Investigating Undergraduates' Oral Competence in English: Some Significant Findings

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Abstract - English is perceived as a global link language and plays a prominent role in knowledge dissemination in the areas of medicine, technology, business and higher education. Therefore, students require proficiency in English language, particularly L2 oral competency for academic as well as professional gains. However, recent surveys and reports indicate that our graduates have poor language skills. This paper reports the findings of a small study conducted on students studying in different colleges at the University of Delhi, India to examine their oral English proficiency. A structured interview of 45 Final Year B. Com (Honours) students was conducted telephonically and the recorded spoken samples were analysed quantitatively as well as qualitatively. The statistical analysis based on English language experts' evaluation revealed that the oral proficiency of around 50% students was average or below average. Moreover, a qualitative analysis further revealed that spoken samples of each of the three levels of oral competence displayed some distinct salient features. Students with average or low-level of oral competence exhibited lack of fluency and spontaneity and their speech was marked with several grammatical and pronunciation errors. Some key recommendations include modifying materials and methodology to incorporate activities such as role-plays, simulations etc.; encouraging contemporary ways of communicating using technology and providing more opportunities to students to express themselves in a stress-free environment. It is hoped that the findings of this study will be of use in future research related to exploring university students' L2 oral proficiency in different contexts.

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