



Psychological And Cultural Impact On Learning English As A Secondary Language

Vasanth S.

Associate Professor

Department of English

Government First Grade College Kadugudi, Bengaluru - 67

Abstract:

English has emerged as a global language that plays a significant role in education, employment, and social mobility. In multilingual societies such as India, where regional languages dominate everyday communication, the acquisition of English as a second language presents both academic and psychological challenges. This article examines the cultural and psychological factors that influence English language learning among students, particularly those from rural backgrounds. The transition from vernacular-medium schooling to higher education environments where English serves as the primary medium of instruction often creates barriers related to comprehension, communication, and self-expression. Such difficulties are frequently intensified by socio-economic disparities, inadequate exposure to English, limited linguistic support, and differences in pedagogical practices. The study further explores how language proficiency is closely associated with self-esteem, identity formation, academic confidence, and social integration. Students who perceive themselves as linguistically disadvantaged may experience feelings of inferiority, anxiety, social withdrawal, and reduced motivation, which can adversely affect both educational achievement and mental well-being. The article also highlights the influence of family background, peer comparison, gender expectations, and institutional culture in shaping learners' attitudes toward English. Particular attention is given to the experiences of rural students who encounter multiple transitions while adapting to higher education settings. The discussion emphasizes the need for inclusive language education, learner-centered teaching strategies, psychological support services, and supportive learning environments. By addressing both linguistic and emotional dimensions of second-language acquisition, educational institutions can promote greater academic success, psychological resilience, and social participation among learners from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

Keywords: English as a Second Language (ESL); Language Learning; Psychological Factors; Cultural Influence; Rural Students; Second Language Acquisition; Self-Esteem; Higher Education; Academic Achievement; Mental Well-Being.



Today, English has become a language of the globe. It is not restricted to a land of its own; it has traversed continental barriers and is influencing cultures worldwide. The process of colonization has assisted in establishing its foothold. As a result, many indigenous languages have been overshadowed in the wave of English. Cultural connotations have further supported English in establishing itself as a superior language.

The widespread usage of English and its acceptance in official communications have infused a sense of inferiority among speakers of other languages. Especially in a country like India, the multiplicity of indigenous languages has lost its prominence. After Macaulay's Minute on Indian Education introduced English as the medium of instruction and education, a significant number of people failed to meet the demands of the language. This failure, along with a sense of pride in native tongues, further alienated English from the people. The imposition, unfamiliarity, and prevailing misconceptions about the language have created an aversion so strong that the very idea of learning it appears daunting.

In the present times, although English has somewhat lost its earlier connotative dominance, students from rural areas still carry an aversion and persistent preconceptions about its difficulty. Language is a powerful tool; it is not only a means of expression but also a medium of influence. For individuals coming from economically and socially developing place or communities, language becomes the most effective means to distinguish themselves and ensure their voices are heard. India being a diverse and multilingual nation, allows most states give to prioritise their vernacular languages as the primary medium, while English is designated as a secondary language. Language plays a crucial role in education and learning; however, this fact has often been overlooked.

Low proficiency in English at primary and secondary school levels can be attributed to several factors, including inadequate teacher training, lack of a robust curriculum, and an uncondusive learning environment. Many of these students are first -generation learners; hence, they lack opportunities to interact in English, as vernacular languages dominate daily communication. Consequently, students graduating from such schools are often neither competent not effective in using English.

Students opting for higher studies in search of a better future enter a new phase of life. They encounter diverse beliefs, sentiments, cultures, and ideologies. This amalgamation of varied and often uncontrollable external influences, combined with the student's own preconceptions, creates a complex psychological landscape. As students navigates through new social interactions, adapt to unfamiliar ideas, and gradually reconstruct their sense of self, this process of self-discovery continues will into adulthood. In this journey, language becomes the most powerful tool at their disposal; it helps in shaping identity and facilitates their transition into new environments. However, in the absence of linguistic competence, students find it increasingly difficult to adapt to these changing contexts. While some students perceive this transition as an opportunity for personal growth, others become overwhelmed by the changes and fall into patterns of emotional maladjustment and even depression.

Students from rural backgrounds are particularly vulnerable to this phenomenon, as multiple underlying factors hinder both their professional growth and emotional stability. This study examines



several commonly observed factors, including the transition to English as the primary medium of communication, differences in pedagogical methods, family dynamics, issues related to appearance, exposure to new cultures, and various distractions.

With the transition to higher education, there is a significant shift in teaching methodologies, where most academic communication takes place in English. Students with limited proficiency often struggle to follow instructions and comprehend academic content. Their restricted fluency directly affects their learning outcomes. Furthermore, there is a sudden increase in the frequency of English usage, both oral and written, which makes it difficult for them to actively participate in discussions. The language is often neglected due to a perceived lack of relevance, as their primary mode of communication throughout life has been their native tongue. One of the most significant barriers to language acquisition is the learner's attitude; fear and aversion create psychological boundaries that restrict expression and limit social interaction.

The new academic environment is also highly heterogeneous, consisting of students with varied levels of prior knowledge and exposure. When confronted with peers who demonstrate greater linguistic and conceptual competence, students who struggle to grasp these concepts often develop a sense of inferiority. Such sudden academic and social displacements can have a profound psychological impact, leading to a loss of confidence and diminished motivation.

A student from a rural background encounters multiple layers of difference, including disparities in socio-economic conditions on the student's psyche cannot be overstated. Students often begin to compare their financial resources and social freedoms with those of their peers. This tendency toward comparison, which is socially ingrained as a measure of self-worth, can lead to dissatisfaction when not mediated by critical self-awareness. Consequently, students may begin to question their self-worth and develop the misconception that material acquisition can resolve their sense of inadequacy.

Moreover, students carry varying degrees of responsibility, shaped by both personal aspirations and familial expectations. These factors should serve as points of self-evaluation, as they help maintain focus on long-term goals. In this context, family dynamics play a crucial role and must be examined with sensitivity. For many students from rural backgrounds, the home environment may be marked by socio-economic instability, where emotional support is often overshadowed by immediate financial and social challenges. This lack of support can have a lasting impact, manifesting in forms such as anxiety, low self-esteem, and a significant deficiency in self-compassion.

These barriers to learning, compounded by emotional distress, give rise to numerous behavioral complexities; such patterns significantly influence the student's mindset and hinder overall development. These tendencies are often exhibited in academic settings in the form of disruptive behavior, defiance of authority, and chronic avoidance of work. As the academic work load accumulates, coupled with an unproductive attitude, the student becomes increasingly agitated due to an inability to express themselves effectively. This frustration gradually leads to a loss of interest in studies, fostering a sense of apathy toward life and, ultimately, a loss of hope. Although these symptoms are often noticed, they are seldom given adequate attention. Research indicates that mental health remains one of the most neglected areas of student well-being, and such conditions frequently mark the onset



of depression among students.

When examining the role of gender, it is observed that majority of female students tend to perform better than their male counterparts, a trend particularly noticeable among students from rural backgrounds. Many students underestimate the significance of English, perceiving it merely as a compulsory subject required for graduation rather than as a valuable skill. Male students often prioritize employment prospects post-graduation, with the primary objective being the completion of their degree. In contrast, female students approach academic performance differently. For them, achieving higher grades does not always translate into improved employment opportunities. Despite possessing inherent capabilities, they often lack a supportive environment to practice their skills and apply their knowledge. Limited exposure to external opportunities, coupled with socialization within a patriarchal framework, conditions them to exhibit compliance and deference to authority. This, in turn, restricts their confidence and limits their potential for self-expression and growth.

Most of these barriers can be addressed, to a significant extent, through individual effort supported by external guidance and institutional intervention. Since many of these challenges originate at the level of primary education, there is a pressing need to reform existing pedagogical practices. This includes the development of more interactive teaching methodologies and curricula that emphasize practical application over rote learning or superficial skill acquisition. Educational institutions must also assume responsibility for the psychological well-being of students by providing accessible counseling services through trained professionals. Furthermore, systematic measures should be implemented to identify students who require additional academic and emotional support, ensuring timely and effective intervention.

Conclusion

The process of learning English as a second language is shaped by a complex interaction of psychological, cultural, social, and educational factors. For many students, particularly those from rural and vernacular-medium backgrounds, the transition into English-oriented academic environments presents challenges that extend beyond language proficiency and affect confidence, self-esteem, identity, and academic performance. Limited exposure to English, socio-economic constraints, family circumstances, and differences in educational opportunities often create barriers that hinder effective communication and participation in learning. These difficulties may further contribute to feelings of anxiety, inferiority, and social isolation, ultimately affecting students' overall well-being and motivation. At the same time, the increasing importance of English in higher education and employment makes language competence an essential component of personal and professional development. Therefore, language learning should be viewed not merely as an academic requirement but as a process closely connected with psychological growth and social integration. Educational institutions have a vital responsibility to create supportive and inclusive learning environments through effective teaching methodologies, learner-centered curricula, language-support programmes, and accessible counselling services. Greater attention must also be given to the emotional needs of students who struggle with linguistic and cultural transitions. By addressing these challenges through coordinated educational



and psychological interventions, institutions can foster confidence, resilience, and communicative competence among learners, enabling them to participate more effectively in academic, social, and professional contexts while preserving their cultural identity and sense of self-worth.

References:

- Masks of Conquest. (1989). Masks of conquest: Literary study and British rule in India. Columbia University Press.
- Mary Atanas Mosha. (2014). Factors affecting students' performance in English language in Zanzibar rural and urban secondary schools. University of Tanzania.
- Revathi Kaushik. (2010). Teaching young learners. Pearson Education.
- Stephen D. Krashen. (1982). Principles and practice in second language acquisition. Pergamon Press.
- Rod Ellis. (2015). Understanding second language acquisition (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Lev S. Vygotsky. (1978). Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes. Harvard University Press.
- Albert Bandura. (1997). Self-efficacy: The exercise of control. W. H. Freeman.
- Bonny Norton. (2013). Identity and language learning: Extending the conversation (2nd ed.). Multilingual Matters.
- Zoltán Dörnyei. (2009). The psychology of second language acquisition. Oxford University Press.
- Jim Cummins. (2000). Language, power and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire. Multilingual Matters.