

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The objective of this study was to evaluate the factors affecting acquisition of secondary language i.e. English, by non-native English speaking students doing their advanced degree in different fields. The study was done through conducting a survey. The groups of respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire posted and which later analyzed. The study evaluated the effect of internal factors such as motivation, attitude as well as external factors like exposure to English, and academic environment on acquiring English proficiency skills. 77 responses were used to analyse these results accounting for 33% of the total population.

More than 50% of the respondents were female aged between 25-30 years. Most of the respondents have been exposed to English less than 12 years in their native country and have used English in their previous studies and/or job before joining AIT for pursuing higher education. Almost 62% of the respondents hold a bachelor degree with Technical/Engineer academic background.

5.1.2 ENGLISH PROFICIENCY LEVEL

The English proficiency of the various non-native English speaking respondents attained from a standardized test was presented in Table 4.1. The results show a clear difference in standardized score of the two tests. The first test score which has taken by the respondents immediately after joining AIT shows that more than 50% of the graduate students scored less than 5.5, which is rated as unsatisfactory scale. There were almost 25% of the respondents whose score was less than 5.0 in first scale, which clearly indicated that even though the respondents were exposed to English in their native country less than 12 years, due to the natural habit

of conversing in their native language, their English proficiency was still unsatisfactory.

However, the scores significantly increased in the second test which is done after the respondents took English course(s) offered by the Language Center. The results show significantly higher amount of respondents scoring 6.0 and above which, according to the AWPT standards, represent a satisfactory level of English proficiency. The improvement in their English efficiency might be due to the teaching methods used by the Language Center instructors or might be due to the increased exposure to English in the multicultural environment at AIT.

The effect of exposure of language as well as internal factors on language proficiency, are discussed in the following section.

5.1.3 EFFECT OF INTERNAL FACTORS ON ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

The internal factors affecting the skills are divided in two major sections; attitude and motivation; in learning a language. The respondents were asked to fill a certain number of questions in the questionnaire on a 5-point-scale where 5 points means strongly agree while 1 point indicates strong disagreement. An analysis of the results are discussed in a separate section.

5.1.3.1 Effect of Attitude on Acquiring English Proficiency:
The effect of respondents' attitudes on acquiring the English proficiency is analyzed and presented in Table 4.3.1. The results were presented using mean along with standard deviation. It can be inferred from Table 4.3.1 that getting a better job and usefulness of English in acquiring further higher education are the two most important driving factors. Most of the respondents strongly believe that if they are proficient in English they have a better chance of getting a better job or that it will be helpful to get opportunity for higher education. However, there were very few respondents who felt that English proficiency is essential to gain respect in social circle or to achieve expertise in the field. The results clearly indicate that the attitude driven by sense of achievement in a sense of mental or financial gain is more important in acquiring the skill rather than just the individual attitude. The results, however, conflict with the

findings of Day, Raven, and Newman (1997) as well as Ching-Chun Shih, Julia Gamon (2001) which show that students with different learning styles, and attitudes do not show differences in learning.

5.1.3.2 Effect of Motivation on acquiring English Proficiency:

Motivation, according to Gardner and Lambert, refers to the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning plus favorable attitudes towards learning the language and thus can play important role in acquisition of English proficiency skill. The effects of motivation for this study are presented in Table 4.3.2. The results show that similar to attitude, the most motivating factor that affects an individual to acquire English proficiency skills are the fact that an individual with better English has a better chance to get better job and higher opportunity for further studies. The respondents do not seem to be motivated much with the fact that a better English skill will make them able to be friends with the other international students doing their gradation in same field or in other field. The results are similar to the findings of Berwick and Ross (1989) who found in their study of 90 first-year Japanese university students enrolled in an international program that has a compulsory English course that motivation was linked with entrance exam requirements.

In the case of attitude, it was found that the respondents' agreed that financial and mental achievement motivated them more than social achievement.

5.1.4 EFFECT OF EXPOSURE TO ENGLISH ACQUIRING ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

It is believed that exposure to secondary language enhances the ability to acquire proficiency in a secondary language. Considering this fact, the respondents were asked to provide their opinion on whether they feel that exposure of English has increased their proficiency in English. The result from the analysis is presented in Table 4.3.3. The results clearly show a strong agreement of the respondents on the fact that their exposure to English helped to gain a proficiency of the language. The academic exposure through medium of instruction and regular presentations by the respondents in English made the respondent consider it to be a very important factor to improve their English proficiency skill. Respondents also felt that, beside academic

exposure, social exposure through international friends, and participation in multicultural social gatherings plays a positive role in the improvement of their English skills. Living conditions at AIT are another factor which, according to the respondents, increases their English proficiency through regular exposure to the language. However, the respondents did not believe that the academic environment, other than class room environment, helps them much to increase their language proficiency.

5.1.5 RELATIONSHIP AMONG ABOVE FACTORS TOWARD ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

Correlation analysis of various factors and improvement of English proficiency was done by T-test analysis through SPSS. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 4.3.4. The analysis was done to show the correlation between internal as well as external factors on acquiring English proficiency. The English proficiency is measured by the standardized score. The correlation analysis shows that both internal as well as external factors significantly affect acquisition of English proficiency skills. However, motivation found to be strongly correlated with acquiring the skill, which indicates the individual's motivation is the main factor to acquire a proficiency in English. Exposure to the language is also shown to be equally important with high level of correlation with AWPT score. The results from this study resonate the findings of different groups working in the field of factor effecting secondary language acquisition.

5.2 CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to evaluate various factors affecting the English proficiency skill of non-native English speaking students. The study was carried out at Asian Institute of Technology, an International Institution providing graduate level studies in different fields and which has students from 40 different countries. Study was done through a survey completed by the graduate students, who are in their second year of graduation, and belong to countries where the native language is not English. The survey in the form of questionnaire was posted on a website. The researcher requested to the respondent through internal mail to complete the survey. A

total of 77 respondents from the total population of 207 completed the survey and thus representing 33% of the population. The results were analyzed by Microsoft Excel and SPSS version 16.

The majority of the respondents (62%) are from technical science or from engineering fields. Almost 50% of the population responded that they have been learning English in their native country less than 12 years and are involve in dealing with communicating in English in their work or study. However, the score of standardize test organized by AIT, shows different results. In the placement test, which is organized upon arrival of the new students, 50% of the respondents had an unsatisfactory level of English proficiency. The score in the second test increased significantly which shows there might be some correlation of different internal factors like attitude, motivation as well as external factor on increase in English efficiency. The external factors evaluated in this study were exposure to English and academic environment outside of classroom environment.

Further analysis of responses on questions related to internal and external factors show that both internal and external factors have strong positive relationship with acquiring proficiency in English. The fact that proficiency in English will help in moving ahead in the career either in the form of a good job or in the form of opportunity for further studies internationally was found to be the single most important driving factor for acquiring English proficiency. The results clearly indicate that more than integrative motivation, as suggest by Crookes and Schmidt 1991 (as cited in Jacqueline Norris-Holt, 2001), the instrument motivation (Hudson, 2000) is more important in the context of this study. Responses to open-ended questions, which were posted to get input from the respondents on what kind of improvement they expect to further improve their language skills, suggest that at academic level the faculty should spend more time with the students and socially there should be more community events to enhance the chances of interaction among the international community. However, the responses these open-ended questions were provided by very few respondents to offer any concrete evidence.

The SPSS analysis for correlation studies shows that motivation is strongly correlated with acquiring English proficiency. English exposure in academic

environment and daily life also shows very high correlation value with acquiring English proficiency.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Survey studies are always provide a potential disadvantage in that they depend on socio-psychological state of the respondents while they are completing the questionnaire. The author tried her level best to limit any loop holes in the collecting the data. The questionnaires were posted on web space and giving the respondents the facility to complete the questionnaire through multiple visits. The respondents were selected from second year of their study. However, the posting of the questionnaire posed another limitation since the source does not have any control on the respondents, number of the respondent prefer not the respond especially the open-ended questions. Still, looking at the trends the author would like to make the following recommendations for future studies

- A bigger scale of the survey which include questionnaire filled in front of surveyor as well as through webpage to eliminate any discrepancies
- The survey should include different nationality and nationality wise studies should be done.
- Effect of colonization and education system on language proficiency also needs to be studied.
- This particular study considers the fact that a better writing ability indicate overall a better communication skill due to a limitation of resources; however, there is a need to develop a standardized test, for institution, that evaluate all aspects of English communication skill.
- The author would like to recommend an elaborated study on the effect of other internal and external factors on acquiring other language as well as English.