



Socio Linguistic Economic and Cultural Factors Affecting L2 Acquisition in the Students of Professional Courses in Andhra Pradesh A Study

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Introduction:

The study focuses on the Linguistic, Socio Economic, Cultural and Environmental factors that affect teaching/ learning in the context of teaching ESL to the students pursuing professional courses in Andhra Pradesh. According to (Bartolomé, 1995; Villegas, 1991), curriculum and instruction that attempt to build on students' cultural knowledge are part of what is called "culturally responsive pedagogy" When culturally responsive teaching occurs, students' home cultures and experiences are drawn upon as resources for teaching and learning instead of being viewed as barriers to education.

Educators generally agree that effective teaching requires mastery of content knowledge and pedagogical skills. As Howard (1999) so aptly stated, "We can't teach what we don't know."

This statement applies to knowledge both of student populations and content. Yet, too many teachers are inadequately prepared to teach ethnically diverse students. Some professional programs still equivocate about including multicultural education despite the growing numbers of and disproportionately poor performance of students.

Context of the Study:

The students are expected to be proficient in language in terms of presenting their ideas in terms of rhetoric diction and idiom. However, there exists a gap between their technical and linguistic skills. It is also observed that students appearing for various competitive exams such as GRE, IELTS, TOEFL, SAT etc., are not able to overcome certain typical speech habits, expressions, mannerisms arising from dialectical influences of their respective regions, leave alone making of common errors. Writing in L2 involves many different areas of knowledge and

skill. The ability to write creating appropriate content, coherently and logically is required on the part of the reader. According to Richards (2003), writing is the most difficult skill for L2 learners to master. The difficulty lies not only in generating and organizing ideas but also in translating these ideas into a readable text.

Hence, in this paper an attempt has been made to focus on various theoretical precepts that affect the process of teaching / learning with special reference to developing academic skills of reading and writing. The study also suggests the pedagogical implications that contribute to the teaching / learning of L2 in the context of the present study taking into account the Socio Linguistic Economic and Cultural Factors.

Viewed from a pragmatic perspective, according to Dimitracopoulou (1990), cultural characteristics of a language affect second language learning. According to him, language is considered to be a form of social action as the linguistic communication occurs in the context of structural interpersonal exchange; and meaning is thus socially

regulated. In other words, "shared values and beliefs create the traditions and social structures that bind a community together and are expressed in their language" (Carrasquillo, 1994:55)

Hence, it implies that any student whose personal values conflict with the common values is likely to experience difficulty accepting and adjusting to the academic environment. Therefore,

it is felt appropriate to account for socio economic factors which highly determine the competence of the students in academic learning.

Observations of the Study:

In this section the details of questions pertaining to educational, personal, linguistic and socio economic background are discussed. The section also presents a brief interpretation of the student responses.

Table-1

Questions	Nature of questions
Questions-1 to 4	Medium and place of instruction, educational details, region.
Questions-6 to 8	Languages known
Question-9 & 10	Difficulties faced in learning English other than mother tongue.

Discussion: Although, English is the official language of instruction, many students still use their first language in non instructional settings. Students who are from higher socio economic status (SES) groups have more exposure to different types of texts, compared with lower students from lower economic status groups. (LES). According to the respondents it was found that the discrepancies among the socio economic status cause linguistic gaps in them.

The students come from different parts of the state. Majority (95%) of the students use Telugu as their mother tongue, while a 5% of students are from Hindi, Marathi, and Tamil background. The medium of instruction of majority of students is Telugu at the post graduate level. On the contrary 30% of students come from English medium background especially in B-Tech courses (table 3.1) and remaining 70% are from Telugu medium. Hence, there is a wide variance in the competence of two student groups.

Factors affecting learning:

Learning is influenced by cultural differences

The work of Vygotsky (1978), Greenfield et al. (1996), and other cultural psychologists has demonstrated the cultural basis of learning. One example is Trumbull et al.'s (2001) work on collectivism and individualism, which refers to the degree to which a society values individual versus collective learning.

Learning is influenced by the context in which it occurs

Social, political, and economic contexts all affect learning in significant, though not always obvious or predictable, ways. Nieto (1999) cites Kinchloe and Steinberg's proposition that cognition is always interactive with the environment and that schools are never ideology-free zones.

Learning is socially mediated and develops within a culture and Community

Teachers act as socio cultural mediators, responsible for assisting their students through their zones of proximal development. Nieto (1999) cites Cummins' (1996) work on identity, affective development, and power relationships as issues that are involved in helping students move through their ZPD's to become successful learners.

Role of Teachers:

The fundamental issue in the processes of teaching-learning is the role played by the teachers in understanding the psychological barriers to learning. The teachers play a major role in observing and engaging the students to develop their intellectual and emotional strengths within the context of their everyday experiences and the society around them that in turn contribute to learning. Based on my experience of teaching professional students for the last ten years it was felt that teachers need to adapt themselves to the changing learning environment in terms of the following practices enlisted.

- retention of learners' interests by making the texts interesting, understanding the socio economic background,
- meeting the institutional demands in terms of completion of the syllabus/ new syllabus patterns,
- understanding learning difficulties with reference to linguistic and conceptual complexity of the text.

Hence, the role played by the teachers is influenced by various factors. Factors with reference to response to new syllabus patterns, background, interests, levels of comprehension,

conceptual complexity of the text, changing management, new kinds of students, new theories of teaching and learning and new technologies.. Nevertheless, teachers need to be familiar with multiple instructional strategies that help the students develop effective language skills

The teachers need to be reflective and self-critical; that motivate and help the students learn. This idea has been reinforced by theorists such as Vygotsky (1978), Greenfield et al. (1996), and other cultural psychologists opine that as part of learning teachers need to know the values, practices, and learning styles of the cultural groups from which their students come.

Finally, Gay (2000) outlines Diamond and Moore's work regarding teacher roles and responsibilities. According to them, culturally relevant teaching requires that teachers act as cultural organizers understanding how culture operates in the classroom, creating learning environments that emanate

cultural and ethnic diversity and facilitating high performance for all students;

Pedagogical Implications:

According to Ladson-Billings (1995), the importance of understanding students' particular cultural backgrounds and skills was elaborated upon with reference to funds of knowledge. Knowledge can be incorporated in order to teach academic skills. Funds of knowledge, then, refers to understanding, discovering and appreciating many cultural practices of students and their families. Various research studies by Villegas (1993) offers these methods of collecting information:

- Home visits
- Conversations with community members
- Consultations with other teachers
- Observations of students in and out of College

"Funds of knowledge" expresses the belief that students bring valuable home knowledge to the learning environment. In addition, what students bring may differ according to their cultural and linguistic backgrounds and their individual circumstances. This gives teachers the opportunity to consider how students learn to construct knowledge in social contexts. In many instances, schools and teachers are not aware of the abundant knowledge that families have

I. Joint Productive Activity: Facilitate learning through joint productive activity among teachers and students.

II. Language Development: Develop students' competence in the language and literacy of instruction throughout all instructional activities.

III. Contextualization: Contextualize teaching and curriculum using the experiences and skills of home and community.

IV. Challenging Activities: Challenge students towards cognitive complexity.

V. Instructional Conversation: Engage students through dialogue.

Conclusions

The acquisition of L2 learning/teaching can be fostered by inculcating the concept of multicultural education. It is an integrative and holistic concept. Therefore, it is very important for teachers to embrace multicultural education enthusiastically. This concept is very much suitable to promote cooperation, integration and living together of different social groups in the heterogeneity of Colleges. The teacher acts as an adviser who encourages the students to find their ways of learning (self-supported learning) and who should be open minded with respect to the outcome of learning process as long as the students are involved. The teacher should accept and encourage suggestions from potential students and their own ways of problem solving if it is in a meaningful way. Therefore, this concept should be integrated in teacher-training as well.

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