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Embracing Relevant Strategies in Acquisition of Verbal Skills in the Second Language Learning: A Dire Need

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Introduction

English language is no longer confined to the study of colonial literature as in earlier days. It has merged as a language of communication the world over encompassing all aspects ----- trade, commerce, education and so on. Thereby, it has become a global language. Hence, English language speakers are expected to be able to convey their knowledge in words and interact socially with all. Basically, communication is a natural phenomenon that develops with age. Nevertheless, to excel in the art of communication requires attention and constant practice.

Purpose of the Paper

The purpose of this paper is to present the dire need of the improvement of communication skills to meet the challenging demands in the present scenario. Further, it discusses the role of language in general and the English language in particular in the process of communication skills. It also mentions the introduction of English language in Indian educational institutions with a brief focus on English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) English for Academic Purposes (EAP). It also discusses at length a few methods that help in the improvement of communication skills especially speaking skills. Thus, the paper stresses the importance of the oral language skills in the process of communication.

Communication

Communication is one of the sixty-four arts celebrated by humankind. It provides a medium for conveying information for all organisms including human beings. The ability of communicating through a language separates human beings from all animals. Communication is the integral part of any individual. People spend more time in communicating than doing anything else like talking, listening and interacting with others. Moreover, it is necessary in everyone's life irrespective of caste, creed, gender and age.

Demand of Skills

There is ample evidence that communication skills have helped *Homo Sapiens* develop into the advanced societies on Earth today. Further, the globalization of science, technology and civilization demands the need for successful communication.

Huge competencies in the digital society compel the youth to be well equipped with the basic skills of communication to obtain better placements.

The range of employment for all is being expanded in the twenty-first century. In such prevailing situations, eligible candidates are expected to possess multiple skills to communicate perfectly in different situations. They are required to think creatively and critically and demonstrate both interpersonal and team skills. There is a desperate need to possess a set of soft skills demanded by recruiters. Since professional and result oriented companies always seek for the employees who can communicate influentially and efficiently. Communication skills are cited as the most important decisive factor in choosing the executives. A lack of sufficient communication skills serves only to be disqualified in the placement interviews.

Students who are adept at communication skills have a considerable advantage over those who are not. Furthermore, this lack of communication skills assists to undermine the whole profile of the professional students.

Communication skills are a vital component of these, recognized by academia and industry alike. Indeed, communication skills are considered an outstanding part in the make-up of the new global employee.

Role of Language

Language constitutes the vehicle on which both oral communication travel. It forms the cornerstone of learning. The purpose of language is to perform the tasks that speech does. In other words it is like an axe, a tool with which things are done.

Introduction of English in India

India being a multi-lingual country needs a common language for communication. English being considered as an international language is widely acknowledged and serves as an effective medium of instruction in the Indian educational institutions. How English as a means of communication is introduced in India is an interesting fact to be noted. In fact, the influence of British rule is the primary reason for the spread of the common language. Indian merchants acquired English mainly through translation. Thus Grammar-Translation method of language teaching and learning became popular in India.

Apparently, the introduction of English for communicative purposes has taken place in successive steps.

Successive Steps

In this direction, the charter act of 1813 has decreed that English would be taught in the Indian education system although not as a replacement for the native languages. Thus, the current system of education is mutually introduced and funded by the British in the 19th century following the recommendations of Thomas Babington Macaulay.

Later, the use of English for educating the Indian masses is recommended by Lord Macaulay in his famous “Minutes” (Minutes of 2nd February 1835). His Minute on Indian Education (1835) encapsulates both the overt and invert agendas for such a policy. He has regarded that English language is the only appropriate means to convey technical knowledge and scientific twist of Indians. His intention is to prepare a small segment of Indians who would shortly use English as a means of communication and connect the gap between India and the Western world. In spite of

his prudence, for diverse reasons he cannot bring up full-scale English based educational system for Indians.

In the same year, Lord William Bentinck has revitalized the earlier charter act with his New Education Policy that determined that English should be the official language. From then onwards, only those with western style education and knowledge of English are considered eligible for the government employment or for a career in public life.

Soon after, Sir Charles Wood has become successful in implementing English in Indian educational institutions through a Dispatch in which he noted that English could be a suitable medium at a higher level of education, because a sound knowledge of English is a requirement to seek admission into the university. It has aimed at widening the availability of western oriented knowledge. Accordingly, several universities are established under the London model in big cities through out India. The claim for universal education has resulted in an augment in the number of students from all occupations joining educational institutions.

Thus, English is adopted as the medium of instruction for natural sciences that has resulted in the rapid growth of university education, especially in urban areas, according to a report released by the study group appointed by the Ministry of Education, Government of India.

Application of Skills

English is being used for about 400 years altogether without losing its multi-lingualism ever since its introduction. Approximately, 350 million Indians use English in their daily lives. There exist 300 universities, 25,000 colleges, 250, 000 schools and over a million teachers teaching English. Indians have proved that if one's approaches are right no language can be a threat to the host culture.

Simultaneously, it is very sad to mention that 300 million Indians are unable to speak English properly.

Thus, the root cause of unemployment in the job market these days is lack of a grip over language skills.

Need To Develop Oral Skills

In this age, it has become an essential commodity to possess good communicational skills to achieve higher aims and goals in one's career. Hence, it has become compulsory to imbibe excellent communication skills along with the technical knowledge. Lack of this makes them jobless, as the Selection Committee selects those candidates who excel in effective communication. English language is no longer confined to the study of colonial literature as in earlier days but has merged as a language of communication the world over in all aspects such as trade, commerce, education and so on. It has become a source of information and a medium through which transactions take place.

English for Specific Purposes

Therefore, a great need is felt to develop oral skills among the Indian youth. To meet these communication needs, more and more individuals have highly specific academic and professional reasons for seeking to improve their language skills. English for Special Purposes (ESP) fulfills their requirements. Since, ESP programs focus on developing communicative competence in a specific field, such as aviation, business or technology.

ESP is different from general English language courses

The words and sentences, relating to a particular field or discipline, are learned. The courses make use of vocabulary and tasks related to the field such as negotiation skills and effective techniques for oral presentations. ESP uses printed and audio-visual materials that are specially designed to meet the needs of a specific group of learners,

ESP has a common purpose: to increase students' skill and confidence in using English.

Historical Background of ESP

A brief look into the historical background of ESP in the field of ESP gives us an insight into the need for a specific purpose of learning a language. I quote Kennedy, The importance of English as an international language continues to increase as more and more people are being required to learn English.

ESP is different from general English Language Courses

It is in the 1960s that ESP has been recognized as a vital and innovative activity within the movement of teaching of English as a second language. The growth of ESP has been due to the developments in the increase use of English as the international language of science, technology and business has given a thrust to the future of ESP. English language is no longer restricted to the classrooms. Its use has become widespread and vibrant, affecting all the sectors of society and economy. English has become a major medium of communication world- wide. The major demand was felt for a variety of English language styles, which could cater to the different expressions arising out of the varied needs. Thus a new form of using the language in the perspective of meeting communication needs has been focused.

The development in the sphere of language learning has sent ripples across the English language teaching – learning community. It is gradually felt that in the language learning process, the position of learners is gaining importance, because the learners begin to determine their needs and interests. As a result, there is a parallel rise in the importance of the English course material to meet the needs of the learners. This increases learners' motivation levels and thereby makes learning better and faster.

ESP Course

The overall purpose of an ESP course is to equip the learners with adequate language skills to function successfully in a demanded situation. ESP is regarded as a trendsetter in the field of LSP. The purpose of language learning has seen a dramatic twist with the introduction of English as an international language. The two major divisions are English for Academic purpose (EAP) and English for Occupational Purpose (EOP). English for Science and Technology (EST) and English for Vocational Purposes (EVP) has been considered as a major outcome of ESP.

Hence, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has been an attempt to cater to the language needs of the professional students for specific purposes. ESP is a step which focuses not only on the specific skills of language learning such as LSRW but also interpersonal skills, team work and so on.

Characteristics of ESP

Stevens defines ESP by making a distinction between four absolute characteristics and two variable characteristics- absolute and variable. The absolute characteristics are that ESP consists of English Language Teaching, which are:

- ❖ Designed to meet specified needs of the learner
- ❖ Related in content (that is, in its themes and topics) to particular disciplines, occupations and activities.
- ❖ Centered on language, appropriate to those activities in syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics, and so on, and analysis of the discourse in contrast with General English.

The variable characteristics are that ESP:

- ❖ May be restricted as to the learning skills to be learned (for example reading only)
- ❖ May not be taught according to any pre –ordained methodology. I unquote.

English for Occupational Purposes

As the title suggests this flow of English caters to the requirements of English practice in a specialized setup or in a working situation. The working environment can base upon any profession or job that requires specialized skills for working. To make the concept of EOP clear, it is useful to look at some of the definitions of EOP.

There is a need to make a distinction between EAP and EOP as the purpose and the use of the language is different. The term EOP refers to English that is not for academic purposes, it includes professional purposes in administration, medicine, law and business and vocational purposes for non-professionals in work or pre-work situations. To make the distinction clear, consider the following example – language and discourse of medicine for academic purposes will be useful to medical students, whereas language and discourse of medicine for occupational purposes will be useful to practicing doctors.

The emergence of the EOP course goes back to late 60s in the type of standard letter formats, to make complaints or requests for information. These resources existed in the form of model papers, texts and dialogues. The focus was shifted to top business needs, mainly spoken in the mid 70s. During mid 80s the requirement was towards behavioral skills in the business communication situation such as attending calls, arranging and conducting meetings and seminars and so on. The present day EOP explores not only the communication skills extensively but also management and language training requirements.

EOP Course

English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) mainly focuses on the business requirements or occupational needs of a profession. Generally, any EOP course comprises the following:

- ❖ Particular terms and text formats for business dealings.
- ❖ Clear styles for spoken interactions such as speeches, meetings, telephone conversations and so on.
- ❖ Linguistic terminology precise to that profession or field of activity.
- ❖ Behavioral skills.
- ❖ Approach and methodology to training.

The raising specialization of content in English language teaching curricula has seen its beginning in the early 1960's. English languages play a major role in transmitting knowledge as a mean rather than as an end itself. Teaching of English generally is treated as teaching with Utilitarian Purpose.

Usually, people use English language only when associated with an occupational, vocational, academic or professional requirement. When wants are clear, learning aims can be defined in terms of some detailed purposes in which the language substances are adapted. The outcome is that the coaching is so concentrated as the students pick up communicative ability in the concerned area. The result can be impressive where such requirement for communicative ability with specially designed materials is relevant to the needs of particular students to improve their communication skills.

Thus, English language has been fast in status and reputation recently due to the understanding produced by the experts in the field of technical education.

Oral Language Learning

English language learning needs proper language models to develop the English language skills. Engaging in academic conversations with peers is the primary tool of learning oral skills.

Language can be learned only through its use. It is very essential to build up communication among teachers and learners. Teachers encourage conversations among the learners. These Conversation activities enable the learners' speeches understood and corrected. Such activities

and discourses between the teachers and the learners create a common context of experience within the classrooms. Instructional conversations reveal the knowledge, skills and values of the learners.

Developing Oral skills

Imitation and repetition are important elementary steps in developing speaking skills in English language. Imitation helps learners to pronounce and produce the language used by the teachers. Repetition refers to the acts of producing the similar utterances of the instructors in the classroom.

Substitution of a word, phrase or sentence by another is also an elementary method which helps learners to produce new utterances and thereby develop speaking skills.

Effective Speech Acts

Through the following activities effective speech can be gained:

- Speech – generating Games
- Oral communication – based short activities
- Oral presentations
- Dialogues

Further experts in the field of ELT have mentioned a few activities through which oral skills can be improved by the learners.

Activities relating to the students' experience

Learners will be more motivated if they are exposed to activities to which they can relate, which encourage them to use the target language, and which allow them to choose what they want to say. They will be motivated to engage in an activity if they feel it is cognitively challenging. Activities with elements of problem-solving are recommended (Brown, 1994).

A simple activity in which students introduce themselves in groups and talk about their hobbies or interests can be adapted for business majors by assigning a realistic business purpose to the task. While students are introducing themselves, other members of the group listen and take notes about the speakers' interests and hobbies. Based on the data they have collected, they decide what kind of products or services a company might create for these groups.

Another activity for business majors requires students to make use of their combined knowledge of business and English. Students take on the role of a business executive. They introduce themselves, where they are from, what company they represent, and what it sells. A sample introduction would be: "My name is so and so. I come from so and so place. I work for the Jim Thompson Company, which is based in so and so place. We produce high-quality silk."

Managing turn-taking

Giving 25 learners in one class the opportunity to speak is a challenge to the teacher's management skills. The teacher should introduce some kind of system that automatically allocates turns to each of the students, for example by using tokens or small topic-related picture cards.

Mini-erasers in shapes of food can be given to allocate turns when discussing food-related topics. Tokens in the shape of hearts, birds, or stars can be used symbolically--to lift up the students' spirits and build up their confidence.

Building up security and confidence

Most Asians tend to be conformists. They are group-oriented and value harmony above all else. Consequently, learners feel more secure working in pairs or in groups, since they will not be the only ones to shoulder the blame or to lose face if they answer incorrectly. To get all students to speak, the teacher should maximize pair and group activities with specific goals and monitor the students' language production as they work.

Letting students take the initiative

Classes in which the teacher has students raise their hands to volunteer to answer questions are not so common, although not improbable. The teacher may also get into the habit of walking into the classroom and, instead of asking the students questions, give the students a topic of the day and have them ask two or three questions on that particular issue. Students could also ask open questions which require others to answer. Each time that students' different ideas are accepted, their self-esteem will increase (Christison, 1997).

Learning Oral Skills

Oral skills can be learned by:

- Making short statements, questions, and commands
 - Saying common words
 - Expressing basic communication functions
 - Interacting appropriately in survival situations
 - Pronouncing words understandably in connected speech
 - Using different types of sentences in conversation
 - Using basic vocabulary in speech
 - Referring to people already mentioned
 - Performing simple communication functions
 - Using appropriate pronouns and forms of address
 - Learning to interact appropriately in everyday encounters
 - Using complex sentences of various types
 - Narrating events in past and future time
 - Expanding vocabulary
 - Connecting sentences together smoothly to form discourses
 - Managing conversations
 - Performing social functions without complications
-
- Speaking with an accent that does not disturb native speakers

- Conveying emotional tones through accent
- Conversing at normal speed
- Using all structures commonly used in oral speech
- Broadening the range of vocabulary
- Producing more complex oral discourses
- Expressing abstract relationships between ideas
- Expressing indirect speech acts
- Using colloquial speech and idioms
- Expanding vocabulary to be able to talk about any subject with ease
- Producing complex formal oral discourse
- Using appropriate rules of interaction in any social situation

Conclusion

The teacher is probably the most critical factor in motivating students. Cohen & Norst, 1989 confirmed that the teacher's warmth, friendliness, empathy, and sense of personal commitment help students build confidence to participate more in class. The teacher should set realistic, achievable goals, and praise students' progress and help them develop strategies for tackling problems. It is vital that the teacher acknowledge the students' progress and achievements by giving them some form of reward for their attempt to learn, and feedback on their performance so that they can improve themselves. It is very important that the teacher maintain an open line of communication with students so that they can speak out when they have learning problems.

Maximizing students' oral skills does not require any dramatic changes on the part of the teacher. It could start with the teacher's developing sensitivity towards the students' feelings. Once teachers understand students' insecurity and fear, they can start building up their confidence by making a few slight adjustments, starting with creating a positive class atmosphere. Teachers then gradually adjust their style of teaching, sidestepping their traditional role as imparter of knowledge or lecturer, and gradually adopting the role of facilitator or mentor. This does not require a radical re-orientation, but it does require sensitivity, planning, and action. Finally, through self-reflection, teachers can determine whether they have provided sufficient support for students to try and improve their oral skills.

I sum up my topic with an anticipation that the learners would try to improve their oral skills with constant attention and practice and be successful in their careers.

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