

## Insights into Second Language Teaching and Learning – An Analysis to Enhance Learner Competency

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### Abstract

The globalized business arena has brought about the need for employees who are excellently skilled in their English language skills. To compete with business worldwide, corporate organizations are always on the look for employees with adequate language skills. This has thrust the need for adopting effective language teaching methods in educational establishments. When language acquisition pedagogies are implemented efficiently in classrooms, the tertiary learners are facilitated to become proficient in their language skills. Imparting effective skills amongst these learners has become the paramount need for educational institutions. These institutions have to focus on both technical and language skills in order to make the learners employable in esteemed organizations. For language acquisition to materializemeritoriously, both teachers and the learners play a prominent role. The teachers and the learners equally contribute to the language learning process. This paper focuses on analyzing the effectual language teaching and learning conceptsthat enhance learners' language proficiency and competency.

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Received: , Accepted:

## Introduction

The globalized economy has boosted the need for producing graduates with effective language proficiency. Business organizations expect their employees to be competent in the English language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), in order to contribute to the company effectively. “Activities like emails, online chat, business presentations require ‘above average’ language skills in order to have unambiguous and clear-cut transfer of information to all participants”, (Clement A and T Murugavel, 2018 p 1). Studies have shown that the language skills of corporate employees are not adequate to meet the requirements of the business establishments. Poor language skills not only affect the employee’s professional growth but also his/her companies’ communication processes and business advancements.

Poor language skills of corporate employees have accelerated the importance of effective language teaching and learning processes. Palacios Martínez, Ignacio M(1996) while mentioning Rubin and Wenden refers to the main features in the second language learning. He points out that tactics are important for language learning, the learners are the real means in the choice of procedures, language learning is adopted and problem-solving techniques are to be used and that learning strategies are flexible.

In order to impart language learning, implementing theories in learning contexts is important. Of the many learning theories, Stephen D Krashen’s Monitor Model (1985) is of utmost importance to enhance second language learners’ learning competency. This theory puts forth five hypothesis: The acquisition-learning hypothesis (acquisition happens naturally), The natural order hypothesis (learners acquire grammatical structures in a foreseeable order), The monitor model hypothesis (learners make use of their already learnt knowledge), The input hypothesis (learner acquisition happens when inputs are given in the target language), and The affective filter hypothesis (low filter occurs when there is high motivation and confidence amongst learners, while learners with low motivation and confidence receive less input).

## Language Learning and Teaching Approaches

To enhance learner competency, certain methods of language learning and teaching can be adopted. Adopted from (Saraswathi V, 2012)

1. Languages are learned predominantly through imitation.

Imitation is an important means to learn language. It is one of the most important ways to learn a language. Imitation is a process, which starts from infancy and continues for a lifetime. In the infancy of babies, they learn the language from the environment that they live in. They listen to the voices around them. Unconsciously the language is recorded in their mind and then they start uttering a few words. After which the baby learns to talk. The child learns reading and writing skills from the kindergarten, as it starts going to school. Saraswathi V (2012) points out Behaviorism theory (B F Skinner). The theory contains major tenets of behaviorism. Saraswathi V (2012, p 18) points out that “language learning is behavior. It is not a mental phenomenon. Language acquisition by human beings is equated with the learning process of animals”. Imitation helps the learners to build new skills. Through the imitation method, higher skills are also gained. At the graduate level, language can be learnt when socializing with an academic circle. Conversing in an academic setup makes it comfortable to break the starting trouble, which most learners have. The students who come are greatly influenced by their vernacular and they have the fear to speak in English. Imitating the speaking, tone and style of academicians around, enables the learners to learn the speaking skill. Saraswathi V (2012, p 18) further states that “language acquisition depends on a chain of stimulus-response activities, in which imitation, repetition, memorization, rewards and reinforcement play a significant role”.

Parents usually correct children when they make grammatical mistakes. Children’s speaking skill is developed from their homes. As children hear the sounds of the language, unconsciously the vocabulary, style, tone and the grammatical components are registered in the mind. Whenever children commit grammatical errors, parents correct the faults. Parents play a vital role in developing children’s language skills. They help the children (kindergarten) to not only speak clearly but also motivate the children to read and write.

Persons with extraordinary IQs are good language learners. Good language learners are not only organized and creative but also possess excellent IQ. “In a nutshell, classroom based learning of a second language requires sensitivity to rules, processing speed and considerable powers of memorization in the area of verbal skills. It makes demands that can only be met by those with higher than average levels of ‘academic’ power, in other words of the intelligence that IQ tests aim to measure” says (Bonar B Martin, 2005 p 14).

Motivation is the most significant prerequisite for success in second language acquisition. Motivation is an essential factor to stimulate human beings to act positively. For learning to

take place effectively, motivation plays a vital role. In the learning context, motivation plays a forceful role enhance the learners' language skills. AlizadehMitra (2016 p 11), points out to Pourhosein Gilakjani, Leong, and Saburi, "the success of any action is dependent on the extent to which persons try to get their goal, along with their desire to do so". Motivation is the blend of effortin addition to desire to attain the objective of acquiring the language. In the second language milieu motivation depends to the extent to which the learner works, due to his or her inward desire and the satisfaction to do the task. Huitt (2001) says, learners (who are not inherently driven) can be motivated when they give more attention to the importance of learning the language. LucasRI (2010) says that "learners are intrinsically motivated to learn speaking and reading skills and are also intrinsically motivated through knowledge and achievement". Adding to this, (Alizadeh, Mitra, 2016 p 14) points out that learners' motivation can go up and down depending on the context of language learning. Motivation has a key role in the development of language skills. Teachers can play a significant role in motivating learners to the learning of a second/foreign language". Thus it is important that learners are motivated in order to enhance their language learning skills.

The timelier the children are acquainted to second language in school, the better the prospects of attainment in engrossing it. The beginning years of school education is an important phase when the cognitive skill of learners are developed. During this phase, the learners' level of observation and keenness is extraordinary and this enables them to absorb the language more quickly. Research has shown that bilingual learners are good at problem-solving, cognitive retention, attentiveness and educative growth. "Following a 'topic centred' and 'game-based' approach proved to be a very useful way to teach 'intentional' communication in a semi-natural context, and an attractive option for teaching English to the specific group of young learners. It has been indicated that language learning performed in a 'playful' atmosphere resulted into a) stimulating student's motivation, b) making students feel confident and c) creating their positive attitudes to foreign language learning" say Grivaa Eleni, Klio Semogloua and Athina Geladaria (2010, p 3703). The study points out that the young learners were exposed to various learning contexts. This helped the young learners to conceive and cultivate verbal proficiency. Role-plays were conducted during the study. It made the learning process flexible and enhanced in the cognitive absorption. Including games in the learning process brought in a relaxed environment, reduced stress, fear, and facilitated the learning progression to be successful. Grivaa Eleni, Klio Semogloua and Athina Geladaria (2010, p 3700) opine (Pinter)'s view as "Ages 'between' 5 to 8 can be considered as a sensitive and critical period for the

acquisition of basic skills in a second language as well as for the development of perceptual-motor skills. Very young learners are keen and enthusiastic, active and interested in exploration, and they are usually less anxious and less inhibited than older language learners”.

Learners commit grammatical mistakes predominantly due to their mother tongue interferences. Falla-Wood, Julia (2017) says “According to behaviourists learning theory of language, language learning is a habit formation, and the errors are due to habits already formed in L1. These behaviours interfere in the process forming habits already formed in the L2 (p 2). Touchie Hanna Y (1986) notes that research in applied linguistics consider errors as an indication of an inventive process in language learning. Further she says that interlingual errors (errors caused due to mother tongue) and developmental errors occur due to the difficulty of the second language. Interlingual and developmental factors include simplification, overgeneralisation, hypercorrection, faulty teaching, fossilization, avoidance, inadequate learning and false concepts (Touchie Hanna Y 1986).

The teachers need to focus on grammatical rules one by one. They must introduce the concept and then give exercises to the students. The need to teach grammar has become mandatory. Today, the writing skill has been the most neglected one. Making learners to understand the importance of effective writing is one of the paramount task of the English teachers. Effective writing is essential in all formal contexts like workplace, business and the academic arena. Formal writing with grammatical errors cause employees to lose jobs and businesses to close. “It is exact that putting grammar in the foreground in second language teaching, because language knowledge of grammar and vocabulary is the base of English language. Grammatical competence is one of communicative competence. Communicative competence involves knowing how to use the grammar and vocabulary of the language to achieve communicative goals, and knowing how to do this in a socially appropriate way” says Zhang Jianyun (2009, p 184). Zhang Jianyun (2009 points out that grammar, which is essential for effective writing, cannot be learnt naturally, but has to be imparted. Further, grammar is not a set of rules but a cluster of meaningful forms. Grammar is the foundation for the English language and mastering the nuances of the language is also important for tertiary learners. Thus it has become vital that effective grammar teaching methods are adopted in classrooms. The English teacher plays an important role in imparting grammar knowledge to the young and tertiary learners. Over the years, grammar teaching methods like grammar translation method, transformational generative grammar method etc., have been adopted. “Instead of teaching grammar, usage, and

as a prescriptive way to reach a uniformity of correctness, we should approach it descriptively, exploring and celebrating the many discourses that students bring to class” says Shafer Gregory, 2012 p 69. Teaching grammar has to be done systematically; therefore imparting the grammatical the knowledge needs to be one by one. The teacher can focus on one topic at a time. This will enable even the slow learners to get a hold of the basic concepts in grammar.

“Teachers should teach simple grammatical structures before complex ones”, says Saraswati V 2012 p17. The psychological and cognitive aspects of the learners need to be considered while teaching grammar. The grammatical forms have to be conceptualised with the daily communicative usage. Teaching grammar through dialogue method is an effective way to reach out to learners. “The use of dialogues in grammar teaching is useful because the use of dialogues generally matches learners’ expectations of how language is used in the real world: people use language primarily to talk to each other” (Thornbury, 1999 p76). Contextual teaching of grammar will enable the learners to relate the concepts to real life situations and enhance their knowledge. “Teaching grammar through context will help learners perceive the structures of the language effectively. If learners are given grammatical structures in context, they will be able to master the language better” says Mart Çağrı Tugrul, 2013 p 128. Teaching grammar in a simple method motivates the learners to learn the language without difficulty. The fun way method is one of the methods that lowers fear and stress in learners and enables them to learn the grammatical components better. The dreary grammatical rules can be made more interesting when fun activities are included in the teaching methodology. “Language games are an invaluable tool as they offer the elements of fun and meaningfulness in language learning. They are also a means of motivating students to learn, as well as sustaining their interest and focus in the learning itself. When learning grammar is formatted into a game, it removes the monotony that seemingly relates to it” say Metom Lilly, Amelia Alfred Tom and Saira Joe, 2013 p 402. Teaching grammar through games has proved to be a valuable method to ease the learners’ psych and enables them to grasp the concepts without difficulty. To avoid difficulties when conducting games, the following tips may be useful:

- The classroom activity should be organised. The teacher should focus on the learners’ age, level of language proficiency and interest in the learning activity.
- If the class gets boisterous, the teacher can change the activity in order to bring decorum.
- The teacher should choose activities or games that appeal to all kinds of learning patterns and modify the activities as per the need of the learners.

- For certain activities or games, the teacher can set up an established method of conducting the activity.
- The teacher has to inform the rules of the activities with clarity and understanding. The learners should have clarity on the activities given to them.

(adopted from Cam Lien and Thi Minh Thu Tran, 2017 p 68)

The teachers need to check the errors committed by the learners immediately in order to avoid the development of faulty practices. The learners need to be taught not only the right way of writing but also unlearn the wrong writing practises which they would have imbibed over the years. This is not an easy task. It involves patience and meticulous teaching on the part of the teacher. Since error correction is an indispensable part of classroom learning, utmost importance and keenness has to be to it by the teachers. Error correction should not be postponed but it has to be made as early as possible. The duty of the teacher is not only correcting the errors but doing it immediately after the activity is over. Pointing out errors instantly, helps the learner to correct his or her mistakes at once. When corrections are made at the beginning stage, complex errors at the later stage of writing or speaking can be avoided. When the teacher gives immediate feedback, it can motivate the learner to avoid mistakes and learn from the errors. Almuhimedi, Rana Abdulrahman and Yousif A. Alshumaimeri (2015, p 127) point out Long, “reactivefeedback that reacts a problem is effective in facilitating second language acquisition: it distinguishes a grammatical from an ungrammatical one, adjusts the input to match the learners’ proficiency level, and it draws attention to inter-language gaps, and motivates learners to modify the output”.

Academic resources are useful tools in presenting and conducting effective classroom teaching. Today, resources are not just in the form of papers, but also as websites, word documents, blogs, etc. The modern learners are updated in the technological advancement. Subsequently, it is even more necessary that teachers are updated in recommending technological resources to the learners. Teachers need to use knowledgeable resources to enable better learning and also the learners should be shown to the language patterns which they have been taught already. It is the utmost responsibility of the teachers to educate the learners on a concept and then build on it using examples and exercises. For example, in a class when the topic - concord is taught, the teacher should give more examples and exercises pertaining only to that topic. This brings in clarity and helps the learners to understand a particular topic thoroughly. Using resources in classroom is an important aid to the teachers. If ample resources or materials are not used, the students will lose concentration and the purpose of the class will be lost. It creates interest and

motivates the learners to learn new concepts. Resources help in achieving the educative goals and enhances the learning acquisition process. (Busljeta, R 2013) brings in the following shared aims to use resources in classrooms:

1. To motivate students
2. To develop students' creativity
3. To recollect the past information
4. To Inspire the process of understanding, interpreting, organising and blending the educational subject, logical thinking, and reasoning, communication and interaction, and
5. To Contribute to the progression of diverse skills amongst students.

When learners are permitted to intermingle freely in classroom, they study from their peers' errors. Classrooms are not just a one way communicative context (lecture), but a place where academic interactions happen amongst the faculty and learners and also between learners. Classrooms are not just places of theoretical interpretations but also interactive sessions of learning. When students interact with each other and participate in activities, the fear factor in learning is removed and effective learning is promoted. Though teachers spend hours and hours in lecturing, effective learning will not happen unless learners participate in the learning process. One such means to imbibe knowledge is through interaction. "Generating new knowledge and revealing gaps in knowledge through peer instruction, then, effectively supports students' ability to solve novel problems. Peer instruction can be an effective tool to generate new knowledge through discussion between peers and improve student understanding and metacognition" say Tullis-Jonathan G and Robert L. Goldstone (2020 p 10). Sometimes, in large-sized classrooms, teaching and learning becomes demanding. Such challenges can be overcome when the learners are allowed to do group activities. The teacher can divide the groups as four or five in a group. The groups can comprise of intelligent, average, and below-average learners. When learners of different cognitive levels are put together in a group, knowledge sharing would happen successfully. Also, these group-activity sessions enhance the problem-solving skills and critical thinking skills of the learners. Moreover learners' satisfaction in learning new concepts is also achieved. Knowledge enhancement happens amongst both slow learners and quick learners. "To achieve a critical instructional process, interaction is important. The involvement of all class members in the instructional interaction



between teacher-student, teacher-teacher, and student-student has a positive impact on the classroom environment”, say (Rasmitadila, Zulela and Endry Boeriswati, 2017 p 904).

“Learners learn what they are taught” says Saraswati V, 2012 p 17. The teaching process exhibited in the classrooms are of utmost importance. Only in a classroom setup, the learners are given the opportunity to gain knowledge and further their academic competence. Only when the fundamental concepts in language skills are taught and practised in the classroom, the learners will be able to implement it in a workplace context. The classrooms are places of active learning and knowledge gaining platforms. So, it is the ardent duty of the teachers and facilitators to impart the language skills that are essential for the learners.

### **Conclusion**

The modern technological world has become demanding and competitive. Only employees with high language proficiency are considered appropriate for organizational growth and benefit. In order to possess proficient language skills, the process has to onset from the tertiary level itself. The college English or the English taught at the tertiary level is of great importance, since it is from the colleges that learners move to the workforce. “In college English teaching, based on second language acquisition theories, teachers should establish a student-centered class teaching pattern to deliver intercultural communication knowledge, cultivate students’ intercultural communication abilities, create language acquisition environment, fully consider students’ emotional factors, and improve the teaching quality and learning effect of college English” says (Li, Changyu 2009 p 60). This paper focuses on the language learning methods and ideas to enhance tertiary learners’ language acquisition. The various methods that enable learners to acquire English language skills have been discussed in this paper.

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