



Empowering Strategies for Learners to Improve English Communication and Soft Skills

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Abstract- Learning a second language requires a strong desire and enthusiasm. It also requires consistent motivation. If a learner has a strong desire and motivation, learning a second language becomes an enjoyable process. English is clearly a second language for many learners. Empowerment is a major aspect for the growth of a country and it needs to be taken care with proper planning and implementation of various schemes and strategies. While receiving higher education, a learner's desire to become a professional is crucial. As a professional, a person needs to possess strong personality attributes. Teachers and trainers of English, communication skills and soft skills play a crucial role in the life of learners. They should be equipped with teaching and learning material and methodology. They also require relevant training on regular basis so that they can keep their learners updated with recent technological and research developments. Soft skills are the major personality attributes and they play a significant role in the journey of a learner towards becoming a professional in life and career.

Curriculum designing is another significant aspect which needs a careful attention from experts in the field of higher education. It needs to be designed taking into account the requirements of the employing workplaces as well as the requirements of the emerging fields in management and areas of human resource as well. This research paper provides empowering strategies to learners of English. These strategies will empower them to learn and master English. The paper also suggests useful strategies on enhancing learners' soft skills and how these both areas can significantly be utilised in the path of making personal and professional career.

Key Words: Empowerment, English, communication skills, soft skills, curriculum designing, teaching, learning, training, life, career

I. INTRODUCTION

The Basics of Communication Process

Communication is not only the exchange of words. It consists of verbal and non-verbal components. Verbal communication is the use of words whereas non-verbal communication includes the use of body language—hand movements, facial expressions, eye contact and other body gestures. Non-verbal communication implies the use of music of our voice, the body and facial gestures we use, the way we move our eyes, hold our body and the other physical positions we adopt during our conversation. Therefore, conversation is not simply just the exchanges of words.

Understanding the Importance of Teaching and Learning English

It can be strongly believed that teaching is not only a noble profession, but also a mission. English is a language of science and technology, mass media and international publications. In the words of Roger Bacon, "Knowledge of languages is the doorway to wisdom." This thought can clearly be applied to English as it helps the learners to achieve the level of wisdom as well as success. Therefore, the teaching of English has to be considered as a higher priority. The fundamental aspects such as eligibility and standard while recruiting the eligible candidates have to be given the paramount significance. Unfortunately, there is an unnecessary favouritism in every field of life and that needs to be curbed immediately. The government recruitment bodies need to be formed to recruit and complete the transparent employment process. There has to be a regular assessment of teachers and trainers alike. Unfortunately, there is a huge difference in the wages offered to teachers in the government and private institutions and there is no logic for why government is paying more to their employees even when many employees are not eligible and they are also paid more than they expect from their own life. This kind of discrimination of pay can directly affect the tendency of people of both government and private and also affect the process of teaching and learning at a broad scale.

sStrategies to Improve Conversation in English

English is a second language for many speakers and therefore the time-span to learn and master it should be considerably longer. If learners devote and dedicate their maximum time on learning and practising it, surely they can master English within a considerable period of time. Conversation is the heart of communication. The major and significant way we convey our ideas is the conversation. Therefore, conversation is the most significant means of communication human beings possess. Communication is a highly flexible and dynamic process. Conversations are the way human beings create shared meaning. Effective communication involves the improvement in the quality of conversations.

Human beings converse with a certain reason and purpose. The important reason for conversation is to promote ideas and action. It is necessary to learn and improve our English so that we can improve our day-to-day conversations and thus achieve the status of effective communication. Teachers have to involve learners in the process of learning English and make them aware that learning English is an interesting process and also a fun activity. English is a second language for many learners and learning any second language requires a number of conscious and dedicated efforts. Therefore, learning a language is a process and it is similar to the journey from the unknown to the known. It is a process of learning with engagement. Teachers of English should engage their learners with various constructive activities such as story-telling, anecdotes, puzzles and language games. The skill of creating and telling stories can be developed among the learners and it can be used as one of the pedagogical tools.

It can be said that when learners and especially children learn a language, they are not simply engaging in one type of learning among many; rather, they are learning the foundations of learning itself. Therefore, learning English also involves learning, understanding and exploring various aspects of the target language. Therefore, in the same context, it can be claimed that learning the target language, i.e. English provides a number of doorways of knowledge, wisdom and success. Every teacher is essentially a language teacher and communication skills are useful in getting a job and also to start our own business. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the fact that English should not be looked at as a subject but a language to be learnt and improved. It should become the responsibility of each teacher to learn English, in the first place, and then help their students to learn and improve it on a regular basis.

Strategies to improve English and Soft Skills

English helps people communicate with the world. An ability to communicate in English is extremely essential in the professional career. Soft skills are the skills which directly help job aspirants to get desired jobs. They are acquired and developed. Employers value soft skills more than technical skills while recruiting the freshers. Soft skills are the desirable traits of a person's personality. There are many soft skills but to name just a few important ones are like: interpersonal skills, ability to work in a team and team management, problem solving skills, analytical thinking, positive body language, creativity, capacity to think logically, strong professional or work ethics and communication skills. Though English is a second language for many people, it can be acquired and mastered through consistent practice and dedication. Speaking English in acceptable pronunciation, possessing strong vocabulary, clarity of thought, speech and expression are key requirements to master English and to become effective communicator as well. Acquiring soft skills is difficult but one can acquire them through conscious efforts and consistent practice. They help graduates get jobs and feel comfortable and confident in the professional scenario.

Soft skills are the essential qualities for students, teachers, professionals and everyone wishing to succeed in his or her professional career. For freshers, soft skills help to start a smooth journey from the campus to the corporate world. In the present days, the recruiting firms emphasize more on soft skills than core skills. As the modern workplace is interpersonal, customers also expect soft skills from the professionals. It can be said that the future workplace will fully rely on effective communication skills and soft skills. Therefore, there is a strong necessity to prepare the list of need-based communication skills and soft skills and provide the learners with guidelines on how to acquire them. This can help graduates to take a smooth journey from campus to corporate and succeed in their life and career.

English as the Target Language

English is a target language for many of us to learn and master. The paper does not intend to discuss the politics about English language. People have differences of opinions about English, and it cannot be

discussed as it leads to debate and criticism. Since English is considered the language of the globe and corporate as well, it becomes necessary to understand that it helps the youth to communicate with the world and get respect and value in the corporate workplace. In the similar context, it should also be understood that only knowing and interacting in English is not sufficient as it should be accompanied with positive personality and appropriate mindset and attitude and that is why freshers have to master both English and Soft Skills to be employed and feel confident in the contemporary challenging as well as competitive workplace.

The corporate scenario expects its employees to communicate and work professionally. It requires employees to manage people, stakeholders, and customers and service-related relations in a successful manner. Therefore, effective communication in English plays a significant role. In the same manner, the corporate scenario also expects its employees to acquire and master soft skills and they are also considered the power skills in the present situation.

The Research at a Glance

The recruiting agencies and employers are keen during recruiting freshers and graduates for new positions. Multinational companies and even government sectors recruit freshers on the basis of their performance in spoken as well as written examinations. Companies like TCS, Infosys, Accenture and Cognizant expect their employees to be good at English and soft skills. They should possess these basic skills as well as should be able to communicate in English effectively. Nowadays, mastering English and soft skills has become an essential part of one's life and career.

While discussing these basic requirements, it becomes necessary to prepare a list of major aspects to master these areas and they have been discussed in detail. It is also important to understand that English should not be just learnt and taught for employability but it should be matter and pattern of study on daily basis. Therefore, the desire to learn English should be cultivated among students to overcome the lack of proficiency in the language. In the similar context, David Graddol in his book *English Next India*, writes that, "English Next India has identified low standards in English as a weakness in Indian higher education. This will be made worse by any expansion in enrolment. Although English courses are now offered by the better institutions, these are too often focused on 'employability' skills rather than study skills." These statements clearly indicate that learners and freshers learn English only for employability but it should be studied and mastered as a language to prosper in life and career. The development of this kind of approach toward English is extremely crucial and only this approach can help them succeed in life and career. Learning any second language requires conscious and consistent devotion, dedication and practice.

Basics of Four Language Skills in English

Everyone desires to learn and master English. It is necessary to master language skills to become a fluent in English. Understanding and practising the basic language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing have to be considered as a priority for the learners. Another important skill is the thinking skill and it can also be added as one of the language skills as all the four language skills are fully based on the way a person thinks. Though it is an abstract process but the process needs a language and this process becomes a directional force to master these four language skills. Thinking skill can be developed and mastered through logical development and directional and sequential pondering about one aspect of the subject at a time.

Training and Practice on Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing

Human beings are gifted with one tongue and two ears and it is the obvious reason that human beings should listen more. Listening is a skill of comprehension. A listener understands the world through listening to people. It is considered a passive skill but it is certainly not a passive process. Listening involves a lot of attention and care. A listener has to hear the message carefully, understand the content, interpret it and analyse it. The entire process needs an active involvement on the part of the listener. The real nature of the listening process has to be understood and it helps a listener to learn different things, gain information and knowledge, learn different items of vocabulary and different aspects of knowledge and the universe. A renowned thinker, Ravinarayan Chakrakodi mentions that, "Listening facilitates language acquisition. It helps in picking up chunks of language, building one's vocabulary, improving pronunciation, and developing one's knowledge about the language. It is, therefore, important for

teachers to create authentic listening situations in the classroom so that students can develop their listening comprehension skills.” Therefore, listening is a significant activity which helps a listener in the process of becoming an effective communicator. It is necessary to desire to become not only a communicator but our target should be to become an effective communicator. Therefore, listening plays a significant role in the life of fresher and graduate to become an effective communicator and succeed in life and career.

Undoubtedly, speaking is a natural gift available to human beings. It is not only a skill but also an art. Effective speaking skill can be developed, improved and mastered. It requires a human being to be fully involved in the process of communication. It is the skill of expression and requires active involvement of both the speaker and the listener to complete the communication process. Many speakers take this skill for granted and as a result they fail to become successful and effective communicators. Effective speaking also requires the understanding and knowledge of basics of pronunciation of words. Body language also plays a crucial role in the communication process. It carries many signs and they carry meanings. Therefore, use of proper body language is inevitable for effective communication.

The process of reading involves many aspects and it is surely an active process. It requires a reader to be fully engaged in the process. A reader has to understand the content, create meaning out of words, ponder upon various aspects involved in the meaning making process and then finally interpret and analyse the reading content. Reading helps a person to become complete in many ways. It is not only literature but any kind of reading material is compilation of many ideas, thoughts, innovations and experiences and therefore, it helps a person learn through other people’s experiences. It can be said that a single person’s own experiences in life are not sufficient for the person to live life smoothly and successfully. Therefore, reading has a tremendous significance in a person’s life and career. Therefore, freshers and graduates should make reading an integral part of their day-to-day life and career as it helps them succeed in their career and life.

Undoubtedly, human beings are the only living animals having developed and mastered the skill of writing. They can express themselves through writing as it is a skill of expression. The present scenario in the job market and professional career of freshers and graduates expects that they should express effectively during the day-to-day communication. They should not only express through speaking to people but they should also express themselves through writing. Writing has received a strong prominence in many competitive examinations as well. It is unfortunate that learners and graduates of today do not tend to write unless it is made mandatory for them. They tend to neglect writing as writing involves a complete engagement and attention.

However, it is necessary to understand the fact that writing skill can be developed. Mastering writing skill is possible but we need to first develop our liking and interest for writing. The activities like writing short passages, essays, short stories and writing blogs can be extremely useful in the process of developing our interest in writing process. It needs logical thinking, rigorous process of editing and reading and writing again and then finally, it provides the writer a lot satisfaction as he or she has become a good and productive writer.

Practice on Pronunciation in English

For many speakers, English is the second language and therefore, they are not fully aware of the dynamics about how to pronounce English words. Pronunciation is a key factor in any language. Speaking English in an acceptable manner is necessary in the corporate sector. Knowing the essentials of pronunciation in English is primary as it is the basic requirement. It is also necessary to know how to speak in the public. Clarity of thought is required for clarity of speech and expression. For this, freshers and graduates have to practice speaking in correct and acceptable English.

While discussing about the students’ competence in various language aspects, a well-known author Diane Larsen-Freeman writes that, “The goal is to enable students to communicate in the target language. To do this, students need knowledge of the linguistic forms, meanings, and functions. They need to know that many different forms can be used to perform a function and also that a single form can often serve a variety of functions. They must be able to choose from among these the most appropriate form, given the social context and the roles of the interlocutors. They must also be able to manage the process of negotiating meaning with their interlocutors. Communication is a process; knowledge of the forms of language is insufficient.”

These lines clearly indicate that learners desiring to learn and master English need to practice various aspects of it. Teachers of English need to provide basic information to freshers and graduates so that they can learn, practice and become confident to speak English fluently.

Professional World and Its Expectations

Multinational companies like Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, Cognizant, Accenture and others recruit freshers on the basis of their performance in qualifying examinations. These qualifying examinations are conducted by various Information Technology and other production companies. Candidates are expected to possess knowledge about various topics like tenses, parts of speech, phrasal verbs, synonyms, antonyms, confusing words, paragraph writing and reading comprehension. That is why freshers and graduates should focus on mastering English and soft skills to lead a smooth and successful life and career.

Emerging Need of Soft Skills

Soft skills should be taught from the 8th standard and they should be market-driven skills. It is necessary that a student must have at least three employability skills once he or she receives higher secondary education. Knowing and mastering English is obviously essential for career development but it needs to be combined with soft skills. Soft skills are desirable personality traits. Employers expect that their employees should possess soft skills as they help them to communicate effectively and achieve more in their professional career. Essential soft skills for job and professional career are like effective communication skills, creativity, teamwork, leadership skills, interpersonal skills, flexibility or adaptability and time management.

Communication skills, Interpersonal skills, Teamwork, Leadership skills, Flexibility or adaptability

All these are basic but necessary soft skills and they have gained a tremendous significance in the present day scenario. Communication skills are considered to be the most significant skills as they directly help freshers and graduates to communicate with the universe. Verbal communication is an ability to speak concisely and clearly. It is the ability to make use of words. It is essential to speak English fluently. Many people take fluency to mean speaking fast. Fluency means using the right word at the right time and in the right place. Non-verbal communication consists of body language, facial expressions, hand movements and eye contact. These aspects of non-verbal communication carry signs which are extremely meaningful and therefore, non-verbal communication is considered highly significant in the field of effective communication.

Interpersonal communication is one of the major soft skills. It requires people to interact with different kinds of people and groups. It is necessary to create professional relationships at the workplace and therefore, the ability to communicate and develop rapport with people becomes an integral part in day-to-day communication, life and career. Nowadays, the corporate world demands that freshers should be social and possess certain social skills. They prefer to recruit the candidates who possess positive and constructive attitude toward society. There are different types of people at the workplace and it is highly challenging to work with people from various backgrounds. Therefore, our ability to handle and manage people plays a crucial role. In the workplace, it is required to be open to people's appreciation as well as criticism. We need to accept criticism in a positive sense and therefore, an ability to manage various types of people also plays a significant role in the corporate world.

Today's working style has changed tremendously and it requires people to work together as a team. Working in a team is essential as it helps to achieve a bigger target not only for the firm but it is also helpful for the growth of an individual. It is proved that individuals can achieve more in group than working individually. Freshers and graduates need to understand that being introvert is harmful to their career development and therefore, it becomes necessary to change our mindset and mix with people and learn from one another.

It is a well-known fact that leader is not born but made. Obviously, any person can become a leader. It requires a person to take initiative to work and manage people in the right direction. It is the willingness to help and lead people from the front. It is the ability to work in a team and still lead a group. Major and most essential skill to become a leader is an ability to communicate effectively. Effective speakers can

convince the team members easily and they also possess the ability to manage groups and group behaviour. A leader needs to be dynamic and powerful. Corporate and professional sectors need people who can lead teams and therefore, leadership skills can be developed during college days. Freshers and graduates can focus on participating in various co-curricular and extra-curricular activities and programs and manage events at their college level. Their active involvement in such programs helps them become good and effective leaders.

It is necessary for freshers and graduates to be open-minded and ready to accept the change in the workplace. Rigidity and arrogance do not help employees in the long run and they cannot survive. It also becomes necessary to create a healthy environment at the workplace. This is the world of information technology, artificial intelligence and machine learning. Because of the changes in the fields of information and technology, there have been many changes not only in private sector workplaces but in government sectors as well. Multinational sectors expect their employees to be flexible, adaptive and ready to accept the changes. Therefore, freshers and graduates need to develop their flexible mindset and prepare themselves for such an open and healthy environment.

Activity-Based Practice Sessions

Human beings are social beings and they communicate with one another. They need a language to interact and express themselves with one another. Talking with learned people helps people sharpen their memory. It also helps us to develop insights about research and general awareness about the universe around us. Information sharing has become a significant aspect and therefore, we need to communicate more with people. We need to discuss more and write more to become an expert and effective communicator. It is extremely essential to provide practical activities like group discussion, role play, short-talk, making a short presentation, extempore and impromptu speech. While emphasising the importance of the role play, a well-known author Diane Larsen-Freeman writes that, “Students should be asked to pretend temporarily that they are someone else and to perform in the target language as if they were that person. They should often be asked to create their own lines relevant to the situation.” These activities help learners to improve their logical understanding of various topics of discussion and gradually they become presentable. It is necessary to discuss these activities in detail as they are essential to learn and improve English of learners and help them in their journey from campus to corporate or professional career.

Importance of Body Language

Everyone knows the significance of words in the communication process. However, body language also plays a key role in the communication process. Human beings spend maximum of their time on listening. This takes place in groups and sometimes only when two people are conversing with each other. Therefore, most of the communication takes place through gossiping social as well as individual issues. Gossip is so common in the Indian socio-cultural scenario. According to Robin Dunbar, “language evolved to allow us to gossip.” Sometimes, we have less control on our body language than over the way we speak and therefore, some body signs and movements can be misinterpreted. It takes place because some of the non-verbal signs can be interpreted by people depending on their knowledge of the signs and we normally do not have control on this meaning making process. Normally, gossip helps us understand about where we are in the social scheme. Knowing this situation makes us relax. In the words of Alan Barker, “Physical grooming stimulates production of endorphins—the body’s natural painkilling opiates reducing heart rate and lowering stress. Gossip probably has a similar effect. In fact, the research suggests that gossip is essential to our social, psychological and physical well-being.”

Therefore, the foremost fundamental and essential quality in any kind of conversation is to build a rapport with the speaker or listener. Therefore, building rapport is essentially or fundamentally a pattern-matching process and it happens without the use of words. It can be developed through eye contact, body orientation, facial expressions, hand movements body movements / gestures and also the tone of voice.

Recommendation of Training by New Education Policy 2020

There are various challenges in the field of teaching and learning and they need to be addressed systematically and intelligently. The introduction of the New Education Policy 2020 has rightly highlighted the importance of training for teachers and learners alike. Training helps us know that we

need to unlearn our few ways and strategies learnt in the past. Our ways of teaching and learning normally do not project or have a high level of impact and significance in the present age of digital teaching and learning. Therefore, the process of learning, unlearning and relearning plays a crucial role in the process of not only learning but teaching as well. The training centres will impart training to teachers and trainers teaching languages and soft skills in institutions of higher learning.

The New Education Policy has also recommended the use of native languages to be used in the teaching and learning processes. It has also advocated the use of a mother-tongue while teaching and learning. This kind of shift or change in the attitude towards learning and delivery is of paramount significance. It will not only provide learners a relaxation from learning a language, but the use of mother-tongue can also foster their creativity, increase their level of being comfortable and feel more confident. It can also make learners learn their first language with enthusiasm and thus resultantly also make the language rich and gain more significance at the broader scale.

Approach towards Self-Learning

Self-learning is of key importance. Learners need to be self-motivated, disciplined and dedicated and feel that they have to learn certain aspects of life and their education field on their own. A learner has to be self-disciplined and motivated towards learning and improving his or her target language and communication skills as well. Since English is the second language for many learners, it requires efforts, dedication and devotion. Learners need to prioritise learning to any other activity in their life. It will directly help them make their career and achieve success in life and career.

Inevitability of Online Learning Platforms

Online and digital platforms have made the learning process simpler and user-friendly. Availability of various useful mobile applications such as British Council English, Cambridge English, Storytel, Audible, BBC English and Dictionary.com have tremendously helped learners to listen to various programs in English. These national and international level programs are easily made available through these mobile applications. Learners can read and listen to masterpiece novels and short-stories through the mobile applications like Audible, Storytel, Scribd and Audiobooks.com. Reading and listening clearly play a crucial role in the process of learning a language. Increasing vocabulary also becomes a significant step to be at home in any language. Therefore, online dictionaries and mobile applications like Oxford, Longman and other dictionaries provided an easy alternative to hardbound and heavy-weight dictionaries.

Learners have a number of alternatives available and they need to be open-minded and devoted to their goal in life. These kinds of digital and online alternatives can be used extensively to learn and improve our language skills and communication skills as well.

Importance of MOOCs

This age can be called the Golden Age as far as the variety and resources of online learning are concerned. This is a digital era and learners are equipped with electronic gadgets like laptops, mobile phones, tablets, etc. The availability of online teaching has made the learning possible and thus learners can learn even by staying at home. Many premier institutions such as IITs, IISc and NITs are providing online certification courses in the form of massive open online courses (MOOCs). These courses are available in the disciplines such as management, engineering, medicine, pharmaceuticals, arts and humanities as well as digital marketing. These courses are prepared by the highly qualified and experienced faculty and these certifications have been recognised by the higher education authority bodies like Human Resource Department of India, UGC and AICTE. Other international online platforms providing MOOCs such as Coursera, British Council, edX and udemy are also extremely effective and providing various online certification courses for the desired learners. Therefore, these online certification platforms are playing significant role in learning effective English communication and mastering soft skills in one's life and career.

Provision of Adequate Human Resources and Teaching Tools

The government needs to pay more attention towards the education process and its proper delivery. All the aspects of development from science to technology, arts and humanities, management, craft and designing, manufacturing and engineering are directly associated with the quality of education. The government policies need to emphasise the quality not only in the higher education but primary

education setting as well. Bureaucracy needs to be properly standardized and regulated so that unethical practices will vanish automatically.

Recruitment bodies and proper regulatory authorities should be introduced at a large scale and there has to be a continuous monitoring of the government policies and their proper implementation and execution at a higher scale. As the education is the pure and entirely sacred sector, language is also a pure and sacred entity. They need to be given a higher priority and therefore, proper planning and the implementation of rules and various schemes need to be meticulously addressed.

II. CONCLUSION

To conclude, it can be stated that the higher education sector needs to maintain its standard by hiring qualified teachers and trainers. It also requires the continuous assessment of the eligibility of teachers and trainers. It can also be concluded that mastering English and soft skills is a necessary step to be successful at the workplace. The contemporary workplace requires its employees to be efficient, smart, dynamic and effective communicators as well. Multinational sectors expect people to be competitive as well as sensible toward the society. Therefore, knowing English and using soft skills helps freshers and graduates to face the contemporary competitive workplace in a successful manner. This paper discusses the empowering strategies to improve English and soft skills in the life of freshers and graduates and how improving these skills can help them to get good jobs and face the challenges in the outside world more effectively. The basics of English and using soft skills like creativity, communication skills, effective interpersonal communication, leadership skills, team management, flexibility and negotiation skills are highly in demand in the corporate as well as government sectors. It is extremely essential to provide practice sessions on group discussion, role play, short-talk, making a short presentation, extempore and impromptu speech and they have been proved extremely useful in the process of improving communication and making it more effective in day-to-day life and the professional career as well.

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