

# Awareness of Language Learning Strategy Use of the ESL Students of Rural Telangana

Madhumathi Pasupathi<sup>1</sup> & Arijit Ghosh<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of English, Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

<sup>2</sup> Department of English, Mahatma Gandhi Government Arts College, Mahe, Puducherry, India

Correspondence: Dr. Arijit Ghosh, Department of English, Mahatma Gandhi Government Arts College, Mahe, Puducherry, India. E-mail: madhuhoney87@gmail.com and arijit2net@gmail.com

Received: October 6, 2023

Accepted: February 7, 2024

Online Published: March 14, 2024

doi:10.5430/wjel.v14n3p302

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v14n3p302>

## Abstract

Language learning strategies are methods that help users improve their English proficiency. We conducted a survey of 3012 rural students to assess their awareness of communication strategies in English. The survey revealed that students from rural areas in Telangana struggle with English proficiency, which affects their professional performance. Previous research has shown a link between language learning strategies and proficiency. Therefore, it is important to investigate the strategies used by these students and create an intervention program to teach them language learning strategies explicitly. The study suggests incorporating specific strategies into the undergraduate English language curriculum to enhance proficiency in professional settings.

**Keywords:** LLS, Writing, Reading, Proficiency, Strategy, ESL

## 1. Introduction

The future career of a student is contingent upon possessing proficient English language skills. In the wake of globalization, English proficiency has become increasingly crucial owing to multifaceted business demands in India. Interviews and job searches emphasize the significance of effective language proficiency during work. In the hierarchy of Indian states with the maximum unemployment, Telangana stands at the third position, according to the recent survey (Raju, 2019). A significant number of Arts and Science college students from rural backgrounds struggle to find employment upon completing their degree (Hassall et al., 2013; Korra, 2016). The job market presents numerous opportunities for graduates across a variety of sectors. According to the India Human Development Survey of 2005 (Desai et al., 2008), Hyderabad residents who speak English fluently earn 44.2% more than those who do not, and those who speak it at an elementary level earn 36.2% more, which is higher than the national average (Azam et al., 2013; Warschauer, 2000; Zaharim et al., 2009).

Initially, this paper attempts to measure the proficiency levels of rural students enrolled in arts and science colleges in Telangana. It uses a standardized test developed by Cambridge Assessment to benchmark the English language proficiency levels of these rural students. By using this assessment, facilitators can identify the current shortcomings in students' English proficiency and can benchmark every student as per their proficiency levels from Novice to Distinguished, as stated in ACTFL proficiency guidelines. Moreover, the literature review reveals that these rural students studying in arts and science colleges in Telangana lack proper training in attaining English Proficiency, which affects their employment opportunities (Pasupathi, 2020). Secondly, the study aims to understand the level of awareness among rural students in the use of language learning strategies. Thirdly, the study wants to correlate the results of English language proficiency and the results of strategy awareness to identify their correlation.

## 2. Research Question

Before delving into the detailed analytical queries, we consider the pivotal questions guiding this study: the first seeks to ascertain the breadth of rural students' strategic awareness in language learning, and the second examines the influence of these strategies on their English language proficiency. These foundational questions are:

- (i) What is the level of awareness of rural students in language learning strategy use?
- (ii) Is there any relationship between strategy use and language proficiency achievement of the rural students?

## 3. Review of Literature

Saranraj and Meenakshi (Saranraj & Meenakshi, 2016) investigated the influence of Motivational Strategy and Language Learning Strategy on English language learning attitudes in Indian students from rural areas. The study reveals a significant positive correlation between the desire to learn English and the attitude towards learning English. In the present study, even though their desire to learn English is obvious; the proficiency of the rural students in English language is low. The awareness of the students in using the language learning strategies is also moderate. Thus, requires attention to measure the correlation between the proficiency levels and LLS use, in

order to identify the problem in lack of proficiency among rural students in English.

The knowledge of effective deployment of LLS enhances the proficiency of the students. Some researchers (Hosseinpur & Kazemi, 2022) identified that high proficiency students use more strategies and the students with poor writing skills have the knowledge of strategy use. However, their knowledge does not coincide with the implementation part while writing (Habák et al., 2022; Teng, 2022). Therefore, the findings conclusively affirm that these students must engage in active implementation of the strategies during communication, regardless of their awareness of the strategies (Damanik, 2022; Li, 2022; Zhang & Goh, 2006). This illustrates a gap in the students' awareness of strategy knowledge and its practical use in while communicating, highlighting the need for further study (Irwandi et al., 2022).

However, the findings align with the current study, where students have reported being aware of strategy utilization, but statistically there is no correlation between the results and students' proficiency achievements. As a result, understanding students' approaches to enhance the English language proficiency and implementing tailored strategy instruction becomes vital to boost students' self-confidence and reading proficiency (Kazi et al., 2022).

The previous studies show that strategy intervention is effective in boosting students' proficiency (Kazi et al., 2022), (2022). The studies report that most of the students are conscious about the usefulness of the LLS; however, they have not yet gained confidence in using the LLS. They also stated that there is a need to increase the students' range of use of LLS to strengthen students' English language proficiency. Thus, the present study attempts to identify the students' frequencies in utilizing the LLS strategies, even if they are aware of the strategies. In most of the cases, the students are aware of the strategies but they are not using it when the need arises. Thus, the gap in the literature is understood that mere awareness of strategies will not establish a strong correlation between LLS use and English Language Proficiency. The awareness of how often and where to use the language learning strategies is essential to establish correlation between the variables of LLS and English proficiency.

The overall observation of previous studies reports that students with high proficiency have used LLS strategies effectively. The lower awareness in the deployment of LLS may be the reason for poor or lack of correlation between the variables of EPT results and Strategy Awareness (Goh, 2002). Learner strategies encompass the deliberate choices and techniques employed by learners to advance their mastery and utilization of a second language (O'malley & Chamot, 1990). Thus, improving the awareness levels of the students in using the LLS may enhance the English proficiency levels of the students.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The study's aim is to determine the language proficiency levels of the Arts and Science College students in rural Telangana and to examine their awareness and use of language learning strategies. It utilizes instruments like the Metacognitive Awareness Inventory in Listening and Speaking Strategies (MAILSS), Second Language Online Reading Strategies Inventory (SLORSI), along with strategies for writing and vocabulary. This analysis is intended to understand how strategy use correlates with language proficiency among these students, which could inform more effective language teaching approaches and ultimately improve their employment prospects post-graduation.

#### **5. Methodology**

Rural students studying Arts and Science in Telangana colleges are the participants of the study. The number of students involved in this study is 3012. These rural students read English as a Second Language (ESL) in their school. The researchers are using qualitative and quantitative methods in their study. Proper permission is taken from the competent authority before data collection.

We used a standardized diagnostic test from Cambridge English Assessments to assess the students' English proficiency levels. To determine the individual student's proficiency on a scale ranging from novice to distinguished, we referred to the ACTFL proficiency guidelines of 2012.

The investigation aims to assess students' proficiency in employing LLS strategies by utilizing standardized instruments such as MAILSS, SLORSI, and selected strategies related to writing and vocabulary. The MAILSS instrument measured students' awareness levels in listening and communication strategies, while SLORSI was employed to analyze their online reading strategies.

The researchers also used a combination of select strategies for writing (Petrić & Czár, 2003) and vocabulary. Thus, a holistic questionnaire was developed for Strategy Use by compiling the above listed questionnaires which covers strategies supporting all four LSRW skills.

The questionnaire for the test and the strategy use were put through a content validity test, which involved the participation of five experts. The reliability score of the diagnostic test is  $\alpha = .746$  Cronbach Alpha, which is moderate, and for the strategy use it is  $\alpha = .998$  Cronbach Alpha which is high. Apart from that, answers for questions seeking opinions of the students in implementing strategies and anxiety related to strategy use is also collected along with the test.

#### **6. Results**

The results of the English Proficiency Test (EPT) conducted on rural students showed that a dearth of English Language Proficiency is prevalent among most students. Students enrolled in three-year degree programs at rural Telangana colleges show lower levels of English language proficiency, as evidenced by the overall average EPT score of 18.27 out of 50 (Madhumathi, P., 2020). The EPT results show a

subpar performance by students, with only 36.55% achieving a satisfactory level on average, thus highlighting the dire need for improvement in language proficiency. Upon analyzing the cumulative percentage scores for the five language proficiency skills, the students' performance in conversations with one-line statements is noteworthy. The ensuing sections illustrate the typical percentages accomplished for distinct proficiencies.

We observed that nearly 42.3% of students are knowledgeable about the necessity of using proper vocabulary while communicating, 65.8% of students possess the ability to engage in monosyllabic communication in English. The students exhibit a poor command of English grammar, with only a mere 23.78% demonstrating proficiency. Reading comprehension is lacking among the rural students, with a mere 21.84% achieving satisfactory performance. Last, the students encounter challenges in writing, with only a mere 36.55% demonstrating proficiency in composing a paragraph.

The reading comprehension skills of rural students have been the least proficient. However, the five proficiencies, namely vocabulary proficiency, listening and speaking skills, written comprehension, grammatical expertise, and writing fluency, are interwoven.

6.1 Strategy Awareness and EPT

These students have moderate levels (m=3.09) of awareness about the language learning strategies; however, implementing the strategy for communication purpose is low.

Table 1. Reliability Statistics for Strategy awareness

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.980	.981	22

The reliability test results for strategy awareness of these rural students are .981, which is high. This shows that the instrument designed for this study is highly reliable. The language learning strategy use of these students can be analyzed with the help of these instruments chosen for this study, such as Metacognitive Awareness Inventory in Listening and Speaking Strategies (MAILSS), Second Language Online Reading Strategies Inventory (SLORSI), writing and vocabulary strategies.

6.2 Results of Metacognitive Awareness Inventory in Listening and Speaking Strategies (MAILSS)

The survey findings, when viewed holistically, demonstrate that rural students possess an understanding (m=3.16) of the value of listening and speaking strategies. However, the students' use of the strategy to enhance their English language proficiency is low (m=2.83). Moreover, these students strongly believe that employing targeted strategies and communication techniques can help improve their English language proficiency. The students have reported using MAILSS strategies moderately when communicating. However, the test results show that these rural students do not use the strategy appropriately.

The students have reported that they find communicative strategies (with a score of m=3.17) highly useful and active employment of it is highly beneficial. In contrast, they have achieved very low scores in the conversation section of the EPT. The students use focused strategies (m = 2.71) to some extent. These students used focused learning strategies (mean=2.8) and comprehension strategies (mean=2.8) to a moderate extent.

Hence, it uncovers a discrepancy regarding the extent to which students employ these listening and speaking strategies, as well as their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of these strategies.

The findings indicate these students need training in language learning strategies. They do not effectively apply the strategies they know, so they need proper guidance. This finding aligns with previous research in this field, which shows that matching reported strategy behavior with actual usage frequency necessitates extensive practice and guided training for the learners (Goh, 2002).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for MAILSS

Categories of Listening and Speaking Strategies	Mean Of How often you use	Std. Deviation	Mean of How useful is the strategy	Std. Deviation
Use Focused learning Strategies	2.7377	.84976	3.1764	.73847
Form Focused learning Strategy	2.8740	.84149	3.1651	.73497
Comprehension	2.8018	.83995	3.1663	.73515
Communication	2.9867	.87965	3.1714	.73663
Total	2.8362	.75147	3.1608	.76409

6.3 Results of Online Reading Strategy Use

Table 3. Mean value of different strategy use

Strategy	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Inferring	3012	1.00	5.00	3.0747	.87975
Skimming	3012	1.00	5.00	3.1913	.88770
Translation	3012	1.00	5.00	3.2931	.86765
Locating	3012	1.00	5.00	3.1863	.75713
Synthesis	3012	1.00	5.00	3.1864	.75703
Saving	3012	1.00	5.00	3.2143	.76905
Navigate	3012	1.00	5.00	3.1956	.75909
Evaluate	3012	1.00	5.00	3.1987	.76018
Communicative	3012	1.00	5.00	3.2027	.76220

These students are struggling readers; they often use translation to understand the meaning of the text they read. They mostly translate the text into their mother tongue for a better understanding of the meaning.

Extracting meaning from complex texts, where the intended message was not explicitly specified, proved difficult for the students. They could not effectively deduce the minimum information because of their inadequate skills. This shows they are lacking the ability to make accurate inferences while reading a text.

Therefore, these results are not in agreement with the previous findings regarding students' utilization of text reading strategies, highlighting the necessity of investigating the diverse strategies employed during online reading in an academic setting (Dreyer & Nel, 2003).

Students who achieve lower scores in reading comprehension tests have reported a lower frequency of using online reading strategies, and their awareness levels in utilizing these strategies are also diminished.

Table 4. Correlations between the results of RCT and SLORS

		Mean	Reading
Mean	Pearson Correlation	1	.322*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.043
Reading	Pearson Correlation	.322*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.043	

\*. The correlation exhibits significance at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The study highlights the importance of providing online reading strategy training to college students who heavily rely on technology for their academic preparation. It also shows that the students possess a moderate level of awareness in employing these online reading strategies. Hence, it becomes imperative to acquaint them with these reading techniques that specifically apply to the digital media. The analysis shows that students who use more strategies experience improved reading comprehension performance. Likewise, students have indicated a moderate utilization of writing and read & write strategy. It is in line with other LLS uses.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for writing and Vocabulary Strategies

	N	Mean	Deviation
Writing Strategy	3012	3.0636	0.87216
Read and Write strategy	3012	3.1176	0.65874

6.4 Correlation between Strategies Use and EPT Test Results

Correlation within the reading, writing and speaking listening is moderate. Nevertheless, EPT marks display a negative correlation, signifying the absence of a link between students' strategy utilization and proficiency test scores. It shows that the use of strategies is not appropriate, and they lack sufficient knowledge in using strategy. Thus, the lack of correlation in EPT results and results of awareness in using LLS is not due to lack of influence between variables, but the lower awareness in using appropriate strategies.

The correlation between the LSRW strategies is moderate, such as  $r=.522$ ,  $r=.519$  and  $r=.595$ , respectively, with a two-tailed significance. The results contradict the existing results of strategy use, where the students with higher proficiency use higher strategies. Hence, the results prove that students with low proficiency lack awareness about strategy implementation during communication.

Table 6. Correlation EPT marks and strategy use

		EPT Marks	Read & Write Strategy use	Speak & Listen How Often use	Speak & Listen HOW Useful to use
EPT Marks	Pearson Correlation	1	-.065**	-.039*	-.052**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.034	.004
	N	3012	3012	3012	3012
Read & Write Strategy use	Pearson Correlation	-.065**	1	.595**	.518**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	3012	3012	3012	3012
Speak&Listen How Often use	Pearson Correlation	-.039*	.595**	1	.522**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.034	.000		.000
	N	3012	3012	3012	3012
Speak & Listen HOW Useful to Use	Pearson Correlation	-.052**	.518**	.522**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.000	.000	
	N	3012	3012	3012	3012

\*\* . The variables exhibit a significant correlation at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\*. There is a significant correlation among the variables at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

**7. Discussion**

The usage of technological devices such as mobiles, tablets, and laptops is increasing among students daily. Although students have a moderate awareness of SLORS, they still prefer using mobile devices for studying and exam preparation. Integrating technology in education is leading to rapid changes in teaching and learning methods, so it is important to cater to the interests of ESL students. In order to understand the correlation, calculating the reading comprehension performance of students in the EPT test individually is necessary. Correlation analysis shows a moderate association between students’ utilization of strategies and their performance in reading comprehension. Similar to previous studies, this study also confirms that high proficiency students use online reading strategies more frequently compared to less proficient students. Students who score lower in reading comprehension tests report using online reading strategies less often and have lower awareness levels in using these strategies.

Introducing technology in education has led to rapid changes in the modes of teaching and learning. As a result, it has become essential to adapt to the interests of ESL students in order to benefit them. Calculating the reading comprehension performance of students in the EPT test separately helps us understand the correlation. The correlation analysis reveals a moderate correlation between students’ use of strategies and their reading comprehension performance. This study, akin to prior studies, illustrates that students with advanced proficiency use online reading strategies more frequently compared to students with lower proficiency.

**8. Findings and Suggestions**

The rural students have a moderate awareness of language learning strategy use. From a statistical standpoint, there was no correlation between the students’ awareness of strategy use and their proficiency achievements, suggesting a lack of knowledge in implementing strategies during communication. The study identifies that these rural students lack practice in using LLS. Therefore, they have reported low for section enquiring ‘how often’ they use the strategies and moderately for ‘how useful’ the strategy is. Hence, it is identified that the lack of co-relation in results of English proficiency test and Strategy Use is because of the lack of practice from these students in utilizing the strategies wherever needed. The findings suggest for practice sessions to deploy LLS wherever necessary to improve the proficiency.

The examination of the English syllabus of these colleges revealed a notable absence of language learning strategy components for teaching. Most previous studies in Language Learning Strategy have showed that students with a high level of English proficiency extensively use LLS (Griffiths, 2003). The students in the Strategy Intervention program also assert that providing training in LLS to students at a basic proficiency level is imperative for enhancing their proficiency to advanced levels. Studies show that strategy interventions are helpful for students with limited English proficiency compared to students with advanced proficiency levels, as it enables them to gain easily the techniques to improve their skills. Thus, the necessity for developing a separate course emerged with incorporating strategy use. The findings also contemplate that improved frequency in using LLS may increase the correlation of LLS and EPT results.

The analysis of the existing English curriculum in Telangana colleges exposes a deficiency in prioritizing listening and speaking skills. In various universities, there is no evaluation of listening skills (Shah, 2018). Unfortunately, a substantial number of colleges do not possess language laboratory facilities to develop students’ listening and speaking skills. The failure of college instruction to prioritize conversation skills resulted in a shift towards online training.

There has been a growing global trend of placing high value on English language proficiency during placement interviews. In the initial stages of interviews, students' proficiency in English, as well as their reasoning and logical abilities, are assessed by interviewers. Those who do not meet the expected communication standard are not eligible to proceed to the next phase of the interview process. This trend in

the job interview selection process emphasizes the importance of English skills for employability. Unfortunately, graduates in the Arts and Sciences often struggle to secure jobs in communication-related fields because of their inadequate English language proficiency. In summary, it is crucial for a well-designed curriculum to address the needs of these students and enhance their employability.

Thus, the findings of the study help us understand that improving the proficiency levels of the rural students in Telangana is essential as they have scored low in EPT. Even though the students are having the desire to improve their proficiency, they are not confident in deploying the LLS, which affects their English proficiency enhancement. The correlation between EPT test results and Strategy use results may improve only after improving the knowledge and frequency of deploying the LLS. Thus, the improved frequency of use of LLS will strengthen the correlation with EPT results, which may directly influence the attainment of English Language proficiency by these rural students. The improvement in English language proficiency will enhance their academic achievement and eventually improve the employability of these rural students in the job market.

### **9. Implications of the Study**

The students were surveyed about their preferred method of implementing training in LLS into their studies. In response, the students expressed a keen interest in learning LLS through mobile-based activities, game-based activities, or as an extramural activity. They indicated a preference for engaging in fun activities to enhance their English language proficiency, in addition to their regular classes, as a means of reducing stress. The study also recommends that instructors assess each student's individual ability in strategy use and tailor tasks accordingly, recognizing that the capability of each student varies.

The implications of the findings suggest that rural students have a gap between knowing about language learning strategies and effectively using them to improve English proficiency. Such a lack of correlation between awareness and proficiency indicates that students may be aware of strategies but are not applying them effectively or frequently enough in communicative contexts to impact their language proficiency.

To address this issue, the study suggests implementing practice sessions to help students deploy language learning strategies where necessary, which could enhance their English proficiency. Moreover, considering the positive impact of strategy interventions for students with limited English proficiency, as shown in other studies, there is a strong recommendation to develop and incorporate a course focused on strategy use in the English syllabus of these colleges. This could support students, especially at a basic proficiency level, in advancing their skills more effectively. The findings advocate for educational interventions that provide targeted strategy instruction to improve the use of language learning strategies, which is likely to influence proficiency test outcomes positively.

### **10. Conclusion**

The limited knowledge in implementing language learning strategies is highlighted by the inverse correlation between the use of strategies and EPT test results. Therefore, it is essential to provide training to rural students on strategy use, specifically related to the subskills of LSRW, in order to enhance their English proficiency levels. Previous studies (Oxford, 1989; Rao, 2016) have shown that the utilization of language learning strategies significantly improves proficiency levels. Highly proficient students employ more strategies when communicating and comprehending texts. Emphasis should be placed on designing a curriculum and specialized courses that highlight strategic skill-building in the English language. This will address the observed discrepancy between the students' awareness and actual implementation of language learning strategies, particularly for those with vernacular backgrounds. The instructional methodologies could be enriched by incorporating technology and simulation-based activities to increase student engagement and facilitate the practical application of language skills. Additionally, assessment methods might need to be revisited to evaluate not only the students' conceptual understanding but also their ability to effectively apply these strategies in real-life communication situations. In conclusion, raising strategy awareness is crucial for enhancing language proficiency skills among students in Telangana's Arts and Science Colleges. Explicit training in language learning strategies might enhance language proficiency, increasing their employability in the job sector after graduation.

### **Acknowledgments**

Not Applicable

### **Authors contributions**

Dr. Madhumathi Pasupathi and Dr. Arijit Ghosh were responsible for study design, data collection and revising. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. All authors contributed equally to the study.

### **Funding**

The work was supported by IMPRESS Scheme of the Indian Council of Social Sciences and Research, New Delhi, India.

### **Competing interests**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

### **Informed consent**

Obtained.

**Ethics approval**

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

**Provenance and peer review**

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

**Data availability statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

**Data sharing statement**

No additional data are available.

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