

EMPHASIS ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE AT THE INTERMEDIATE LEVEL IN ANDHRA PRADESH: AN EXPERIENTIAL STUDY

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Abstract

In a student's academic career, Intermediate is the turning point where his future gets decided. There is no doubt that majority of the students in Andhra Pradesh are eager to join professional courses like Engineering and Medical stream. One just can't find fault with them as there seems to be no other alternative. Some of the students may have a great love for literature but are not allowed to choose. They are not given a chance to pursue the course for which they have flair or aptitude. A student who is good at English in school tends to neglect English at Intermediate level by over-emphasis on science subjects. In addition his parents too believe that only Engineering and Medicine courses would fetch him a good job. The present article is a part of a UGC Major Research Project entitled "Emphasis on English Language at Intermediate Level in Andhra Pradesh" (2013-2016) with a total grant of 4.7 lakhs, attempts on examining various reasons for a drop in fluency of English among students coming from Intermediate background in Andhra Pradesh and measures suggested to improve their fluency in English at college level. It also endeavors to examine the role of English in a student's career.

Origin of the Research Problem:

Besides the above mentioned reason in the abstract, there are a number of other reasons for which the students may neglect English. It is aptly said that interests and hobbies must be cultivated only when young. An Intermediate student is taxed heavily by the regular syllabi and hardly gets time for relaxation. He feels burdened by his curriculum and shows no inclination for general reading or enjoying a good book. Whatever little time that he gets is spent on watching television, movies, playing video games or by lazily lying on a couch.

Thus the idea of enjoying a good book has been lost. One of the greatest linguists of all times, Noam Chomsky too asserts that language is natural and there are four major skills that a learner of a foreign language needs to master: listening, reading, speaking and writing. A language can be enriched only when all the four skills are simultaneously developed. If one is a good listener, he is a good speaker, and if he is a good reader, he is also a good writer. Another reason for not improving English could be, the exposure to English at school is very little only with an hour of English everyday and the rest of the subjects by teachers who happen to come from regional medium background.

Interdisciplinary relevance:

It is commonly found with many of the English teachers from their long experience that the students at Intermediate level have forgotten all the English learnt for 10 years in school. In spite of this, some students are able to secure 90% in English at Intermediate level and others are effortlessly getting through it. At this point one needs to ponder on the point that 'should competence level of a student be decided on the basis of marks secured'? It could be one of the reasons that the students have developed an attitude of indifference and negligence to English. That is the reason why they are not able to perform well or improve in English. Besides, around 90% of students' performance in First Year of Engineering are not up to mark not only in written skills, but also in the other three skills (Reading, speaking and listening). So any engineering student with such indifferent attitude doesn't make an attempt to improve his fluency in written or oral skills. During the time of campus recruitment, he realizes the lacuna in him, and regrets the lack of the appropriate employable skills.

Review of Research and Development in the Subject:

Purple Leap in 2009 conducted a study on Employability Skill Index of Engineering Students and came out with dawning revelations. The study was conducted in 95 colleges across the country (15 colleges in A.P.) and 9000 students (600 in A.P.). It says that 36% of students fail on all major skill count- Communication, Problem solving and Technical Skills. Only 7% were found employable when all factors are considered. It says that Communication skill is a problem area especially to students in Tier 2 & Tier 3 Cities. 80 % of engineering students in A.P do not meet the qualifying criteria as far as their communication skills are concerned. And few, whose Communication skills are fine, but still not hired because they lack in technical skills or problem solving skills. Proficiency in Communication Skills is considered more a qualifying criteria than selection criteria for technical roles in industry.

The Purple Leap survey in 2009 also revealed that about 25 % of the student population, which fall in the 30-40% performance brand, can be trained to upgrade their skills to employable levels. These students will need focused training in Communication skills, Problem solving and Technical skills so that they may be brought to the employable pool. But

36 % of the rest had no chance of an engineering job, as they are “hard to train” as they are not able to meet the qualifying criteria in all three skills.

National Employability Report by Aspiring Minds states that “India has a sizeable engineering talent pool. It produces about five lakh Engineering graduates every year, but only less than one- fifth of the total number of them are fit to be employable, especially in IT service sector. It also says that the percentage of ready to be employed engineers for IT Jobs is dismally low at 2.68%. The report which covered more than 55000 engineering students, who graduated in 2011, highlighted the fact that the zeal to increase the number of colleges has impacted on the quality drastically.

According to Purple Leap Survey conducted in the year 2012, only one out of ten students graduating from tier 2,3 and 4 Engineering colleges can be readily employable. It also pointed out regarding the huge gap between education and employability of the so-called Engineering graduates. One third of these graduates who have done academically well by securing 60% marks are unfit for employment even after being given proper training. Companies today want candidates possessing the three critical skills- Communication, Problem solving and Technical Skills, and ready to start working from day one, because nobody wants to spend and money on training. So students will need to do all that they can to work on their skills and be industry ready. Just going to college and finishing their studies is evidently not enough. The pass percentage of final year of Engineering in Andhra Pradesh was 49% in 2006, 35 % in 2007, 29 % in 2008. According to Aspiring Minds National Employability Report, which is based on a study of more than 1,50,000 engineering students who graduated in 2015 from over 650 colleges, 80% of the them are unemployable.

A news- paper publishing the results of first year engineering graduates of JNTU, recently has painted a very gloomy picture. It states that in 15 % of colleges, the pass percentage is only 60. In 34 % of colleges only between 40 to 60 percent of pass could be achieved. In 35 % of colleges the pass percentage is between 20 to 40. In the rest of 16 % of colleges, the pass percentage is less than 20. All this has been related to lack of qualified faculty, infrastructure and delay in admission process by the study conducted by a three member team appointed by the government, headed by former Technical Education Commissioner K.Laxminarayana, who in his report to the state Government opined that Engineering education will be at loss if steps are not taken to improve the academic quality and infrastructure.

Significance of this study:

This study throws a significant amount of light on the reasons for the fall of standards at Intermediate level in English. A student with such indifference towards English usually doesn't have reasonable proficiency in it and faces difficulties in the final year and later as well. Therefore the situation prompts a change of attitude on the part of the policy makers of Intermediate Board. They need to realize the importance of languages which improves the

students' communicative skills, inculcates and enhances soft skills. Similarly English should be given its due place in the entrance of EAMCET (Engineering and Medical Common Entrance Test)/NEET (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test) and other qualifying tests so that the students will start taking the subject seriously.

Its potential contribution to knowledge in the field of social relevance:

The academicians and people at the helm of affairs should give a little more thought while framing the curriculum, which would mould the students not as mere self centered, automatons but as more civic and responsible human-beings, while developing the necessary life skills and employable skills. People are dehumanized with no Humanities as subjects in their curriculum. In this aspect the Western countries should always be remembered as they have realized this and inculcated social sciences in their curriculum.

Objectives:

In the given scenario it appears as if so much of national resources are being wasted on these students who are unable to find a suitable job. It is high time that the policy makers and academicians realize that the conduit with which a student can express himself and become qualified, is the English language which is a pre-requisite for employment, but often neglected. Attempt has been made with the help of statistical analysis to find out various reasons behind why is there a drop in the performance level of students in English at college level. A test of proficiency in English has been suggested after giving admission into professional courses. Finally a bridge course in English for first year students of Professional courses has been recommended.

Hypothesis:

The students in the Intermediate level study English from examination point of view. They develop an indifferent attitude towards the subject of English as it is not included as a component for EAMCET (Engineering and Medical Common Entrance Test)/ NEET (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test) and other qualifying examinations. Above all in spite of coming from English medium background they are not performing well in the subject at the college level.

Research design and methodology:

The study has been conducted in some of the professional colleges of Visakhapatnam district by gathering information through questionnaires, personal interviews of teachers, parents and students. Students from 5 Engineering colleges 5 Intermediate colleges and 4 medical colleges have been selected, thus making a total sample of around 200 Intermediate students, 200 engineering students and 100 medical students. Around 100 teachers of different Engineering colleges handling various subjects are given appropriate questionnaires covering all the aspects of the problem of professional students. After a gap of two months, collection of the filled questionnaires and personal interviews are carried out. To analyze the data, some statistical tools that bring out the best results have been used. The tools used are descriptive

statistics with frequencies and factor analysis. The software used to carry out statistical analysis is SPSS (Statistical Package for The Social Sciences)

Final Report: To test homogeneity as well as statistical significance of the observed association in a cross table, usually **chi-square statistic** is used. In the present paper, chi-square statistic is used to analyze all the three types of questionnaires. Further through **null hypothesis**, H_0 : there is no association between two classification variables. H_1 : the two variables are associated, it is tested. The test is preceded by computing expected cell frequencies, as no association is present between the variables; it is presented in row and column totals. In $I \times J$ cross-table, the expected frequency of any cell is obtained by the product of corresponding row and column totals divided by the grand total. Let n_I, n_J and n respectively denote, the number of observations in a row, in a column and in a table. Then the expected frequency corresponding to a cell is computed as follows:

$$E = \frac{n_I \times n_J}{n}$$

After computing the expected cell frequencies, they are further compared to the observed cell frequencies (O) and the discrepancy is quantified by computing:

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{\text{over all cells}} \frac{(E - O)^2}{E}$$

The calculated value of **chi square** is then compared to the tabulated value for a given d.f $(I-1)(J-1)$ at a specified level of significance α , where I denotes the no. of rows and J denotes the no. of columns.

According to the Statistical analysis obtained through the questionnaires given to the students at the Intermediate level it is found that their emphasis on English is poor. At the Intermediate level, around 77% of the students neglect the study of English Language and prefer to focus and concentrate more on subjects related to Science with the sole aim of getting admission into professional courses of study. As the EAMCET (Engineering and Medical Common Entrance Test) examination conducted in Andhra Pradesh that these students are required to take in order to gain admission to professional courses like Engineering or Medicine does not include English as one of its components, has further added to their negligent attitude towards English Language.

Firstly the people at the helm of affairs also contribute to this attitude of negligence by giving little importance to English as a subject and not including it as one of the components in the entrance examinations. The academicians should include English in all the entrance examinations to professional courses as it is the only language of instruction in all the specialized courses. It is high time that they really need to put in more thought while framing the curriculum and add more of value based literature along with language to mould the

students from being self centered, automatons to more civic and responsible human-beings by developing the necessary life skills in them.

Secondly it is found that they lack the necessary English language skills needed for comprehension of a particular concept. They also face difficulty in constructing grammatically correct sentences. As a result they lack confidence while communicating to the other person in English. Although some students have the requisite knowledge in their technical fields, they fail to convey the same due to poor language skills, both written and oral. The junior colleges over emphasize only on core subjects and do not provide a platform for the students to improve their English language and soft skills. Due to time constraint they do not conduct any Debate, Elocution and Extempore, Group Discussions or JAM (Just-A-Minute) sessions that encourage the use of English LSRW skills. Almost 90% of the students are not motivated or encouraged to read books, journals and Dailies in English. This would have helped them in keeping themselves updated with the recent developments in their respective fields.

The third roadblock faced by the students at the Intermediate level is that they resort to rote learning method, almost 78% of them, whereby, they are not really concerned whether or not they have understood the concept. The emphasis is only to get marks in the qualifying examination. To add to this they are taught English towards the end of an academic year for fifteen to twenty days and then made to learn the answers from the given study material and replicate the same in the exams with a view to score high marks in order to get better grade points in their board examinations.

Fourthly the students at Intermediate level almost 80% converse only in their mother tongue and make no effort to improve their proficiency in English. The teachers handling various subjects at the Intermediate level teach in their regional language. Even the English teachers go to the extent of teaching the subject of English in Mother tongue. They do not particularly encourage their students to speak in English or read books written in English, and add to the problem of learning English. While the medium of learning is English, their speaking skills do not develop much since their exposure to English is very poor, both in the classroom as well as with their peers. Even at their homes, they do not get an opportunity to improve their English language skills as they converse in their mother tongues with their families. In the classrooms, while the lessons are being taught, the students do not get a chance to read the text aloud and improve their reading skills because of the time restraint placed on the teacher to complete the syllabus in time.

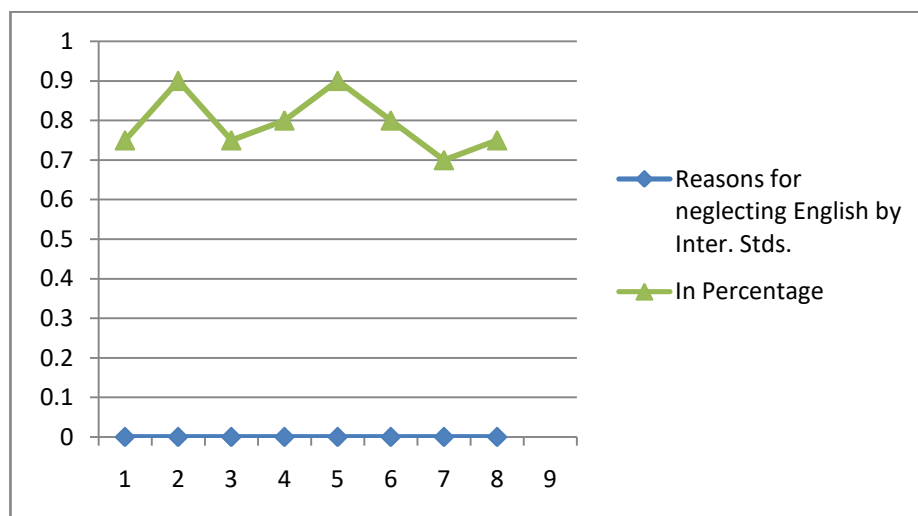
Besides these, there are several other reasons related to Intermediate students not emphasizing on English language properly. i) Lack of flair for English Literature on the part of a student acts as a road block, ii) A student being not fluent in English has lower levels of confidence compared to his academic peers, iii) Lack of extracurricular activities literary/cultural/sports at Intermediate level hamper the all round development of one's

personality, iv) Most of their parents view that science subjects/ professional courses would pave the way for a brighter future for their children. v) Not reading English newspaper daily is harmful to them, vi) teachers' not encouraging to speak in English in the class room with peers and teachers is always harmful, vii) They all miss the literary activities that they had in school level viii) and they fumble while communicating with others due to lack of command on English Language. They are required to focus on these factors to improve their command on English language. ix) All of them share the same feeling that English is being neglected now and x) emphasis on the Sciences at the cost of English in Intermediate level is not beneficial to them in the long run.

Finally it is found that such kind of learning at the Intermediate level only aims at scoring and does nothing to improve their language learning skills. When it comes to written skills, they face problems of writing grammatically correct sentences and are unable to write even a letter by themselves. Their writing is restricted to the answers that are expected of them from the study material given to them on each subject. Due to this, such students find themselves at crossroads being unable to go beyond their academic curriculum. They fail to apply LSRW skills to real life situations and develop feelings of inferiority with a belief that they lack the ability to excel in a particular field due to poor English Language skills.

Line graph on the Statistical Analysis of Intermediate students' questionnaires:

| Reasons for neglecting English by Inter. Students. | In Percentage |
|---|----------------------|
| 1. Over emphasis on core subjects: | 77% |
| 2. No general Reading habits: | 90% |
| 3. Learn by Rote learning Method: | 78% |
| 4. Converse in Mother Tongue: | 80% |
| 5. Lack of Literary Activities: | 90% |
| 6. Not Including English in EAMCET: | 80% |
| 7. No proper Importance on LSRW Skills: | 70% |
| 8. Other Teachers use Mother Tongue: | 75% |



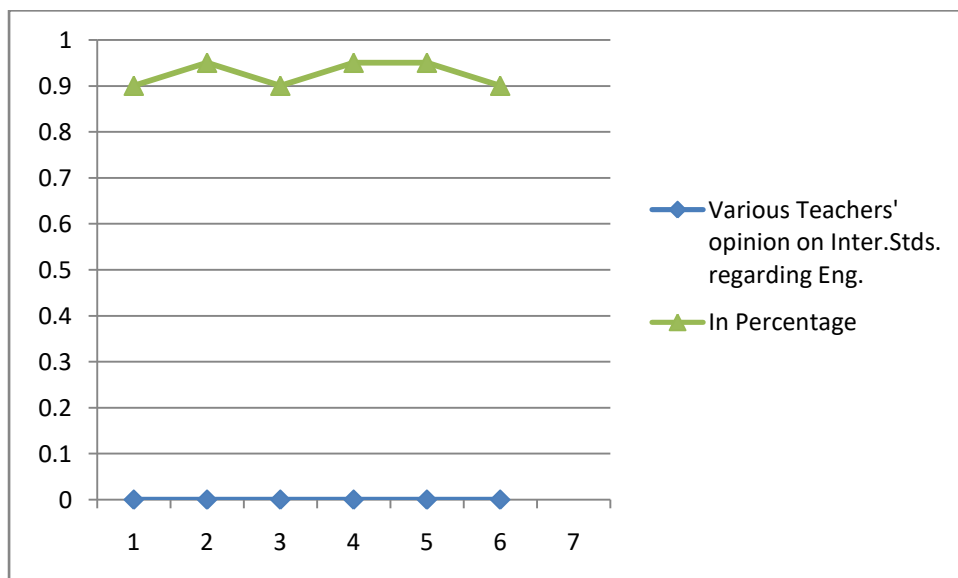
2. Similarly as per the Statistical analysis of the questionnaires given to the **Teachers** handling different subjects at the undergraduate level from various professional colleges, it is found that majority of them irrespective of their branches feel that, i) One with fluency in English can express any subject well, ii) A student with fluency in English would make him stand in good stead because he can make his point of view clear to the person on the other side, iii) Students who take running notes in the classroom get benefitted in future as they are aware of various nuances of English, iv) Those who interact in English outside the classroom are benefitted in the long run because they are in constant touch with the language, v) Any kind of regular general reading like journals in the library would improve the quality of the professional students in making them employable, and vi) Students must be updated with latest developments by doing a lot of general reading. vii) From their experience they feel that student should know the world by doing a lot of general reading in English. In order to fit into the above category of students the approach of the learner at the Intermediate level has to change completely in a positive manner.

Line graph on the Statistical Analysis of Teachers' of different subjects questionnaires: Various Teachers' opinion on Intermediate

| .Students' emphasis on English. | In Percentage |
|--|---------------|
| 1.Taking running notes is beneficial: | 90% |
| 2. Fluency in Eng. Is beneficial in expressing subjects: | 95% |
| 3.Interacting in Eng. outside the classroom is | 90% |

helpful:

| | |
|---|-----|
| 4.General reading is useful: | 95% |
| 5.One must try to improve communication skills: | 95% |
| 6.One needs to update with latest developments: | 90% |

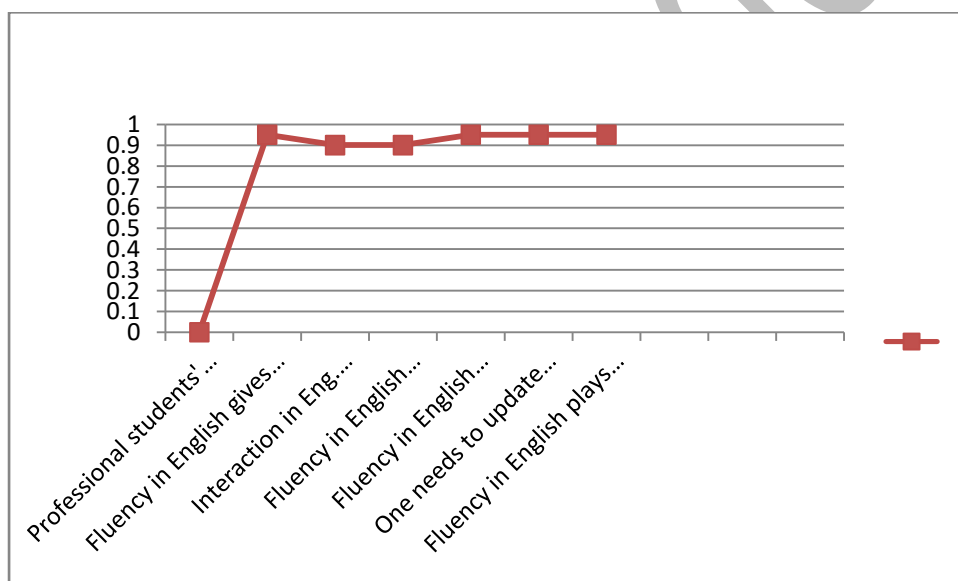


3. From the Statistical analysis of the questionnaires given to the **Professional students** of various streams at the undergraduate level in various colleges it is found that they realize that fluency in English plays a vital role in their lives. They wish to overcome the deficiency created by neglecting English at Intermediate level in A.P. i) The students feel that a student with fluency in English has an edge over a student not all that confident in English ii) Fluency in English is a boon for the professional student as it is the only language of instruction at the undergraduate levels. iii) They feel the importance of interacting with teachers and friends in English both in the classroom and outside the classroom and it is certainly beneficial to the student in future iv) They also agree on the point that fluency in English would boost one's confidence levels and help in all round development of one's personality. v) They realize that English is the window to the world and all the latest developments in various professional fields can be accessed from journals/publications in English of the Library. Furthermore the students who are not confident in English regret over their negligence. They also agree that this has further led to the inability to express effectively in future. They wish to bridge the gap which is being created due to various reasons at the Intermediate level.

Line graph on the Statistical Analysis of Professional students' Questionnaires

Professional students' opinion on importance of English

| | Percentage |
|--|------------|
| 1.Flucy in English gives an edge over others: | 95% |
| 2. Interaction in Eng. With teachers & friends is imp: | 90% |
| 3.Flucy in English boosts confidence level: | 90% |
| 4.Flucy in English develops one's personality: | 95% |
| 5.One needs to update with latest developments: | 95% |
| 6.Flucy in English plays a vital role: | 95% |



Among all the influencing factors for professional students in realizing the importance of English language in their lives, 6 reasons are included. The **correlation table** presented below on all the 6 reasons outputs the determinant value. This option is vital for testing multi-co -linearity or singularity as the determinant should be greater than 0.00001.

Correlation Table

| | Component-1 | Component-2 | Component-3 | Component-4 | Component-5 | Component-6 |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Component-1 | 1 | 0.178 | 0.198 | 0.343 | 0.364 | 0.314 |
| Component-2 | 0.178 | 1 | 0.111 | 0.118 | 0.182 | 0.244 |
| Component-3 | 0.198 | 0.111 | 1 | 0.216 | 0.197 | 0.03 |
| Component-4 | 0.343 | 0.118 | 0.216 | 1 | 0.335 | 0.406 |
| Component-5 | 0.364 | 0.182 | 0.197 | 0.335 | 1 | 0.581 |
| Component-6 | 0.314 | 0.244 | 0.03 | 0.406 | 0.581 | 1 |

The Suggested Bridge Course in English :

After considering the statistical report, I wish to suggest a bridge course to improve Listening, Speaking, Reading and Speaking skills of the students who are not fluent at English. It is an attempt made both through literature and language to improve LSRW skills at the first year of their professional courses. It will try to fill in the gap and help them to come on par with the students who are fluent at English. Before implementing this, I would certainly like to suggest that English also to be included in the entrance test of EAMCET (Engineering and Medical Common Entrance Test) and other qualifying exams before giving admission into professional courses by the respective Institution. This will certainly regulate and filter the standard of intake of the candidates into any professional course and make the Intermediate students more serious in their approach towards English.

Then I would like to suggest a test of proficiency in English for the students already admitted into professional courses by the Institution. This will certainly segregate the weaker students from the ones with fluency in English. The suggested bridge is meant for “not so confident in English” students to take up the course and fill in the gap in order to come on par with the regular batch of students. They will follow the course for 35 to 40 hrs in the first semester of

their respective professional course for 3-4 credits. This bridge course has to run for only segregated weaker students and through the same I would like to bridge the gap between students, not so fluent at English with the ones who are fluent at English, following the regular course in English prescribed by the respective Institution. It will certainly prove to be helpful in meeting their requirements at the time of recruitment and later at various work places. It will contribute competency, efficiency, values and necessary life skills to the professional students and bring in a holistic development in them.

Suggested-Reading:

A selection of fictional and non-fictional prose pieces from English and Indian Literature are chosen to introduce the students to different writings and induce the importance of values in life. The list includes different forms like short stories, novels, plays and autobiographies. The suggested writers are:

17th Century-18th Century—

- i. Charles Dickens-Great Expectations,
- ii. Thomas Hardy-The Mayor of Caster bridge,
- iii. Lewis Carroll-Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,
- iv. Arthur Conan Doyle-The Hound of The Baskervilles,
- v. Rudyard Kipling-The Jungle Book,

19th Century-20th Century—

- i. O Henry-Short Stories like Girl, Dream, After Twenty Years,
- ii. H.H. Munro-- Short Stories like The Story Teller, Tea, The Threat
- iii. Mark Twain—The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,
- iv. Somerset Maugham-- Short Stories like Luncheon, The Rain, The Colonel's Lady
- v. G.B. Shaw—Play -Pygmalion,

20th century-- Present-

- i. R.K. Narayan- Swamy and Friends,
- ii. R.K. Laxman—The Distorted Mirror,
- iii. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam—Wings of Fire,
- iv. Khushwant Singh—The Mark of Vishnu and other Stories,
- v. Anita Desai-The Artist Of Disappearance,

Besides the above suggested reading, daily reading of the news paper will be certainly helpful to the students.

II. Writing- Paragraph, Essay, Précis, Reading Comprehension, Letter Writing, Resume writing, emails, notices and minutes of the meeting.

III. Speaking and Listening- Practice listening to the news daily and speaking in English to others by participating in Just A Minute, Debates, Group Discussions and other activities.

IV. English Practice- Both in written and spoken communication in English, grammar play a key role. This umbrella term “grammar” includes many smaller components like **tenses, subject verb agreement, prepositions, articles, conjunctions** and **the sentence structure**. Thorough practice on all the above components will certainly make them confident to express themselves freely to others without hesitation.

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