



## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LATERAL THINKING SKILLS IN LEARNING THE SECOND LANGUAGE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*English has become the universal language. Approximately only one out of four is native speaker of English language (David Crystal, 2003). English has turn out to be the contact language among the non native speakers of English. Presently English is defined in a number of ways such as, English as an International language// (Jenkins, 2003; Mc Arthur 1998; Melchers and Shaw, 2003), English as a global language (Crystal, 2003; Gnutzmann, 1999), and \_World English (Brutt-Griffler, 2002). English is preferred as the means of communication in some countries where natives come from different first language milieu. A huge number of verbal interactions in English are not made by native speaker of English but by non-native speakers. Inhabitant of English is also making methodical study of the nature of World English. The teaching of English language has found new directions and new justifications for its subsistence. The approaches of teaching English language have changed along with the changes in political ideologies. Innovative approaches and methodologies have been created. English has become a universal language to express the thoughts. Students know that English language is important to express about their identity, language, civilization, culture, technology and personality to the world. To increase the skills of English at the undergraduate level, it is necessary to consider the capability of the entry level. Hence all the students in Colleges and university are learning English to mark their identity in the society. Despite the fact that many universities have brought advanced technologies to teach language, it is necessary to make the provision for communicative competence at the entry level by offering an apt syllabus to implement growth mind set attitude.*

An average student by and large looks upon the university or the college for the degree which will bring him good employment opportunities. In this situation only educational programmes based on practical needs can serve as bridge between education and employment. The situation calls for special efforts and suitable programmes in the university/college to develop

communication skills in English. Eternal soft skills should be imparted to the learners than custom-made technical skills. It is important that educational and training institutions should show interest to produce people with knowledge, skills and attitudes. The present study aims at training young men and women in lateral thinking skills to produce personnel with growth mind set attitude, oral and written communication skills.

### **Problem and solution**

Learners' credence about the role of aptitude plays a significant role in language learning and communication skills. Mindset is the major factor that influences the aptitude of the learner. Individuals have two sorts of mind sets such as growth mind set and fixed mind set (Dweck, 2006) The person believing the natural talent as gift for successful learning is said to have a fixed mind set and a person believing his own efforts and hard work to affect the learning abilities is said to have growth mind set (Sarah Mercer & Stephen Ryan, 2010). Dweck (2006) institute evidence of differing mind sets across different domains as music, sport, geography and language learning. Similarly, learners hold different mindset across different skill domains in the aspects of language. Learners' belief about their speaking skills differed from writing skills. If a learner believes that the natural talent is necessary to acquire language skills, s/he has to believe that they possess the natural talent to accomplish a particular goal (Sarah Mercer & Stephen Ryan). In the same way if learners believe that language proficiency is a natural talent, they need to believe that they have the talent of reaping success. It is suggested, in order to encourage growth mindset in learners, one has to cheer learners to put more effort, handle better with setbacks and admit failures as encouragement to develop positive attitudes and to acquire effective communicative competence. Allusion to one's own achievements and subsequently developing a sense of personal advancement may help to nurture a growth mind set (Sarah Mercer & Stephen Ryan, 2010, 442). Mindsets have an effect on the whole system of the individual. It has the capacity to interact with all key factors of the mind as strategies, motivation, personality, proficiency, self concepts, proficiency and aptitudes.

Human mind is filled with evocative concepts. Thinking is the best tool to equip the mind with elevated concepts (De Bono, 1995). —Our expertise forms certain concepts, patterns and organizations. We go after along this pattern. In order to progress we may have to backpedal and modify to another pattern which is more apt for the situation (De Bono 1995, p. 51). The brain is using and creating patterns to make sense of the world and to live. Once it starts forming a pattern, it continues to create the same sort of pattern repeatedly. But changing the pattern of brain is necessary from time to time to deal with a number of situations. New patterns are needed to cog the demands of everyday life.

### **Educational and Cultural Background Vs Attitude in Acquisition**

Learner's inconsistency such as ability, approach, inspiration, ethnocentrism, dictatorship etc. plays an important role in second language learning. A number of researchers emphasized the role of ability and enthusiasm in the second language acquisition e.g. Anisfeld and Lambert;

Feenstra, Gardner; Gardner and Lambert; Lambert et al. —Learners who have strong ethnocentric or authoritarian attitudes or who have learned to be prejudiced towards foreign people are unlikely to approach the language learning task with an integrative outlook|| (Gardner and Lambert, 1972, p.16). Skill of learners in second language learning varies from individual to individual. Working memory has the capacity to control and uphold attention especially in the presence of irrelevant and distracting stimuli (Miyake, Shah). A positive approach will always improve the second language learning. Students with qualities of imagination, calmness and low concern score high in written communicative ability (Bartz, 1974). Positive attitude influences the motivation to learn English completely. Most of the students wish to learn English to get a job. They do not have integrative motivation but instrumental spur. The present research focuses on providing integrative motivation to institute the growth mind set through which it attempts to develop the writing style of the learners. A kind of fundamental process of ingenuity was seen in each of the process.

### **Using Lateral thinking techniques practically to enhance second language communication**

#### **a. Focusing on improvement**

- 1) Lucid focus on the process and choosing sub focuses.
- 2) Challenging the existing methods of thinking and concepts.
- 3) Utilizing escape provocation to escape from the existing grooves of thinking.
- 4) Using stepping-stone provocations to transform the system.
- 5) Using the concept fan method for major reconsideration of performance explores improvement in lateral thinking.

#### **b) Providing problem solving activity**

1. Focusing on the problem to grant own definition.
2. Providing unconventional definitions to the problem.
3. Challenging the definition, presentation of the problem, existing thinking, the shaping factors of thinking and basic concepts in the mind.
4. Using fixed points and alternatives for simple problems and concept fan for creative efforts.
5. Using escape type of provocation to escape from old approaches;
6. Using stepping stone provocation for radical thinking;
7. Using random word technique to find a different approach to solve the problem and to provide innovative new ideas.

#### **b. Demanding to approach tasks with lateral thinking attitude**

- 1) Using filament technique at the beginning may lead to use appropriate techniques to explore lateral thinking skills.
- 2) Emphasizing on desires induces wishful thinking provocation that may assist the mind to tackle tasks differently.

**c. Using designing technique to explore lateral thinking attitude**

- 1) Strata's at the initial stages insists on the requirements of the task.
- 2) Filament technique as second step paves way to realize the requirements of mind to explore lateral thinking skills.
- 3) The random word gives fresh approaches.
- 4) Challenge the existing concepts; challenge to normal thinking during the creative effort
- 5) Using escape provocations leads to explore the different design.

**d. Providing green field situations in lateral thinking attitude**

- 1) The use of random word gives a starting point.
- 2) Use of strata's allows new ideas to emerge.
- 3) Wishful technique also provides a good place for lateral thinking in Greenfield situations.

**f) Exploring opportunity to explore lateral thinking**

Opportunity can be treated as other techniques providing Greenfield situations and task.

**g) Tasks Demanding invention**

Opportunity, green field situation, and task determine the invention.

**h) Insisting blocked /stagnation technique**

- 1) When there is no new ideas random technique could be used to produce new ideas.
- 2) The escape provocation would be useful to move away from the old traditional thinking.
- 3) Wishful thinking steps help to open up new directions for people.

**i) Increasing conflict**

- 1) To tackle the conflict a number of techniques could be used.
- 2) Focus the creative needs, use the techniques used for problem solving, green field situation, design and task.
- 3) Design to move the thinker to move forward differently.



4) Initiate the fresh approach by using Random word to open up the new directions and new techniques. Challenge and escape provocation could be applied to the current thinking situational conflict and to locked-in-situations.

#### **j) Implementing Strategy**

- 1) Strategical technique can best be treated as design and task.
- 2) Challenge is a powerful technique to treat planning situation.
- 3) Sub-problems and fresh focuses can be considered.
- 4) Fixed points and alternative techniques are valuable at various points in exploring lateral thinking strategy.

#### **k) Inducing Planning technique**

- 1) Planning for flexibility is taken into account. —one should plan to be in a position to change just as much as one should plan to be in a certain position||. (De Bono, 1995, p.120).
- 2) The plan is to maintain the flexibility to proceed the plan; plan to change the points; plan to achieve the change and plan to abandon the plan if things went wrong.

#### **A Model to implement Lateral Thinking skills and increase second language learning.**

As the sub-title indicates, lateral thinking is used as a tool to develop language proficiency in L2 learners. The centrality of the model of this study is the combination of teaching language and lateral thinking skills. The first aspect of the model is the process of the acquisition of knowledge and language related to both the factors of language and thinking skills. The major factors that influence the acquisition process of language are cognitive maturity, the linguistic knowledge and learning contexts. The learning contexts include teaching methodology, learning environment and materials used for teaching. Learners bring the knowledge of social learning experience as background to the class. The next aspect of this model is the process of acquisition of the lateral thinking skills. Implementing lateral thinking skills to break the influence of background knowledge patterns. Lateral thinking skill has a number of sub skills. The prominent factors of lateral thinking ability is generating alternatives, changing patterns, creating new concepts and reaching the goal in an unusual way. The sub skills and methods of attaining these features are discussed in the previous sections. The goal of lateral thinking is breaking the fetters of old ideas and attitudes and forming new ideas. All these skills are discrete in nature when applied to specific tasks. These skills influenced the unnoticed cognitive activities also. The final step to reach the lateral thinker state is reaching the objective by using a number of strategies and techniques that suit the demands of the situation. Finally everything that is learnt has to be applied in new/different contexts and only then the person can be called as lateral thinker. A 40- hour

classroom experiment, undertaken for the present research, is assessed systematically to observe the improvement in lateral thinking skills and subsequently to view the development in language production.

A unique educational framework to empower thinking skills is needed to increase the balance between mind and the real world. Learning occurs when the mind makes connection between known ideas and information. Therefore knowledge is constructed by the thinking process (Gleitman, 1995). By stimulating the thinking process, knowledge of language system and the ability to use the knowledge in communication would be increased (Nelson et al.). Bloom in —Taxonomy of Education|| includes thinking skill as one of the important factors in the education. He includes thinking skills, knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. George L.Grice ; M. Anway Jones(1989) insists on the importance of including thinking skills in the curriculum by saying that —...thinking skills are a valuable component in the development of our students, it is time that we implement those skills into our teaching as well as into our curriculum|| (DeBono,1985, p.341). Beyer (1987) Thinking skills motivate learners to learn and increase better learning of the subject. Ruggiero(1988) explains that —teaching thinking is a course emphasizes the process that give every subject its vitality-hypothesizing, interpreting, seeking alternative views, raising questions, evaluating and discovering. That emphasis to create excitement and encourages involvement|| (p.12). David Moseley et al.(2005) Types of thinking that covered in thirty five noted frameworks are, Self engagement(p.19), Reflective thinking(p.29), Productive thinking(p.35),basic thinking skills(p.33), Knowledge recall(p.27), Perception(p.13) etc.

### **Methods to implement growth mindset in the process of the mind**

#### **Task 1**

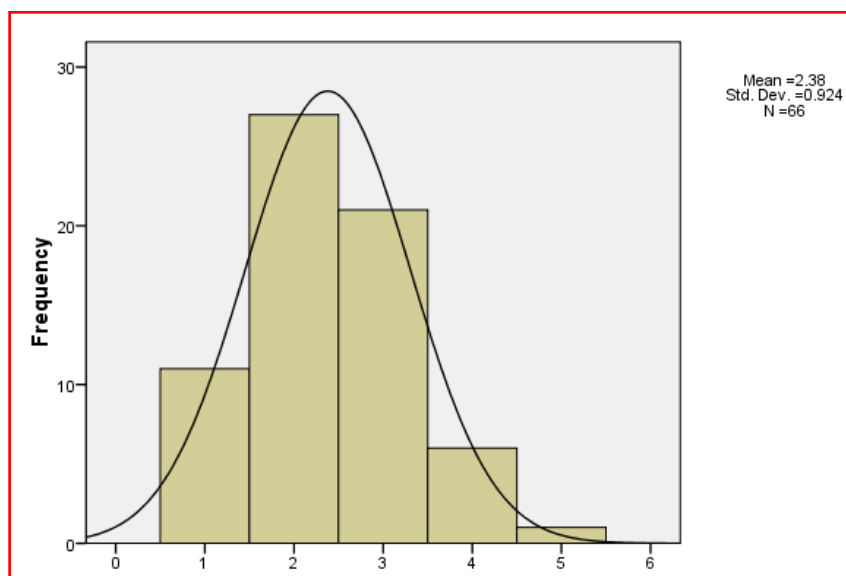
- Task:** Write twenty short messages conveyed in the cartoon
- Rationale:** to enhance the ability to connect ideas with the image and to increase the creativity Code complexity: As the complexity was in visualized image, there would be no linguistic complexity also.
- Cognitive complexity:** Though the images were the representation of common life, identifying a number of concepts and messages were demanding and so it required a meaningful creativity. Twenty minutes were given to complete the task.
- Procedure:** The learners were given oral instruction along with the written instruction projected on the screen. The images related to everyday life were shown to the learners and they were asked to identify a maximum number of messages conveyed in the picture. They were told that there were no restrictions for their creative response but were asked to relate image with the information they conveyed.

The assessment of the learners' performance is presented in the following:

**Table 1: Learner’s response to task 1**

Marks	No of Learner’s	Percentage of Learner’s	Cumulative Percentage
1.	11	16.7	16.7
2.	27	40.9	57.6
3.	21	31.8	89.4
4.	6	9.1	98.5
5.	1	1.5	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>	

**Fig.1 Learners’ responses to task-1**



**Analysis of the responses**

Results of this task showed improvement in the performance of the learners than the previous task. Eleven learners scored Grade E whereas remaining learners have fulfilled the demands of the tasks to some extent. Learners’ response to this task confirmed the initiation of accepting intake in the mind of learners to reach the objective of this task. Setting provocation technique was initiated in the minds of the learners. The learners were able to attempt the task by using their thinking skills and language ability. The responses showed that learners were able to find a number of information from different perspectives whereas very few were not able to think independently as they were afraid of their proficiency level.

1.5% of learners expressed their views through messages from various perspectives and their expression of language was also appropriate so they were given Grade A. 9.1% of learners scored Grade B because errors existed in language but were less in number. Concept chosen by the learners was relevant but an incompleteness was found in the performance. Various possible explanations were provided. Though few errors were found the ideas were communicated clearly. A good number of vocabularies were used. Responses of 31.8% of learners were neutral in all demanded aspects and stood average in their performance so they were provided Grade C. Though ideas were expressed there were mistakes in sentences. Concepts were partly creative. Responses of 40.9% learners were given Grade D as there was more number of grammatical errors in the sentences. Performance of 16.7% of learners was worse; a more number of errors were seen in the language; concept was irrelevant and unrealistic. So they were given Grade E. Total mean score was 2.38 and standard deviation 0.924.

**Task 2**

- a. Write words related to the scenes from a cartoon movie
- b. Identify the main information conveyed

<b>Task:</b>	Identifying the main information.
<b>Rationale:</b>	To activate the innate skills.
<b>Cognitive complexity:</b>	Learners had to relate the existing knowledge with the given context. Though learners have done few similar aspects earlier, finding messages from a video clipping in this was challenging for them.
<b>Source:</b>	A video clipping was downloaded from internet (www.youtube.com)
<b>Communicative pressure:</b>	This task demanded learners to complete two tasks together within fifteen minutes. Hence, communicative pressure was quite higher than the previous task.
<b>Procedure:</b>	The learners were shown two scenes of a muted cartoon film. The following instructions were given to the learners, <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Write words related to the video</li><li>▪ Write ten messages conveyed through video</li><li>▪ Try to use words from word web to convey your messages</li><li>▪ Fifteen minutes would be given for the task</li><li>▪ Twice the video would be shown(4 minutes)</li><li>▪ Express the ideas you found from the videos</li></ul>

The assessment of the learners' performance is presented in the following:

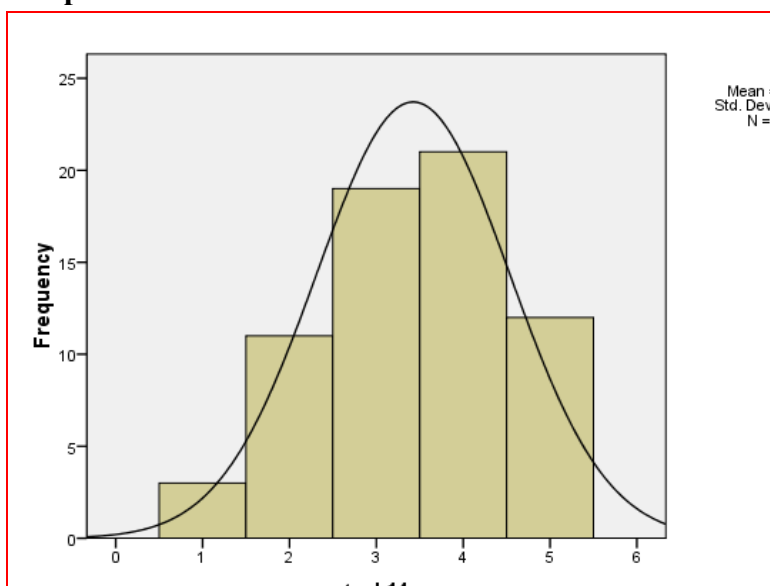


**Table 2**

**Table 2 Learners’ responses to task-2**

Marks	No of Learner’s	Percentage of Learner’s	Cumulative Percentage
1.	3	4.5	4.5
2.	11	16.7	21.2
3.	19	28.8	50.0
4.	21	31.8	81.8
5.	12	18.2	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

**Fig 2: Learners’ responses to task-2**



A large amount of the learners showed a superior improvement in right use of lateral thinking technique and language skills. Learners’ participation in the errands showed their want to improve their aptitude level. 18.2% of learners articulated their views from a variety of perspectives via appropriate language of expression and compared a number of themes by using suitable connectors. Their scores for the performance were harmonized with the scores given by the investigator. 31.8% of learners incorporated a number of aspects were in the checklist and matched with the assessment of researcher to certain extent. Responses of 28.8% of learners were scored Grade C. Only 4.5% of learners unproductive to implement the demands of tasks whereas others satisfied the anticipation to a good extent.

**Task-3**

**Task:** Completing the tasks by including the social concern of an individual through subjective view.

**Rationale:** To bring out direct points of views.

**Code complexity:** As the topic was a general one it was not complicating.

**Cognitive complexity:** Though performing situational speaking task was not a new task for the learners, preparing an appropriate conversation in the social context appeared a challenging one. Learners had to comprehend the topic; predict the consequences and come up with interesting conversation for the context. All these enabled activating creative and lateral thinking skills further in the learners.

**Source:** The topic was chosen from the life situation

**Procedure:** Learners were given the following instructions

The title —escape of the culprit||

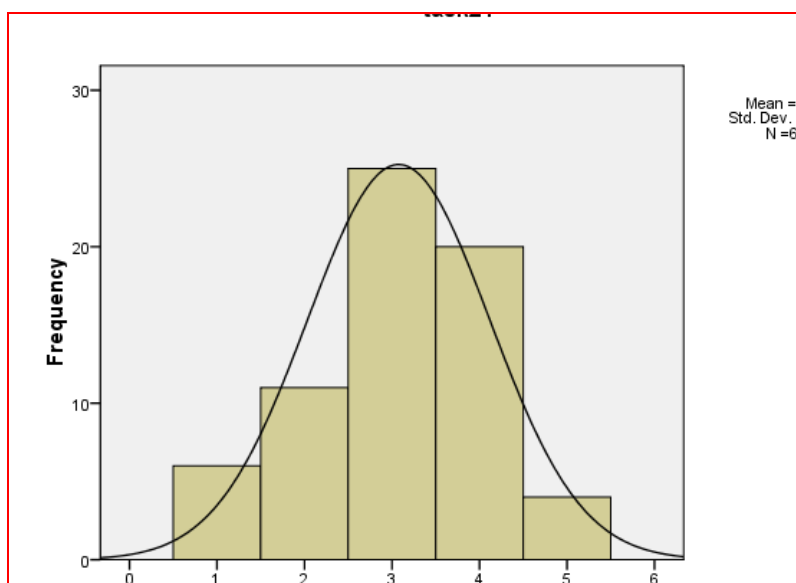
- Write a conversation based on the title
- The conversation must be between two members.
- The conversation can be either sharing the experience or performing the experience as role play.
- Subjective view should be used in the conversation.
- Time limit 15 minutes

The assessment of the learners' performance is presented in the following

**Table 3: Learners’ responses to task-3**

Marks	No of Learner’s	Percentage of Learner’s	Cumulative Percentage
1.	6	9.1	9.1
2.	11	16.7	25.8
3.	25	37.9	63.6
4.	20	30.3	93.9
5.	4	6.1	100.0
<b>Total</b>	66	100.0	

**Fig. 3: Learners’ responses to task-3**



### Critical analysis of responses

Learners came up with innovative ideas. Most of the conversations were good but brief. Four learners set provocations and produced socially realistic concept in effective language. Twenty learners set provocations and used alternative techniques but views were mixed, creative responses were presented; dialogues showing the subjective points of views were comparatively less to Grade A learners and they were Graded B. Responses of twenty five learners were average, dialogues showing subjective views were comparatively less to Grade B learners; planning technique was not incorporated properly and few errors were found in the language. Hence they were given Grade C. Though responses of eleven learners were filled with some errors in the language, a sign of designing technique was found in the concept formation and hence they were given Grade D. 74.3% of the responses reflected the learners' enhanced ability to complete the task with relevant conversation demanded by the task. It was found that some of them forgot few dialogues that they had planned. Language of the learners was error free to some extent and the form chosen for the task was suited to the chosen context. As the conversation of the learners reflected the expected task demands it could be said that the learners gained the ability to think beyond their experience and express their ideas briefly in suitable language. It stood as one of the proofs for the enhancement of lateral thinking ability in the mind of the learners.

#### Task 4

**Task:**

Conversation from objective point of view.

**Rationale:**

Enabling the link of memories.

**Code complexity:** As the topic was already given for another perspective in the previous task the code complexity was not high.

**Cognitive complexity:** Though the learners were familiar with the topic, thinking from objective point of view was quite demanding to the tertiary level learners. Source: This is a continuation of the previous task. The same source was used.

**Procedure:** The learners were given the following instructions orally and were also written form.

- Think and fulfill the demands of the task
- Prepare a conversation from objective point of view for the title —escape of the culprit||
- The conversation may be either sharing the experience or enacting the experience.
- Choose a partner for the task
- Writing is suspended in this task. Each one should speak from the memory.
- Discussion would be allowed for ten minutes

**Expected response:** Learners were expected to bring out their social concern and new ideas for possible application in an effective language in the conversation.

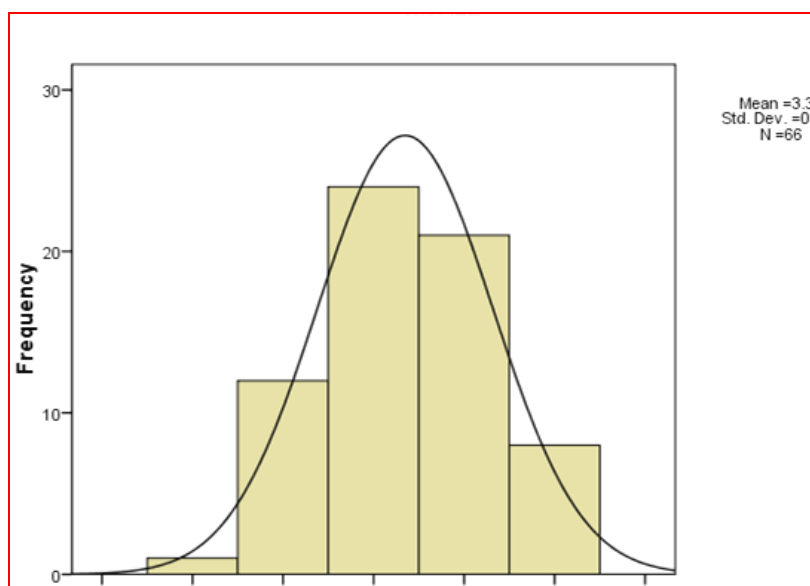
The assessment of the learners' performance is presented in the following

**Table 4: Learners' responses to task-4**

Marks	No of Learner's	Percentage of Learner's	Cumulative Percentage
1.	1	1.5	1.5
2.	12	18.2	19.7
3.	24	36.4	56.1
4.	21	31.8	87.9
5.	8	12.1	100.0
<b>Total</b>	66	100.0	

**Fig.4: Learners' responses to task-4**





**Critical analysis of responses**

Fifty three learners scored three and above points. They tried their best to give expected performance. The others attempted but could not provide point of views in their conversations. They ignored the instruction regarding point of views and concentrated only on the completion of the task. Those who got Grade D showed poor performance as they included very few dialogues. Since learners performed a few situational speaking tasks earlier in the study, performing situational speaking task in task 9 was not new to them; the title was simple which they would have heard or experienced earlier but including their point of view in the conversation was a new one. It made learners to challenge the demand. However, most of them completed the task but still they were graded low because they had not succeeded in including the points of view. The cognitive pressure made them to focus only on the completion of the task. Therefore it could be said that their level of lateral thinking skills were improved.

**Task-5**

- Task:** Searching for alternatives.
- Rationale:** To enhance the level of confidence to implement lateral thinking ability in demanded situations.
- Code complexity:** As the same video was shown code complexity was not much higher.
- Cognitive complexity:** The learners were expected to comprehend the language and concept used by the characters in the short film. They were supposed to watch it meticulously in order to comprehend, analyze, and distinguish the facts and find

**Communicative pressure:**

possibilities to find suitable alternative end for the story. Therefore, cognitive complexity of this task was challenging than the previous task.

Learners were not given time for the preparation. They were given topic on the spot. They were asked to discuss the story and provide an alternative end for the story through the discussion. Hence communicative pressure was considered as higher.

**Source:**

A short film was downloaded from the internet. (BBC videos)

**Procedure:**

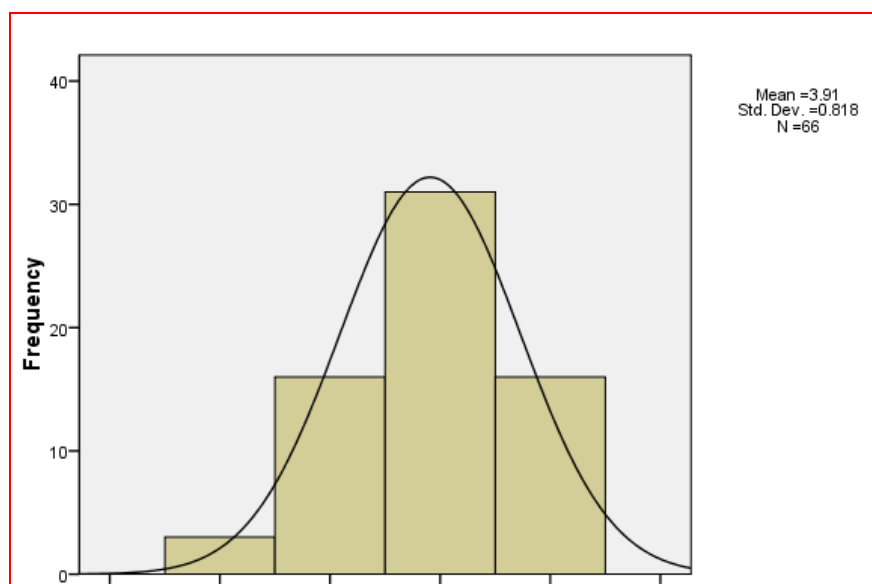
Learners were shown a short film in L2 and they were asked to observe the language content and gradual development of conversation presented in the film. The following instructions were provided to analyze the appropriateness in the end of the story

- Find an alternative end for the film.
- Look at the film from various points of views.
- Discuss the film from various perspectives.
- Include the point of views in the discussion.
- Summarize a number of possibilities found at the end of the discussion.

The assessment of the learners' performance is presented in the following

**Table 5 Learners' responses to task-5**

Marks	No of Learner's	Percentage of Learner's	Cumulative Percentage
2	3	4.5	4.5
3	16	24.2	28.8
4	31	47.0	75.8
5	16	24.2	100.0
<b>Total</b>	66	100.0	

**Fig.5: Learners' responses to task-5**

### Critical analysis of responses

Learners were able to comprehend the purpose of the task. Their language responses were graded. Though the cognitive complexity and communicative pressure were high they were able to think innovatively and put forth their views. Almost all the learners were able to put forth their point of views coherently. A very few of their views were very much suitable for the film. All of them were successful in finding alternatives for the bottom line of the film from various points of views and perspectives. Their discussion was also remarkable. Responses of sixteen learners were given Grade A, filament technique and stratals were found in their presentation of thought, and errors free language was seen in the discussion, accepted the views of others by adding few more suggestions for their thoughts. Responses of thirty one learners were given Grade B because they considered the views of others and added other points to reinforce their ideas; turn taking was done with enthusiasm to present their ideas. No domination and argument was found but few errors were seen in the presentation of ideas. Responses of sixteen learners consisted of alternatives and concept fan techniques. Turn taking in the discussion was done with involvement but some errors were found in the use of tenses. So they were given Grade C. Responses of three learners were given Grade D because errors were found in their language and the confidence level was low. They controlled their thoughts and preferred to express very few of them thinking that they may go wrong. Totally 24.2% of learners scored average marks and 71.2% of learners scored above average level of grades. Only 4.5% of learners scored below average level of scores. The relevance of the response showed improvement in the thinking ability of learners. Reorganization of ideas, visualization of the events to view the appropriateness of the new idea etc., exhibited their enhanced skills. The learners' ability of managing the situation by adopting a number of views



from others, adjusting with others attitudes, and noticing points from every individual presentation showed their goal reaching attitude. It was assured that learners had started reaching the expected goal of their discussion. The transferable independent skills were developed as part of training lateral thinking strategies. The application of the learnt skills in new contexts was enhanced. The whole process of the framework focused on lateral thinking that led to language development and learner autonomy. Above all, the approaches based on the thinking process provided lasting abilities to communicate. The meticulously designed instruction and tasks met the learners' interest and cognitive levels that led to progress during the process of acquiring skills. Learners working together solved linguistic problems while co-constructing the language. The opportunities to talk and interact in the second language allowed learners to re-organize knowledge in communicative aspects of language. It made learners active and led them to contribute to a great extent in communication.

### **Conclusion**

The learners were trained in lateral thinking skills from the initial stage of the course. It helped them to adopt the strategies needed to respond to the tasks. It has been found that it would not be possible to teach thinking skills in terms of theories. Enabling procedure of education provided young people the opportunity to realize their potential in the form of understanding and ability. The provided innovative language modules enhanced the lateral thinking skills of the learners. Tasks related to the real world and the demand for meaningful language engaged students in the systematic process of completing the tasks without noticing much of anything about the language they use. Through task based learning approach lateral thinking attitude was implanted in the minds of learners. The study proved that enhancing learners' lateral thinking abilities would enhance the language proficiency and the learning ability. Examinations of these issues led to give training for implementing lateral thinking skills. As all the tasks called for effective use of cognition, learners adopted different strategies, expressed their ideas in the required language and changed the mindset. It helped learners to achieve two goals simultaneously: lateral thinking attitude and English language proficiency.

**Appendix** - Sample cartoons used for the tasks





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