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Second Language Acquisition and Challenges in Asian Classrooms to Learn English as a Second Language

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Language acts as an instrument to express ourselves effectively in various communicative situations. Actually, Language learning is a social phenomenon and students learn their first language without much effort. But, it is the very second or foreign language which requires conscious, diligent and systematic efforts to acquire or master it. Second language acquisition is really a big challenge for all non-native speakers of that language who really deal with it; reasons may be of their academic pursuit, socio-political needs, and cultural exchange or to ensure the participation at global platform. If we talk about English language learning as a second language especially in Asian context then the challenge really becomes even more crucial. This paper is an attempt to discuss the nature of second language acquisition and factors responsible for its fast or slow acquisition and how second language learning differs from learning of first language with special emphasis on Asian classrooms challenges in learning second language (English). It further investigates what should be the ideal situations, conducive environment, role of different agencies which act as a catalyst for the learners to grasp the second language quickly and how various individual, societal, geo-political and attitudinal factors play their crucial role to determine the level of acquisition of second language and how to make learning process more natural and substantial by making language learning a joyful activity.

Introduction: Language acts as an instrument or social tool to our thoughts, ideas or feelings and helps us to express ourselves effectively in various communicative situations in our life in most convincing manner. It is a perfect medium of communication and gives an outlet to our manifestations. Its role in our life is perfect, definite and very crucial. Language learning is a social phenomenon and it comes in a natural ways and gets shaped in the prevalent environment. So, language learning is a prime activity for every individual of every society or community throughout the world. Learners learn their first language without much conscious efforts and acquire command over it due to its prevalence and its use in common in that particular country, society or such communicative situations. Due to the natural learning environment of any particular language, its speakers get command and fluency over it. But, it's the very second language which poses a challenge in front of the non-native speakers of that language to acquire it profoundly. Actually language learning is a social activity and we feel comfortable in our native language and dialects but the case of second language learning is different and requires conscious and systematic efforts, certain level of skills and greater passion to learn or master it effectively. Second language acquisition is a big challenge for all the non-native speakers of that language. Actually, there is a slight difference between acquisition and learning. Language acquisition is a subconscious process in which learners do not become too much conscious and vigilant about the technical rules and regulation of grammar or language but rather develop a kind of feel for correctness. On the other hand language learning is more conscious and systematic understanding of the language with being too much aware of rules and regulations of that language. Language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical

rules, and excessive drilling and practices. Real language acquisition develops slowly being a gradual process.

Second language acquisition (SLA) refers to both the process and study of developing the ability or competence to use a language other than the native tongue and how does a non native speaker of the language comes nearer to the native like competency and fluency in that particular language with what efforts and up to what extent or we may simply understand it as a process by which people learn second language. SLA is also the name of the scientific discipline devoted to studying that process. It also indicates how similar the acquisition process is to the first language acquisition. It refers to the language learned by the people in addition to his first language and talks about what learners do to learn the additional language with which strategies and ways.

In the case of first or native language learning, the learners learn it automatically or even subconsciously by taking no extra pain, just because of the social surroundings and its use among common people. Due to these factors even if the learner is reluctant towards the first language and does not make an effort to grasp it, still he learns it sub consciously. He learns it without making very genuine or deliberate efforts even. He does not bother about the grammatical accuracy and perfect sentence structures of that very language rather he learns these aspects without knowing even and gets full native-like command on his first language like our national or regional languages. Hence, first language acquisition is different than that of the second language learning due to so many reasons. Moreover, to get a command like native-speaker on second language is rare for the second language learner and it takes huge time and practice to get a reasonable command even, but still, by dint of hard work and right kind of linguistic strategies and speaking habits learner may reach very close to native like fluency and competency.

SLA requires a continuous conscious effort on the part of the speaker. He has to put his best efforts to learn new language code, phraseology, sentence structures and all the fundamentals of that second language including the rules, being aware about them and being able to explain them. Besides this, the crucial aspect would be that he has to learn and use it in such an environment where there is no native-like social situations or trends of that language which might have helped him to gain mastery on it by getting involved in the communicational process in that language. Speakers may be limited or may not be the best ones. So, learners may have to learn it in non-native environment which makes it even more complex where the learner will not get an appropriate environment to use that language or to listen that language. That is the root cause why learners feel it quite tough to learn a foreign language like English.

Challenges in Asian classrooms to learn English as a second language

As we know that English is an international language and acts as a link language throughout the world, so its importance is universal and a genuine need to learn and to use it, has been felt throughout the world. Specially, in developing countries, commonwealth countries. Governments of all these countries have taken initiative to ensure its fast spreading and made it as a compulsory subject at all level right from primary to university level. However, we are still far behind to reach an optimum level of this language. During that process we are facing a lot of problems. These could be of academic, social, economic or may be of attitudinal. If, we consider

this very aspect in the context of Asian classrooms setting ,then, still we are struggling in the learning process of English being a second language. There are lots of challenges in the schools and colleges in Asia which make the process even more concerning regarding the learning of English as a second language.

Major challenges in Asian context:

Non –native background: As far as English learning as a second language is concerned in Asian context, the biggest reason of not being able to acquire this language with profound command is its non-native background and having different prevalence and country specific environment. Being a foreign language, students as well as teachers find it difficult to learn and to teach. The flow and use of this language is restricted or limited in such environment and we do not have the native like environment and conducive situations. So to develop such communicative situations is really a big challenge for teachers and to be in such perfect situations for a long time is a challenge for the students to grasp it fully.

Native/regional influence: To learn a language other than native language is always a challenging task and it demands a certain levels of interest, passion and social environment which may be conducive and favourable enough to spread its use effectively and desirably. Moreover, every country has its own national tongue and different dialects which have an everlasting impact on the mindset of the people of that nation and so it becomes challenging and difficult to mould them towards a new patterns of a new language like English . Sometimes learners do not come out of the excessive influence of the national language and find it difficult to be associative with second/foreign language because of the intensive hold of the national or regional languages. So, this creates a challenge in the phase of acquiring command on second language that how to strike a balance between the national tongue and second language like English. Moreover, our Asian students find it very difficult to cope up with English language.

Social and political factors: Asia, being biggest continent has very diverse social and political scenario with their unique socio-cultural aspects, which brings variation in terms of the English use and its spreading. Sometimes country's social code and cultural values do not allow such flexible constructive situations for its crucial usability. They become more particular about their own custom and codes and do not adopt such encouraging steps to make this possible that English learning should be developed to meet out the demands of this ever changing global scenario.

Narrow domestic walls and geo-political impact: In Asia we have a variety of students who belong to absolutely different set up and community which have very different ways of life and in terms of geographical and political front they also have their own attitudes and perceptions toward new language and culture, because language also connect the very concept of culture. So, such rigidity and non- flexibility make the country aloof and disconnected from the larger and global culture and happenings. English, today serves as a political, scientific and library

language throughout the world and also acts as a language of medical science, research, cultural exchange as well as language of international negotiation or relations. So, its importance in this phase is indispensable and cannot be undermined under such narrow attitudes and taking it as major threat to their own country's social code and culture. They need to be more liberal enough to let the flow of English language be spread and ensure its positive growth in their countries to make themselves connected with the larger culture of the world. So, such narrowness, religious ferment may also hinder the smooth process of the English in our continent.

In Asian context English language learning is a complex whole because of variety of reasons. As it is quite clear that English in Asian context is a foreign/second language and even on that very ground students take it guaranteed that they have to wrestle with this language, however it could be their psychological fear only which can be overpowered through various means and tactics.

Students are more prone to cram than to understand the concept: Students in Asian country find English a tough area to deal with and they heavily rely on the cramming strategy rather than putting themselves into such real learning situations. So, they do not develop the confidence level which is directly associated with the right kind of conceptual clarity. So, to tackle such situation is really very challenging that how to make students realized about true learning aspects which give profound and substantial base for real learning .

Psychological factors: Students take it a tough and very challenging subject as well as they are given to this thought that it's out of their reach and comprehension. So, this kind of tendency itself poses a challenge that how to motivate the students to come out of such negativity or psychological fear.

Crowded classrooms: In Asia, classrooms are still dense and crowded and teacher- taught ratio is not that good which may help the teacher to take an individual attention towards the students in the class on equal terms which creates a disequilibrium in the class and most students are left with doubts and uncertainty. This problem is the outcome of so many factors like non-availability of resources, funds etc. which themselves are challenging factors in this process.

Syllabus is too much bookish and does not caters the diverse needs of the individual at all level: Students' main motive is to pass the exam with good score irrespective of the practical implication and to be able to make the best use of such knowledge in real life situations. Hence, there is a missing link between the syllabus prescribed and the needs of the diverse learners. Due to this factor students may develop the tendencies of disinterest and loose an interest in class and subject. It would be very harmful and challenging situation for all the policy makers and the teachers and educationists.

Diverse learners : In most of the countries like India where the learners are very diverse in terms of background, religion, caste and creed, sometimes it becomes even more challenging for the teacher to make them understand uniformly because of their different orientation and perceptibility. So is the case with learners they may find aloof if they are in minority in the class

and may certainly develop a tendency of neglect and inferiority complex, which is really a dangerous sign for the integrity of a nation. In such situation the role of the teacher becomes even more crucial and they have to make every possible effort to make the students united and confident.

Physically and mentally challenged students: In Asia specially in India there is a large section of the students who is physically and mentally retarded or challenged with very low mental I.Q. They aren't in a position to go with normal classroom situations. So, situation becomes really challenging when we have to tackle them. Actually, they need an extra care, attention and patience and a sense of fellow feeling. So in that case we need to have a sense of humanitarianism and specially trained teachers well suitable for the dealing of such students. Govt. should also take some special efforts by opening separate institutions and well trained teachers who could deal these situations successfully.

Traditional teaching: In most of the countries of Asia, specially the backward and far flung areas of the countries like India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh etc. where the access of the best of innovation, facilities and infrastructure is poor it has been found that the teacher are still adopting the age old methods of teaching and do not take initiative to be equal with the existing and latest trends and pedagogies. Even teachers are not well aware about I.C.T etc. that how technology is being utilized in the field of education to facilitate teaching learning process. They still heavily rely on the translation and bilingual methods of English teaching where students are being taught through making translation or using their regional tongue, which is not a true base for the learning and teaching of English. That's why students stumble in English speaking even after getting good marks in the examination.

Lack of situation based teaching (meaningful effective teaching activities) and faulty teaching pedagogies: language can be best learned and acquired through communicative situations and by providing or putting the students in some real life situations. Interaction and activity based teaching is still missing in our curriculum and practice and we merely teach the students for the sake of teaching only. We do not provide them best possible situations and areas in which they may feel like doing, participating and make an active entry, which should be the main concern of the learners as well as the teachers. Otherwise, Students may lose interest in English learning.

Not using true methods of English learning: To learn a new language we need to provide such a platform which may be favourable enough to acquire the habit as well perfect speaking situations for the learner. But, in Asian context still we are struggling to make the best use of direct method of English teaching as well as learning, even teachers keep on falling back on their mother tongue while teaching English which proves a handicap for the learner because the moment they start facing the problem of using an appropriate word, they eventually fall back upon their easier mode of speaking. So, true learning does not take place. Hence, we have to counter such tendencies.

Teacher centre vs. students centre: Classroom teaching activities should be students centre and focus point should be students only. But, still its teachers who dominate the whole class by not providing ample opportunities to the students to be the part of democratic classroom situations and activities. Student's interactive participation in teaching learning process is prerequisite condition for true classroom learning situations.

Lack of trained teachers: If the teachers are not trained enough to maintain a balance with the new ways of teaching which includes the use of technologies and new innovation, it may also hinder the process of learning of the students. Teacher should be in a position to accept new and favourable changes in teaching methodologies and training courses such as refresher programmes, workshops, conference and expert lectures should be provided or organized for the teachers to make them up-dated, then only students may find some good ways of learning and improving their strategies by taking suggestive links from their teachers. Teachers need to be given pre-service or in-service training to make them updated on priority basis.

Government policies and lack of funds and infrastructure: Asian countries are developing countries. Except very few institutes, in almost all countries there is a huge scarcity of basic requirements and resources. Technological facilitation is available to very few privileged institutions only, but larger sections of the countries have to go without it. Teachers aren't in the perfect access of these technological feature like -T.V. internet, record players, projectors, video and language lab, video graphic etc. which students not only find interesting but meaningful as well as concrete, but it's not within the reach of every school and college of these countries. They lack funds and Govt. needs to pay more attention towards this area by providing or ensuring more percentage of budget toward this main area, so students may get best of the resources and congenial environment to grow and to be skilful.

Lack of positive motivation and inspiration: Positive motivation plays a vital role in the process of learning a new language. In case of English learning student become reluctant and find it difficult to learn and practice this mind boggling language in terms of vocabulary and sentence structures. They should be motivated and well guided to realize that it is very much within their reach if they take extensive practice of it and keep on making this language the language of their day to life with their friends and learned ones. Hence, positive motivation and inspiration is imperative in the process of learning this language.

Crucial role of teacher and other agencies:

Teachers need to play a crucial role in the language acquisition process of the students in a better ways. Its teachers only who spend most of the time with the students after his/her family. Its teachers' humble duty to help their learner by providing an expert guidance and real life situations to learn and use English effectively. They need to create such conducive and congenial environment in the academic institution so students may feel like participating in all sort of productive activities. Activities should be judiciously and psychologically selected and graded as

well administered on the students. Moreover, teachers need to play a role of facilitator, guide and friend to their students. Family and the environment of surrounding society, trends also play or can play more vital role in this concern if they adopt a positive language attitude towards English by realizing its global acceptance, value and relevance that English is really a gateway to success in this modern world.

Student's front: It's actually the students who have to make their best possible efforts to ensure the command over the language. They have to develop a true interest in this global language and must have to keep a positive attitude towards the same by knowing its international status and need. But, students have lots of things which hinder this process of true learning. First, they take it as a subject meant only to pass the exam. They do not understand its manifold value for their rest of life. They learn it through faulty ways like cramming without knowing the true relationship of the concepts. They don't take an extensive practice to acquire the command on it. Speech mechanisms is faulty and they speak this language through translation in their mind into their own language which is not a true way of acquisition of language. It should be used directly, thought process should be direct and spontaneous and for that standard they need to adopt right ways of learning and need to take an extensive practice and drill on this language.

SUGGESTIVE MEASURES: Following measures may act as principle guidelines for the learners to acquire mastery over the English. However, native-speaker like command and fluency is very rare but still such recommendations may prove crucial and decisive in the course of learning English as a second language.

Students should realize (be made realized) the global importance of this very dynamic English language. Intrinsic motivation is the best way to acquire it fast and profound.

Student's sole aim should be to become a good speaker as well as to become a competent user of this global language with intensive command on its various areas like speaking, writing, active listening and pronunciation and enhancement of vocabulary.

Students should give themselves rigorous practices on this language and should deliberately put themselves into various communicative situations where they may get enough opportunities to make the best use of the English.

Students should be enough bold to tackle any communicative situation in a confident manner and should maintain their balance.

Teacher should use the simple to complex, concrete to abstract process while teaching or making students understand about any concept and topic. Communicative language teaching should be preferred in the class as well prevalent in Japan, Taiwan and in European countries. Task based language learning should be emphasized by providing creative situations in the classes. Computer assisted instructions should also be employed and should be the integral part of language learning.

Classroom environment should be democratic and positive and must ensure the participation of the each and every student in any activity or any teaching learning process. Cycle or rotation process may be used if teacher feels lack of time.

The knowledge of grammar is inevitable to be accurate and confident but, still grammar makes students afraid of it every time and everywhere, as most of the students find it very intricate to wrestle with grammatical structures of this language. Rather they should be made aware and taught with small-small steps and let them draw out the conclusions themselves after best judging the structuring of the sentences.

Egrule and Ruleg methods can be employed for grammar teaching.

Speaking habits of the students should be immediately rectified if they aren't up to the mark and should present in front of them model reading, writing and best component of active listening.

Encourage the students even if they make any mistake. Afterwards, we can apply corrective measures by making them aware about their mistakes.

The use of technology should be used in an interactive classroom. Student's speaking competence, pronunciation, stress patterns voice modulation etc. can be best judged in language laboratory and teachers should play them interesting speeches, biographies etc. to test their comprehension skills and retention abilities.

Basic phonetic skills should also be made clear to the students so they may avoid any linguistic ambiguity and may lead towards the true fluency and competency of the English language.

Contextual teaching should be emphasized in order to get a better insight into the sentence structure. Teachers should provide a context for all sort of teaching aspects.

Students should be motivated to make the best use of the dictionaries available with them. They must study at least 20 to 25 new words on daily basis with their various usages. It is important because vocabulary can't be improved within few days and it takes a lot of time to enhance the vocabulary. So, early preparation should be emphasized.

Group discussion, declamation, language games, extempore grammar games/quiz etc. should be highly encouraged in the classroom.

Don't be afraid to take risk and to conduct an experiment for any creative or innovative idea by attempting new things in the class. Simulation, role-play/enactment, co-operative learning group-activities, power point presentation etc. should be best put into the real classroom situation.

Students new ideas should be accepted open-heartedly and should also be positively reinforced for such creativity.

A sense of healthy competition should also be put among the students and to generate team-spirit, leadership qualities dilemma should be put forward in front of the students.

Students must develop a sense of love and appreciation for literature and language. A positive language attitude should be developed among students towards English language.

Student must be motivated to get native-like command and fluency habits in English.

Conclusion: Hence, we can conclude that language is a medium of our social interactions, connectivities and language acquisition or language learning is a continuous process to acquire it with refinement. Language acquisition phase is really crucial where the learners aren't very much consciously concerned about its acquisition and they get it with the passage of time due to social surroundings and prevalent linguistic scenario which help the learner to master it. Generally, first language (native) comes to the speakers in most natural ways and they learn it without making too much endeavours in this regard. The scenario is different in case of second language learning where speaker has to toil a lot in order to get a certain level of competency on that language by making his best conscious efforts. But, English as a second language especially in Asian concern poses a big challenge in front of the Asian students/teachers and common learners. Now, English being an international language is being accepted open hearted throughout the world and even the developing countries have realized its universal status and utility despite of so many hurdles in the form of concept, notions, rigidity, non flexibilities as well as challenges in the form of social, conventions and political ideologies or intricacies. The role of trained teachers, learners, social agencies (family, society) government policies and initiatives can really play a very decisive role in the fast spreading of this global language. In Asian context, we still need to take genuine and prompt steps to enhance the level of English language with earnest efforts and coming out from the narrow domesticity and rigidity. We should understand one thing that in today's world English plays its emphatic role in all sphere at international level so, if we have to meet that level we need to ensure the reach of this golden tongue everywhere.

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