

## **A Study on the English Language Competency among Model English School Students in Aizawl City**

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### **Abstract**

Today's children are living in a globalized world where English is a lingua franca. The majority of school children in cities and towns are educated in English medium schools right from their preschool age. In spite of this, teachers at higher education level often complain the weakness of students in English. The present study was conducted to find out English language competency among class VII students of Model English medium school in Aizawl and to compare the English language competency in relation to their gender. English language competency test constructed by the investigators was administered to 83 students. The statistical analysis revealed that 57% of class VII students showed unsatisfactory results in English language competency, 23% possessed an average level and only 6% showed a satisfactory level of English language competency.

**Key words:** English Language Competency, English language.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Language plays a central role in teaching and learning, without it, we cannot make sense of or communicate our understanding of a subject (The Open University, 2021)<sup>13</sup>. The students' academic competency is enhanced when they are proficient in language and it also helps them adapt more easily to a different learning environment. With the advancement of teaching and learning, there is a mushroom growth in the use of English Language in schools. However, the majority of students are not able to express themselves with proper language competency which surely affects their academic development leading to dullness of intelligence. As teaching-learning can be more effective when children and teachers possess command over the language of instruction, there is a need to enhance the English Language Competency of students.

Keeping the above context in view, the present study was conducted to administer the English Language Competency among Model English school students in Aizawl city. This study was done with the hope of providing insights for teachers and educators who wish to promote students' English language competency as well as to fill the gap that exists in the current literature.

### **II. RELATED LITERATURE**

We cannot make any kind of achievement in the study of language if we do not consider language 'competency' (Information Processing Language, 2021)<sup>5</sup>. The notion of language competency was first developed in the mid -1960 by Naom Chomsky, an American linguist. Chomsky identified language competency as an idealized linguistic ability to understand and comprehend words and sentences (Belletti & Rizzi, 2003)<sup>1</sup> The student's language competency can be examined through conducting a systematic research study so that teachers will have a general knowledge of students' errors (Xie & Jiang, 2007)<sup>14</sup>. The study on Language Competency proved to be an important tool as it sheds light on the areas of problems faced and by providing comprehensive results upon which teaching module of remediation can be erected as given by Keshavarz (2008)<sup>6</sup>. Thus, there is a need to identify the source of problems in the process of attaining proficiency in language competency.

Existing research contributing to the language competency of students reveals various problems in the teaching and learning process. In a study conducted by Farooque (2005)<sup>3</sup>. the language competency in different subjects is measured and identified and that almost every teacher working at an English medium school in Kannur district are not trained and lack adequate proficiency in English language which highly affect the academic performance of the students. In another study conducted by Subramanian (2009)<sup>12</sup> where the linguistic skills of the graduate students in English Language are examined, all the language competency skills namely- listening, speaking, reading, and writing have been evaluated where he identified various errors as -

grammatical, phonological, and orthographical errors. The researcher recommended language games and audiovisual teaching aids for language teaching and learning. In an analysis conducted by Qureshi (2012)<sup>7</sup> titled 'Language planning in higher education: A case study of Pakistan', the investigator analyzed the teaching and learning process of the English language and examined the interest of the students in understanding English language in the context of Pakistan. To make language learning interesting language games were developed by the researcher. Supportively, Sindkhedkar (2012)<sup>11</sup> researched the objectives of teaching and learning the English language in India. The researcher emphasizes that the main focus of teaching English language in the Indian context should not be linguistic robots or producing bookworms.

The review of literature gives the researchers insight into studies related to English language competency and has led the investigators to conduct a study in Aizawl city as no study has been conducted which emphasized the development of English language competency. The researcher considered all the respective research studies and used them as guidelines to prepare English Language Competency modules. The reviews have clearly shown that student's language competency could be enhanced when effective teaching aid is used.

Existing research on the English Language Competency of students is still at an embryonic stage. The continuing failure to provide comprehensive information on students' language competency leads to drawbacks in an academic setting. Considering various research studies on language competency - listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, the main purpose of this study was to investigate the language competency of class VII students from Model English School.

The research questions addressed in this study are:

1. What is the language competency among students of Model English School in Aizawl city?
2. Is there any significant difference in the language competency between boys and girls?

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To study English language competency among students of Model English School in Aizawl city.
2. To compare English language competency among students of Model English School in Aizawl city in relation to their gender.

### **III. MATERIAL AND METHODS**

A between group design study was used in this study to examine the English language competency among class VII students of Model English School in Aizawl. The study aims to find out English language competency among class VII students and to identify the language competency in which the students need improvement most so that remedial measures could be suggested. English language competency test constructed by the investigators was administered to 83 students with 45 (boys) and 38 (girls). Random sampling was used. The study was administered in a regular classroom and students were seated apart.

**Study Design:** Between group design study

**Study Location:** This was conducted in a government aided school called Model English School located in Aizawl, Mizoram, India.

**Study Duration:** January 2021 to September 2021

**Sample size:** 83 students

**Sample size calculation:** The sample size was estimated on the basis of Random sampling design

#### **Data Analysis**

Microsoft Excel software (2010) was utilized to analyze the data. Students' performance was the dependent variable while English Language Competency Test was the independent variable. Descriptive statistics of the sample and paired sample t-test inferential statistics were applied to analyze the data.

Section 1: Descriptive Analysis

Section 2: Inferential Analysis

**Section 1:** Language Competency among class VII Students of Model English School in Aizawl City (Descriptive Analysis).

**Table 1.1** Indicating the Language competency level-wise distribution of Model English School Class VII students

<b>Level</b>	<b>Marks</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Very Poor</b>	<b>&lt;10</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Poor</b>	<b>10-20</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Average</b>	<b>20-30</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>23</b>

<b>Good</b>	<b>30-45</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Excellent</b>	<b>&gt;45</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>100</b>

*Figures in parentheses indicate percentages*

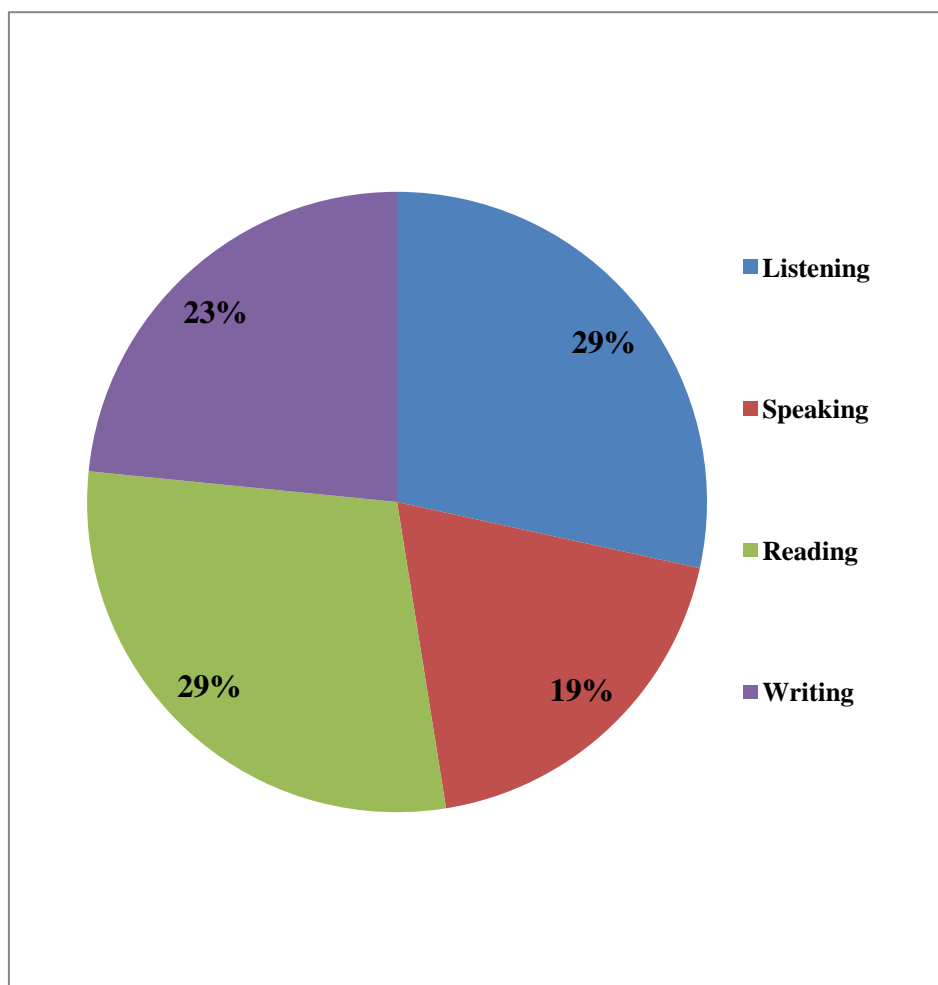
#### IV. RESULTS

Descriptive statistics were computed to learn about the characteristic of the sample. Out of the 83 responses received, analyses were conducted based on the responses. There were 83 students with 45 (54%) boys and 38 (46%) girls. The students were of diverse economic backgrounds. Some of them are first-generation learners who are likely to receive less support from their families in their quest for higher education.

The Language competency level-wise distribution of Model English School Class VII students presented in Table 1.1 gives a clear picture of descriptive statistics. As per Table 1.1, the statistical analysis revealed that 57% of class VII students have shown unsatisfactory results in English language competency, 23% possess an average level and only 6% have shown a satisfactory level of English language competency.

**Table 1.2** Indicating the Language competency components - wise distribution of Model English School Class VII students

Components	Max	Min	MD	SE	SD
<b>Listening</b>	12	1	5.79	0.87	3.05
<b>Speaking</b>	11	1	3.88	0.58	2.26
<b>Reading</b>	12	2	5.93	0.89	2.79
<b>Writing</b>	12	2	4.77	0.71	2.27



**Figure 1:** Indicating the mean scores of the components - language competency

**Listening**

Listening is regarded as the mother of all four skills. It involves the process of making meaning out of a spoken language, constructing and processing sounds into words. Table 1.2 reveals the component-wise descriptive analysis of the language competency of class VII Model English school students. The components that are measured in Listening include hearing, sensing, interpreting, and remembering. The calculated mean score for Listening is 5.79. This shows that students need improvement. In today’s technological age, it is a challenge to keep students’ attention therefore educational technology that is available today can be carefully selected and used that will teach students about what they are learning.

**Speaking**

When compared to listening, speaking is a much more complex skill. It is often regarded as an act of creativity. Speaking involves the consciousness of the lexical and grammatical, the ability to present understandably and speak without any grammatical errors. The components that are analyzed in Speaking include pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. The calculated mean score for Speaking is 3.88. Students need a remedial class in speaking that will allow the student to advocate for themselves. Making students attain proficiency in speaking demands a good model syntactic structure and incorporates questions that boost comprehension. Therefore, a comprehensive language competency module must be developed to develop oral language for the students.

**Reading**

Reading is said to be a conscious and complex activity, it is considered as a gateway to getting extensive worldly knowledge. Traditionally, reading was considered as a passive skill however, today it is considered as an active skill and also one's reading ability decides his academic achievement (Fulcher, 1998)<sup>4</sup>. The components that are measured in Reading include the pace of reading, expression, phonic, fluency, and comprehension. Table 1.2 depicts a mean score of 5.93 for reading among class VII students from Model English School. In a reviewed research conducted by Slavin, Cheung, Groff, & Lake (2008)<sup>10</sup> on the approaches to improving the reading of middle school students includes: (a) reading curricula, (b) mixed-method models (methods that combine large and small-group instruction with computer activities), (c) computer-assisted instruction, and (d) instructional-process programs.

**Writing**

Writing is considered an alternative medium of language. It is the ability to express one's thoughts and wishes and present them in a written form without any grammatical errors. The components that are analyzed in Reading include spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, knowledge, and creativity. The calculated mean score of Class VII students in writing is 4.77. A closer look at the table reveals that there is a need to provide an extensive guidance and tutorial program that offer necessary services to help students attain proficiency in writing, it may also require the involvement of parents (Chang, 2001)<sup>2</sup>.

**Table 1.3** Indicating the Language competency components - wise distribution of Model English School Class VII students across gender

Components	Gender	Max	Min	MD	SE	SD
<b>Listening</b>	Boys	10	1	5.75	1.17	2.78
	Girls	12	1	5.85	1.30	3.42
<b>Speaking</b>	Boys	8	1	3.58	0.73	1.79
	Girls	11	1	4.25	0.95	2.73
<b>Reading</b>	Boys	11	2	5.79	1.18	2.73
	Girls	12	3	6.1	1.36	2.91
<b>Writing</b>	Boys	9	2	4.5	0.91	1.84
	Girls	12	2	5.1	1.14	2.71

**Listening**

The component ‘Listening’ which measures varied listening competency of the students given in table 1.3 reveals that the calculated mean score for boys is 5.75 and girls is 5.85 respectively. This shows that there is not much of a difference between the mean scores of boys and girls.

**Speaking**

The calculated mean score on ‘Speaking’ which measures pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension is 3.58 for boys and 4.25 for girls. At the same time, the scores reveal that girls have a higher mean score which means that they are better at speaking.

**Reading**

The calculated mean score for boys concerning their ‘Reading’ is 5.79 and girls is 6.1. It can be seen that the mean score of the girls is higher than boys. The component included in Reading includes the pace of reading, expression, phonic, fluency and comprehension.

**Writing**

The component – ‘Writing’ that measures spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, knowledge, and creativity shown in table 1.3 depicts a mean score of 4.5 for boys and 5.1 for girls. This shows that girls scores higher than boys.

**Section 2: Difference in the Language Competency for Demographic Variable – Gender (Inferential Analysis)**

**Table 1.4** Inferential statistics on the level of English language competency between boys and girls students

Variable	Gender	SED	Paired ‘t’ value	Df	Levels of significance 0.05 & 0.01
English language competency	Boys	3.01	0.15	83	Significant
	Girls				

**Results**

Table 1.4 represents a paired sample t-test conducted to compare the English Language Competency between boys and girls students of class VII students from Model English School. It is found that there is a significant difference between boys and girls students Df (83) = 0.15, t value >.05. Boys (M=20.86, SD=8.65) and Girls (M=21.3, SD=11.29).

**V. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This study is intended to contribute to existing research on finding the language competency among class VII students from Model English School, Aizawl, and to fill the research gap on the significant difference between boys and girls. Based on the results and the research questions addressed in this case study, it is concluded that a) Majority 57% of class VII students have shown unsatisfactory results in language competency, 20% possess an average level and only 5% has shown a satisfactory result b) There is a significant difference in the English language competency across gender.

Results on the language competency were consistent with a previous research study conducted by Nisha (1995)<sup>9</sup> that explored the language competency of first-year degree students. The investigator concluded there is a hindrance between language teaching and language syllabus that resulted in poor English Competency. The communication strategies of the students are also examined based on the problems exhibited by the learner in the process of attaining proficiency in the language. Findings on gender differences were also supported by a study conducted by Naderi, Abdullah, Aizan & Sharir (2010)<sup>8</sup> that confirmed that there was a significant difference between boys and girls.

The findings of the present case study greatly exhibit the role of teachers and educators in enhancing the language competency of students. More focus is needed in the areas of speaking and writing competency. At the same time, from the calculated means, it is also evident that student’s listening and reading competency needs improvement too. It is apparent from this study that an effective curriculum and structured modules are needed to be introduced to enhance the language competency of students. An intelligence profile must be maintained to remain aware of students’ potential and capabilities. Hence, maintaining a unique record of students’ academic performance will help both the teachers and parents in understanding the specific strengths and weaknesses of the student.

**VI. IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

The findings of this study lead to several educational implications for future practices that may bring about changes in the teaching and learning process. The implications provided could be useful for schools in Aizawl city when addressing the language competency of students. Moreover, implementing these

recommendations put forward by the investigator would not only help the students but will also have a positive impact on teachers on the overall curriculum planning and development on all levels.

This present study revealed that the majority 57% of class VII students from English Model School have shown unsatisfactory results in English language competency. To increase the level of academic performance, the education department of the state may look into the quality and consistency of the teaching process and may attempt to introduce a comprehensive curriculum framework based on modern technology. Providing competent and consistent teaching aids will help students to develop an interest in learning and also motivate them to enhance their language competency. Therefore, a practical solution would be to identify effective and efficient teaching pedagogy.

Implementation can start with the state government insisting all the school teachers attend more courses that are related to the development of language competency. A useful solution would be to call upon the central or state to raise financial aid on educational programs by implementing periodical training for the teachers on all levels. Schools may put forward resourceful curricula with emphasis on the attainment of proficiency in the English language. The process of education could improve more rapidly if monitored and executed by the state authority more proficiently, and not as a routine method.

## VII. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study had several limitations. Firstly, it was limited to only one city, Aizawl. A similar case study can be conducted in other cities and states. Secondly, this research was limited to only one method – between group design. Future research could employ a mixed research methodology to obtain more widespread information on language competency. Thirdly, the sample of the study was limited in terms of the variable considered. It is suggested for further studies to include more variables. Finally, more research study is needed on seeing the language competency at all levels.

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