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Akhilesh Vasantao Peshwe

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Use of Students' Native Language in Reversing their Underachievement When Learning

English as a Second Language

APPROVED BY

SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:

Supervisor: _____

Diane L. Schallert

Marilla Svinicki

**Use of Students' Native Language in Reversing their Underachievement When Learning
English as a Second Language**

by

Akhilesh Vasanttrao Peshwe, M.A.

Report

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**Use of Students' Native Language in Reversing their Underachievement When Learning
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Akhilesh Vasant Rao Peshwe, M.Ed.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

SUPERVISOR: Diane L. Schallert

In finding ways to help students achieve their goals and become productive members of society, mere categorization of students as successful or unsuccessful is insufficient. Hence, in this report, I explore the literature to understand the connections between the construct of underachievement and other such aspects as motivation, anxiety, attitude, cognitive ability, self-efficacy, and learning strategies that are also related to underachievement and may play a crucial role in its reversal. I propose an organization of a lesson plan based on the use of the mother tongue in order to reverse low achievement while specifically delving into the Indian context when learning English as a second language.

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CHAPTER 1

Underachievement: A Complex Construct

Employment opens up a wealth of opportunities, and being employable means possessing the right knowledge, right skills and right attitudes. For those who do not possess or cannot acquire this trinity of achievements over a period of time, the label of *underachiever* is often applied. One of the major concerns of educational systems throughout the world is to make youth employable. All over the world, there is immense manpower represented in the youth that stands the danger of being wasted if students are allowed to pass without having been groomed and cultivated. A state with an unskilled and unemployable workforce has a bleak future in the global economy.

Underachievement has always remained a problem with students and in fact the very existence of academic underachievement has been persistently questioned (Dowdall & Colangelo, 1982; Reis & McCoach, 2000). The complexity of this construct is basically because of the difficulty of deciding the exact nature of ‘underachievement’ as the construct acquires different meanings in different settings, and defining it has always remained an intriguing problem for researchers and educators (Delisle & Berger, 1990; French, 1960; McCoach & Siegle, 2003a; Reis & McCoach, 2000; Whitmore, 1980; Zilli, 1971)

Assessing Students’ Achievement: A Challenge

The complexity underlying the construct of underachievement is based on several reasons. The challenge in coming up with a perfect system of grading that can indicate the exact performance of a student adds to the complexity of the construct. The absence of accurate grading system generates several issues regarding students’ true achievement. Various types of

grading systems are used all over the world in order to assess the academic achievement of students. For example, we may use a norm referenced grading system or criterion reference system or other modified grading system but the fact remains that these systems have their own drawbacks especially when it comes to predicting the success of the students. Additionally the interpretation of grades may vary from institution to institution depending upon the individual status of the institution. A student receiving high grades at one institution might be graded as a struggler at another institution and a student might even have been graded high because of the level of the other students' in the same class. In some cases a teacher's or a grader's belief in grading plays a role in students' grades, and depending upon the teacher's propensity students' grades may not represent well what they know or can do. For example, a teacher who is focused on receiving a better course evaluation, perhaps because the teacher has received poor evaluations from students in previous sessions, may grade "easy". Students' grades in such cases are not reflective only of what the student has achieved. It has been argued that easy graders receive better evaluations than hard graders because they are easy graders (Howard & Maxwell, 1982).

The eligibility criterion for admission into an undergraduate course in an Indian context is the same for all students: for example, for admission into a BA course (Part I), a student should have qualified for the Higher Secondary Certificate Examination. This is also known as a 10 + 2 pattern, similar to the American K -12 patterns. All these BA part I students come from different schools and institutions and have been groomed and taught by teachers with different skills and expertise. This very fact may create variance in the performance and final grades of the students. Superior teachers might stimulate students to greater achievement in their courses than poor teachers (Marsh et al., as reported in Howard & Maxwell, 1982). To a great extent, superior

achievement might be expected to result in both higher grades and greater student satisfaction grades (Howard & Maxwell, 1982). However, it has been interesting for me to observe that my students in BA I undergraduate classes, though they have come from different institutions and were taught by teachers with different expertise, generally have low marks in English. One interpretation is that they were all taught by poor teachers, and hence ended up as strugglers with average or low performance in English. The interpretation that all students were taught by teachers with poor expertise is difficult to maintain as there are other students from the same schools and classes who scored high grades and were admitted to exclusive fields such as commerce and science. If students' teachers had poor expertise then most would have scored low marks and grades; instead, we find that some secure good marks and grades; and pursue difficult program in accounting, math, physics, other sciences, etc. This leads to the conjecture that all those who have scored low marks and were admitted to the Arts have issues regarding second language learning, and it would be most appropriate at this point to understand the various issues and aspects that are associated a system that fails to allow students to acquire the proper knowledge, skills, and attitude. Multipronged solutions are needed to reverse the underachievement of these students. This is the central focus of this report.

Causes of Underachievement

There are numerous causes associated with underachievement of both internal and external causes such as the student's peers, culture, family, and school environment (Balduf, 2009; Berube, 1995; Garber, 2002; Greene, 1986; Harris & Coy, 2003; Kanevsky Witmore, 1989). Different perspectives associated with achievement and underachievement reveal the multifarious reasons of underachievement.

Perspectives on Underachievement in Relation to Successful and Unsuccessful Students

The term *underachievement* is defined in various ways and each one of these definitions proposed by researchers holds validity. Underachievement has crippled students at all levels. Whether they are in district schools, private schools, public schools, government schools, or little-known or world famous schools, there are always some students who struggle through their courses. There are students who succeed and display high achievement at lower school levels but falter at higher levels and even face failure in the very subjects in which they have done exceedingly well in the past. In other words, even gifted students can show underachievement even though they have succeeded in the past (Balduf, 2009). Ample research has demystified the notion that only the average or below average students are underachievers. Even gifted students suffer from this problem. This tells us that the term underachievement is quite mercurial in its nature, is relative, and holds different meanings in different contexts or settings, leading to much debate about its meaning (Diaz, 1998).

Balduf (2009) and other researchers have accepted the definition of underachievement proposed by Reis and McCoach (2002) as clear and most integrated:

Underachievers are students who exhibit a severe discrepancy between expected achievement (as measured by standardized achievement test scores or cognitive or intellectual ability assessments) and actual achievement (as measured by class grades and teacher evaluations) Gifted underachievers are underachievers who exhibit superior scores on measures of expected achievement (i.e., standardized achievement test scores or cognitive or intellectual ability assessments). (p.157)

An important aspect noted by Balduf (2009) regarding this definition is that it defines underachievement precisely for cases of gifted students. Researchers have made several attempts and in several ways have tried to study underachievement in the case of gifted students (Balduf 2009).

Table 1: Definition of Gifted Underachievement that Includes a Discrepancy between Potential and Performance

Author		Definition
Baum, Renzulli, & Herbert	1995a	High potential as evidenced by intelligence, achievement tests, tests of specific aptitude, teacher observation, grades; underachievement as evidenced by discrepancy between performance and potential.
Butler-Por	1987	Large discrepancy between school performance and potential.
Dowdall&Colangelo	1982	Discrepancy between potential and actual performance.
Emerick	1992	Evidence of giftedness included standardized achievement test scores, scores on tests of general aptitude, or other indicators of potential for well-above average academic performance.....Evidence of underachievement included average or below average academic performance as assessed by test scores, grades and teacher observations.
Whitemore	1980	High aptitude scores but low grades and achievement test scores or high achievement test scores but low grades due to poor daily work.

(Source: Reis &McCoach, 2000)

Table 2: Definitions that Emphasize Specific IQ / Ability Test Score as a Criterion for Identification as a Gifted Underachiever.

Author	Date	Key Concept
Colangelo et al.	1993	Giftedness as evidenced by scores at the 95 th percentile or above on the ACT; underachievement as evidence by GPA of 2.25 or below in high school coursework.
Gowan	1957	Giftedness as evidenced by an IQ of 130 or above, Diagnosis of underachievement occurs when a student falls in the middle third in scholastic achievement in grades, and sever underachievement occurs when a student falls in the lowest third in scholastic achievement.
Green, Fine, &Tollefson	1988	Giftedness as evidenced by scores in the top 2% of the Tollefson norm group on an intelligence test. Underachievement as evidenced by one of the following criteria: a. earning a C or below in at least one major academic subject; b. having at least one year difference between expected and actual performance on a standardize achievement test; or c. failing to complete work or submitting incomplete work at least 25% of the time as indicated by teacher records.
Krouse&Krouse	1981	Underachievers-those individuals who consistently, over a number of ears, perform at higher levels on instruments of academic aptitude or intelligence then they do in regular classroom situations.
Supplee	1990	High academic ability as assessed through an IQ score or through achievement test scores at the eighth or ninth stanine. Low achievement as evidenced by achievement test scores that were at least two stanines lower than the IQ score, or by teacher ratings, or by school grades showing a marked discrepancy from expected achievement based on IQ or achievement tests.

(Source: Reis &McCoach, 2000)

Table 3: Definitions of Gifted Underachievement That Stress Predicted Achievement Vs. Actual Achievement

Author	Date	Key Concept
Gallagher	1991	“ If the actual achievement scores fall some distance lower than what was predicted the student can be labeled underachiever”
Lupart&Pyryt	1996	1. Determine the correlation between IQ and achievement. 2. Estimate the expected IQ in relation to achievement for each student using the error of estimate. 3. Individuals with a discrepancy beyond one standard error or estimate were targeted as possible underachievers.
Thorndike	1963	2. Underachievement refers to the fact that a group of pupils all of the same age, the same will still vary in the scores they receive in school.
		3.

(Source: Reis &McCoach, 2000)

Table 4: Definitions of Gifted Underachievement That Stress Development of Potential

Author	Date	Key Concept
Richert	1991	1. Achievement among gifted students-developing four aspects of giftedness: Ability, Creativity, Productivity Performance, Motivation-Emotions-Values. 2. Underachievement among gifted students-underachievement in any of the four areas necessary for the manifestations of giftedness”
Rimm	1997a	“ If students are not working to their ability in school, they are underachieving.”

(Source: Reis &McCoach, 2000)

A review of the literature indicates that researchers have made rigorous attempts to understand the concept of underachievement. However, as rightly noted by Richer (1991), the research well accounts for the gifted students who are identified through intelligence tests can be used to understand other students who are not identified as gifted because of their IQ. The

National Commission on Excellence in Education (1984) reported that 50 % of gifted students' achievement levels do not confirm their ability. In addition, it has also been estimated that approximately 10% to 20 % of gifted students eventually dropout of schools. If these are the possibilities for gifted underachievers, imagine the fate of students who have a history of struggling at school. The risk of dropping out of school is all the more high for such students (Diaz, 1998).

Indians in general display better control over language, and they speak better English most likely because of its long introduction and continued association with the country. However, this broad generalization is not representative of all Indians, a large number of whom never master English as a second language. The majority from this hidden India struggle to speak in English. It becomes abundantly clear when we take a look at the performance of Arts students, particularly in English, in the institutions from semi-urban or rural areas. The story does not differ much even in the case of some of the major cities where the language problems are particularly evident in students from poor slum areas. Underachievement should be taken very seriously at the school level itself as continued adverse academic experiences may destroy all the chances of these students doing better in later life. The absence of early appropriate academic experiences can thwart students' possibilities for developing abilities or talents (Diaz, 1998). Data collected in classroom indicate that students who had struggled in the previous two school level examinations and did not experience much change in their scores. Along the lines of what was revealed by Diaz, the chances, of second language learners doing better in later stages are stalled unless their persistent habits of underachievement are reversed. When the academic performance declines below what is expected temporarily (Diaz, 1998), it is possible that the student will reverse underachievement and recover the path to opportunities in life. However, in

instances where underachievement is chronic or constant and there is a pattern of underachievement (Diaz, 1998) over a long period of time, it can be challenging for students to reverse the trend.

Whitmore (1980) argued that some students underachieve in a single subject or ability area. She divided underachievement into three parts: underachievement in a specific subject, underachievement in a particular area, and general underachievement (Diaz, 1998). Whitmore (1980) argued that some students only underachieve in a single subject or ability area (Diaz, 1998). According to data of the Arts faculty of my college, the majority of students have low grades in general and their achievement in English is especially low. Thus, these students, seem to fit Whitmore's description of being underachievers in general as well as underachievers in the specific subject area of English. This dual predicament puts these students in a unique category of their own and, though ample research is available defining underachievement, much involves the gifted students. Considering these non-gifted students, there is a need of, understanding their low achievement and correspondingly a need to design models and strategies to reverse their course ultimately to help them to become ready for employment.

Considering the difficulties of low achievers, there have been studies that allowed education through the students' native language in certain subjects. Research with students with learning difficulties initially revealed that students with learning difficulties lacked enough native language linguistic capabilities to hinder the pursuit of foreign language study. Based on these findings, many American universities began to offer a relaxation of the foreign language requirements. In other countries, the necessity for learning a foreign language, particularly English, was relaxed, and students were offered options and substitution courses so as to avoid second language learning (Cabal Krastel, 1999). This idea has been discounted today as it has

been abundantly clear that knowledge of a foreign language enhances career prospects and widens career opportunities, and that achievement in a second language is directly associated with career options (Hawang, Lee, Lin Gin et al., 2014). The importance of learning English as a foreign language has once again been accepted in most countries around the world. Many countries like China and Japan that traditionally insisted on imparting education strictly in the native language have now shifted their focus to English. In India also, there was a movement that insisted on “education through Mother tongue only”; however, the cry against English is now more subdued and mastery of English has become the aim of students in India general.

Problems do not end by merely accepting the importance English as a foreign language, as the low achievers suffer from a number of difficulties and attendant consequences. Considering their needs and exigencies, it seems important to design a plan where the mother tongue is also given a role in the learning of English or other foreign languages. It would thus seem imperative to understand the issues of underachieving English (L2) learners and to explore the motivational aspects associated with their engagement and disengagement with the process of learning. It is further important to explore the pros and cons of the use of the mother tongue for second language learning and to devise ways of avoiding its negative impact if any.

A classroom is never composed of students of uniform characteristics. A second language learning classroom is no exception. In any given class, there are a number of students who do not learn in the same way, who display individual differences, and experience issues in education. Mueen (1992) observed that student’s performance in speaking English fluently is affected by several factors: problem in expressing oneself, hesitation to speak in English, shyness, nervousness, fear of speaking English in front of others because of lack of confidence about their own competence (Kanwal & Khurshid, 2012).

Researchers have explored the difference between good and poor language learners in an attempt to identify solutions to bring up the language learning levels of underachievers. Porte, (1997), studied the differences in approaches to revision in writing which is an important aspect of language learning and reported important differences between good learners and poor learners. Unskilled writers seemed to revise from a narrow outlook and to make changes addressing surface grammatical structures of compositions, usually at the level of the word, rather than addressing deeper issues of content and organization. Unskilled writers and language learners find it harder to make use of learning opportunities because of their lack of understanding of the content (Porte 1997). Further it was found that better writers are more conscious of audience (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990) and organization (Hall, 1987), indicating that better writers focus their attention on the important factors such as content and style unlike poor writers who find themselves concerned only with surface level revisions (Porte, 1997)

Sources of Underachievement

The literature on demotivating aspects of learning indicates that though there are other factors responsible for demotivation in the classroom, teachers are one of the major demotivating factors, becoming in particular situations the major source of underachievement in students. The contemporary research on the effects of age on motivation also points towards the teacher as a crucial factor in supporting learners' motivation during the process of language acquisition (Ghenghesh, 2010).

Research has established that language achievement to a great extent depends on the degree of a learner's motivation to learn the language and on success in maintaining it over the sustained period of time required for language learning. Dornyei (2001) emphatically maintained

that an adequate degree of motivation is a must for student achievement. Even though achievement is associated with several factors, no other factor can ensure achievement as much as sufficient levels of motivation can.

Motivational research associated with second/foreign language learning has progressed in stages. Initially Gardner and his associates (Gardner 1985; Gardner and Lambert 1972; Gardner & MacIntyre 1993) in Canada demonstrated that attitudes and motivation are related to how well individuals learn a second/foreign language. Crookes and Schmidt (1991) explored socio psychological constructs of second language learning motivation and found that certain cognitive and situation specific variables are also associated with motivation. Williams and Burden (1997) have made invaluable contributions to the field of second language motivation by presenting a framework of motivational factors (Ghenghesh, 2010). Based on the findings of Dornyei and Noel (1994) from a classroom study in Hungary, Dornyei developed a framework of L2 motivation consisting of three relatively distinct levels: 1. The language Level (Integrative and Instrumental Motivational subsystems); 2. Learner Level (cognitive aspect of motivation on the part of a learner) and 3. Learning Situation Level which involves: 1. course specific motivational components; 2. teacher-specific motivational components and 3. group-specific motivational components (Ghenghesh, 2010).

Researchers have found several external factors such as the course, teaching methods, instructional materials, the influence of family and friends, and the nature of learning activities and individual tasks that can affect learners' motivation, achievement, efforts, and positive and negative feelings (Chambers, 1998; Dörnyei, 1994, 2002; Dörnyei, 2008; Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar & Shohamy, 2004; Egbert, 2003; Ellis, 1985; Inbar, Shohamy & Donitsa-Schmidt, 1999, 2001; Julkunen, 1990, 1994, 2001; Kim & Schallert, 2014; Mihaljević, 1990, 1994; Ozek & Williams,

1999; Williams & Burden, 1999; Williams et al, 2001). However, a very substantial connection has been made also between teachers and learners' motivation, achievement, negative feelings and efforts have equally been found (Chambers, 1998; Clément et al , 1994; Gardner et al, 2004; Kim & Schallert, 2014; Mihaljević, 1990, 1992, 1994; Nikolov, 1999; Ozek & Williams, 1999; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Williams & Burden, 1999; Williams, Burden & Al-Baharna, 2001; Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2009; Hardré & Sullivan, 2008), leaving us with little doubts that “the teacher's level of enthusiasm and commitment is one of the most important factors that affect the learners' motivation” (Dörnyei, 1998, p. 130).

It is well settled and needs no explanation that language acquisition is a process spanning over a length of time. Learning a language continues over years, and a learner must persist in order to display increasing control over the use of the language, maximize mastery as much as possible. In other words learners' efforts are focused on acquiring language skills to a level of native-like fluency as much as possible. However, this long route is full of challenges and difficulties, and only a few emerge successful in acquiring excellent language skills. We tend to find that many lose because they lose motivation to gain mastery over the language. The initial surge of motivation wanes and disappears along with the joy of learning (Schallert, Reed & Turner; 2003). Schallert et al. argued that joy and happiness in learning is to be found along the process and not only at the end of it.

Researchers have explored the relationship of age with motivation. Ghengesh (2010) found that the motivation of learners in school contexts declines with age and that it is influenced by external factors related to the teacher and course-specific motivational components as outlined in Dörnyei's (1994) framework of L2 motivation. Ghengesh (2010) aimed to find out the extent to which various factors affect students' motivation and achievement in second/foreign

language learning particularly as they enter senior high school. The research also looked into the temporal dimension of L2 motivation. Results showed that older learners tended to score significantly lower on the motivational scales, and interview data gave further support to this finding. In the same research, several external factors were also found associated with motivation. However the role of the teacher was seen as fundamental in guiding students' attitude to the language and in fueling their motivation. Thus, again the onus comes down on teachers to motivate students and to maintain their motivation.

Underachievement in the Indian Context, Specifically in English

Merely acknowledging the importance of learning English as a second language by students and teachers is not adequate to bring about the desired results. Adequate time for the teaching-learning process, appropriate class size, and background knowledge deficiencies are some of the very common features that need to be addressed in addition to the several issues associated with motivation, anxiety, and self- efficacy. In what follows, I review the Indian context of learning English as a second language in arts classrooms.

Value and Importance of Learning English

Whether it is countries such as China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Poland, or Jordan where English is taught as a foreign language, or countries such as India, Malaysia, or Nigeria where English is taught as a second language, the fact remains that English plays an important role in the global knowledge economy. English has become an important academic skill that makes students potentially employable.

It is widely accepted that above average language skills in English are immensely important. The increasing attention paid to English communicative skills by educational institutions, private coaching classes, and the corporate world indicate that educators are aware of the fact that excellent language skills in English enhances the employability of youth in the present context, providing for advancement and knowledge in all fields of developments and activities (Yule,1995)(Kanwal & Khurshid, 2012). In the USA, the federal government desires academic success for all the students, and one purpose of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was to have all students learn basic skills to perform at or above mandated proficiency levels. Legislation envisions progress and development of the nation, and if youth fail to raise their knowledge, skills, and attitude to the required bar, they impede the progress and development of the nation. Underachievement is a sign that education or what is being done in the class room or outside of it is not working for the students (Balduf, 2009).

Around the World of English 48 Minutes

For many years, the classroom teaching time for English in India was limited to 48 minutes (minimum teaching time as per UGC rules). From the performance of students on class room tests or in final examinations particularly in English, it has become clear that this minimum of 48 minutes for a given subject in a day is inadequate. Results indicate that what educators do in 48 minutes in the class followed by what students do at home together has failed so far. With classes held for 48 minutes as per the appropriate rules and regulations and it is a fact that a majority of institutions prepare their time table accordingly, students often learn a subject for only 48 minutes per day. If we take a language class in English, or any class of 48 minutes for

that matter, and calculate the actual time spent for the teaching learning process in a class of 120 students, we find that:

80 to 90 students are present

Faculty reaching time after the bell = 3 minutes

Attendance taking 9 minutes @ 6 sec for each individual

This leaves us with just 36 minutes ($48 - 12 = 36$) for instructions.

If the initial activities such as reaching class and taking attendance happen in a leisurely manner, then the actual teaching- learning time may go down to ten minutes or even less. This obviously affects the teaching-learning process and contributes to the underachievement of students.

Large Class Size

In a large class of 120 students, it is observed that about 80 to 90 students typically show up for class. Now, to conduct group activities, or any other student-centric activity, a teacher will be required to make 20 groups of five students in each one of them. If only 36 minutes out of 48 are left at the teacher's disposal to conduct the teaching learning activity, group activities in that given time will be difficult at best, particularly in a typical Arts class that has some of the following features that I have noticed. Underachievement can be influenced by such a miniscule amount of time being spent on instruction.

Knowledge Deficit

Students are particularly found wanting in the required language skills in English. They sometimes have low percentages (with most scoring at 45 %) or have taken several attempts to

qualify for the undergraduate course. Both these factors are indicative of a gap in their knowledge and skills. These factors do not reflect their talent, intelligence, or capacity but are never the less likely to mean that students have struggled for clearing the examination hurdle and have probably been underprepared from their earlier educational years. The other issues that negatively affect such students are lack of family support, little funds to buy texts or necessary study materials, no access to modern IT gadgets, which may lead to lack of will and motivation, and ignorance about the value and meaningfulness of language learning.

Chapter Conclusion

The various definitions of underachievement are satisfactory to categorize successful and unsuccessful students. However, what solace can educators obtain simply from categorizing students? Instead, our present concern is to reverse low achievement, and hence it is pertinent to understand the connections between the construct of underachievement and other such aspects as motivation, anxiety, attitude, cognitive ability, and learning strategies that are also related to underachievement and may play a crucial role in its reversal. The Indian situation represents an interesting reason why both students and teachers cannot perform, and highlights the fact that external factors can also have a negative impact on students' performance. Acquisition is associated with motivation, cognitive ability, learning strategies. It is essential to bring in research associated with motivation, cognitive ability and learning strategies in order to have a chance to reverse the low and underachievement of students.

CHAPTER 2

Prominent Aspects Associated with Underachievement

Under and low achievement are common universal problems in many educational systems around the world. Motivational aspects are associated with underachievement, and researchers have attempted to suggest interventions based on motivational theories. Because underachievement is associated with several aspects such as anxiety, attitude, self-efficacy, and learning strategies to name the a few important ones, comprehensive interventions that will operate at several levels are needed to weed out the demotivating factors and elevate the performance of students, helping ultimately become good citizens and gainfully employed. In this chapter I will address how the motivating and demotivating factors including such important factors as anxiety, attitude, and self-efficacy influence students' achievement.

Motivating and demotivating factors associated with underachievement

Researchers have explored the motivational status and learning strategies used by the successful and unsuccessful students. Successful students have been found to have different motivational orientations and learning strategies from unsuccessful student (Ghadirzadeh, Hashtroudi & Shokri 2013).

Researchers have further found that a lack of intrinsic motivation, lack of perceived individual competence, inappropriate characteristics of teaching methods and course contents, and lack of metacognitive strategies predicted university students' future failure. These factors seemed to predict whether students belong to the group of successful students or to the group of unsuccessful students because style, strategy, and demotivational factors seem significantly related with achievement (Ghadirzadeh et al., 2013)

What is interesting is that whenever there is underachievement in the class, the first suspicion of educators is that it is due to the cognitive ability of the underachiever. The student is further suspected of not using the right strategy or of having the right motivation. Educators seem too busy with finding fault in the student that they often overlook that underachievement could also be on account of several other important factors such as administrative mismanagement, faulty policy, improper time management, poorly chosen content, and other such factors. Underachievement, no matter whether it is permanent or temporary or chronic, is repairable and as research has suggested, it is not necessarily associated with students' low cognitive abilities, or simply bad teaching (Ghadirzadeh et al., 2013).

Low achievement in English in second language learners is commonly observed in the Arts students in India. It is also often observed in immigrant students in the USA and in many other parts of the world. Though in some cases it is the cognitive ability of the student that is responsible for the low achievement, it is always not so. In some cases, it is on account of the mismatch between the chosen teaching approaches and the students' learning preference or lack of awareness about effective learning strategies. It is also found in students in case they have become demotivated to learn the language because of external factors (Ghadirzadeh et al., 2013).

Motivation is associated with achievement and academic performance. Several studies indicate that there is a positive relationship between learners' use of learning strategies and their academic performance (Al-Hebaishi, 2012; Bremner, 1999; Oxford, 1989). Whereas findings are more controversial when it comes to the relationship between students' learning styles and their academic performance (Al-Hebaishi, 2012; Shaw-Wan, 2009). This contrast or contradiction in the findings is not surprising to find as we know that underachievement is not associated with

any single factor. There are several factors that operate on the performance of the students (Ghadirzadeh et al., 2013).

A number of researchers have attempted to understand the factors contributing to language learning. Factors such as age, influence of the first language/mother tongue, and internal processing have been associated with second language acquisition. For example, the issue of the best age to learn a second language has been settled with a verdict that children learn a second language faster but adults learn it better (Jha, 2012).

Another myth broken by research was that use of the L1 obstructs and interferes with second language learning. Mother tongue or L1 is no longer looked at as an interference in learning a second language. Research has revealed a crucial role for the mother tongue in second language acquisition (Jha, 2012).

Just before 2000, researchers began to examine predictors of foreign language proficiency, an area which had not been much studied at the time. Sparks et al. (1997) conducted two experiments with public school students, and found that foreign language word decoding was a good predictor of both oral and written proficiency, suggesting its importance as both a predictor variable and an important component of foreign language proficiency. Interestingly, foreign language grades and word decoding had not been considered as predictors of foreign language proficiency before this.

In order to help struggling learners we need to consider factors such as native language skills and vocabulary. There is a possibility that these factors will indirectly or directly increase the chances of improving second language proficiency. Sparks and Ganschow (1995; Sparks & Ganschow, 1991) developed a hypothesis about the language-based nature of foreign language learning differences, the linguistic coding differences hypothesis. That is, native language skills

serve as the foundation for foreign language learning. In particular, good, (successful, more proficient) and poor (unsuccessful, less proficient) foreign language learners have been found to differ significantly in their native language skills, particularly in their phonological-orthographic skills levels (Ganshow & Sparks, Javorsky, Pohlman, & Bishop-Marbury, Sparks et al., 1992 a, 1992b; Sparks, Ganshow, Artzer, & Patton, 1997; Sparks, Ganshow, Fluharty, & Little, 1996).

An older perspective on second language acquisition was that a second language should not be taught at all as it would have adverse effects on children, leading to insecurity, and academic delays (Lambert & Tucker, 1972). The Ontario Heritage Language Program was established with the intention of promoting minority children's first language in school settings. The program was discontinued as the teachers began to interfere with efforts to teach English. On the one hand, there were initiatives for the use of the first language in the school setting, and on the other hand, there were teachers who would encourage parents to use as much English as possible in the home because they believed that it would facilitate learning of English (Cummins, 1980a; Bishara Theneyan Seif, 1984). Continued research in the field eventually caused the fall of this unilateral view. The correlation between high competence in a foreign language and high competence in the mother tongue led to a view that children who cannot fully develop their mother tongue have great difficulties in learning a second language properly (Bishara Theneyan Seif, 1984).

Demotivating Factors

The research on demotivating factors in second language learning points to a conclusion that even today in a student-centric classroom, the teacher plays a crucial role as studies have indicated that the teacher is the number one culprit when it comes to demotivation in second

language learning. It is interesting that teachers do not agree with this view. From teachers' point of view, it is the students who are primarily responsible for demotivation and underachievement.

Dornyei (2001b) provided a balanced definition of a demotivated learner without putting direct blame on either the teachers or students, or any single other factor. In his view, demotivation is treated more as a situation-specific phenomenon that depends on various factors. According to him, a demotivated learner is someone who was once motivated but has lost his or her commitment/ interest for one or several reasons.

Credit for a good amount of research in the field of demotivation goes to Gorham and Christophel (1992) as they tried to determine the factors that demotivate students at the college level. They found that teacher-related factors were the most responsible for causing demotivation. Gorham and Christophel repeated their study in 1995 with the same instrument with a different group of participants. The findings this time matched the earlier results holding teachers as a major source of demotivation in the case of second language learning. These findings were further supported by research conducted by Gorham and Millettee (1997) in which students associated their demotivation with teachers' behavior such as poor presentation skills and lack of enthusiasm. Chamber (1993) found that both teachers and students perceive causes of demotivation differently. Students attribute them to their teachers and blame them for such reasons as: not giving clear enough instructions, criticizing students, and shouting at them when they do not understand. For their part, teachers perceive students' lack of motivation as related with variety of reasons such as: psychological, attitudinal, social, historical, and geographical reasons. Irish learners of French in a study conducted by Ushida (1998) identified several negative aspects affecting their learning: the institutionalized learning framework; inadequate school facilities; reduced self-confidence; negative attitude; the compulsory nature of L2;

interference from another foreign language being studied; negative attitude towards the L2 community; attitudes of group members and coursebook. Oxford (1998) gave further insight on the causes of demotivation: 1. the teacher's personal relationship with the students; 2. the teacher's attitude towards the course or the material; 3. style conflicts between teachers and students; and 4. the nature of the classroom activities.

Underachievement and Anxiety

Anxiety poses one of the major obstructions to students' learning of second language (Yousef1, 2013). Anxiety in general has negative effects in the classroom (Elkhafaifi, 2005; Gregersen, 2003; Gregersen&Horwitz, 2002; Horwitz, 1995; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre& Gardner, 1989, 1991; Young, 1986). Anxiety affects the language quality of learners, and they speak, anxiety can make them look less fluent than they actually are (McCroskey, 1997). Self-perceived communicative competence, defined as, "adequate ability to pass along or give information; the ability to make known by talking or writing" (McCroskey&McCroskey, 1988, p. 109), according to Phillips (1968, 1984) in the case of reticent or uncommunicative people, is associated with two major reasons: anxiety and a lack of communication skills. Linguistic competence and lack of anxiety combine to form one's linguistic self-confidence (Clement, 1980, 1986).

Graham (1997) emphasized learning communication strategies to increase the willingness to participate in conversations, an emphasis that becomes particularly relevant as research in the field of second language learning supports the idea that the level or rate of language proficiency among second language learners is associated with level of anxiety and apprehension in students (Horwitz, Horwitz& Cope, 1986). Further, a significant relationship between anxiety for

speaking the second language and oral achievement has also been shown (Woodrow, 2006).

Researchers have found that learning communication strategies strengthens interaction in the target language (Tarone, 1981; Faerch&Lasper, 1983; Dornyei& Scott, 1997) and has a significant effect on language performance (Rost& Ross, 1991; Dornyei, 1995).

Yousef,JamilandRazak, (2013) studied the effect of oral communication strategies on Malaysian students' willingness to communicate in a second language, and found that language learning communication strategies directly affected motivation, self-perceived communication competence, and willingness to communicate in English. Thus, overall results indicate that using oral communicative strategies can boost the willingness to communicate in English and result in a lowering of students' anxiety and an improvement of their level of fluency.

These research studies established the links of demotivation with second language learning. However, Rou-JuiSophia Hu, (2011) tried to understand the role of demotivating factors as predictors of English language proficiency in a group of Taiwanese students. She found that learning difficulties and language specific anxiety were the two most powerful predictors of EFL learners' English language proficiency. She also found that lacking sufficient vocabulary was the most significant demotivating factor among Taiwanese students. The responsibility for an insufficient vocabulary entirely rested with students rather than with teachers. A student has to answer more for having an insufficient vocabulary as a demotivating factor rather than a teacher. Learning difficulties were also linked with anxiety in the classroom. Limited vocabulary size and language-specific anxiety were interrelated, and from the obtained results, Rou-JuiSophia Hu, (2011) could reasonably conclude that students with deficient vocabulary experience anxiety in their foreign language classrooms. Students can be said to be

deficient in vocabulary when they meet many unfamiliar and unknown vocabulary in a text (Ismail Sheikh Ahmad et al., 2013; Kuru-Gonen, 2009).

The focus of researchers has now shifted to foreign language reading anxiety from mere foreign language anxiety. There is no doubt that foreign language reading anxiety is associated with general foreign language anxiety but it still has its own distinctive flavor if we consider the sources of foreign language reading anxiety. These sources may vary from culture to culture; however, as far as EFL or ESL (Kachru, 1985) learners are concerned, there is a possibility that some features such as anxiety would always be associated with learning English. As a matter of fact, neuroscience reviewed research has found that nervousness associated with reading task seems to exist (Ismail Sheikh Ahmad et al., 2013), supporting the possibility that what was found with Jordanian EFL students likely experienced by ESL students from countries such as India, China, and Nigeria. Reading skills need to be taken seriously as there has been found a high correlation between reading skills and academic performance. There has also been found a correlation between knowledge gain and reading (Carrell, Devine, & Eskey, 2000).

A popular scale developed by Saito et al. (1999) has been used to measure foreign language reading anxiety. One criticism it has received is that it does not highlight all the subtle factors associated with foreign language reading anxiety. Unfamiliar culture and unfamiliar writing systems are two main aspects associated with foreign language reading anxiety according to the scale (Ismail Sheikh Ahmad, 2013). The sources of foreign language reading anxiety need to be investigated thoroughly as beginner foreign language learners often express a feeling of stress, nervousness, or anxiety in learning a foreign language in general (Horwitz et al., 1986), and in reading skill as a specific skill as well (Saito, Horwitz, & Garza, 1999). Ahmad (2013)

found that foreign language reading anxiety is associated with personal factors as well as text features.

Personal factors include the following sub factors: 1. worry about reading effects; 2. Fear of making errors and text features comprise of the following sub-factors: 1. unfamiliar topic 2. Unfamiliar culture; and 3. unknown vocabulary. Deficient vocabulary knowledge is associated with the unknown vocabulary that is part of a text.

Although research tells us that anxiety is often an impeding factor when it comes to language learning, there is evidence that anxiety also can have a positive influence. Thus, anxiety has both debilitating and facilitative impacts on language achievement. Though anxiety can have a facilitative effect, it is our common experience, well-supported with research, that there is a negative relationship between anxiety and language performance, and most studies have defined its role as a debilitator in language learning (Kamarulzaman, 2013). The negative impact of anxiety on language learning as explained by affective filter hypothesis is because input is impeded in the presence of anxiety (Krashen, 1985).

Whether anxiety has similar impact on high achievers and low achievers has been of interest to researchers. In order to understand the impact of anxiety with gifted learners at the tertiary level, 119 gifted learners were surveyed at PERMATApintar National Gifted Center (PpNGC), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, in Malaysia. The results showed that gifted learners can experience a certain level of language anxiety in English language learning settings; that language anxiety negatively correlates with gifted learners' English language performance; and that female gifted learners indicated higher language anxiety than men. Finally, this paper provides some insights towards minimizing gifted learners' language anxiety in English language environment (Kamarulzaman1, 2013).

Attitude Matters!

Research has established that there is a strong correlation between attitude and the language learning process. At the college level, it is essential that students hold appropriate attitudes (Bhaskar & Soundiraraj, 2013). Student's attitude towards English language learning should particularly be positive. Research has shown that something be done for those who hold negative attitudes. "Attitude is an evaluative reaction to some referent or attitude object on the basis of the individual's beliefs or opinions about the referent" (Gardner, 1985). Motivation is associated with attitudes towards other ethnicities and language learning contexts. Chapman and McKnight (2002) presented a perspective that attitude is a general disposition of a person. It is the starting point for viewing life and the people and events in it. Baker (1988) argued that attitudes are dispositions to approach an object, a person, an institution, or an event favorably or unfavorably. In a study on the interrelationships of different types of attitudes, it was found that the positive attitudes held by learners towards the people who speak the language they are learning and toward the language itself can help them learn the target language (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Research on attitude formation indicates that family, school and the media are three major contributors (Bhaskar & Soundiraraj, 2013).

This brief review indicates that it is the teacher who needs to be careful about not allowing any negative evaluative reactions towards any referent, may it be text or activity or the teacher himself or herself, to arise in class. The teacher also needs to ensure that second language learners attitudes towards the language and the people who speak it remain positive, if it is already so and if it is not, then become positive as positive attitude towards the target language generates desired results. Thus we can conclude that the teacher has a crucial role to play from the perspective of attitude towards language learning (Liu, 2013).

Self-Efficacy and Second/Foreign Language Learning

Students must believe they have the skills to do well before they begin a task. Self-efficacy, the term first coined by Bandura (1977), self-efficacy has been defined as individuals' judgments about their ability to perform a particular activity (Murphy & Alexander, 2001). Research in this direction is obvious as Self-efficacy is strongly associated with one's belief about capabilities. As defined by Bandura (1997), self-efficacy refers to "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments." Someone who is well aware of his or her capabilities and can execute the course of action to attain the ultimate goals is more likely to be successful than someone who has lower self – efficacy. This is well supported by the findings that learners' beliefs in their capabilities can be better predictors of performance than their real ability (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 1991). Learner's beliefs about one's ability and self-efficacy are so important in learning that scholars like Pajares and Urdan (2006) believe that it is impossible to examine some aspects of human functions such as learning, motivation, and academic achievements without examining the role of self-efficacy in the learners.

Many researchers have recently turned their focus exploring the role of self-efficacy beliefs in the context of foreign/second language learning (Raofi, Tan, & Chen, 2012). Hsieh and Schallert (2008) in their study demonstrated that self-efficacy was the strongest predictor of achievement among South Korean students who were studying English as a foreign language. Similar studies in Turkey (Tilfarlioğlu & Ciftci, 2011) revealed that there was a positive relationship between academic success as defined by grades and learners' self-efficacy beliefs. Mills, Pajares and Herron (2006). Some researchers like Klassen (2002), Chan and Abdullah (2004), Rahimi and Abedini (2009) also explored the predicting capacity of this construct and

found that self-efficacy can influence writing skills and ability and is positively correlated with listening. This brings us to the logical conclusion that self-efficacy is associated with high and low achievement and probably may play a major role in reversing underachievement.

Some researchers have explored the relationship between self-efficacy and learning strategies. Wong (2005) examined Malaysian students' language learning strategies and found that participants with high self-efficacy beliefs used more language learning strategies. Chinese students' reading self-efficacy was found to be positively correlated with their reading strategies (Wong & Li, 2010). Magogwe and Oliver (2007), in a longitudinal study of Botswana students learning English as a second language, found that self-efficacy and use of strategies were strongly related. Along the same lines, Su and Duo (2012) in a study on Taiwanese students found that learning strategies were significantly associated with self-efficacy beliefs.

As educators, the issue before us is whether, as self-efficacy has been found to be associated with achievement and to affect language learners' choices of learning tasks, persistence, motivation and achievement (Liu, 2013), what are we to do with those underachievers who have low self-efficacy. Research with Chinese students indicated that even self-efficacy can be enhanced by both outcomes of behaviors and input from the environment (Liu, 2013). Liu found that students who regularly go to the self-access center to speak in English demonstrated higher levels of self-efficacy than those who seldom or never utilized the facility. However, as there is a positive relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and academic performance and persistence (Robbins et al., 2004; Zientek & Thompson, 2010), those with high self-efficacy are not only more likely to attempt tasks, they also work harder and persist longer in the face of difficulties (Bandura, 1986; Lyman, Prentice-Dunn, Wilson, & Bonfilio, 1984; Schunk, 1981; Reis & McCoach, 2012).

Chapter Conclusion

The review has revealed how motivation is associated with achievement and how aspects such as anxiety can have a positive as well as negative impact on learning. However, generally anxiety causes more damage to the learning process. Teachers play a vital role in a classroom. They can sustain the motivation of students for second language learning, or destroy it. They can increase their anxiety level or reduce it, they can cultivate the attitude of students in a positive way or be responsible for their adverse attitude towards second language learning. Several other factors from the students' side are also responsible for low achievement. Also, factors from the environment can influence learning. Educators constantly think of solutions to reverse underachievement. Using the mother tongue in the right degree and right place as the second language lesson progresses in the classroom can be an effective way of reversing underachievement.

CHAPTER 3

Appropriate Use of the Mother Tongue and its Role in Reversing the Experiences of Underachievers

Academic underachievement is a major concern for many around the world. Researchers have revealed that underachievement is not only an issue of the low-average and below-average level student but it can also be an issue with gifted students. The problem of underachievement associated with second language learning has also been studied by several researchers, and they have suggested various ways, methods, and approaches to cause its reversal. In this chapter, I address the specific situation of underachievers in the Indian context and eventually propose a lesson plan based on the meaningful use of the mother tongue to enhance acquisition of content in the second or foreign language.

Underachievement in general is a major issue that needs attention when it comes to learning English as a second language is concerned. In a typical Bachelor of Arts Classroom in India, students often are low achieving in general, and many also have problems with learning English as a second language. Sample data from my own college can be considered as reflective of the issues associated with these students.

In the Arts section of the BA Part one, I found that many students have low marks in general. The mean general percentage (including all subjects) at the Secondary School Certificate (SSC; 10th grade) level 50.15 and at the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC; 12th grade) level 49.99. The average percentage of students' percentage specifically in English was found to be 43.91 at the SSC level and 43.33 at the HSC level. These averages are indicative of the fact that the class in general seem low achieving, especially in English. Whether

underachievement is temporary or permanent or in any specific area or any specific field, there are numerous aspects associated with such low underachievement.

In the Indian context, those who secure marks above 60 % marks and beyond are considered excellent learners, those who score between 50% and 60 % are considered as average learners, and those who score below 50 % are considered poor learners. It can be expected that the marks and grades of these students may not be representative of their abilities, and there might be some variance with different evaluators. Even with such variance in grading taken into account, their basic percentage is likely still low. Low achievement is also associated with graders' toughness and leniency in grading. There is a possibility that graders may take a tough stand against these particular students who have enrolled themselves in the BA section yet, the identities of the grader or evaluator and the students are not known to each other and at the university level, adequate care is taken to maintain the confidentiality of the evaluation process. Also, the fact remains that all the students of the Part one BA section come from different schools and colleges where they were taught by different teachers, and graded and evaluated by different evaluators. Though some of the students coming from the same school might be taught by the same teachers, there are only negligible chances that these students were evaluated by the same evaluator. Another possibility is that perhaps all these students had poor teachers, although it is difficult to believe that all teachers from different schools were poor. This assumption is not supported in any case for the simple reason that many other students from the same schools and classes score high marks.

Although the academic history indicates that some students are chronic underachievers, this does not mean reversal of underachievement is impossible. Research in this field has

demonstrated that the right intervention can help these students emerge with the right knowledge, right skills and right attitude.

The large size of classes makes it impractical to conduct student-centric activities such as group discussions. For the simple reason that even if only 80 to 90 % of the students are present, it is extremely difficult to conduct fruitful group discussion activities. There will be about 20 groups in the class with at least five students each, and it is difficult to monitor 20 groups in roughly the 36 minutes that remain out of 48 minute periods. Infrastructural facilities also become inadequate in most situations. Besides this, there are reasons such as unmotivated students, who fail to regulate themselves and take ownership for what they are doing, not practicing and working hard.

Students' perspective

From the students' perspective, they cannot get enough attention from their teachers. Too little teaching time, inadequate monitoring, demotivating teachers, and unavailability of resource, are some aspects that hold them from achieving. Besides these reasons, we know that there are other environmental issues coming from the family, society and culture, and the peer group.

There is a direct link between excellent language skills in English and employability. The progress and development of the nation depends on the proficiency of youth and their appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes. Every nation is coming up with measures that would put youth on the path of success. However, it is often true that low achievement has crippled students at all levels and stalls the developmental plans of the nation. Whether they are in district schools, private schools, public schools, government schools, or world famous schools, there are always some strugglers trying to make it through their courses. Research has demystified the

notion that only the average or below average students are low achievers in various ways. Even the gifted student can suffer from this problem even if they are rarely identified.

Scholars have proposed numerous definitions to explain what underachievement is and who can be called an underachiever. However, it is essential to understand the effect of underachievement on both the students and to some extent the teachers. They are both affected by underachievement, and they can both become caught in a negative spin that probably confines them to a certain level through which they find it difficult to breakthrough. Once underachievement becomes a chronic issue with a student, its reversal becomes a huge challenge. At its worst, it ends up sending students out of school and they become dropouts. Underachievement should be taken very seriously at the school level itself as continued adverse academic experiences may destroy all the chances of doing better in later life. The absence of early appropriate academic experiences can thwart students' possibilities of developing their high abilities or talents later in life.

Underachievement can affect several aspects of learning such as motivation, self-efficacy, anxiety, and attitude simultaneously, and all these aspects can also produce and be responsible for underachievement of students. Low expectations on the part of the students can set off a negative cycle.

Underachievement and Motivation

Motivation research suggests that the discrepancy or gap between achievement and underachievement may lie in the difference in motivational status and use of learning strategies between successful and unsuccessful students. Factors include students' lack of intrinsic motivation, perceived competence, and inappropriate metacognitive strategies. Researchers

found that these factors can predict the chance of success or failure in students. On the part of teachers, the predictors are found to be inappropriate teaching methodology, lack of enthusiasm, and ill-suited course content in some cases.

It is true that sometimes underachievement is caused by no other factor but the low cognitive ability of a student. Yet, in some cases, researchers have found underachievement to be caused by a massive mismatch between teaching approach and learning approach of a student or the learning strategies used by the students. There are several studies that indicate that there is a positive relationship between learners' use of learning strategies and their academic performance.

Demotivating Factors that can cause underachievement

Research has found that the teacher is a crucial factor as the teacher's behavior, attitude, approach, as well as conduct and personality can either motivate or demotivate a student. In some cases, teachers have been found to be one of the major reason for demotivation for learning. Even poor presentation skills or lack of enthusiasm on the part of a teacher have a demotivating effect on students.

In the teaching learning process, we cannot single out only teachers or only students for their demotivation. The onus lies on both though it is a fact that different reasons are recorded by the teachers and students so far as demotivation is concerned. Besides the ones already mentioned, students complain about teachers not giving clear enough instructions, criticizing them, and shouting at them when they do not understand whereas from the teachers' perspective, demotivation is due to students' psychological, attitudinal, social, historical, and geographical reasons. Researchers have also found such factors as the following: 1. The teacher's personal

relationship with the students; 2.The teacher's attitude towards the course or the material; 3.Style conflicts between teachers and students; and 4.The nature of classroom activities. Students, particularly those who cannot overcome such difficulties might end up with underachievement.

Some other factors that create deficiency in the teaching and learning process are negative aspects of the institutional framework, inadequate school facilities, and the compulsory nature of L2. Research has also shown how motivation is associated with attitudes towards other ethnicities and the language learning contexts, and it has been established that there is a strong correlation between attitude and the language learning process. Thus, it is clear that if demotivating factors are not reduced they might damage the attitude of a learner towards learning the second language.

Anxiety and Underachievement

In several cases, students end up underachieving simply because they become anxious and, as a natural corollary, they end up not being able to give final performance according to their potential, ability, and capacity. Research has demonstrated how anxiety affects language use, and it can make individuals look less fluent than they actually are. Just as it affects the oral skills of a person, it can very much affect writing skills as well. To a great extent, anxiety explains reticence of some students in the class. However, research has found that learning communication strategies can keep students' anxiety down and improve their communicative skills. Language learning strategies directly affect motivation, self-perceived communication competence, and willingness to communicate in English.

Research in second language learning has revealed certain other anxiety-related factors that eventually causes underachievement in students. It has been shown that anxiety is associated

with reading, coming from deficient vocabulary as well as unknown vocabulary. In addition to unknown vocabulary, the other two textual features that contribute to underachievement are unknown topic and unfamiliarity with the foreign culture. Besides anxiety, beginner foreign language learners often express a feeling of stress, and nervousness in learning a foreign language in general. A negative spiral can be set in motion by factors such as worrying about reading and fear of making errors. Even though some findings that have shown a positive impact of anxiety on learners, anxiety usually has a debilitating impact on language achievement as shown by the research.

Self-Efficacy, Second/Foreign Language Learning, and Underachievement

Motivational factors along with anxiety can damage the self-efficacy beliefs of students. Research indicates that beliefs about one's ability and self-efficacy are very important in learning. Researchers have also established the predicting capacity of self-efficacy in the writing skills of students. Other research has shown a positive correlation between self-efficacy and listening skills, and between self-efficacy and learning strategies.

Students who have suffered chronic achievement problem have much to overcome before they can be exposed to new learning. Reversal of underachievement is a major challenge and exploring students' views can reveal that they have a cumulative deficit of from previous years. In other words, they arrive at college with a deficit or gap that needs to be addressed first in order to allow them to benefit from instruction.

Research has stressed the need to build up the prior knowledge of students before they begin to read a text, and this is true even in the case of second language reading. At the beginner level, these underachievers cannot by themselves collect ideas, arrange them in the best

sequence, and communicate in English as a part of the process required for the productive skills of speaking and writing. Gifted or self-regulated students might display these skills but for the underachievers, if expected to engage this process by themselves, they will experience another failure. Research has found out that underachievers or unsuccessful students cannot display this high level skills. However, if rendered assistance through their mother tongue, underachievers might show some understanding of the process. However, as Trudgill has further expressed that rote learning though universally discredited, is sometimes required, and the mother tongue can be used to cultivate understanding of new words from the text. Good practice to gain familiarity with words and vocabulary that students would come across when they finally approach may be helpful. Researchers have found that a strong foundation in the native language facilitates content based learning in a second language, for example English, for the simple reason that so far as the content is concerned, the students are already well acquainted with the content through the mother tongue, and this knowledge gets transferred to their second language.

In the case of gifted students we might be able to attain the transfer of knowledge through languages as these students are expected to be good in the native language too. However, this may not work with students with a history of underachievement as it is the common observation that a vast majority of underachieving students may have similar underachievement issues with both native and learned languages.

Mother Tongue in Teaching a Foreign/Second Language

As we know that there is wide gap in the academic knowledge that accumulated over a long period of time, such a gap can only be bridged and addressed quickly by way of building the required prior knowledge using the native language as an instrument. Use of the mother

tongue may activate the zone of proximal development and serve as a bridge for the learner with the new text. Researchers have found that whether it be first language learning or second language learning, both depend on the prior knowledge of the learner. In the case first language learning, the learner draws prior knowledge from knowledge of the world, knowledge of relations or causalities, whereas in the case of second language learning, the learner draws additionally on knowledge of sounds, groupings, patterns, and expectations of basic syntax-meaning configurations.

It becomes relevant to argue for the use of the mother tongue to build the prior knowledge necessary for second language learning. However, it is important to consider to what extent the use of the mother tongue in class would improve second language skills? We have already seen that anxiety is associated with underachievement. If initial knowledge is presented in the mother tongue (for example by giving a summary of the text in the native language), then chances are students' anxiety will be lowered. There is a negative correlation between anxiety and achievement. So, the level of students' achievement is likely to increase. Unknown vocabulary is one of the strongest causes of reading anxiety. So, vocabulary items should be explained in the native language and also be used as part of prior knowledge required in order to bring the student to the level of proximal development. Initial use of the mother tongue to explain the summary, background of the text, and expected vocabulary that students should already know will likely bring down the anxiety level of the students which is otherwise high because of aspects such as unfamiliar topic, unfamiliar culture, and unknown vocabulary or other personal factors. Thus, use of the mother tongue can pave the way to reverse underachievement.

A study involving Slovenian students indicated that story telling technique or narrative is important in learning English as a second language or English as a foreign language, and most

teachers use it (Fojkar,2013). Others have also emphasized the importance of using narratives and storytelling in teaching a foreign language, especially to young learners (see Morgan & Rinvoluceri, 1983; Garvie, 1990; Machura, 1994; Wright, 1995, 1997; Kuhlweck, 1999; Brewster, Ellis & Girard, 2002; Ellis & Brewster, 1991, 2002; Waynryb, 2003; Enever, 2006; Láng, 2009; Mourão, 2006, 2011, among others) (Fojkar,2013). Daniel (2012: 3) pointed out that “narrative is the natural way in which humans organize information, and storytelling is the most immediate (and fundamental) means by which that narrative is communicated”. Egan (1986, 1997) identified a story as one of the most effective tools for communicating new information to young learners.

However, we know that for narrating and storytelling to be effective, the learners and teachers both need sound vocabulary. If the teacher initiates a story telling task without ensuring whether students are equipped with the right kinds of words or vocabulary then chances are that the students with deficient vocabulary or students who have reading anxiety because of unknown vocabulary may not be able to benefit from the task to develop the language skills further. Whether the narrative or story is interesting from the teacher’s point of view, it will not have any positive impact on students learning if the topic of the story is unfamiliar from an unknown culture and is related using unknown difficult vocabulary. In an instance like this, the task at once becomes meaningless, and a demotivating factor for the students. A task designed by the teacher needs to be meaningful and valuable to the students. On this account, it has been observed by researchers that even gifted students or high self-efficacy students do not do well (Rubenstein et. Al., 2012). In cases like this, using the mother tongue particularly for non-gifted students can be effective to elucidate the task for students. Initial explanations in the mother

tongue would help the teacher to prepare the necessary background information for the students and with knowledge of vocabulary it will enhance the meaningfulness and value of the task.

In a program jointly sponsored and conducted by the Directorate of Collegiate Education, Government of AP, and the U.S. State Department English Language Fellow Program aimed at updating the teaching skills of English teachers of undergraduate colleges in the State of Andhra Pradesh (India), it was found out that good reading comprehension ability is critical to students' academic success. Reading is also considered valuable because the reader has more control over the language input than in the case of listening, where much of the control lies with the speaker. The data showed that a majority of students improved their reading "when their teacher read aloud and explained the lesson in English". However, the data also revealed that a considerable number of students improved their reading "when their teacher read aloud the passage and translated into mother tongue" (Sreehari, 2012). The findings of this project might not have been popular with researchers as the results indicated the need for a teacher-centric approach. However, even if a student-centric approach is designed, the strong possibility of the students who were helped by the use of the mother tongue will remain.

Lesson Plan to enhance acquisition of content

Having explored the literature on underachievement and understood how it is related with motivational aspects, we now know that underachievers can get enmeshed in a negative spin and probably not have a chance to improve their acquisition of a new language. Considering the importance of developing in their zone of proximal development so that future learning becomes easy for them, they are less likely to be dissuaded by demotivation when the mother tongue is effectively used by organizing the classroom activities in the following manner:

- Step 1: Narrate the story or the content of the lesson in the mother tongue to the students.
- Step 2: Acquaint them in advance with the unfamiliar words, knowledge, unfamiliar mythological concepts, and unfamiliar cultural information in advance using their mother tongue.
- Step 3: Narrate the story or the content of the lesson in English (target language) using the words and vocabulary that were recently introduced to them.
- Step 4: Take them to the original text in English. At this stage minimal use of the mother tongue and maximum use of the second language is recommended.
- Step 5: Students can be given tests to assess their level of acquisition of knowledge.

Benefits:

Step 1- their ideas regarding the content that is going to come improves. If the stories, for example, are interesting then they become further interested to read the story in English.

Step 2- Their background knowledge will improve and the new knowledge will come within their grasp. The gap between their knowledge and new knowledge will be reduced.

Step 3- When beginners find English easy, their motivation is likely to go up and anxiety-related issues will be put under control.

Step 4- Reduces the use of the mother tongue and instills confidence in students that they understand English and their self-efficacy beliefs about themselves will also improve.

Such a lesson organization is likely to enhance the acquisition of second language content which in turn will affect the underachievement in the particular instances of low-achieving students.

There is a possibility that students might show increased acquisition and understanding of the content but still may not be able reproduce their understanding in English writing, particularly on tests. This failure on the part of students may occur because of their poor grammatical skills or poor writing skills. However, in such cases, the only way to help them would include supplementing the lesson plan with extra tutorials on grammar where students will get lessons only on those grammar items that are connected with the text under consideration.

Chapter Conclusion

Learning English as a second language is essential in order to be fully employable in many societies around the world. However, in the Indian context, we find that a large majority of students in the Arts are wanting in the second language skills. There are several reasons why they do not display adequate language proficiency in English. However, based on the review of literature, moderate and wise use of the mother tongue can be effective in enhancing the level of content acquisition in students that, in turn, might have positive effects on their motivation to learn English as a second language. A needs-based carefully organized lesson plan making use of the mother tongue in adequate degrees and at appropriate stages can have a positive impact on students learning and reversing underachievement.

CHAPTER 4

Conclusion

Underachievement is a multiply complex construct. It is the nemesis of many students in the modern world, and it has always looked so intimidating and hard rooted that weeding it out has appeared almost impossible. Some have even said that the history of mankind is a history of underachievement. Those who do not take steps to effect the reversal of the story of underachievement would say that the future of mankind is a story of collective underachievement.

Through various rigorous attempts, researchers have defined the various aspects of this construct. Underachievement is identified based on an interpretation of the grades obtained by students relative to others, to criteria established by society or educators, and to their own potential. However, it is a fact that these grades are not always representative of future success. Grades cannot be authentic predictors of future success even in instances of chronic underachievement.

The review of literature presented in this report indicates that the teacher is an extremely crucial factor when it comes to learning a second language. Teachers can motivate students and do their best to hold them up in that charged up state of mind until they achieve their goals. Teachers can also be painfully demotivating. They can contribute to students' positive attitude formation and subdue their anxiety levels, or do the opposite. It can be concluded that a teacher can be both a positive or negative force and can make the learning experience enjoyable or miserable.

The teacher, of course, is not the sole factor responsible for achievement or underachievement of students. There are various factors such as motivation, anxiety, attitude,

self-efficacy, and learning strategies, to name the most important ones that have been investigated and found to be responsible to affect whether students attain their goals.

Underachievement in English as a second language learning

In the Indian context, it is a common belief that the majority of students majoring in the Arts display chronic underachievement in all subjects in general and in English as a second language in particular. The chronic underachievement is also associated with students' knowledge deficit as well as lack of progress in language acquisition. For example, continued to carry forward with deficient vocabulary at each level, a condition that brings with it a negative effect on motivation, anxiety, and the four language skills, students experience underachievement and a gap in knowledge and skills. Filling up this language skills gap and bringing the students to the required level can be identified, in other words, as cultivating the zone of proximal development of a student so as to open the chances for a positive learning experience for the students.

A review of the literature indicates that the older incorrect attitudes towards the use of students' mother tongue in English language classes no longer hold. The mother tongue can be effectively used to cultivate students' language skills. Researchers have also reported that though the mother tongue can be used in learning English, there is need for more investigation of the length of time and manner it should best be used. Using the mother tongue to minimize the knowledge deficit and cultivate the zone of proximal development of a student is likely to produce best results, at least so far as acquisition of knowledge is concerned, thereby initiating an upward swing in the motivation of students, inching them closer to attain their goals and ward off underachievement using various learning strategies and techniques. Wise and controlled use

of the mother tongue in second language learning can eventually produce the right knowledge, right attitude, and right skills for students.

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