th year, students who following in the other years should be given more attention to get involved in the practice of the skills.
3. Opportunities should be made for students of all religions to enhance their English Language Proficiency.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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