CHAPTER 6

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6.0 Introduction

In this chapter we look at the significant findings of our study. The summary of our findings is given along with suggestions for future research and some implications for policy making and implementation.

6.1 Summary of the Findings

The purpose and objectives of the study have been discussed in Chapter 1. The main objective of our study was to compare the learners of English from two different pedagogies, namely, the traditional face-to-face learners and the open and distance learners. Twenty eight variables were explored in detail. Some of these variables were found to have significant influence in the acquisition of English in both the modes. The result of the comparison of learner variables in both the modes is discussed below.

6.1.1 Comparison of Learner Variables in the F2F mode and the ODL mode

We began our study with the purpose of comparing the linguistic proficiency of the learners from both the modes of education, namely the face-to-face mode and the open and distance mode. The detailed analysis of learner variables by means of correlation analysis and t-Tests showed how both the sets of learners differed in some aspects and how they were similar in some other aspects. Of the total 28 variables compared, statistically significant difference was found among ten variables. The two sets of learners appeared to share similar traits with respect to the rest of the variables. In this section we will look into the linguistic variables we had considered for our investigation. The analysis of the data showed how both the groups of learners differed in their linguistic proficiency. The social and social psychological variables which seemed to have significant influence on the linguistic performance of both the F2F and the ODL learners are discussed under the section 6.1.1.1.
6.1.1.1 Difference in Linguistic Proficiency

The t-Test results showed how both the sets of learners differed in their performance in the proficiency tests. The F2F learners did better than the ODL learners in both the proficiency tests of cloze and personal interviews. The proficiency scores for the F2F learners showed they had performed better in the spoken interviews compared to the cloze test. This shows the positive contribution of the learners’ constant interaction with their peers and teachers in the face-to-face environment.

The ODL learners, on the other hand, had scored less in the spoken interview compared to their performance in the cloze test. These learners’ lack of regular interaction with their peers and teachers appeared to reflect in their below satisfactory performance in the spoken component. The overall performance of the ODL learners was less than satisfactory compared to the F2F learners.

The discussion of social and socio-psychological variables that appeared to have significant correlation with the learners’ proficiency in English is given in the next section.

6.1.1.2 Variables that influenced Linguistic Proficiency

Certain variables were found to have significant correlation with the learners’ proficiency in English. The variables of statistical significance among both the sets of learners are discussed separately.

6.1.1.2.1 Variables that seemed to influence linguistic proficiency among the F2F learners

In the case of F2F learners the following variables positively influenced their performance in English:

1. Male learners did better in the cloze test in English. The majority of the boys outperformed the girls in cloze.

2. Those learners who were exposed to English before the age of five did better in both the proficiency tests. Early introduction to English seem to help the learners to perform well in the language.
3. Those learners who were from private and English medium schools performed well in both the proficiency tests.

4. Parents’ education appeared to have a direct influence on the linguistic performance for both the proficiency tests. Educated fathers and mothers contributed positively to their children’s education.

5. Use of more English in the intimate domain of the family helped the F2F learners to do well in the English tests.

6. Use of more English in various domains of interaction helped in improving the learners’ spoken skills.

7. Exposure to various media components in English seem to contribute to linguistic proficiency.

8. Merely an instrumental orientation towards English is detrimental to learning the language efficiently. Both instrumental and integrative attitudes contribute towards second language acquisition.

9. Learners with an authoritarian attitude did not do well in both the linguistic tests. Flexibility and a democratic outlook help in the acquisition of a second language.

6.1.1.2.2 Variables that seemed to influence linguistic proficiency among the ODL learners

The linguistic performance of the ODL learners showed significant correlation with the following factors:

1. Male learners outperformed the female learners in cloze test as in the case of F2F learners.

2. Those learners who were introduced to English before five years of age did better in cloze.

3. Those from private and English medium schools seemed to do well in both the proficiency tests. Among the ODL learners, only the variables of type and
medium of school showed significant correlation with the learners’ interview scores. Thus, private and English medium schools seemed to help in English language learning. Learners from private and English medium schools were favourably inclined towards English and their family background also helped in learning English.

4. Those with ethnocentric and authoritarian leanings performed badly in cloze. Ethnocentrism and authoritarianism do not help in the learning of a second language. Ethnocentric learners will not be open to languages and cultures other than their own and authoritarian learners would not be flexible and democratic in their outlook.

On comparing the significant variables that influenced second language acquisition of English among both the sets of learners, we can see that male learners did better in both the sets. Likewise, those introduced to English below five years of age performed well in English. Also, private and English medium schools helped their students to learn English efficiently. Authoritarian leaning proved to be detrimental to the learning of English as a second language in both the sets.

In the case of ODL learners, sex, age, schooling and ethnocentrism and authoritarianism influenced linguistic performance. Compared to this, the F2F learners were also not only influenced by these factors but their performance was also influenced by their parents’ education, use of language in the family and total domains of interaction, and their total media exposure.

We can conclude that in both cases, social factors tend to have stronger influence in the learners’ proficiency. Social psychological variables seem to exert comparatively less influence on language proficiency.

Another important finding was that the traditionally held important variables like the use of language in the outside and college domain, affinity towards people based on the language they used, learning styles like Field Dependence/Field Independence and learner autonomy did not seem to have a direct correlation with the learners’ English language proficiency in both the modes. The finding that the variable of learner autonomy did not seem to influence the ODL learners is quite significant given the importance accorded to learner autonomy in the Open and Distance learning
system. These learners had claimed to be autonomous in their learning of English but it did not translate into proficiency in the language

6.1.2 Points of Difference

Now, we look at the major areas of difference between the two sets of learners in terms of their social and social psychological background.

1. The two sets of learners differed in their age. The F2F learners were younger in age compared to the ODL learners. The flexibility of the ODL mode of education enables learners from all age groups to pursue their education and as a result the ODL learners were older in age. The F2F learners, on the other hand, were all below twenty years of age and straight out of school.

2. The F2F learners were also introduced to English when they were younger. On the other hand, many of the ODL learners were introduced to English at a later age. Thus, on the whole, the F2F learners were younger and were introduced to English earlier.

3. More ODL learners were employed compared to the F2F learners. This is again due to the flexible nature of the ODL mode which does not require compulsory and regular attendance. Learners can pursue their education along with their jobs. The system also enables those already working but could not for some reason complete their education to continue with their studies.

4. The F2F learners had scored higher scholastically than the ODL learners. However, it is interesting to note that this achievement did not seem to have statistically significant correlation with the F2F learners’ proficiency scores.

5. The fathers of the F2F learners were more educated compared to the fathers of the ODL learners. Educated parents tend to contribute positively to their children’s education and overall development.

6. The ODL learners had reported more positive attitude towards English compared to their F2F counterparts. This could be attributed to the ODL learners’ anxiety to learn the language and the desire to be ‘successful’ in their
lives for which English is considered to be an important factor. As a result they seem to have over-reported their fondness for the English language.

7. The F2F learners had reported more positive attitude towards Malayalam compared to the ODL learners. These learners exhibited a healthy and appreciative attitude towards their mother-tongue. The ODL learners, on the other hand, in their over-the-top enthusiasm for English seem to have under-reported their preference for Malayalam.

8. The F2F learners also reported more intimacy with the speakers of Malayalam compared to the ODL learners. This appears to be an extension of the learners’ language attitude. That is, the F2F learners reported a positive attitude towards Malayalam and also claimed intimacy with people who spoke Malayalam.

9. The ODL learners reported intimacy with people who spoke both English and Malayalam.

10. The ODL learners claimed more autonomy in their learning of English. This could be attributed to the ODL system which encourages learner autonomy and the learners are officially inducted into the system by making them aware of their responsibility as an autonomous learner in the open and distance education system. We have already seen in Chapter 5 how this ‘sense’ of autonomy does not translate into better performance in English among the ODL learners.

6.1.3 Other Important Findings

1. Both the linguistic tests used in the study correlated positively amongst themselves in both the F2F and the ODL groups suggesting the reliable and valid nature of these tests.

2. The learners from both the sets were from similar socio-economic background but their attitude towards both English and Malayalam differed greatly. The F2F learners reported a positive and appreciative outlook towards their mother-tongue Malayalam whereas the ODL learners in their zeal over-reported their fondness for English at the cost of their mother-tongue. It does
not help to have a negative attitude towards one’s mother-tongue. A healthy appreciation of one’s mother-tongue is essential for learning the second language.

3. School teaching and nursing were reported as the most preferred professions by female learners from both the categories. This is typical of Kerala where job opportunities are less. Both these professions are seen as ‘safe bets’ and people do not hesitate to invest their time and money in securing degrees leading to these professions.

4. The typical ‘Kerala dream’ of gulf jobs has not lost its attractiveness despite the political and economic uncertainties in the middle-east. The majority of the learners from both the sets expressed a keen desire to migrate and settle abroad, the ‘gulf’ being the most desired location.

5. Among the F2F learners, the females appeared to be more integratively motivated in their learning of English. As seen already, in the context of Kerala, women are actively engaged in the professions of teaching and nursing and the desire to migrate and settle abroad is keen. Settling in other countries requires good knowledge of English and an integrative outlook helps in accepting other cultures successfully. Also, teaching and nursing are careers that require the practitioners to be empathetic and accepting of other people, their culture and languages.

6. The F2F females appeared to be authoritarian in their leanings. As seen in Chapter 5, women in Kerala tend to be educated and employed. They are decision makers and participate actively in different spheres of life. Also, the matrilineal nature of some of the communities in the state seemed to contribute towards the independent and authoritarian stature of women.

7. Introduction of English early in school tended to reduce authoritarianism and promote democratic and liberal outlook among the F2F learners. Learning of more languages help to broaden one’s worldview. In the early years, learners are receptive and open to new ideas.
8. The age of learning English influenced the learners’ choice of language in various domains of interaction in both the cases. Those who were introduced to English early tended to use more English in various domains of interaction.

9. Among both the groups, we can see consistency in the learners’ claimed use of language in various domains. Those who claimed to use more English in a particular domain claimed to use English in other domains as well. They also preferred more English in their media exposure.

10. Learning of English early seemed to help in academic achievement as English is an important language in higher education. Academic achievement and linguistic proficiency can be improved with the early introduction of English. Also, high academic achievers tended to use more English in the various domains of interaction.

11. English is seen as an instrument for social mobility and parents from lower economic strata tend to send their children to private and English medium schools which do a comparatively better job of teaching English to its students. Education in English medium is considered a panacea by these parents who want their children to do well in life.

12. Parents play an important role in the socialization of their children. Learners with educated parents tended to be less ethnocentric and authoritarian in their leanings. Educated parents tend to instil democratic and liberal outlook among their children. Educated parents contribute positively to their children’s linguistic performance by providing them with an environment conducive to learning at home in informal settings. Educated mothers provide their children with more opportunities to use and learn English.

13. The language Hindi was not found to have much importance in the lives of the learners from both the modes. It is mostly used by the floating population from other parts of the country and the average Malayali is yet to claim it as his/her own language. This is true of the Hindi media as well.

14. Though learners from both the sets claimed to use both English and Malayalam in various domains of interaction, we can see that though English
is mainly used in formal situations, it is gaining ground in the intimate
domains of the family as well. It is increasingly becoming a language of the
friendship domain too.

15. Many of the learners from both the sets did not have the habit of reading.
Reading as an aesthetic pursuit seems to be on the wane.

16. Both integrative and instrumental orientations appear to be positively
correlated. The learners approach English with both utilitarian and aesthetic
motives. The desire for English is not limited by utilitarian motives alone. It is
not possible to view motivational orientation from the traditional binary view
but see both integrativeness and instrumentality as complementary. Our study
supports recent studies on motivation (see Chapters 2 and 3) which state both
these types of orientations appear to complement and ‘feed into’ each other.
Moreover, the English language has become a part of the national identity so
much so that some learners even considered it to be an Indian language. So the
‘ideal L2 self’ will approach the language with an integrated motivation.

17. The positive correlation between learner autonomy and motivational
orientation in both the cases establish how motivation is certainly related to
learner autonomy. Emerging theoretical perspectives have reported a link
between learner autonomy and motivation.

6.2 Recommendations

Our study has tried to understand the profile of the learner of English from two
different styles of teaching and learning, namely the traditional face-to-face and the
open and distance mode. Based on our analysis, some recommendations have been
made, which when implemented can help the learner of English.

1. The teaching and learning of English should be introduced in the initial years
of schooling, preferably before five years of age. This is in alignment with the
suggestions made by the National Focus Group (2005) and Kerala Focus
Group (2007). English can be taught along with mother-tongue. Since multiple
languages can be learnt in the early age, this can be done without burdening
the child.
2. Healthy and positive outlook towards languages should be instilled among students right from the start of schooling. The notion that no language is inherently superior or inferior should be ingrained in the learners so that they do not feel ashamed of their inadequacy in English and feel their mother-tongue is inferior. Both English and Malayalam should be approached as languages to be learned and appreciated as any other language.

3. In the case of ODL learners, there should be scope for more regular contact classes. We know this defeats the purpose of ‘distance’ education but for those learners who want more meaningful encounters with their peers and teachers, the system should provide them with more points of contact and interaction. This could be done by the formation of online peer groups that can be moderated by the teacher. They can discuss and share knowledge and help each other in learning the language. This can be done asynchronously as these learners often find it difficult to spare a fixed time slot for their academic pursuits. Though the system provides them with audio and video facilities in the form of television and radio (interactive) programmes, the learners seemed to fail in making full use of them. In order to improve the spoken skills of these learners, not only more audio-video materials should be made available but also make it a mandatory component for grading purposes. Personalised care should be given to these learners by the teachers assigned by the study centres and follow-ups made into the progress of these learners. All these kinds of intervention can go a long way into reducing the learner isolation experienced by the ODL learners. The support provided by a strong peer-network and teachers can instil in them confidence and help these learners to perform better.

6.3 Limitations of the Study

The sample for the face-to-face learners consisted of 44 learners and the open and distance learning mode consisted of 50 learners. It was difficult to obtain permissions from educational institutions to meet and interact with more number of students. Not all the ODL learners could be interviewed given their tight schedules and commitments. They were not easily accessible. The spoken interview had questions framed mainly for the purpose of analyzing spoken skills of the learners. More
probing questions on their experience of learning English would have been helpful. Constraints of time did not allow us to be more elaborate.

The sample represents the learner population of a particular region of a state. The results obtained for these learners may be different for learners from other regions of the country, given the difference in society and culture across regions.

6.4 Scope for Future Research

Based on our study, some suggestions for future research have been given below:

1. The learning requirements of the ODL learners are different from that of the traditional F2F learners. An in-depth needs analysis of the ODL English language learners can further our understanding of the ODL learners’ expectation from the courses offered to them and thus provide them with appropriate content matter. English is a skills based subject and research into ways and means of improving the teaching and learning of such a subject in the ODL mode will benefit the Open and Distance system and its stakeholders.

2. Though the ODL system claims to make use of audio-visual media for content delivery and teaching and learning, the real extent to which it is available and used is not clear. A study about the extent to which the audio-video components are really used by the ODL learners will help us re-align the teaching and learning process and improve efficiency.

3. Research which examines in detail the learners’ language attitudes, especially with reference to their mother-tongue and a second language can throw light into the complex interplay between attitudes and language acquisition.

4. The concept of ‘learner autonomy’ needs to be analyzed and understood in the Indian context, more so with respect to the ODL mode. The learners from the traditional mode were dependent on their teachers and the structure and format of learning. The ODL learners, though they had claimed to be more autonomous in their learning, were not comfortable being left to learn on their own. They missed the constant guiding presence of a teacher and expected someone to help them.