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Contents

From the Editor's Desk

Papers presented at the International Conference from 28 to 30 December 2015
at Vidyamandir College Payyanur, Kerala: Part I

1. Patil Z N	Ideas That Have Transformed Second/Foreign Language Pedagogy	3
2. Gururaj S.	Smell of Soil and Sweat without an Elegant Bloom: Yanadis in Karnataka	12
3. Jainlal V S	The Lasting Significance of Classroom Reading in the Age of ICT	18
4. Al Muneera J	The Road Not Taken: New Ways for the Teaching of English in Rural Classrooms	22
5. Fahmeeda. P.	The Concept of New Woman in the Women Writers of the West: Olive Schreiner, Sarah Grand and Mona Caird	27
6. Maria Liza Mathew & Binu Zachariah	Semantic Mapping for Reading Performance	31
7. Aby John	Trepidation of Colonial Paranoia: A Comparative Reading of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and J.M. Coetzee	34
8. Dipak A Bhatt & Vikas Raval	Writing Skills : A Learner Perspective	38
9. Kanthimathi K.	'Tanglish' In Written Text	42
10. Navya. V.K	K J Yesudas: A Study on the Construction of the Modern Singer's Persona	45
11. Cijo Joseph	Different Traces of Feminism in Ibsen's <i>A Doll's House</i>	49
12. Chandra Sekhar C.	Dalits and Conversion to Christianity in Colonial Rayalaseema	54
13. Sabari G Rajan	Through the Unheard Voices: A Subaltern Reading of <i>Kaalam</i>	58
14. Jayalakshmi S.	Learners' Attitude vs. Teacher's Motivation in ESL Classrooms - a Qualitative Assessment	61
15. Mareena Alexander	Problems of Learning and Teaching of English to the Students of Engineering, Songkhla Province, Thailand	65
Book review		
Livingston George	<i>Communicating in Business</i> by Simon Sweeney	70
Parenting		
Dhanya Bhaskaran	An Outing a Month, Keeps Boredom Away	71
It works in my classroom		
Bhaskaran Nair P	Classroom Activities for Early Stages	72

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Learners' Attitude vs. Teacher's Motivation in ESL Classrooms – a Qualitative Assessment

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Introduction

It is a commonly understood that language education is a complementary process which demands the involvement of both the teacher and the learner. Assuming that a group of learners has formed a negative attitude towards English, predictably it has a certain impact on the motivation and inclination of the teacher too, thereby affecting the cadence of the class(room). The attitude of the learners and the motivation of the teachers affect alike a holistic language education in important ways. Sentiments apart, a good proficiency in English gains one a better profession, gives one a facelift, and adds to one's mileage at all possible levels of academics and profession in India, if not elsewhere. Having stated that as a fact, it becomes a matter of interest that despite the pronounced importance of this language and its status as a second language and as a medium of instruction (optional though) for more than ten years, there are still issues pertaining to the language education from the primary level till the tertiary level, the most important of which is that despite their acquaintance with this language throughout their course of education, not many of the language learners seem to have a pleasant heart for English. Especially, at the tertiary level, when the students are expected to have realized the importance of English, more often than not the teachers face an 'enough-of-it' kind of an attitude from the learners' end, and it thus becomes difficult for them to motivate these students and ensure complete involvement in the class. Among the several factors that contribute to the failure of a language class, this attitude of the learners appears to be the strongest in spoiling the motivation of the language teachers. This paper

is an outcome of a subjective yet genuine inquisitiveness into what actually happens when the learners have a strong mindset leading to a great degree of indifference in the language class.

Significance of this study

Attitude and motivation are two vital concepts in the field of educational psychology and their role cannot be underestimated in the domain of language education. As a matter of fact, it is beyond any question that the personalities, interests, needs and social and educational backgrounds of the teachers and the learners can definitely influence the achievement of the objectives of education. Nevertheless, when it comes to teaching English as a second language in a multilingual milieu like India, the issue of maintaining positive attitude of the learners and sustained motivation of the teachers is indeed a demanding yet crucial task. This is even more important at the tertiary level because after having been in contact with this language for more than ten years the learners still struggle to communicate in English. On the other hand, even the highly motivated teachers, despite the goodies that their profession offers, tend to lose heart at the pupils' poor levels of achievement in English and start to experience states more of failure and disappointment than of success and progress. This study is significant in that, many a time, in the chaos connected to exams, the teachers as well as the learners tend to overlook the need to revive the nerve of language learning at least to enjoy the very process, if not achieve the objectives of language learning/teaching.

Scope and Limitations

This study analyses the attitude of the learners

and the motivation of the teachers. It does not deal with the attitude of the language teachers and the motivation of the language learners. The study is built on two assumptions:

- that the motivation of the students depends largely upon and is determined by their attitude towards the language, and
- that the language teachers have taken up English for their profession itself is a justification for the positive attitude they have towards this language, the very fact that nullifies the need for an assessment of their attitude

There have been solid studies on the second language motivation by pioneers like Gardner (1985), who has made in depth analyses of the role of L2 learning motivation and hypothesized that L2 learners with positive attitudes toward the target language, culture and people will learn the target language more effectively than those who do not have such positive attitudes. According to him there are three key components that go into second language motivation viz. *motivational intensity or effort, desire to learn the language and attitudes towards learning the language*. Taking the cue from his Socio-educational Model of Second Language Acquisition this study attempts to validate some of the claims pertaining to attitude in the context of Second Language Learning and Teaching.

Developing the proficiency of the language learners in the second/target language is acknowledged to be a complex process which involves various factors viz. learner anxiety, their beliefs and attitude, teachers' motivation and so on. Of all these factors, this study concentrates more on the attitude of the students and subsequently its impact on the motivational levels of the teacher. The argument is built on the observation that despite the efforts that the language teacher takes to maintain balance and stay motivated in the language class, many a time it is the unresponsiveness of the learners that disheartens her.

As far as this study is concerned, demographic details, age and gender of the learners and

teachers were not taken into account. For teachers, extrinsic motivational factors, like salary benefits, job security and physical environment are not considered for discussion. The attitude test for language learners and the motivation test for language teacher nevertheless encompass the full range of issues and ideas involved in the topic to the maximum possible extent. However, since this study is essentially qualitative the variables for the concepts may seem overlapping. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized at a larger scale. Moreover, as the chosen area of study encapsulates several disciplines like psychology, education and the like, it requires extensive empirical authentication for accuracy and for a staunch justification of the claim made.

Methodology

The primary aim of this study is to justify that the learners' attitude is the main factor that affects the motivation of the teachers. Therefore to gauge the same, two sets of questionnaires, one for the language teachers and the other for the language learners, were prepared. Assuming that at the tertiary level the language learners could have constructed opinions and beliefs about English as a second language, the questionnaires were administered to 235 undergraduate students; responses were also taken from 53 teachers handling English classes for degree students in different Government and Government-aided colleges in a sub-urban town of the State of Tamil Nadu.

Since this study is qualitative by nature, questionnaires were semi-structured with both close-ended and open-ended questions. For purposes of validation, the questionnaire for language learners was based on the following:

1. Gardner's 2004 model of Attitude/Motivation Test Battery proposed in the International AMTB Research Project.
2. Adaptations were also made from the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) of Horwitz.

The Language Teacher Motivation Questionnaire was designed on the basis of

teachers' intrinsic motivation factors, their expectations of students and the like, for which again the ideas were adopted from the models mentioned above. In addition to the Yes/No options, all the questions carried blank space for any explanation intended, and there were also completely open-ended questions aiming at a more candid expression, however subjective it could be. Absolute liberty was given to the respondents, like they did not have to mention their name and affiliation anywhere, to ensure more transparency, honesty and authenticity in responses.

The learners' questionnaire contained 49 Yes/No questions and 7 open-ended questions. They were categorized as follows:

S.No.	Factors affecting attitudes	No. of Statements
1.	Beliefs about English and language skills in general	8
2.	Beliefs about the advantages of learning English as a second language	16
3.	Attitude towards the teacher	10
4.	Thoughts about the class environment	16
5.	Encouragement from parents.& peers	656

Table 1. Language Learner Questionnaire

The questionnaire for the learners was designed in such a manner that all the questions reflect aspects of attitude as consolidated from various definitions available. Since this is a qualitative study these different aspects or what can be called variables are more representative of their attitude than empirical.

Akin to the one meant for the language learners, the questionnaire for the teachers was used to consolidate the factors that affect the motivation of the teachers and substantiate the hypothesis of this study. The teachers' questionnaire contained 51 Yes/No questions and 7 open-ended questions. They were categorized as follows:

S.No.	Intrinsic factors affecting motivation	No. of Statements
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1.	Beliefs about English and language skills in general	11
2.	Beliefs about learner involvement in language classes	11
3.	Personal involvement towards teaching	10
4.	Efforts taken to enhance the effectiveness of language classes	9
5.	Anticipations about the teaching outcomes	8
6.	Inclination towards achieving goals as a language teacher	958

Table 2. Language Teacher Questionnaire

Data Analysis

Inferences were made from the consolidation of their responses. Some of the implications based on the research findings are discussed to help students develop positive attitude towards English language learning and for the teachers to understand the source of their beliefs and navigate accordingly. Thus from the inferences made, it is understood that there are academic as well as non-academic factors that play behind the disinterestedness of the language learners. This needs to be taken into consideration while planning remedial measures towards successful, productive and participatory language classes.

Suggestions

The results of the qualitative analyses demonstrate that among the many factors investigated in this study, it is the learners' attitude that pulls down the teacher's motivation drastically. Having positive attitude towards learning a language is a good start to learn a language. Pintrich and DeGroot (1990) maintain that students who believe that their study is interesting and important are more actively engaged in the learning process and more persevering in their academic work. In addition, language teachers also need to know their learners in order to plan the classroom procedure in the most effective way for learning. Factors like better teaching strategies, classroom and social environment can drastically reduce negative attitudes (Choy, 2002). As Hall (2009) suggests language teachers should take motivation and attitude factors into

consideration when designing English language training and instruction'.

Students' beliefs can be an obstacle if they believe that they cannot learn the new language successfully (Lennartsson, 2008). Negative attitude can impede learning a language (Ellis, 1994). But a student's negative attitudes can be changed and turned into positive ones and facilitate getting a positive result (Lennartsson, 2008). Given the multitude of factors that contribute to the learners' attitudes, it is important that teachers base their work on their genuine needs, attitudes and involvement. There is no one single formula for increasing student motivation. The key to doing this is to consider the language choices of the learners and their inclination to language learning and to plan the instruction techniques accordingly. This can improve the classroom atmosphere to an interestingly great extent.

It is not very difficult to guess that a negative attitude can be a big hurdle in keeping the learners at ease in the language class, thereby slashing their motivation to even learn, if not acquire, the language. It is understandable that the attitude of the language learners in Indian

ESL classes has been more instrumental than integrative in that a majority learns or tries to learn English in order to get through their exams or get better job opportunities. Teachers' overbearing enthusiasm for teaching the foreign language, respect of pupils, response to pupils' social and psychological needs, and good communicating skills are additional factors which can affect pupils' attitudes in varied degrees

The power of intrinsic motivation should not be underestimated, although it often appears beyond the control of the teacher. By using texts that learners can use for enjoyment, not only for learning, we can help to promote personal satisfaction with the object of study and in that way create the conditions for intrinsic motivation to be fostered. Allowing learners to choose their own topics and integrating a variety of interesting materials are also seen as important.

It is crucial for teachers and students to recognise that multiple standards exist and teachers should make every effort to identify what functions and forms of language matter to their learners.

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Problems of Learning and Teaching of English to the Students of Engineering, Songkhla Province, Thailand

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Abstract

English has become the approved international language of communication, due to the significance of globalization and increased communication between people who speak different languages. Thailand, as part of the global nation, cannot deny that English language skills is one of the vital keys within the educational development that Thai learners require in order to participate in the international society. This article focuses on my experience of learning problems of the students, teaching problems and the effective fruitful method which I enforced on engineering students of Songkhla Province, Thailand. English language teaching for engineering students is an uphill task, my experience as a foreign teacher to teach English for Thai engineering students is challenging and enriching as well. The major difficulties in the process of learning the English language for Thai students are lack of motivation, limited vocabulary of students, poor English skills. Teaching English could be fruitful reality in Thailand if the teacher is imbued with capability of understanding the students need, appreciation and the expertise for, using suitable English language teaching methods so that the built-in talents of students could be brought out and enhanced.

Keywords: English Learning problems, Teaching problem, Engineering students, Songkhla

Introduction

English language also referred as International English or Global English (Crystal, 2003) has become the recognized international language of communication. In this era of globalization, people with high proficiency to speak English is a huge asset (Gerrish & Lacey, 2010) have more access to resources and better opportunities for education and socio-economic success, as well as job advancement (Baker, 2008; Keyuravong, 2010; Tellefson, 1991; Wah Kam & Wong, 2000).

English language has played an increasingly important role as the medium of communication among people in Thailand (Somai & Intaraprasert, 2011) but not as fully developed in the nativized variety (Schneider, 2003). According to Akkakoson (2012) English has become essential for Thai students as it is the globalized language for the expansion of academic knowledge and it helps to transform the educational experience of numerous students. Therefore, English is not only a subject studied in the classroom for academic purpose, but also a medium for social and occupational fields (Foley, 2005; Masavisut, Sukwiwat, & Wongmontha, 1986).

Language in Thailand

In Thailand, there are four major dialects of the national language, corresponding to the northern (*kammuang*), southern (*tay*), northeastern (*isaan* or Lao) and central (*klaang*) regions of the country. The national standard language is based on the central

or Bangkok variety and is taught in all schools, used for most television broadcasts, and widely understood in all regions (Slayden, 2008). Bangkok is the administrative and commercial capital, as well as the most populous urban centre, so its linguistic centrality is not surprising. Each regional dialect has a modification of the system of tone contours so words are pronounced in a manner associated with a certain geographical area. In addition, many dialect vocabulary items are different from standard Thai. However, Smalley (1994, p.13) points out that there is little overt conflict between linguistic groups (with the exception of the Malay-speaking minority in the South), so that these differences are often not even noticed and Thailand is considered to be overwhelmingly monolingual.

English language in Thailand

English was introduced to Southeast Asia with the growing of the British colonial Empire. Though Thailand has never been colonized by Western countries, the role of English has gained prestige in Thai society especially in media (Masavisut et al., 1986), personal communication (Glass, 2009), and education (Foley, 2005). Surprisingly, English language teaching in Thailand has one of the longest histories among Southeast Asian countries (Bautista & Gonzalez, 2006). Though English is taught as a second language or foreign language to the schools and university students in Thailand, Thai is the national language. Also English is considered to be a foreign language taught