An Assessment Of English Listening And Speaking Skills Of The Learners From Early Immersion Model -An Experimental Study

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Abstract

English is the language of the world and key to the upward mobility. English symbolizes in Indians' minds as better education, better culture and higher intellect. Indians who know English often considered to be of in a prestigious positions in the society, since it is a most read and written language. It is also believed that English fetches good career prospects. It aggravated in the minds of the parents which made them to enroll their wards in English medium schools as expected to provide immersion language teaching at the early stage. As researches state that immersion language teaching produces better language proficiency and the early and complete immersion always provide better results in the acquisition of English language. In this context this paper is an attempt to assess the speaking and listening skill acquired by the learners coming from early immersion model.

Keywords: immersion, early immersion, English medium schools, proficiency, acquisition

1. Introduction

Language immersion means surrounding oneself with the target language to be acquired in which using the language as much as possible. Language immersion is not only a method of language teaching but is more of a pedagogical approach promotes second language learning. In the language immersion classrooms, language is not taught as a subject rather it is a medium through the entire curriculum is taught.

Language immersion is one of the recent methods, which Canada implemented first in the 1960's. In Canada, which has a two language formula, some of the parents with English as their first language wanted their children to be proficient in French. For that they adopted a new experimental technique called language immersion.

Immersion is a kind of language learning condition, based on social interaction theory and Stephen Krashen's Second Language Acquisition theory. These theories advocate communicative language

teaching. It encourages acquisition rather conscious learning. It propagates learning of language in actual meaningful situations and it also enables the learner to learn the language throughout the day in all possible encounters. It ensures competency in all the four skills namely, LSRW.

Cervantes identifies four different types of language immersion and he characterized by the age of the learner.

- Early immersion: Students start learning their second language at the age of 5 or 6.
- Middle immersion: Students start learning their second language at the age of around 9 or 10.
- Late immersion: Students start learning their second language after the age of 11
- Adult Immersion: Students start learning their second language after the age of 15

The concept of English language immersion is not alien to Indian context and it could be compared with English medium instruction in India. As Clark K.would point out, "Immersion is an approach to teaching a language where learners receive all or most of their instruction in the new language" (Clark 2000: 29). It is also the basic premises of English medium instruction.

In both the instructional procedures are completely in English in which the teaching as well as all the basic transactions of the class is in English.

In both the methods, learner's language achievements are measured in terms of their fluency in the language. They enable the learner to think in the second language. Both encourage situational learning and aim at bringing a conducive ambient to maximize learning.

With regard to language acquisition, both methods aim at attaining fluency as the primary goal and accuracy of the language as secondary.

Language immersion and English medium education provide the ability to perform well in the standardized test administered in English.

In this regard, learners who enrolls at the age of 5 in the English medium instruction come under early immersion model, learners who enrolls at the age of 10 in the English medium instruction come under middle immersion model, learners who enrolls at the age of11 in the English medium instruction come under late immersion model and the learners who enrolls at the age of 15 in the English medium instruction come under adult immersion model.

Basing on this premises the researcher conducted an experimental study on the acquisition of English listening and speaking skills of the learners from Early Immersion model by comparing with the other three existing immersion models.

2.Population of the study

The population of the study comprises of four groups of learners from the U.G. 2016-2019 batch of Sacred Heart College, Tirupattur. The researcher employed a demographic details tool through which the samples are identified and grouped. Though the samples are taken from one college, the focus of the study is the kind of English immersion they have undergone in school. The Demographic details tool enabled the researcher to choose samples from different rural districts of Tamil Nadu such as Undivided Vellore, Dharmapuri, Krishnagiri, Thiruvanamalai and Villupuram and the schools also ranging from government schools, Aided schools and Private management schools. It gives an holistic view to the research. From the Demographic details, four different groups are identified based on the different immersion models they had undergone in school: early immersion, intermediate, late and adult immersions. Four samples from each group of each department are selected based on stratified random samplings method. **3.Reason to Choose the Population from Sacred Heart College, Tirupattur**

It is one of the colleges situated in a rural place with a history of more than sixty years. The name, Tirupattur, in fact means 'respectful ten villages' (respected + 10 + places). Students studying in this

college are hailing from ten (now more) villages. Though the college is located in Tirupattur district, equal numbers of the students are hailing from Tiruvanamalai, Dharmapuri and Krishnagiri districts, which are considered to be rural districts of Tamil Nadu state. Hence, this setting is ideal for research studies, dealing with rural learners. Besides, the researcher is working in the same college for the past ten years and the above-mentioned research questions have been inspired and arose out of real experience from such realistic background.

4.Research Design

The objective of the study is to**assess the English listening and speaking skills of the learners from Early Immersion model**. To attain this objective an overall research design of the current study was formulated and it consisted of two phases:

Phase- 1: Identifying the Target Group from Different Types of Immersion Models
      • Collection of demographic details
      • Grouping into different immersion models
      • From the ordered list, select the Target group

Phase-2: Assessing the Speaking and Listening Skills of Early Immersion model by

comparing with the other three immersion models

- Listening and Speaking skills testing tools to be employed to all the four immersion model to test their proficiency in Speaking and Listening skills.(Primary data)
- Comparative analysis of the four sets of data obtained from four immersion model to assess the Speaking and Listening skills of the Early immersion model

5.Research Tools Employed for the Study

The following tools were used in the study after proper validation:

5.1 Demographic Detail Tool

Questionnaire was prepared to collect the demographic details. In which they are asked fill the type of immersion education they have undergone,district, type of school, whether they come from rural or urban set up and their X and XII marks. It enabled the researcher to group the students in four different immersion models. Initially the students were arranged according to their departments then they are rank ordered based on XII English marks in the final board exam then based on the districts. From each department one student with highest score, one in the middle and two of the least scored with the combination of samples hailing from different districts were chosen as the subjects of the study for each model.

5.2 Evaluation Test Tool to test the proficiency of the samples
The researcher used a set of two well-trained teachers to assess the Listening and Speaking skills. The assessors negotiated their scores for every test of a learner and they have given marks for the tests.

5.2.1 Listening Test

Listening is the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and or nonverbal messages. People listen in order to comprehend information, critique and evaluate a message, show empathy for the feelings expressed by others, or appreciate a performance. Effective

listening includes both literal and critical comprehension of ideas and information transmitted in oral language. (Morreale, Rubin & Jones 1998: 10)

Listening Test had two parts: part one was a transcription test. An audio of an Indian Speaker was played and the students transcribed the whole text. The second part was a writing test. The learners had to answer a set of questions based on the passage transcribed by them.

The first part, transcription, checked the ability of the learners to recognise the sounds and words, their familiarity with simple vocabulary and grammatical units.

The second part, comprehension questions, checked the overall comprehension ability of the learners. It tested their ability to scan for specific information, and skim for important and central idea (s), summarise the text, etc.

5.2.2 Speaking Test

Speaking is the process of transmitting ideas and information orally in a variety of situations. Effective oral communication involves generation of messages and delivering them with attention to vocal variety, articulation, and nonverbal signals. (Quianthy 1990). One of the goals of the curriculum is to prepare learners to use English language in the day-to-day real life situations.

Speaking test has two parts. One is a conversation and second one is a speech where they have given their opinion.The evaluators randomly selected learners in pairs; and a particular situation was given to them for role-play. All the pairs were given the same situation; they would know of the situation only when they came up for the role-play. No prior preparation was allowed for the role-play, to enable the learners to exhibit their actual conversational ability in English. Hence, the language produced by them would reveal their level of language speaking ability. There was no fixed time limit for the role-play. Given the local context, boys were paired with boys and girls with girls, to avoid psychosocial and cultural barriers. Their performance was video graphed from a distance. The role-play was later assessed. In the same way learners are called individually and they are given a situation. No preparation time was given and they have to speak. It is also video recorded and assessed later.

The given situation for conversation was: A student says communicative English class during the first year in the college is useless and other one tries to prove him/her wrong.

The given situation for speech was: Why do you like English and how do you learn English?

6.Data Collection

The researcher had chosen four groups based on probability sampling from the demographic details obtained, Such as Early Immersion, Middle Immersion, Late Immersion and Adult Immersion. A common proficiency test was conductedat the tertiary level during the beginning of First Semester comprising the two language skills such as Listening, Speaking and the test was conducted for fifty marks in which each carries questions for 25 marks. These scores were considered as primary data.

7.Analysis of the data

The objective of the study is to assess the listening and speaking skills of the Early Immersion model. To achieve that data was obtained from all the four models of immersion and it is compared to establish the difference achieved by the early immersion model. Analysis was done at two levels. At the first level the scores of listening and speaking skills were put together and compared and the second level the scores of individual skills were compared.

7.1 Comparison of the four immersion models with the overall language proficiency in listening and speaking skills

Assessing the listening and speaking skills of early immersion models, actually directs to the Language acquired by the selected samples pertaining to the immersion model to establish the difference in the acquisition of early immersion model.The test was conducted for 50 marks. The percentage of the total marks of Listening and Speaking is considered as the proficiency in the Language and it is taken for analysis and it is categorised under four ranges; below 55, 55 to 70, 70 to 85. Hence it is analysed as follows:

7.2 Comparison of the Four Immersion Language proficiency and Type of Immersion Models * LS OVER ALL Cross Tabulation

LS ENTRY OVERALL						
			Less than 55	55 to 70	70 to 85	Total
Type of Immersion Models	Early Immersion	Count	0	12	11	23
		% within Type of Immersion Model	0.00%	52.20%	47.80%	100.00%
		% within LS ENTRY OVERALL	0.00%	25.50%	78.60%	22.80%
	Intermediate Immersion	Count	1	20	3	24
		% within Type of Immersion Model	4.20%	83.30%	12.50%	100.00%
		% within LS ENTRY OVERALL	2.50%	42.60%	21.40%	23.80%
	Late Immersion	Count	13	10	0	23
		% within Type of Immersion Model	56.50%	43.50%	0.00%	100.00%
		% within LS ENTRY OVERALL	32.50%	21.30%	0.00%	22.80%
	Adult Immersion	Count	26	5	0	31
		% within Type of Immersion Model	83.90%	16.10%	0.00%	100.00%
		% within LS ENTRY OVERALL	65.00%	10.60%	0.00%	30.70%
Total		Count	40	47	14	101
		% within Type of Immersion Model	39.60%	46.50%	13.90%	100.00%
		% within LS ENTRY OVERALL	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Cross tabulation between the two variables "Type of Immersion models" and "Language proficiency is presented in the table **7.2** The data suggests that the English Language Proficiency of the learners coming from Early Immersion model seem to be better than learners coming from other Immersion models. Out of 23 learners from the Early Immersion model (which has English as medium of instruction for 14 years), 11 have scored between 70 and 85, which is 47.8 per cent; 12 learners have scored between 55 and 70, which is 52.2 per cent. No one has scored below 55. It strongly points out to the fact that the learners coming out of Early Immersion model could have good English language proficiency.

Chi-Square value is 73.725 with 6 degree of freedom at .000 level of significance.

Chi-square test compares the various Immersion models pointed out in the study and the corresponding Listening and Speaking test scores to ascertain any association between the two entities. As observed in the above table, Chi-Square value is 73.725 at 0.000 level of significance. It points out to a high degree of association between the two compared entities of "type of Immersion models" and "Language proficiency test scores". So, the Chi-square test value strongly suggests that

the Level of English language proficiency at the entry-level is influenced by the type of Immersion model one has undergone.

7.3 Comparison of four Immersion models Listening Skills Type of Immersion Model and Listening Cross tabulation

Listening			less than 55	55 to 70	70 to 85	Total
Type of Immersion Model	**Early Immersion**	Count	3	12	8	23
		% within Type of Immersion Model	13.00%	52.20%	34.80%	100.00%
		% within LISTENING	6.30%	30.80%	57.10%	22.80%
	Intermediate Immersion	Count	3	16	5	24
		% within Type of Immersion Model	12.50%	66.70%	20.80%	100.00%
		% within LISTENING	6.30%	41.00%	35.70%	23.80%
	Late Immersion	Count	13	9	1	23
		% within Type of Immersion Model	56.50%	39.10%	4.30%	100.00%
		% within LISTENING	27.10%	23.10%	7.10%	22.80%
	Adult Immersion	Count	29	2	0	31
		% within Type of Immersion Model	93.50%	6.50%	0.00%	100.00%
		% within LISTENING	60.40%	5.10%	0.00%	30.70%
Total		Count	48	39	14	101
		% within Type of Immersion Model	47.50%	38.60%	13.90%	100.00%
		% within LISTENING	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Cross tabulation between the two variables "Type of Immersion models" and "Listening Skill" is presented in the table **7.3**.The data suggests that English Listening Proficiency of the learners coming from Early Immersion model seem to be better off than learners coming from other Immersion models. Out of 23 learners from the Early Immersion model (which has English as medium of instruction for 14 years), only 3 have scored less than 55, which is 13 per cent; 12 learners have scored between 55 and 70, which is 52.2 per cent; 8 have scored between 70 and 85, which is 38.8 per cent. The data strongly points out to the fact that the learners coming out of Early Immersion model could have better English Listening skill than others. It could be the result of having English as a medium of instruction for over twelve years where the learners have more opportunity to listen to English compared to other models of immersion. It would have familiarized number of new vocabularies and such vocabularies increased the level of comprehension. It is like the schema theory proposed by Rumelhart (1980), "if listeners are familiar with the given topic they are listening to, their content schemata can be activated and, consequently, comprehension becomes much easier."

The calculated Chi-Square value is 54.353 with 6 degree of freedom at .000 level of significance.

Here, Chi-square test compares the two variables "the various Immersion models pointed out in the study" and the corresponding "listening proficiency scores" to ascertain association between the two entities.As the Chi-Square value is at 0.000 level of significance, it points out to a high degree of association between the two compared entities. Thus, the Chi-square test value strongly suggests that the Level of English listening proficiency is influenced by the type of Immersion model that one has undergone. This strongly validates the data presented in the table **7.3** and the interpretation of the same.

7.4 Comparison of four Immersion models Speaking SkillsType of Immersion Model *

Speaking Cross tabulation

			SPEAKING				
			less than 55	55 to 70	70 to 85	85 and above	Total
Type of Immersion Model	Early Immersion	Count	2	8	10	3	23
		% within Type of IM	8.70%	34.80%	43.50%	13.00%	100.00%
		% within SPEAKING	6.10%	17.40%	52.60%	100.00%	22.80%
	Intermediate Immersion	Count	7	13	4	0	24
		% within Type of IM	29.20%	54.20%	16.70%	0.00%	100.00%
		% within SPEAKING	21.20%	28.30%	21.10%	0.00%	23.80%
	Late Immersion	Count	10	12	1	0	23
		% within Type of IM	43.50%	52.20%	4.30%	0.00%	100.00%
		% within SPEAKING	30.30%	26.10%	5.30%	0.00%	22.80%
	Adult Immersion	Count	14	13	4	0	31
		% within Type of IM	45.20%	41.90%	12.90%	0.00%	100.00%
		% within SPEAKING	42.40%	28.30%	21.10%	0.00%	30.70%
Total		Count	33	46	19	3	101
		% within Type of IM	32.70%	45.50%	18.80%	3.00%	100.00%
		% within SPEAKING	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Cross tabulation between the two variables "Type of Immersion models" and "Speaking Skill" is presented in the Table **7.4,.** The data suggests that the Speaking Proficiency of the learners coming from Early Immersion model seem to be better off than learners coming from other Immersion models. Out of the 23 learners from the Early Immersion model (which has English as medium of instruction for 14 years), 3 have scored above 85, which is 13 per cent; 10 have scored between 70 and 85, which is 43.5 per cent and 8 learners have scored between 55 and 70, which is 34.8 per cent. It strongly points out to the fact that the learners coming out of Early Immersion model could have better Speaking proficiency in English. This also could be related to their degree of exposure to English (as a medium of instruction). As pointed out in the previous section, prolonged exposure to spoken English by way of classroom instruction and the need of the learners to communicate in English to carry out various functions at school (asking permission, apologizing, etc.) or certain compulsion from teacher/school/parent to communicate in English, could result in learners acquiring better Speaking skill in English.The data also points out that there are 2 learners below 55, which is 8.7 per cent. It could be because of mixed ability group factor or their unwillingness to be active participants in language practice for many other reasons.

The calculated Chi-Square value is 28.531 with 9 degree of freedom at .001 level of significance. Here, the Chi-square test compares the "various Immersion models pointed out in the study" and the corresponding "Speaking proficiency scores" to ascertain any association between the two entities. As the Chi-Square value is at 0.001 level of significance, it points out to a high degree of association between the two compared entities. Thus, the Chi-square test value strongly suggests that the Level of English-speaking proficiency is influenced by the type of Immersion model that one has undergone. This strongly validates the data presented in the table **7.4,** and the interpretation of the same.

8.Findings

In table **7.2**, while observing the listening and speaking proficiency, it is obvious that learners from Early Immersion have better proficiency than learners from all the other models; 47.8 per cent of Early Immersion learners have scored above 70 marks whereas, 12.5 per cent of Intermediate Immersion learners have scored above 70 marks; while none of the learners from the other two models has scored above 70 marks.

Table**7.3**, presents the data that compares the four immersion models proficiency in Listening skill. The data clearly reveals that nearly 35 per cent of the learners from Early Immersion have scored between 70 and 85 per cent of marks; whereas, only 20.8, 4.3, and 0 per cent of learners from Intermediate, Late and Adult immersion models respectively have scored in the same range.

Table**7.4** ., makes it obvious that 56.5 per cent of learners from Early immersion model have scored above 70 per cent of marks in Speaking proficiency; whereas only 16.7, 4.3, and 12.9 per cent of learners from Intermediate, Late and Adult immersion models respectively have scored in the same range. It is pertinent to know that among the 56.5 per cent, 13 per cent of them have scored above 85 per cent of marks; whereas, none of the learners from other immersion models has scored in this range. While 8.7 per cent of learners from Early Immersion model have scored below 55 per cent of marks, a whopping 29.2, 43.5, and 45.2 per cent of learners from Intermediate, Late and Adult immersion models respectively have scored in the same range.

Hence it is very oblivious that samples coming from Early Immersion seem to score well in terms of marks and in their proficiency in the listening and speaking skills.

9. Conclusion

A Chinese proverb goes thus, "To learn a language is to have one more window from which to look at the world." Every new language learnt gives a different vision of life. Second language learning, thus, holds the imagination of people across the world and time. In Second Language Teaching, there is always another quest; to learn a language quickly and to communicate effectively. Hence, there are number of studies undertaken around to find the best method. The underlying principle of many of these studies is a cue taken from L1; language immersion, which enables every child to acquire its mother tongue. The language learning experiment carried out in Canada, was the first of its kind to try out the immersion model and well documented. From the results, it is firmly established that immersion model of L2 learning is one of the most effective ways of L2 acquisition. The current study assessed the English listening and speaking skills of the learners from Early Immersion model and found that samples coming from Early Immersion seem to score well in terms of marks and in their proficiency in the language.

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