

## ENGLISH TEACHING PRACTICES AT SECONDARY LEVEL: A CASE STUDY OF WEST GODAVARI DISTRICT

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### Abstract

This paper presents an analysis of the English teaching practices at the secondary level in Govt. /ZPH Schools, based on a case study of West Godavari district in Andhra Pradesh. The sample consists of 46 English teachers from 46 manuals of the district. The data is collected using a structured questionnaire. The findings of the study show that most of the teachers still follow traditional methods of teaching English, but they are not against the latest methods and techniques. They favor the introduction of evaluating the speaking performance of the students. The paper concludes with a few suggestions for further improvement of English teaching-learning situation in the district.

Keywords: analysis, questionnaire, methods, secondary level, improvement

## Introduction

English is a language of opportunities in the globalized world today. English speaking is one of the prized skills that the youth of the day are required to possess. It helps in elevating one's academic performances and in career development. In all academic settings, it is recognized as a necessary skill for the students at all stages. Hence, teaching English speaking skill needs special attention by both teachers and students. The teachers' teaching practices including the methods they adopt, the approaches they follow and the techniques they implement at classroom level play a key role in achieving the objectives of teaching the English language to students. An outdated or inappropriate method/practice makes their job futile and lands the students too in a world of troubles. English teaching in India still follows the Macaulayan model of 1835 and even after more than sixty years of political independence, we do not seem to think that our own situation, requirements, and culture are to be taken into account in planning our education and English teaching programme" (Krishnaswamy, 2012: 1).

## The context of the Study

The secondary level of education establishes a vital connection between primary education and higher education, paving way for students to explore practical realities in applying their hither-to-learned skill and knowledge. In case of learning the English language, these students confront many hurdles when they try to speak in English. Learning a language to write and get through the exams is what they have experienced till then. To give an English presentation of the project they have done is an all-new experience for them. To participate in a dialogue with their peers in English looks like a big unknown task for them.

Usually, the students at secondary level, especially those who study in Government Schools spend little time in English speaking activities. They do involve in reading and writing activities quite often either in or off the classes. At times, thanks to new technology, they are engaged in listening to English too. However, speaking is the most neglected skill at this stage. Unless it is thrust upon them, students hardly attempt to express their views in English. They are comfortable with their mother tongue, and therefore, they generally tend to continue in their comfort zone.

The teachers at the secondary level are predisposed to preparing the students for the examinations because the governments and higher officials take results into consideration for any kind of assessment of the teacher's performance and ability. Hence, to save their skin, they mostly focus on the writing aspect of the English language which is put to test in all sorts of examinations. They sincerely conduct

assignments, daily tests, weekly tests, lesson-wise tests, monthly tests etc., all of which are oriented to improving the writing skill or, in many cases, memorizing the skill. All this is done at the expense of speaking skill which is crucial for the students' future. The teachers have good abilities to train the students to speak in English, but they find no option but to concentrate on the writing skill/memorizing skill.

Under these circumstances, the author as a part of his research for a doctoral degree, surveyed 46 Government/Zilla Parishad High Schools in West Godavari (WG) district to find out the teaching practices of English teachers for IX class English medium sections and to suggest measures to bridge the gaps if any for strengthening the role of the secondary level English teachers and for the overall improvement of the secondary level students.

#### The sample for the Study

To reflect the scenario of the entire district, the researcher randomly chose one school from each of the 46 mandals in the district (the new mandals from Telangana are not included for the study). Again, he randomly selected one-ninth class English teacher from each school (in a majority of the schools, there is only one English teacher) for collecting data in relation to their English teaching practices, their views on English language and their assessment of the students. The respondents were briefed about the purpose and procedure of data collection in advance.

#### Objectives of the Study

To find out the teaching practices of secondary level English teachers;

To analyze the views of the English teachers on the students' English speaking skills;

To assess their opinion on evaluation practices and the need for new methods and approaches; and

To suggest measures for bridging the gaps if any in teaching English.

#### Hypotheses

The existing ELT and evaluation practices are not effective in improving the English speaking skill of the secondary students.

The English speaking skills of the secondary students are not adequate.

#### Research Tools

(1) A questionnaire on Likert Five-Point Scale was designed with 20 statements and administered to 46 English teachers identified. The statements were divided into three sections – Section-I, II & III - for the convenience of data collection and analysis. Each section was planned with a specific focus to achieve the objectives outlined below.

Section-I is aimed at gathering the respondents' basic information, including name, gender, qualification, experience, and location of the school at which they are presently working. Section-II contains ten statements from 1 to 10. It is concentrated

on understanding the teachers' classroom practices and their opinion on the points like:

The significance of English speaking skill in today's world;

Scope for improving students' speaking skill at the secondary level;

Traditional methods of teaching like the Grammar-Translation Method;

Need for introducing latest methods;

Teaching material in the textbooks;

Time constraints for making use of the tasks in the textbooks; and

Present evaluation patterns.

Section-III contains ten statements from 11 to 20. This is focused on finding out the teachers' understanding of the students'

Views on the importance of English speaking skill;

Attitudes to learning English speaking;

Use of mother tongue in the class;

Learning practices;

Abilities to understand and use English; and

Apprehensions about speaking in English.

(2) In a differential analysis, a Z-Test is employed where the sample size is above 30. As the sample size in the present study is above 30, Z-Test is used for statistical analysis.

Formula:  $Z = \frac{p - PPQ}{n}$

Analysis of Section-II

The responses of the teachers on the statements 1-10 given in Section-II of the questionnaire are presented in Table 1 for statistical analysis and interpretation of data.

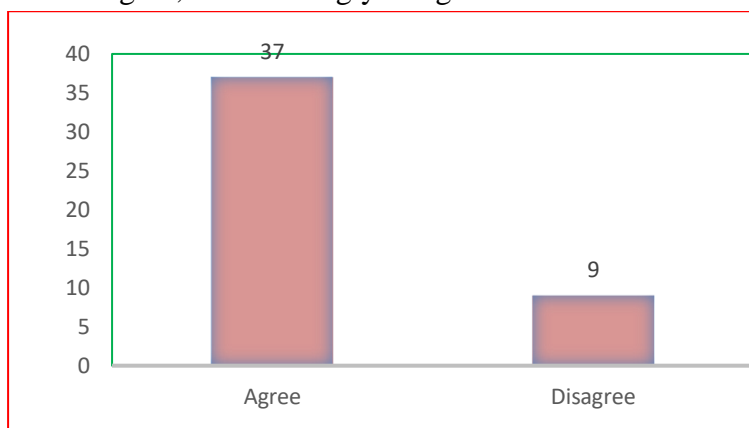
Table 1

Teachers' Responses on Statements from 1 to 10

Sl. No.	Likert Five-Point Scale					Adjusted into two columns	
	SA	A	NAND	D	SD	A	D
1	41	05	-	-	-	46	-
2	32	14	-	-	-	46	-
3	12	29	03	02	-	42	04
4	07	24	06	06	03	34	12
5	25	16	01	02	02	41	05
6	09	15	08	11	03	28	18
7	12	18	05	11	-	33	13
8	17	20	01	05	03	37	09
9	09	15	03	10	09	26	20

10	13	22	04	07	-	37	09
Means	17.7	17.8	3.1	5.4	2.0	<b>37</b>	<b>9</b>

Note. SA = Strongly agree; A = Agree; NAND = Neither agree nor disagree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly disagree.



Note. SA = Strongly agree; A = Agree; NAND = Neither agree nor disagree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly disagree.

Figure 1. Comparison of Agree and Disagree Responses

For carrying out statistical analysis, the data in the first four columns of Table 1 are regrouped into two columns (last two). The responses received in the columns strongly agree and agree are added, and the total is considered as agreed. Likewise, the responses received in the columns disagree and strongly disagree are added, and the total is considered as disagree. The responses received in the column neither agree nor disagree are shared to both sides equally.

In view of the nature of the data in Table 1, Z-Test is used to obtain the results of the sample of 46. The Z calculated value is compared with the critical value of Z for verifying the Null Hypothesis. In the present context, the sample size is  $N = 46$ , the number of favorable cases is  $X=37$ , the sample proportion of the favorable cases is  $p = X/N = 37/46 = 0.8043$ , and the significance level is  $(1 - \alpha)\%$  i.e.  $95\%$   $\alpha = 0.05$ . The assumed P and Q values are 0.75 and 0.25. Therefore, the Null Hypothesis is  $P=0.75$  (x is not significantly different from  $\mu$ ) while Alternative Hypothesis is  $P \neq 0.75$ . The Z-statistic is calculated with the formula below.

$$Z = \frac{0.8043 - 0.75}{\sqrt{0.75(1 - 0.75)/46}} = 0.851$$

#### Interpretation

When the calculated value of Z 0.851 is compared with the Z-critical value 1.96, it is proved that the calculated value of Z is less than its critical value ( $Z = 0.851 < 1.96$ ) and so it is not significant. Therefore, the Null Hypothesis is accepted. From this

statistical analysis, it may be concluded that 37 out of 46 respondents have accepted the opinion of the researcher in Section-II of the teachers' questionnaire.

#### Analysis of Section-III

The responses of the teachers on the statements 11-20 given in Section-III of the teachers' questionnaire are presented in Table 2 for statistical analysis and interpretation of the data.

Table 2

Teachers' Responses to Statements from 11 to 20

Sl. No.

Likert Five-Point Scale

Adjusted into two columns

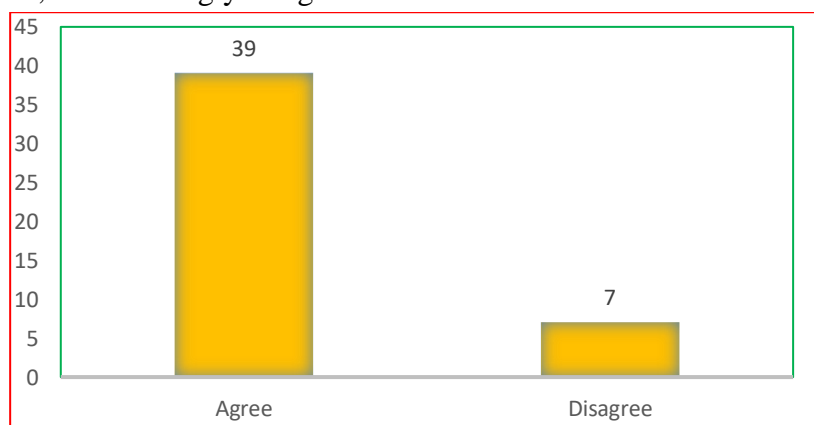
Table 2

Teachers' Responses on Statements from 11 to 20

Sl. No.	Likert Five-Point Scale					Adjusted into two columns	
	SA	A	NAND	D	SD	A	D
11	11	20	03	12	-	32	14
12	07	19	07	11	02	30	16
13	18	27	01	00	-	45	01
14	09	24	02	08	03	34	12
15	18	21	03	04	-	41	05
16	15	28	01	02	-	43	03
17	10	28	04	04	-	40	06
18	24	18	02	02	-	43	03
19	18	22	02	04	-	41	05
20	14	28	04	00	-	44	02
Means	14.4	23.5	2.9	4.7	0.5	39.3=39	6.7=7

Note. SA = Strongly agree; A = Agree; NAND = Neither agree nor disagree;

D = Disagree; SD = Strongly disagree.



Note. SA = Strongly agree; A = Agree; NAND = Neither agree nor disagree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly disagree.

#### Figure.2 Comparison of Agree and Disagree Responses

For carrying out statistical analysis, the data in the first four columns of Table 2 are regrouped into two columns (last two). The responses received in the columns strongly agree and agree are added, and the total is considered as agreed. Likewise, the responses received in the columns disagree and strongly disagree are added, and the total is considered as disagree. The responses received in the column neither agree nor disagree are shared to both sides equally.

Based on the nature of the data in Table 2, Z-Test is used to obtain the results of the sample of 46. The calculated value of Z is compared with the critical value for verifying the Null Hypothesis. In the present context, the sample size is  $N = 46$ , the number of favorable cases is  $X = 39$ , the sample proportion of the favorable cases is  $p = X/N = 39/46 = 0.8478$ , and the significance level is  $(1 - \alpha)\%$  i.e.  $95\%$   $\alpha = 0.05$ . The assumed P and Q values are 0.80 and 0.20. Therefore, the Null Hypothesis is  $P = 0.80$  (x is not significantly different from  $\mu$ ) while Alternative Hypothesis is  $P \neq 0.80$ . The Z-statistic is calculated as follows:

$$Z = \frac{0.8478 - 0.80}{\sqrt{0.80(1-0.80)/46}} = 0.811$$

#### Interpretation

The Z calculated value 0.811 is compared with the critical value 1.96. Therefore,  $Z = 0.811 < 1.96$ . As the Z calculated value is less than Z critical value, it is not significant. Hence, the Null Hypothesis is accepted. From this statistical analysis, it may be concluded that 39 out of 46 teachers have accepted the opinion of the researcher in Section-II of the teachers' questionnaire.

#### Findings of the Study

The findings of the study show that the teachers still adopt traditional methods as it is clear in their responses to the statements number 4 and 6. Majority of the teachers felt that it was necessary to give a set of rules before teaching a grammar topic and to focus on preparing students for written examinations. In relation to the evaluation practices, the majority of the teachers favored the evaluation of the oral performance of students in English as one of the measures to improve their English speaking skill. Almost 90% of the participants agreed that there is a strong need for implementing the latest methods to improve the English speaking skill of these students.

The teachers agreed that the students hesitate to speak in English for fear of making grammatical mistakes. On the whole, according to the teachers, the English speaking skill of these students is on average and below average level, and hence, they are not satisfactory.

#### Suggestions

English teachers need to "free themselves from the fetters of traditional practices in teaching the English language in the Indian context" (Patil, 2012: xiii) and focus on class-specific and student-specific techniques to meet the needs of the students.

They may adopt latest practices like task-based teaching to motivate the students for active participation in learning English speaking skills.

Simple group tasks and pair tasks fully engage the students in doing the task and help them get exposed to a variety of language functions.

Increasing Student Talk Time and reducing Teacher Talk Time in the class is a strategy which may be implemented by all.

Integration of the four skills of language is to be done in all activities in English class.

Introducing evaluation of the oral performance of the students in English and awarding marks for it will go a long way in making the students good communicators.

If the teachers are not burdened with non-academic work, they get more scope for developing the speaking skills of the students.

#### Conclusion

The paper has explored the prevailing English teaching and learning scenario at the secondary level in Zilla Parishad/Government Schools of WG District. After a relevant analysis of the teachers' views on different aspects of teaching English speaking skill, it has made a few suggestions to help further improve the situation and achieve the desired outcomes.

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