Any significant work starts with objectives and ends with productive results. Starting with a goal, continuing with the goal-oriented behaviour, and achieving the expected outcome are the steps towards success in any project. The researcher was also undergoing such a process in his research on language acquisition. The researcher had the following objectives to start this research:

a. The researcher is working in a higher secondary school. He has been dealing with the same age group in different schools for the last nine years. Even in the higher secondary level, which is known as the threshold of the professional education, the performance of students in English is very poor. Though they achieve adequate marks to go to the next level, most of them are unable to speak in English. Whatever subject they graduate in, current career scenario demands communication ability in English. Even professional education is not possible without good command in English. The lessons and teachers inside the classroom and interviews and interactions outside the classroom necessitate efficiency and effectiveness in English language, especially in oral communication. So the researcher wanted to equip the students with English speaking skill.

b. Majority of the students the researcher teach are from rural area and they lack motivation, self-esteem and, self-confidence. It reflects in their performance in English also. They are afraid to speak in English. English was introduced to them as “not easy,” “very difficult,” “tough,” and “foreign.” So it is natural that the students keep a mental distance from such a “terrible subject.” The researcher
wanted to present the simple and interesting aspects of English language learning and thus build self-confidence in the students to speak in English.

c. Language is known as a skill subject and it includes skills in four areas - listening, speaking, reading, and writing. But in the school curriculum, it is not treated as a skill subject and the students are learning about the language - its grammar, rules, etc. They do not get the chance to acquire the language. Since only writing area is highlighted and tested, students get mark in the examination but they lack the language skill.

d. The researcher has taken 200 higher secondary students from his own school as the sample population. Since he is working among higher secondary students, he thought of conducting his experiments on that group to improve their language skills. As the total number of students was large, the researcher had taken only 200 students - including two science batches and two humanities batches.

When the researcher started his research he had the following questions in his mind.

j. How does language acquisition take place?

k. Why does not our second language education produce the expected outcome?

l. Why do our students remain “dumb” even after learning a skill subject for nine years?

m. Is there any procedure for systematic language acquisition/learning?

n. What are the stages through which one acquires mother tongue?

o. If we find out the mother tongue acquisition pattern, is it possible to develop foreign language course in the same pattern?

p. If mother tongue acquisition is possible without learning the alphabets, why not English?
q. Is reading ability a must in language acquisition? How far does it help in the acquisition of a second language?

r. A child takes years to acquire his mother tongue. Is it possible to reduce the period in second language acquisition since one already knows a language?

The researcher wanted to get answers, at least, for some of the questions mentioned above. That is why he got into this research. He clubbed his research with his teaching - selected his school, took his students as sample population, and used actual classroom situations, except in one case to utilise his experiments in future. He wanted the students not just to learn and forget the language, but to acquire and inherit it.

Language acquisition means unconscious inheritance of a language through exposure and situational use. It is not learning about the language, but acquiring the language itself to use it according to the situation. Language learning is the conscious understanding of a language. In language learning all the four skills of the language are taught describing its rules, features, etc. But in language acquisition all those features are accessed internally. Students get the chance to use the language and those situations help them to internalise the necessary rules. A learner may be able to describe the rules in a language, but may not be successful in productive communication using those rules. One who has acquired the language may not able to describe the rules, but he will be efficient in communication. Learning happens through habit formation and once the habit gets broken, the learning itself slowly dies. Acquisition happens through internalising and so remains permanent. Language learning often happens in the examination point of view and all are satisfied with the “Grades” they achieve. But all grades are in vain if communication does not take place. So the researcher conducted his research in acquisition rather than in learning and it was done not in the examination point of view.
but in the practical life point of view. The following objectives helped him to move forward:

a. To find out whether it is possible to achieve second language acquisition in higher secondary students.

b. To analyse if second language acquisition is possible through language games and activities.

c. To explore the possibility of developing other language skills through oral skills.

d. To find out how far building up of vocabulary will strengthen the language acquisition.

It is a well-known concept that one should begin with the end in mind. The researcher had to decide the end points from the above objectives. Once the finishing point is decided it is easy to decide the route. So the researcher formed the following hypotheses from the objectives to design his journey:

a. It is possible to develop second language acquisition in the higher secondary students.

b. Second language acquisition is possible through language games and activities.

c. By developing oral skills, other language skills can also be developed.

d. Building up of vocabulary helps language acquisition.

Once the target is fixed, the next step is to identify the route. The researcher had to identify a school and sample population to conduct his experiment. He has selected his own school, St. Thomas Higher Secondary School, Pala, for his work. Since he was a part of the school, he could continue his research there easily. This school, situated in the semi-urban area, is an aided boys’ school working under the Corporate Educational Agency, Catholic Diocese of Pala. It had the total strength of 940 students from Class V
to XII (in the year 2009-2010), Higher secondary section had 300 students in six batches of fifty students each in four science and two humanities batches (including first and second years). The school followed SCERT syllabus and the medium of instruction was Malayalam.

The researcher selected 200 students as sample population, hundred students from Science batches and hundred students from Humanities batches. Getting all the 300 students to conduct the experiment was difficult. It was not allowed because of the administrative constraints. The sample population included both first and second years. Most of them were from middle-class family in the rural areas and their family size was also medium. Majority of the parents had only secondary or higher secondary level education and so they were not able to do much in the language development of their children. Students’ routines and habits also were not formed in acquisition-friendly manner. Only 7% students were in the habit of reading English newspapers. Though 62.5% students were watching English movies, it was because of the visual thrill rather than language interest. That is why, the number of students watching news channel and other programmes were 31% and 64% respectively. Most important, even after learning English for nine years, only 10% of students claimed that they spoke English. Their participation in co-curricular activities was also same. So the researcher had to motivate and bring them out of their shell to do his experiment. Their attitude towards English was positive and they wanted to be successful in their career.

The researcher conducted a pre-test in all four areas of the language skills to check their entry behaviour. By the test, the researcher could understand that students’ language efficiency was limited to their writing skill only. Their textbooks, examination, evaluation - everything was focused on writing area alone. As a result, naturally their performance was very low in other areas, especially in spoken area. So the researcher
designed and conducted interactive sessions to improve their speaking ability, believing that improvement in speaking area can influence all the other areas.

The researcher allocated five sessions in each class to conduct his experiment - four sessions for conducting experiment through language games and activities and one session for evaluating the experiment by conducting a post-test. The focus of the sessions was on speaking area. Session I was conducted to improve their vocabulary. It had group formation, competition, vocabulary game etc. to make the class different and thus to keep the students interesting. From Session II onwards students got the chance to make sentences and then to speak in English using those sentences. Nothing was taught theoretically. Simple present tense was introduced using their own favourite sentence “I love you.” Pair work, picture description, individual presentation, etc. made the session alive. Questioning skill was focused in Session III. Conversation happens and continues only with questions. Through the group formation competition and Hot Seat game, the students got enough opportunity to ask and converse in English. Listening and speaking activities were included in the fourth session. Students got the opportunity to listen to a news reading and they got the training to read the news. Story telling competition was also included in this session. Students got the chance to listen to a story and present it in their own version.

The researcher paid special attention to keep all the sessions interactive and interesting. Since the performances were in teams students could do it without inhibition. The researcher evaluated the students’ performance after the session through a post-test. As in the pre-test, he tested all the areas of language skills. All the tests were conducted individually to ensure maximum reliability.

The post-test showed the improvement in students. The improvement was visible and remarkable among average students, especially in the speaking area. Students who
were in the “B” and “C+” Grades showed the highest level of improvement in speaking area. Only thirty-one students got “C+” in the pre-test, but it became forty-seven in the post-test. Thirty-three students got “B” Grade in the post-test, whereas it was only twenty-two in the pre-test. The decrease in the number of low achievers was also noticeable. The impact of improvement in the speaking area was visible in other areas too. In writing and listening areas, the highest change happened in “B+” and “B” Grades. Reading area showed maximum improvement in “B” and “C+” levels. In the speaking area, in the pre-test, the highest number of students was at “D+” level (forty-seven), but in the post-test the bar has been raised and the highest number of students was at “C+” Grade. In listening and reading areas also this improvement was noticeable. In the writing area it remained the same. Since they got the focus in the writing area throughout their language education period, the result remained the same.

Findings

The research process carried out by framing the hypothesis, selecting sample population, conducting the pre-test, experiment, and the post-test, and analysing them statistically, helped the researcher to arrive at the following findings;

a. The researcher could understand that it was possible to achieve second language acquisition by higher secondary students. Of course, mother tongue has the certain advantages in the process of acquisition. Since all the elements, environment, people around, etc., are supportive to mother tongue acquisition, it is comparatively easy. But it does not mean that one can acquire only mother tongue and acquisition of no other language is possible. Though the home environment does not support English language acquisition, especially in rural areas, acquisition-friendly atmosphere can be created in educational institutions.
It is not limited inside the classroom. A higher secondary student spends seven hours a day in the campus. If those seven hours can be made English-friendly, a student can listen, think, speak, play or do anything in English, almost half of the living time, since they sleep eight hours a day on an average. When students get continuous chances to listen and to speak, naturally the unconscious internalisation takes place. When the sample population got three hours to listen, speak, and act, they displayed the improvement. If they live in such an “English Speaking World” outside the classroom, their improvement will be much higher.

b. Second language acquisition is possible through language games and activities. As you sow, so you reap. It is true regarding language acquisition also. The sample population was not speaking English because they never got the chance to speak. They were asked to write and they were writing, only writing, for the last nine years. We cannot expect speaking or listening skills from such a group of students. If they need to speak in English, they should get the chance and training to speak in English. Language games and activities are the best to give such trainings. They are conducted not in the examination point of view, but in the acquisition point of view. When the acquisition takes place, performance in examination will also be improved.

Games and activities helped the students to come out with confidence. Higher secondary students face all the challenges and features of adolescence. They have inhibition, want to protect their self-esteem, afraid to make mistakes and get insulted and above all, they believe in image building. In such a stage, students hesitate to make individual performances, that too in an unfamiliar area - speaking in English. In games and activities, students are in spirit of competition and they forget their inhibition, image, etc. The swiftness of the
procedure does not allow them to think otherwise. Games and activities give a lot of listening opportunities to students. Since the teacher does not use any word in mother tongue - he is not supposed to use - the students have to listen to the instructions in English and grasp them. Continuous listening to the target language will improve their language skill. Naturally, the students will start thinking and speaking in English. It was visible in the sessions conducted by the researcher. In short, games and activities affect the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor levels of students and help them in acquiring the language.

Developing speaking skills can develop other language skills also. Language is essentially meant for communication, specifically for oral communication. Speaking ability is the best evidence to prove one’s language ability. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are the steps in the mother tongue acquisition also. So the first steps are listening and speaking. But in second language teaching, the process is reversed, it has become writing, reading, and the other two do not happen at all. The researcher could prove that “speaking area focused training” can improve the performance in other areas also. The performance comparison in the pre-test and the post-test reveals it. Though the sessions were speaking skill-oriented, the post-test was conducted in all the areas in order to check this impact. Majority of the students could upgrade themselves at least to the next higher level and thus the number of students at the lowest level became remarkably low. In the speaking area, the number of students at the lowest level (between 20-29) was thirty-four and it became thirteen in the post-test. Same impact is there in other areas too. In the reading area, twenty in the pre-test became nine in the post-test and in the listening eleven in the pre-test came down to four in the post-test. It was visible in writing area too. Only one remained at the lowest level in the post-
test, whereas there were five in the pre-test. So it is true that improvement in the speaking area naturally modifies the performance in the other areas too.

d. Building up of vocabulary helps second language acquisition. Words form sentences, not in writing alone, but in all areas, so in speaking too. Most of the students fail to speak because of their lack of vocabulary. They may know the word, but they often could not use right word at the right place. Most of the time, they complain that they have the idea but they do not know how to express it. If the students get training in vocabulary, they will automatically improve their language. The researcher could understand it through his research. Students played vocabulary game, identified lead words, and those words were indirectly tested in the post-test. Most of them could respond positively, not just in the test, but in their conversations too and in the next day exercises the researcher could hear students using those words in their conversations. When the students use the right word at the right place, they naturally acquire the usage. Those vocabularies will be naturally repeated in their future conversations and thus they become confident to speak. When the students listen, they identify and pick up the vocabulary they need and repeat them when the situation arises.

e. Unlearning is more difficult than learning. Sometimes it remains a block to acquisition. The researcher felt the same during his sessions too. It has arisen in mainly two areas - pronunciation and sentence pattern. Mispronunciation of common words like hotel, tour, etc. was repeated even after the general feedback given by the researcher. It was not easy for them to correct. When the sentence pattern was introduced using “I love you” the students were happy and they could grasp it. But some of the students’ presentation was interrupted by the mother tongue influence like “I late came.” Since such wrong structures were almost
internalised, unlearning and re-learning were needed. It was not easy. So, for better and easy acquisition of a language a “clean slate” - *tabula raza*, as put by John Lock - is needed.

f. Students perform better in team and it enhances their individual performance. Students, especially at the higher secondary level, do not want to get insulted because of their poor performance. So they often believe that it is better to avoid the situations to perform. When they make individual performance, they are afraid of being observed by many a people. So they try to get away with such incidents. In team performance everybody performs and nobody watches. Nobody is worried about his or others’ performance. They just do what they are asked to do. Since everybody is assigned with certain duties, their concentration will be on that activity and they have no time to watch others. They are working towards their goal, completion of their work, and they know that everybody has to contribute to it. Moreover, group works are fired by winning and losing. So all the teams want to win somehow or other. Thus everybody participates to their maximum level. Naturally their performance and confidence will be improved. When speaking activities are given to the teams, they are forced to speak thus the external rule becoming internal motivation for winning, and they will not bother about making mistakes. The researcher could feel it in his sessions.

g. Activity oriented sessions boosts up teacher-student relationship and facilitates language acquisition in friendly atmosphere. Games and activities are student-oriented and they have a great role to play in the classroom. Students are supposed to follow the read-and-translate method of the teacher, where the whole process revolves around the teacher. In the interactive classroom situation, students get lots of opportunities to speak, act, and interact throughout the
session. There, the teacher remains a facilitator and monitor the activities. Thus student-teacher interaction becomes frequent and it builds up a positive and friendly relationship between them. This positive relationship helps in language acquisition. Most of the time, students hate a subject because of the mundane method of teaching or because of the unfriendly approach of the teacher. When the teacher is there to help, motivate, and guide, any expected outcome is possible, including language acquisition,

h. Do not be afraid of growing slowly; but be afraid of standing still. People do not do new things because of the reason that they have not done it. We have not done something does not mean that we cannot do it. Students do not dare to speak because they have not spoken in English and they are afraid whether they can do it. So they find themselves comfortable in not doing it, and thus remain silent doing writing activities. When small achievements are appreciated, students get motivated and they are encouraged to speak further. When growing slowly, speaking with mistakes or in low voice, is not recognised and appreciated, students prefer standing still. The researcher could see the enthusiasm and spirit of students when they were appreciated.

The researcher does not claim that all the questions, he had in his mind when he started the research, were answered. He could find out answers to most of the questions in the process of his research. He could understand that the following facts:

a. Acquisition takes place through exposure and situations. One acquires mother tongue also in the same way.
b. Second language teaching in Indian schools is confined to the development of writing skill only. Giving importance to other areas, especially to speaking area, can enhance language acquisition to a great level.

c. The students do not get any exposure or opportunity to speak in English. They might not have got any chance to listen to English.

d. Learner-centred interactive sessions can create language acquisition.

e. Mother tongue acquisition takes place through different stages. Second language acquisition also will take time during which one may have to undergo such stages.

f. If we follow the mother-tongue acquisition pattern - listening, speaking, reading, and writing - we can achieve language acquisition.

g. In mother tongue, one gets many years to acquire all skill areas, but in the higher secondary level, such a time period is not possible.

h. Reading ability helps a lot in building confidence and in internalising the pronunciation.

i. Since the brain is developed and the grasping also is improved, the higher secondary students may not need such a long time, as in the case of mother tongue, to acquire a second language. Also the researcher does not forget that unlearning is equally difficult.

The researcher firmly believes that these findings and convictions will trigger him to modify his teaching methodology and it may help many others also.
Suggestions

This research on language acquisition helped the researcher to make his own suggestions to improve the language teaching process, not only at higher secondary level, but also even before that.

a. This research brings out the need of changing and revamping our syllabus. The present syllabus is purely examination-oriented and does not help the students in acquiring the language. In the examination, only the writing skill is tested. When a language is taught for nine years and if it does not produce any result - here the researcher considers the majority - it is high time that we changed the system. Interactive sessions like games and activities should be given space in the syllabus. It does not mean that the whole shall be filled with games and activities and that is the only method to acquire language. The researcher does not deny the relevance of prose and poetry in language learning and does not state that they also must be taught through games and activities. Prose and poetry can be included minimum in number to understand the verities and specialties of language. Since poetry has the rhythm, it should be included to make the students imbibe the rhythm of language, as English is often described as the language with stress-time rhythm. When prose and poetry are included, it should be made sure that they also serve the purpose of language acquisition in any level. Instead of making the syllabus heavy and tough, it needs to be simple to serve the purpose of improving communication ability. Teacher cannot do justice to an overloaded syllabus. They will not get time to finish all the chapters in a fruitful manner. Let the student get time to work on the text, and let the teacher get the time to comment on it.
Games and activities can be conducted once in a week/fortnight. If they are injected everywhere, that will be monotonous. Interactive sessions must be designed in such a way to serve the purpose of the lesson.

b. Exam procedure also needs renovation. Language is a skill subject and it has four areas of skill. Language acquisition happens when all these areas are strengthened. In the current examination system only writing area is tested and that mark is considered as the mark for the language. Any skill has to be practised and has to be tested practically. In English language also all the four areas of language development have to be tested and practical examinations have to be conducted for this purpose. It is true that it demands a lot of time and effort from the teacher and it is not easy. The researcher felt the difficulty when he conducted the pre-test and the post-test. But the impact is entirely different. The researcher feels that in the process of language acquisition, difference in the result has to be considered than difficulty in the procedure.

c. Setting language labs in the school has been recommended since long time. It may not be possible in all schools, especially in rural areas. Government or aided school cannot often bear the huge expense of setting up such labs. The purpose of the lab is to encourage interactive learning. As it is not financially practical to implement the machine-based interactive session, often the solution is man-based interactive works. The only way again, is teacher-initiated learning activities in the classroom. Highly effective and lesson-based games and activities shall be included in the textbook itself.

d. Teachers also must be ready to change themselves - both in the method of teaching and in the attitude towards teaching. Change in the textbooks alone will not work unless the teachers who handle textbooks are not ready to change the
method. If we are going through the same route that we have been going, we will reach the same place that we have already reached. If the teachers follow the same method of teaching, even when the textbooks are changed, students will get the same experience and the whole group will produce the same result. So it is essential for the teachers to change the method of teaching. More than the method, what is more important is the change in the attitude. If the attitude is changed, the method will change naturally.

e. Peer correction is more advisable than teacher correction. Students do not feel bad when they are corrected by their friends. They feel uncomfortable when a mistake is pointed out by teachers. It does not mean that teachers should not correct any mistake. When corrections are given, it is better to give individually or present it as general feedback after evaluating many. Along with correction, appreciation also can be given. It works. It is true that teachers are very good at finding mistakes and correcting them. Recognizing the progress and appreciating the improvement are also essential elements in the art of teaching.

f. The expected medium of instruction in higher secondary schools is English. Still in majority of the schools, education is in the mother tongue itself. It will be better and beneficial to students, if English is made compulsorily as the medium of instruction. Students will be forced to use English in their professional colleges. So if we can pave the way for their professional education, it will benefit the students in their future life. Moreover, creating an English environment will positively help in language acquisition. At present, only the English teacher is handling, or required to handle, classes in English. So if the English teacher is so inspired to take the class in English, the students get maximum forty-five minutes’ English experience a day. If all the teachers except
the second language teachers - in Kerala, Malayalam, Hindi, etc. are titled as second languages and English is labelled as first language - handle sessions in English it will surely help the students in their language acquisition. It may be difficult at the initial stages, but by practice, it can be familiarised.

Scope

This research conducted at the higher secondary level has wide scope. This study is limited to the sample population of higher secondary students. If language acquisition is possible even at the higher secondary level, it must be possible even before that - the earlier, the better. The language acquisition studies should start from primary, or even before, from nursery levels. Since they have not thoroughly internalised all the wrong practices, it would be easier for them to acquire a new language. As their psychological status is also different, it would be easy to work on them. The researcher can check their knowledge level, study their behaviour, understand their needs, and design specific lessons for them. Researches can be conducted in other levels also. New research can be conducted with high school students, college students or professionals to check the feasibility of language acquisition. This study is limited to the higher secondary students of a particular school only. So further research can be conducted on students from different schools, districts etc., and a comparative study also can be made. The school selected for this study is boys’ school and so further scope is there to conduct the experiment in co-education schools and study can be conducted to find out the gender difference, if any, in language acquisition.

Studies can be conducted in the CBSE or the ICSE school, where they follow a different syllabus and system in education, to check how far the difference in the syllabus helps them to acquire the language, because most of such schools are known as
English medium schools. Studies can be there in institutions of towns or metropolitan cities where the lifestyle, environment, exposure, attitude are different.

Language acquisition is the internal absorption and external expression of a new language and it is possible at the higher secondary level also. But it needs planned behaviour from teachers and students and updated support from the curriculum. Language acquisition can be made possible using many methods and systems. Many researches were also conducted in this area. This researcher focused on language acquisition through exposures and interactive sessions like language games and activities.

Learning can be made through certain techniques and habits. But once the relevance is over or the habits are broken, learning may not stay there. Learning is temporary and that is why most of us forget the lessons in the previous classes. Acquisition, as it is internalisation, stays permanent and the individual can use it whenever required. The researcher, through his study, realises that language acquisition is possible, through his specially designed sessions, at the higher secondary level.

Any language activity may not lead to language acquisition. They should suit the age and knowledge level, and should go on a par with the specific needs of the lesson. Activities and games must be structured in such a way to initiate students’ interaction and thus to build self-confidence and positive attitude in them. Activities should not make confusion and conflicts among students. The competition has to be managed tactfully to keep the interest alive.

The researcher feels that he has done justice to his work. All the steps were carried out systematically from selection of sample population to the post-test analysis. Students were tested individually, sessions were designed to suit their knowledge level,
classes were conducted without disturbing schedule of the school and the post-test analysis was also made to evaluate the efficacy of the research. The researcher does not claim that it is complete in all aspects. This study is confined to a rural school, at higher secondary level only. So this study can be expanded to various other fields.

This study helped the researcher to refine and redefine his own concepts of teaching and teaching methodology. It enabled the researcher to go through the previous researches and get the best out of them. It persuaded him to interact with many teachers and researchers regarding the topic and their teaching methodologies. It equipped the researcher to explore the possibilities of online language learning and the researcher could familiarise with teaching strategies used in other states and nations. In short, this study enabled the researcher to have new perceptions and practices in language teaching and acquisition.

Taking science subjects into consideration, it is obvious that whatever is learned theoretically is put into practice in the laboratory, complementing each other. Evaluation is done on theoretical knowledge as well as practical ability. The same procedure can be followed while evaluating the students’ performance in English.