

**An Introspection of Mixed Ability and Multilingual Indian Classrooms in Second  
Language Acquisition**

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**Abstract**

In study an attempt has been made to showcase the difficulties and complexities faced by mixed ability and multilingual undergraduate Indian classrooms in acquiring second language. To oblige the determination of the research and find the various challenges that are being faced by students and teachers at times, a qualitative and quantitative research methodology were chosen appropriately. The main purpose of the research was to understand the attitudes of students towards learning. The students reflect upon their attitudes and behaviours concerning to the level and the number of years they were into learning second language. A questionnaire was circulated among the students which included the father's occupation and also the native place of the learner. This is to consider the impact of first language and from the number of years that they have started to learn second language, the economic status of the family considering from the childhood has a mere impact on the learning strengths and weakness, pertaining to the level of schools that they have been studies. The collected data had been analysed and semi structured in the form of pie charts, to understand better the perspectives of set of students for every question. The researcher had also discovered that the teacher should create a good atmosphere in mixed ability classroom, in which the students should feel secure, and given opportunity to ask questions without feeling anxious.

**Key Words:** Mixed ability, Multilingual, Undergraduate students

**Introduction**

English language is regarded as the global language in the present world. Resultantly, English as a second language or as a foreign language is flourishing by becoming the specified area of interest for non-native speakers with the urge to learn the language, specifically in the developing countries like India. Mixed ability classes can be defined as the class where the students have varied set of learning skills.

Ability grouping of the students had been one of the oldest traditional ways of teaching differently based on their strengths. It is impossible for a teacher to fulfil all the needs of students in mixed ability classrooms, so they may defend through the path of teaching. There is also the sympathy shown on the slow learners by the teachers and also by the fast learners, this makes the students to feel low of their strengths. This in turn discourages the student with weakness while learning the second language. This

very concept of learning disabilities is still a new concept for few states.

Due to the multilingual and multicultural aspects of Indian's that may not seem to be a very easy task to conduct studies on Indian students. When we look into Karnataka, there is a three language formula, which was formulated by the Ministry of Education of the Government of India, where the three languages as English, Hindi and Kannada were made as the basic subjects to be learnt, actually causes the dilemma for a student in ESL classroom.

### **Background of the study**

Language and culture are interlinked; when both are viewed as a separate entity they lose their real meaning. Many of the linguists and anthropologists are of the opinion that language is the reflection of societal values and norms. Culture plays a very important role in the learning of a language. There are no particularly defined issues that come in the path of learning a language due to the effect of a language. The attitude and approach of the teacher needs to be changed based on the very purpose of the learning of the learners. The difference in the linguistic variations arises mainly due to the impact of culture and these are discussed as the differences in the culture. Because of the existence of different cultures, various theorists and linguists viewed that due to the cultural transmission and the linguistic variations the languages are being acquired makes a sense while thinking out of it. The process of socialization of human beings triggers with the traditions of the society based on the historical patterns. To define culture is not an easy task; the difficulty arises from the fact that it is used in many contexts.

### **Mixed Ability learners**

Mixed ability which are 'heterogeneous' classes are curriculums made up of students of different level of proficiency. But as Penny has suggested in the early 90's these terms are misleading as now to learners are really alike and homogeneous classes don't actually exist. If at all the classes are made up of learners who differ in many ways, some of them are most obvious difference include maturity and language ability. When we speak about the maturity of the learner, consider the developmental gap between a girl of 20 years old and a boy of the same age. Girls reach what is called the inflection point in half way stage in brain development at around the age of eleven. While totally boys don't get into the age of fifteen. The problem is that sometimes maturity is mistaken for a lack of ability.

For example, a student may have low level of profession 'C' and 'B' weak in English they may have a strong aptitude in learning with the correct support we perfectly capable of catching up. The trouble is students vary in learning styles and strategies and what works for one student may not work for other student. So what does a teacher do in such case is the question. The teacher should be flexible in terms of methodology and appeal to variety of learning styles and abilities. It is achieved through use of good and varied course book and secondly, a wide variety of supplementary classroom activities, here varied means to the differences in ability and skills focused to space, interaction patterns etc.

### **Research Objectives**

- To explore the issues faced by mixed ability students in a classroom as

interest, participation and discipline of the students.

- To show on measures about the effectiveness of English teachers in large mixed-ability classes in order to help the weaker students.
- To evaluate the learning ability and motivation provided through activity based teaching.

### **Research Gaps**

- The problems faced by the teachers with lack of training programs and strategies.
- The needs of each students overshadowed by the learning challenges.
- The true potential of advanced learners in a mixed ability classroom.
- The dilemma of an instructor, on whom to focus more, whether on passive learners or active learners.

### **Mixed Ability Classrooms**

To the positive note, mixed ability classrooms do have their own set of advantages and some benefits which actually help the teachers and learners to bloom:

- Students will always will to interact in classroom.
- A rich diversity of human resource is available in the form of learners.
- The teacher does not work only as a tutor.
- Neither the learners nor the teachers are bored.
- Development occurs logically in ways of profession.

It's hard to meet the needs of all the wide range of students in the class. Some learners are good at grasping through visual texts, whereas few are addicted to learn through additional writing and tasks.

But criteria for 'ability' seem to be based on:

- Gender
- Race
- Class-socio economics
- Parent's occupation

### **Literature Review**

The students in a mixed ability classes differ from strengths and weaknesses and will have various approaches towards learning. For instance Ansari (pp.61) describes a mixed ability class as involving of not only learners with various aptitudes but were also those that have a wide range of likings and learning styles. This can be noted to be a difficult for the students to teach accordingly wherein the students fail to grasp all the elements of a lesson that is taught. According to the studies that were conducted in the past years, it is noticed that there are advantages of teaching a mixed ability classrooms, even though they are often overshadowed. Ireson and Hallam (2001, pp.69) suggests that language instructors must acknowledge that the students are with different abilities and approaches towards learning and they improve at different levels. Consequently, the instructors are always been pressurized in regular classes to put on more efforts to reach the needs of varied learners (Mayer, pp.16)

Educational accomplishment in India is highly stratified by the social class. There is a strong relationship between wealth of family and educational outcomes and also between wealth of family and post educational outcomes. Socio-economic backgrounds of a student rise to be a part in attaining the highest outcomes in educational sector. The schools and colleges make a difference in the ways of

teaching students from different backgrounds. This may also affect the ability of a student to perceive education, meanwhile the evidence is being provided by many schools and colleges of this fact. It must note that ability is not a fixed conception rather we should see it as flexible and prior accomplishment.

B.F Skinner had proposed behaviourist theory, he explains it as 'good outcomes which are followed by actions will recur and the actions that are followed by bad outcomes are less possibly to recur.' He dealt only with observable behaviour which occurs without an external stimulus. The stimulus that is being secured is the instrumental behaviour, which is the representative of learning process every day. His theory on the methods of learning through punishments for certain behaviour is called as 'Operant conditioning', which is between the consequences and behaviour of an individual.

Skinner gives three kinds of responses that are followed by behaviour:

- Neutral response
- Reinforces
- Punishers

For example, when you were young you have stolen something from your home, and the chief consequences was that you always wanted something which you wanted to highlight amongst your friends, here you would have been positively reinforced and will repeat the behaviour. The main consequences were you were caught and the school teachers involved, for which you will be punished, here you are less likely to repeat the behaviour. When we think of the examples on how our behaviour had been really affected the punishers, it is probably with the consequences.

The possible difficulties of the learners while discovering the spatial linkages that are already being commanded in first language. The possibilities are of two kinds:

- Based on the cognitive development, adult learners retain a gauge of theoretical complexity. At the first search of target language the proximal notions of grammatical marking represent simplicity.
- The relatively frequency is marginalised with most basic notions of target language. In general speakers have less encoding of complex notions and they just reflect the input that they are given with. Due to the complexity of learners 'gate them out' occurs as threshold frequency.

Second language input is the comprehensible input that can be understood by the learners regardless of not understanding all the structures and words in a language. If it is only understood then it is described as the one level above that of the learners. According to the language acquisition theory by Krashen, giving learners the comprehensible input can help them acquire and learn the language, slightly than learning the language consciously. For example: The instructor chooses a second language reading text for upper-intermediate level students from a lower progressive level sequence book. Based on the knowledge of the teacher about the learners, the teacher has confidence that this will help the students to acquire huge language through the 'comprehensible input'. 'In the classroom The students are encouraged with the use of natural strategies such as finding out new vocabulary and guessing the words and finding the meaning for them all, this

happens when the learners try to understand language considerably. According to the above example, it suggests that the teacher should be aware of the level of learners in order to give them with a selected comprehensible input through texts, courses, activities and so. In a mixed ability class, teacher should provide different texts for different learners with varied levels of acquisition.

### **Methodology**

To oblige the determination of the research and find the various challenges that are being faced by students and teachers at times, a qualitative and quantitative research methodology were chosen appropriately. The qualitative methodology is employed with a small structured data obtained through resources and collection of data process through means of direct observation and semi-structured talks with the students and teachers which were set in the real second language classrooms. Before preparing a questionnaire sheet there had a pilot speak with the students of a mixed ability classroom, which made easy to frame questions for the research.

A small scale research was planned for 60 undergraduate students, following it to be a mixed ability class of second language who differentiated with levels of learning. To get overall picture of both qualitative and quantitative data, the questionnaires were prepared with 'A-felt-level- options', the scale of questionnaire consisted of 10 questions, mainly about the implementation of their knowledge in second language class and on their level of expressions and perspectives of English language. As it is a mixed ability classroom, the instructions were passed and these did not reach every student. When the questionnaire sheets were passed

over to them, few students were noticed to be clueless about what they should answer. But after a time the researcher had received the answered sheets from every students and that is analysed in the later part.

The qualitative research uses the design of case study which means that the researcher chooses the phenomenon of the subject for the examination. The selected phenomenon may vary with subject and overseer of one concept to other program. Thus, to gain an in-depth explanation, understanding and situation interpreter case study design is being employed. The data that is collected after the survey happens due to the nature and level of student, teacher, asynchronous data which doesn't include pre and post-test, and this will be communicated with the use of multilevel analysis of students. There was also an interaction with the students to frame their perspectives and find out their relevant experiences as a second language learner."An investigation into the real life difficulties of the learners which was being researched is by depth- analysis of case study; giving the opportunity to capture the actual reality of setting"(Scott & Usher, 1999, p.98).

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

The quantitative studies which were conducted in the past years of mixed ability have been very inconsistent, where focusing only on the side of ability grouping as the only way to teach separately for both active and passive learners. In this present study, research was done on the undergraduate students of the total population 60 students. 10 sets of questions were prepared to check on the different perspectives and experiences of the students as second language learners. The sheet of questionnaires has also

included the father's occupation and also the native place of the learner. This is to consider the impact of first language and from the number of years that they have started to learn second language, the economic status of the family considering from the childhood has a mere impact on the learning strengths and weakness, pertaining to the level of schools that they have been studies.

The questionnaires were handed over to the students by hand in hand, where the students are requested to mark one among five options as their response. The set of 10 questions focused on how every learner

has different perspectives on learning environment and on how they learn a second language essentially. This study had made an opportunity to delve much deeply into the various perspectives and experiences of the students in an interdisciplinary mixed ability classroom. The collected data had been analysed and semi structured in the form of pie charts, to understand better the perspectives of set of students for every question as follows;

- ❖ As a second language learner, I get bored due to lack of stimuli; concerning laziness.

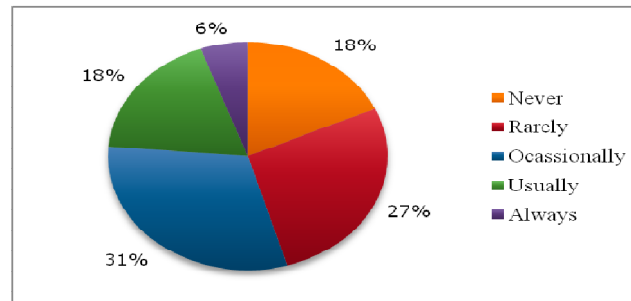


Figure - 1.0

According to the case study it was found that out of 60 undergraduate students. 27% of the students felt that it happens rarely with them in a second language class, this means that the students may not always be motivated with some activities as such to make them being active in class. 31% of the students had told that they occasionally feel it in a class. And 18% of them had

noted that it is usual with them. 18% of the students had not agreed to the question asked and said that it had never happened with them in second language class. 6% of them had said that it is always that they get bored due to laziness and stimuli.

- ❖ Learning is easy with fun. Activities help well than workbook or lessons.

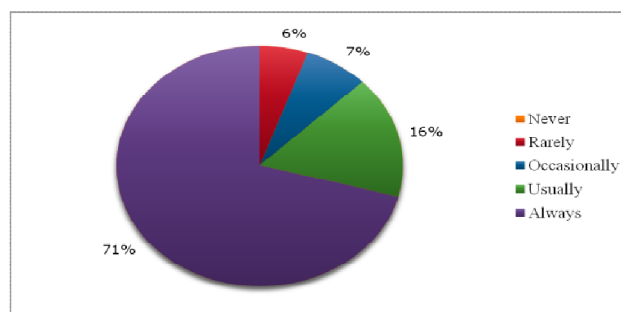


Figure - 1.1

According to the survey that is being conducted on undergraduate students, on a positive note 71% of them had agreed to the fact that activities will help them better with learning and told that it is always the continuous mechanism, so this is very set of students provides to the hint to the educational intuitions that the curriculum must be included with some activities to make them learn a second language easy. 16% of the students had mentioned that learning is easy with fun. 7% of the students had told that it is an occasional

report up-to-date. 6% of them had told that learning through activities of the second language happens usually. None of the students had told that it is never that learning is impossible with activities and fun in the class, as this gives a chance towards the teaching to realize that students learn and enjoy through teaching with activities.

- ❖ I feel, teachers can only correct mistakes when they hear you make them.

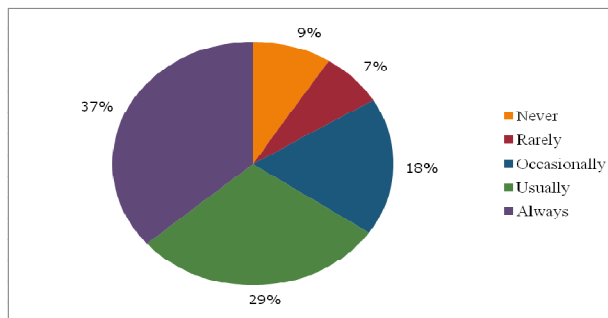


Figure – 1.2

According to the action study that is conducted on undergraduate students, 37% of the students had told that it is always the teachers who can only correct the mistakes when students make a way to show up the mistakes to the teachers. 29% of the students told that rendering towards their experiences, it is usually the teacher who corrects their mistakes. 18% of them told that it happens only occasional that, if only the students show their mistakes then the teacher corrects it. 7% of the students mentioned that it is very rare about the

question, wherein they mean that their mistakes can also be corrected by themselves too rather than always a teacher. And 9% of them told that it is never that the teacher can only correct the mistakes of the students when they hear it. Here the students may mean to say that the friends or family can also correct the mistakes when they hear it but not to a great extent.

- ❖ My level of ability of a language in a group affects the opportunities.

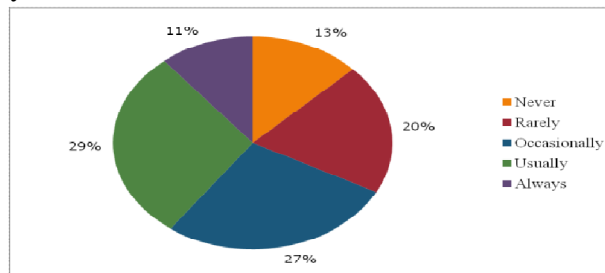


Figure – 1.3

According to the survey that was conducted on students of undergraduate level, it was noted that out of 60 students, 11% of them had mentioned that it is always with them that their ability of the language is what affects them with a group of opportunities. On a larger note 29% of the students had agreed that the opportunities are only created with the ability of their language and their level of acquired language, only through communication any kind of knowledge is exhibited, here these set of students have acknowledged that ability of language is such important. 27% of them had told that

it is occasional that the opportunities are linked with their level of language that are in. 20% of the students has told that it is the rare dependence act. And 13% of them found that the opportunities will never be affected with the level of language in a group, they may also show some more intelligence factors to create their opportunities where the ability of the language does not distress.

- ❖ Motivation and Positive attitude are the important factors when it comes to success in a second language.

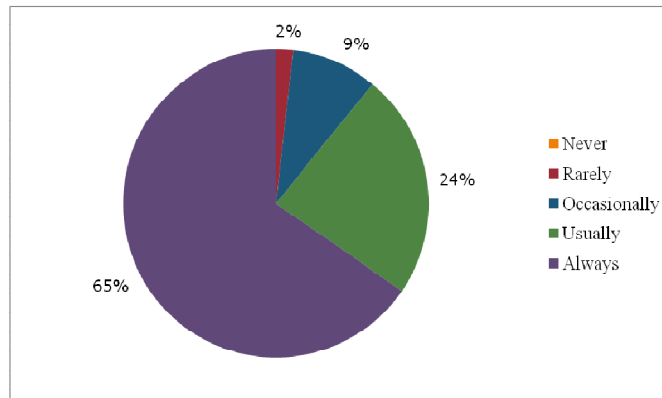


Figure – 1.4

According to the facts that were collected from the survey of 60 undergraduate students, astoundingly 65% of the students had strongly agreed that it is the motivation and positive attitude that are the important factors towards the success of second language, this response is because many students feel that learning a second language is a difficult task, so they mean that positive attitude is what bring them to the affective side of learning. 24% of them had mentioned that it happens usually with the success of language with positive and motivational attitudes. 9% of them were to the fact that it was occasional of the success of language. 2% of them

had marked as it is very rare in kind. And none of the students had told that the success in a second language is not without the motivation and positive attitudes. The facts that were collected from this question mean that every student of second language believes that the success is linked to the positive and motivational attitudes which run to be the factor.

### Conclusion and Suggestions

Language acts as a mechanism to express meritoriously in various communicative situations, it defines us as human. The study of language is the elementary foundation of learning, however, it is the



second language which necessitates a conscious and diligent, organized efforts to acquire it. English language serves as link language in a multicultural and multilingual society like India. Teaching English has been emerged as one of the top expectations of parents from educational institutions. Mixed ability classrooms are mostly seen in rural and urban areas, when they come out as a workforce they face the problems.

### Suggestions

The activity based learning approach is multi-faceted. Every educational program does not have the solitary objective of good and amplified learning outcomes. This research had revealed that the activity based learning has constructive effects on the non-cognitive outcomes of the learners who are exposed to different pedagogical approaches. In general, the question may arise as whether activity based learning will affect all kinds of learners (active or passive learners). The findings are that the learners who are studying in the activity based learning classes are exposed to have higher leadership skills, higher aspirations, better situations and non-cognitive improvements in all. The treatment for passive learners can be said as activity based teaching and learning outcomes. The comprehensive analysis of the program can reveal the better impact of this kind of learning in every aspect.

A few guidelines that the teacher should adopt in language teaching for a mixed ability classroom:

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- Share the load
- Think about how they learn
- Get them talking
- Step Outside
- Small is Beautiful

Some of the Mixed-level ESL activities are:

- Fun Adverbs of Frequency Activity.
- Alphabet Pronunciation activities for adults mainly.
- Minimal pair games.
- Fun Homophones Activities.
- Fun activities for weather Vocabulary.
- Adjectives of Personality activities.
- Clothes vocabulary activity.
- Language of emotions activities.

A tree with different sets and lengths of branches having a different shaped leaves is how beautiful to see as it is natural. Likewise it is natural to have a class with different levels of students with different kind of knowledge of a language. The fact is to be accepted and the students should be provided with motivation to sense their own strengths. Errors occur once the learners start to acquire the language, these errors are to be checked and correct consequently so that the student will not repeat in the next step of learning. Mixed ability classrooms are to be celebrated and should be accepted in a positive way.

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