Factors Affecting English language learning

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ABSTRACT :

The aim of this paper is to give an analytical description of the state of decline of English language standards at university level specifically in communication skills. It is believed that language as a system of arbitrary symbols for human beings' communication in speech and writing , is used by the people of a particular community" to help the people to communicate and interact. This definition means that; every language operates within its own system. Every language has its own arbitrary symbols. The words" communicate and interact" mean to understand and speak. We believe firmly that no text book can claim that it develops communicative competence in the learners by itself, but there are other influential factors participating in reinforcing the educational process. Also there are negative affecting factors which need well tackling for solving the problem. Learners' perception towards the teaching and learning of English should be taken and reviewed seriously as it is a two- way process involving communication and learning. Meanwhile, teachers should take the initiative to insure that their teaching plans are effective so that students' learning becomes meaningful through a variety and mixture of teaching methods to cater for the majority of the students' learning styles and preferences.

Key words: *cognitive, techniques, language proficiency, communicative competence, learning strategies.*

المستخلص:الهدف من هذه الورقة تقديم وصف تحليلي لحالة التدني في مستويات اللغة الانجليزية على المستوى الجامعي على وجه التحديد في مهارات المخاطبة .و يُعتقد ان اللغة هي نظام من الرموزالاعتباطية للتواصل في مجتمع معين . وهي تساعد الناس على التواصل والتفاعل.

هذ التعريف يدل على ان كل لغة تعمل ضمن نظامها الخاص وكل منها لها رموزها الخاصة بها حيث ان كلمتي "التواصل والتفاعل" تعني الفهم والمخاطبهونحن نجزم بحزم انه لا يمكن لأي كتاب ان يطور كفاءة المخاطبة لدى الدارسين من تلقاء نفسه ، ولكن هنالك عوامل مؤثرِة اخرى مشاركه في تعزيز العملية التعليمية .وهنالك ايضاً عوامل سلبيه مؤثره تستوجب الحذر ، في حاجة الى معالجة جيدة لحل المشكلة.

إن رؤية الدارسين لتعليم اللغه الانجليزيه علي انها عملية ذات اتجاهين ,

,التعلم و التواصل, ينبقي ان توخذ بحزر كما انه ينبقي علي المعلمين انخاذ المبادره لضمان خطط تعليمية فعالةحتى يصبح تعلم الطلاب ذو معنى عن طريق العديد من طرق التدريس المتنوعه لتلبية احتياجات اغلبية الطلاب في شتى اساليب التعليم و أفضلياتهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية:*الادراك، الانجاز، استراتيجيات التعلم، التخاطب*

INTRODUCTION:

As is often claimed, globalization has turned the world into a small village. With interaction between people from different nationalities increasing, boundaries become flimsier, making effective communication ever more critical. Meanwhile, English has emerged as the world's great lingua franca(Crystal,1992,2002); (Graddoll, 2003).(Canagarajah.2006). It is the language of information science, commerce, medicine, aviation, diplomacy, peacekeeping, trade, technology, and the internet. Hence countries everywhere have recognized the importance of including English in their education systems, beginning even in the early school days of their young learners (Graddoll, 2003). The number of students learning English as a foreign language currently exceeds the combined number of its native speakers {the inner circle, as Kachru (1982,2005)termed it}and its second language speakers (the outer circle).

According to second language researchers, acquiring a second language is a difficult and complex process (Collier, 1995), Krashen&Terrell,(1983). In the early stage of learning a second language, learners pass through developmental stages similar to those when learning a first language. Early on, LEP students may err in their use of grammar or vocabulary, just as first language learners do Collier,(1995); Krashen &Terrell, (1983) Although the process of second language acquisition varies with each student, depending on various factors, it is important to acknowledge that all LEP students go through general developmental stages Collier, (1995); Krashen &Terrell,(1983).

For language acquisition to occur, students must (1) receive understandable and meaningful messages that are a little beyond their comprehension level; and (2) learn in an environment where there is little or no anxiety, (Collier, 1995), (Krashen, 1981, 1982)(Vygotsky,1978). Recognizing these two principles can assist teachers in creating a natural language learning environment in their classrooms.

Below there are five effective key elements which can assist all students in accessing the content material.

Comprehensible input: teachers can make their language more comprehensible by modify their

speech by avoiding colloquialism and speaking clearly, adjusting teaching materials, avoiding the increase and context.

Reduced anxiety lessons: A students emotions play a full role in assisting or interfering with learning a second language. Teachers can assist students by creating a comfortable environment that encourages participation and risk talking without fear of feeling embarrassed or foolish(Coolllier,1995), (Krashen,1981), Krashen &Terrell,(1983).

-Contextual clues: Visual support makes language more comprehensible. For example, a grammar lesson using manipulative may be more understandable than explanation of the grammar rule. Even social language is more comprehensible when context is added. For example, understanding and a face to face conversation in which facial expressions and gestures are used is easier than understanding a telephone conversation when context clues are nonexistent Cummins,(1981).

-Verbal interaction: Students need opportunities to work together to solve problems and use English for meaningful purposes. They need to give and receive information and complete authentic tasks.

- Active participation: Lessons that encourage active involvement motivate limited English proficient students, engage them in the learning process, and help them remember content more easily.

A. Problem of the Study

The practitioner knows his students abilities, their styles of learning and shortcomings in their language. He should make a specific plan to be applied according to certain theories and strategies for language development, also to use effective techniques within the main syllabus for the students' specialization and level of learning.

The remedy for this problem has been proposed by scientists in different aspects of represented language in their theories and methods of teaching. The problem is stated as communicative techniques and its traditional English programmed in the Sudanese schools, which leads to disability in communicative competence at University level. It is believed firmly that no text book can claim that it develops communicative competence in the learners' ability by itself, but there are other influential factors participating reinforcing the educational process.

These opinions have been built through their experiments in the field of Education; it includes many ideas in using strategies, substances and technique for teaching sound, grammar, vocabulary and cultural systems. A wide variety of communication activities has been incorporated for teaching direct linguistics utterances and communicative abilities.

The methods of teaching explained in this research were chosen to fulfil the students' needs of adequate, fluent and coherent English language. Therefore teachers have the right to view these methods and techniques and use what suits their students' needs.

Aims of the Study

1. To make a specific plan to be applied according to certain theories and strategies of language development for developing students' competence in English.

2. To apply these strategies of language development within the main syllabus for students taking English as a major subject.

3. There are some secondary objectives which will be handled across the text.

4. To help the reader to know the system in which words and their written symbols combined in learning the social and creative uses of language

5. How to develop the learners' ability in English language to convey through thoughts, feelings and intentions in an organized culturally patterned way that sustains and regulates human interactions.

Questions of the Study

1. To what extent are the existing English language courses taught at Sudanese undergraduate levels help develop communicative abilities of the students?

2. What is the nature of communicative techniques in English language teaching?

3. What are the activities that help in motivating the students for developing their English language?

Hypotheses of the Study

1.The existing English language courses taught at Sudanese undergraduate levels do not help develop communicative abilities of the students.

2.The nature of communicative techniques in English language teaching.

3.The activities that help in motivating the students for developing their English language.

Research method

The research has followed the descriptive method and analytical model. The tools for

Data Collection Include:

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1. A tape script for the material on cassette.

2. A questionnaire for Omdurman Ahlia University English teachers , Alahfad University English teachers, Alneelain English Teachers and Alsudan English teachers.

The results are presented in table form and discussions, and analysis of the results is carried out.

Setting

The setting of this study covers third year Computer Science students' ability in E.S.P assessed through the two mentioned tools.

The population

The study covers third year students specializing in Computer Science. E.S.P. Course, Omdurman Ahia University. The composition of the population is (40) female students and (80) male

students. All are nearly of the same age (21) and have the same Education back ground. Its also covers the teachers of Omdurman Alia University English teachers, and Alahfad University English teachers.

Sample of the study

The minimum number for descriptive studies is 10% for relatively large population, and more than relatively 20% for small population(Gay,1981: 98).therefore the sample for the study is 50% which is equivalent to 30 students selected randomly.

The significance of the Study

The research is significant for learners and teachers to identify the importance of communicative skills and to specify causes of lack and fluent communication, also to suggest solutions to the problem. very few studies involve in depth investigation of why students aren't apparently learning as much as they could - in other words,why their level of second language acquisition remain relatively low. this is where I decided to focus my efforts.

Limitations of the study

this study is restricted to

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Types of language proficiency:

Another theory about language acquisition that can help teachers understand the challenges of low English proficiency students is the distinction between social and academic language proficiency. Jim Cummins (1981) suggests that there are two types of language proficiency:

Language aptitude and cognitive factors

Second language learning which is only one

among several learning activities involving language aptitudes has much in common with language learning activities in the native language, the acquisition of special languages, codes, and other symbol systems in mathematics and in other areas of the curriculum.

Another aspect of the current view on aptitude is that it is not something that a person has or has not.

The view of language aptitude is not a single entity, but a composite of different characteristics which come into play in second language learning. This view confirms with the theory that proficiency is compound. It is consists of several constituents:

• Language learning may occur at different maturity levels from the early years into adult life. No age or stage stands out as optimal or critical for all aspects of second language learning.

• All age level face second language learning in similar ways; hence adults and children are likely to have certain strategies in common and to get through similar stages of language learning. These stages have much in common with first language acquisition.

• Language learning is not consistency. There are age differences in the acquisition of different aspects of language (phonology,vocabulary,syntax,etc.(Snow&Thoef nage Honle 1978: 333)

• In certain aspects pre-school children, young school children, older child learners, adolescents, and adults differ psychologically in their approach to second language learning. What these differences in developmental stages are in at present not fully under stood. But it appears that young children respond more readily and intuitively to language "acquisition" in social and communicative situations, while older learners can learn languages more lightly by means of cognitive and academic approaches.

• Each stage of development may have certain advantages and certain disadvantages for second language learning.

• -It is by observation, experiment, and by educational trial-and –error and careful evaluation of such experiments at different age levels that the particular characteristics of different age levels of language learning will gradually be land side.

• For decision on the best age for language learning Stern& Weinribs (1977:20; 1978:167) option has been 'to recognize that a language can be taught from any age upwards.'

Educational process to introduce a foreign language can be governed by three criteria:

The estimated time necessary to reach a desired level of language proficiency by specified stage in the school career of the majority of learners.

• The educational value attributed to learning foreign.

• languages at a given stage of the curriculum.

• The human and material resources required to develop and maintain an educationally sound and successful foreign language programming.

(Neufield 1973, 19) said that in language learning it is often necessary to understand language items in their context, and at the same time to classify the item out of that context to understand it paradigmatically. For example, the learner should understand an embedded phrase, a clause, or sound sequence in the context or 'field' in which it occurs; yet, it is equally necessary to be able to isolate the linguistic item from it' s field and to use it in other contexts. When faced with ambiguous sentences, a field – independent individual can recognize the multiple meanings, while a field dependent person be less able to do so.

Another problem for the second language learner is how to inhibit the invasion influence of firmly established first language habits where these are inappropriate.

If we review the interpretations of the cognitive qualities there are individual must bring to bear upon language learning, we recognize that the researchers have set out from the identification of a few basic characteristics of school learning, such as word knowledge, verbal intelligence, reasoning, and school achievement .they have then focused on those cognitive qualities needed to function in a particular type of introductory

• The ability to cope with a sound system and its written representation.

• The ability to absorb the grammatical rule system, and verbal memory skills.

More recent research has attempted, although quite initially, to identify basic cognitive characteristics underlying learning strategies such as field dependence /independence, transfer/ intransferance ,broad and narrow categorizing.

All these analysis have a certain face validity. They make sense in relation to our common sense experience of language teaching and learning. However, they have all a common weakness; they set out from theoretical conception or solid experimental basis of what cognitive processes second language learning actually involves, and why these and not other skills have been specialized as indicative qualities needed for language learning.(Neufield 1973,19)

Basic interpersonal communication skills
Cognitive academic language proficiency

According to Cummins, limited English proficiency students generally develop conversational fluency in more technical, grade appropriate academic language can take from five to seven years depending on the student's age and level of native language literacy. Failure to understand between these two types of language proficiency can lead to false assumptions about a student language ability (Cummins, 1984). For example, LEP students may be exited prematurely from direct English

instructional programs because they appear fluent in conversational English; however, they may lack the necessary academic language and reading and writing skills to succeed in mainstream content classes.. several more years of direct English instruction may be required before the students are fluent in all four skill areas((listening, speaking, reading, and writing) necessary for academic success.

Language aptitude and cognitive factors

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Affective and personality factors

A more systematic investigation of affective and personality factors in language learning has interested researches since the early fifties. These studies have focused on learners social attitudes, values, and the motivation of learners in relation to other learner factors and learning outcome.(Gardner1979;Gardner &Smyth1981) summing up the analysis of the affective aspects, the following distinctions can be made:

Basic tendency in the individual and relatively pervasive personality characteristics which are likely to have affection on language learning(for example; tolerance of ambiguity, need for achievement)

• More specific attitudes related to second language learning, and to ethno-linguistic communities in general, and attitudes to particular languages and language speaking-groups such as language learners' attitudes to the French language and France and to other francophone communities, or to the English language and British, American and other Anglophone communities and so forth.

• The motivation of learners that initiates and maintains the learning process, or that leads to the avoidance or rejection of learning; the stated reasons and perceived goals as well as the subconscious drives and needs that support the learning effort or leads to it's repression.   . That is the learners' emotional reactions to the language as a whole, or to specific language items, further distinctions that should be made clearly enough are the following :

• The affective conditions which precede the learners' approach to second language learning.

• The affective conditions that are resultant by the learning outcome
(Gardner 1975: 71

Sound/ Letter Correspondence in English

Another consideration in understanding the difference between acquiring speaking/ listening skill and reading/ writing skills is the deep orthographic system of English. While some languages have a consistent sound/ letter correspondence in their written forms, English has an inconsistent sound/letter correspondence. For example, note how the regular past tense marker /ed/changes pronunciation in the following words: *looked, planned,painted.* Consider the sound of / ough /in these words: cough/enough/ though/through. Low English proficient learners may have difficulty making the connection between the oral form and the written form of the same words. For example, students may be able to participate in class discussions and in oral lesson reviews using new vocabulary. However, if they do not attend to the written form of new vocabulary in classroom activities, they may not be prepared to decode and understand the word in written form. Several repetitions may be necessary for low English proficient students to acquire new vocabulary for tests and assessments. With daily activities that integrate reading and writing. Low English proficient students can be exposed to all forms of key vocabulary in language arts and content- area classrooms.

Strategies for teaching low English proficient student

For LEP students who are still acquiring academic English, teachers must design lessons that consistently integrate the study of academic vocabulary and grammatical structures with concepts of the content areas.

It is critical to integrate language and content for the following reasons:

Students learn a second language   more successfully when instruction includes social and academic language in each lesson (Colliar, 1995).

Students can learn language and academic content simultaneously through meaningful academic content (Colliar,1995).

Studying English in isolation without learning

grade-level concepts can delay a LEP student's academic progress. Native speakers of English have not stopped learning content as their LEP counterparts catch up (Collier, 1995; Ovando & Collier, 1998).

To increase comprehension and make content areas more accessible to LEP students, teachers may want to use a variety of strategies:

Classroom Management Strategies

When asking questions, allow for "wait time." LEP students need time to process the question and then formulate an answer. One way to allow a natural, predictable wait time is to account aloud, " I see one hand up, two hands up,…ten hands up." Over time such a routine sends a message to the class that 1) the teacher has acknowledge when a student has raised his/her hand;2) The teacher is giving LEP(and other) students the time to process the question and the answer. Such a technique gives LEP students a better chance to participate. Calling on the first student to raise their hands often results in dialogue between the teacher and a few students. Send the message that all students are invited to participate by simply giving more "wait time" between asking a question and having the question answered.

Design activities that encourage participation from all students. An exercise for small group work, for example, will naturally force LEP student to become actively involved without much risk. In addition, it gives an opportunity for the LEP student to practice and rehearse in a smaller setting.

Allow LEP students to talk to a peer in their language to clarify understanding. LEP student should feel that their first language is valued Collier, 1995). In addition, using the first language to clarify is often the most efficient way to stay on track and not distract from the flow of the lesson.

Establish a classroom library containing age-appropriate fiction and non- fiction books at varying reading levels. Books related to the themes and issues of the students' content areas can serve as a basis for a natural recycling of vocabulary and concepts. Include visual and bilingual dictionaries in the class for LEP students to use as quick references.

• Pause between sentences or thought groups.

• Use gestures and visuals to help clarify the messages.

• Avoid using idioms and slang words.

• Use key words frequently.

• Repeat, rephrase, and paraphrase.

When LEP students speak, focus on the LEP students' message rather than their grammatical skills and pronunciation. Respond by modelling the proper grammatical form rather than overtly correcting their mistakes.

Encourage LEP students to use bilingual and / or pictures dictionaries.

Seat LEP students purposefully (near the teacher or next to a buddy).

Anticipation guide

Anticipation guides can be used in a variety of ways: to asses prior knowledge, to give students a purpose for reading,, and to assess reading comprehension during reading and post-reading. Anticipation Guides can also motivate students to read for meaning.

The teacher has an important role during the process of using anticipation guide. During the peer and class discussions, it is very important for the teacher not to give away the correct answers. The students must remain motivated to use their reading strategies to discover the correct answer according to the text. A teacher who gives the correct answer before allowing the students to read for meaningful purpose takes away the intrinsic motivation of the activity.

Teach organizational skills

Demonstrate how to read a textbook. Point out the aids embedded in text books: chapter and section headings, the vocabulary in bold, the

reading guides and vocabulary sections, the illustrations and charts, the glossary, indices, and appendices.

Teach students how to organize notebooks and binders and record homework assignments as well as scores on quizzes and tests.

Teach mnemonic devices that assist memorizing content.

Teach study and test-talking skills.

Teach note-taking skills. For beginner LEP students, copying notes is an effective way to begin learning writing conventions.

Result

This selective review of these factors has shown that there has been in recent years an increasing sensibility of specific psychological characteristics which bear down an approach to language learning,and which sensitize language learning and which can at last influence to learning out come.

The awareness of learner characteristics and individual differences among language learners can sensitize teachers to possible variation in learners reactions to teaching and to differences in learning strategies.

The concepts should therefore have a place in our language teaching theory,and be both cognitive and effective factors should be included. Well educational background ,previous language learning experience,as well as the components of aptitude assessments and learning styles can provide an indication of the way in which the learner is likely to respond to the cognitive demands of the more academic side of language learning.

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