

"Pragmatic Learning Activities in English Language in the COVID – 19 Period A Study of Paradigmatic Shift"

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ABSTRACT

In our education system, the role of the teacher especially English teacher is pivotal. As English has become the lingua-franca throughout world, the responsibility of English teachers is increasing exponentially. It's high time that English teachers should encourage paradigmatic change in their teaching as Covid-19 forces everyone attend online classes. Students are learning many new words, novel themes and latest technologies in this period. Quarantine, isolation, lockdown, sanitization, social distancing or physical distancing are the buzz words at present. A small child could understand these words because of their rapid usage or access. Have the kids been enriched their vocabulary by knowing or listening to those words? Has novel corona made people's life in jeopardy? As the sword has two edges, there are some positive things people are noticing in these lockdown days. People, mainly students want to improve their English language skills in this period. English teachers notice that it's the need of the hour to instill interest of learning English language skills among the students. Teachers and other professionals are advancing their abilities by attending webinars, online courses, MOOC courses, video conferences, research-oriented programs, discussions etc. According to a survey, the most searched program is free online courses and learning English online. As teachers are continuous learners, it is their duty to motivate their students by showing their upgrading skills and knowledge. Creating natural environment to learn

freely, encouraging innovative and action research methods for online classes and making English class a very useful, productive and entertaining really an onerous task for English teachers. This study expounds various innovative methods to make students actively participate in diverse activities willingly and excitingly.

INTRODUCTION

Pragmatic and experimental teaching always helps teachers making English class more resourceful and constructive. What is pragmatics in English language learning? David Crystal defines - "Pragmatics is the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication." (1985:240)

Activity-based learning generates interest and enthusiasm among students in all levels like primary, upper primary, high school and college stages. Learning through language games, audio-visual presentations, mind-mapping, graphic organizers and info graphics make the language seem very amicable that the students never feel scared about English language. It is the duty of English teacher to create a special ambience where the students learn English as naturally and inconspicuously as their mother tongue. English rhymes, petty conversations and small stories make the class lively and energetic in primary level. Role plays, mono-action, word games and minor discussions are useful to upper primary and high school students. It is proven in our research that upper primary and high school stage students in rural areas got interest when they were asked to translate movie dialogues from their mother tongue to English and many students tried their best. It created fun and frolic in the classroom and majority of students preferred to do this activity as their homework. They were amused by watching some visual conversations and puzzles and they showed their eagerness to solve the word puzzles. College students showed interest in JAM, small skits; role plays etc. which are entirely opposite to traditional teaching. In other activity when college students were told they were in a place where the people can understand only English, students were thrilled and more than three hours they spoke only in English and did their tasks in English. Through these action research methods English teachers can create English ambience in the class.

However, this academic year is a strange year which has taught many things not only to the students but to the teachers also. How can English teachers create English environment online classes without facing the students physically? It's a big challenge to the teaching fraternity in general and English teachers who encourage student-centered learning in particular. Teachers should make the students listen to their classes without sleeping and doing other works. Again the obliging method is activity-based method. What activities are interested to the students? What activities accommodate them with enthusiasm and erudition? Some tasks are sketched and planned after doing a lot study.

The objective of the study is exploring pragmatic language competence and practices of the undergraduates who prefer activity-based learning in Krishna and East Godavari districts where the researchers are working in private engineering colleges. This would help in evaluating the levels of the students and their efforts offline and online classes. It is strictly a regional study but with a potential of

application at a national level.

This research was a study conducted in Krishna and East Godavari Districts, Andhra Pradesh and the focal point was mostly prepared on the students who are studying in various undergraduate courses in Engineering. Various students from both urban and rural regions are opting different courses in engineering from Jawahar Lal Technological University, Kakinada. The students were the first year students of the courses as their final exams were not completed because of lockdown. Participants gladly took part in the study and they were well informed prior the motive of the test and no personal details of the students were collected in this process. A total of 265 students were participated in questionnaire, and discourse completion tasks, out of which 249 questionnaires were considered for study and, the remaining 16 papers were not considered as the data was not filled completely.

Framing of Varied Activities

A pragmatic survey was conducted through activity-based teaching classes. Three batches of engineering students were taught different topics. Some topics are completely theoretical and some topics are tasks. While conducting assignments, task-oriented instruction was followed by the teachers. Students' marks and participation were evaluated.

First activity is Problem Pondering. In this task, students write their problems while learning a new language or foreign language or problems related to their English language skills. Teacher should not reveal the names of the students but tell problems to the students and ask them write the solution in the chat box. In this exercise students think about several predicaments they face in their life and visualize the solutions. In future if they face any type of obstacles, they can overcome them by recollecting the solutions they have discussed in the class. The questions might be related to English or any other subjects or life-threatening problems, students get confidence and courage to overcome them.

Second exercise is Synonym Search. In this activity, teacher gives a paragraph related to their syllabus and highlights some words. Then asks the students to search synonyms for the highlighted words and narrate a story by using those words. This exercise can be given for teams also. Teacher can divide the class into teams and give some time for the preparation. The teams can talk on conference call and the team leader narrates the story. But this activity has worked wonderfully as an individual task. In this activity, students learn many words and it enhances students' vocabulary. The same activity may be given to learn antonyms also.

Third exercise is Accurate Acronyms. As COVID is an acronym, the students were asked to frame acronyms related to various fields. There are different sorts of topics and students can create many acronyms. It has generated lots of fun and information. Some students have a bundle of verbose and they are ready to show their talent to other students. On Whats App and Telegram also this activity can be conducted. Students started posting many acronyms and when they were questioned about any word, they gave correct answer. If we give some time limit and invite every student to participate, they enjoy the activity and learn many new words.

Fourth exercise is Matching Motto. In this activity, students are required to frame their own motto with a caption. It's a common factor that many people watch advertisements and want to buy those products because of their quality and captions

as well. People are attracted by the catchy words and aesthetic wordy presentation. Hence, our students were regulated to outline such type of captivating and appealing words and sentences. To our surprise, students participated enthusiastically and prepared many catchy phrases and sentences.

Fifth activity is common words in other languages. As teachers, we always encourage our students to learn popular words in other languages. In lockdown time, all must stay at home. Fortunately, there's no impediment for getting access to internet. Students got surplus time to spend at home. Students were encouraged to learn new words in foreign languages like German, French and Spanish. They were entailed to greet their classmates in a foreign language in which they got interest. This exercise also created loads of fun and enthusiasm among the students and everyday they used to ask how many words they learnt so far, where their rank in that app is and how many medals they got until now. Some of the words in Spanish are hola, Buenos dias, Buenas tardes and Buenas noches. Como estas, como esta usted, bien gracias, lo ciento, por favor, senor, senora, senorita etc. In German, Guten Morgen, Guten Abend, Guten Tage, Guten Nicht, Entschuldigung, wie ghet's, bitte, Vater, Mutter, Bruder, Schwester, Tochter, Sohn, Mann, Frau, Freundin, Wasser etc. In French, bebe, garcon, enfant, fille, ami, homme, pere, mere, soeur, fils, frère, Bonjour, Merci, desole, accueil, desole, oui, aucun etc.

Sixth exercise is Practice Portmanteau. Portmanteau words are fascinating and functional. By combining two words, we can get another meaningful word. Eg. Brunch, fantabulous, wlog, infotainment etc. In this activity, students are asked to write as many portmanteau words as they can and they are given the opportunity to prepare some more. Students made portmanteau words by combining film actors and T V actors' names, brand names, players' names and celebrities' names. From this exercise students got awareness about word-creation and meanings of portmanteau words.

Here are the tables which show the research of pragmatic learning levels of students from different branches and different areas. These activities were conducted at various times whenever the students and the teachers got excess time of teaching-learning process. Comparison between urban and rural areas is nearly similar which gives the impression that students have equal capability whether they studied in local language or English medium. Four branches students were given chance to participate in doing exercises. ECE, CSE, Mechanical and Civil students who showed utmost interest to know about wide-ranging application of their learning abilities.

ECE: Total students participated – 63

Urban area students – 36

Rural area students – 27

	Excellent No. of Students		Very good No. of Students		Good No. of Students		Average No. of Students		Very slow No. of Students	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Problem Pondering	2	4	5	6	10	18	8	6	2	2
Synonym Search	3	6	6	8	11	20	6	2	1	0
Accurate Acronyms	2	6	6	9	12	19	5	2	2	0
Matching Motto	3	5	4	5	14	15	3	8	3	3
Common foreign words	1	4	3	8	15	21	3	2	5	1
Practice Portmanteau	3	4	7	9	9	15	5	6	3	2

CSE

Total students participated – 62

Urban area students – 33

Rural area students – 29

	Excellent No. of Students		Very good No. of Students		Good No. of Students		Average No. of Students		Very slow No. of Students	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Problem Pondering	4	5	5	8	12	12	6	7	2	1
Synonym Search	3	7	6	8	13	10	5	3	2	0
Accurate Acronyms	3	8	6	9	13	8	5	3	2	0
Matching Motto	3	6	6	7	14	8	4	8	2	4
Common foreign words	3	8	3	9	15	9	5	4	3	3
Practice Portmanteau	5	9	7	6	9	7	4	8	4	2

Mechanical

Total students participated – 63

Urban area students – 26

Rural area students – 37

	Excellent No. of Students		Very good No. of Students		Good No. of Students		Average No. of Students		Very slow No. of Students	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Problem Pondering	5	4	6	5	12	10	8	5	6	2
Synonym Search	4	4	5	6	10	9	13	6	5	1
Accurate Acronyms	4	3	5	4	11	8	12	7	5	4
Matching Motto	8	7	9	6	10	6	7	4	3	2
Common foreign words	7	7	9	5	12	7	5	4	4	2
Practice Portmanteau	4	3	6	3	13	8	8	9	6	3

CIVIL

Total students participated – 61

Urban area students – 29

Rural area students – 32

	Excellent No. of Students		Very good No. of Students		Good No. of Students		Average No. of Students		Very slow No. of Students	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Problem Pondering	5	5	6	6	11	10	7	6	3	2
Synonym Search	5	4	5	5	10	8	8	9	4	3
Accurate Acronyms	4	4	6	5	12	9	8	9	2	2
Matching Motto	7	7	9	9	11	9	4	3	1	1
Common foreign words	7	7	9	8	11	10	3	3	2	1
Practice Portmanteau	2	2	5	4	9	7	10	10	6	6

No. of Students participated

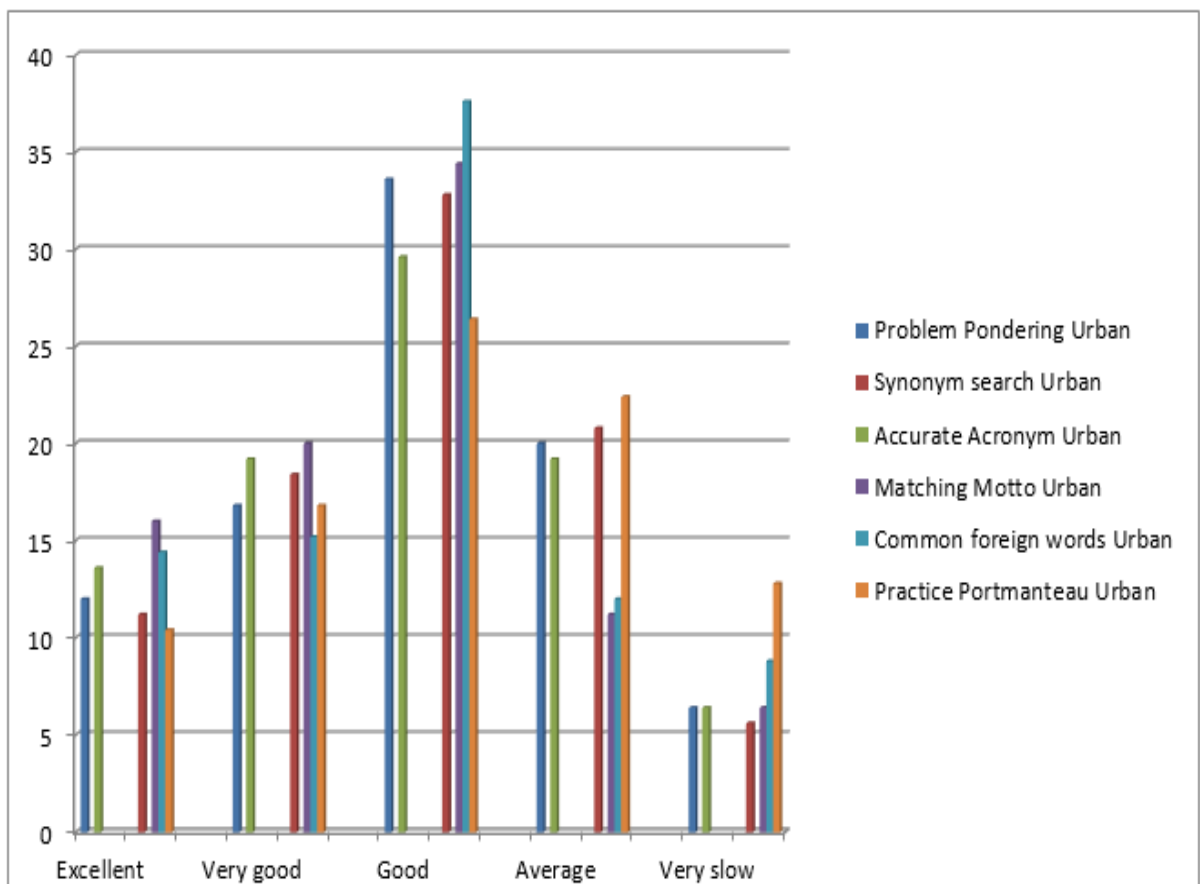
Aptitude Level	Problem Pondering		Synonym Search		Accurate Acronyms		Matching Motto		Common foreign words		Practice Portmanteau	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Excellent	19	15	22	14	22	17	26	20	26	18	19	13
Very good	26	21	26	23	29	24	30	25	35	19	26	21
Good	53	42	50	41	50	37	44	43	53	47	44	33
Average	28	25	26	26	25	24	27	14	14	15	32	28
Very slow	12	8	9	7	7	8	11	8	10	11	16	16

Percentage of Students' Participation

Aptitude Level	Problem Pondering (Percentage) %		Synonym Search (Percentage) %		Accurate Acronyms (Percentage) %		Matching Motto (Percentage) %		Common foreign words (Percentage) %		Practice Portmanteau (Percentage) %	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Excellent	15.3	12	17.7	11.2	17.7	13.6	20.9	16	20.9	14.4	15.3	10.4
Very good	20.9	16.8	20.9	18.4	23.3	19.2	24.1	20	28.2	15.2	20.9	16.8
Good	42.3	33.6	40.3	32.8	40.3	29.6	35.4	34.4	42.7	37.6	35.4	26.4
Average	22.5	20	20.9	20.8	20.1	19.2	21.7	11.2	11.2	12	25.8	22.4
Very slow	9.6	6.4	7.2	5.6	5.6	6.4	8.8	6.4	8.0	8.8	12.9	12.8

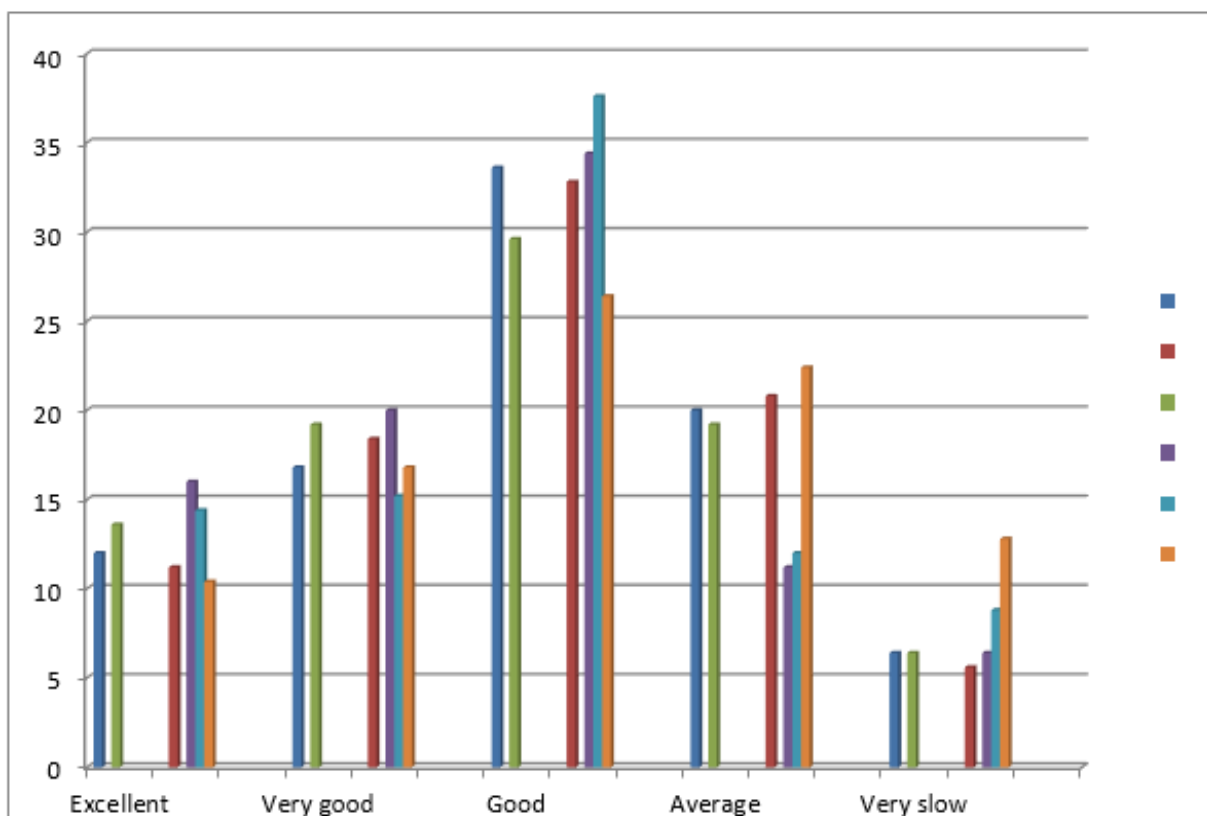
Urban Area Students' Performance

	Problem Pondering	Synonym Search	Accurate Acronyms	Matching Motto	Common foreign words	Practice Portmanteau
Excellent	15.3	17.7	17.7	20.9	20.9	15.3
Very good	20.9	20.9	23.3	24.1	28.2	20.9
Good	42.3	40.3	40.3	35.4	42.7	35.4
Average	22.5	20.9	20.1	21.7	11.2	25.8
Very slow	9.6	7.2	5.6	8.8	8	12.9



Rural Area Students' Performance

	Problem Pondering	Synonym Search	Accurate Acronyms	Matching Motto	Common foreign words	Practice Portmanteau
Excellent	15.3	17.7	17.7	20.9	20.9	15.3
Very good	20.9	20.9	23.3	24.1	28.2	20.9
Good	42.3	40.3	40.3	35.4	42.7	35.4
Average	22.5	20.9	20.1	21.7	11.2	25.8
Very slow	9.6	7.2	5.6	8.8	8	12.9



CONCLUSION

The results from the above study present that the role of activity-based online classes in the process of learning pragmatic competence is very vital and the students are very aware of their role in cultivating pragmatic practices at present time. Most of the students believe the role of teachers is of prime importance who introduces them to the opportunities ahead and a language class objective should not be only scores in the examinations where their memory alone is tested but enable them to identify their language deficiencies and guide them to explore the sources available. English teachers also should be aware of growing technical knowledge and try to improve their acquaintance with technology. Teacher must introduce different apps which can guide the students learn something new and useful.

Teacher's role should be a facilitator rather than just an information provider. Their instinct should be ignited by creating information gap. Students are to be made aware of their pragmatic shortage and acquaint themselves with the socio-cultural variation that a language holds. The study suggests that teachers need to recognize the deficiencies in the present teaching and learning process; they need to make a conscious effort to learn what their students' needs are in relation to developing communicative competence, and they need to conduct English language teaching more effectively to meet the needs. Along with that support, English teachers think about present pandemic situation and prepare the students to learn at any place, any time and any subject without losing their concentration.

This study proves that if the teachers follow innovative and motivating teaching methods, students will always be ready to learn from the teachers. Enthusiasm has no difference with rural places or urban areas. Rural area students may have less exposure but they have more passion and curiosity when compared to city-dwelled students. Another good thing is in all activities, slow learners are very less in all branches. Most of the students welcomed unique style of learning and they enjoyed all the activities. Some students have tried to write small poems and short stories with newly learned vocabulary. Some students have verified various study apps and suggested the teachers to join and learn novel things.

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