

Cultural Effects and Anxiety Faced by the Tribal Children in Learning English

S.V. Karthiga, Soundarya K.R

ABSTRACT--- As far as the minority children's education is concerned, many notions were given by The National Policy on Education pertaining to the allocation of incentives and modification of institutional infra-structure. It is also mentioned that minority children's educational curriculum and instruction should give importance to their own mother tongue or their own tribal language at the beginning, and there should be a gradual switching over from mother tongue instructions to state language. Second language learning is totally different from first language learning. In the second language learning situation, the students can adjust in many ways. Whenever there is a chance for the students to interact with the other students using native language, they use the native language and they prefer not to use the school language/target language. So the learning progress is found at a lesser degree in the tribal areas. It is generally felt that the tribal children face a lot of problems in learning English. The present study tries to analyse the problems and the cultural effects and anxiety faced by the tribal children in learning English.

Keywords— English, state language, Tribal, anxiety, sociocultural.

INTRODUCTION

Government of Tamil Nadu (A State in India) has created and provided facilities for imparting education to the tribal children. Government has also started schools and gives special attention to promote literacy among the tribal population. These schools are popularly known as G.T.R. Schools (Government Tribal Residential Schools). Tribal children generally enter the school with the competence of their mother tongue. When compared to the non-tribal children, the tribal children are found to have lesser competence in learning a language. English becomes a third language for the tribal children because after their mother tongue, they acquire the local dialect (state language). English is being learnt only as a subject in schools. Automatically they lose confidence and they turn introverted, which creates an aversion to learn English. Most of the folk of tribal communities are found to have less competence in local dialect (state language) because they have less scope and accessibility with other people. This is because most of the tribal residential schools are situated in the forest areas. These schools are located mostly near the tribal settlements. Even in this modern era, most of the tribal students face a mental trauma in learning English. There is no chance for the tribal children to develop their acquisition

outside the school, and this is due to their locale or settlements/hamlets which are separated from those of the other groups. Even in the school situation the tribal students are found to interact only with their own groups, and so they do not get more chances for the acquisition of the other language (English).

The urban middle class oriented textbook is one of the factors which prohibit English language learning of tribal students. Separate books are not available for them as well. Books published by the Tamil Nadu textbook society are only used for teaching and learning purposes. Culture based instructional strategies should be dominant and are to be employed by the teachers, their people, their language and culture. So the learning progress is found at a lesser degree in the tribal areas. It is generally felt that the tribal children face a lot of problems in learning English. The present study tries to analyse the problems or the cultural effects and anxiety faced by the tribal children in learning English and their cognition level compared to the non-tribal children.

The students even face difficulties in learning alphabets in English, since most of them are first generation learners. An observation method was adopted and the students' activities were inspected keenly. In field linguistics it is known as eves-dropping technique. The information from the classroom activity were collected, where the students spoke using their mother tongue most of the time and while interacting with the teacher it was mostly the state language commute. That way, English is learnt only as a subject.

Second language learning is totally different from first language learning. In the second language learning situation the students can adjust in many ways. Whenever there is a chance for the students to interact with the other students using the native language, they use the native language and they prefer not to use the school language//target language. Here it will not be out of context to quote Lado's words,

"The child is forced to learn the first language because has no other effective way to express his wants. In learning a second language this compulsion is largely missing, since the students knows that he can communicate through his native language when necessary." (1964, p.5-6)

The above observation is an accepted fact in language learning situation. The situation also states that the culture plays a major role in language learning. Since the tribal students learn English as a subject they face a lot of hurdles in learning English. When it comes to tribal populace, there are negative transfer/ interference in language learning. When the first language hinders the learner in learning

Revised Manuscript Received on February 11, 2019.

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second language, the hindrance is called negative transfer/interference. In other words, difference between two languages lead to interference and ultimately lead to the creation of learning difficulties. Weinreich has given a definition of interference in the following lines:

"Those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilingual as a result of their familiarity with more than one language, i.e. as a result of language contact." (1953, p.1)

This interference may be reflected in performance of the learner in second language. The units which reflects the interference of first language on second language are phonological, morphosyntactic and lexical. Moreover, Weinreich has made an assumption about learning. The following explains the same,

"The greater the difference between the two systems, i.e. the more numerous the mutually exclusive forms and patterns in each, the greater is the learning problem and the potential area of interference." (1953, p.1)

From the observation of Wreinreich, it can be assumed that whenever the structures of first language and second language differ, there is chance for the learner to go wrong in his second language process. The nature of the errors depends essentially on the structures of first language. The above reveals the plight of the tribal students in learning second language and ideologically English stays as a question mark. This is another reason which creates an aversion and eventually increases anxiety among them when it comes to English language. The education policies and existing curriculum, and the description of them are felt to be essential at this juncture. The paper throws insights on the existing curriculum for the tribal students (tribal literacy) and gives some suggestions in the light of the study.

For example, The New Educational policy of India was framed in 1986 under the cover term *National Policy on Education*. Several constructive points were suggested in the policy report and the same were expected to be followed by the curriculum planners and tutors who carry out the curriculum activities. The points related to 'Child-Centred Approach' and 'Curriculum for Minority Children' is felt to be important and relevant for the study. Therefore, they have to be reviewed here. Reports on National Policy on Education convey the following Child Centred Approach.

"A child-centred and activity base process of learning should be adopted at the primary stage. First generation learners should be allowed to set their own pace and be given supplementary remedial instructions." (1986, p.11)

As far as the minority children's education is concerned, many notions were given pertaining to the allocation of incentives and modification of institutional infra- structure. It is also mentioned that minority children's educational

curriculum and instruction should give importance to their own mother tongue or to their own tribal language at the beginning, and there should be a gradual switching over from mother tongue instructions to state language. In general, minority children's education curriculum should be an average avenue for the creation of an awareness of their cultural identity and should be a basis for developing creative talents among the minority children. Giving priority and remedial measures to drop-outs in schools is also considered as an important policy in the report on National Policy on Education. The following quotation of the National Policy is presented to substantiate the above points.

"The need to develop the curriculum and devise instructional materials in tribal languages at the initial stages, with arrangements for switching over the regional language.

Educated and promising Schedule Tribe youths will be encouraged and trained to take up teaching in tribal areas. Incentive schemes will be formulated for the Schedule Tribes, keeping in view their special needs and life styles. The curriculum at all stages of education will be designed to create an awareness of the rich cultural identity of the tribal people as also of their enormous creative talent." (1986, p.7-8)

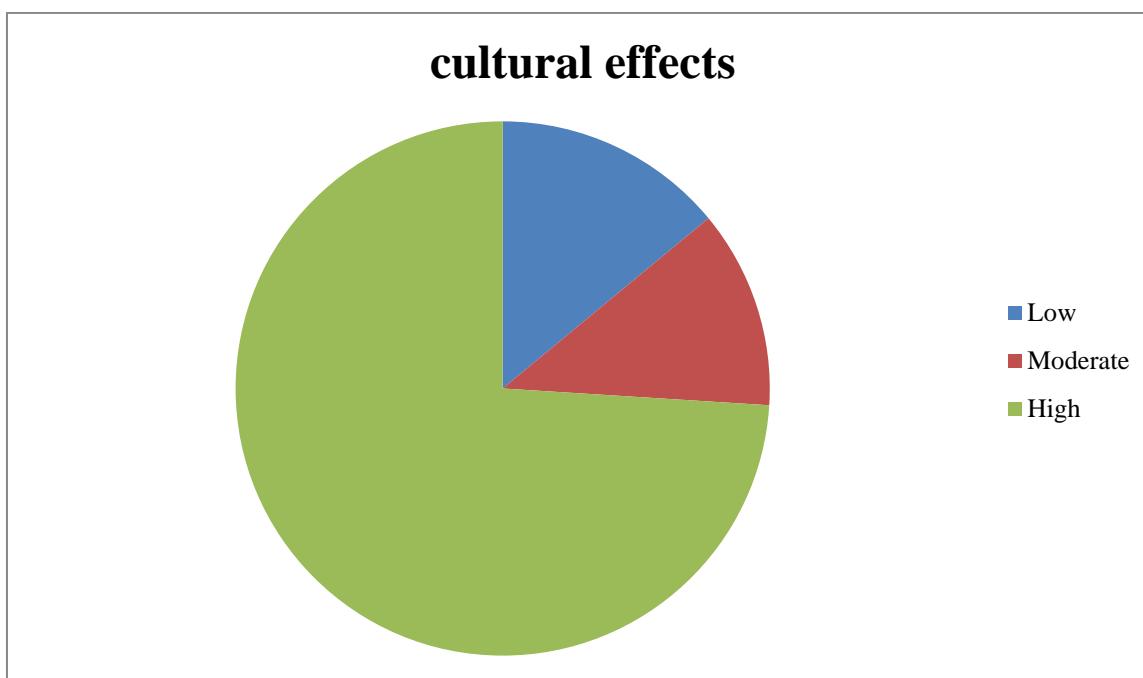
Some general suggestions can be given towards the improvement of the curriculum in an integrated way, especially with reference to the tribal situation. Some measures are to be taken to crate good attitude over the second language among the tribal children. This ultimately requires a change in the socio-cultural outlook of the tribal population. At present the tribal parents feel that some insecurity arises to their children if they are given formal education. Moreover, they also feel education will keep their children away and make their community as a whole - divided. So, some steps will have to be taken in order to remove this kind of attitude.

Sociocultural conditions play a very important role in the poor performance of students while they learn the second language. Usually the children are spending most of their time not in schools but outside by the way of helping their parents in earning for their daily living and by looking after their other children and household. Government can take measures to see to that the children stay at school by providing some more incentives to the students and to the community as a whole. An analysis was made to comprehend the cultural effect and anxiety among the tribal learners with regard to English language learning.

RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

Percentage analysis of cultural effects in learning English amongst the tribal learners is portrayed through the chart below.

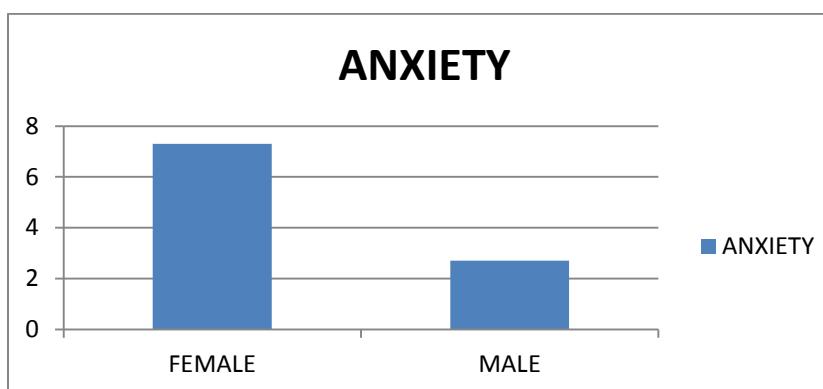




It is inferred from the table that 7.2 % of tribal students have high cultural effect in regard to English language learning. 1.2 % and 1.4 % of tribal learners have low and moderate level of cultural effects respectively. The above percentage shows that the impact of culture is high and it remains as a barrier for the learners in learning the language.

Table 2

Percentage analysis of anxiety among the tribal learners in learning English with reference to gender is portrayed through the chart below.



The above percentage analysis represents the anxiety among the female and male students in learning English language. The anxiety was more amongst the female learners when compared to the male learners. It was analysed that 7.3% of female students were nervous and apprehensive when it came to English language. Most of them did not want to come out of their comfort zone. The male learners of 2.7% found English language complicated and difficult to comprehend which leads to anxiety.

'Fear is the key' thus goes a saying. Most of the tribal children are infested with fear, and the feeling of insecurity and feeling to be amidst strangers when they are in schools. Some steps will have to be taken to remove the psychological aspects with reference to the fear in tribal children. As far as teaching is concerned, methodologies giving importance to the development of communicative competence also have to be followed so as to develop communicative skill and to eradicate

inhibition in using language wherever and whenever needed among tribal children. This requires incorporation of higher percentage of communication-oriented syllabus pattern in the existing syllabus, and teaching methodology. When language teaching becomes communication-oriented one, and when communicative skills develop in children, the fear complex will automatically disappear. Language teaching will become unimportant if the attitudes of the students do not change. So, the curriculum on the whole should be designed with the purpose of removing negative attitudes towards second language learning and of removing fear complex among the students. Steps have to be taken even if it is a long way to go. Only then, tribal education will be a successful one and tribal upliftment will become a reality.

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