

## **The importance of assessing English as Second Language for uniform level of acquisition**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Today teaching or learning English as Second Language is a challenging job as English is increasingly being used for communication in all steps of life. In this context curriculum or course designs to teach English as Second Language depends on managing and manipulating not only the cognitive, affective, and socio-cultural variables but also the language capability of the learners. English is learnt as second language for different purposes like academic, instrumental and integrative and the curriculum is designed accordingly. Realising the curriculum objectives depends on the successful execution of the course modules through appropriate methods and techniques. The actual success is not the mere completion of the course but it is ensuring the projected terminal language behaviour. Assessing the language capability of the learners will help the teacher to take decisions to make the course productive. This paper represents the importance of assessing English as Second Language for uniform level of acquisition and the capability of the learners to take informed decisions on adapting the course according to the abilities of the learners to realise the course objectives.

**Key Words:** ELT, Assessing, language capabilities, acquisition

### **Introduction**

ELT is dynamic in today world. Profitability in teaching or learning English as Second Language depends primarily on managing both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. These factors affect the learners apart from the content, approaches, methods, techniques etc. It happens when a learner inclines to learn a language as second language the primary objective may be instrumental, or integrative, or academic. The learners may be unknown about the primary objective, yet it guides him/her through to realise his/her goals. To take decision on these primary objectives is very important in teaching of English as Second Language as these decisions determine not only the approach, curriculum, content, syllabus, methods, techniques, testing and assessment but also from where to start and what to start with. For example in an English language classroom where teacher likes to teach English as second language it should be clearly indicated whether the teacher starts at the phonological, orthographical, and morphological, or semantic, or lexical level, or

combination of more than one level. Such decisions are vital in shaping the course and to realise the objectives of the course. So, the realisation of the goals as envisaged depends on a number of internal and external variables.

### A Language Classroom...

Accordingly Densie E. Murray and Marry Ann Christison in "What English Language Teachers Need to Know observe, when planning instruction, based on what is known about learning and teaching, instruction should:

- a. Frame what learners already know.
- b. Focus on new information in chunks that learners digest.
- c. Include teacher input that is comprehensible to learners.
- d. Challenge learners to move beyond their content level of language.
- e. Add chances for learners to provide new skills and knowledge.
- f. Assure feedback (from teachers and/or peers).
- g. Show a supportive environment.
- h. Must be responsive to learning opportunities that occur in the classroom.

While external variables like classroom environment and the socio-cultural environment can be measured and controlled to certain possible extent, internal variables like intrinsic motivation, attitude, and ability to learn the language pose some difficulty in controlling them. It will be difficult without measuring and controlling these variables ensuring the desired level of achievement. Though there are various methods to control the cognitive variables-intelligence, memory, and the ability to analyze and evaluate etc. and the affective variables attitude, emotions, motivation, personality, etc. the variables of the socio- cultural environment are external in nature and controlling them involves factors. These are outside the purview of the classroom environment. Such variables can be effectively affected when an important variable (called the learner's language capability) plays an important role in achieving the goal of an academic programme assessed appropriately and controlled effectively. This paper enlightens some practical methods and tools through which the learner's language capability can be measured and how it can help the teachers take effective decisions in teaching English as second language.

A curriculum based instructional programme for teaching English as Second Language should alter and adapt itself according to the working of the variables in the teaching learning environment. However, in

institutionalised and certification based programmes the main point is on the administration of the course and the summative assessment. It is very often result in not achieving the level of competency as envisaged in the course objectives. According to, Chris Morgan et al. "competence in a skill is acquired by practice. The principal challenge for the teachers is to provide maximum opportunities for practice with individual feedback upon developing expertise" (141). Such observations enlighten that it often not possible to make the learning programme individualised because of constraints like time allotted, strength of the class, and other resources. However, the issue can be resolved by adopting certain assessment methods assess the level of the dormant language capability of the learners. An interface can be established between the learner and his/her the language course.

Accordingly, Chris Morgan et al., "There may be no absolutes or external measures of acceptable competence in a skill. This is particularly the case if the skill is assessed at differing points across a programme with staged development of expertise. In such situations, teachers will be required to exercise significant judgement about what is appropriate and at what stage"(141). Such idea can best aid the teachers to do modifications during the implementation of a course based on the assessments made before and during the course, to bring about the projected level of success.

In the case of youths the linguistic abilities of a young learner have to be tested and the level be determined at some point. If any learner displays difficulty in grasping the natural linguistic tasks or any problem in the psycho motor skills is detected, the child has to be referred to some specialised training for he cannot learn the language with the other normal children.

Now the question is where to start, at the phonological, or the morphological, or the semantic, or the lexical level. In L2 situations starting with oral drills will prove useful as language learning starts with ears. But in subsequent stages the teacher may find the situation a complex one for the level of attainment of the learners at that particular stage has a bearing on the success of the course or language programme administered. Designing the curriculum and the syllabus may help the teacher complete his task with the content of the syllabus. It is the time have to know how much is transferred into observable terminal behaviour, envisaged in the course, depends upon the uniform level of acquisition by the learners which is always a hypothetical proposition.

A course or a language programme is designed to impart certain level of language skills or training in certain language functions to a set of learners. Their level of attainment is only presumed by the course designers at the time of designing the course. The assumed level of attainment may differ from that of the real classroom

environment. Now, the teacher has to decide if he/she has to proceed as per the directions stipulated in the course or to attempt to build a bridge between the learners and the course. The idealist will choose the latter while the educational managers are usually more concerned about the successful conduct of the course rather than achieving real success.

The board examination times or school unit tests times throughout the session is the best time of educational programme. The teachers are asked to prepare the students to pass the final examinations. Without mechanism measurement the learner has really acquired the skills up to the level he is supposed to have acquired. Ultimately students with certificates do not really reflect their language competency. In order to overcome this problem the teacher should have some degree of autonomy to adapt the course modules based on the inputs derived from the learners. It must be appropriate assessment methods and tools. Few helpful tools are discussed below.

## **Methods for Assessing Language Capability of Learners**

### **Formative Assessment**

Formative assessment and instructional scaffolding is essentially the same thing. Formative assessment uses insights about a learner's current understandings to alter the course of instruction and thus supports the development of greater competence. Scaffolding refers to supports that teachers provide the learner during problem solving-in the form of reminders, hints, and encouragement-to ensure successful completion of a task. Four strategies illustrate the strong connection between formative assessment and research on learning: eliciting prior knowledge, providing effective feedback, teaching for transfer of knowledge, and encouraging student self-assessment. These strategies if used appropriately will give a clear roadmap to the teacher at any given point of time to move towards his goal.

### **Useful Assessment**

In order to plan curricula and design activities that will be useful and beneficial for ESL students, it is necessary, first, to know what the students' goals are for learning English and what their current linguistic capabilities are. Needs assessment can provide these inputs. According to the Centre for Adult English Language Acquisition, needs assessment is a tool educators can use to understand the language and literacy abilities students may already have, the skills and proficiencies they want to develop and the contexts in which students generally use English language skills. Needs assessments are ongoing throughout

a course of study and inform the development of curricula and activities as the students continue to expand their capabilities.

### **Portfolio Assessment**

Portfolio assessment involves analyzing and evaluating multiple examples of a student's work and assessing student's proficiencies and problem areas. English language learners are sometimes left out of portfolio assessments because of their perceived limited abilities in English. Because portfolio involves scoring a wide range of student work based on predetermined criteria, all students can benefit from this type of assessment. Setting realistic goals for portfolio assessment increases the probability of sustained teacher interest and use.

The concept of portfolio development was adopted from the field of fine arts where portfolios are used to display illustrative samples of an artist's work. The purpose of the artist's portfolio is to demonstrate the depth and breadth of the work as well as the artist's interests and abilities. Many educators perceive the intent of educational portfolios to be similar to that of portfolios used in fine arts, to demonstrate the depth and breadth of students' capabilities through biographies of students' work; descriptions of students' reading and writing experiences; literacy folders; collections of pieces of writing; comparison reports and student work exhibitions. A portfolio is a collection of a student's work, experiences, exhibitions, self-ratings (i.e., data) whereas portfolio assessment is the procedure used to plan, collect, and analyze the multiple sources of data maintained in the portfolio. A portfolio that is based on a systematic assessment procedure can provide accurate information about the depth and breadth of a student's capabilities in many domains of learning.

### **Cloze Tests**

There are many different ways of assessing an individual English language learner's capabilities. Cloze tests provide a good way of gauging a student's written, reading and vocabulary proficiencies. A Cloze test consists of sentences with blanks in places where words have been removed. Students must choose the proper word to fill in the blank. Cloze tests have a wide range of applications, from testing vocabulary retention to honing reading comprehension skills and deductive logic. One popular cloze activity is using a song that students learn to sing. Later, a Cloze version of the song with key words removed is presented to the students, who must then fill in the missing links.

## **Impact of Other Assessments for English Language Learners**

Dictation exercises, strip stories, multiple choice tests and written assignments are all examples of different types of assessment suitable for English language learners. Simple dictation exercises require students to write down a passage read aloud by the teacher. These exercises offer an assessment of students' listening and writing skills. Strip stories require students to organize a short passage into the proper order after it has been taken apart and reorganized. Strip stories test reading comprehension and narrative awareness. Multiple choice tests and written assignments are good ways of assessing vocabulary reading comprehension and writing skills.

## **Conclusion**

The cosmopolitan character of the English Language is an undoubted asset for it to attain global uses. Lately, the context of career opportunities both in domestic and international contexts depend on the candidate's communicative ability in English language. Average young generations are unable to possess the required level of skills for competitive world. In order to ensure success, the aims and objectives are to be clearly mandated. It is to be clearly stated as to whether the language is taught for communicative, or academic, or instrumental, or integrative purpose. The effectiveness of the course is not all to get success. The timely correct and well informed decisions about the latent capabilities of the learners, apart from the cognitive and the affective variables, to make amends to the course to make it more successful.

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