

## **SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING TAKEN FOR GRANTED BY LEARNERS AT TERTIARY LEVEL.**

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### **Abstract**

English has been widely accepted as lingua fauna of the world and its versatile use is seen in most of the human endeavours in the society. In India, a student with a firm command over English earns a wide scope to explore the world of opportunities and career enhancement in the professional world. 21<sup>st</sup> century is the century of cut-throat competition and it is seen all walks of life in the society, so if a student won't put the best to outperform in the desired fields and career goals, he would be alienated from the world and second language learning is one of the fields to be mastered in India subcontinent.

At tertiary level students mostly concentrates on acquiring professional and technical skills. They put a lot of emphases to master them by scoring decent scores in the academic grade sheets, but tend to forget that academic score and skills are of no use if not properly communicated in the professional world and workspace without proper second language competence. This paper throws a light on all the issues which make language learning a secondary issue in career building at the tertiary level among students in India.

**Keywords:** Second language; Language acquisition and learning; English language teaching.

### **Introduction**

Language is one of the most precious gifts bestowed on human beings. It lays the foundation for the basic human existence in the society by fulfilling all the basic needs through the exchange of information and ideas among people. Language is a means used to convey ideas and thoughts from one mind to another through ages and this makes language acquisition one of the most fascinating skills among linguists. -The language is a means through which a person contemplates the past, grasps the present and approaches the future. (Sundari & Latha, 2015)

The study of language lays the foundation for all other learning in the world. It is language that makes us human, quite unique to the rest of the species on the earth and plays a vital role in the mental, emotional and social development of a person. Language is a powerful weapon to explore the world of opportunities and build strong relationships among cross-cultural societies for professional and social needs. It is a vital means of communication to fulfil professional, business, social and cultural needs to name a few. The knowledge, skills and experience expressed in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century cutthroat competitive world only through effective command over language to climb the path of personal and professional advancements. The richness and vitality of language bloom with extensive usage in the society beyond cultural and geopolitical barriers and in a long run emerge as a global language.

### **Importance of English in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

The ages of human endeavours have dominated by many languages according to the use, once Latin, Armenian, Hebrew and Greek to name a few have dominated the society but faded with the course of time when people stopped using them. In the Seventeenth and Eighteenth-century, English spread across the world due to British colonialism. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the emergence of industrial revolution and the expansion of trade and commerce had made English bloom and flourish as a global language with extensive use of English in every walk of human life to an extent that, if anyone wants to do away the use of this language will alienated himself from the mainstream of human development. According to Mahu(2012), English is the most spoken language, with an estimate of 380 million native speakers, 300 million people use English as a second language and an over 100 million people use it as the foreign language around the world. More than 54 Sovereign countries and 27 non-Sovereign states around the world have declared English as an official or co- official language for the smooth governance.

English has spread with fast pace around the world due to colonisation in the past and due to globalization in the present competitive lifestyle. It has become lingua franca and a window to the world of opportunities and human prosperity. The advancements in the fields of science and technology, business, cultural exchanges, international interdependence and digital communication have made "omnipresence" of English in all human endeavours today. Nair(2012) says that in an aggressive neo-colonial world, English gives a competitive edge to its users as a killer language, cannibalizing the users of other languages. It is one of the library languages and a key to the rich repository of knowledge. Once English was a jewel of the elite class but today it has become a necessity for the common classes to sustain a living in the society. India is known for its rich cultural heritage and diversities present in its DNA. Language is one of the diversities seen all throughout the country with people speaking different regional languages. To bring all the people together whether it is during freedom struggle then and now for successful living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is English. It has been declared an official language in India after independence seeing the importance of language in the fast- growing world of science and technology so that India can compete to prosper in the digital world. This was foresighted by architects of Indian education system Radha Krishnan of University Education Commission. -It is a language which is rich in literature –humanistic, scientific and technical. If under sentimental urges, we should give up English, and we would cut ourselves from the living stream of ever growing knowledge. (Pahuja, as cited in Joshi, 2014)

### **Second language acquisition in India**

Krashen states language acquisition as a process that occurs when the first language is learned and on the other hand second language learning is learning about a language i.e. about grammar rules, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc. Krashen further states learned competence and acquired competence develop in very different ways. He believes language learning occurs through the formal study of rules whereas language acquisition unconsciously without bothering about the convictions (Tricomi, 1986).

The global expansion of business, trade and commerce, cultural exchanges and liberalisation policies of the Indian government has increased the probability of young technocratic minds to venture out for many greener pastures of life in terms of employment, higher education, cultural exchange and professional advancements beyond geographical barriers. The teaching of English as the second language has a long history in India. It was introduced by

the British to create a sect of people who would be Indian in blood and colour but British in taste, in opinion, in morals, and in intellect for the smooth governance of the government. Though British had left India after governing for more than 200 years India could not dare to do away with English citing the benefits of this global language for opportunities and prosperity. Though, Hindi declared as the national language after independence, however, the multilingual nature exists in country's DNA did not allow flourishing, as many south Indian states don't accept it, instead of English used as an official language for language for interstate- communication. After Hind, it is one of the most spoken, widely read and written language in India. ( Vijayalakshmi & Babu, 2014).

Second language teaching in India has a long history and undergone many changes till now. It was once considered one of the much-hated languages of the masses to most learned and admired the second language of today (Gupta, 2005). Language teaching itself has undergone many changes from teacher centred learning to learner-centred learning on one hand to the literature-based syllabus to skill-based syllabus on the other. In teaching learning process, language teacher should understand the students' nature and needs following by methods and approaches that best suits students but these criteria were mostly not taken into consideration in classrooms resulting monotonous learning with limited results.( Sundari & Latha,2015) Keeping the multilingual nature of Indian sub-continent in mind, educational, in the beginning, adopted three language formulas giving equal importance to regional, national and second language. The result of the said policy found to be less effective as students managed to pass exams with little command over the second language. Most of the students in India treat "English" as a subject of study rather as a skill to be mastered. (Behera, 2013) says methods like grammar translation, situational language teaching and direct method dominated at the secondary stage. Written and reading skills were commonly focused on schools. These methods pay little heeds to equip students with language competence so teachers of English turned to other methods.

Language acquisition is a subconscious, effortless process of assimilation of linguistic knowledge. It generally takes places in the early childhood when a child masters his mother tongue or first language, whereas language learning is a conscious process of learning a language in addition to the primary language. Language acquisition is opposed to learning and is a subconscious process similar to that by which children acquire their first language (Kramina, as cited in Jeļena, 2010) There is general belief that children and young people are better language learners than adults, based on the fact that their brains have a natural ability to absorb new information as part of their developmental growth. Fossilization of language is age-dependent, as older learners are more likely to fossilize than younger ones during second language learning. Some cases adults are also more motivates as pointed out by as Janet.

Learning is slow and not innate like that of language acquisition seen among children. It needs a serious and a conscious intervention on the part of the learner to master. Here a learner needs to learn the syntactical, phonological and morphological aspects of a language. Language learning is a conscious process, is the product of either a formal learning situation or a self-study programme (Kramina, as cited in Jeļena, 2010). In India perception for language learning is related to grammatical competence rather than skills of language over the second language.

In India second language is being introduced from five years onwards when the child has already mastered the first language naturally at home through innate language acquisition. Language learning after early critical age becomes a relatively slow process depending on a personal choice of the learner, attitude and motivation from the surrounding environment. The

multilingual power structure prevailing in the society hardly creates any conducive environment of second language learning. Students also treat English as a subject of study to score grades in the examination rather than learning the language for the real-life purpose. Often seen among students in the primary and secondary schools learn English by rote certain linguistic lexical and grammatical structures only without any understanding of practical usage. The gradual learning of the second language in the said practice would result in low language competence among second language learners. To sort out the challenges of language learning in schools teachers followed certain methods and approaches like communicative teaching, natural method, the Audio-lingual method etc.

If we have a glance at the history of ELT in India, a variety of methods and approaches has been adopted to impart language competence to students. In the pre-20<sup>th</sup>-century Grammar Translation method dominated language teaching in the world followed by the Direct and audio-lingual method in the early 1900s. In the 1980s to equip students with communicative competence, CLT (communicative language teaching) was introduced. CLT not only focuses on grammatical competences but also on how a speaker produces appropriate language in a given situation based on the nature of participants and needs to be fulfilled. Some of the teachers showed an affinity for the audio-lingual method to impart better pronunciation in English speaking skills and to do away with mother tongue influence. Later task-based language learning method was introduced to tailor the language requirement according to the needs of the learners for some specific profession. Though second language teachers have turned every stone to impart effective communication skills and language competence but failed to achieve the objective.

#### Second language acquisition at tertiary level

At the tertiary level, only students realise and pay heed for the importance of second language learning in India. Students who have been learning about the language till now in terms of grammatical rules, vocabulary and pronunciation try to put language in use for personal and professional growth. The functional use of language gain importance among students to express thought and views in English to gain language competence. It is the stage students use the first language as a base to learn the second language and try to correlate both for better understanding and comprehension.

Age of learners plays a crucial role for second language acquisition and with rising in age language acquisition ability decreases among students due to fossilization of the first language. Many studies have proved experimentally that the lower the age it is easier, faster and more complete the second language acquisition becomes. Students ability to language analysis and the deductive rule-driven study of grammar is quite ineffective and frustrating for attaining communicative competence in the second language so it is much easier and enjoyable to acquire a language rather than learn (Schütz, 2012).

However as far as Indian classrooms are concerned the second language is still learned through traditional methods where teachers think teaching language is just like filling an empty pot rather than igniting the minds of students for the second language. According to Krashen (as Cited in Tricomi,1986.) language teaching at tertiary level teacher should take the help of acquired language competence which is more powerful and reliable than learned competence in the language class, however, this is generally not adopted in at tertiary level in India yet.

Students even at this stage also follow grammatical rules and basic rules of pronunciation to

gain command over the functionality of language which is quite complicated and frustrating for non-native speakers of English. At tertiary level to gain command over second language students are supposed to listen more English either from teachers, friend or in electronic media to acquire better spoken skills, as listening is the first step for language acquisition as students take into consideration the tone, the intonation patterns and the pauses between words but most of the students pay little attention to listening skills for language learning at this stage. As pointed out by Devi (2015) A child from the day of its birth acquires skill of listening and seeing and grows further till it internalizes the language it hears so listening leads to the learning of language, however at the tertiary level, students hardly pay attention to listening either at college or at home as most of the parents speak and watch regional languages. In classrooms, students get a little scope for peer teaching, group activities, and role plays so second language environment must be created for students at the college and at home for optimum English learning.

Reading is an essential skill which needs to be furnished further by the students in order to strengthen command over writing skills at this stage but situation prevailing at the tertiary level is quite dismal, students tend to read technical subject books and material, surf the internet for technical information but neglect reading language books and literature beyond syllabus. Extensive reading not only enhances reading speed but also leads to better comprehension of the written text which is very much needed for career advancement in professional life. At the tertiary level, second language learners read only to gain command for vocabulary by keeping an Oxford dictionary for references for the meaning of words they don't comprehend so the scope for extensive reading in English becomes less for learners resulting low command over reading skills.

Low reading skills take a toll during campus drives at the college level and business communication at industry level not only with respect to reading rate but also with writing skills because command over reading skill in a language is reflected in writing skills of learners.

### **The attitude of learners for English at the tertiary level**

For second language learning, the attitude of the learners towards target language and speakers plays a crucial role in attaining competence and gaining command over the second language. (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Williams and Burden 1997; Mantle- Bromley, 1995 as cited in Genc & Aydin (2017) points out the importance of learners attitude for second language learning and teacher should address these issues for better learning. They further state language teachers and students should acknowledge the high motivation and positive attitude of students facilitates second language learning (Eshghinejad, 2006). In the past ten years of teaching language to non-native speakers of English in India common issues with learners of the second language observed at tertiary level are as follows.

1. Learners take English for granted in the course of the study

Most of the second language learners in Indian educational institutions at the tertiary level take language a mere course of study that needs to be passed in order to get promoted for higher classes or to pass the professional course. They hardly try to put language into practice even in the language classroom or to fulfil social needs in the society. Language is an entity that needs to be experienced its creative use and culture but in India English is learned by rote without enjoying it. Often students seen distracted if they listen English of an eloquent speaker of English in the class for a long time.

2. Learners treat English as a subject of study instead of treating it as a language

In Indian classrooms, second language class at the tertiary level is one of the most unwelcomed subjects and students tend to bunk classes to visit library or canteen during the course of the study resulting in low attendance in the language class. Students habituated to treat English as a subject of study to score marks in the semester end exams. Students spare less time, a day before the exam to go through the rules of grammar and a few questions and answers to pass the exam. Students treat English as a mere subject which needs to be passed with a minimum score to get promoted to next semester. This tendency of students towards language has remained unchanged from primary to tertiary level in Indian classrooms even after seeing the growing importance of English teaching language for the past 200 years.

3. Environment too is not conducive for making student encounter with the second language English being a second language and multilingual nature existing in the country's DNA make a teacher create a conducive language learning environment challenging. Students are more habituated to use primary language by instinct at home and educational institutions as all students are locals from the same state and region. Lack of proper awareness among students for English and its importance in the career and professional growth de-motivates students to put the second language into practice to fulfil social needs. At home students hardly get a chance to use second language due to affinity for first language, however at educational institutions students either hesitate to speak to avoid mistakes they tend to commit in second language or the bullying faced from peer for using second language so as pointed out by Devi(2015) hence, if a teacher creates a conducive real-life environment then learners would become members of the society to learn language in the social context by applying the knowledge gained for effective communication.

4. Teachers are conservative in following the same methods that they were taught yesterday

In India, teachers tend to follow conventional methods of language teaching all throughout the career resulting paleness in professional development. Teacher loses the charm of teaching, if the same method is taught for long years without any change in its implementation, unfortunately in India teachers tend to follow same old approaches through which they were taught yester years without taking into consideration, the nature of students, needs of students and industry and environment prevailing around students. Devi (2015) states that language learning rate enhances among students if the teacher creates proper ambience in the classroom making learning language a two-way communication process.

5. Rigid conventional syllabus followed by universities and technical boards. Despite experiencing a dismal performance by the students at various competitive exams and recruitment drives after the completion of the course not much lesson being learned by the universities and technical boards at central and state level. Latest startling revelation by the CEO of one of the IT industry's Tech Mahendra states -94% of IT graduates are not fit hiring. Citing the lack of skills mostly language and employable skills as reasons for current market conditions prevailing for technical students. (Times Of India, June 4<sup>th</sup>2018) Most of the universities still focus on theoretical ways of teaching the second language rather than framing syllabus with a practical application of language in day to day application related to various real-life situations. The syllabus is also very rigid and vast resulting monotones and passive teaching and learning by teachers and students respectively. So educational boards and universities must consider including practical application of language in the syllabus such as e-learning, blogs in the fast connected digital world, Skype, mobile devices, to make language learning active and enjoyable (Sarica & Cavus,2009). Cavus & Sarica further say learning does not only accure in the classroom and should not stop after learners leave class in web-based e-learning in today's' fast connected digital world.

## Conclusion

The importance of the second language for the people of the Indian subcontinent in general and a global language in particular for the world, English is an indispensable entity in the life of a person aspiring to achieve success in terms of professional growth and personal development in the society. The command over English is a boon for people to fulfil professional, business, cultural and social needs but despite knowing benefits of language, many students at tertiary level in India take second language learning for granted in the classroom and struggle in life and profession later. Though second language teaching has undergone many changes in India results were a little disheartening as far as language competence is concerned. In India from primary to tertiary level English has become a nightmare for students who hesitate to learn and speak the language. To create affinity for the second language, students must be motivated to inculcate a positive attitude for second learning and seriously learn the language for future use rather for examination scores and grades at the tertiary level. English is a second language so students must not only use language in the classroom but even outside the class for better command and fluency. Language learning is slow at the tertiary level so teachers must make teaching and learning process active and students cantered by following innovative methods and approaches that make learners active learner of language by doing away with conventional methods. More emphasis must be for the functional use of language rather than theoretical knowledge. University and technical boards too must frame syllabus to focus the practical use of language than imparting theoretical rules of language hence if the above said steps are taken then second language command would be on par with the first language and students would use language freely and creatively for a day -to day conversation.

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