

## TECHNIQUES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN TERTIARY LEVEL STUDENTS

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### Abstract

Effective English Communication has become a prerequisite in the modern era of Globalization. It is no doubt a big challenge to bring in activities in the classroom of students pursuing tertiary education. More so because the students will have learnt the language to a certain extent; and often will have inculcated some wrong or unauthentic expressions in them. The deletion of unauthentic data or expressions which have already been installed in the students becomes a greater challenge for the teacher. Most of the students in colleges and universities are in this stage and thus the teacher's duty becomes multi-fold. He/She has to help the students to delete the unauthentic data and install the authentic or correct data. In task-based learning practices the students get involved personally and thus become active learners. In this paper some of the activities which can be practised in the tertiary level English classrooms are discussed. Some of these are- Activities on Vocabulary, Error-detection, Free-style speech, Presentation skills and dialogue construction. These activities ensure learning along with enjoyment on the part of the students. This kind of Activity-Based Learning is an effective strategy to enhance students' level of interaction and develop linguistic proficiency in them.

**Keywords:** Tertiary education, Teacher, Students, English Language, Communication.

### Introduction:

English, as a link language has acquired a very important place in our social activities. 'Communication Skill' is the buzz word in today's globalised world. Thus, everyone is intimidated to plunge into the task of learning English language in order to survive in the competitive world. Even in an interview, if one is clear in expressing one's thoughts and articulating one's accomplishments and attributes, an interviewer is more likely to form a favorable impression and gain an understanding of one's skills. In the globalized context, students need a specific set of language skills for their success in education and career. Consequently, the academic planners are moving heaven and earth to impart the English

language to the future citizens of India. English, although a foreign language, is taught as second language as the society provides certain English learning situations.

Tertiary education is normally taken to include undergraduate and postgraduate education, as well as vocational education and training.<sup>1</sup> Today, the teachers of English language at the tertiary level have a greater challenge of creating interest in the subject for the students in the classroom. Along with this they have to identify the weaknesses of individual students and assist the students in overcoming them by introducing different activities. The task, though challenging, can be transformed into a pleasant teaching-learning experience using various interesting methodologies.<sup>2</sup> It is the duty of the teachers to offer the students highly interactive learning environments, providing effective support for the acquisition of communication skills.

The hackneyed, stereotyped and traditional methods of exams aim at clearing English not as a language but as a subject....Even after learning English for 14-15 years, the level of the students remains poor<sup>3</sup> as their learning of English is merely confined to passing exam through rote learning. It is clear that success in English examinations does not ensure fluent and independent use of English. Students are found to lack confidence while speaking in English or writing something on their own.<sup>4</sup>

Effective learning process depends upon the effective teaching.<sup>5</sup> The basic aspects in which the students at this level should be trained are- Error-detection along with fortification of grammar; Free-style speech; dialogue construction and delivery; fluency development; improvement of stress, intonation, pause pattern and pronunciation in speech; enhancement of presentation skills and enrichment of vocabulary. To achieve all these, various types of activity-based techniques can be incorporated in the classroom and these are discussed in the present paper.

Students in fact, are able to focus and enjoy learning more when the classroom makes them feel safe and comfortable with themselves and their surroundings.<sup>6</sup> Modern teachers need to provide a variety of learning experience to students. The concept should change from that of teacher to that of facilitator of learning, motivator and designer of the learning situation. They need to join the students honestly as co-learner. Creating an environment in which students can learn effectively and efficiently is the core managerial role of teachers.<sup>7</sup>

In English language teaching, there exists an opinion that successful learning is influenced by appropriate methods of teaching.<sup>8</sup> Listening only, to English language everyday for years cannot produce English speakers. It is only during interaction- reflecting, verifying, clarifying, asking, discussing – does the language begin to make sense. A language needs to be presented as a stimulus- a springboard for interaction- one which can provoke.<sup>9</sup> Free style speech and presentations are the activities which help the teacher realize this objective.

### 1. *Free-style speech:*

This activity helps the teacher in understanding their level of Spoken English. Here the students are asked various questions on current affairs and they are free to express their own views and ideas. Students with poor English are facilitated to communicate in a better way by correcting their sentences and reasoning out their errors.

In free-style speech students are provided with opportunities to express their thoughts freely and frankly, which enables the teacher to know the mindset of the students, their background, their thought process, the way of their expression and the kind of exposure they have. The teacher needs to keep an open mind to others' points of view. This also helps students gain confidence to face interviews.

## 2. **Bouncing:**

Indian English is highly influenced by native language either lexically or phonetically. Bouncing is a unique technique which helps the learner to develop proficiency in English communication. It is the act of instantly recalling a sentence or passage just heard or seen in print. It is a means of installing linguistic corpus in the adult learners.

Here the students are made to hear sentences which are vocalized with the proper stress, intonation and pause pattern. They listen to them and bounce them in the same pattern. Hereby they get to know the proper stress pattern and correct pronunciation of various words. As sentences are vocalized they get installed in them. Here the students get to install such ready-to-use templates which enhance their competence in the language.

## 3. **Presentations:**

Students' motivation to learn comes from their desire to communicate in meaningful ways about meaningful topics which interest them.<sup>10</sup> In today's world presentations are acquiring greater importance. Presentation is considered an art. Presentation skills encourage oral communication of the students and provide them a suitable platform to transform their information and knowledge. It also helps to develop confidence level and reduces hesitation. Group tasks and presentation enhance interpersonal skills.

To develop this skill in the future professionals, the faculty gives guidelines on how to give good presentations, instructs about the dos and don'ts, and accordingly every student will be assigned to give a presentation in front of the class on any topic of their interest.

The student needs to go on the stage and present it facing the audience. Here the students learn the art of speaking in front of a large audience providing factual information, speaking clearly, formulating questions, listening carefully and giving more or less precise answers.<sup>11</sup> At the end of the presentation, they are subjected to peer evaluation- the audience gives them a feed back on their positive and their negative aspects. The teacher then gives a review report on the whole presentation and instructs them on the aspects they have to improve. The teacher also uses the patterns of mistakes committed by the students while presenting and prepares a Strength Weakness Opportunity and Threat (SWOT) analysis of the students, based on their performance which can be used while organizing remedial lessons.

Presentation can also be a part of their oral assignment, where marks can be given to them based on their performance. These two activities provide the teachers an opportunity to assess the students' proficiency in English language and his/her weaknesses.

## 4. **Error-Detection:**

Most students fail to communicate effectively because their speech is marked by template mix-up and they would be afraid of speaking unauthentic English. To speak effectively one has to be acquainted with authentic data. Students are trained in small groups to identify the errors in a given set of sentences /speech and reason them out. They are then taught the correct usage of words and phrases in particular kinds of sentences. These are further substantiated by grammatical rules.

In order to steer the language, one should internalize the grammatical pattern existing in all linguistic levels of language. The internalization of grammatical rules happens covertly if a language is acquired as first language and it happens overtly if a language is learnt as second or

foreign language. However, the internalization of grammatical rule is an imperative prerequisite for any language learning process.<sup>12</sup>

#### 5. *Dialogue:*

Language has a level of creativity that allows it to be ever expanding, ever changing.<sup>13</sup> Students want something holistic, something exciting and something new with a slice of life in it.<sup>14</sup>

Dialogue is one such activity where different kinds of real life situations can be given to groups of students to create conversation, thereby attempting to develop their creativity. The students can weave a skit around the situation and enact it in the classroom. This gives the students ample opportunities to create authentic sentences, deliver them with appropriate stress, intonation and pause pattern demanded by the situation. They get to practice the right pronunciation of words in the target language.

The teacher should set up the exercise, step back and observe the students' performance acting as a referee. But he/she has to be available to the subgroups and individuals as a consultant and resource as they plan and carryout this activity.

#### 6. *Vocabulary:*

Vocabulary plays an important role in facilitating language production. Vocabulary is the core component of language proficiency. According to Wilkins, "Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed".<sup>15</sup> Lack of adequate vocabulary hinders their speaking, listening, reading comprehension and writing. Therefore, vocabulary has to be taught so that the learners may be trained to speak and write naturally and effectively.<sup>16</sup> Here a huge gallery of words with different meanings in different contexts is opened for the learners. The students are encouraged to befriend dictionaries especially Advanced Learner's Dictionaries, where they not only get the meanings of the words but also learn the exact pronunciation and proper usage. Research findings also point that teaching vocabulary or lexis in context is highly beneficial to improve speaking skills.

To increase their interest in developing their vocabulary a quiz is carried out. The questions will be in the form of the meaning of the word, which they have to give as answer, so that they will be able to know quite a number of new words and their meanings.

One of the most common problems which students face is stage fear. Attempts are made to overcome this step by step in all these activities. Almost all these activities necessitate a learner to speak with and listen to other learners. They provide adequate opportunity for learners to use the target language with one another and also with the teacher. Thereby they learn English through interaction. Group tasks and presentation enhance interpersonal skills.

The role of the teacher is also a very significant one here. He /She should always be ready and generous enough to encourage students by using positive language instead of discouraging them with a lot of criticism.<sup>17</sup> It is also important that the teacher praises the best performer and show concern and sympathy to those students who find it difficult to match up with the others. They should motivate such students to perform better by giving them confidence and encouragement.

The benefits of these student-centered activities in the classroom are as follows- students learn the language efficiently through active participation and collaboration with other learners. They get motivated to reach goals they have set for themselves. The students' interest to learn will be greatly enhanced. They will start working much harder to meet the high expectations and

improve their analytical, critical thinking, problem-solving and creative skills along with teamwork and communication skills.

### Conclusion:

Effective English Communication is derived from the need to use language as a tool in facilitating success in professional life. But it is a well-known fact that communication skill cannot be developed overnight. It needs continuous practice over a period of time. It is quite essential that the students need to put in effort on their own to consciously improve their proficiency in the language apart from participating in the above mentioned activities wholeheartedly. Innovative strategies prove effective in increasing the competency of students both in oral and written communication and these make them life-long learners.

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