



THE IMPORTANCE OF EXPOSURE IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE - STRATEGIES TO BE EMPLOYED TO IMPROVE THE STUDENT'S LANGUAGE EXPOSURE IN THE CONTEXT OF RAPID CHANGES IN THE FIELD OF TECHNOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

In the context of globalization and economic liberalization, there has been a huge demand for English in India. Previously, English was treated as an oppressor's language and there was cultural and psychological resistance to learn English. The emergence of English as a global language and the employment opportunities it provided to Indian software professionals, brought a tremendous change in the mindset of the people. The uncertainty of agriculture and the poor economic conditions made the people to change their perception towards English. They saw a ray of hope in English as a source of upward mobility. As a result of this, so many English medium schools were started to meet the demands and aspirations of the people. Number of pass outs are growing year by year but the quality is a matter of concern. Even after learning English for six to seven years in school, the students fail to acquire minimum language skills. This has resulted in the wastage of human capital and the low self esteem of the students. The curriculum writers and the teachers have been employing different methods, techniques and approaches to teach English as a second language. Students learn their mother tongue in a favourable environment with the help of the exposure they get through parents, family members, friends, neighbours and social gatherings. They learn their mother tongue without knowing alphabet and grammar. In the case of English the only exposure he gets in the class is for fifty minutes only. Hence, this article discusses the importance of exposure and the strategies to be employed to improve the exposure of the students with the help of the technology.

Key words; Globalization, Economic Liberalization, Psychological resistance, human Capital, exposure.

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INTRODUCTION

English is introduced in India by the Britishers to create a class of people Indian in blood and colour but, English in taste, in morals and in education. After learning English, they have to interpret between the rulers and the ruled. The

journey of English in India has undergone so many changes. After independence, the question of continuing English came to the fore. At that time people were afresh with the memories of the freedom struggle. There was cultural and psychological resistance among the people towards

English .After so many deliberations and discussions, English was given the status of associate official language with the idea that Hindi would replace English .But anti Hindi movements in the states like Tamilnadu forced the policy makers to continue with English. Thus, English has been continuing with the status of associate official language.

"I would have English as an associate, additional language, which can be used not because of facilities, but because I do not wish the people of non-Hindi areas to feel that certain doors of advance are closed to them. So I would have it as an alternative language as long as people of India require it"- Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, (from the Convocation Address, delivered at University of Pune on 27th Jan. 1955).

The Role of English in India after Globalization and Economic Liberalization.

With the advent of globalization, the whole world has shrunk to become a global village with the advancement of communication revolution in all the fields .English has become the lingua franca of the world. In India ,the image of English has been elevated from as a mere means of communication to the position of employment generator .suddenly English has caught the favour of the poor and middle class people as a source upward mobility. Indian software professionals getting employment all over the world with good salaries is a clear example before the people. The aims and aspirations of the people to make their children proficient in English so that they can get good jobs and change their lives, created a huge demand for English in India. So many English medium schools were opened to grab the opportunity. The uncertainty of agriculture and the poor economic conditions of the people were also the reasons for the growing demand for English in India. Number of pass outs is increasing year by year but the quality is a matter of concern. After spending ten to twelve years in school, students fail to acquire minimum language skills in English. This has resulted in the wastage of human capital and low self esteem of the students when they are tested for their proficiency in language skills. At this point, Professor V. K. Gokak's comment is worth mentioning "the study of

English in our schools is in a chaotic state today .Pupils are taught English for about six periods a week for six years. But, it has been estimated that they hardly know 1500 hundred words by the time they join a university. This means that they have hardly been able to learn English words at the rate of one word per period. They do not know how to use the commonest structures of English".

The Differences in Learning L1 and L2

A student learns his mother tongue from the moment he is born. He or she gets a lot of support from parents, family members, neighbours and social gatherings and anywhere else in the community he lives. The child is treated sympathetically whenever he makes mistakes. He really experiences what he learns or speaks. The child learns her mother tongue without learning alphabet and grammar. Strong reinforcement takes place in whatever he learns. All his needs and emotions are expressed through his mother tongue.

When it comes to learning English as a second language, the student experiences a strange atmosphere. He did not get support from his parents, friends, family members and the society as is the case with learning mother tongue. For a student of regional medium government school the only exposure he gets is for fifty minutes or so in the class only. The exposure varies on the basis of management and medium of instruction. Another important thing is that the material through which he learns does not suitable to the environment in which he lives .The summer about which he reads in the book is pleasant contrary to the hot summer he experiences. He has no where seen the beautiful daffodils of whose beauty Words worth describes in the poem. The teacher gets a feeling that the student is not able to understand the lesson however hard he tries to explain. He feels that he is doing a great favour to the students by teaching the language which is foreign in nature and difficult to learn. On the other side, the student feels that the teacher is trying to make him learn a language which is not used in the environment in which he lives .Since childhood, the students have been induced with an apprehension that English is a difficult language to learn. Thus the whole class room atmosphere becomes uncongenial to both the

student and the teacher. Another important thing is that the student does not feel the necessity to learn a new language because all his needs and emotions are satisfied with the mother tongue. The only positive thing while learning the second language is that he has the base of mother tongue and he is in a position to transfer his skills.

The Importance of Exposure in Learning English.

“Exposure, as defined in the study of Magno et al (2009), refers to the total amount of time in which an individual has contact with a language, may it be in verbal or written form, formal or informal ways of communications and in which the individual may have either an active or a passive role. Adopting this definition, exposure to a second language occurs

whenever individuals engage in conversations in the second language with family members, friends, classmates, and colleagues; whenever they read books, magazines, and newspapers written in that language; whenever they come across information being disseminated in different multimedia sources; or even when they are mere passive listeners in any activity or place in which the second language is being spoken (2 – 3)”.

According to Clark & Clark' at the very least, there must be some innate mechanisms that allow one to learn in the first place. At the same time, children will not acquire language unless they are exposed to it' (Clark & Clark 1977:298)

Various variables affect the learning of language. One of the most significant is exposure to the language itself. Students with more exposure to the target language are expected to acquire greater familiarity with the target language. Language exposure is vital to language Learning and the type and level of language proficiency that emanates from the language learning process is almost entirely determined by language exposure (Lubega 1979)

The distinction between formal and informal learning settings is significant also in debates about second language development.

Lightbown and Spada (2001) describe informal setting as the contexts in which the adult learner is exposed to the target language at home or at work or in social interaction, and formal settings as the contexts where the target language is being taught to a group of second or foreign language learners. In the formal language learning setting, the focus of learning is on the language itself. On the contrary, in informal language learning setting the focus is on meaning. According to Marsick and Watkins (1990), formal learning is classroom-based, and highly structured and purposeful.

When we talk of exposure it includes inside the class room exposure and outside the class room exposure. In the formal or inside class room exposure to English, the teacher employs different methods and approaches to achieve some specific results in the target language. Activities in the class room are planned. It is like learning driving under the guidance of a specialist. In the informal or outside the class room exposure to English, the activities are not planned. It may be friends, media or any social gathering. The student will get a real time exposure to try and test his language skills .This is like real driving experience. These two exposures are mutually helpful for the student to improve his language skills.

Studies or Observations on the Role of Exposure in the Enhancement of Learning English as a Second Language.

Rajagopal (1976), in a survey among Malay-medium pupils in selected schools in Selangor, observed that pupils who were less competent in English were those handicapped by their environment. They received less opportunity and encouragement to practise speaking English at home. Even their contacts outside the home did not provide them with situations in which they could practise speaking the language. Chesterfield et al. (1983), studying the influence of teachers and peers in L2 acquisition among pre-school learners of English, observed that in classrooms where English-preferring children (i.e. those who speak English most of the time) predominated, those children who used relatively more English with peers and who increased their English usage over time generally showed the greatest increase in English proficiency.

A study conducted on two groups of Nepalese showed that exposure plays an important role in learning English. The first group or formal group consists of twenty nine students and the second group or the informal group consists of twenty nine Members. The first group learnt their English through formal class room instruction and the second group learnt the second language through informal exposure. The majority of the informal group came from Sherpa Community and they work as Mountaineering and Trekking guides for foreign tourists and expedition teams. When they are tested for their language skills the informal group was good at spoken English skills where as the formal group was good at functional English. The informal group was free from anxiety and the formal group failed to express themselves for the fear of making mistakes. The informal group members are school drop outs or stopped studies after fourth or fifth standard. They got language skills only through their exposure to English speaking foreign nationals but the formal group students had minimum exposure except their school studies.

Chandrasegaran (1979), in a first study of its kind among Malay-medium learners of ESL in Peninsular Malaysia, noticed a definite link between degree of exposure to English and competence in the language. She also found that urban pupils tended to be better at English than rural pupils. As observed by Politzer (1965), all immigrants coming to the United States eventually learn to speak English – no matter what their educational level or language aptitude - so long as they continue to expose themselves to the TL environment.

Suggestions to Improve Exposure

1. Creation of English villages so that the students attend these programmes
2. Formation of English clubs
3. Whole school learning programme i.e. all the programmes in the school are
Designed with an eye on improving exposure to English
4. Lunch break discussions
5. Observation of 'English days' and 'English weeks' in schools and colleges
6. Movie clubs

7. Making friendship with native English speakers via social media
8. School assemblies as venues to improve exposure to English
9. NSS &NCC Camps can be utilized to get maximum exposure
10. Literary clubs
11. Class libraries with print rich short stories
12. Boarders residing in the Govt Hostels would get ample opportunities to get
Maximum exposure
13. Cell phone language learning applications
14. Self introduction of students and small skits played by students got video graphed and telecasted before the students
15. Translated books
16. Telecast of comic scenes and jokes
17. Announcements in English
18. Involving parents and parent associations
19. Language labs
20. Interactive spoken English programmes

Conclusion

The aim of learning any language is to communicate with others. The effectiveness of communication is proved when we interact with the people in the society. The more exposed we are to the target language the more fluency we get. Time constraint is the major problem in schools to provide more time to English. The only thing we can do is to make use of the available time in the best possible way. All our efforts as the teachers of English are to make the students learn English so that the student's valuable time is not wasted without any productive outcome. The importance attached to Communication skills in the job market and the role of English in the economic upliftment of the individuals by the way to the economy of the nation is the reason behind the craze for learning English. It is the need of the hour to minimize the gap between theory and practice. At the same time, there is a need for research work to be done on the Indian specific conditions instead of importing foreign methods and techniques to teach English in India. Both inside the class room exposure and outside the class room exposure of the student must be improved to get better results

in teaching English in India and to improve the confidence of the students.

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