

Immersion technique and its benefits for English Language learners: A Literature Survey

Jevetha Vijayadasan* and Prajeesh Tomy

School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, Tamil Nadu, India
kimjeeves22@gmail.com

Available online at: www.isca.in, www.isca.me

Received 7th September 2019, revised 16th December 2019, accepted 4th January 2020

Abstract

English being the common tongue of many people around the world, it is necessary that everyone knows it. Learning English is more about knowing how to reach people's heart and making them understand your reasoning than just reviewing vocabulary and grammar. Observing others on how they communicate can be great way to learn quickly, however you should know how to use the language as well. Fortunately, there is a way to learn English that will help you with both of these things. It's called immersion. This article reviews in detail about the benefits of immersion technique and how it has gained momentum in the past ten years. It also looks into some of the immersion programs offered in various universities and other organisations and how they help utilize the principles of immersion to make the learning process fun and easier.

Keywords: Bilingualism, Dual language learning, Fluency, Immersion technique, Language acquisition.

Introduction

Many of us think what immersion has got to do with English. Not just for English but it can also be used for learning foreign languages. It can help us get involved with the language so deeply that we tend to get more passionate about it. And when you finally master it, you feel powerful and contented. You relate it to your life experiences and this is exactly what immersion technique does. For instance, you can learn a great deal about business ideas by listening to the lectures online rather than taking an English course¹. If you are sick and tired of staring at the English recipe books, maybe you would prefer watching some random food channel on your television or any other program about cooking. Or maybe you would cherish conversing with your favourite English instructor in place of just sitting in the class the whole day.

Immersion means being involved in depth or submerged by something. In this case the language being learnt is perpetually utilized in a daily basis along with the individual's first language. One simple example is of an individual who is put into a new surrounding with absolutely no idea about the culture or the language. Well this reminds me of a girl from Bihar who was in the same Tamil (second language) class as mine, knowing nothing about the language. It was surprising to see that by the end of the month she was communicating clearly².

Bilingual inculcation requires utilization of two languages as method of instruction in the school curriculum³. Bilingualism progresses more effortlessly, the quicker the second language is initiated⁴. A child's brain is capable of installing, processing, analysing and differentiating the sundry other melodies, sounds

and tunes. In this way, kids are able to analyse a second language in a barely identical method as they learnt their first. This promotes the cognitive development of children and provides more impulsion for them to learn.

Methodology

Immersion helps us understand the culture and etiquettes of the language being learnt. You may use immersion by reading magazines like Vogue or Time and watching Hollywood movies¹. Likewise, you can also set your mobile's first language as English. This might help give you more exposure. That said, you would have to do it on a daily basis and allocate time for it so that you don't lose touch.

Today, learning foreign language is a necessity for everyone. If you are aware of at least two foreign languages, you can very well survive in faraway lands. Furthermore, your work will take you to several places and eventually you would have to learn to get habituated in non-English speaking countries. The subsequent three factors are the major requirements on which learning a foreign language is based on: i. The language should cover all potential aspects such as the interaction, mode of communication and outreach. ii. The stipulated period of time (for over 6 years), iii. Mode of instruction.

The immersion method has proved to be the most successful in all three areas⁴.

Some Common questions regarding Immersion: Do I need to go anywhere?: If you love travelling and are very interested to learn from a different place, then you can very well go for it. It

is true that people learn much better when they are exposed to a new environment. However, you can also gain knowledge by just sitting at home. The web has made it possible for us to access innumerable number of websites, blogs and newsfeeds. There are plenty of apps you can download on your mobile from play store or app store. You can search for videos in You tube, look up for movies and T.V. series from all around the world in a click of a button.

Does it cost money?: Not necessarily. If you want to go less on your savings, you would most probably prefer recharging your Wi-Fi or mobile data than planning an education tour. There are several websites online in which you can watch videos and movies in various audios and with English subtitles. *Fluent U* is one such monthly subscription site from which u can learn through native videos. All you need to do is subscribe and follow their uploads.

Survey on the immersion programs in India: The official languages of India are Hindi and English. During the British rule, English was fundamental for communication among traders and rulers. It was implemented even in the education systems⁵. According to the *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, even while Hindi is taught as the fundamental language in northern parts of India, it is being substituted by English. Whereas in South India, English forms the first language and the state language is the second language. Hindi and Sanskrit are mostly taught from grade 5 to grade 8 as third language. Immersion models are being implemented in many institutions, mostly in private schools. The government schools still offer native language instruction.

There has been a lot of discussion about the importance of immersion and how it can influence the Indian education system. Its benefits have been studied and it has been noted that the time taken to reach fluency in English is very less through immersion. This is a remarkable thing as it saves time and its effect is long lasting.

More stress has to be laid on how immersion programs can be executed in remote areas as it could benefit young children in villages. This will make people aware of the various educational benefits of immersion and its impact will be recognised all over India.

The different types of formal immersion programs offered around the world: i. Certain programs from the Boston Language Institute, allows you to choose between group immersion and private immersion¹. ii. The Hawaiian Language Immersion Program is presently provided for K-12 students. It is a total immersion bilingual program offering Hawaiian language immersion up till grade 4 and partial immersion in English and Hawaiian simultaneously from grade 5 onwards⁷. iii. ESL (English as second language) students are expected to learn various subjects through immersion. Theimmigrant students attending native institutes are put into an immersive

surrounding; for instance, the refugee children from Bosnia attend schools in Germany and kids from Puerto Rico visit American institutions⁸. iv. Many other formal programs also comprise a homestay option. This helps you to live with a family and learn their culture and accent.

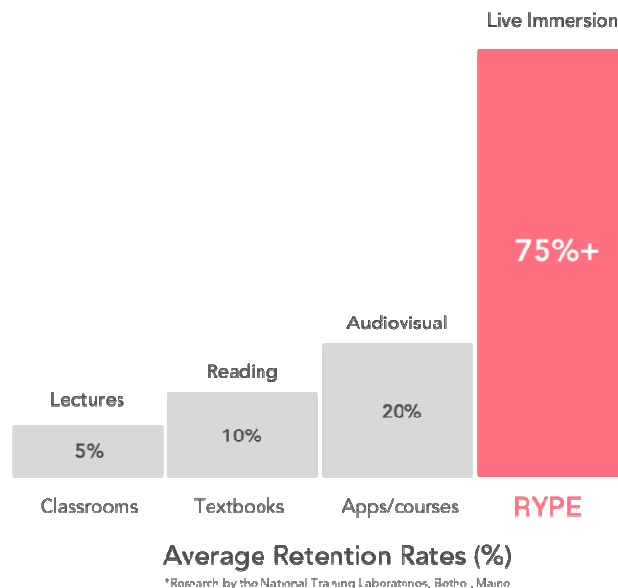


Figure-1: Statistical analysis of the average retention rates of different learning methods⁶.

Support and cost needed: Ways of practising immersion on your own: Field trips: You can look around your neighbourhood for restaurants, cafeterias and stores. Tourist areas work best since there would be a huge gathering of people speaking various dialects. If you rummage around, you may find hotels which offer miscellaneous number of cuisines. Visit these locations and practise ordering food in English. Also go attend the prayer meets in churches which are conducted in English. You will be benefitted if you attend them regularly.

Planning immersion days: Take a day off for the purpose of immersion. Make a timetable. Come up with a plan on how well you could utilise your time. Visit any English speaking area in your locality. Search on Google Maps for better results. Try and talk only in English the entire day and present yourself with a gift if you succeed in doing so.

Online tutor: *Italki* and other online sites offer plenty of search options to find the right tutor. Regular courses can be practised every day. You can also refer to your notes, ask for doubts and get them cleared. Through *Skype*, you can video chat with your tutor which will help you maintain a good rapport with one another. Charges for online classes are minimal and for some courses, financial aid is also provided. Apps like *Duolingo* offer learning of multiple languages. You can set a daily goal such as practise time ranging from 5 to 20 minutes. It starts from simpler topics and the more levels you clear, the topics get harder. The points you get increase and therefore you can judge

your language fluency level. It keeps track of your entire progress and you can become a pro.

Foreign trips: While on a foreign trip, try and talk to people rather than shying away. Although you may not be familiar with them, but there many kind souls who would help get your queries answered. You will eventually end up making new friends from whom you can boost up your English communication skills.

Immersion classes: Of all things mentioned, this is by far the best way to immerse oneself. There are plenty of advantages to this, as you get to live in the same place, concentrate on one particular thing at a time and have friends who have the same goal as you. That means you can help each other out. You won't feel left out and over time you will get used to it and the language you are learning. You will adapt well to new surroundings and your communication skills will improve drastically.

Recent trends: There has been an increase in the number of immersion programs offered by institutions, certain organisations and NGOs in the past few years. This is indeed a reminder as to how well it would develop overtime. It would be included in very school's curriculum and a number of children will learn languages in a method easier than any other. More websites will be released which would state the importance of immersion and its effect in one's life.

Conducting an immersion program in school or other institutions: There are a variety of ways in which immersion programs can be enacted. In full immersion, the teacher articulates only in one particular language like English and the

student's native language is not considered. The other method is termed the "sink-or-swim" approach which is often discouraging and frustrating to the children. Therefore what is preferred is a partial immersion program, which recognizes the child's home language and at the same time gives emphasis to English.

Immersion teachers must know what should be taught in each class and they must be able to make children understand the concept in a simpler fashion⁹. They should bring together the familiar language with new words and phrases so as to ease the process of learning. The child must be taught to frame sentences from unfamiliar words and letters. Plenty of easy "to do now" exercises must be given so that children can incorporate what they have learned and be able to answer the questions themselves. The difficulty level should then be increased grade wise.

Mostly immersion takes place in a bigger environment such as a school. Nevertheless the role of home is just as important¹⁰. If children concentrate only in English and don't bother to give equal importance to their native language, then they will not be able to keep up with their friends at later stages. We all know the fact that majority of a child's vocabulary is discovered at home. Therefore a child's mother tongue should not be ignored and if it is, then after a certain period of time, they will tend to concentrate only in English as their fondness over that subject will grow further and they will end up forgetting their own mother tongue. That said, if they switch from one subject to another with no proper effort, it will lead to a reduction in their learning curve. They will end up mixing the languages. So it's equally important to teach the child's native language at home and English at school. This should be done regularly, so that they maintain the same amount of proficiency in both subjects.

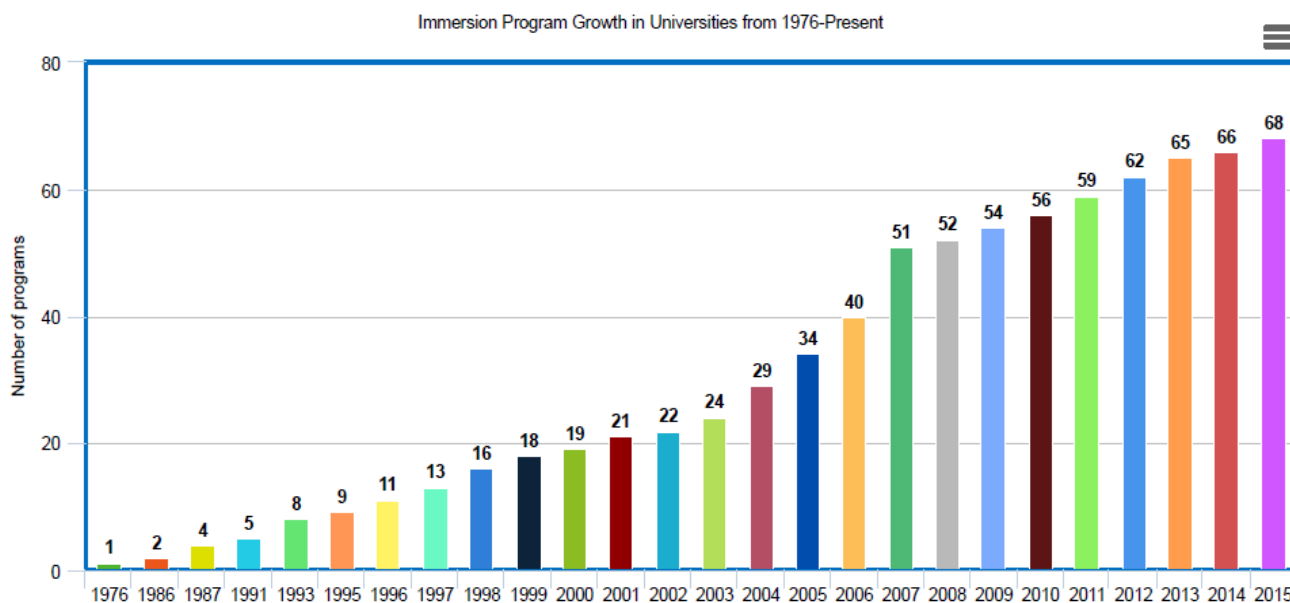


Figure-2: Statistical growth in the number of Immersion programs offered by institutions over the past four decades.

The role of parents: Parents play a major role in their child's language development and it determines whether the child will be able cope up in school with his or her friends the same way he or she does at home, in a safe and secure atmosphere. Parents should try and get in touch with the tutor and learn about their child's progress. They should also attend parent-teacher meetings and communicate better with the help of translators. This will help them understand better about their children, their learning habits and the daycare environment. So learning multiple languages would not matter when they are sure that their children are placed in the right learning environment.

Results and discussion

The benefits of learning English through Immersion: A chance to learn about another culture: When you devote time in learning a new language, not only do you develop grammar and vocabulary but also learn the culture and diversity behind it. It brings with it, a history of how it was developed and the way people communicate in various accents. Food, festivals religion and tradition are all interconnected with a language. This helps develop a bond between you and the language.

Overcoming insecurities: Local people are often happy to communicate with the person who knows their language. Instantly you will find how kind they are to you, and you too will reciprocate in the same way.

Quick learning: The more you practice, the more you master it. Your brain efficiency will improve according to how fast and accurately to solve exercises. A study reported by *Psychology Today* showed that children who learn their second or third language immersion course, outperform the students who have not taken up these courses¹. Students showed cognitive improvement. That is what immersion will help you to do.

Pronunciation: Natives speak with a slang that is developed over time. The pronunciation of words makes a huge difference while you speak. You need to be aware of these little things and pay more attention to what you sound like.

Conclusion

It has been noted that the number of dual language learners has drastically heightened over ten years and more exploration has provided us new methodologies about how best children can be made to learn various languages. Two different thoughts have been put forward, immersion and dual language learning. We know the benefits of immersion, whereas the dual language benefits are still being evaluated². However the programs in which the techniques of both practises overlap are said to have the best results. The benefits of this include swiftness and being able to come up with striking connections among different languages. The impact of this experience is more intense at individual levels¹¹. Last but not the least I would like to highlight the fact that immersion is suitable for all age groups

and social backgrounds. It does not require any special quality or trait. Now go ahead and immerse yourself in a new language and spread the joy of learning to everyone around you.

References

1. Whitney Foster (2019). Five effective ways to learn English through immersion. <https://www.fluentu.com/blog/english/easy-english-short-stories/> (Accessed 03-09-2019).
2. Jeff Shore (2019). The Immersion Technique. <https://jeffshore.com/2012/06/the-immersion-technique-2/> (Accessed 03-09-2019).
3. Cummins Jim (2009). Bilingual and Immersion Programs. *The Handbook of Language Teaching*, Chapter 10, 159-181. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444315783.ch10>
4. Educare (2019). Immersion method. https://educare.de/immersion_1.html?&L=1 (Accessed 03-09-2019).
5. Bhat S. and Beri A. (2016). ICT immersion in different domains of teaching profession-a literature review. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology* ISSN, 2348-5396.
6. How to Speak English Fluently (2019). <https://www.rypeapp.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/rype-retention-chart-768x720.png>(Accessed 28-09-2019).
7. Pacific Policy Research Center (2019). Successful Bilingual and Immersion Education Models/Programs. http://www.ksbe.edu/assets/spi/pdfs/Bilingual_Immersion_full.pdf(Accessed 03-09-2019).
8. Language teaching methods - A guide to learning English (2019),<http://esl.fis.edu/teachers/support/method.htm>(Accessed 2019-08-12).
9. Anthony Jackson (2019). Immersion teaching-successful approaches.http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/global_learning/2013/10/immersion_teaching_successful_approaches.html(Accessed 03-09-2019).
10. Gryphon house (2017). Immersion school benefits for English language learners. <https://www.gryphonhouse.com/resources/immersion-school-benefits-for-english-language-learners> (Accessed 26-09-2019).
11. Wilkinson S. (1998). On the nature of immersion during study abroad: Some participant perspectives. *Frontiers: The interdisciplinary journal of study abroad*, 4(2), 121-38.
12. Language immersion (2019). Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition. <https://carla.umn.edu/conferences/past/immersion/terms.html>(Accessed 29-09-2019).
13. Cindy Long (2019). Immersion Programs Teach Much More Than another Language.

- <http://neatoday.org/2019/06/14/why-language-immersion-programs-are-important/>(Accessed 29-09-2019).
14. Learn English with “The Immersion Method” (2019). Our World English.<https://www.ourworldenglish.com/2018/11/12/learn-english-with-the-immersion-method/>(Accessed 26-09-2019).
 15. Ltc Eastbourne (2016). Why immersion is the most effective way to learn English. <https://ltc-english.com/why-immersion-is-the-most-effective-way-to-learn-english/>(Accessed 26-09-2019).
 16. Steele J.L., Slater R.O., Li J., Zamarro G., Miller T. and Bacon M. (2018). Dual-Language Immersion Education at Scale: An Analysis of Program Costs, Mechanisms, and Moderators. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 40(3), 420-445. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373718779457>
 17. Xiong T. and Feng A. (2018). Localizing immersion education: A case study of an international bilingual education program in south China. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2018.1435626>
 18. Swain Merrill (1996). Integrating Language and Content in Immersion Classrooms: Research Perspective. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 52(4), 529-548. [10.3138/cmlr.52.4.529](https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.52.4.529)
 19. Slavin R.E. and Cheung A. (2005). A synthesis of research on language of reading instruction for English language learners. *Review of educational research*, 75(2), 247-284. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543075002247>
 20. Soderman A.K. (2010). Language Immersion Programs for Young Children?: Yes ... but Proceed with Caution. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 91(8), 54-61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003172171009100811>