



English Language Learning Strategies of Agricultural Students of ANGRAU

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ABSTRACT

The research aimed to study the English language learning strategies of agricultural students at Acharya N.G. Ranga Agricultural University. To carry out the study, which was conducted between January and April, 2021, a total of 64 students studying Post-Graduation and PhD filled- out the interview schedule that was administered to them. The strategy inventory for language learning (SILL) questionnaire version 7.0 (Oxford, 1990) was utilized for this study. The interview schedule (google form) comprised 39 questions from the strategy inventory and these questions were modified slightly for Indian students. The results indicated that agricultural students of ANGRAU fell under 'moderate strategies' category in English language acquisition. Though the results showed 'moderate to high strategies' are followed by students, they do not use them 'almost always' or 'always'.

Key Words: Agriculture, English, Inventory, Language, Learning. Strategy, Students.

INTRODUCTION

The English language, unlike other languages, has spread to all corners of the world. Embraced by many disciplines such as science, education, technology, and more, it is now considered a global language and is viewed by many as the language of commerce, business, law, and science and technology (Drubin and Kellogg, 2012). With agriculture being a science and technology-based discipline, academic and professional communication tend to occur in English. As a result, graduates of agriculture, like many other professional graduates, are expected to develop and be equipped with the necessary skills needed to cross communication barriers. Moreover, According to Diana Ansarey (2016), these graduates find themselves placed in local, national, and multinational organisations where they are expected to be equipped with both their subject matter expertise and English. Many employers also insist that their employees demonstrate proficiency in the English language before being hired.

English for Academic Purposes (EAP)– refers to the English language and the associated skills that people need to undertake English-medium higher education and work (Gillett, 2011). Indian agricultural students who are considered as professional course students need to have knowledge of standard English, ranging anywhere from A2 (pre-intermediate or basic) to C1 (advanced or proficient), as many textbooks they encounter throughout their studies are published only in English and the medium of instruction in the universities is English language. Students are involved in activities such as reading scientific articles and journal, which require a good knowledge of English. M.Sc and Ph.D. students are also required to write their dissertation/theses in the English language, which involves a decent amount of knowledge of academic English. Furthermore, all official communication in agricultural universities is in English. Despite agricultural students essentially being expected to be bilingual, using

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Table 1. Categorization of students based on their overall strategies to practice English language (n=64)

Sr.No.	Strategies classification	Frequency	Percentage
1	Low (Mean-SD)	11	17.19
2	Moderate (Mean-SD to Mean+SD)	43	67.19
3	High (Mean+SD)	10	15.63

both their native language and English in daily communication, there seems to be a limited amount of research regarding the English language learning strategies of students in agricultural universities in the Indian context. In addition to this, all the agricultural colleges of ANGRAU have only part-time English teachers/instructors, forcing many students to depend on their peers for clarification of any doubts they might have regarding the language. Also, English language course is offered only for one credit hour in M.Sc/ PhD and the syllabus contains only theory class and no practical classes are offered. Mostly, agricultural students of higher education need to give more attention to their specializing disciplines; and hence, get less time to improve English language skills. In such scenario, knowledge of Language learning strategies can prove helpful to acquire required proficiency in a short span of time. Therefore, this study is aimed to research English language learning strategies of M.Sc and Ph.D. students of the Acharya N.G. Ranga Agricultural University.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted between January and April 2021. Interview schedule was prepared with 38 strategies as questions and pre-tested with 10 English language teachers, who have a formal degree in English language. Pre-tested questionnaire was modified as Google Form and administered to the M.Sc and PhD Students on their e-mails. A total of 64 students filled-out the Google Form. Out of the 64 students, 38 were female students and 26 were male students. Also, out of the 64 students, 45 were M.Sc students and 19 were PhD students. The students belonged to various disciplines (from plant sciences

and social sciences). The respondents belonged to three agricultural colleges' viz., Bapatla, Tirupati and Naira campuses and Advanced Post Graduate Centre, Guntur.

The strategy inventory for language learning (SILL) questionnaire version 7.0 (Oxford, 1990) was used for this study. Few statements of the inventory were modified for Indian Agricultural University students. The final inventory consisted of 39 positive statements. Frequencies were recorded on a 5-point likert type continuum - 'Never or almost never true of me', 'Usually not true of me', 'Somewhat true of me', 'Usually true of me' and 'Always or almost true of me'. The Frequencies were scored as 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, respectively according to their weightage for the given statements with 'never or almost never true of me' weighing 1 and 'Always or almost true of me' scoring 5. The SILL is used to determine whether the agricultural students were low, medium or high strategy users.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overall, the students have moderate strategies to learn and practice English language, with more than half of the students (67.19 %) falling under this category (Table 1) and they do not use them almost always or always. The agricultural students were not consistent in English language learning strategies even though they fell under medium strategies. Ruba *et al* (2014) reported that University of Sargodha, Pakistan students were also not consistent in learning English as second language. In this study, only around 16 percent of the students have high strategies, who are motivated to practice English on daily basis. The reason might be due to

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Table 2. Strategies used by agricultural students in acquiring English language.

Sr. No.	Statement	Never or almost never true of me f & %	Usually not true of me f & %	Somewhat true of me f & %	Usually true of me f & %	Always or almost true of me f & %
1	I use English language as medium of communication	3 (4.69)	7(10.94)	19(29.69)	19(29.69)	16(25)
2	I think of ways to make connections between what I already know and new things learnt	-	2(3.13)	22(34.38)	30(46.88)	10(15.63)
3	I form sentences with new words I learn to better understand its meanings	-	3(4.69)	29(45.31)	22(34.38)	10(15.63)
4	I am aware of my anxiety when studying or using the English language	6 (9.38)	16 (25)	20 (31.25)	10 (15.63)	12 (18.75)
5	I feel encouraged to speak in English even when I am afraid I might make mistakes	-	5(7.81)	22(34.38)	20(31.25)	17(26.56)
6	I use rhymes or mnemonics to assist in the memorization of new English words	18(28.13)	19(29.69)	18(28.13)	4(6.25)	5(7.81)
7	I utilize flash cards/ electronic flash cards to assist in reviewing or practicing the English language	18(28.13)	23(35.94)	17(26.56)	5(7.81)	1(1.56)
8	I repeat or rewrite new English words several times to assist in memorizing their meanings	9(14.06)	11(17.19)	29(45.31)	13(20.31)	2(3.13)
9	I practice my pronunciation of the English language	1(1.56)	9(14.06)	30(46.88)	14(21.88)	10(15.63)
10	I use English words I already know in many different ways	2(3.13)	3 (4.69)	30(46.88)	18(28.13)	11(17.19)
11	I initiate conversations in English	1(1.56)	5(7.81)	25(39.06)	25(39.06)	8(12.50)
12	I watch TV shows or movies where English is the main language being spoken	4(6.25)	6(9.38)	18(28.13)	17(26.56)	19(29.69)
13	I read in English (newspapers/books) for fun or pleasure	5(7.81)	11(17.19)	27(42.19)	13(20.31)	8(12.50)
14	I write notes, messages, letters or reports in English	1 (1.56)	2 (3.13)	27 (42.19)	14 (21.88)	20 (31.25)
15	I skim over English texts first, and then go back and reread them carefully	4(6.25)	6(9.38)	24(37.50)	26(40.63)	4(6.25)

16	I try to spot or recognise patterns in the English language	2(3.13)	8(12.50)	30(46.88)	17(26.56)	7(10.94)
17	I look for words in my own language	0(0.00)	4(6.25)	31(48.44)	18(28.13)	11(17.19)
18	I divide English words into 'word parts' as a way to help me understand their meanings	2(3.13)	13(20.31)	24(37.50)	17(26.56)	8(12.50)
19	I try to refrain from translating word for word	3(4.69)	6(9.38)	31(48.44)	17(26.56)	7(10.94)
20	I guess the meanings of unfamiliar English words to help me better understand them	0(0.00)	4(6.25)	29(45.31)	23(35.94)	8(12.50)
21	I read and comprehend English comfortably without having to look up every new word I come across	4(6.25)	10(15.63)	32(50.00)	13(20.3)	5(7.81)
22	I try to guess what someone speaking English might say next	0(0.00)	7(10.94)	29(45.31)	22(34.38)	6 (9.38)
23	I try to use my English in as many ways as possible	0(0.00)	3(4.69)	29(45.31)	22(34.38)	10(15.63)
24	I plan, schedule, or manage my time to ensure I have enough time to study or practice the English language	9(14.06)	18(28.13)	22(34.38)	10(15.63)	5(7.81)
25	I seek out people to converse with in English	4(6.25)	8(12.50)	28(43.75)	18(28.13)	6(9.38)
26	I look for opportunities to read in English as much as possible	3(4.69)	3(4.69)	20(31.25)	18(28.13)	20(31.25)
27	I think about my progress in English	3(4.69)	4(6.25)	19(29.69)	22(34.38)	16(25.00)
28	I practice English with other students	1(1.56)	13(20.31)	25(39.06)	19(29.69)	6(9.38)
29	I ask questions in English	2(3.13)	5(7.81)	24(37.50)	23(35.94)	10(15.63)
30	I try to learn more about native English-speaking cultures	10(15.63)	9(14.06)	24(37.50)	18(28.13)	3(4.69)
31	I take English vocabulary or grammar tests on the Internet	9(14.06)	16(25.00)	26(40.63)	13(20.31)	0(0.00)
32	I use apps such as Hello Talk, Duolingo, or Cambly to practice my English with native English speakers	17(26.56)	25(39.06)	13(20.31)	7(10.94)	2(3.13)
33	I use text-to-speech tools such as Google Pronunciation to better understand the sounds of the English language	13(20.31)	10(15.63)	21(32.81)	16(25.00)	4(6.25)
34	I use speech-to-text or voice-to-text tools such as Apple Dictation or Android voice input or Google Indic Keyboard to correct my pronunciation of the English language	14(21.88)	16(25.00)	22(34.38)	11(17.19)	1(1.56)

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35	I try to think in English when I am trying to speak in English	1 (1.56)	1 (1.56)	31 (48.44)	22 (34.38)	9 (14.06)
36	I use hand or body gestures if I am unsure how to use an English word in it's correct context	1(1.56)	16(25.00)	29(45.31)	12(18.75)	6(9.38)
37	I am subscribed to, or receive notifications from daily 'A. Word. A. Day' websites or mobile applications (For ex: Knudge.me)	15(23.44)	23(35.94)	14(21.88)	7 (10.94)	5(7.81)
38	I utilize interactive apps, software, or games such as '4-Pics -1- Word' to learn English vocabulary	14(21.88)	19(29.69)	23(35.94)	5(7.81)	3(4.69)
39	I utilize free websites or software such as 'Grammarly' to check my academic English for grammatical or spelling errors	12(18.75)	11(17.19)	22(34.38)	12(18.75)	7(10.94)

Note: figures in parentheses indicates percentages

the fact that these students might be aspiring to study PhD/PDF abroad in near future. Patil and Karekatti (2012) reported that 60 Engineering students from Ratnagiri district also fell under medium to high category of strategies.

Statement 1 showed that a total of more than three-fourth (85%) of the respondents considered English language as their medium of communication due to the high usage of the language in their daily life. More than half of the students (62%) practiced this particular English strategy. This might be due to the reason that most of the students studied English in school as an academic subject and hence aware of this strategy since formative years. Likewise, nearly 5% of the students disagreed with the statement 3. Nearly half of the students (50.01%) use this strategy to remember the vocabulary they have learnt along with their meanings by constructing sentences with the newly acquired vocabulary.

Statement 4 depicts that one-third of the students (34.38%) are aware that they are nervous when studying or using the English language. This might be due to the reason that they consider English as

a foreign language. A meagre percentage of the students (7.81%) were discouraged to speak in English or conversational English (Table 2). Further, nearly half of the students (42.19%) did not consider this as an important strategy. The reason might be due to the fact that they consider English as a second language and not very important to focus at this juncture in their studies. Only a small percentage (9.37%) of the respondents were using electronic flashcards, etc for practicing English language. This might be due to the reason of unawareness about the availability of the technologies in the Internet.

Statement 8 showed that nearly one-fourth of the students (23.44 %) are using this strategy of repeating the new words they learnt on a regular basis. The reason might be due to the interest to increase their vocabulary for studies/career purpose. One-third of the students (37.51%) were mostly practicing their pronunciation. Students usually express their weakness as pronunciation of English words and hence might be dedicating time for this strategy. Nearly half of the students (45.32%) are using the words they know in different ways to practise English. This strategy is a common

strategy followed by many ESL learners. Majority of the students (90.62%) initiate conversation in the English. This is a common strategy followed by the students as the medium of instruction is English in professional colleges/ Universities in India and they mostly converse in English with the faculty members.

Statement 12 illustrated that more than half of the students (56.25%) watch TV shows where English is the dominant language because it is the informal way to practice English listening comprehension. Also, it is a common practice to watch TV shows/ movies with subtitles among younger generation. One-fourth of the students (25%) are not reading English newspapers/books for fun or pleasure. Almost all the respondents prepared notes, messages, letters etcetera in English language because the University/ college requires English as the language of correspondence. Also, the smart phones contain predictive dictionary (U.S./U.K English) which makes it easy to compose a message in English. It is a common strategy followed by M.sc/ PhD students and can be considered as strength for learning English.

Statement 16 illustrated that the respondents who are MSc and PhD students have already passed their under graduation with English as the medium of instruction. Therefore, the practice of recognizing patterns is a strategy acquired by the students over the years. Majority of the respondents (93.76%) try to remember the new words learnt in English by translating them into mother tongue/ native tongue. More than one-third of the respondents (39.06%) divide the English words to comprehend their meaning. Generally students are learning the new words with the practice of inserting prefixes and suffixes. More than one-third of the students (37.5%) try to comprehend the meaning of the sentences and paragraphs instead of translating word by word. Nearly half of the students (48.44%) are acquiring the meaning of the new words by guessing their meaning (Table 2) and more than one-fourth of the students (28.12%) mostly do not look up the

meaning of the new words. Slightly above one-third of the students (43.76%) can guess what the English speakers might say next in a situation and only a meagre percentage of the students (4.69%) were not using English in as many ways as possible.

Statement 24 showed that more than one-fourth of the students (42.19%) do not take time out to study English on a daily basis or weekly basis. Mostly, English is learnt in an informal way by the students of professional courses as the syllabus demands focus on science-based subjects. Slightly above one-third of the students (37.51%) seek out people to converse with in English. The students might be generally conversing in regional language outside the classroom except with ICAR students (outside the state of Andhra Pradesh) who are unfamiliar with regional language Telugu (Table 2). More than half of the students (59.38%) read in English as agricultural science textbooks are mostly in English. Also, dissertations, theses and research articles are also published in English language. Nearly two-third of the students (59.38%) think and review their English language fluency.

Statement 28 depicted that nearly one-fourth of the students (21.87%) do not try to practise English with other students. This was an important strategy, but not practiced by these students. Half of the students (51.57%) ask questions in English in classrooms on a regular basis. Nearly one-third of the students (29.69%). do not try to learn about native English speaking cultures. This strategy was not popular among Agricultural students. The reason might be due to the fact that only few students want to complete their PhD or pursue a Post-Doctoral Fellowship (PDF) in English speaking countries. None of the students take English vocabulary or grammar test on the Internet on a regular basis. Only two-third of the students (60.94%) were aware of the English vocabulary or grammar tests on the Internet and have taken the tests.

Statement 32 depicts that more than half of the students (65.62%) are not aware of various apps to practise English with native English speakers. Only

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one-third of the students (31.25%) are using text-to-speech tools for pronunciation help, etcetera. This important self-learning strategy was mostly not followed by more than one-third of the students as they might be busy with M.Sc/PhD research works (Table 2). Nearly half of the students (46.88%) are not practicing their pronunciation and nearly half of the students (48.44%) try to think in English when constructing sentences, Instead of regional language.

More than one-fourth of the students (26.56%) never use hand or body gestures while communicating in English and more than half of the students never heard of applications or websites that helps in practicing English vocabulary on a daily basis. Half of the students (51.57%) never used interactive apps, software or games that helps in learning English in a faster way. Likewise, more than one-fourth of the students never heard of free websites or software such as 'Grammarly' to check their academic English. The reason might be due to the fact that many of the students are not aware of this website.

CONCLUSION

Agricultural students fell under moderate strategies category in English language acquisition. Though the results showed moderate to high strategies were followed by students, they do not use them almost always or always. The strategies

followed were common/basic approaches to learn English as second language/foreign language. The study indicates that the students need strategy instruction or training to improve English language acquisition. Agricultural students need English throughout their studies/careers and hence, need to follow more strategies to acquire English in a consistent way. The Agricultural Universities should also encourage students to participate in formal/informal ways of English language acquisition by designing programs such as English Corner, English Conversation Club, and English quizzes, etc.

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