ASSESSING READING, WRITING AND ORAL PROFICIENCY OF ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN INDIA /STATE UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

English in India spans the first-second-foreign language spectrum because learning opportunities for the language are mediated by variation in environmental exposure and teacher competence. Systems delivering comprehensible input in multilingual, language-across-the-curriculum contexts could allow teachers to be learners, and learners to outpace teachers. Evaluation geared to language proficiency rather than curricular achievement would allow curricular freedom, certification of diverse attainment levels and provide alternate routes to success in English for those leaving school without a 'pass in English'.

Keywords: Reading, English, Language learners, teaching

INTRODUCTION

Recently, the spread of the English language is rampant all over the world. English language has been widely used and considered as the universal language. English is very powerful that it has been used when negotiating with very prominent personalities. With regards to worldwide meeting, the language of English is officially the language being spoken. The language of English is also known as the first language of the countries of Australia, Canada, the Commonwealth Caribbean, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom as well as the United States of America; and the second language of the Commonwealth countries like India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and South Africa as well as the other international organizations.

The modern English is quite described as global lingua franca, and it is the major communication tool for science events, business, aviation, entertainment and diplomacy. The Indian software engineers created the global computer and IT revolution, which has now spread over the whole world. In doing so a happy synthesis has taken place between the American English and English as spoken in India. The Indian English has got world-wide acceptability in all walks of life, particularly in business, finance and in the field of science and technology.

Global importance of English can not be underestimated. English has an access to significant magnitude of Knowledge. No matter what you are interested in, with today"s technological advancements and the rise of the internet you can find access to huge amounts of knowledge on just about any subject.

English language learners (ELLs) students who are still developing proficiency in English represent a large and rapidly growing subpopulation of students in U.S. classrooms. Accordingly, they are also a key group of students to consider when designing and administering educational assessments. The guidelines in this document are designed to be of use to test developers, testing program administrators, psychometricians, and educational agencies as they work to ensure that assessments are fair and valid for ELLs.

Language Arts and Skills

English language arts teachers have a lot on their plates. In fact, their plates are filled with main courses of reading and writing, with a side of speaking and listening. These topics encompass a wide range of skills, and each area is essential in order for learning to take place in all other subject areas. ELA, English language arts, teachers must always be assessing students in these areas to ensure they acquire the necessary skills to continue their education or succeed in the professional world. This lesson discusses several examples for developing effective assessments for all three main categories for ELA.

Reading

Reading skills are those necessary to read text, process the information and gather meaning. Reading is truly essential for all other subject areas. Imagine you are an 8th-grade science teacher. What would you do if your students could not read the textbook? Or could read, but got no meaning from it? Reading is a skill that is universally used not only in all subject areas, but nearly all workplaces.

Since reading is a very internal skill to develop, assessing it can be tricky. The overall purpose of assessing for reading skills is to verify students are learning how to personalize and interpret a variety of texts. Let's use a sample learning standard, or objective, to discuss ideas for assessing reading skills.

- Trace the development of a writer's or poet's ideas, viewpoint and themes through a text and relate these to other texts read.

This standard focuses on theme, which is the moral or message of the story. You can assess for theme using a number of ways, including observation, group work, creative writing and many more. You might follow these steps:

1. Spend some instructional time defining theme and finding examples in literature.
2. Assess each student, which could include a theme scavenger hunt. Give students different themes to hunt for, like everlasting love or coping with loss.

3. Students must search the textbook, or other anthologies, to find other pieces of literature that share that theme.

This type of assessment could be modified for any number of reading objectives and standards. Basically, your assessments need to show that each student is processing and gaining meaning from various texts.

Writing

The second major area of language arts is **writing**, which include skills needed to express ideas using the written word. These include grammar, punctuation, spelling and sentence structure. Like reading, writing is also essential across curriculums and in the workplace. Assessments for writing should center on students producing quality writing samples. Here is a sample writing standard:

- Demonstrate controlled use of a variety of simple and complex sentences to achieve purpose and contribute to overall effect.

From this objective, you can do a variety of activities to assess your students. Let's say your students have learned the basics of simple and complex sentences. Now you have to assess whether your students can use both types in their own writing. One activity could be an analysis of a famous speech. Have students identify the simple and complex sentences and explain why the author used them. You can use observation or group work to assess this step. Furthermore, after the analysis, have students write their own speeches on a different topic but mimicking the structure of the original speech. This will allow you to assess if students can use simple and complex sentences in their own writing. All assessments you create should involve students using a specific writing concept in their own writing.

COMMON FACTORS AFFECTING TEACHING/LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

There are so many factors that affect the teaching-learning process in India. The students in India can be categorized into two; the one is having the regional language as medium of study from the primary level and the other is having English as the medium of study. Hence, the problem of teaching English as a second language, to the Indian students starts from the pre-schooling. Further environment and family background play vital role in success of learning process. For example, countries like India, where majority of the people are farmers, have the poor background in education. Moreover, the income of majority of the families is not adequate. Hence, the parents are not interested in giving good education background to their children. In contrast, they are willing to engage the children in some jobs in order to earn money. This is the very basic reason and the affecting factor in teaching.

Secondly, the infrastructure, viz. school buildings – class rooms, labs, etc. is not adequate as required. The first category of the students are almost compelled to attend their classes under the trees even after several five year plans.

Majority of the students are coming from village and also their parents are farmers and uneducated. If the nature fails, the survival of the farmers will be questionable. Hence, the students are mentally discouraged due to the family conditions. In the second category, the students are having enough background in basic education since their parents are educated and they do not depend on the nature much. Many of the students from second category are joining in English medium schools and hence, they do not find much difficulty in pursuing their higher education. Moreover majority of the families of second category are dwelling in towns and cities and hence, they have easy access of quality education. But, the first category of students are scoring good marks the examinations conducted. It proves that they are having good writing skill in English.

The only thing is that they have to be given training in oral English communication also. Hence, a common programme for English Language Teaching must be framed in the pre-schooling itself.

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY TESTS

Oller and Damico (1991) indicate that language proficiency tests can be associated with three schools of thought. The first of these trends, the discrete point approach, was based on the assumption that language proficiency: ...consisted of separable components of phonology, morphology, lexicon, syntax, and so on, each of which could be further divided into distinct inventories of elements (e.g., sounds, classes of sounds or phonemes, syllables, morphemes, words, idioms, phrase structures, etc) (p. 82). They describe language tests based on the discrete point approach in the following way: Following the discrete point model, a test could not be valid if it mixed several skills or domains of structure (Lado, 1961). By this model, presumably the ideal assessment would involve the evaluation of each of the domains of structure and each of the skills of interest. Then, all the results could be combined to form a total picture of language proficiency.

LITERATURE REVIEW OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

The following is a review of the literature that supports content-based language learning. The articles and books reviewed here cover recent literature as well as a number of key contributions that date as far back as the late 1980s. There are many commonalities between the earlier works and those of more recent origins since the authors grapple with similar concepts. These early inquiries into content-based language learning offer insights and discuss educational benefits in the areas of learning strategies, thematic teaching, sheltered instruction, collaborative learning, use of comprehensible input and concept development.

The foundational literature is preoccupied with identifying areas of interest, while the more contemporary resources approach these issues more pragmatically. More recent texts read as "how-to" manuals for the classroom teacher. A number of additional themes emerge within this body of literature. Common instructional strategies are repeatedly cited as sound practice for the content-based language learning classroom. The development and use of native language is seen as advantageous to both learner and teacher. The learner builds cognitive resources and gains cultural knowledge, while the teacher is able to activate prior learning and build background knowledge. Under the umbrella of comprehensible input, the use of appropriate materials and visuals, modified language and scaffolding are discussed. While commonalities do emerge, the field is divided regarding direct instruction.

ORAL PROFICIENCY AMONG ESL LEARNERS

In India English is an important language occupying a high position for a few reasons as mentioned here: meeting new people and communicating with others, career and travel opportunities and improving one's academic performance in other subjects. Teaching of any language requires an assessment to check its successful delivery. Generally assessments and exams are written in nature conducted by external bodies and test only a few language skills like writing and reading. Oral skills get neglected and good grades in writing or reading skills do not necessarily mean excellence in oral proficiency. This is where the role of self -assessment comes in. Self-assessment means judging the quality of your own performance based on specific criteria.

In contemporary discourse on education in Sweden, there is a focus on educational efficiency and student achievement. Aspects of uniformity and equity in grading are often emphasized and the lack thereof is frequently attributed to teachers. English, as one of the most important subjects in school, according to policy documents and also according to teachers and students, has been subject to investigations by the Swedish Schools Inspectorate. English lessons have been observed and found to not always comply with what is stipulated in the curriculum. National tests have been rerated and found to deviate too much between raters. In an effort to explore one part of the English language proficiency taught in school, this study investigates how twelve skilled language teachers define oral proficiency, how they grade the oral part of the national test for English for year 9 and what influences their grading practice. The aim is to learn how the teachers perceive oral proficiency and the performance standards for oral proficiency in the policy documents, as well as how they organize and rate the oral subtest based on their interpretations.

A GLOBAL LANGUAGE IN A MULTILINGUAL COUNTRY
Why English?

English is in India today a symbol of people's aspirations for quality in education and a fuller participation in national and international life. Its colonial origins now forgotten or irrelevant, its initial role in independent India, tailored to higher education (as a "library language", a "window on the world"), now felt to be insufficiently inclusive socially and linguistically, the current status of English stems from its overwhelming presence on the world stage and the reflection of this in the national arena. It is predicted that by 2010, a surge in English-language learning will include a third of the world's people (Graddol 1997).1 The opening up of the Indian economy in the 1990s has coincided with an explosion in the demand for English in our schools because English is perceived to open up opportunities (Das 2005).

English in our schools

The level of introduction of English

The visible impact of this presence of English is that it is today being demanded by everyone at the very initial stage of schooling. The English teaching profession has consistently recommended a relatively late (Class IV, V, or VI) introduction of English, and this is reflected in spirit in policy documents. The dissatisfaction with this recommendation is evident in the mushrooming of private English-medium schools and the early introduction of English in state school systems.

The popular response to systemic failure has been to extend downwards the very system that has failed to deliver. The level of introduction of English has now become a matter of political response to people's aspirations, rendering almost irrelevant an academic debate on the merits of a very early introduction.

There are problems of systemic feasibility and preparedness, for example, finding the required number of competent teachers. But there is an expectation that the system should respond to popular needs rather than the other way round. We address this question, therefore, in various ways. First, we hope through multilingualism to counter some possible ill-effects such as the loss of one's own language(s), or the burden of sheer incomprehension. Second, we describe what can realistically be achieved in given situations, supplemented with affirmativeaction interventions where necessary; the aim is to identify delivery systems for comprehensible input to the child, whether in the classroom or outside it. For a fuller understanding of the issues around the early introduction of English, we have included an assessment of the "critical period" or "sensitive window" hypothesis to show that this does not entail a very early introduction of English.

The variety and range of English teaching in India

The teaching and learning of English today is characterised by, on the one hand, a diversity of schools and linguistic environments supportive of English acquisition, and, on the other hand, by systemicallypervasive

classroom procedures of teaching a textbook for success in an examination, modulated by teacher beliefs influenced to varying degrees by inputs from the English-language teaching profession.

One way to broadly characterise English-teaching situations in India is in terms of (a) the teacher's English language proficiency (TP), and (b) the exposure of pupils to English outside school, i.e. the availability of English in the environment for language acquisition (EE). (The reference for these parameters for school classification is Nag-Arulmani, 2000.) Kurrien (2005) thus identifies the four types of schools below:

1) KKTP, KKEE (e.g. English-medium private/ government-aided elite schools): proficient teachers; varying degrees of English in the environment, including as a home or first language.

2) KTP, KEE (e.g. New English-medium private schools, many of which use both English and other Indian languages): teachers with limited proficiency; children with little or no background in English; parents aspire to upward mobility through English.

3) LTP, LEE (e.g. Government-aided regional-medium schools): schools with a tradition of English education along with regional languages, established by educational societies, with children from a variety of backgrounds.

4) LLTP, LLEE (e.g. Government regional-medium schools run by district and municipal education authorities): They enrol the largest number of elementary school children in rural India. They are also the only choice for the urban poor (who, however, have some options of access to English in the environment). Their teachers may be the least proficient in English of these four types of schools.

While these examples suggest a rough correlation between type of school management and the variables of teacher proficiency and environmental English, wide variation also obtains within each of these school types. Private English-medium schools may differ in the learning opportunities they offer, and this may be reflected in differential language attainment (NagArulmani 2005); pupils in, for example, schools with class libraries read better than those in schools where reading is restricted to monotonous texts and frequent routine tests of spelling lists. Mathew (1997: 41) found, in a curriculum-implementation study, that the 2,700- odd schools affiliated to the CBSE differ in the "culture" arising from "the type of management, funding, geographic location, salary structure, teacher motivation and competence, the type of students they cater for and the type of parents". Prabhu (1987: 3) suggests that "typologies of teaching situations should thus be seen as an aid to investigating the extent of relevance of a pedagogic proposal", rather than as absolute categories.

ELT (English Language Teaching) in India Traditionally, English was taught by the grammartranslation method. In the late 1950s, structurally graded syllabi were introduced as a major innovation into the state systems for teaching English (Prabhu 1987: 10). The idea was that the teaching of language could be systematised by planning its inputs, just as the teaching of a subject such as arithmetic or physics could be. (The structural approach was sometimes implemented as the direct method, with an insistence on

monolingualEnglish classrooms.) By the late 1970s, however, the behavioural-psychological and philosophical foundations of the structural method had yielded to the cognitive claims of Chomsky for language as a "mental organ".

There was also dissatisfaction within the Englishteaching profession with the structural method, which was seen as not giving the learners language that was "deployable" or usable in real situations, in spite of an ability to make correct sentences in classroom situations. In hindsight, the structural approach as practised in the classroom led to a fragmentation and trivialisation of thought by breaking up language in two ways: into structures, and into skills. The form-focused teaching of language aggravated the gap between the learner's "linguistic age" and "mental age" to the point where the mind could no longer be engaged.

The emphasis thus shifted to teaching language use in meaningful contexts. British linguists argued that something more than grammatical competence was involved in language use; the term "communicative competence" was introduced to signify this extra dimension.

The attempt to achieve communicative competence assumes the availability of a grammatical competence to build on, and indeed the communicative method succeeds best in the first category of school described above, introducing variety and learner involvement into classrooms where teachers (and learners) have confidence in their knowledge of the language, acquired through exposure.

However, for the majority of our learners, the issue is not so much communicative competence as the acquisition of a basic or fundamental competence in the language (Prabhu 1987: 13). Input-rich theoretical methodologies (such as the Whole Language, the task-based, and the comprehensible input and balanced approaches) aim at exposure to the language in meaning-focused situations so as to trigger the formation of a language system by the mind.

GOALS FOR A LANGUAGE CURRICULUM

A national curriculum can aim for a cohesive curricular policy based on guiding principles for language teaching and acquisition, which allows for a variety of implementations suitable to local needs and resources, and which provides illustrative models for use. A consideration of earlier efforts at curriculum renewal endowed some of our discussion with an uneasy sense of déjà vu. However, we hope that current insights from linguistics, psychology, and associated disciplines have provided a principled basis for some workable suggestions to inform and rejuvenate curricular practices. English does not stand alone. It needs to find its place along with other Indian languages

i. in regional-medium schools: how can children's other languages strengthen English teaching/learning?

ii. in English-medium schools:

iii. how can other Indian languages be valorised, reducing the perceived hegemony of English?

A language-acrossthe-curriculum perspective is perhaps of particular relevance to primary education. Language is best acquired through different meaning-making contexts, and hence all teaching is in a sense language teaching.

This perspective also captures the centrality of language in abstract thought in secondary education; whereas in the initial stages contextual meaning supports language use, at later stages meaning may be arrived at solely through language. The aim of English teaching is the creation of multilinguals who can enrich all our languages; this has been an abiding national vision. The multilingual perspective also addresses concerns of language and culture, and the pedagogical principle of moving from the known to the unknown.

Language acquisition inside and outside the classroom

Second-language pedagogy, more than the teaching of any other curricular subject, must meet the most stringent criterion of universal success: the spontaneous and appropriate use of language for at least everyday purposes. This is a feat achieved in one's own language(s) by every pre-school child (Chomsky 1975). It is this "minimum level of proficiency" (which can, however, be shown to require a mental grammar of remarkable sophistication, which allows for the comprehension and production of language in "real time") that the person on the street aspires to: "speak English", as against merely passing examinations in it, or knowing its grammar.

• Can the English-language classroom replicate the universal success in the acquisition of basic spoken language proficiency that a child spontaneously achieves outside the classroom, for the languages in its environment? If so, how?

• Other spoken language skills in limited domains (for example, for the travel and tourism industry) would build on such a basic proficiency.

A common cognitive academic linguistic proficiency

Language in education would ideally and ordinarily build on such naturally acquired language ability, enriching it through the development of literacy into an instrument for abstract thought and the acquisition of academic knowledge.

We can then speak of a "cognitive academic linguistic proficiency" (cf. Cummins 1979) as language and thinking skills that build on the basis of a child's spontaneous knowledge of language. This is a goal of language education, and education through language. (This discussion has most often been in the context of language education in the mother tongue.)Such cognitive and academic skills, moreover, are arguably transferable across languages, to a second language.

This transferability is one of the premises for recommending a relatively late introduction of English: that language-in-education proficiency, developed in the child's own languages, would then naturally extend to a new language. The dissatisfaction with this recommendation is attributable to two factors:

(i) the unsatisfactory achievement levels of academic linguistic proficiency in the firstlanguage(s) in, for example, reading and writing, thus the failure to provide an academic base for the second language. There are data to show (Nag-Arulmani 2005) that 40 per cent of children in small towns, 80 per cent of children in tribal areas, and 18 per cent of children in urban schools cannot read in their own language at the primary stage; these disparities widen and translate into general academic failure at later stages.

(ii) the failure to ensure the spontaneous working knowledge of English on which higher-order skills (such as reading with inferential comprehension, and writing with conceptual clarity) can be built.

ATTITUDE

Attitude is a complex social, cultural, and psychological factor, which influences students' approaches to the situations in life, including second language learning. Students with positive attitudes usually progress more rapidly in second language learning.

LANGUAGE ATTITUDES

Although attitude is a hypothetical psychological construct, it touches the reality of language life. Learning a language is closely related to the attitudes towards the languages. (Starks &Paltridge 1996: 218, cited in FirdevsKarahani. 2007, p.75) In the Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics (1992:199) 'language attitudes' are defined as "An Expression of positive or negative feelings towards a language may reflect impressions of linguistic difficulty or simplicity, ease or difficulty of learning, degree of importance, elegance, social status, etc. Attitudes towards a language may also show what people feel about the speakers of that language.

Fishman and Agheyisi (1970) have suggested that there is a mentalist and behaviorist viewpoint to language attitudes. According to the mentalist view, attitudes are a "mental and neutral state of readiness which cannot be observed directly, but must be inferred from the subject's introspection. According to behaviorism, attitudes are a dependent variable that can be statistically determined by observing actual behavior in social situations. Gardner (1985) sees attitudes as components of motivation in language learning. According to him, 'motivation ... refers to the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes toward learning the language'. He believes the motivation to learn a foreign language is determined by learner's attitudes towards foreign people in general and the language in particular.

Teachers' Attitude towards linguistic

Teachers' attitude plays an important role in the present context. In the professional courses, the teachers have changed their role from being the controller of the class to the facilitator. They accept students' mistakes in the language use as a necessary part of the language learning.

They help and motivate students use more language in their daily life. Learners learning outcomes are influenced by the interpretation of teachers' interpersonal behaviour. If they believe that the teacher is associated with them and their learning outcome, the teacher empathizes with them and understands their problems, they react positively and this factor contributes to their motivation level in the classroom. Why are teacher attitudes important? Teacher attitudes are important because they affect the student.

Teacher attitudes play a significant role in shaping the classroom environment which has an impact on a student's self efficacy which in turn influences a student's behavior. To be more specific, studies have shown that teacher mindset can affect the performance of linguistically diverse students. Consciously or unconsciously, their attitudes play a crucial role in language's "growth or decay, restoration or destruction" (Baker, 1988).

Teacher attitudes are often reflected in their behaviors toward students, the classroom environment, and perhaps even in student achievement. A teacher's positive attitude, however, can be very helpful in supporting ELL's and fostering a community that reaps the most benefits for all students. A teacher's negative attitude toward language develops low-esteem and less academic abilities. The effects of negative teacher attitudes on English Language Learners can be particularly harmful because these students may already be experiencing a great deal of conflict about their self-identity which comes when taking on a new language.

CONCLUSION

Every educational system has certain objectives which aim at bringing about desirable changes in pupil. In order to bring about those changes, the institutions arrange learning experience. The success of learning can be judged only in terms of the changes brought about by this experience. This is a learning experience and evaluation. Thanks to the globalization in all the fields, it necessitates the learning of a language which is international. Undoubtedly, English has become a world language rather than the language of only the English speaking countries such as the UK and the USA because the number of the people who use English as a means of communication exceeds much more than the number of the people who speak it as their mother tongue.

In the case of English in India, more than two centuries, India has been directly and indirectly had influence of the language,English on all the fields, such as Education, Medical Science, etc. Text materials relating to the subjects of Science, Engineering and Technology as also Medicine are available only in English. Moreover, all over India, there is no single language to unite the whole country. Since, in India, several

languages are spoken and also one set of people are reluctant to learn one common Indian language, we have to borrow a new non-Indian language.Considering the above facts, learning English, the universal language, as a Second Language, becomes inseparable branch as also unavoidable in Indian education system.

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