SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AT TERTIARY LEVEL

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Abstract:

The present paper attempts to study and investigate the impact of covid 19 pandemic on the process of the second language acquisition that is acquiring English as a L2 by the undergraduate students. When the lockdown was announced and all academic activities were brought to a screeching halt. Academicians started exploring new methods so that education should not be affected .Although the Stakeholders in an Education System, viz. ~ Teachers, Students, Society, Institutions and Government, all have been impacted as a result of the Lockdown. Every Impact can be viewed as positive or negative. Since there is so much negativity prevalent due to the fear of pandemic as well as disruption of economic activities, we shall focus on the positive opportunities arising out of this situation, which can be capitalized for the benefit of all the stakeholders. Every crises yields unique and incredible opportunities and it leads to creation of new system or structure. Often a crisis acts as the forcing mechanism to compel expeditious innovation, leading to rapid advances in technology. Second language learning is an area which cannot be ignored especially now when world has become a global village and we need a common language to exchange information and to share and survive. The present paper discusses the possibility of using SMS and mobile based E-mail effectively in the process of the second language acquisition. The effect of these two on their writing skills, vocabulary and spelling mistakes is measured. To find out this effect on the acquisition, the researcher carried out a questionnaire survey of 150 undergraduate students of B.Com. from the college affiliated to the University of Mumbai. The collected data were analyzed. The results showed the positive effect of the use of SMS/E-mail on the language acquisition. E-mail and SMS will help to put the learners in real life like situations and thus encourage acquisition that is spontaneous learning. If wisely used SMS/e-mail will be a blessing. Based on the results, some pedagogical implications for the use of SMS/e-mail are given.

Key words: Second language, pandemic, acquisition, L2, SMS

Introduction: Covid-19 may be a microbe but its tentacles are spreading fast in all directions. Amidst this worldwide struggle that has crippled all economic and social fields; the educational sector too is witnessing a major challenge, a challenge that has stunted the teaching faculty and students who were not mentally prepared to face it. Like most other sectors, here too people turned to technology to be its saviour and to overcome most of its obstacles. But the basic question is that, do we really understand the magnitude of the impact?

Modern mass media technologies have revolutionized the concepts and practices of second language learning/teaching in our country. These technologies have totally changed the face of communication in the academic world. One of the objectives of modern education is to make students confident, creative and productive users of new technologies, particularly information and communication technologies, and understand the impact of those technologies on society. According to Warschauer (2003), the introduction of new technology automatically brings results which are referred to as 'technological determinism'. It can be viewed as new processes or outcomes. It brings about pedagogical changes which should be examined from broader perspectives and not only from the classroom point of view. Technology in the first place creates new social contexts, which determines new teaching-learning ways. He states that students who use new media can develop a wide range of literacies and identities and these skills must be taken into account in English teaching/learning at undergraduate level.

Computer/mobile assisted technology has been attracting attention in L2 teaching/learning process especially post covid 19 lockdown. A multi-pronged strategy is necessary to manage the crisis and build a resilient Indian education system in the long term This modern technology has blessed us with SMS and E-mail, which are widely used and commonly accepted methods of formal and personal communication. They have special benefits for L2/FL learners such as easy access, quick feedback, valid, direct, comparative negligible cost and reliable communication. They ensure accuracy as they can control planning, composing, editing and delivering messages. They do not require any technical expertise to be able to use them.

 Inclusive learning solutions, especially for the most vulnerable and marginalized, need to be developed. With a rapid increase of mobile internet users in India, which is expected to reach 85% households by 2024, technology is enabling ubiquitous access and personalization of education even in the remotest parts of the country. This can change the education system and increase the effectiveness of learning and teaching, giving students and teachers multiple options

to choose from. Many aspirational districts have initiated innovative, mobile-based learning models for effective delivery of education, which can be adopted by others.

E-mail is the most widely used application of Computer mediated communication (CMC) (Newmen et al, 1996). With it, we can analyze; motivate the learners, the classroom and real world; facilitate reflective learning; provide L2/FL learners with a real audience. Thus e-mail extends language learning time and space and provides input for real world communication and immediate feedback. (Hoffman, 1996).

Even SMS texting, the most ubiquitous and stable technology, has great potential in L2 acquisition/learning process.

In today's digital world, students world wide are techno savvy. Rather they are naturally stimulated to SMS/e-mail which can, therefore, be used very effectively as teaching and learning aids in the second language classroom. Since these two encourage students 'participation in their social environment, the grasping of the second language occurs in a very natural manner. Thus spontaneous second language 'acquisition' and not 'learning' is promoted. Learners are put in natural contexts which create relaxing atmosphere making group dynamics easier.

Review of Literature

SMS and e-mail Literature survey shows the wide use of computer/mobile assisted means of communication in the field of education.

There are quite a number of research papers reported in this area. Only some research projects will be highlighted here.

There are numerous English as a foreign language research studies which explored how the integration of technology improved learners' academic performance, motivated them and enhanced their language learning (Blake,2000; Cheng, 2003; Egbert,2002; Skinner and Austin,1999).

S. Cornavacca, Huff and Marshall (2007,2009) studied the possibility of using a SMS based classroom interaction system for language learning.

Markett et al (2006) advocated SMS to encourage interactivity in the classroom through their mobiles.

Cui and Wang (2008) insisted on the possibility of language learning at any time at any place which is highly desirable for busy learners.

Most of the researchers reported that SMS could be effectively used in vocabulary learning as it enables discrete SMS messages in a short and succinct manner and also it can be easily accessed.

Kukalska-Hulme and Shield (2008) did an overview of mobile assisted language learning and promote'push approach' of learning by sending information to the learners at set time on set days.

The studies are also conducted in other languages. Levy and Kennedy (2005) and Pinacas (2004) studied the use of SMS for learning Italian and Greek languages respectively.

Lu (2008) reported the application of SMS in L2 Learning in Taiwan. Students learned through mobile phones.

Thornton and Houser (2001,2005) advocated the use of 'SMS' and 'e-mail' for English lessons in Japan.

Bollen, Eimler and Hoppe (2004) implemented a communication and discussion tool based on sending SMS messages through the interface of PDAS.

Cavus and Ibrahim (2009) investigated MOLT – SMS based system for learning technical words.

Lu (2008) found out the positive attitudes towards learning vocabulary via mobile phones. The effect of SMS vocabulary lesson for 30 high school students divided into two groups was studied.

Geoff Stead at CTAD provided many case studies ranging from preparing work based promotional materials, raising literacy to numeracy awareness via sector based phone and SMS quizzes (Stead, 2005).

A number of studies have investigated the effect of e-mail on the development of foreign language learners' skills and vocabulary (Ma, 2006; Jou, 2008; Lu, 2008; Brown, 2008). Most of them have reported how mobile/e-mail can be used effectively in teaching and learning language skills (especially writing) and vocabulary. Stockwell (2007) studied the effect of using mobile based e-mail strategies on vocabulary learning.

However, a few studies have been done on the effectiveness of mobile based –e-mail and its effects on writing and vocabulary together.

Research suggests that e-mail can facilitate communication (Cooper and Selfe, 1990), reduce anxiety (Kern, 1995), facilitate social learning (Belz, 2002), and improve writing skills (Warschauer,1996).

Shang (2007) studied the overall effect of using e-mail on the improvement of writing skills specifically the syntactic complexity, grammatical accuracy, lexical density. The study also investigated the relation between the number of e-mail exchanges and writing performance. The e-mail approach was found to be a positive strategy for improving language learning and attitudes towards English.

Leslie Opp-Beckman and Cynthia Kieffer advocated collaborative online language learning with three stakeholders in it: the learner, the instructor and the informant through e-mails, discussion boards, web publishing,etc. This promotes learner motivation, personal interaction and a cultural connection to the target language culture.

Pennington(2003) advocated the use of LANs,WANs and e-mails for teaching and learning writing. Such devices, according to her, promote more collaboration and more active participation of students. Woodin (1997) reported e-mail as a bridge between the language classroom and the natural setting. Nobors and Swartley (1999) also found that the use of e-mail with freedom of topic promoted students' creative communication.

According to Crystal (2001) e-mail is a third medium which is distinct from speech or writing. He refers to CMC as 'Netspeak' wherein 'speak' involves writing as well as talking. E-mail like speech, uses a simplified speech-like register, simple vocabulary, anaphora and contradictions, speech-like sentences with frequent spelling and grammar errors, abbreviations and acronyms, simplified spellings and even ways of supplying paralinguistic information to express emotional states of mind.

Studies since 1980s indicate that e-mail exchanges enable L2 learners to control their own learning and interaction; they become better writers because they have an authentic audience and a communicative purpose for writing. They help students develop their own thoughts and ideas, help them to improve their English proficiency and give them feelings of accomplishment and enjoyment (Warschauer,1996).These positive results produce enhanced motivation to study the

target language. They change students' attitude and make them feel that L2 is a powerful medium for communication and not only an object for study (Beauvois,1998;Gu&Zhe,1999;Shetzer&Warschauer,2000;Warschauer ,2003).

The present study attempts to examine the effect of the mobile based e-mail and SMS together on the Acquisition of English as a L2 by the undergraduate students of the two colleges affiliated to the University of Mumbai. The researcher tried to evaluate the use of SMS/e-mail in the process of Acquisition of English as Second Language.

Survey:

Teachers' viewpoint:

Teachers are not averse to online teaching and the corresponding technology; they need time to adopt and adapt to the changing scenario. Full- proof and secure platforms of Indian origin and good infrastructure which can be easily accessible to students from lower strata are some of their wants. To facilitate teaching - learning in an educational institution (which was earlier based on a brick and mortar model) teachers explored use of technology for delivering the process of learning, - video conferencing plus circulating notes, hand-outs, reading materials.

Crises to cooperation: systemic change

1. The Stakeholders in an Education System, viz. ~ Teachers, Students, Society, Institutions and Government, all have been impacted as a result of the Lockdown. Every Impact can be viewed as positive or negative. Since there is so much negativity prevalent due to the fear of pandemic as well as disruption of economic activities, we shall focus on the positive opportunities arising out of this situation, which can be capitalized for the benefit of all the stakeholders.

2. The Library Resources made available to students through use of inflibnet.

3. All this required teachers to learn new technologies available for Teaching /Learning Process.

4. The students have readily accepted and adopted this Learning process

5. Teachers are updating their knowledge through various online webinars and faculty development programs

6. The closure of colleges and universities has widespread implications for students, faculty, administrators, and the institutions themselves.

Objectives of the Study:

- To investigate the use of SMS and mobile based E-mail in the process of the second language acquisition that is acquiring English as a L2 by the undergraduate students from M.M.K. College .
- To find out the effect of SMS/e-mail on their language acquisition
- To find out their ways of using English while writing or sending SMS and e-mails.
- To find out their perceptions, attitudes and problems while using these devices.

The questions raised here are:

- How are the SMS and e-mail used in the process of acquisition of English as a second language?
- Do they promote Students' motivation and active participation?
- Can they be used effectively in the process of language acquisition?
- What are students' attitudes towards these devices?

Hypothesis

- E-mail and SMS have great effect on the acquisition of the language of students residing especially in urban areas.
- Students make use of English language while sending SMS and email.
- Effective use of SMS/e-mail improves students' L2 Acquisition.

Methodology

A survey of 150 undergraduate students was conducted during April 2020 post covid 19 lockdown. A questionnaire was administered to these students in order   to collect their

responses. The questionnaire was designed by the researchers. It included questions about participants' use of mobile/SMS/ e-mail; their attitudes to the use of SMS/e-mail in the language acquisition process; difficulties they come across in this process; the effect of SMS/e-mail on their writing skills and vocabulary . Both open ended and close ended questions were administered. Self reporting was also done by the students.

Subjects:

The subjects of the Study consisted of a sample of 150 undergraduate students enrolled in Mumbai suburban colleges (Smt. M.M.K. College) affiliated to the University of Mumbai. They were F.Y./S.Y.B.Com. students. All of them had the same level of English proficiency and they were in the age group 18-19 years. The selection of these students was randomly done. It was assumed that these students had similar opportunities for learning English.

Data Analysis

A very simple numerical analysis of the data collected was done.

Results

Data Analysis revealed the following results:

The students from the colleges were using mobile assisted SMS/e-mail devices for the last 3-5 years. There was exchange of 5-10 SMS- text messages and 1-5 e-mail messages per day. They mostly used English language for the purpose and sometimes even Hindi/Marathi messages in English.

All of them felt these devices more useful and convenient than face-to-face communication as it facilitated self editing, spell check and thus writing skills and vocabulary learning. They used abbreviated words. But the abbreviated words are used once the standard spelling is learned.

There were mixed responses to the questions related to their Attitude towards the use of these devices. Some of them felt that these devices have increased their confidence and motivation level. Some felt they have become more creative by using these devices. All of them felt that

these have assisted them in their language acquisition that is spontaneous learning as these devices allow learning at any time, anywhere. So they are more comfortable with these devices.

The students felt that they were not encouraged to use these devices by their teachers before covid 19 lockdown out of fear of distraction. Now it is the only source of education through which they can contact their teachers and classmates and interact.

Findings

The questionnaire survey yielded the following findings:

Overall findings indicated the positive effect of mobile assisted SMS/e-mail devices on the acquisition of English as Second Language by the undergraduate students from the college. By means of SMS and E-mail the students showed improvement on their overall performance in language skills.

- Students could improve their writing skills and vocabulary as they were always provided with the language situations where they had to acquaint with English words, phrases and sentence constructions even without formally learning them in the classroom. This frequent dealing and encounters with English words and sentence patterns encouraged their independent use of the language in authentic communication.
- These devices made Group dynamics easier and that further facilitated their language acquisition process.
- These devices were found to be a high motivator for stimulating learners to write. Thus they could promote their confidence in English.
- However the use of these devices was found to be quite limited in the classroom out of fear of distraction. So the students were rather discouraged by the teachers to use them. Therefore, these devices are not fully used for the learning process.
- These devices brought about the behavioral and attitudinal changes in second language learning of the students as the students felt using these devices quite trendy.

- Students preferred a mixture of language i.e. English, Hindi with varying frequency while sending messages through these devices. A very interesting fact is that even Hindi/Marathi messages were typed in English script.

- Students mostly used English while sending SMSs and e-mails since English is a widely used and commonly accepted language for their purposes and it is mostly used in Business correspondence. Students also believed that the short and informative nature of SMSs and e-mails could be best expressed in the operational language of the instrument or device, i.e. English.

- These devices encouraged spontaneous learning - acquisition as students could be put in natural context. They found their use quite convenient as they allow learning at any time anywhere.

- These devices helped them to be more creative. They came out with witty replies, couplets and beautiful expressions. They could differentiate between formal and informal English. Their understanding of the appropriateness and acceptability of words, phrases and expressions in a given situation seemed to be enhanced.

- Students seemed to understand not only the structural meaning but also the contextual meaning of the words. This is because most of their SMS and e-mail messages included day-today conversation.

Recommendations:

SMSs and e-mails are popular with the students due to its short and informal form. Students feel free to use the language the way they like in order to express meaning. This encourages spontaneous learning. In order to operate any such device, one needs at least a working knowledge of English as most of the templates installed in mobile phones to be used readily for various occasions are in English. The user has to follow instructions or dialogue boxes that are generally in English. Even to type a text message, a keyboard with English alphabet is used. In this situation, students opt for English for quick and effective communication. This helps to reinforce the correct language use. These changes will definitely pave way for pedagogical changes.

The present study has shaken to the certain extent the myth that SMS/e-mail has a disastrous effect on language learning especially on writing skills, and vocabulary. The study supports to some extent Crystal's (2008) suggestions that language is in the process of revitalization, not destruction due to technology and texting. Baron (2008) also gives similar suggestions that texting helps develop vocabulary and reading skills instead of damaging language.

Since these devices are now an integral part of our life and have great potential to rise in various communication situations, we should learn to manage these effectively.

These need to be proved as the useful means of education. Considering their positive effect on the language acquisition, these devices are recommended as learning/teaching strategies in the Second language classroom for college students. They should be used to promote and supplement teaching /learning activities. As these devices provide the learner with the input and natural contexts spontaneous/ subconscious learning can be fostered. In this way these devices help to create the learning opportunities outside the classroom as well.

In sum, the paper attempts to focus on the general effects of these devices on language acquisition but in a limited way. Therefore it is suggested that larger samples can be studied for the purpose. Further research study may be undertaken to find out the effect of these devices on any grammatical aspect in the process of language acquisition by the younger students. This might yield different results.

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