

An Empirical Study of Proficiency in General English and Functional English Students at Higher Secondary Level in Srinagar

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Abstract

In the era of information technology, communication skills, particularly in English, have assumed vital significance. In recent years, English language teaching in a developing country, like India, has taken a new dimension. Communicative Language Teaching is highly advocated by many applied linguists and English language teachers as an effective language teaching approach. It is also believed that we learn language most effectively by using it in realistic situations, so communicative syllabi aims at developing student's ability to use the target language through activities which actually stimulate target performance (Nunan 1989:13). Though English is taught to the Kashmiri students at the higher secondary level but the content of General English usually lacks in the communicative component necessary to acquire requisite skills in effective use of language for communication. Thus realizing the importance of communicative skills in English, Functional English has been introduced as one of the subjects in secondary school and college curriculum in Kashmir. It should not be mistaken that Functional English is a separate subject but it is basically a communicative approach to teaching and learning of English which focuses on realistic topics, relevant to real life situations. The present study is based on the following assumption that those students who opt for Functional English course develop greater proficiency in English. In this backdrop a study was carried out in the higher secondary schools of Srinagar with an aim to test the proficiency of

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General English and Functional English students. The sample for this study was taken from various higher secondary institutes of Srinagar city. This paper attempts to explore the significant difference in the results of General English students and Functional English students with the help of t-test. The findings showed that Functional English students perform better at both levels and there is significant difference from initial to final level of writing, reading, listening and speaking. The results also reveal the fact that Functional English course helps the students to achieve proficiency in English language to a greater extent.

Key word

Communicative Language Teaching, Writing, Reading, Listening and Speaking.

Introduction

Communicative language teaching (CLT) is an approach to the teaching of second and foreign languages that emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. Although students know the rules of language but are not able to use them for communicative purposes. They must be able to use these rules for determining appropriate use of language in living situations (Larsen-Freeman 1986, Widdowson 1978). CLT pays due attention to all the language skills and can prepare students to use the language in real life situations. Here the teacher and student are equally involved in the teaching-learning process by offering them interesting and motivating activities and teaching materials. It is believed that we learn language most effectively by using it in realistic situations, so communicative syllabi aims at developing students' ability to use the target language through activities which actually stimulate target performance (Nunan 1989:13). According to Richards and Rodgers communicative syllabi aims at developing procedures for the teaching of four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication. A communicative syllabi offers a classroom where learners do the activities using the target language which they will need outside the classroom. The activities are in the form of tasks given to the students which they perform by using the target language. Thus this approach is communicative and task oriented. The use of a variety of different tasks in language teaching is believed to make language teaching more communicative because it stimulates proficiency and confidence among students. It means that learners become functional in their use of

English rather than acquiring a separate entity known as Functional English. Functional English actually requires a communicative approach to teaching and learning of English language. “The aim of the Functional English is to encourage learners to develop their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills in a range of contexts. Functional English course is essentially concerned with recognising the ability of learners to apply and transfer skills in ways that are appropriate to their situation¹”.

The focus of Functional English is that the teacher has to involve each student in every activity so that the student becomes confident in the skills and can practise and apply them in meaningful ways. The teacher arranges group work and pair work which enables the students to use language in different contexts. The situation becomes student centred rather than teacher centred. It encourages student-student interaction and also cooperation because it can remove the inhibitions of those who feel intimidated by formal classroom activities. In developing functional skills learners can adapt and apply what they have learned to suit different situations that face them. “Functional English will help young learners to take a more active and responsible role in their communities, to be more alert and responsive to changes in technology, to communicate effectively and to be literate in broadest sense².” Therefore, Functional English course fosters success for students by developing further their language skills and use them to evaluate and describe the world around them. They participate confidently in their interactions with others and use language clearly and effectively to achieve various purposes and convey different meanings. The ultimate goal of the Functional English is to have mastery of all four skills. Functional English stresses the importance of the ‘real-life situations’ in which learners will ultimately have to use their skills.

Methodology

The sample for this study was taken from various higher secondary institutes of Srinagar city. The sample comprised of a total number of 160 respondents from which 80 belonged to General English course and 80

¹ Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency, 2007.

<http://www.education.gov.uk> retrieved 2011/6/11

² (<http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/keystages3and4>) retrieved 2011/8/25.

belonged to Functional English course. It also included equal number of male and female respondents. The sample was divided into 4 groups i.e From each group 40 respondents were taken

Table 1: Sampling

	male	female	total
11th Functional English	20	20	40
11th General English	20	20	40
12th Functional English	20	20	40
12th General English	20	20	40

A questionnaire was prepared which consisted of two parts. Part one was designed to elicit personal information about the student which included items such as student's background , their schooling at high school level (govt. Private, missionary), economic background, educational qualifications of their parents and so on. The other part was prepared for the elicitation of linguistic data which was designed to test the student's knowledge of all the four language skills, namely reading, writing, speaking and listening.

For the present work, four separate schedules (each one for each skill) were prepared and the students were tried out in the field through a pilot study. Based on the results drawn through the pilot study, the questionnaires were modified and finalized. The finalized questionnaire were used for data collection.

Data Elicitation:

The respondents were contacted in their respective classrooms and information about the purpose of study was provided to them. After obtaining their consent, the research questionnaire was administered to them. Furthermore clear instructions were given to respondents before filling the questionnaire. In this way the data collection was carried out in all secondary schools under study. A similar test was conducted after a gap of six months involving the same informants.

After collecting the data from a survey instrument, it was converted into numbers before transferring to an Excel spreadsheet. So the data was codified and then quantified. The quantitative data was captured in a software program called Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 14.0 for its final analysis and tabulation purposes.

Scoring

All four skills were graded on a scale of 0 to 5. A score of 0 means no response, likewise a score of 1 means that the student is very weak in English. A score of 5 shows that the student possesses excellent English language skills. An average student shows score of 2 to 3 in the test.

The response of the student was independently rated by two qualified evaluators. This test was a measure of English language proficiency in general. It also helped in determining whether a student has attained proficiency in English to some extent by taking up Functional English course to achieve their goals in future life. Although, their levels of English language proficiency will also depend on other factors, such as their present schooling, the schools they have attended, educational background of family, use of English and so on.

Table 2: Scoring Scale

Skill	Range score	Level	Scale
Writing	(0-40)	Excellent (33-40)	5
		Good (25-32)	4
		Fair (17-24)	3
		Average (9-16)	2
		Weak (1-8)	1
		no response (0)	0
Reading	(0-40)	Excellent (33-40)	5
		Good (25-32)	4
		Fair (17-24)	3
		Average (9-16)	2
		Weak (1-8)	1
		no response (0)	0
Listening	(0-36)	Excellent (29-36)	5
		Good (22-28)	4
		Fair (15-21)	3
		Average (8-14)	2
		Weak (1-7)	1
		no response (0)	0
Speaking	(0-30)	Excellent (25-30)	5
		Good (19-24)	4
		Fair (13-18)	3
		Average (7-12)	2

		Weak (1-6)	1
		no response (0)	0

Findings and Results

The main objective of the present study was to see whether the teaching of Functional English enhances the communicative skill in a student or not. The proficiency of respondents in writing, reading, listening, and speaking skills were explored. The difference between initial and final levels of respondents in these skills were determined by using T- Test. T- Test is generally applied, For example, in the context of the present study, to find out the proficiency of respondents at initial level and final level after giving a certain kind of input.

Interpretation of Result

In this particular analysis, the statistical significance level was accepted to be $p < .05$ for all the paired sample findings. If the p-value (2-tailed significance value) is greater than .05, then there is no significant difference, and if the value comes out less than .05 or equal to .05 then there is significant difference.

The detailed interpretation and discussion of the descriptive analysis of the data is given below. The results are explained and presented in tables, and are illustrated in figures.

Mean Scores Scored by the Respondents at their Initial and Final levels in all Four Skills.

T-Test

Paired Samples Statistics

Table 3: Mean Scored by the Respondents at their Initial and Final levels

		Mean	Total respondents
Pair 1	INITIAL LEVEL OF WRITING SKILL	3.1188	160
	FINAL LEVEL OF WRITING SKILL	3.4563	160

Proficiency in General English and Functional English

Pair 2	INITIAL LEVEL OF READING SKILL	3.4063	160
	FINAL LEVEL OF READING SKILL	3.7125	160
Pair 3	INITIAL LEVEL OF LISTENING SKILL	2.3250	160
	FINAL LEVEL OF LISTENING SKILL	2.5750	160
Pair 4	INITIAL LEVEL OF SPEAKING SKILL	2.5188	160
	FINAL LEVEL OF SPEAKING SKILL	2.5500	160

In case of writing, after analyzing the data it was observed that the mean score has increased from 3.1 to 3.4 from initial to final levels. Similarly, in reading it has increased from 3.4 to 3.7. In listening it has increased from 2.3 to 2.5 while as in case of speaking it remains almost same, i.e., from 2.51 to 2.55

Table 4: Significant difference between initial and final level in general. Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	INITIAL LEVEL OF WRITING SKILL	- .33750	.50016	.03954	-.41559	-.25941	-8.535	159	.000

	- FINAL LEVEL OF WRITING SKILL								
Pair 2	INITIAL LEVEL OF READING SKILL - FINAL LEVEL OF READING SKILL	-.30625	.61426	.04856	-.40216	-.21034	-6.306	159	.000
Pair 3	INITIAL LEVEL OF LISTENING SKILL - FINAL LEVEL OF LISTENING SKILL	-.25000	.68221	.05393	-.35652	-.14348	-4.635	159	.000
Pair 4	INITIAL LEVEL OF SPEAKING SKILL - FINAL LEVEL OF SPEAKING SKILL	-.03125	.56548	.04471	-.11954	.05704	-.699	159	.486

After applying t-test, it was observed that there is significant difference between initial and final levels of writing, reading and listening. While as

there is no significant difference in speaking from initial to final level. This may be because of the fact that less focus is given to speaking activities and students get less exposure to speaking skills.

Mean Scores of Writing, Reading, Listening and Speaking Skill in case of Functional English Respondents from Initial to Final Level

paired T-Test

Paired Samples Statistics(a)

Table 5: Mean Scored by the Respondents at their Initial and Final levels in Functional English

		Mean	Total respondents
Pair 1	INITIAL LEVEL OF WRITING SKILL	3.1700	80
	FINAL LEVEL OF WRITING SKILL	3.7250	80
Pair 2	INITIAL LEVEL OF READING SKIL	3.4550	80
	FINAL LEVEL OF READING SKILL	3.9125	80
Pair 3	INITIAL LEVEL OF LISTENING SKILL	2.5500	80
	FINAL LEVEL OF LISTENING SKILL	2.7625	80
Pair 4	INITIAL LEVEL OF SPEAKING SKILL	2.6375	80
	FINAL LEVEL OF SPEAKING SKILL	2.8125	80

In this case, the mean score of all four skills has increased from their initial to final levels. In writing it has increased from 3.1 to 3.7, in reading from 3.4 to 3.9, in listening 2.5 to 2.7 and in speaking 2.6 to 2.8.

Paired Samples Test(a)

Table 6 :Significant difference between initial and final level in Functional English Respondents

	Paired Differences	t	df	Sig. (2-
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		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	INITIAL LEVEL OF WRITING SKILL - FINAL LEVEL OF WRITING SKILL	-.47500	.52711	.05893	-.59230	-.35770	-8.060	79	.000
Pair 2	INITIAL LEVEL OF READING SKILL - FINAL LEVEL OF READING SKILL	-.43750	.63333	.07081	-.57844	-.29656	-6.179	79	.000
Pair 3	INITIAL LEVEL OF LISTENING SKILL - FINAL LEVEL OF LISTENING SKILL	-.46250	.76214	.08521	-.63211	-.29289	-5.428	79	.000

Proficiency in General English and Functional English

	NG SKILL								
Pair 4	INITIAL LEVEL OF SPEAKING SKILL - FINAL LEVEL OF SPEAKING SKILL	.17500	.56870	.06358	.30156	.04844	2.752	79	.005

The above table clearly shows that there is a significant difference in all four language skills from their initial to final levels. This is because

of the fact that the four skills are adequately covered in the teaching of Functional English.

Mean Scores of Writing, Reading, Listening and Speaking skill in case of General English Respondents from Initial to Final level

Paired Samples Statistics(a)

Table 7: Mean Scored by the Respondents at their Initial and Final levels with General English

			Mean	Total respondents
Pair 1	INITIAL LEVEL OF WRITING SKILL		2.9875	80
	FINAL LEVEL OF WRITING SKILL		3.1875	80
Pair 2	INITIAL LEVEL OF READING SKILL		3.3375	80
	FINAL LEVEL OF READING SKILL		3.5125	80
Pair 3	INITIAL LEVEL OF LISTENING SKILL		2.4000	80
	FINAL LEVEL OF LISTENING SKILL		2.4675	80

Pair 4	INITIAL LEVEL OF SPEAKING SKILL	2.3000	80
	FINAL LEVEL OF SPEAKING SKILL	2.3875	80

While talking about General English respondents the mean scores of writing and reading has increased from their initial to final levels i.e. (in writing from 2.98 to 3.18 and in reading from 3.3 to 3.5), but in case of listening and speaking it remains almost constant.

Table 8: significant difference between initial and final level in General English respondents Paired Samples Test(a)

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	INITIAL LEVEL OF WRITING SKILL - FINAL LEVEL OF WRITING SKILL	-.20000	.43283	.04839	-.29632	-.10368	-4.133	79	.000
Pair 2	INITIAL LEVEL OF READING SKILL - FINAL LEVEL OF READING SKILL	-.17500	.56870	.06358	-.30156	-.04844	-2.752	79	.007

Proficiency in General English and Functional English

	FINAL LEVEL OF READING SKILL								
Pair 3	INITIAL LEVEL OF LISTENING SKILL - FINAL LEVEL OF LISTENING SKILL	.03750	.51420	.05749	.15193	.07693	.6527	.79	.516
Pair 4	INITIAL LEVEL OF SPEAKING SKILL - FINAL LEVEL OF SPEAKING SKILL	.11250	.52756	.05898	.00490	.22990	1.907	.79	.460

Comparing Functional English respondents with General English respondents at initial and final levels, it has been observed that Functional English respondents perform better at both levels and there is significant difference from their initial to final level of writing, reading, listening and speaking (see table 6). It indicates that Functional English course focuses on all language skills. In case of General English student, the significant difference can be seen only in reading and writing from their initial to final levels. While there is no significant difference in listening and speaking skills. It means that listening and speaking skills do not get much focus in General English class and the syllabi of General English at various levels lay least emphasis on listening and speaking skills.

Mean scores of Writing, Reading, Listening and Speaking skill in case of 11th class Respondents from Initial to Final level.

T-Test

Table 9: Mean Scored by the Respondents at their Initial and Final levels in 11th Class

		Mean	Total respondents
Pair 1	INITIAL LEVEL OF WRITING SKILL	3.0650	80
	FINAL LEVEL OF WRITING SKILL	3.6250	80
Pair 2	INITIAL LEVEL OF READING SKIL	3.1000	80
	FINAL LEVEL OF READING SKILL	3.5250	80
Pair 3	INITIAL LEVEL OF LISTENING SKILL	2.4350	80
	FINAL LEVEL OF LISTENING SKILL	2.6050	80
Pair 4	INITIAL LEVEL OF SPEAKING SKILL	2.3500	80
	FINAL LEVEL OF SPEAKING SKILL	2.3900	80

After analyzing the data of only 11th class respondents, it was observed that the mean score of writing has increased from 3.0 to 3.6 from their initial to final levels. Similarly in case of reading skill, it has increased from 3.1 to 3.5. In case of listening it has increased from 2.4 to 2.6 while as in case of speaking it remains almost same, i.e., from 2.35 to 2.39.

Table 10: Significant difference between initial and final level in 11th class respondents

Paired Samples tests(a)

	Paired Differences	t	df	Sig.
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Proficiency in General English and Functional English

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				(2-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
INITIAL LEVEL OF WRITING SKILL - FINAL LEVEL OF WRITING SKILL	.45000	.55238	.08734	.62666	-.27334	-5.152	39	.000
INITIAL LEVEL OF READING SKIL - FINAL LEVEL OF READING SKILL	.52500	.71567	.11316	.75388	-.29612	-4.640	39	.000
INITIAL LEVEL OF LISTENING SKILL - FINAL LEVEL OF LISTENING SKILL	.55000	.87560	.13844	.83003	-.26997	-3.973	39	.000
INITIAL LEVEL OF SPEAKING SKILL - FINAL LEVEL OF SPEAKING SKILL	.17500	.71208	.11259	.40273	.05273	-1.554	39	.128

Here we can depict from the above table that there is significant difference in writing, reading and listening skills from initial to final levels while in case of speaking skill there is no significant difference. In other words the student does not show any progress in speaking skill. The obvious reason for the present finding could be that in 11th class, student's speaking skill is less focussed.

Mean Scores of Writing, Reading, Listening and Speaking Skill in case of 12th class Respondents from Initial to Final level.

CLASS = 12TH

Table 11: Mean Scored by the Respondents at their Initial and Final levels in 12th Class

		Mean	Total respondents
Pair 1	INITIAL LEVEL OF WRITING SKILL	3.1950	80
	FINAL LEVEL OF WRITING SKILL	3.5050	80
Pair 2	INITIAL LEVEL OF READING SKIL	3.6500	80
	FINAL LEVEL OF READING SKILL	3.9000	80
Pair 3	INITIAL LEVEL OF LISTENING SKILL	2.5750	80
	FINAL LEVEL OF LISTENING SKILL	2.6800	80
Pair 4	INITIAL LEVEL OF SPEAKING SKILL	2.6050	80
	FINAL LEVEL OF SPEAKING SKILL	2,7800	80

In this case, the mean score of all four skills has increased from initial to final levels. In writing it has increased from 3.1 to 3.5, in reading from 3.6 to 3.9, in listening 2.5 to 2.6 and in speaking from 2.6 to 2.78.

Table 12: Significant difference between initial and final level in 12th class respondents

Paired samples test(a)

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	INITIAL LEVEL OF WRITING SKILL								
	FINAL LEVEL OF WRITING SKILL	.50000	.50637	.08006	.66194	.33806	6.245	39	.000
Pair 2	INITIAL LEVEL OF READING SKILL								
	FINAL LEVEL OF READING SKILL	.35000	.53349	.08435	.52062	.17938	4.149	39	.000
Pair 3	INITIAL LEVEL OF LISTENING SKILL								
	FINAL LEVEL OF LISTENING SKILL	.37500	.62788	.09928	.57581	.17419	3.777	39	.001

Pair 4	INITIAL LEVEL OF SPEAKING SKILL	-							
	FINAL LEVEL OF SPEAKING SKILL	.17500	.38481	.06084	.29807	.05193	2.876	39	.005

If we make a comparison between 11th and 12th class scores, we observe that 11th class students show significant difference in reading, writing and listening from initial to final level while as speaking skill does not show any significant difference (see table 12). In case of 12th class students there is significant difference in all four skills from initial to final level. It means that students from 12th class have more or less achieved greater proficiency in speaking from initial & final levels than 11th class. This may be due to the fact that 12th class respondents get more exposure of English learning than 11th class respondents

Comparison of Functional English and General English Respondents in general.

The below figure is formulated on the basis of the mean scores presented in the above tables calculated manually to show difference between Functional English and General English respondents belonging to 11th class in general irrespective of their initial and final levels.

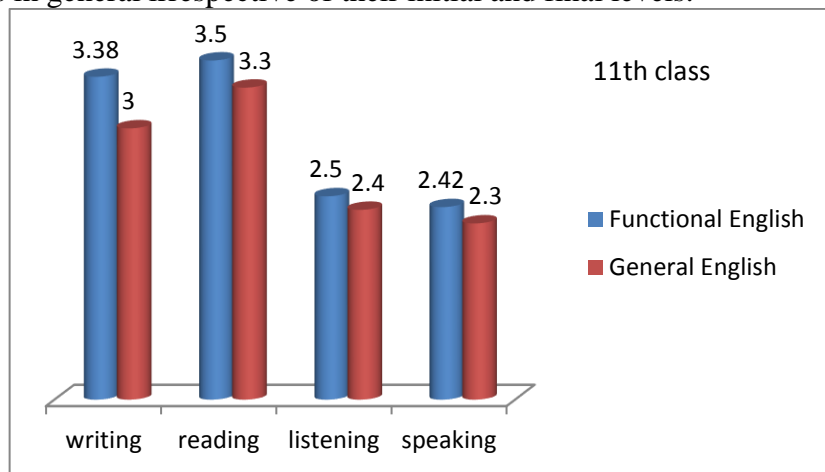


Fig 1: Mean scores showing difference between Functional English and General English respondents of 11th class

Looking at the above chart, we observe that Functional English respondents perform better than General English respondents in all four skills.

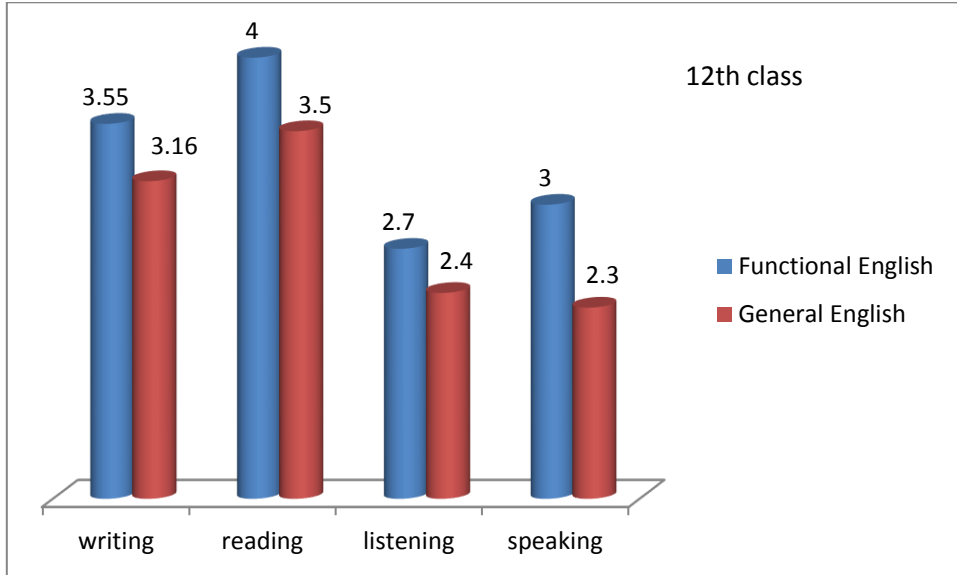


Fig 2: Mean scores showing difference between Functional English and General English respondents of 12th class

Similarly in case of 12th class, respondents with Functional English occupy higher positions in the chart than General English respondents.

From above two charts, we can make out an important point that Functional English respondents are more proficient than General English respondents both in 11th and 12th class. It is because of the fact that in Functional English course, the communicative method of teaching is utilized which hones the skills of the learners. Besides English is exclusively used as medium of instruction and no recourse to mother tongue is found in Functional English classes.

In case of Functional English students, it is observed that reading, writing and listening skills show remarkable difference from initial to final level, while as in case of speaking skill there is little difference from initial to final level. This may be due the fact that students get less exposure to speaking skill. Yet another reason may be that respondents become conscious while speaking and make mistakes which in turn effect their scoring in this skill. A further reason for these findings could be the large classes that teachers have to cope with. Because the classes are large in terms of student strength, the teachers cannot give individual attention to

all the students. Another reason for the present findings could be the defective educational system in Kashmir, especially the lack of adequate number of trained teachers. It is a fact that majority of the teachers are not well equipped and pedagogically well trained as far as the teaching of English language is concerned. Due to this reason as well, teachers are unable to effectively mould their teaching according to the prescribed curriculum objectives.

Conclusion

Brief conclusions of present study are given below:

- Functional English students perform better at both levels and there is significant difference from initial to final level of writing, reading, listening and speaking. It means that Functional English course focuses on all language skills.
- While as General English students perform better in reading and writing from initial to final levels but there is no significant difference in listening and speaking from initial to final levels. It means that listening and speaking skills are not focused much in General English class.
- 11th class students show significant difference in reading, writing and listening from initial to final level while as speaking skill does not show any significant difference.
- The study also reveals that 12th class students have better language skills than 11th class students.
- Reading and writing have greater mean scores in all four groups than speaking and listening skills.
- Reading is most developed skill in all four groups
- 12th Functional English respondents are at highest position than 11th Functional English which is followed by 12th General English respondents. The 11th General English respondents are at lowest position among the four groups.
- The results also reveal the fact that Functional English course helps the students to achieve proficiency in English language to a greater extent. It may be due to the fact that communicative language teaching method is focused in Functional English course.

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