

# LANGUAGE IN INDIA

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## Overcoming Mental Inhibition through Experiential Learning Strategies

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### Introduction

In spite of its troubled journey in India during the last four centuries, English language has retained its distinctiveness and uniqueness in India. Besides, during this lengthy sojourn in India, English has shaped the communicative capability of Indian minds and in turn it has been influenced by the Indianness of society in India. At present the evolving status of English as a leading global language further strengthens the position of English in India.

In his *English as a Global Language* David Crystal states:

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“Indeed, if there is one predictable consequence of a language becoming a global language, it is that nobody owns it any more. Or rather, everyone who has learned it now owns it – ‘has a share in it’ might be more accurate – and has the right to use it in the way they want” (2003:2&3).

Crystal also says that some countries use English as second language “because it is seen as a complement to a person’s mother tongue or ‘first language’ (2003:4). Joshua A. Fishman in his “Sociology of English as an Additional Language”, categorically puts forth the following:

“The growth of English speaking “false foreigners” in various parts of the non-English mother-tongue world (e.g. West Africa, East Africa, India, Puerto Rico) is an indication that a non-native variety of English may succeed not only in stabilizing itself cross-generationally (i.e., in nativizing itself), but also in becoming a mother tongue in certain speech networks.... Steps have been taken to make sure that English does not intrude upon the domains of local ideology, literature, history and citizenship” (Kachru, ed., 2001:20&21).

However English has not been used effectively in the formal context by L<sub>2</sub> learners. It is mainly due to the mental inhibition which affects acquisition process both in the school and college levels. In the present study it is found that the students struggle with the inferiority complex and due to that they are not able to communicate well. Various approaches and methods are put forth by many scholars and linguists to make the classroom teaching of English student-centric and contextually oriented. Among the teaching methods, experiential learning method, proposed in the present paper, is considered productive. This method particularly helps students to overcome mental inhibition.

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## **Experiential Learning Method (ELM)**

Having accepted “mental inhibition” as a serious ‘communication barrier’, I make an attempt in this paper to introduce English Language Lab with a specific teaching module to overcome the same inhibition. The focus is to enable a learner at the college level to effectively bring out his or her understanding of a topic without any mental inhibition and assert himself or herself as a ‘creative person’. Experiential learning method (ELM) based on the ‘Experiential Language Learning theory’ formulated by David Kolb using the ‘learning cycle’ is applied to meet the objective of helping the students to overcome mental inhibition and learn the skills comfortably. Kolb considers ‘learning as a process of creating knowledge.’ (p.38)

To know more about this learning, human knowledge should be explored to find out the types and the methods through which knowledge was acquired. Knowledge creation happens, whether small or big, in all spheres. Interaction between ‘social’ and ‘personal’ knowledge creates knowledge. Social knowledge is the ‘the civilized objective accumulation’ of the learners’ cultural experience. Personal knowledge is the collection of each individual learner’s ‘subjective’ experience. Thus knowledge is created by the close interaction between the above objective and subjective experiences in a ‘process called learning’

Kolb connects experiential learning to a level that can create a situation where ‘everyone is a winner’ or ‘can make winning and losing irrelevant’. Kolb turns a bit spiritual and says that each learner should be aware of his self and existence and integrate ‘value, facts, meaning and relevance’. And also fully remembering and acknowledging his past taking ‘choiceful responsibility of the future’; only then he can experience the ‘dialectic conflict necessary for learning experience.’

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## **Four Cycles**

Kolb presents an experiential learning cycle and his model theory has a four-dimensional cycle. In this four-dimensional cycle, learners, a) 'have some form of concrete experience, b) reflective observation of this experience through which one has gone through, c) 'abstract conceptualization d) 'actively experiment with application of these concepts', creating new concrete experiences through doing the cycle repeatedly. The final products of this learning method are: convergent knowledge, divergent knowledge, accommodative and assimilative knowledge. Kolb calls apprehension, comprehension, extension and intention ideas, and their various combinations as styles of learning.

## **Application of the ELM**

A sound mind produces sound communication. One of the very common factors which make a learner mentally inhibited in the classroom is being conscious of the audience and the fear of exposing oneself ineffective. This 'inhibition' can be overcome if the Teacher allows freedom for the learners to think and process their learning in their own learning style. As Kolb suggested the learning has to happen with regular reflection of familiar experiences. The activities proposed in the research enabled the learners to use ELM more effectively. The students are given the tasks based on their own experience which in turn made them involve more closely in doing the tasks. Thus ELM has become effective in the L<sub>2</sub> classroom.

## **Psychological Inhibition**

A child learns his language in his desperation to express himself. Communicative compulsion creates a ceaseless longing within a child to learn his language through 'trial and error method'. Similar environment can

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be created for learning a second language. It is possible only through ELM-enabled tasks. Psychologically ‘inhibition’ means conscious exclusion of unacceptable thoughts or desires. Physiologically ‘inhibition’ means the process whereby nerves can retard or prevent the functioning of organ or part. In other words ‘inhibition’ can be termed as learning disorder wherein a learner fears failure in public. Since it is impossible to make the learner forget the environment, it is imperative to provide learning privacy by bringing in a familiar environment. In such a case, experiencing and reflecting on the experience for learning can be easily implemented in the English Language Lab or classroom.

### **Communication and Monitoring System**

To make the learning process fruitful, it is necessary to create the following levels of communication and monitoring system:

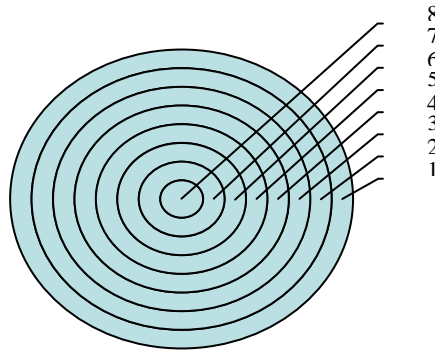
1. Teacher as Guide
2. Creating English environment
3. Focusing on Creative Ability
4. Student as Teacher
5. Student as Student
6. Self – Evaluation
7. Mutual Evaluation
8. Student Performance Monitoring

The following is the diagrammatic representation of the levels of learning and monitoring system.

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The diagram focuses on the monitoring system of the learning process. Teacher, as Guide stands at the boundary of the learning process, guiding and not directing. The middle part of the learning process is governed by the learner himself, and close by the language acquisition remains the ‘self evaluation’ and ‘mutual evaluation’.

### **A Three-level Learning Process**

Through ELM it is possible to impart language skills, if it is done in a systematic way. It allows learner to learn in their own style with little inhibition. With the above structure as monitoring system, the researcher has proposed a three-level learning process which he experimented successfully with his students at the undergraduate level. A batch of thirty students was taken for a 100-minute session. Students were introduced to familiar topics for discussion and shown pictures for observation. All the three levels were taken up with group activity as the first, pair activity as the second, and individual activity as the third.

### **Level I: Group Activity: (Total Time required : 30 minutes)**

A batch of 30 students is divided into 6 groups with 5 students in each group. Any one of the interesting topics is given to each group and is allotted 10 – minute time for preparation. All the levels of monitoring system are adopted. Each group is allotted 5-

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minute time for presentation and they are asked to speak through the microphone which they find comfortable.

**Level II: Pair Activity: (Total Time required: 30 minutes)**

All the 30 students are divided into pairs and given the topics or pictures. They are allotted 5-minute preparation time and their presentations are recorded. All the levels of monitoring system are adopted. Each pair is allotted 2-minute presentation time.

**Level III: Individual Activity: (Total Time Required: 30 Minutes)**

In this activity everyone is asked to speak on the topic given to them through the microphone while all the others listen to the speaker through the headphones. No preparation time is allowed. This method enables the listener to better his/her presentation when his/her turn comes for presentation.

The entire proceeding was recorded and while one group or pair or individual was sharing the information, the others had been allowed to listen to their presentation through headphones. This method enabled the students to better their own presentation in the light of the presentation of others and a remarkable improvement was noticed in overcoming the mental inhibition. The same process was repeated in the next 100-minute session for effectively overcoming inhibitions. The mental inhibitions like lack of reasoning, lack of emotional freedom, cultural blocks, intellectual reservations and academic indifference were identified and corrective measures were taken in the classroom itself. The concept of using one's own experience for learning and communicating enabled the learners to achieve the required competency level. By implementing around 10 tasks according to the learners' various experience level, the researcher could assess and find out that the ELM strategy showed good result.

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## Sample situations

1. What is your ambition in life? Can you share your ambition with others in the group and arrive at a common ambition, which may develop your society?
2. What kind of job prospects you will be expecting once you take up a post? Is it possible to determine ideal job prospects?
3. “Women prove smarter than men”. Have you experienced this in your personal life? If you come across such a situation, how will you react?
4. Do you want to be independent or dependent? Tell the truth.
5. “Young mind does not like to be instructed”. Do you agree with this or not?

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