The Role of a Teacher in Improving Speaking Skills through Classroom Activities

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Abstract

Language is a tool of communication. The ultimate aim of English teaching is to cultivate the students' ability of speaking. So the teacher should create, a classroom environment, where students have a real life communication, authentic activities and meaningful tasks that promote oral language.

Speaking is a crucial part of second language learning and teaching. Despite its importance for many years, teaching - speaking has been undervalued. English language teachers have continued to teach speaking, just as a repetition of drills or memorization of dialogues. However, today’s world requires that the goal of teaching- speaking should improve students communicative skills, because it is the only way, students can express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rolls appropriate to each communicative circumstances. The teacher should know the ways and means of generating class room English. The teacher should promote an interactive and interesting teaching -learning ambiance.

Since communication is a two way process, the teacher and the pupil should make the process of communication effective hand in hand. The former serves as a source of information and transmit the same in the form of message. The later, receives information, responds and serves as a feedback to the process. Hence, the classroom activities provide an interesting way of learning any language. It develops self confidence. Successful manipulation of games in class room goes a long way in improving the communication skills of students.

KEYWORDS: Language Training, Problem in Learning, Classroom Teaching, Speaking Skills

1. Introduction:

English Language: An Elixir to Mankind

All are in a rush to be part of global village and links among people who make up the world community both desirable and essential. The world shrinks when people bridge towards friendship, understanding and respect. Language is the basic medium of interaction without which human social life could not have emerged.

With its elegance, grace and style, English the Queen of languages helps keep the wheels of the world turn. The world-wide garden of English unfolds the folds of a dark curtain of ignorance. It is also adaptable and transparent language that is can take on to the tint of any country. By the number of people using the language, geographical
dispersion and vehicular load, English enjoys a predominant position among world languages. English found its way into the warp and woof of the Indian National life; it came to open the gates for the emancipation of the souls—a subtle parallel to the power attributed to Sanskrit text. As C. Rajagopalachari has opined, it is “the gift of goddess Saraswathy to the Indian nation”. Being the official language of administration English got a fillip and relegated the Indian languages to the background.

2. Materials and Methods

Factors in Language Instruction

Training in language is training in living, in understanding and getting along with people. Growth of language is conditioned largely by the stimulation and direction provided by parents and teachers. Language is purposeful and not a mechanical act. One should clearly understand the role of English in India and evolve suitable methods for teaching English in contexts in which it is used. The approach is to be realistic and practicable.

Language learning process is complex with three determinants; the learner, the teacher, and the interacting situation. When a student needs to learn something a feeling of need must be created. To achieve this, the learning activities should be appealing. Personality traits such as age, educational and linguistic background, aptitude, attitude towards the language, motivation and adjustment influence the process of learning.

3. Why Language A Skill Subject?

To acquire proficiency in any language, one should use it meaningfully, that is one should use it for communication. He/she must possess certain pre-requisites like knowledge of language elements experience and also certain abilities. Mastery over rules and meanings alone will not suffice. One must listen carefully, speak fluently, read with comprehension and write correctly.

4. Relation among Skills

“Nothing is to be spoken before it has been heard
Nothing is to be read before it has been spoken
Nothing is to be written before it has been read”.

• The English language is a powerful medium of communication all over the world.
• Learning English as a foreign language is a difficult task to many students. It can be made easier if teachers and learners work cooperatively.

5. Language as Rule-Governed Behaviour

• The problem of learning a language is primarily a problem of establishing a ‘bond’ between a language form and its meaning.
• Learning a language is not nor a mere memorization of certain words or cramming of certain sentences as a parrot does.
• Though the child commits numerous mistakes at first in learning a language, in course of time the child makes its own generalization and as hoc rules (which it keeps modifying as it come across more examples) about the major systems of language to produce new sentences and to avoid incorrect constructions.
• The number of possible sentences in a language is infinite. But even so a child of four years old knows all these infinite number of unuttered sentences in his mother tongue. In fact, the child produces a new sentence every time he speaks, because we hardly say the same sentence twice in our life but for a few exceptions like ‘thank you’, how do you do?

6. Learning a Second Language

Language skills, like any other skills, can be acquired only through practice. In the case of mother tongue, the child gets sufficient scope for this practice in its daily environment. The child uses the language at home, in the playground, at school—everywhere. With its parents, others members of the family, friends and relatives almost everyone in his day to day life, slowly learns the language without any deliberative effort:

But in case of second language particularly when it happens to be a foreign like English, these natural resources are not available to the learner. Unlike the mother tongue, a second language is learnt deliberately, usually in formal classroom teaching. Therefore the classroom activities must provide sufficient motivation and scope for practicing the language. Further, the language material presented for practice should be carefully selected to highlight the regularities of the language so that pupils can make their own ad hoc rules.

Transfer of language can be positive or negative. Positive transfer facilitates learning and negative transfer impedes (delay or block the progress) learning.

• “Critical period” of learning (the unconscious assimilation) generally lies between 2 to 16 years in human being.

• Language learning at early is primarily a matter of imitation and the speech habits of the first language are still at the formative stages: a careful and intensive drilling of the problem items should eliminate the danger. But English as a second language is introduced in schools when the pupils are at an age of 10. In such an age the habits of the first language can seriously interfere with the learning of English. The habits of the mother tongue have been fairly established in these children and they have also lost the capacity for imitation, which plays a dominant role in acquiring language habits.

7. Importance of Learning English

• Of all the languages in the world today English deserves to be regarded as a world language. It is the world’s most widely spoken language. It is the common means of communication between the peoples of different nations. One person out of every four on earth can be reached through English.

• English is the medium of instruction as well as the language of administration in a number of Asian and African countries today.

• Most of the countries cannot give up the use of English for more than one reason. English education helped them get their ideas on freedom and self-government and enabled them to fight for the independence of their countries. In the multi-lingual contexts of these countries English became a unifying force and helped the freedom fighters propagate the
ideas of nationalism and self rule. In these countries English still remains a cementing force.

- A very important reason for regarding English as a world language is that the world’s knowledge is enshrined in English. Countries in Asia and Africa that were recently under the British rule got their scientific knowledge and technological knowhow from English books. It is the knowledge of English that helps these countries maintain the high level of their intellectual and scientific training and achievement.

- For everyone, English has a special place. This is not merely because English is a world language but because it has historical associations and has made an impact on everyone’s cultural life. Therefore English is not a foreign language rather a second language.

- A very significant factor in language learning is motivation. The child acquiring his mother tongue has its motivation in the recognition that wins all around in the urge to establish identity with other children. But the second language learner has his/her motivation in the need to communicate whatever be the level of communication to reach. So the emphasis should be laid on the communicative use of language.

- The classroom activity should be geared so that the learners are well motivated to ensure effective learning through a natural urge to communicate.

- So learning becomes more effective when one is drilled in sentence patterns in which one understands every lexical item.

- The child learns to speak first; then write and that too when taught; speaking he does without being formally trained. On the analogy of the child’s language acquisition should be taught speech first and writing next?

- The history of human language shows that it came to be spoken first and written afterwards.

- There are two sides in a language one is spoken and another is written. Spoken side is on the right side.

With the social and economic development of our country, education at college level is changing to reflect the needs of the learner and the society. Consequently, foreign language teaching is responding to society’s need by preparing our youth for an unpredictable future in which language skills will be in great demand. However, according to the survey conducted by the College English Directive Committee, the comprehensive skills of the college graduates their oral and written abilities in particular, are not satisfactory. To change the phenomenon of “dumb English” has become a challenging task for us.

Realizing the need to maximize the learner’s foreign language abilities, the national educational administration has mandated language requirements for college English teaching that in turn require adjustments for teaching a diverse group of students and developing their oral communicative competence. The focus of curriculum and hence assessment have, therefore, also shifted from the
knowledge of grammar to oral proficiency and communicative competence in target language.

8. The Aim of Classroom Teaching

The aims of language teaching courses are very commonly defined with reference to four language skills. These aims, in turn, usually decide the content and the approach of our teaching.

What one can expect our students to do in a language class is their capability of expressing what they wish to say and their meaningfulness. So in a language class, the teachers’ purpose is not just teaching our students to be model Americans or Englishmen but to teach them how to convey their thoughts and purposes efficiently in order that they are competent to communicate in the target language with native speakers naturally and smoothly. So a more realistic goal might be “communicative efficiency”, put forward. In terms of language skills, communicative efficiency means that students should be able to perform efficiently in oral and written verbal communication.

However, there are many factors now in English classroom that hinder the development of communicative competence, thus resulting in the failure in achieving communicative efficiency. The texts are too difficult to comprehend and it takes most of the class time to explain the difficult language points, which leaves little time for the students to internalize the language input and communicate with it. Its lack of practical application and the difficulty of organizing communicative activities have made it hard to meet the demand of communicative language teaching. Besides, improper approach and test-oriented teaching approach mislead the process of developing skills to use language.

Traditional method, which focuses on linguistic phenomena rather than on comprehension and communication, are still popular on account of various reasons, little or very less attention paid to listening and speaking. And unfavorable learning environment is also an obstacle to achieve this goal in the classroom.

As a result most students possess poor oral communicative competence and they desire to improve their ability. We design a questionnaire and interview some students to identify students’ perception of their language needs and motivations and discover students’ oral communicative competence. The results of the analysis demonstrate that learners want more opportunities to speak English and are in need of teachers’ help in listening and oral practices. On throwing a light on these finding, it is suggested that in order to achieve this goal in the classroom, priority should be placed on the following areas: improving listening and oral skills, creating English-speaking environment and shifting from test oriented teaching to communication-oriented teaching. It is essential to design a superior way to achieve communicative efficiency.

9. Analysis of Communication and Communication Activities:

Language teachers are supposed to adopt a superior approach in teaching practice. However, before designing a useful and efficient approach it is necessary and beneficial to analyze the nature of communication.

Communication between humans, though rather complex and ever-changing, shares certain characteristics which are relevant for the learning and
teaching. Therefore, one may make some generalizations. In a talk involving two people, both speaker and listener have their particular roles for a certain reason. The three generalizations which apply to all speakers and listeners may be as the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>listener</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Want to say something</td>
<td>Want to listen to something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a communicative purpose</td>
<td>Be interested in communicative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select from language store</td>
<td>Process a variety of language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table suggests that a speaker makes a decision to address someone. Speaking may be forced on him/her in some way, but intend to speak, or else keep silent. Speaker says things because they want something to happen as a result of what they say.

Having discussed the nature of communication one can now suggests characteristics necessary for communicative activities. There is considerable debate on appropriate ways of defining communicative language teaching and no single model is universally accepted as authoritative. However, according to Richards and Rodgers, communicative language teaching starts with a theory of language as communication, and its goal is to develop learners’ communicative competence.

In classroom teaching, whatever activities the students are involved in, if it is genuinely communicative and really promoting language use, the students should have a desire to communicate and use language in some way to achieve the objective. Their attention should be centered on content of what is being said not the form that is being used. And the students will have to deal with a variety of language rather than just one language item.

Another characteristic is that “activities in the Communicative Approach are often carried out by students in small groups”. And is “its learner-centered and experience-based view of second language teaching”. The teacher’s intervention should be forbidden when the students are engaged in communicative activities. The teacher should act as a participant instead of an instructor. In addition, communicative activities favor authentic materials form life.

10. Results

Characteristics of Speaking

One may communicate in various ways, but one may not succeed in communication without good command on the four skills. Speaking and writing are said to be productive skills whereas listening and reading are said to be receptive skills. Speaking may be mainly fostered and trained at the stage of the output. Classroom activities are designed to develop the learner’s ability in the four skills which may be divided into two major categories; those that gives the student input and those that encourages the student to produce output.
As mentioned above, classroom activities fall into two major categories, input and output and the speaking skill is mainly fostered and trained in output ones, but in actual teaching practice one may not achieve the purpose without employing the input activities, especially at the beginning of teaching.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-communicative</th>
<th>introducing practice</th>
<th>communicative activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>new language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Input</td>
<td>output</td>
<td>input&amp;/output</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The introduction of a new language is often an activity that falls at the “Non-communicative” end of the continuum. At this stage, the teacher will work with controlled techniques, asking students to repeat and perform in drills. At the same time, he will insist on accuracy, correcting the mistakes students make. Although this stage should be kept short and the drilling abandoned as soon as possible, they are important in helping the student to assimilate facts about new language and in enabling them to produce the new language for the first time.

The practice stage falls somewhere between the two ends of the continuum. Now the teacher may slightly intervene to help guide and point out inaccuracy. Students are insisted to use the new language in different contexts, often in combination with English which the student already knows. The aim is to encourage communication while ensuring that special language items are used.

The features of the communicative activities have already been discussed in the previous part such activities are vital in the teaching-speaking, since students can do their best to use the language as individuals, arriving at a degree of language autonomy. In most communicative activities, the students will use all the language that they know, they will be forced to retrieve the English that they have in their language store and they will gradually develop strategies for communication. Instead of concentrating on accuracy, the focus will be on the success in communicating. This implies that the role of the teacher should change. If the teacher stops the students every time they make a mistake and points this out, students may find frustrating and de-motivated and the process results futile.

The above paper has discussed the purpose of classroom teaching, the features of communication as well as the communicative activities. Apart from these, the analyses of speaking serve as the foundation for the suggested stage in the teaching-speaking. These stages are just rudimental in teaching language.

11. Conclusion

Teaching-speaking is the prime role of second language learning. The ability to communicate in a second language clearly and efficiently contributes to the success of the learner in school and success later in every phase of life. Therefore, it is essential that language teachers play a vital role in teaching-speaking, rather than leading students to pure memorization. Thus by providing a rich environment where meaningful communication takes place is desired. With this aim, various speaking activities such as those listed above can contribute a
great deal to students in developing basic interactive skills necessary for life. These activities make students more active in the learning process and at the same time make their learning more meaningful and fun.

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