
Psychological Barriers in the ESL Learning Process of Tribal Students: A Study

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Abstract:

This study was conducted among the tribal students of Kurkheda taluka, district Gadchiroli to verify the observation and to isolate the impending factors that baulk their (ESL) English as Second Language learning process. Through the study it has been observed that the pace at which the tribal students learn English (ESL) is extremely slow in comparison with that of most other students. This study tries to reveal some interesting facts, which are discussed in this paper. Of the numerous problems face, the psychological and linguistic factors are of paramount significance which adversely affect the (ESL) learning process of the tribal students.

Key Words: 1) Prejudice 2) Hatred 3) Negative attitude 4) Fear 5) Uncertainty and Confusion, 6) Anxiety and Inferiority Complex 7) Indolence and Lack of Confidence 8) Lack of motivation

Introduction:

Learning is very much conditional upon healthy emotional factors and proper thinking habits. There are many psychological variables which make or mar the language learning process of learners. Mere exogenous factors cannot improve the situation. Good motivation and positive emotions go a long way in mastering the English language or any other language. In this regard, Speaking of 'approach and avoidance motivation', a group of psychologists state that

“Motivation impels us towards some things and away from others. We seek to maximize pleasures and minimize pain, gravitate towards rewards and avoid punishment and deprivation. These seemingly universal tendencies reflect the activity of two distinct neural systems in brain.” (Michael *et al*, 2009, p.476).

When the psychological factors are favourable for the learners, actual learning takes place. True learning is sure to leave an indelible mark on the future course of actions of the learner.

“All knowledge, however acquired, all skills resulting from motor activity, all habits, all acquaintances with people and things, all attitudes built up in dealing with people and things, have been learned in the broad sense of the term.... Learning then is an activity that produces a relatively permanent effect on later activity” (Woodworth, 2001, p. 288)

A learner should have good and positive attitudes towards his/her subjects under study as also towards the teachers and the peers. Further, motivation plays a crucial role in forging ahead in one's studies. Clear thinking is yet another factor in good learning. The mind that is clouded by emotions of any sort cannot think clearly. Emotions especially negative ones blur clear thinking. Clear thinking is a precondition for clear perception which in turn is a prerequisite for acquiring a language too.

Mind needs freedom, freedom from the shackles of negative emotions such as fear, hatred, doubts, uncertainty, hesitation, anxiety, helplessness, inferiority complex, and the like. If principles of language are to be internalized they have to be perceived well. Only a tranquil mind can easily grasp the complexities of a language. Fortunately, human beings are endowed with a capacity for learning languages. In learning a language internalization of grammar is essential.

This enables the learners to use the language effectively. Language is a mental phenomenon as Chomsky asserts. In his attempt to differentiate between 'ideation and ideology'.

Very often the (ESL) second language learners do not have unburdened and clear minds. Their minds are rather weighed down by numerous problems, mostly psychological. Most problems originate from the families from where they come. Some problems are the outcome of their own environment and heredity. The hypothesis was that these psychological factors enfeeble their mental faculties and hinder them from acquiring the second language easily. Hence it is reasonable to have a closer look at some of these important problematic variables. The major endogenous or psychological variables identified are: 1) Prejudice 2) Hatred 3) Negative attitude 4) Fear 5) Uncertainty and Confusion 6) Anxiety and Inferiority Complex 7) Indolence and Lack of Confidence 8) Lack of Motivation.

The Major Impediment: Psychological Variables

The following psychological variables have been identified as the major impeding factors in (ESL) English language learning process:

1. Prejudice

Prejudice is a major obstacle in learning process and especially in language learning process. Many students come to educational institutions with highly prejudiced minds. When people are prejudiced they will not be able to cope with the reality which they encounter later, because prejudice is a judgment formed in advance without having sufficient experience, or rather it is a preconceived notion. Many students in the tribal area of Kurkheda had the prejudice that English is a difficult language. The majority of the students are of the opinion that English is a very difficult language and have a certain prejudice against English. This prejudice is a hindrance to their (ESL) English language learning process. Probably, they repeatedly heard others or even teachers affirm that English is a difficult language. This might have made them prejudiced.

2. Hatred

One of the major stumbling blocks in English language learning process is hatred or dislike. There are a few objects the students may hate or dislike. We never pay due attention to the thing or person we hate or dislike. The study proves that, the majority of tribal students dislikes learning, English as a second language. Thus, the hatred of the language as a psychological factor is a hindrance to language learning process.

3. Negative Attitude

If students have a negative attitude towards English language, they will not put in the required effort in learning the language. The attitudes of many students are negative when it comes to learning English. In such cases, the students develop negative attitudes which prevent them from approaching the language with a thirst for mastering it. The study revealed that, the students were told by teachers or others that English is a colonial language, thus, creating in them a negative attitude towards English language learning.

4. Fear

Many tribal students have vague and irrational fear of English. They fear that it is a language that is likely to bring about their possible failure in the examinations and obstruct their progress in life. Some fear that it is so tough a language that they cannot master it in their life time. Others fear that learning English is likely to retard their knowledge of or interest in their own Mother

Tongue. They fear English may snatch them away from their interest in the local language. Once the mind fears something, it tends to avoid contact with it. Thus, English learning is adversely affected. The study revealed that majority of the student have a fearful attitude towards (ESL) English language learning.

5. Uncertainty and Confusion

Several students know English well but are not sure if what they speak or write is correct. Their knowledge is not strengthened by the required level of practice. Lack of written and spoken practice and lack of language exposure makes them doubt whether they are using the right expressions or correct usage. So they are hesitant to speak or write confidently and courageously. The study reveals that uncertainty and confusion are serious problems in the use of English language. A staggering number of tribal students agreed that they suffer from uncertainty and confusion regarding the right usage and correct expressions of the English language. In this way, "Uncertainty and confusion as adverse psychological factors impede English language learning" has been validated by the study.

6. Anxiety and Inferiority Complex.

A good number of students suffer from high level of anxiety when they confront situations where they have either to speak English or to write English. During learning process also many students suffer from anxiety caused by the inability to learn the language well or the complexity posed by the language itself. The idea of a pass in English is a cause of deep concern for many students.

There are students who also suffer from inferiority complex when they confront English situations or learning English language. It is due to the feeling developed in them that English is a language of the elite class and that hailing from a poor tribal background they do not possess the ability to learn an international language like English. They tend to associate English with their one-time supposedly superior white bosses in India and also with the language of the high society, the upper educated class. This inferiority born of reverence to English or attributing to it greater difficulties than it actually has, affects their learning process adversely. Only proper guidance and effective classes can cure them of this problem.

The study reveals that, a fair number of tribal students suffered from anxiety and inferiority complex as well.

6. Indolence and Lack of Confidence

Majority of students in the tribal belt are indolent in academic matters and it is more so in the case of English because it poses greater difficulties being a foreign language. If students strain a little or put in a little more effort English can easily be learned. The tribal students generally are not that interested in English. Had they evinced sufficient degrees of interest, learning English would have been quite easy, as English is a comparatively easy language with very few inflections. Indolence is a major obstacle. The other important factor is hesitation or lack of confidence. The tribal students feel low and uncomfortable in speaking English. Being ill at ease is the outcome of lack of practice and inadequacy of language exposure. They are keenly aware that they lack knowledge and practice of English language. This is a root of their lacking confidence.

8. Lack of Motivation:

Motivation is needed for any sort of activities to be accomplished well. This is particularly so in intellectual pursuits like learning (ESL) English language. Motivation can be either internal or external motivation. If both kinds of motivation are easily available, learning becomes all the more effective. Students in the tribal areas generally lack both these types. Their non-intellectual tradition has deprived them of any internal or intellectual motivation; their un-educated parents and the ignorant and illiterate ambience around them do not provide them any external motivation. So a good number of students come to schools and colleges without adequate motivation and involve in intellectual activities of learning quite mechanically and listlessly. Teachers have limitations in this regard but persistently strive to motivate them. Students admit the positive role played by their teachers. The study reveals that most of the students get external motivation from their teachers. But how far the students are spurred by internal motivation is a dubious proposition.

Conclusion:

The study clearly reveals that several psychological factors like the ones chosen here for study have their deep impact on the minds of the learners especially the English language learners. This study is intended to help the teachers and policy makers have reliable insight into the working of the student psyche in relation to the English as a second language learning process. Although the study is specifically related to the tribal students of Kurkheda taluka of Gadchiroli district in Maharashtra, it is likely to have a bearing on the rural students in general.

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