

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING PREFERENCES OF TAMIL NADU RURAL TERTIARY LEVEL LEARNERS DURING THE PANDEMIC PERIOD: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Every facet of the life of an earthling is impacted by the circumambient especially, its energy and attitude. Its influence could be seen in Second Language learning too. This pandemic period greatly changed the roles of teachers and learners; modes of teaching and learning as well as the materials used. This paper attempts to bring out the English language learning preferences of Tamil Nadu rural tertiary level learners during this Covid-19 period. This qualitative and quantitative analysis of the research focuses on adopting a humanistic approach to learning a second language. Thus, this experimental study will provide an overview of Tamil Nadu rural tertiary level learners' English language learning preferences during this pandemic period.

KEYWORDS: Preferences, Rural, Pandemic, Pedagogical and Humanistic

INTRODUCTION

Language is the breath of a human being. Learning a second language is like having a mask to ensure the safety and protection. The learner inhales the air of fear, pessimism, anxiety, confusions, gaiety and mirth during this pandemic period. A chasm could be perceived before pandemic and during pandemic period especially in the role of a facilitator, learner; their affective factors and the modes of teaching and learning materials of English language. Since the mode of education during this viral crisis has been shifted to online, the prior concern of the researcher is the rural tertiary level learners who are technologically deprived. In the past years, numerous researches have done on L2 learning preferences. Significance of language learning preferences are there not only in the conventional language learning classrooms. Even in the online pedagogical scenario, language learning preferences play a momentous role. Its incorporation into L2 teaching bestow enormous effectiveness in L2 input into intake and its outcome. Hence this research paper attempts to spot the L2 Learning Preferences of Tamil Nadu Rural Tertiary Level Learners during the Pandemic Period by imposing its attention towards online pedagogical tools and affective factors of L2 learners.

SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING DURING THE PANDEMIC PERIOD: A FACTUAL PANORAMA

Language learning is a marrow in the life of a human being. The nature and process of Second Language learning may be little tedious and acrimonious. L2 learning could be impacted by various elements like individual preferences, intrinsic motivation and external affective factors received by a learner. The novel arrival of Corona virus to the world, has entirely changed the notions and attitude of the human beings. In its list second language learning is not an exceptional one. Hence, the process of learning a second language is an inquisitive venture during escalating viral catastrophe.

Teaching and learning processes are drifted towards online mode. Hence some Tech- shy teachers are destined to clasp the digital waves along with Covid -19. According to the report of World Economic Forum on 20 April 2020, Cathy Li, Head of Media, Entertainment and Information Industries, World Economic Forum stated that "the total market for online edification estimated to reach \$350 Billion by 2025" (29 April 2020). Recent transformations and changes in the society, learners' anticipation and expectations, and the surge in the usage of technology are rousing the educational institutions to reconsider the language pedagogy and the modes to reach the learners who are in various places. Hence, it is the prime responsibility of the ardent facilitators to design the L2 pedagogy in a humanistic way by providing intellectual nourishment on language and catering to the

emotional needs of the language learners. A holistic learning is the better panacea during this dreadful pandemic period.

ONLINE PEDAGOGICAL TOOLS: A SAMARITAN BRIDGE BETWEEN LEARNERS AND FACILITATORS

Numerous governments around the globe have provided free electronic devices and e-learning platforms to the students during this pandemic time. The following are few online pedagogical tools to teach, learn, conduct activities, test, and assess L2. MOOC courses, You Tube videos, TED Talks, Skype classroom, Flipgrid, Anki, Padlet, Kahoot, Socrative, Quizizz, Classcraft, Do Ink, Visme, Google Classroom, Apps, Zoom, Google meet, Storybird, Pixton, Flipsnack, Seesaw. Spiral, Coggle, Wake,let, Zotero, GoSoapBox, Crowdsignal, Plickers, etc., along with few social networking sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, Delicious, Stumble upon, etc.

Online pedagogical tools create familiarity, teach through fun and games, motivate methodically, expand the comfortable pace, time and build community. It demands the facilitators and the learners to be skilled in technology.

TAMIL NADU RURAL TERTIARY LEVEL LEARNERS: NOTIONS AND CHALLENGES

The scenery of a village is mostly admired by many for its aesthetic value but its challenges, difficulties and certain disadvantages are brushed off by most of the people. Learning a second language is sometimes a bitter pill. Teaching and learning English in rural area add much more to the bitterness of the pill. The following are the droplets from her observation of rural tertiary level learners as a facilitator and a research scholar. From their schooling, English language has been taught as a subject, where memorization plays a significant role to have a great leap to get through English paper. The influence of mother tongue could occupy their mind and tongue. The fear and coyness of the learners conquer the place of motivation to learn and speak English language. Lack of infrastructure especially technology make them to be isolated from the digital waves of the world.

L2 LEARNING PREFERENCES OF TAMIL NADU RURAL TERTIARY LEVEL LEARNERS DURING THE PANDEMIC PERIOD: A DETAILED ANALYSIS

During this pandemic period education in general and language learning in particular tuned to online mode. But learners from rural area are bound to accept the situation where technology could not find its hut in their landscape. "Strategy for New India @ 75" report of The Niti Aayog, emphasized the availability, standard, and credibility of the internet as a chief obstruction. It keenly highlighted a point that 55,000 villages in the country are without mobile network coverage. Hence language learning during this viral crisis is a rancorous process.

OBJECTIVES AND SETTING OF THE RESEARCH

The objectives of this experimental study are the following:

- To find out the rural tertiary level learners' language learning preferences of online pedagogical tools during this pandemic period.
- To find out the difference in the preferences of L2 learning between English Major and Non-English Major rural tertiary level learners.
- To find out the affective factors of L2 learners, while learning through online pedagogical tools during this pandemic period.

In order to attain these objectives 50 rural tertiary level learners (II B. A. English-25, II B. A. Tamil 25) from Sacred Heart College (Autonomous), Tirupattur, Tirupattur District, Tamil Nadu, India were asked to take part in a survey through WhatsApp by answering the opinionnaire.

SIGNIFICANCE OF LANGUAGE LEARNING ONLINE PREFERENCES

Attitude, perceptions and preferences of a language learner play a vital role in manipulating their pace and interest in learning a second language. The awareness of individual's preferences would enable them to take responsibility of their own learning too. In 1995, Reid stated about the consciousness and awareness of an individual's preferences and styles, "will enable students to take control of their learning and to maximize their potential for learning" (p 14). It will provide a space towards learner autonomy. In order to make a learner - centered pedagogy the individual differences and preferences could be accommodated by the facilitators. During this pandemic period learners are provided with various online platforms. Markus Deli Girik Allo in his article, "Is the Online Learning Good in the midst of Covid-19 Pandemic? The Case of EFL Learners" stated that "The importance of student perception is known to be an input for lecturers and institutions in running this online

learning process to keep it running optimally and keep the transmission of COVID-19 widely.” (p 3). Hence this experimental study would aid the facilitators.

DATA ANALYSIS OF THE EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

The target population were given a 25 item Opinionnaire survey tool which focuses on finding out the L2 learning preferences of online pedagogical tools, the emotions and feelings of the learners while learning L2 during this pandemic period. The researcher offered closed and open ended questions in order to grab the entire essence of the objectives of this quantitative and qualitative research analysis.

From the demographic details collected from the Opinionnaire survey tool, the researcher documented certain common features of the target population. Mostly they were the first generation learners, where their medium of school instruction was Tamil. They have willingness to learn and speak English language but that motivation lasted only for few hours.

Chart 1 portrays the L2 Learning Preferences of the target group through Online Pedagogical Tools. It reveals a very minute variances between English and Non-English Major Samples. During this pandemic time, the research samples have learnt many words by using dictionary probably in online mode. ‘ChetChat’, ‘Let’s Talk’, ‘Sen Talks’ were some YouTube channels that the target population were making use of. ‘The Hindu’ and ‘The Times of India’ were the opted newspapers by them to read. Mobile Applications like ‘British Council’, ‘Cake learn’, ‘Word Up’, ‘BBC’ were used by learners.

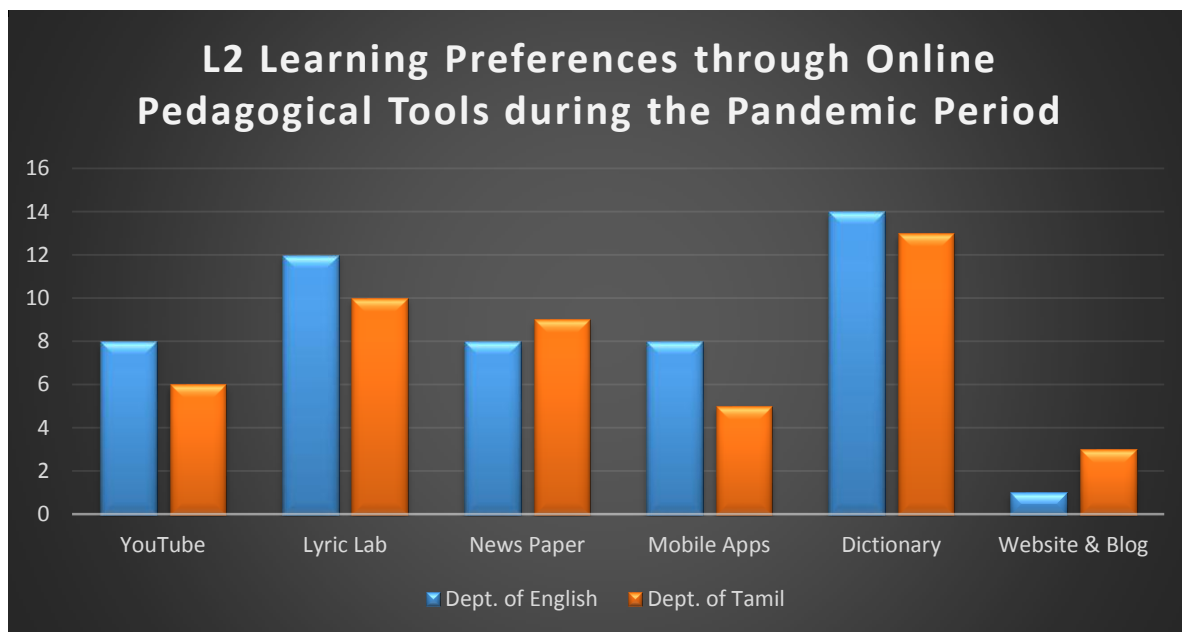


Chart 1 L2 Learning Preferences through Online Pedagogical Tools during the Pandemic Period.

In Sacred Heart College (Autonomous), Tirupattur, the institution enabled the facilitators and the learners to use MOODLE platform. It is a great tool during this pandemic to resume the teaching and learning process. The notions of the target group about the online L2 teaching through MOODLE was tabulated in the table below. It ensured that even in rural area, if the learners were gifted with internet accessibility, an optimum use of online pedagogical tools could be developed. It reiterated the idea that practice and consistency will make the impossible, a possible one.

| S. No | Notions of L2 Learners | Dept. of English | Dept. of Tamil |
|-------|-------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Fulfillment of L2 needs | 16 | 20 |
| 2 | Accessibility | 16 | 20 |
| 3 | Getting Clarification | 15 | 24 |

Table 1 Notions about Online L2 Learning through MOODLE

When the samples were asked to express their feelings and difficulties during online class through open ended questions, they expressed the following:

The target learners were happy to learn during this pandemic period. They expressed their difficulty in understanding new concepts and unfamiliar words. They noted that the notes and text of a lesson could be given in advance. Many respondents expressed the point that network problem was a predominant bottleneck to have clear online sessions through MOODLE. They honestly accepted that they lacked concentration during the online classes but at the same time they recognized that it was useful to learn English during the pandemic. The attitude and feelings towards learning English language was not that much varied from the two target groups. In the case of understanding English was more difficult for Tamil department learners. They earnestly expressed their need to get guidance to learn L2 through online pedagogical tools. By inculcating affective factors, the humanistic approach to teach language could be brought out.

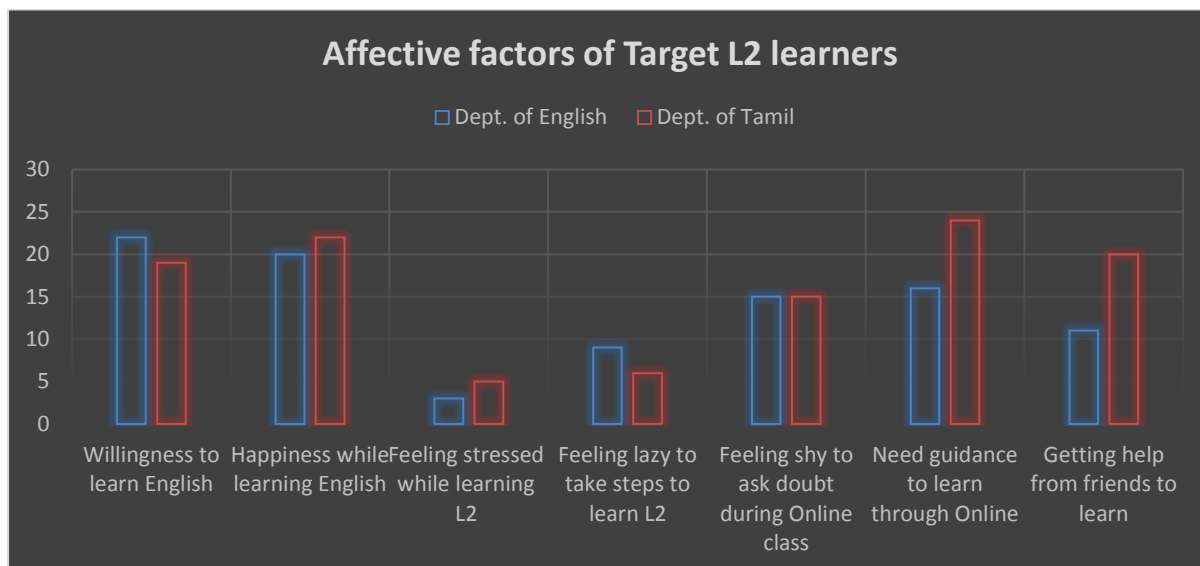


Chart 2 Affective factors of Target population

On the whole, the samples spelled out their learning style preference. 60% of the English Major learners preferred the ‘Visual Learning Style’ and 56% of Non-English Major learners preferred ‘Auditory Learning Style’. It was quite clear that Kinesthetic and Tactile learning styles were not preferred. Hence it could be a great help for the facilitators to make use of these preferred learning styles in their pedagogy.

The Research and its Implications for L2 Teaching and Learning

Following are some implications from this study drawn with the foremost concern.

Be Aware, Design and Implement: Rural tertiary level learners’ L2 learning preferences of online pedagogical tools could be taken into a greater consideration while designing the pedagogy. As Nunan (1989) highlighted, incorporating learners’ needs and preferences is an essential element in designing a learner-centered curriculum. The facilitators’ awareness of the learners’ L2 learning preferences of online pedagogical tools and the learning style could provide a clear vision on which the pedagogical activities could be given to the learners during this pandemic period. The awareness of learner’s own L2 learning preferences could increase the level of responsibility for their own learning too.

Poise between Cognitive and Affective Factors: When a facilitator sails the ship by considering the nature of the sea waves, the sail would be safer and reach the destiny too. The humanistic approach of a language teaching could enhance the quality of learning because the facilitators could be aware of the learners’ emotions and feelings while learning L2.

Effort to Reach the Unreached: The learners who are deprived from the technological wellness could be asked to make use of the pedagogical tools that are available to them during this viral crisis. In this research, the researcher also found that 52% of the English Major and 64% of the Non- English Major samples used the ‘Previous English textbooks’ to learn English language and 48% of English Major and 44% of Non-English Major learners learnt English through Television. Through English films, sports and games commentary, advertisements and English news the target population learnt some vocabulary and sentence formation too. Hence during this pandemic period, the quality of teaching could be given priority than the quantity by considering the individual’s preferences.

RESEARCH LIMITATION

This research, its outcome and its implications for L2 teaching is limited to the rural tertiary learners of Tamil Nadu.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The following are the recommendations for the further research, which could be pursued in the rural areas of India. A comparative experimental research could be accomplished between rural and urban learners' online pedagogical learning during this pandemic period. The significance of Individual Differences of learners' L2 learning during this Covid-19 timeline could be figured out. Effectiveness of L2 learners' preferences in L2 teaching during this pandemic period could be undertaken.

CONCLUSION

Effective learning and good teaching are two sides of the same currency. In order to make English language teaching and learning process an efficacious and quality one during this viral crisis, the researcher identified the English language learning preferences of Tamil Nadu rural tertiary level learners. This study examined the difference in the preferences of L2 learning between English Major and Non- English Major rural tertiary level learners. It also explored the cognitive and affective factors of Samples while learning English through Online pedagogical tools. The implications of the findings of this experimental study could provide a pavement to the facilitators to develop a constructive and holistic pedagogy during this pandemic period.

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