Challenges Faced by the Second Language Learners: A Review

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Abstract

The purpose of this review article is to identify the challenges faced by second language learners. It has been observed that English has the strongest position as a second or foreign language across the globe. Despite the prestigious status, learners are facing numerous challenges. This article gives a comprehensive review of the relevant literature from the last two decades, with special attention to different challenges in the way of second language learning. This review article investigates the various latest studies based on challenges faced by L2 learners. "Second language acquisition is a complex process, in many ways much more complex than first language acquisition, as the factors involved are numerous"(Ellis 2015,p. 17). While interpreting , it was established that challenges such as anxiety in L2 learners, interference of L1 on L2, socio-linguistic and socio-economic background of learners, structural differences between L1 and L2, flawed pedagogy, lack of interaction, practice, and motivation among second language learners have created major challenges in the way of successful second language learning and acquisition.

Key Words: Second Language Learning, Challenges, ELT, University Students, Sindh

Introduction

The majority of educational professionals worldwide choose English as their primary language of instruction. It is also the most frequently spoken language in the world. Chen and Kraklow (2015) said that English has recently established itself as a global language of instruction and communication in higher education. Without a doubt, learning English has many benefits (Okoro, 2010).However, learning English as a second language can be difficult particularly in nations where English is not the native tongue. Learning English is regarded by non-native speakers as being a difficult task, especially at the beginning of academic studies (Berman and Cheng 2001). Learning environments, cultural differences, and the impact of the local language are frequently cited as obstacles to second language learning. Even though studies show that learning a new language is excellent for brain function, many students find it extremely difficult to become successful in a second language. These students are known as L2 students. When L2 learners must rely on their mother tongue in order to acquire a new language learning becomes challenging. Only knowledge of their native language may be used to apply the necessary knowledge. As a result of the mother tongue's detrimental influence, language learners undoubtedly confront numerous challenges when learning new languages. Due to this, the comprehension of a new language is not good, especially in grammar, vocabulary, and syntax.

Second language acquisition is the process of learning a language in a country where it is widely spoken, such as learning English in the US or UK. It is thought that people learn languages through their daily interactions with others. Ellis (2015) says that we cannot get by without language. It is inconceivable to

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imagine a society that does not communicate through the use of words. Everything humans do is guided and governed by this force, which concentrates its attention on the minds of those being controlled. In the case of the child's mother tongue, rapid acquisition of the language is made possible by the child's favorable environment and significant exposure to the language. While it is possible to learn a second language without conscious effort, it is usually restricted in most cases (Bose, 2007). Several factors, including attitude, anxiety, motivation, length of exposure to the language, educational settings, surroundings, and family background, influence the process of learning a second language (Verghese, 2009).

Research and conclusions have shown that learning English as a second language (ESL) here is a window to the world. In the majority of these studies, they have focused on youngsters who are learning English or another language for the first time. Learning English is becoming more dynamic in education and contributes greatly to the global growth of learners, according to Varela et al. (2010). Education and learning, however, cannot take place without English. Because of its role in boosting educational attainment, the English language is said to have reached a critical mass after 1970. Evidence suggests that the teaching and learning process, on the other hand, has faced several challenges (Teevno, 2011). Psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics are intertwined in the study of English language education (Norton, 2010). To put it another way, it is considered that social factors have an effect on how students are taught and learn. Moreover, "World Englishes have elevated English training to a level of importance that cannot be ignored (Matsuda, 2002).

Research Objectives

- To find out the leading causes of the challenges faced by second language learners,
- To identify the significant difference, if any, in the causes of problems or challenges faced by second language learners with regard to L1 interference, lack of interaction, and motivation of the learner.

Critical Review of the Literature

Speaking a second language (L2) is a difficult task, according to Christopher Bergmann (2015), and even those who consider themselves fluent in L2 may struggle with grammar or find themselves at a loss for words at times. The most evident cause of this lack of fluency is a lack of skill, as well as a lack of knowledge and practice in using the L2. Below are some of the challenges that have created obstacles in the way of successful second language learning.

Anxiety

Language acquisition can be difficult for second language learners due to the fact that it is a social phenomenon. When it comes to second language learning, Kamprated's (Banditvilai & Cullen, 2018) research shows that anxiety has a negative impact. According to Khan, Zahid, &Akhtar (2017), anxiety is a major roadblock to learning a second language because it impairs the learner's ability to comprehend the incoming language and short-circuits the learning process. Language anxiety, according to MacIntyre and

Gardner (1991), can get in the way of learning, remembering, and using a new language. In addition, low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, and a lack of willingness to take risks are all possible side effects.

Individual differences, Age and Language Learning Disabilities (LD)

When it comes to learning a second language, a person's unique characteristics can have an impact on their progress. These include things like personality traits like optimism and drive, linguistic ability, as well as social and psychological factors. It is suggested that the amount to which a learner participates in learning and practicing a target language canbe influenced by their personality (Khan, Zahid, &Akhtar, 2017).

Research shows that age is not a significant factor in second language acquisition, but the amount of time spent immersed in the target language is (Bialystok, 2007). Usually, the difficulties of recognizing new sounds and recollecting unfamiliar words may make learning a foreign language in old age more time-consuming and demanding for older individuals, but they are also more calm and eager to learn. As has been pointed out, retrieving new words is the main challenge for the elderly (Kanwal, Sultana & Hafeez, 2016). However, if these new terms are presented in context, people are more likely to recall them.

It is often thought that adults with language learning problems are often unaware that they have them, even if they have them themselves. Many people with LD excel in their careers despite their limitations but they may encounter difficulties while communicating in their second language due to frustration, misunderstanding, and a breakdown in communication(Comstock & Kamara, 2003).

Interference of L1

According to the findings of the study, it has been observed that students at Thai universities face difficulties when trying to use Thai grammar in their English writing. While writing in a second language, students often draw inspiration from their native tongue (Banditvilai &Cullen, 2018). Furthermore, pupils who are learning English as a foreign language are unintentionally using their native tongue. Possibly, there is a wide range of difficulties that second language learners confront, even in the most ideal educational environments. Negative feedback could be one of the difficulties. The term shows it is a psycho-linguistic tendency to use familiar forms of expression when developing a new form, one that is not compatible with learning a new language. The most basic of these is first language interference (the influence that first-language learners have on their second-language acquisition) (Khan, Zahid, &Akhtar, 2017). Research shows that a student will have trouble mastering a second language if they have not obtained the necessary skills in their first language learning experience (because they have not learned many of the necessary skills). Furthermore, a second language learner who comes from a language background that does not use phonemic coding such as analphabetic/spelling or phonological/orthographic rule system that governs the sound and representation of letters in English words may face additional challenges when it comes to influencing their second language (ibid). It has also been noted that second language learners may also have a hard time with word/sound association, which inhibits their capacity to encode and decode.

Lack of Exposure to Speaking Skills or Interaction

According to research conducted in Thai universities, students have very few opportunities to practice a second language, resulting in very poor listening and speaking skills in the second language. It also emphasized the need for learners to have the opportunity to practice with native speakers (Cubalit, 2016).

Learning any second language requires constant practice and patience. Furthermore, Somdee &Ali (2012)and Noom-ura (2013) described how learners' lack of confidence and motivation to speak L2 creates the main obstacle in second language learning. The lack of opportunities for learners to have great opportunities to practice speaking in real-life settings has created a hindrance in second language acquisition. Ellis (1999) says interaction aids in the acquisition of a second language. Individuals negotiate meaning when communicating in order to avoid communication breakdown.

Second Language Structural Challenges

Mehmood and Ghani (2012) found features influence knowing a language. They discovered that pronunciation is a major problem because many English sounds are not found in their first language. Secondly, learners face grammatical problems such as correct use of verbs, surface structure, and other structures, which are the major reasons a learner faces difficulty in learning a second language (Kyle & Crossley, 2018).

Moreover, Pawapatcharandom (2018) made some worth-noting observations; according to her research, the most difficult challenge is writing skills, particularly under time constraints. Many students, she claims, prefer to write in L1 and then translate into L2. Such practices hinder the natural frequency of second language learning. Jalaluddin (2009) argues that structural differences between L1 and L2 as well as the environment that is not conducive to language learning further add to the problem.

Ineffective Teaching

Kanwal, Sultana & Hafeez (2016) say that the significance of English should not be overstated. Teaching English as a second language (L2) is ineffective (Khan, Zahid, &Akhtar, 2017). Pedagogical flaws have hampered students' progress from elementary school to college, resulting in poor outcomes. Pre-university students are having difficulty learning English because of a lack of English-language teaching and learning materials as well as poor pedagogy.

Evue (2013) conducted an investigation into the pedagogical challenges faced by Nigerian students studying a second language. He found that inadequate pedagogical approaches impede student progress and that teachers are underprepared and under-motivated. Teaching students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds in an educational context becomes difficult owing to a lack of teacher competency and training (Hişmanolu, 2005).

Socio-linguistic and Socio-economic Background

According to Norton (2010), the study of English language learning and instruction is not only an important component of psycholinguistics, but it is also an important component of social linguistics. This indicates that social factors are responsible for both establishing a conducive atmosphere for second

language learning and creating obstacles to learning a second language. Using Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, Nariswariatmojo (2011) found that learners' participation in social activities helps them to acquire a second language more quickly and effectively. Rathod (2012) shows that there is a relationship between social status and L2 achievement. It has been demonstrated by the bulk of research that children from lower socioeconomic groups have a more difficult time learning L2 than children from higher socio economic groups. As stated in their article, Arshad and Attari (2012) asserted that parents' socioeconomic status has a direct impact on their children's learning, mostly through the provision of educational resources. According to a report given to the Australian Department of Education and Training in 2010, a disparity in test results was identified between kids whose parents were poor and those whose parents were wealthy, with the former scoring higher than the latter. Parents transmit to their children a measure of their advantages and disadvantages, which has an impact on the educational performance of their offspring.

Conclusion

Investigating the difficulties in learning is a risky task because it exposes the problems and challenges. According to the findings of this study, learning a second language presents numerous challenges. Due to the interference of their first language, structural differences between L1 and L2, lack of exposure and motivation, most learners hesitate to express themselves in their second language. Perhaps the most important finding of this research is that the vast majority of learners do not study or practice English as a second language or interact with people, which further probes challenges to their second language acquisition. Through the review of various studies, it has been revealed that learning a second language is a time-consuming and difficult process that encompasses all parts of the language, including grammar, reading, syntax, and language skills. Some language learners are more successful than others, depending on a variety of conditions. There are, however, a few key characteristics that influence or threaten successful second language learning. More thorough grammar practice and frequent interaction in L2 are recommended in the areas of writing or structural differences between learners' L1 and L2 to break down communication barriers (Murshidi 2020). Learners' lack of practice on a daily basis suggests a serious motivation problem (Raja & Selvi, 2011). Learners' alien attitudes toward second language as well as the process of L1 interference (thinking in L1 and then translating it into L2 structures) should be stopped (Banditvilia & Cullen, 2018; Nawaz, 2015). Teachers should be able to teach students from various sociolinguistic and socioeconomic backgrounds because addressing a learner's social, economic, and linguistic background improves their chances of success. Various incentives can help teachers become more motivated, or proper and mandatory teaching training can help teachers avoid flawed pedagogy (Khan, Zahid, &Akhtar, 2017).

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