

THE BASIC LANGUAGE SKILLS FOR THE BEGINNERS

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ABSTRACT

The term Communication is derived from the Latin 'communico' which means to share. It means to share the information or to share and interact with others what one knows. To be successful in any field one needs to know and understand how to communicate effectively. English has been acknowledged as one of the most significant languages in India. Globally it is established as the language of commerce, diplomacy, administration and higher education. Moreover, English is a language of opportunities and success for life in India. So, it has become essential in higher education to ensure that all the learners possess good communication skills. In the emerging globalized world, to transmit ideas from one person to another, it is required to have an excellent command over the communicative skills in English. If the language learners are unable to share their knowledge with others, they will remain unnoticed and unrewarded. We know it very well that our existing teaching approaches and methods develop in the learners just the ability to compose correct sentences. In fact, we do not communicate just by composing sentences of different kinds, but by using sentences to perform a variety of different acts, e.g. to describe, record, classify and so on, or to ask questions, make request, give order, seek information etc. So, the chief aim of teaching a language is to develop all the four basic language skills- the LSRW skills, which are the keys to unlock the doors to success. Employers are also voicing their concerns about the need for better LSRW skills among the learners. When students graduate from the college and become real professionals, most of them are unable to communicate in English because of lack of exposure, lack of usage etc. So keeping the present scenario in view, an attempt should be made to teach the language skills insisting more on learner centered education. Thus, LSRW training is essential for any undergraduate learner. The present Research Paper is an attempt to highlight the essential requirement of the Basic Language skills for the learners of English Language, especially the beginners.

Introduction

Now-a-days, English is becoming more and more important. It is widely spoken all around the world. Knowing English and mastering it, is very important on the part of the learners for their prospective career. They should have communicative competence to master the subject knowledge and skills better. Most of the scholarly papers or journals in the world are written in English. Most of the professors in several universities deliver their lectures in English. Hence, the students should at least master the Basic English language skills to deal with the countless English lectures, projects and papers.

Language is often described as a ‘skill’ rather than a subject. It is not a content-subject like Science, Social studies, Commerce etc. which aim at imparting information and knowledge. People acquire knowledge by learning or reading content-subjects. The language as skill is more a matter of ‘doing’ than of ‘knowing’. A skill may be called the ability to do something well. Swimming, singing, painting, playing, driving, dancing etc. are skills which people perform after acquiring them. Knowing about these things is an intellectual exercise and using or doing them is a skill.

When a child is born in a community, it listens the language spoken by that community. First, the child gets the language experience from its mother, the family members, neighbours and the people near and dear in surrounding area and so on. As the child begins to learn his mother tongue, the very first that he acquires is the skill of listening. At the next stage, he tries to reproduce the sounds that he has heard by way of verbal expression i.e. the skill of speaking. The ability to read and write is matter of literacy and they are incorporated in the school syllabus. According to Robert Lado, “more fundamental than whether the correct order of teaching the skills is listening, speaking, reading and writing is the fact that reading and writing are partial skills and exercising them constitutes partial language experiences, whereas speaking and listening are total language experiences. The person that learns the can more easily learn the partial ones than vice-versa” (Language Teaching, 1971:43). There are thus, four basic language skills, most commonly known as LSRW:

- ❖ Listening
- ❖ Speaking
- ❖ Reading
- ❖ Writing

These LSRW skills can be further classified into two parts:

- (1) Productive skills, also called Active skills,
- (2) Receptive skills, also called Passive skills.

Speaking and writing are called Productive skills, because while using these skills, a learner is not only active, but also produces sounds in speaking and symbols or letters etc. in writing. On the other hand, listening and reading are called Receptive skills, because at the time of using these skills, a learner is passive and receives details either through listening or reading. As all these skills are essential and fundamental in language learning, they are called basic language skills. A native speaker can listen and speak his language without any formal teaching. However, in the case of a foreign language or a second language, the learners are not exposed to the target language much. As they are deprived of an opportunity to listen, some arrangement is required to make them listen and practice it. Otherwise, it may not be possible for the learners to speak the language. Listening and speaking are thus, most significant inter-related language skills. The other two skills- writing and reading are not natural process. The graphic representation of the

spoken form of communication is known as writing. In most of the languages, words are written exactly as they are pronounced, but in English there is a wide discrepancy between spellings and pronunciations. This makes writing of English words more difficult as compared to the words of many other languages. So, training is required to develop writing skill in the learners. Reading is the decoding of the visual representation of experience. Reading is of two types- silent reading and loud reading. It makes the reader share the experience of the writer. So, formal teaching of this skill is essential to develop it. In other words, training and practice are required to make a person write and read. This shows that teaching is essential for all the four basic language skills. The way of teaching and developing these skills may be understood in detail as under:

Listening Skill:-

Listening skill is also called ‘Receptive skill’, because when listening, the person is at the receiving end of the communication channel. Though it is a receptive skill it requires a lot of practice for its improvement. Many think that it is not an important one and specific training is not given for improving it. The fact is that listening is a significant skill and must be learnt and taught carefully. It is not only a cognitive understanding but it includes the analytical ability to find the main theme, style, etc. There is a need for an active involvement of the learner for the effective performance of listening. Jane Willis writes, “Listening is receptive rather than productive, but it is an equally important skill. Students need to learn how to listen, and to get the chance to listen to different types of English, so they will be able to listen with understanding to spoken English outside the classroom.”

Listening involves the formation of proper auditory images of phonemic components such as the use of vowel and consonant sounds, stress, accent, pitch, pause, juncture, intonation and the rhythm of language in isolation and in combination and also the reception, identification, perception and their discrimination from the mother tongue equivalents and acquisition and development of communicative competence at the receptive level. During the development of listening skill, the learner can recognize the typical speech sounds. He can distinguish speech sounds; understand the meaning of words in context. He grasps the mood and gesture of the speaker and the general theme. He also guesses the meaning of difficult words from the context or understands the mechanics of listening as a skill.

Objectives:

- To enable learners to recognize English sound without errors.
- To develop the ability among the learners to draw meaning from what is heard and respond in action as reaction to hearing.
- To equip the learners, as Jane Willis says, with lexical items, structural items and functional items.

Techniques for developing Listening skill:

The following techniques can be used to develop effectively the skill of listening among the learners.

- Presenting short stories, events, narration, passages etc. keeping in mind the age and interest of the learner.
- Giving one or two guiding questions before the learners begin to listen.

- Using audio-visual aids for narration or description.
- Providing frequent opportunities for ear training, especially the opportunity to listen the typical speech sounds including stress and intonation pattern.
- Giving several commands to the learners and the learners may perform the activity; e.g. –Open the door, -Close the door, -Switch on the fan, -Take a pen from the table.
- Displaying some pictures, making a statement about the picture and the learners may identify the picture.

Learners' activities:

- In a listening exercise, the learners can follow several activities e.g. they can think, write notes, draw pictures, say 'true' or 'false', fill in a table, discuss for or against the topic, summarize what they have heard etc.
- Besides all these devices, different records and cassettes are available in the market and they can be used for listening practice.

Additional classroom activities:

- Making students listen to an English conversation, showing English documentaries in the classroom, broadcasting programmes, reading famous sayings related to listening skills and rewarding the best listener after giving the students a challenging listening quiz may be advantageous to the beginners. Communicative games based on Listening Comprehension help to reduce hesitation and develop self confidence among the learners.
- Before commencing the class, a short article from a newspaper, magazine, or journal can be shared with the class and thereby the learners can be motivated to read interesting article and share it with classmates. Such articles should be read aloud to the class. Afterwards, learners can be asked questions based on that article. Have each student take out a blank sheet of paper. Ask students eight to ten questions based on details from the article. Ask them to write their answers on the sheet of paper. Have students switch papers and then reveal them the answers. Ask students why they did not remember much after listening to the story. Using such practical device, the teacher can explain how to improve their listening skills

Speaking Skill:-

The skill of speaking is 'active' in nature and productive and creative, too. It is a systematic technique employed by a speaker to express his meaning. It is only through speaking that we get many things done for us. Speaking skill is the most significant skill, as the language is considered primarily a spoken language. As language is primarily a means of expression, it is necessary to develop the speaking skill among the learners effectively. The mastery of speaking skill enhances one's confidence and fluency. We can't live without speaking in real life situations. The truth is that listening and speaking are interdependent.

While developing speaking skill, the learners will be able to produce and speak the typical speech sounds both in isolation and combination. The learners use proper words and structures to express the desired meaning in the speech. They further organize their thoughts, ideas, feelings, experiences etc. in logical sequence. They also adjust and express the speech with proper pronunciation, speed, pitch, pause and intonation of tone. The speaking skill of a learner depends on the way in which he learnt the mother tongue, pronunciation of the teacher, and the area in

which he lives. Though the learning situations are provided, it seems the learners are not provided the necessary impetus when compared to reading and writing. There may be some reasons to justify this. The first problem is fear of making mistakes and shyness. Another problem is pronunciation. According to T.C. Baruah (2004:207) the reasons are: “English has been introduced too late; the native-like pronunciation is the ideal to be aimed at; the attempt to impose the characteristics of the mother tongue script on English orthography.”

Objectives:

- To enable the learners to respond in speech as reaction to listening.
- To enable the learners to pronounce with intonation and stress.
- To enable students to express themselves accurately and fluently in public and professional contexts.

Techniques for developing Speaking skill:

The following techniques may be organized and used to develop the speaking skill effectively.

- To select suitable short topics keeping in mind, the age and interest of the learners. The selected topics should be within the range of their vocabulary and structures.
- To use visual aids such as pictures, models and objects and the learners should be asked to speak verbally such aids.
- The learners can be asked to narrate certain public places in terms of its functions and activities, e.g. Post office, Hospital, Bank, School, College etc.
- The learners can be encouraged to describe their ideas and experiences for the events and happenings.
- The students can also be asked to express their experiences of tours and picnics that they have visited.
- Using role-play, simulations, oral composition, dramatization, dialogue pattern, communication games, guessing games etc. Role play is an integral part of personality development. Role-play will encourage self-awareness.
- Making use of ‘Information-gap activities’.

Learners’ activities:

- Exchanging greetings, introducing themselves, expressing opinions, likes, dislikes, telling time etc.
- Using pictures-cues, indirect questions, correction techniques etc.

Further classroom activities:

- Teachers can ask the learners to introduce their friends, or visitors to the class.
- Motivating students give brief summary of the previous lecture and short introduction of the present lecture every day before commencing the class. This will provide them a suitable platform to transform their information and knowledge. It also helps to develop confidence level and reduces hesitation.
- Using pair work and group work techniques. Asking the learners to converse with each other using the model dialogue. Group tasks and presentation enhance interpersonal skills.

Reading Skill:-

Reading is a very complex but significant skill. Reading is the decoding of the graphic representation of a language. It comprises three stages known as recognition, structuring and interpreting stage. Reading is basically comprehension, interpreting or making sense of a given text etc. In the first stage the learner recognizes a spoken word in a written form. The skill of Reading is often regarded as passive in nature and receptive, too. It is also regarded as ‘Graphic Motor Skill’, as it involves visual and psycho motor organs. Initially, the learner should read a paragraph or a passage with proper pronunciation, stress, intonation, gestures, punctuation marks etc. He should understand the meaning of the words and phrases from the context. He should also read silently without moving lips in the case of silent reading. He may also make a summary of the important points of the passage. Since efficient reading is essential the reading comprehensions are much useful in training the learners. Reading for beginning language learners should originate with material that results from a familiar, shared experience or activity. It should utilize the vocabulary that has been learned and practiced during that experience.

Types of Reading:

Usually, there are two types of Reading:

- (i) Intensive Reading, and (ii) Extensive Reading

‘Intensive Reading’ is reading a passage in depth for complete comprehension or analysis. It aims at reading texts and extracting exact information; each vocabulary and structural item is explained and made part of the students’ structural active language. Besides this, pronunciation and intonation are stressed; and each concept or allusion is clarified.

‘Extensive Reading’ is reading in quantity for information or enjoyment, without bothering to focus on every item. In Extensive Reading, the principal aim is comprehension. Learners are trained to get meaning primarily from the context although some common vocabulary items may be developed for active use.

‘Reading Aloud’ and ‘Silent Reading’ is another categorization of the Reading skill. Reading Aloud simply means the skill of speaking what is written. Robert Lado calls it ‘an artistic skill’. By Silent Reading, we simply mean reading a printed text completely silently, without even moving the lips.

Objectives:

- To enable the learners to read simple story, poetry, prose passage etc. comprehensively.
- To enable the learners to read aloud without losing the chain of thoughts.
- To enable the learners to guess the meanings of unfamiliar words and phrases from contexts.

Techniques for developing Reading skill:

The following techniques can be used and several activities can be organized to develop the reading skill among the learners:

- Providing opportunities of reading textual words, sentences, paragraph, and the lesson as a whole, keeping in mind the utterances of sounds, punctuation marks, stress, intonation, articulation etc,
- Suggesting unseen passages for the practice.

- Using flash-cards or black-boards by way of writing words, sentences and small paragraphs and asking the learners to read them and match the words to the right pictures.
- Providing practice-drill in oral reading, selecting suitable passages.
- Providing practice in silent reading, observing mechanics of silent reading.

Learner's Activities:

- Reading Magazines, Journals, Newspaper, Dictionaries, Literature, novels, plays, stories, poetry, etc.
- Reading directions, phone directories, job advertisements, official notices, place names, bus and train time-tables, business letters etc.

Further classroom activities:

- Motivating students read lessons every day in the classroom and at home, summarizing stories and reading texts, making their own dictionaries, time for discussing the students reading, reading competitions and rewarding the best reader may be fruitful for students.
- Provide sentences with missing key words. The Learners should read the sentences and write in whatever word they feel is most appropriate based on the rest of the sentence. This activity not only improves reading comprehension, but will train students to use context to learn new vocabulary words.

Writing Skill:-

The skill of Writing is productive and active in nature. It also involves the visual and the psycho-motor organs and is often called Graphic- motor skill. The skill of writing can be developed by asking the learners to make the scratches, to write the sets of letters, to copy the curves etc. Next, they can be led to write small sentences and from writing small sentences, they can be led to write small paragraphs combining sentences. Explaining the concept of writing Robert Lado writes, "Learning to write a foreign language is learning to put down at a speed greater than that of drawing the conventional symbols of the writing system that represent the utterances one has in mind. This is divided into several stages: pre-writing, copying 'read' texts, transcribing, composition and literature." (1971:143).

The beginners should be able to use words, together in correct word order, use the correct form of verbs, vocabulary, style, distinct main ideas and make the text coherent. According to T.C. Baruah (2004:245), writing is an extension of all skills. "Being different mode of communication, writing also serves another pedagogic purpose in second language teaching; it can be used to fix the structures and vocabulary already taught." The process of writing is of three stages viz. manipulation, structuring and communication. These three correspond to the three stages of reading - recognition, structuring and interpretation. Development of all these stages will take the learner to proceed forward ultimately leading to the art of self-expression.

Objectives:

- To enable learners to form letters, spell words, write small passages and construct sentences.
- To enable learners to write simple description of objects and places.
- To make the learners aware of several components of writing as a skill.

Techniques for developing Writing skill:

After teaching the writing to the beginners in said logical order, the following techniques and activities can be used to develop the writing skill effectively:

- Providing sufficient practice in drawing scratches, strokes of equal size, using systematic copybook.
- Similar practice can be provided for writing sets of letters, curves, pairs of letters and capital letters using printed or hand-written cards.
- Writing practice can be provided in groups and individually as well.
- Transcription exercises and dictation exercises should be given for the practice of writing letters, words, sentences and paragraph.

Learner's Activities:

- Spelling the words correctly, recalling appropriate words and putting them in sentences.
- Arranging thoughts and ideas in logical sequence and in suitable paragraphs, and using appropriate punctuation marks.

Further classroom activities:

- Writing competitions (essays, short stories, poems, etc.), teaching students about writing for specific purposes, and rewarding the best writer may be beneficial.
- Students are given a specific topic to write about with the understanding that they only have five minutes in which to write about it. The fun is in the time limit and in the interesting paragraphs that learners develop. After they have had some experience with writing within a stipulated time, their writing will become more and more creative.
- Moreover, the teacher can conduct writing workshops on letter, report, proposal, resume, paper, poster, and project writing and provide remedial feedback to the learners.

Types of Writing:

In advanced stages, there are two types of writing or composition:

- (i) Controlled composition, and
- (ii) Free composition.

Initially the learners are introduced to Controlled composition. They are given a small topic with essential structures and vocabulary items. As learners write under the complete supervision and guidance, it is called Controlled composition or Guided composition. Afterwards, they are introduced to Free composition. In it, they are free to use any structure and vocabulary items that they like.

Conclusion:

Now-a days, the learners mostly fail to communicate what they really want to do, not because they lack the ideas, thoughts and feelings, but because they have not been taught so far how and when these communicative tasks and acts are performed. As a result, they are not able to say what they have decided to say. And whatever they communicate is enough proof that their communicative competence needs to be developed. So, there is a great need to frame course materials and develop methods and strategies so as to enhance the basic language skills-LSRW skills for the beginners. They require LSRW skills to express and share their experience, knowledge, ideas and thoughts in an effective manner and thereby to impart a better understanding and harmony for the common benefit of the society.

End Notes & Works Cited :-

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