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THE CHALLENGE OF TEACHING ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE

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Abstract:

Learning English as a second language is of utmost critical, and the need to guide the educators to contribute to successful teaching seen to be a vast necessity. Therefore, this article discusses the challenges faced by educators to deliver English as a second language in the classroom, exploring possible ways to overcome the challenges, theoretical perspective of students' difficulties in learning, and proposed future research to explore evidence-based strategies. Hence, this article is known to be impactful for more educators to be aware of the limitation that lies within themselves, the source of motivation, the appropriate skills required, and most importantly the strategies to restructure the teaching process to be proficient in the teaching of English as a second language. In conclusion, the effectiveness of integration between the educators and desired learners leads to the ideal outcome.

Keywords:

English as A Second Language, Malaysia, Educators, Challenges

Introduction

English language is essential and has been regarded as a second language not only in Malaysia, but in many other countries. Second-language acquisition plays an enormous role in a person's holistic development. It has covered the entire aspect of personal development. According to Thirusanku & Melor (2012), the history of English as a second language is intimately associated with the United Kingdom's age of imperialism over people of various countries, such as India, Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, and so forth. The importance of English as a

second language has been established in order to strengthen the individual capability to communicate globally in order to achieve one's desired task. Learning English as a second language increases opportunities, social status, and social elasticity. It also continuously differentiates between the elite and the ostracized community (Gill & Kirkpatrick, 2013).

According to Scrase (2003), English is not only important for getting a better job, but it is present everywhere in social interaction. A person's second language is the language that is not their mother tongue, but it is used in that person's geographical area. Before independence, English was considered as a foreign language because it was not widely spoken in our country nor was it for general use until it reached prominence and started to be used liberally. Teaching English as a second language has become significant around the globe. In order to advance the capability of students acquiring the necessary skills in English, every teacher who conducts lessons about any subject should not only focus on a specific subject, but continuously utilize various languages, especially English, to maximize its usage among their students. These steps improve students' use of language in communicating and increasing their self-confidence, and practicing when out of school. As we acknowledged earlier, teachers are very critical when it comes to educational reform, especially in students' learning processes.

The following is an articulated review regarding the growth resources of previous work of literature on challenges faced by English as a Second Language teacher in preparing their students to learn English as a second language. We conducted an electronic literature search in the google scholar database. Search terms included "challenge of English teachers", "second language learners' difficulties", and "Second language teachers' problem". Additional articles found through citations of the articles mentioned above or reviewer recommendation that met eligibility criteria were also included.

The Importance of Learning a Second Language

In a globally interconnected world, learning a second language is a great way to progress as students, and later on in their lives, as professionals. A psychologist identified that speaking more than one language enhances cognitive functioning and leads to numerous mental wellbeing advantages. Being bilingual has also shown to improve decision-making skills. According to a study conducted by the University of Chicago, bilingual people tend to make more logical decisions. According to another study, multilingual people are more observant of their surroundings.

In Malaysia, based on several advantages of learning a second language, numerous local and private higher education institutions play very critical roles in developing and encouraging the necessity of English language in order to share their ideas in a global context; thus, leading to adequately gaining necessary knowledge. This is to ensure that:

Malaysia is not left out in the global competition amongst higher institutions for becoming exporters of higher education. The government started planning for the nation to become a regional center of education. To provide the private field with a competitive edge that was attractive to international students, Malaysia opened its doors to a model of transnational education with collaborative links to foreign institutions of higher learning (Gill, 2002: 11- 19).

English Language Teaching: Meeting Challenges And Exploring Solutions

Teachers encounter various difficulties when they transition from the learning community to teach in a classroom (Broadley, Martin, Curtis, 2019; Kayi-Aydar, 2015). There is a vast amount of literature, which has stated several challenges faced by teachers in teaching English. Firstly, there is a shortage of trained and qualified English teachers in primary school due to numerous factors (G. Hu, 2005; Y. Hu, 2007). Therefore, teachers without adequate training and qualification are teaching students, which leads to improper subject deliverance. In Malaysia, recently, the Secretary-General of the National Union of Teaching Profession, Mr Harry Tan, urged the government to step up and resolve the shortage of English teachers in schools.

The big trend in the globalization of the language creates significant challenges among teachers. The fact of the matter is, do teachers and their students step into the world and encounter new discoveries in English? Teachers must be able to individually comprehend the diversity of their students in the classroom as student diversity in the classroom could lead to various issues and negative perceptions among students if mishandled. Therefore, teachers should be well equipped with infinite wisdom and knowledge regarding the way of overcoming and managing student diversity in the classroom (Freeman & Anderson, 2011). There are several challenges encountered by teachers, such as students' attitudes about learning a new language (Abdullah & Majid, 2013). According to Latchanna & Dagnew (2009), the critical aspect of attitude is used to discover the feeling and belief of an individual on a specific task or situation. Students' poor and negative beliefs about learning a second language disrupt their ability to learn it successfully (Lennartson, 2008). Students are unable to master a language if they have a negative mindset, and teachers find various challenges with instilling the essence of learning a second language. A growing body of literature has examined the association between students' behaviors and learning a second language, and it has been found to be negatively interconnected (Lennartsson, 2008; Brown, 2008; Ellis, 1997). Although scholars have mentioned the notion of students' attitudes as a determining factor of successful learning, it is not widely understood in the Malaysian context. Can students' attitudes change? How can teachers change in order to remove the obstacles they face? Attitude is defined as "a *relatively enduring organization of beliefs around an object or a situation, predisposing one to respond in some preferential manner*" (Smith, 1971). Teachers should identify and engage their students in various outdoor activities, such as visiting an art exhibition, attending an event, and talks in order to transform their negative attitudes towards English language learning.

Apart from that, it is very critical to demonstrate that driven factors, such as an individual's strong internal intention and interest to learn, is the principle of learning and teaching English. The successful learning of a second language solely depends on learner motivation. However, as stated by Hadfield & Dörnyei (2013), maintaining the feeling of motivation among students is a very challenging task for teachers. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) have identified three various phases in the history of motivation in foreign language teaching and learning. There are: (1) The social-psychological period has been associated with Gardner (1959). He stated that learners surrounding social climate lays the foundation of second-language learning and determines their attitude on the subject matter. (2) The cognitive situated period (1990s). While the social psychological period has its reason regarding the capability of acquiring a second language, the cognitive period considered teacher and student interaction in the classroom more significantly in learning a second language. (3) The process-oriented period where researchers

started to focus on the dynamic characteristics of motivation. This specific time frame exposed a high level of interest in learning language among students concerning their specific surrounding context, which resulted in a new step towards developing a large amount of literary work that focused on that notion. Teachers should equip themselves with several approaches to students by increasing their motivation to master second-language learning.

There are several identified ways to overcome the challenges faced by English teachers in the classroom.

1. Encourage students to set their own goal – Teachers should encourage their students to set their target of learning and assist them to establish fruitful ways to achieve their desired targets. Teachers' roles in this part only facilitate their students by providing simple and effective strategies to learn a second language successfully.

2. Create a situation where students can discover and feel a sense of achievement – A sense of achievement is a critical factor for determining the successful learning of the second language. An increasing number of studies has found that learning in a conducive classroom environment that can boost an individual's self-esteem leads to successful learning (Bajaj, 2013; Fallon, 2013).

3. Connect language learning outside of the classroom – The colossal challenges faced by English teachers occur with the impoverished use of English language outside of the classroom. With every subject, teachers should understand the knowledge of comprehensive literacy and critical awareness of the globalization of the English language. It is very crucial to think that the use of the English language should be emphasized in every other subject as well as in outdoor activities.

4. Maximizing group activities in the classroom – Teachers should increase the number of group activities in the classroom in order to break through students' incapability of interacting with a second language. Students' excitement and interest to engage in classroom activities, such as classroom discussion and presentation, exponentially influence the excellence of teaching and learning (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011).

Second Language Acquisition and Influential Factors

This section describes the definition of second language acquisition and identifies contributing factors, such as motivation and social climate. Learning a language is an essential part of human life. In the literature, second language acquisition tends to be referred to as language learning that is done under a controlled context in a classroom (Djigunovic, 2012). The acquisition of the second language happens in stages. Students certainly ought to go through these five stages stated below in order to master a new language. Table 1 explains the five stages involved in the mastery of second-language comprehension.

Table 1: Stages in Acquiring a Second Language (Vygotsky, 1978)

1. Preproduction	The practice of recognizing a word. The learner gradually makes an effort to master almost 500 words without speaking them but reverberating them after the original sound.
2. Early production	The learner can memorize and form one- or two-word phrases with more than a 1000-word vocabulary. They are able to speak important key words, such as house, food, and school.
3. Speech emergence	The learner is able to create simple phrases and begins to speak despite grammatical errors. The learner is also able to master more than 3000 words. At this stage, the learner is capable of interacting with others, and understands stories.
4. Intermediate fluency	The learner has acquired the capability to master more than 6000 words, and is able to form complex phrases and maintain adequate comprehension skills.
5. Advanced fluency	This is the last stage where the learner masters the second language. They are then considered as near native language processors.

The notion of second-language learning and motivation has received a lot of attention among scholars in the last three decades. The interrelation between second-language learning and motivation is recognized and widely considered to be the most important factor that contributes to the learning process. In their ground-breaking study conducted by Gardner and Lambert (1959), they have always seen motivation as being a crucial driving force for students to acquire and master second-language performance. They also added that an individuals' various affective factors, such as emotion and self-worth, are essential in learning a second language.

Gardner and Lambert went a step further by publishing the orientation index, which states two types of theories of motivation, i.e., integrative and instrumental.

- I. Integrative theory – The individual effort to learn a new language in order to get accepted and be able to communicate with other groups. The desire to mingle with other groups of people becomes a crucial element for students to elevate their capability to learn a new language.
- II. Instrumental theory – This is described as an individual effort to learn a new language in order to acquire a job in the future, gain admission to the best universities, and be able to communicate with co-workers. This pragmatic reason benefits the learners and has witnessed a considerable rise in Malaysia (Ushioda, 2012).

These two types of motivation theories constitute the difference between intrinsic (part of real nature) and extrinsic (existing outside) motivation of a learner in mastering a new language. In

their cutting-edge paper of 1959, Gardner and Lambert intended to trace the prime source of motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic) among Montreal students of French in second-language learning (Gardner & Lambert, 1959). They pointed out that the strongest determination of successful second-language learning primarily depended on the integrative types of motivation. Other than motivation, Mundy and Jarrold (2010) suggested that the development of a new language was mostly determined by the sender and the receiver. They added that communication that takes place in any social context solely depends on the language. Their assumption seemed to be realistic and well grounded. According to Abutalebi (2008), the successful learning of a second language happens mostly in the presence of the intended spoken language environment as compared to first language learning, which is acquired effortlessly. Verga and Kotz (2013) claimed that social interaction plays a major role and is a contributing factor towards the successful learning of a second language, but they failed to provide an adequate explanation of their finding. They also overlooked the finding of the study due to the technical constraints posed by interactive settings in imaging studies.

Theoretical Perspective of Students' Difficulties in Learning English as a Second Language

Although English has been introduced very early to students in Malaysia, many have found it challenging to orally communicate and view it as a struggling medium to communicate that is not one's own mother tongue (Somsai & Intaraprasert 2011). According to Teng (2012), mastering a new language would take approximately more than a decade just to achieve oral and written proficiency. In Malaysia, ESL learners found difficulties in using English as a communicative tool when interacting with others. According to the scholars, individuals who possess less knowledge and skills regarding the use of English as an effective communication tool often tend to code switch between the first and the target language in order to maximize the probability of conveying intended information. Human information processing theory is interrelated with the capability of second-language acquisition.

"To learn a second language is to learn a skill because various aspects of the task must be practised and integrated into fluent performance. This requires the automatization of component sub-skills. Learning is a cognitive process because it is thought to involve internal representations that regulate and guide performance. In the case of language acquisition, these representations are based on the language system and include procedures for selecting appropriate vocabulary, grammatical rules, and pragmatic conventions governing language use. As performance improves, there is constant restructuring as learners simplify, unify, and gain increasing control over their internal representations (Karmiloff-Smith 1986).

According to Altenaichinger (2002), humans are born with a unique language processing system that leads them to acquiring various languages. His preliminary work in this field focused primarily on social-context-proposed creative construction theory based on the assumption of three internal aspects that related with successful second language acquisition. He lists these internal aspects as filter, organizer, and monitor. The term filter has been used

by Altenaichinger (2002) to refer to how an individual is influenced by social context to learn a new language. Organizer is defined as an element of grammatical determination and structure of the language. Lastly, monitor refers to an individual's conscious effort to evaluate and correct their speech based on their context and age development.

Students' environmental context is widely considered to be the most important factor that leads to difficulties in acquiring proficiency and mastering a second language. Human information processing theory proposed by Miler (1956) stated that humans find difficulties with their surrounding environment and are unable to develop and foster current language acquisition.

Figure 1 below articulates the framework of information processing that can be used to describe the way an individual gains information from their surrounding context, and how they process it to develop schema. People receive an enormous amount of information every day from external contexts, such as things they see, smell, touch, and hear, and it is impossible to remember all of it in detail, but somehow, some information gets stored in a way that they can access it later. So, how does this process work? Our brain is very complicated; therefore, scientists have discovered some models that explain this process in detail. One of the most influential models is the information processing model, which proposes that the human brain is similar to a computer.

As shown in figure 1, this model has three storages of memory. The first storage is sensory memory. Sensory memory is everything that a person observes from their surroundings. Human sensory memory is very limited in space and is only able to retain received input in just two or three seconds. If that input received appropriate attention, then it would move to another storage of memory called the working memory. Through the rehearsal method, information from the working memory moves to long-term memory and lasts indefinitely. According to that model, information can be rehearsed in various ways, such as repeating it to oneself, elaborative rehearsal, and relating to other material.

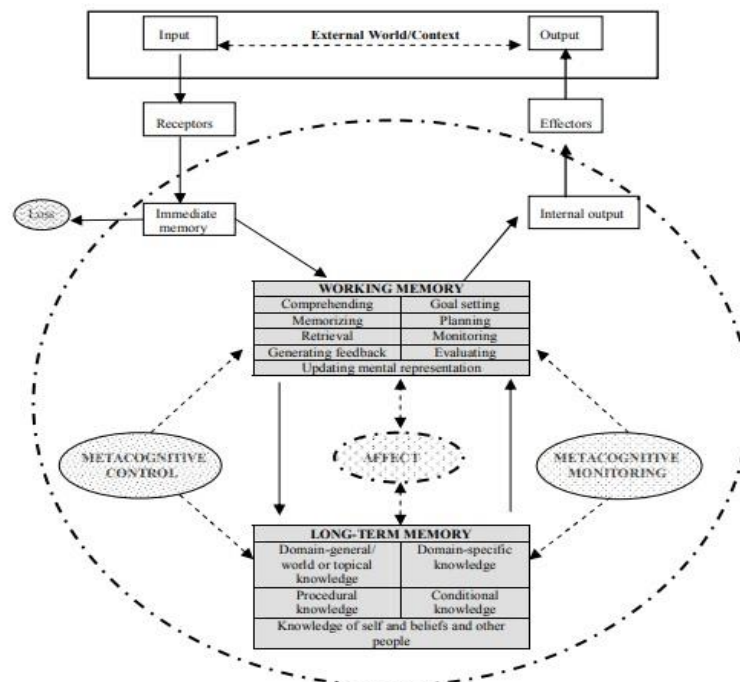


Figure 1: Human Information Processing (Phakiti,2006)

Developing an interrelation between theory and practice is a prime obstacle toward achieving the desired goal. In the field of foreign language teaching, Swaffar (2003) suggests that practice has substituted for theory and the result is a resounding emptiness and a discipline in crisis. From that, it has clearly indicated that educators required something other than typical approach of teaching English. Educators must cognizant that teaching language cannot be fruitful without content: “If language teachers do not even begin to have some understanding of educational and applied subject theory, they will be mere technicians and feel themselves to be such” (Lawes, 2003:27). Thus, there is a need to re-define professional practice in light of a new type of teacher education (CochranSmith, 2005).

Conclusion

The purpose of this review was to discover the ongoing trend over the past 40 years and see the challenges faced by English as a Second Language teachers as well as several contributing factors that lead to successful learning. Gardener’s theory is the prime source of guidance towards understanding the contributing factors of acquiring a second language among learners. It is clearly stated in the literature review that learners’ attitudes and associated sources of motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic) are driving factors towards successful language learning and have been widely discovered by a vast amount of studies globally. Along with this, it is clearly articulated that very little use of the English language from teachers of other subjects when communicating with students in and outside of classroom activities contributes to less successful learning. Therefore, the respective authority should provide in-training sessions to all teachers in order to master the English language as well as an effort to encourage the use of English as a whole. Most of the research conducted focused on the western culture. and their findings might not be representative of the Malaysian culture.

A very limited body of literature focuses on the current issues in the Malaysian context; therefore, it is recommended that further research on second-language acquisition, along with its challenges and contributing factors, should be undertaken in the following areas. Further detailed research on mastering the second language in the Malaysian context that includes the challenges and contributing factors, focusing on geographical based matters to comprehend this phenomenon. We are confident that a geographically-focused growing body of literature will serve as a base for the guidance and future studies on the following matters. Concurrently on a micro level, further research on exploring the effectiveness of evidence-based intervention are warranted as an excellent initial step toward effective learning.

This article also stated that integrative motivation and instrumental motivation are both critical elements of successful language learning, and explained the core essence of integrative motivation, namely, external forces that are able to maintain enduring accomplishments when acquiring a second language. The desire of learners should always be to prepare for acquiring new knowledge. They should be encouraged to practice reading and writing with the guidance of teachers and parents. They should also develop the positive habit of using a dictionary (online or hardcopy) in order to get in depth comprehension regarding the meanings and pronunciation of words. Contextual factors, such as interaction between parents and others, must be positively modified in order to strengthen the use of the English language as this is a vital element in raising the capability of learners acquiring a new language.

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