

**OPEN ACCESS**

Volume: 11

Special Issue: 2

Month: February

Year: 2024

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

Impact Factor: 3.025

Received: 17.01.2024

Accepted: 11.02.2024

Published: 12.02.2024

Citation:

Sam Golden, N.  
“English Language  
Competence among  
The First Year Students  
at Bishop Heber  
College, Trichy: A  
Descriptive Study.”  
*Shanlax International  
Journal of Arts, Science  
and Humanities*,  
vol. 11, no. S2, 2024,  
pp. 100–05.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v11iS2-Feb.7430>

# English Language Competence among The First Year Students at Bishop Heber College, Trichy: A Descriptive Study

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## Abstract

*International communication, commerce, and academia are being dominated by the competency of English language and it offers myriad opportunities on the global stage. Recognising the significance of the English language and the diminishing English language competence in the recent years, this study probes into the factors contributing to English language competency among first-year college students at Bishop Heber College, Trichy. The study aims to identify the relationship of socio-cultural background, prior educational experiences, and awareness on the significance of English language with language incompetency through assessment. This research follows quantitative research methods based on the responses collected through a self-designed questionnaire administered to 100 students. The responses reveal a disturbing trend of low self-consciousness and awareness on the importance of English language, alongside limited exposure and preparation from previous educational backgrounds. The results highlight the need to address certain areas to enhance English language skills and the empowerment of students for academic success and global engagement. Thus, this research aids the students in identifying the cause for the lack of English language competency to move towards success.*

**Keywords:** Educational Background, Influential Factors, Language Competency, Nature of School.

## Introduction

Ever since English has become the lingua franca of international communication, commerce, and academia, proficiency in English language opens doors to countless opportunities on the global platforms and facilitates effective communication. Against this backdrop, the magnitude of English language competency among the students in the first year of collegiate education cannot be exaggerated. Acknowledging the significance of English language competency and the gap in understanding the cause of language incompetency, this study focuses on analysing the factors and root causes contributing to the lack of proficiency among first-year college students at Bishop Heber College (Autonomous), Trichy. This research seeks to shed light on areas for intervention and improvement by probing into the underlying challenges and barriers, in past and present, faced by students in acquiring English language skills. Ultimately, this research endeavours to empower students with the language skills necessary to thrive in the society by identifying the gaps and factors responsible for the lack of holistic English language education.

## **Review of Literature**

(Ranjan, Philominraj, & Saavedra, Jul 2021) The study titled “On the Relationship between Language Learning Strategies and Language Proficiency in Indian Universities” delves into the correlation between Language Learning Strategies (LLS) and language proficiency among students in Indian universities. The study emphasizes the complexity of the relationship between learning strategies and language proficiency, speculating that the language competency of the students may be altered by the individual differences and contextual factors. The research has not made an attempt to identify the individual differences that contributes to the language competency.

(D.F. Stephen, 2004) explores the influence of English language proficiency on the academic performance of Black and Indian students pursuing their first-year in Human Resources Management at a tertiary institution. Results indicate that the Indian group demonstrated significantly higher levels of English language proficiency compared to their black counterparts. This study suggests a link between English language proficiency and academic success and contributes valuable insights into the role of language proficiency in academic achievement among diverse student populations.

## **Scope of the Study**

The study will explore factors that may influence English language competence among first-year students, such as prior educational experiences, socio-cultural background, and exposure to English language media. Further, this will explore the students’ perceptions and attitudes towards English language learning, including motivation, confidence levels, and perceived challenges. Findings from the study will have implications for language education policies and practices at Bishop Heber College and similar institutions. Moreover, the scope of the study may be limited by factors such as sample size, time constraints, and availability of resources.

## **Aim**

This study aims to assess the relationship between factors influencing English language competence among first-year students, including socio-cultural background, prior educational experiences, awareness on the significance of English language and exposure to English language in the college premises.

## **Objectives**

- To quantify students’ level of self-consciousness of their language competency, awareness on the significance of English Language, past influential factors and the influence of College.
- To assess the relationship between the self-consciousness of a student regarding his level of language competency with past influential factors and the influence of college.
- To analyse if the domicile, educational qualification of parents and nature of the school studied has any impact on the language competency dimensions.

## **Methodology**

### **Quantitative Method**

The study will utilize quantitative research method to collect and analyse data.

### **Descriptive Design**

A descriptive design was employed to understand the relationship between the self-consciousness, awareness on the significance of English language, past exposure, influence of college and the proficiency of English language among the first year students of Bishop Heber College.

## Sample Designs

### Universe

The targeted universe was the first year classes from the disciplines of English, Commerce and Information Technology at the Bishop Heber College, Trichy.

### Sampling Method & Size

Simple random sampling method was used to choose a total of 100 students from the first year undergraduates of English, Commerce and Information Technology. The researcher used the questionnaire method to collect data from the respondents. A total of 100 responses were collected.

### Tool of Data Collection

A self-designed questionnaire was prepared by the researcher with various socio demographic details and scales to understand their competency in English language.

### Primary Data

The questionnaire prepared by the researcher is used for collecting demographic details and also for screening the responses with regard to the English language proficiency among the respondents.

### Secondary Data

The secondary data includes journal, articles and books related to the factors contributing to the lack of English language competency among the college students.

### Pre Test

The researcher did a pre-test after preparing the questionnaire. The sample of the pre-test was given to few first year undergraduate students of English. The researcher proceeded with the same questionnaire without any change as it was accepted by the students.

## Results and Discussions

On the grounds of the responses collected from the students, it has been inferred that among the 100 respondents, the study exhibits an acceptable balanced gender distribution (40% male, 60% female). Though the domicile diversity is evident, the majority hails from urban areas (58%) while the rest belongs to the semi-urban (20%) and rural areas (22%). The language used prominently at home is predominantly Tamil (96%) with a trace of exception having English (2%) and Kannada (2%). The educational qualification of the respondent's parents is varied ranging from SSLC or below (44%) to Post Graduates (8%) and including Professional Courses (7%). Many parents have just completed their school education at Higher Secondary level (22%) and a good number of them has also pursued undergraduate courses (19%). Further, the nature of the school differs among the respondents where half the population has undergone their schooling at Private schools (50%) while the rest has come through Government (11%) and Government Aided (39%) Schools. On the other hand, their medium of instruction is chiefly English (79%) and a considerate number of respondents have had Tamil (21%).

**Distribution of Respondents by the Perceived Level of Language Competence**

S.No	Variable	Frequency (n:100)	Percentage (%)
01	Self-Consciousness		
	Low	60	60
	Medium	11	11
	High	29	29

02	Awareness on the Significance of English Language		
	Low	58	58
	Medium	13	13
	High	29	29
03	Past influential Factors		
	Low	56	56
	Medium	16	16
	High	28	28
04	The Influence of College		
	Low	56	56
	Medium	10	10
	High	34	34

### Interpretation

Based on the distribution of respondents by the perceived levels of event, majority perceives low levels of Self-consciousness (60%), Awareness on the Significance of English Language (58%), Past Influential Factors (56%) and the influence of College (56%). These findings collectively highlight a significant response emphasising the necessity for targeted English Language Teaching interventions to address the observed shortcomings and enhance the language proficiency and competency.

### Karl Pearson's Coefficient of Correlation among the Language Competence

	Variable	Self-Consciousness	Awareness on the Significance of Language	Past Influential Factors	Influence of College
Self-Consciousness	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N	100			
Awareness on the Significance of Language	Pearson Correlation	.159	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.114			
	N	100	100		
Past Influential Factors	Pearson Correlation	.319**	-.005	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.965		
	N	100	100	100	
Influence of College	Pearson Correlation	.248*	.388**	.189	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.013	.000	.060	
	N	100	100	100	100

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Interpretation**

From the above table on the Karl Pearson’s Coefficient of Correlation among the perceived impact of event Scale, it is inferred that self-consciousness has significant inter co-relation with past influential factors and influence of college. Further, the awareness on the significance of English language has significant inter co-relation with the influence of college.

**Karl Pearson’s Coefficient of Correlation among the Language Competence, Domicile, Educational Qualification and Nature of the School Students**

	Variable	Domicile	Educational Qualification of Parents	Nature of the School Studied
Self-Consciousness	Pearson Correlation	-.050	.118	.288**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.618	.242	.004
	N	100	100	100
Awareness on the Significance of Language	Pearson Correlation	-.069	.115	.180
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.498	.255	.072
	N	100	100	100
Past Influential Factors	Pearson Correlation	-.058	.154	.096
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.567	.127	.343
	N	100	100	100
Influence of College	Pearson Correlation	-.158	-.092	.262**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.117	.361	.008
	N	100	100	100

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Interpretation**

From the above table, it is deduced that there is no significant inter co-relation between the domicile and the other dimensions. Similarly, there is no significant inter co-relation between the educational qualification of parents and the other dimensions. On the other hand, the nature of school studied has significant inter co-relation between self-consciousness and the influence of college.

**Findings**

The study highlights that majority students perceive low levels of Self-consciousness, Awareness on the Significance of English Language, Past Influential Factors and the influence of College. Students have trouble in expressing themselves and comprehending written and oral communication and hardly they use English in their everyday usage. Many students do not perceive the role of English language in enhancing future prospects and academic success. The previous educational background has not adequately prepared the students for good exposure to English language. Further, the interaction with the peers, ambience and the extracurricular activities are not influential enough to upgrade the proficiency level of the students.

The self-consciousness of the students in confidently expressing themselves relies greatly on the educational background they come from into the college and his exposure in the college. Moreover, it is identified that the domicile of the student, urban, semi-urban or rural, and the educational qualification of the parents does not affect any of the factors related to the Language competency of the students at their first year. On the other hand, the nature of the school has a strong impact on the students in expressing themselves, understanding the lectures and the degree of adaptability they exhibit in embracing the knowledge resources and other facilities available in the college that enhance Language competency and proficiency.

## **Conclusion**

This descriptive study on English Language Competence among First Year Students at Bishop Heber College, Trichy, sheds light on the crucial factors influencing language proficiency among students. The findings reveal a concerning trend of low self-consciousness and awareness regarding the significance of English language, coupled with limited exposure and inadequate preparation from previous educational backgrounds. Despite the diverse socio-cultural backgrounds of the students, the study underscores the need for targeted interventions to address these shortcomings and enhance language proficiency. While factors such as domicile and parental educational qualification show minimal influence, the nature of the school attended strongly correlates with students' ability to express themselves confidently and engage with English language resources effectively.

These findings underscore the importance of tailored language education programs and support services to bridge the existing gaps and empower students with the language skills necessary for academic success and future endeavours. By addressing these challenges and leveraging the insights gained from this study, Bishop Heber College and similar institutions can play a pivotal role in nurturing language proficiency among their student body, thereby enriching their educational experience and preparing them to thrive in a globalized world.

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