Attitudinal barriers for learning English as Second language: Problem analysis

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Abstract

This paper aims at understanding the principal difficulties of second language learners in the areas of productive skills and discusses some possible remedies by showing the disparity of the problem between boys and girls in the class room. Communication is an activity dependent on the flexible nature of the participants. Unfortunately, it became rigid, inflexible and prejudiced after communication skills were declared essential for employability of a candidate. Here, we witness a serious play on attitudes. It is known that learners attitudes towards language learning process is influenced by attitudes of every individual and process of various neuro-cognitive areas, including working short-term memory, inhibitions like fear of syntax and vocabulary, Anglo phobia, etc. So it is agreed that teaching language skills without solving attitudinal problems is a futile task and some possible remedies are suggested to overcome attitudinal barriers in the learning of English as a second language.

Keywords: Productive skills, attitude, barriers, Prejudice, neuro-cognitive, Anglo phobia, syntax, remedies

1. Introduction

Globalization has changed the English language teaching and learning process. It pervades every nook of the world and is widening its scope. Global challenges have changed the ELT scenario: English language teaching is not merely teaching grammar and training students for international graduate entrance examinations, but for increasing the employment potential of a learner by strengthening his/her communication skills. Unfortunately, our graduates could not cope with industry requirements because of their attitudinal problems. They do not interact with others due to prejudices and inhibitions to switch over to communicate in Second language.

2. Statement of the problem

It is observed that communication in second language become rigid, inflexible after communication skills were declared essential for employability of a candidate. Here, we witness a serious play on attitudes where the situation demands a change in students’ psychology. Innovative change to the existing I year B. Tech English syllabus is leaving both faculty and students confused and emphasizes the need for more concerted efforts in designing the syllabus. Motivating students in the class is almost akin to generating interest in the students towards English language learning. Given the time frame of a semester system in professional courses, it is a big challenge for the teachers to generate interest within the short period of time. As mentioned above, learners’ attitudes towards language learning process is influenced by attitudes of every individual and process of various neuro-cognitive areas, including working short-term memory, inhibitions, etc. Communication exercise is affected by the values, opinions and attitudes of the sender and the receiver in a given context. It is agreed that teaching language skills without solving attitudinal problems is a futile task. It is reported in ELT literature that students get boredom if they are exposed to listed jargon of English vocabulary and mechanical grammar drills right during the early learning period.

3. Procedure used to collect data

This paper throws light upon the attitudinal challenges of English language speakers and to suggest some possible remedies to overcome those problems to learn English language without inhibitions in the class room. To bring forth attitudinal problems of English language learners, the researcher has read some related literature and collected data from students by using questionnaire as a research tool. The student questionnaire consists of two questions with a list of attitudinal problems to mark and an open question to add any other problem that is not listed (See Appendix-A). The data was collected from the students of RISE Group of Institutions, Ongole, Prakasam District, Andhra Pradesh. The population size is 150 i.e., 66 boys and 84 girls. The results of the research are presented below in the table-1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr.No.</th>
<th>Problematic Area</th>
<th>No. of Boys/66</th>
<th>No. of Girls/84</th>
<th>Total No.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Anglo phobia</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>30</td>
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International Academic and Industrial Research Solutions
Table 1: Problem disparity between boys and girls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Diffidence and shame</th>
<th>Fear of syntax and vocabulary</th>
<th>Sudden demand for speaking</th>
<th>Role of gender on psyche</th>
<th>Emotional Interference</th>
<th>Fear of failure</th>
<th>Working short-term memory</th>
<th>Prejudice and closed mind</th>
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4. Data Analysis

A sample professional student population is taken and some commonly reported attitudinal problems like Anglo phobia, Shyness and shame, Prejudice and Closed mind, Fear of syntax and vocabulary, Sudden demand for speaking, Role of gender on psyche, Emotional Interference, Fear of failure and Working short-term memory are evaluated in the context of their syllabus.

4.1 Anglo Phobia

Anglo Phobia is like a Psychological aversion towards English. Those who have Anglo Phobia dislike speaking in English. They show reluctance to listen when others speak in English. A majority of the students expressed this type of attitude. It can be consider as one of the learning disabilities and attitudinal problem of English language learners.

4.2 Diffidence and shame

Language learners are afraid to speak in the target language. They fear that they might go wrong and make mistakes. It is observed that more Boys suffer from diffidence and shame to speak in English. Nearly half the number of boys that is 30 out of 66 indicated this reason while only 18 girls among the 84 felt this as a barrier to speak in English. Shyness and feeling ashamed to learn a language are main barriers to learn language effectively. Students are thinking that committing mistake is like a transgression and take it as a prestige issue. No one can learn a new language without mistakes.

4.3 Prejudices and closed mind

No man is an island – every person should listen and talk to others to fulfill his/her daily needs. Sometimes one should try to get into the shoes of the other person to understand his/her mindset and point of view. We should keep an open mind to exchange our views with one another. Most of the students develop prejudices against other peers who are speaking well and reject new ideas, fresh thoughts which are desirable qualities to learn language. This is one of the main barriers to productive skills. It is witnessed that they don’t like to confess that they have prejudice and closed mind.

4.4 Fear of syntax and vocabulary

Students get bored to listen to jargon of English grammar like S-V-O-C patterns right from their early days of language learning. “They often think of the verb ending or word-order while they are uttering a sentence. It makes their performance halting and wearisome to listen to. This is one of the major barriers that students face while constructing sentences on their own or call to mind a right word at a right time. Surprisingly more than 90% of the girl population indicated this problem. It is very low in the boys when compared to girls. It also reduces their ability to respond quickly in conversation and to adapt to changing circumstances”. (Little wood, 1992:45) Because of this attitude they show reluctance and hesitate to speak and also suppress their thoughts within themselves. A new way of language learning process operates when they learn L2, which they might not have witnessed while learning their L1.

4.5 Sudden demand for speaking

The speaking skills have been neglected in the classroom up to 10+2 standards. Students learn English only to pass examinations. There are several vernacular movements which confuse the teen learner during his school days. The
students most often were exposed to Grammar teaching and encouraged rote learning of essays and reproducing them in the examinations. But English language teaching is not merely teaching grammar and developing reading skills, it also includes developing employability skills among students. It challenges learners to change their attitudes. Here students cannot digest sudden changes in the syllabus and hesitate to talk in English all off a sudden in Engineering colleges. As many as 24 boys and 30 girls have reported this problem of ‘Sudden demand for speaking’ as an attitudinal barrier to their English speaking.

4.6 Role of gender on psyche

Gender difference plays a vital role in the class room. It shows major impact on students attitudes when the classroom activity demands for learners response. Gender consciousness and physical changes in the body are prominent issues in the Indian classroom and this leads to a development of disparity between male and female students when it comes to cooperative learning and performing group tasks or role plays. In some cases the concept of gender creates confusion to deliver target meaning in the teaching before girls in the class room. It is evident from the study that learners are 70% consciousness of girls’ feelings, and show only 30% consciousness about how they are responding to the question or problem in the class room. The gender sensitivity in the classroom is in a very pitiable state. Because learners’ attitude towards process and language production is influenced by neuro-cognitive areas, gender conscious students hesitate to speak in the classrooms. It is found that boys are more conscious than girls when it comes to speaking in the classroom.

4.7 Emotional Interference

Feeling of sadness, fear, anger, anxiety or jubilation influences our reception and receptivity to others’ ideas. Communication is a purposeful activity based on rationality and reason and one must assure that one is not emotionally charged before one takes part in a communicative interaction. They may find it difficult to concentrate on the content of the message if one is emotionally charged. Over arousal of emotions may adversely affect encoding and decoding. 42 students out of 150 have this problem to share their views with others.

4.8 Fear of failure

It is the fear of failure that makes many people feel nervous to respond in English language, because they concentrate more on others’ feelings than that topic. They do not try to cope with nervousness; the students think more about what others feel than the topic at hand. The experimental result states that the fear of failure is noticed more miserably in girls than in boys resulting in lowering their confident levels.

4.9 Working short-term memory

Many students displayed the problem of accessing and activating linguistic knowledge stored in their mental lexicon. They are unable to hold verbal information for a long time in their working memory while communicating their ideas with others. Because of this, many students prefer writing assignments to oral work because written work allows them more time to translate their thoughts in to words and sentences. Surprisingly majority of the girls are affected by this kind of psychological problem.

5. Some possible remedies

Based on the research made regarding ‘Attitudinal problems for learning English as second language’, some possible suggestions have been given below.

- Do what you believe to be right, even if others mock or criticize you for it.
Enrich your vocabulary with prefixes, suffixes, word families, roots, synonyms and antonyms to recollect any one of the relevant words at right time in the right place.

If you are angry, consciously stop yourself from reacting—take a step back from the person, situation.

Concentrate on whatever you are listening to, whether it is a group discussion or the news items on the radio or television.

Have confidence in yourself to overcome nervousness. Keep on talking in English, whenever and wherever possible.

Grammatical awareness needs to be developed through the habit of reading and writing. So try to develop habit of reading newspapers, books, magazines etc. to get aware of syntax to some extent.

Success comes from failure and criticism. A wise person moulds his adversity, criticism and failures in to concrete and sand to built a beautiful house.

Do not be very conscious about your gender. A boy is as important as a girl or vice versa.

Do not feel ashamed to stand up and speak in English. Feel that you are gaining an important employability skill when you interact in English with your peers and teachers.

"Learning from mistake is greatness
Greatness is proportional to criticism
Success is proportional to failures."

Think in English, dream in English and develop passion towards English language.

"The bread baked without love will become bitter that feeds half mans hungry"

Regular practice is required to store the new information in long term memory, because lack of rehearsal or practice of new information, so it fades before reaching long – term memory.

College management should recruit Psychologist to counsel and give training to mitigate attitudinal barriers in the students.

A psyche with diffident manner needs continuous motivation in order to raise confident levels in learners of English as second language.

"People who do not learn lessons from history are doomed. Failure is a teacher if we have the right attitude."

- Shiv Khera. You Can Win.

6. Conclusion

Thus it is recognized that the intensity of attitudinal barriers in English as a second language learners and, the research findings concluded that the significant disparity of the problem between boys and girls was found with the help of data analysis collected from the students. The problem rings warning bell to remove attitudinal barriers in order to develop productive skills in the students. Thus this paper showed the principal difficulties of learners in the areas of productive skills, and discussed some possible remedies.

References:


(7) KVSG Murali Krishna, KVKK Prasad, 2002-2003,Placements and Personality Development.

Appendix-A
Questionnaire

Dear Students

I’m doing research on ‘Attitudinal barriers for learning English as Second language: Problem analysis’. So your valuable and genuine responses are needed to identify attitudinal barriers and to suggest some possible remedies.

1. Why do you hesitate to speak in English in the class room, what are the reasons?

Instruction: Mark (✔️) the column against the problematic areas mentioned below.

Name: ___________________________ Gender: M/F

Branch: __________________________

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2. Add other problems which are not mentioned in the above list.

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Thanks for your Co-operation