

Assessing Language Acquisition Behavioral Patterns in Adults

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Abstract

Language learning is a natural process and the process of learning is more of acquisition than conscious learning. It is acquired effectively both by a combination of conscious effort and involuntary acquisition from the surrounding. The Social Interactionist Theory elaborates on the zone of proximal development and this is widely employed in language learning classes. Vygotsky proposes a concept called scaffolding, a part of “zone of proximal development” or ZPD. ZPD can be defined as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86) The ZPD is the set of skills or knowledge a student can't do on her own but can do with the help or guidance of someone else. The study explores into the language acquisition/learning behaviour of individuals and involves practical training of students in English language. The students are those whose native language is not English and all belong to the age group of 18 to 19. These students are from regional medium schools and had entered college level with low or minimum English language skills. The students were provided with group activities, in task based language training and they enjoyed and enhanced their writing and speaking skills.

Keywords: Language learning, Social Interactionist, acquisition, zone of proximal development

Language learning is a natural process and it is more of acquisition than conscious learning. It is acquired effectively both by a combination of conscious effort and involuntary acquisition from the surrounding. The Social Interactionist Theory elaborates on the zone of proximal development and this is widely employed in language learning classes. Vygotsky proposes a concept called scaffolding, a part of “zone of proximal development” or ZPD. The ZPD is the set of skills or knowledge a student can't do on her own but can do with the help or guidance of someone else. The study involves assessing the language learning behaviour of individuals, while they are among their peers in a classroom environment.

Methods, theories and approaches

Approach - The Psycholinguistic approach (Stackhouse and Wells 1997) is a model used by Speech and Language Therapists to investigate the underlying nature of children's speech, language and or literacy difficulties and target intervention accordingly. This includes:

- Speech development
- Word-finding
- Phonological awareness
- Literacy skills

Here the target group is adults with students at the age group of 17 to 19. But their linguistic capability as far as English is concerned is very low as most of them are from regional medium schools who had no exposure to English as a language of instruction or communication at the school level. In this context, the psycholinguistic approach to second language (L2) learning focuses upon what humans know when they talk and how they acquire that knowledge and how that knowledge is put to use.

Kate McGilly (1996) argues that

“...learners are not learning to their full potential owing to the fact that in many cases, they use rote memory procedures in the classroom. With the increased competition in the work force and jobs becoming more demanding, students need to be more prepared for higher learning and the job market with skills that evolve from cognitive theory. These skills, encompassing study skills, social skills, problem solving, and

organizational skills to name a few, should be taught and integrated across the curriculum. (qtd. In Tukhtaeva Kuysin Davlatovna, 2021)

Hence, it is necessary to include modules that contain real life situations so as to enhance the on the feet thinking of the students, to face the world with confidence.

- **Behaviourist Theory** -language behaviour in terms of their natural occurrence in response to environmental circumstances and the effects they have on human interactions. Skinner's behaviour learning approach relies on the components of classical conditioning, which involves
 - unconditioned
 - conditioned stimuli
 - operant conditioning
- **Social Interactionist Theory** – is an explanation of language development emphasizing the role of social interaction between the developing child and linguistically knowledgeable adults. It is based largely on the socio-cultural theories of Soviet psychologist, Lev Vygotsky.
- **Usage-Based Theory** of language suggests that language through very concrete constructions based around individual words or frames on the basis of the speech they hear and use. Bavin states that language acquisition is “done with general cognitive processes, and universals of linguistic structure derive from the fact that people everywhere have the same set of general cognitive processes”(Bavin, 2009, pp. 85).

Based on these theories, a course was designed to facilitate English language skills are built by individuals in collaboration with the target group. The modules were activity based and promoted interaction among students. The target audience was students who learnt all subjects in Tamil during their school. They were encouraged to form their own groups and perform the assigned tasks. A pre- assessment was conducted for every student before the intervention. The entrainment was conducted for a year and a post evaluation was conducted. It was found that the students showed tremendous development in their language skills and

Language Lab activities to enhance spoken and written skills were conducted and the activities were evaluated on the following parameters:

Speaking skills –

Content

Expression

Participation

Writing Skills-

Content

Structure

Accuracy of Language

The evaluation was conducted on a continuous basis, with the help of a log book and the assessment results are as follows:

ORAL – CONTENT

The activities to entrain and evaluate the students in speaking skills include:

1. Role plays

Students are assigned situations and the play their roles accordingly. This activity helps them develop the required skills to speak appropriately, using apt vocabulary in real life situations.

2. JAM (Just a minute speech)

The teacher allows the student to pick a topic from a bowl and gives 1 minute and the students speaks on it for a few minutes.

3. Skits

Students enact short drama on a topic of their choice.

4. Read and act

The teacher suggests reading activities from books/e-class software/library etc. Students are asked to enact a different story similar to the one they read.

5. Floor crossing

Students are instructed to speak for and against on an assigned topic, taking no breaks in between.

6. Presentations

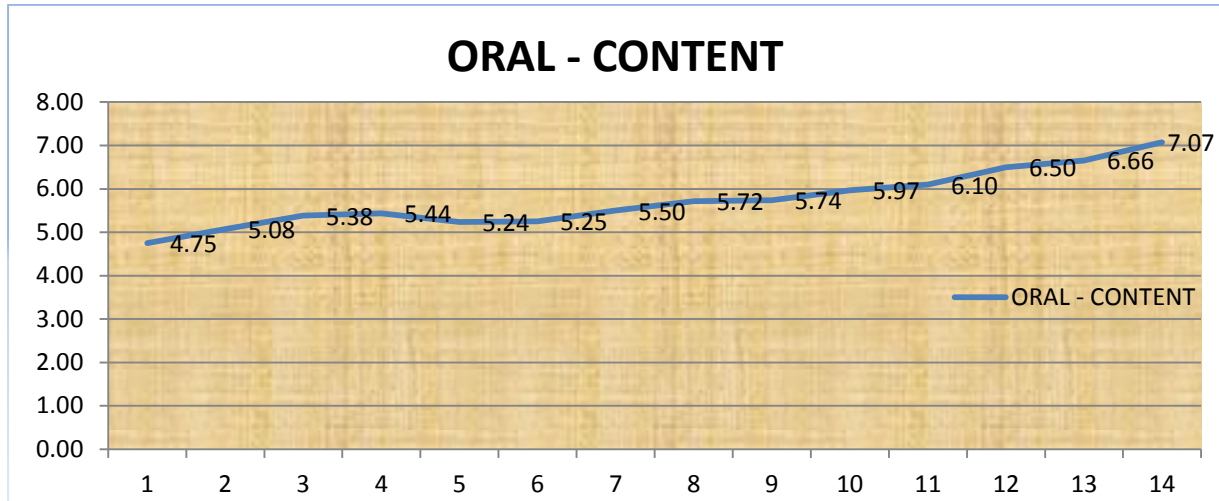
Group presentations by students

7. Cue cards

Students select a card and reflect on/ narrate the picture

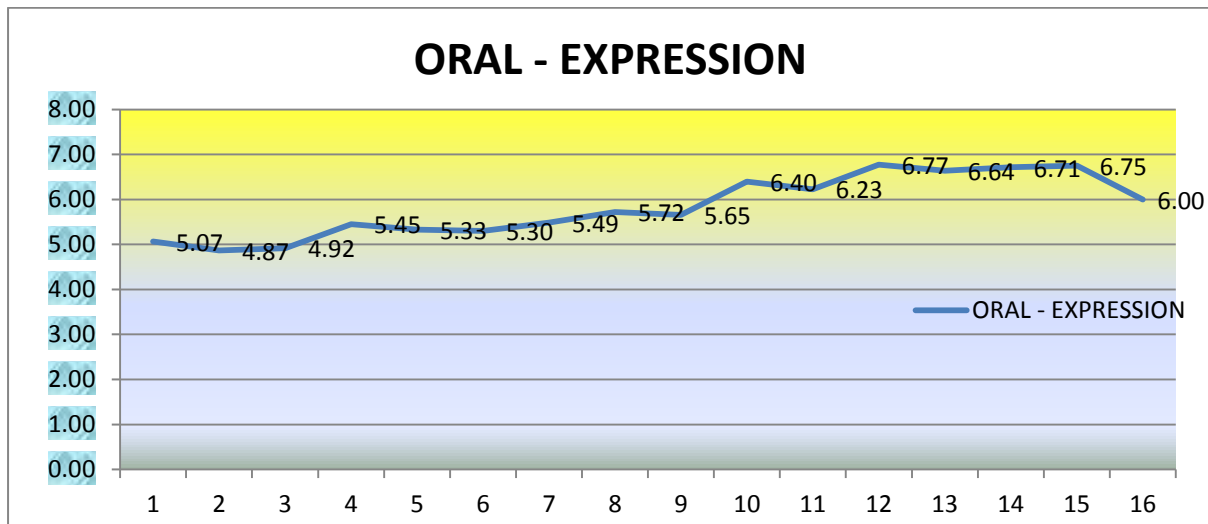
8. Ubiquitous Learning

Students are encouraged to do any of these speaking activities and send a recorded video of the same in order to ensure that learning goes after the regular working hours and students feel more freedom in expressing their ideas.



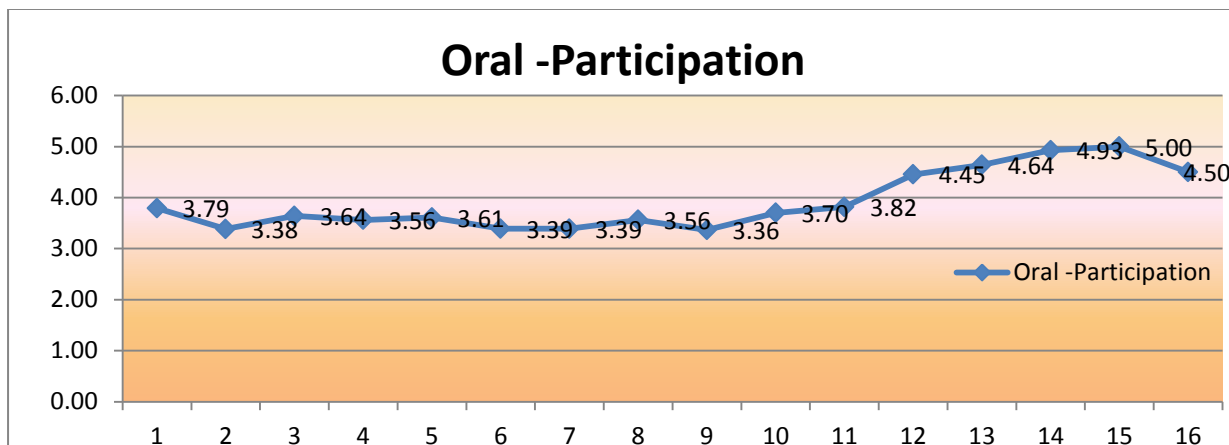
The above graph shows that the students have shown improvement in content with an increase in percentage form 4.75 to 7.07 on an average

ORAL – EXPRESSION



The above graph shows that the students have shown improvement in expression with an increase in percentage form 5.07 to 6.75% on an average.

Oral –Participation

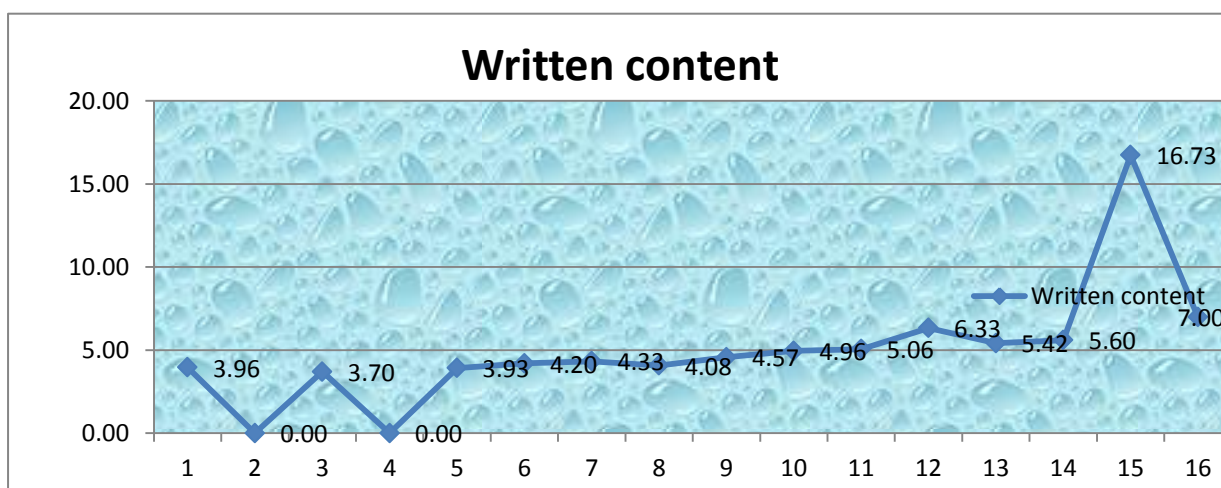


The above graph shows that the students have shown improvement in expression with an increase in percentage form 3.79 to 5% on an average.

Writing skills involves activities like writing

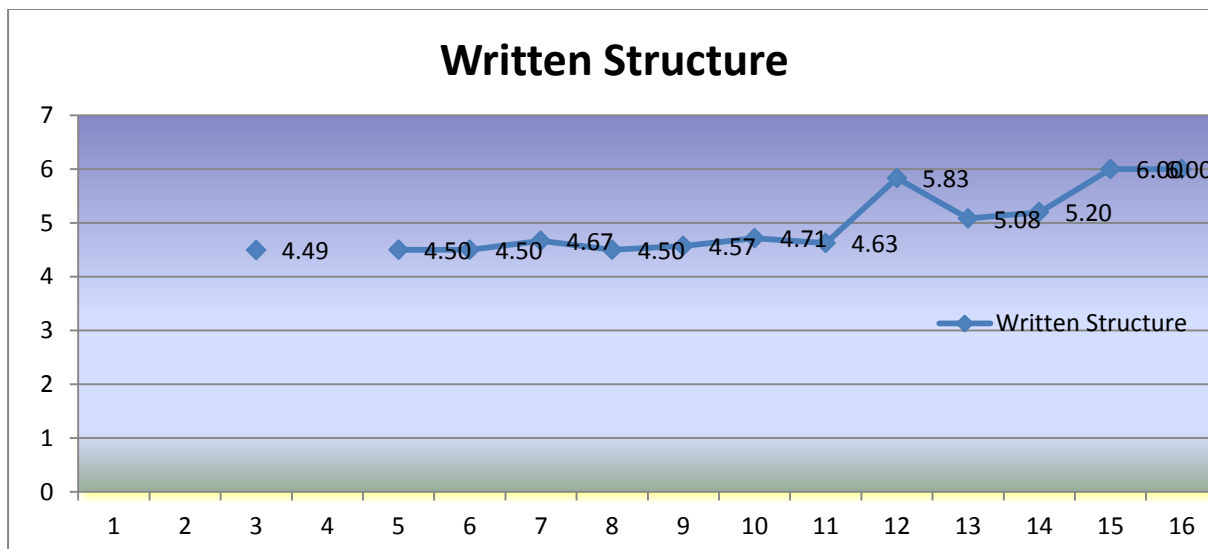
- Short paragraphs
- Skits
- Stories for Read enact activity
- New words from a given passage
- Framing new sentences to convert passive vocabulary into active.

Written content



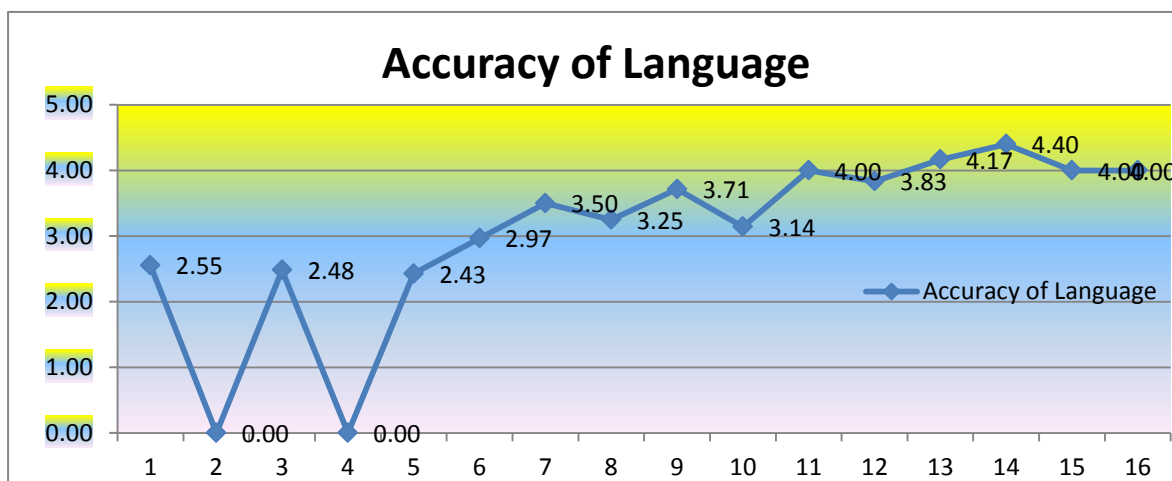
The above graph shows that the students have shown improvement in written content with an increase in percentage form 3.96 to 7% on an average.

Written Structure



The above graph shows that the students have shown improvement in Written Structure with an increase in percentage form 4.49 to 6 on an average.

Accuracy of Language



The above graph shows that the students have shown improvement Accuracy of Language with an increase in percentage form 1.5 to 4 on an average.

Summary:

- It has been found that students enjoy more of speaking activities than written
- They prefer speaking activities that fall in line with ‘total physical response’ method (TPR)
- They prefer working in groups than individually

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