

Learning English as a Foreign Language: A Global Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The present study focuses on the learning of English as a third language, and most importantly, a foreign language across the world. The immense popularity of English as a global subject is growing day by day. Hence, English as a third or foreign language is being taught to students to meet global demands. Though English is not an official language in many countries of the world, it has spread its utter significance in the world as we dwell in a multilingual setup. Due to migration and business, there is currently a surge in English-speaking people everywhere. English is considered the lingua franca in an international context. Bilingual students also tend to acquire knowledge in English due to the intercultural exchange that takes place in the rapidly changing scenario. Not a single society is comprised of monolinguals. All the communities of the Earth nowadays embrace cultural diversity instead of celebrating its individuality. So the requirement of teaching English as a foreign language in educational institutions has become a primary goal for educators. English is regarded as the second language in almost all European countries. The history of colonial setup in almost all parts of the world has affected the official status of English around the world. According to a study, English is considered a second language in 86 countries in the world. English is the highest spoken language and it is rapidly increasing its status. Though it is visible that English does not enjoy official status in many Asian countries, they learn English as a foreign language to satisfy the standard of multinational businesses and communication with the larger part of the world. So, this paper will explore the techniques used by instructors to train students while teaching English as a foreign language. Teachers should act like motivators inside the classroom and even outside the classroom.

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INTRODUCTION

According to a current survey, there are almost 1.35 billion people on earth who speak English. There are 360 million people who are native speakers of English in the current scenario. Apart from that English is acquired as a second language or foreign language in many countries of the world. People get confused about the terms ESL and EFL. Both words are interchangeable and extremely baffling for the non-native speakers of English. EFL classes are conducted by native speakers of English and sometimes non-native English speakers also implement various models to impart guidance on the target language. English is taught as a second language in many countries among non-native speakers where English also enjoys the official status and dominates over other regional languages.

However, English is regarded as a foreign language by some countries of the world where English is not the second or prominent language. Often students acquire the target language to fulfill the demands and challenges of technological advancement. In the growing scientific field, students learn English as a second or third language for their benefit which will further open new doors of opportunities for their career. In the present situation, exploring a foreign language especially English is a serious need for students to cater to the lucrative offers of the business world. Language acquisition takes place in the early childhood of a person. From various types of research, it is evident that acquiring a foreign language along with L1 and L2 are complex phenomena that naturally take place without any

effort. A foreign language is often interchangeably used with a second language. Both are different from each other. The second language is the predominant language in a community along with the first language. In a community, a large number of people must understand the second language and the locals use it for general communication. On the other hand, a foreign language is only taught in the classroom situation and the community very rarely uses that language in their communication. The locals never use a foreign language for their daily conversation. Hence it is different from the second language which is a largely spoken dialect of the native speakers. Learning a foreign language, especially English requires mastering the intricate grammatical structure of the language which is not easy for students always. It needs various methods to acquire the syntax of the language. The suitable age for learning English as a foreign language is still debatable in various countries. According to different experiments, a second language should be taught along with the mother tongue from the age of six. The kid must have acquired proficiency in the second language before attaining puberty. In the case of foreign language acquisition, various opinions vary in terms of their age and the suitable methods to train them with effective results. Later we will see them with accurate examples.

Literature Review

Today, foreign languages are introduced in elementary schools. High school students have lower proficiency in terms of acquiring foreign languages. (Babak Ghasemi, Masoud Hashemi, 2011)

Learning a foreign language provides wonderful facilities for kids. (Bloch, c, & Edwards, V. 1999)

From a very early period, babies capture the voices of their parents against unknown voices and different languages other than their native language. They master the intricacies of language after the age of ten years. (David Singleton)

According to different experiments illustrated in various communities, it is proven that those who are proficient in foreign languages can develop higher mental abilities, and they can develop intercultural awareness with better job possibilities...(Ferreira, F. & Morrison, F. J. 1994)

The structures, strategies, rules, and designs of a language are consciously acquired through learning. In learning a target language, a learner gathers information and utilizes that knowledge further. (Karshon,1982)

Research Problem

1. The average age of learners to acquire English as a foreign language is still debatable. So we will discuss further on this issue.
2. There are multiple methods for the kids to adopt the target language. We will analyze the suitable methods, below.

1. Research Method

The information and data are collected from secondary sources like journals, books, and web sources. The researcher has adopted a qualitative research method to accomplish the entire process.

1.1. Age Is Instrumental In Acquiring A Target Language

Nowadays, learning English as a foreign language is not at all a matter of sophistication. It is now an important choice for an individual that improves his cognitive abilities as well as social responsibility. Young children can decode the intricacies of a foreign language at a very young age. Schools generally, introduce English as a foreign language late. But things have changed now. Today, schools are implementing new technologies like software and other web sources to remove the fear from the minds of the learners. In elementary schools, English is taught as a second or foreign language. Primary students have the natural ability to acquire a foreign language more than high school students. Research is conducted on so many participants and it is proven that a better learning of foreign language takes place from birth to ten. Before they attain puberty, it is better to introduce them to two or three languages. If a child is exposed to five languages then he can master all the languages at the same time efficiently. So from research, it is shown that young children have the flexibility of the mind to adopt the structures, units, and rules of a foreign language naturally better than adults. Sometimes it is also seen that young kids transfer the structure of their mother tongue and grammar rules to the target language. Young children who learn English often get confused and mix the aspects of their mother tongue.

1.2. Factors Affecting Language Learning

There are different opinions regarding the age of the learners for the acquisition of a foreign language. Various factors like social surroundings and the ability of children affect the learning of foreign languages. Interaction is the key factor in bringing improvement to learners. While acquiring English as a foreign language, learners often practice it frequently in a supportive environment. Environment

plays a key role in learning English as a foreign language. In the environment where the kids get the scope to practice the target language and consequently, they repeat it as a habit. So more and more they are exposed to the desired language, and they find it easy to respond further. It is noticed that if the structures of the first language are different from the second language and similar to the third language then the child can learn the foreign language easily while identifying with the rules of his mother tongue. Motivation plays a significant role in facilitating interest in acquiring a target language. Motivators can make a great impact inside the classroom by propelling them to acquire the target language. There are various types of motivation. Often with the target of passing the exam, traveling, or for the job, students learn a foreign language. Motivation also comes from within to quench desires to learn a new language.

2. Methods For Foreign Language Teaching

Methods are like a roadmap for learning. They have been developed with the hope of improving the quality of education. From the criticism of past mistakes, new strategies have been developed by teachers, educators, and researchers to build future goals. In foreign language classes, knowledge is gathered through practice. Along with practice, teachers have adopted different methods to teach foreign languages to learners. Different methods are discussed below.

2.1. Grammar Translation Method

It is a universally acclaimed method where the target language is taught by translation to the mother tongue. It is the old method where grammar is memorized. Learners translate the target language into their mother tongue and there is a limited scope to communicate in the target language. Here reading and writing are given importance. Hence speaking is given less importance. While translating L2 to L1, students can not bridge the gap between their native language and target language. So rote learning of the vocabulary hampers the oral communication. It is the most common method in the typical schools of different countries.

2.2. Direct Method

It is a natural method where children learn the target language like the learning takes place in their mother tongue. Generally, while learning a mother tongue they do not make any effort to understand it. It's because a native speaker directly receives the learning through this method in a hassle-free way. So many researchers have given to the direct method of learning in foreign language teaching. It focuses on the sensory experience of the learners. The repetition of visuals and audio-lingual methods, a student can

acquire the target language. By repeating the experience, tone, and actions, foreign language is taught in the classroom situation, naturally.

2.3. Audio-Lingual Method

The audio-lingual method is different from the grammar-translation method. It depends on the sound patterns and the intonation. Pronunciation and verbal communication are important in this method. The audio-lingual method involves dialogue deliveries between learners to communicate in the target language. Like the direct method is based on the aspects of behavior, repetition, and habits. By repeating the sentences, the teachers encourage the students to attain the target language. This method is based on certain principles. While imitating the teachers, the students either learn from the audio tapes or models of learning. Memorization is a vital aspect of the audio-lingual method. Students practice it again by listening and observing the patterns of learning. While listening to the teachers, the native language of students often intervenes in the target language acquisition. It is the job of instructors to correct their pronunciation. They encourage them to form new patterns different from their old habits.

2.4. Communicative Method

A target language is taught in the classroom. The teaching and learning of the target language aims to foster the ability to communicate. Somehow the aim to acquire "Communicative Competence" was not attained. So the main purpose of the communicative method is to create students who can communicate in the target language outside the classroom. Effective communication can be possible if the learner is efficient in using the structure of the target language and proficiency in the same language. The teacher is an observer in this learning who motivates the students to communicate in the target language. Students who are aware of the functions of the target language try to be competent in speaking the language along with mastering the grammar of the target language. Teachers are the motivators in the classroom who ensure that the students acquire fluency and accuracy in the target language.

These methods have also some limitations along with many advantages. Hence all these methods have different approaches that vary with applications. They have various target orientations that depend upon the teacher who uses them to motivate learners to acquire English as a foreign language. For learning a language, a learner should be competent in four skills reading, speaking, listening, and writing. So it depends on the teachers to create efficient learners by using the best possible methods among all methods so

that they can achieve mastery over the target language.

In the global scenario, the importance of knowledge in English is growing day by day. In East Asian countries like China, and Taiwan, the popularity of English is gaining importance in the current situation. English is compulsory in elementary schools and high schools in China. The Ministry of Education aims to create interest in English. To break the language issues in a multicultural setup, the MOE of China works to improve the four skills of language learning (RSLW). Like China, Taiwan is an East Asian country that aims to convert the nation into a bilingual nation by introducing English from the primary to high school level. They also motivate children to practice English inside the classroom to improve their confidence.

“In Europe, besides acquiring proficiency in the mother tongue, it is recommended to focus on two foreign languages. In a recent report, English is the number one language at primary and secondary levels. For the upper secondary students, English is the choice language than any other foreign languages.” 86.8% of pupils opt for English, according to a survey in Europe.

In South America, learning the English language was considered a privilege in earlier times. But in such a transforming period, to meet the global standard, the Ministry of Education implements English in elementary schools in every state. In Chile, the Government in 2014, tried to implement English at the primary level to develop proficiency in English to meet global competence.

In the U.S. the motivation for learning (English) as a foreign language is more supportive than in other states of North America. Canada stands second in preferring English as a foreign language. In other parts of the world like Japan, Portugal, Spain, and Brazil due to cultural and social reasons don't need English for their daily conversations. English is a world language. So English is enjoying the status of a foreign language in these countries. On the contrary, the Governments in Sweden and Holland tend to make their countries bilingual nations. So English is a second language there like in India and Sri Lanka.

Conclusion

Hence the position of English is affected by cultural, geographical, political, and historical factors of different countries. Over the years there has been an improvement in the ratio of English speaking

population of the world. The place of English either as a foreign language or as a second language in the daily life of an individual bears importance. They keep changing their position with the requirements of an individual. So, a person learning English as a foreign language gives it a secondary position other than their native language only to express ideas. However, the people who acquire it as a second language have a greater command over English next to native English speakers. There are different theories and views regarding foreign language acquisition. It's not possible to give importance to one theory or a single method. Over the years many methods have been reformed with transformative ideas. After being criticized they evolved with positive changes. Not a single method can be proven to be best for a learner. Individual difference is also there for language acquisition. It depends on the motivation and the design that the foreign language teachers impart to learners. The learning that children acquire in early childhood determines their attitude toward the foreign language in the future. So the beginning or primary schooling period of the learners carries utmost importance in building their careers in foreign language education. So the pedagogy and strategy of foreign language teachers even from the preschool shape the competency of students in foreign languages in the future.

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