Developing Communicative Competence In English: An Overview

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Introduction

Employment opportunities are decided on the basis of the skills acquired by the engineering students, more specifically the amount of knowledge one has acquired in communicating oneself in English. This acquired exclusive communicative competence in English remains a core skill which plays a vital role in determining the job in the multi-faceted society. It has been found out through constant research with the engineering students by the researcher that only the learner-centred approach in teaching of English language makes them communicatively competent in English language.

It has to be acknowledged the fact that most of the Engineering graduates lack the required standard of communication skills, particularly when compared to the needs of the multinational companies. In the area of professional studies in India, it has been observed that for most learners, written competence alone is achieved throughout their course of study. However in the changed milieu of this century, academic expertise alone is not enough. "The I.T revolution and globalization of business have brought technical communication to the forefront of academia and industry. With the whole world becoming a global market and businesses becoming diverse and result oriented, professionals and technocrats are facing newer challenges in communication everyday. Success in this competitive environment depends not just on acquiring knowledge, and hard skills, but also on developing effective technical communication skills." (Rizwi, 2005, p.7)

Technical communication is the essence of organizational life and a prerequisite to effective management. The list of its multipurpose functions is very long. It not only makes professional interaction possible, but also directs the flow of technical information and knowledge for the guidance of technocrats, engineers and others in their professional activities. It stimulates scientists and researchers to achieve individual as well as social and organizational objectives for effective group functioning. Moreover, it leads to unification of the activities of individuals as a work team and helps to foster positive attitudes required for motivation, cooperation and other important organizational processes. It ensures free exchange of information and ideas and promotes scientific temper and maintenance of professional relations. Due to

information revolution and some economic changes in the new millennium, the importance of effective technical communication has increased. "The whole world has become a global market and the transfer of technology is playing a key role in economic growth and transformation." (Rizvi, 2005, p.12). As the professional world becomes more diverse, competitive and result – oriented, the importance of technical communication skills continues to increase. In fact technical communication skills are crucial to professional success today because, success in communicating in the technical environment will depend not just on an effective style but on the ability to analyse, organize and present essential information effectively.

Professionals realize that they need English for interaction in the work environment because Engineers who have excellent communication skills shine in their career. On the other hand, the lack of communication skills pave way to undermine the whole profile of the professional engineer. A global engineer must be proficient in the use of the foreign language. "The skill of communication adopted thoughtfully with flair of professional skill can do wonders in the life of an individual to progress towards elite professional refinement" (B. Sushila, 2005, p.10). Obviously it is understood that one can exhibit one's innate talents to the international professional community only through English language. However it has been observed the phenomenon that the students are being trained only in structures for the purpose of making them communicatively competent. In the case of English language students are very much pressurised to learn the structures of English language from L.K.G. to the P.G level. Consequent upon learning the structures of English language continuously, the students tend to think only about the structures while speaking and not the usages. It is because the students are pre-occupied with the memorised structures in isolation, they struggle to use the structures in the appropriate contexts with the required usages. Thus it becomes inevitable to teach the contexts and usages in the class room by creating a native – like environment.

Classroom activities that develop learners' ability to express themselves through speech would therefore seem to be an important component of a language to fulfil the occupational needs of professionals. By working through the activities students both fluent and less fluent would be able to improve their effectiveness in using English in real life situations especially in their chosen profession. "In real life, before making an important phone call or complaining about poor service, we often find ourselves preparing mentally what we are going to say. So why not allow our students to prepare what they want to say, too" (Harding, 1993, p.43). It is understood that the contextual teaching through learner – centred activities alone will pave way for developing the communication skills in English of the Engineering students. Hence the research has been focused on imparting repeated training through learner-centred activities so as to promote learner-autonomy and make them communicatively competent in English. On realizing the need of the hour, the topic 'Developing Communication Skills of the Engineering Students through Learner - Centred Activities' was chosen to provide opportunities for improving the employability of the technocrats.

Learner - Centred Teaching Strategies
Learner - centred teaching strategies and activities are those that focus instruction on the needs, preferences and interests of the learner. Teachers act as facilitators of the learning process, providing direction and feedback rather than just instruction. "They are interacting with materials, directing processes, making connections, identifying patterns and organising materials. All of the learning is linked to existing knowledge. The learner is not passive, they are not receiving pre-digested or

organised materials" (Cambourne, B. 1989, p.19). Learners are encouraged to make guesses and learn from their errors. By going beyond what they have been taught, they are encouraged to employ a variety of communication strategies. Teaching a learner the skills of language is comparable to teaching a child how to walk. At first the mother holds the child firmly by the hand, then progressively relaxes her grip until she feels that the child is ready for its first independent step. The relaxation of control is gradual, but inevitable. "The same thing should happen in language learning : the teacher should lead the student along – prompting directing, guiding and encouraging him. Progressively, the tasks for the learner should become more and more challenging, the help less and less direct, until it is withdrawn altogether" (Paliwal, 1998, p.58). Students are given multiple opportunities to discover knowledge and practice skills in an environment that appeals to them. In learner-centred teaching, students are no longer passive receivers of knowledge, instead they are "active participants in learning and co-constructors of knowledge" (Meece, 2003, p.111). The students actively take part in the teaching-learning process.

Teacher- Centred Class room
In the case of the teacher - centred classroom, it focused essentially on teaching the curriculum. The teacher determines what ought to be taught, when, how and the time frame. Strict discipline is expected because the students' interests are considered only after content requirements are established. Then the teacher "becomes more like the skillful conductor of an orchestra, drawing the music out of the performers" (Byrne, 2006, p.2). The greatest difficulty is created by his failure to understand what exactly he is expected to do, what it is possible for him to achieve and how he might go about it.

Background of the Study
The teaching of English in our schools needs to be improved. The average teacher of English fixes poor aims to teach the language. The only aim that the teacher focuses is to enable the students to get through the examination. For this the teacher makes them cram the matter rather than to master the skills of the language. The teacher is concerned with the pass percentage and not with the attainment of the students in terms of acquiring the language. "Indeed the predicament of the modern language teaching profession is that academic credit is earned and diplomas are awarded for the acquisitions of skills that in many cases are not so well developed as those of a ten-year-old child" (Savignon, 1983, p.53). It is reliably understood that the language has not been

adequately acquired by the adult learner though there are availability of necessary infrastructure facilities.

The use of language needs of the learners is to be carried out in a context which is appealing, motivating and encouraging the learners. Teaching should aim at enhancing the student's natural desire and strategies to learn. Knowledge needs to be distinguished from information, and teaching needs to be seen as a professional activity, not as coaching for memorization or as transmission of facts. (Uppal, 2005, p.7). The students must be put in an atmosphere where they would like to listen to whatever is said, is likely to understand it and feel like responding to it. Such an atmosphere is not likely to be found in a typical classroom where students are seldom encouraged to speak and the mundane atmosphere of the class dampens the students' spirit to explore, experiment and learn. "The innate enthusiasm of the teacher is indeed infectious. Most of the learners just catch it. But with the few who do not get influenced by this natural desire and love to learn the language which is not their mother tongue then the teacher has to go that extra mile" (Rayon, 1998, p.7). It is the duty of the teacher to make the learners take part in the learner-centred activities with enthusiasm.

The existing education system follows lecture method. In the lecture method, the teacher is the centre of the class. The teacher talks, while the students listen with varying degrees of attention. Thus only the teacher has the chance to practice spoken English for an extended period of time. But it is the students of course who need the practice. "Opinions are divided on how to go about making a change in the way English is taught, although many see a problem with the traditional overemphasis on grammar and vocabulary in English classes where students receive intensive but separate practice in reading, writing and listening, with no speaking involved. Even speaking classes do not provide chances for oral interaction, as most of the teachers talk on and on throughout the lesson without giving students any opportunity to speak, thus turning the class into a listening exercise." (Zhang, 2009, p.32). It would be more rewarding and enjoyable for all if the methodology is changed to a learner – centred one and the teacher plays the role of facilitator. "A learner – centred environment is designed to provide learners with more autonomy with the goal of enhancing the learning process through interaction to develop communicative competence. Therefore communicatively oriented pedagogic tasks involving authentic materials are the mainstay of classroom activity". (Segovia, 2009, p.155). According to Numan, the underlying philosophy of a learner – centred curriculum is one in which the goals, materials and implementation are driven by the subjective needs of the learners and their perceptions of the learning process.

History of ELT Scene in India
The history of the English language teaching in India can be traced back to the 31st of December, 1600 the day on which Queen Elizabeth I of England granted a charter to the Governor and Merchants of London trading with the East India, but English education was in fact introduced in India in the middle of the nineteenth century. The focus of ELT programmes and the role of English in our educational system have been shifting over

the years. Many commissions on education were there in the past ranging from the Calcutta University Commission to the Ramamurthy Commission, but, most of the reports have been losing its value now because of the absence of any kind of language planning, political will in implementation and lack of coordination among various agencies such as the Central Government, State Governments, Universities etc. Most of the Boards of Education and Universities in the country do not have clearly defined policies and the aims and objectives are decided by the out-moded examination patterns, resulting in the ideal of delinking of degrees from jobs.

In the absence of any serious language planning, our attitude to English has always been varying, complex, and often contradictory. There are those like the late Rajagopalachari have looked upon the English language as "Goddess Saraswati's gift to India". Henry Kissinger pointed out that it is possible to know Indians and can have easy relations with them because of their ability to converse in English.

There are others who regard English as the symbol of eternal slavery and degradation. Our society has given the right roles to English and Indian languages. English which is not the language of agriculture in India is the language of agricultural Universities because all modern knowledge on agriculture is available in English.
English, which is not the language of day to day business in the market place is the language of business management courses in the Universities in India because English is the language of international business. English which is not the language of daily transactions with the work-force in a work shop, is the medium of instruction in the Indian Institutes of Technology and other Engineering Colleges because English is the language of modern technology.

English is an international language and the world has become a global village. English has become necessary for mobility and social and economic success in the world today. English is the language of opportunities because it takes one outside one's own community, to places where more opportunities are available for professional and economic reasons.

The learners of English have realized that in order to bring modern knowledge into their own lives, they need English. English is the language of modernization and not westernization. English is retained as the language of instruction in agricultural universities, in management programmes, and engineering courses in Universities and Colleges. Apart from this, learners of English in India have also realized that English is necessary to talk about their identity, their languages, their literatures, their values and culture so that the world outside will know about them.

Macaulay, the President of the Council of Education in India wanted English to be the language of government, education and advancement. Lord William Bentinck, the then Governor – General accepted the recommendations acknowledging first of all that the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and Science among India. All funds were utilized for imparting to the native population a knowledge of English literature and Science through the medium of the English language.

English education was offered by the missionary institutions, which had been operating from the beginning of the nineteenth century. The orthodox Hindus of the times were worried by the government - run schools. The Scottish missionary Alexander Duff and other missionaries criticized the colleges run by the Government for imparting secular education in English.

The next important landmark in the spread of English education in colonial India was the report of Charles Wood, the President of the Board of Control. It emphasized the need for using both English and the Vernaculars for the diffusion of European knowledge. However while follow – up steps were taken with regard to higher education, the promotion of the general education of the people of India was still not taken up seriously, as Charles wood himself noted with regret. The setting up of the Universities resulting in selective higher education for training future administrators, imparted through the medium of English, was to lead to a social stratification in the long run. The continuing stratification is perhaps explained by the fact that even now, when only 3% of the national income is spent on education, primary education receives only 10% of this amount.

The Indian Education commission also called the Hunter Commission after the name of its President, Sir William Hunter made recommendations for the improvement of primary and secondary education. When Gopal Krishna Gokkale introduced in the Imperial Legislative Council a bill for compulsory primary education, it was rejected. The Indian Universities Commission paved the way for the passing of the Indian Universities Act which provided for among other things, the right to Universities to teach as well as to conduct examinations, thus enlarging the scope of the Universities.

The Calcutta University Commission recommended that intermediate classes should be separated from Universities and a curriculum spreading over three years should be prescribed for the degree of B.A. A separate High School and Intermediate Board should be established in every province and this Board should be free from the Control of the Department of Education. An Academic Council and Boards of Studies should be set up to settle academic questions pertaining to courses of study, examinations, degrees and research work. The mother tongue should be used as the medium of instruction in intermediate colleges and systematic efforts should be made to promote the serious study of the vernaculars in secondary schools, intermediate colleges and in the Universities.

Taking into consideration, the increasing number of unemployed graduates, the Abbot Wood Report recommended technical education as an integral part of education. Three other recommendations of the Abbot Wood Report are that infant classes should, as far as possible, be entrusted to trained teachers. The education of children in the primary school should be based more upon the natural interests and activities of young children and less upon book- learning. The curriculum of the rural middle school should be closely related to the children's environment and if English is taught to any children of middle school age, it should not be allowed to result in an excessive amount of linguistic load. The mother tongue should, as far as possible, be the medium of instruction in the high school stage, but English should be a compulsory

language for all pupils at this stage. The teaching of English should be made more realistic.

The Sargent Committee named after John Sargent, the then Educational Advisor to the Government of India submitted its report after the Second World War. It concerned itself mainly with the introduction of basic education, namely, a system of universal, compulsory, and free education for all boys and girls between the ages of six and fourteen. The Report reiterated the earlier committees' view that at this level the medium of instruction should be the mother tongue of the pupils. It also made the recommendation that English can be introduced as an optional subject in basic schools. Regarding university education, the Sargent Committee took the first step towards the present ten-plus-two-plus – three system in the country.

The Sargent Committee also recognized the pressing need for training teachers and besides recommending the starting of new training colleges also suggested that refresher courses be conducted for all types of teachers, but particularly for those in remote rural areas. On the whole, the Sargent Committee took a comprehensive, but realistic view in the development of education in India.

In 1857, only three Universities were established, but by 1900, practically all educational institutions in India used English as the medium of instruction. English was used more and more by the learned class. In reality English is still the language that examines students in the Universities, conducts foreign affairs and transacts business with the outside world. The number of learners waiting to learn English is increasing day by day.

The secondary Education Commission recommended that the number of examinations should be reduced and the element of subjectivity in the essay type tests should be minimized by introducing objective tests.

The three language formula was however reiterated by the Kothari Commission. The Commission did take note of the riots in Tamil Nadu, but still recommended that Hindi and English should both be link languages, even as it felt that English could not serve as a link for the majority. It said however that English should continue as a library language and a channel of international communication. Two major recommendations with regard to the study of English were that English should be the medium of instruction in all major Universities and special units should be set up for teaching it as literature.

The structural syllabus prepared by the London School was brought to India by the British Council. The first English Language Teaching Institute was established in Allahabad in 1954 with the collaboration of the British Council. The Central Institute of English was established in Hyderabad in 1958 with the collaboration of the British Council because of the initiative taken by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, with the objectives of training teachers, producing teaching materials and helping to improve the standards of teaching English in the country as a whole. The Institute has two Regional Centres at shillong and Lucknow to serve the needs of the Eastern and Northern regions.

The Regional Institute of English (RIE) was established in Bangalore with financial support from Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. One more RIE was set up in Chandigarh and a number of ELTIs were set up all over India, all with the collaboration of the British Council.

The National Policy on Education was formulated largely to implement the recommendations of the Kothari Commission. The policy noted that the regional languages were already in use as the media of instruction at the primary and secondary stages and proposed that urgent steps should be taken to adopt them as media of instruction even at the University stages. The Policy at the same time suggested that every effort should be made to promote the development of Hindi as a link language.

The Acharya Ramamurthi Commission reviewed the National Policy on Education and commended for making, perhaps for the first time, a frank analysis of the problems in the implementation of the three language formula. It observed that the three language formula had stood the test of time. The Ramamurthi Commission made the suggestion that the Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, and the Central Institute of Indian Languages, the three national level institutions charged respectively with the development of Hindi, English and modern Indian languages should come together and in consultation with the Central Board of Secondary Education and the National Council of Educational Research and Training and the State Governments spell out modalities of ensuring uniformity in the matter of acquisition of language competency by the students in the school system.

In 1917, the Calcutta University Commission took note of the rapid decline in academic standards in all subjects specially English and stressed the importance of the study of English as part of general education in India. The Commission considered English indispensable to the higher education in India at that time. According to the Commission, some of the causes of the deterioration in the quality of the teaching of English were lack of contact with teachers who spoke English as their mother tongue, unsuitability of the lecture method and a lack of systematic instruction in spoken English. Students are interested in learning English, but they are handicapped by certain factors such as bad teaching, lack of motivation and interest on the part of teachers and inadequate content materials. The Radhakrishnan Commission recommended the continuance of the study of English. "English should be studied in high schools and in the Universities in order that we might keep ourselves in touch with the living stream of ever growing knowledge" (Alam, 1998, p.2). The Kunzru Committee stressed the importance of the rise of special methods in English language teaching and the study of linguistics as the essential prerequisites for ensuring adequate proficiency in English at the University stage. It is true to say that English has become one of the major languages of the world. It is through English that we have shared the wisdom of the West and that the West has shared with us our intellectual and spiritual heritage.

According to the recommendation of the Official Language Commission, English should be taught as "a language of comprehension rather than as a literary language" (Alam, 1995, p.3) Randolph Quirk in his report on English Teaching in India also found the standards of English teaching deplorable and stressed the need for reforms

and experiment. Kothari Commission emphasized the role of English as a literary language. There are some people who oppose the compulsory study of English. They say that English is a difficult language and a majority of students fail in different examinations only because of their failure in English. The solution to this problem lies not in ending English but in creating greater motivation on the part of students to learn it and in making the teachers follow the modern teaching techniques and strategies.

The report of the Study Group-I also makes a special mention of the deteriorating standards of English. It is significant that the Group has drawn a distinction between a lecturer in the English language and a lecturer in English

Literature and wants the students to have the choice to specialize either in literature or in language and has also suggested that Universities should have two different Departments. Two important recommendations were that English should be the medium of instruction in all Universities and special units should be set up for teaching English as a skill subject, not so much as literature.

Talking of the courses, those in use before independence have been labelled traditional. The medium of instruction then was English and the syllabuses were literature oriented. The courses in use after independence were by and large, structural or formal. Now English is a second language and there is an apparent inclination towards language in these courses as against literature as in traditional ones. There is a greater concern now for the learners' needs. It is a case of shift of emphasis from the subject to the learner.

Place of English Before Independence
During the British rule over India, English enjoyed the top-most position. It was the first language in the whole country. It was the lingua franca of the literate. It was considered to be the queen of the languages. In every walk of life, it was the vehicle of thought and activity. The importance given to it was the envy of every one and in no way it created any jealousy. It was the pride of all. English used to be the medium of instruction at school and college levels. In some of the elementary schools also, English was used as a medium of instruction. Everybody loved to study different subjects through this language. The Study of English was meant for all the children who joined the school. Our elders speak English very nicely. The main reason behind is that they were taught mostly by the English men. All subjects whether

English, History or Geography were generally taught by the English men. Thus the students were under the impact of the English men for a good deal of time. They listened to spoken English of the native speakers. That is why our elderly persons whose schooling careers belong to that era, can speak 'A Class English'. The study of English was introduced on the day a child entered the school. Every body was proud of it because the study of this language was considered a passport for employment. Thus it is found out that English was of great importance before the freedom of our country. But with the

passage of time, there have come about a number of changes in the position of English in our country.

Position After Independence

In 1947, India became free and the English people left India for good. The whole administration, the language policy etc. came into the hands of Indian authorities. The very question regarding the place of English in India became controversial. Some leaders argued that English should be uprooted from the country whereas some others favoured the retention of English. Mahatma Gandhi said, "It is my considered opinion that English education, in the manner it has been given, has emasculated the English educated Indians. It has put a severe strain upon the Indian students and made us imitators." He further said, "all the superstitions that India has, none is so great as that, a knowledge of the English language is necessary for imbibing ideas of liberty and developing accuracy of thought." But other persons like C.Rajagopalacharya say that English should be retained in the country. Their considered opinion was - "We in our anger and the hatred against the British people should not throw away the baby (English) with the bath water (English people)." Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, soon after taking over the education portfolio in the interim

Government, said at a press conference: "So far as general studies are concerned it was never my intention to suggest that there should be any falling in the standard of English." In the words of Pt. Nehru. "One hundred and fifty years of intimate contact has made English an integral part of our educational system and this cannot be changed without injury to the cause of education in India. In addition English has today become one of the major languages of the world and Indians can neglect its study only at the risk of loss to themselves. I am convinced that in the future as well, the standard of teaching English should be maintained at as high a level as possible." In fact, for the first two or three years of independence, so much was said but nothing concrete could be decided.

In 1950, when constitution of India was framed, it was unanimously decided to continue English as the official language of the country for fifteen years. During this period all efforts were made to develop Hindi-the national language of the country. The Indian authorities, thus, hoped to replace English by Hindi in due course of time. But there was great opposition by the people living in southern part of the country. The result was that in 1963, the Parliament passed a bill according to which English was declared to be the Associate Official Language of India for an indefinite period. In 1968, the National Policy on Education adopted by the Govt. of India stressed that, "Special emphasis needs to be laid on the study of English and other international language. World knowledge is growing at a tremendous pace, especially in science and technology. India must not only keep up this growth, but also make her own significant contribution to it. For this purpose, study of English deserves to be specially strengthened." With the passage of time, some of the states adopted their regional language as the official language. But they could not make Hindi as the link language between the different states. The reason is that Hindi is not understood in the different states of free India. So

in order to continue links between various states of India, English continues to be the unifying factor.

Communicative Competence

It was only when Dell Hymes introduced the concept of communicative competence in the USA and British applied linguists such as D.A. Wilkins, Christopher Candlin, Henry Widdowson, Christopher Brumfit, Keith Johnson and others, that a real shift took place in the approach, methods and techniques in language pedagogy. The goal of language instruction shifted to building up learner's communicative competence.

Communicative competence is a concept introduced by Dell Hymes and discussed and re-defined by many authors. Knowing English means knowing how to communicate in English. This involves the productive skills, namely speaking and writing and the receptive skills namely listening and reading. Knowing English involves not only producing language correctly, but also using language for particular purposes. When learners are able to perform the communicative functions that they need, they achieve communicative competence in the language. One should have command of the language inorder to be fluent in English.

Linguistic Competence

The linguistic aspects of communicative competence are those that have to do with achieving an internalized functional knowledge of the elements and structures of language.

Phonological Competence

Phonological competence is the ability to recognize and produce the distinctive meaningful sounds of a language including consonants, vowels, tone, intonation, rhythm, stress patterns and any other suprasegmental features that carry meaning.

Cultural Competence

Cultural competence is the ability to understand behaviour from the standpoint of the members of culture and to behave in a way that would be understood by the members of the culture in the intended way. Cultural competence therefore involves understanding of all aspects of a culture, but particularly the social beliefs of the people and the way things are assumed to be done.

Discourse Competence

Discourse competence is used to refer to two related but distinct abilities. Textual discourse competence refers to the ability to understand and construct monologues or written texts of different genres such as narrative, procedural texts, expository texts, persuasive texts, descriptions and others. These discourse genres have different characteristics, but in each genre, there are some elements that make the text coherent and other elements which are used to make important points distinctive or prominent.

Discourse competence is concerned not with the interpretation of isolated sentences, but with the connection of series of sentences or utterances to form a meaningful whole.

Learning a language involves learning how to relate these different types of discourse in such a way that learners or readers can understand what is going on and see what is important. Likewise it involves being able to relate information in a way that is coherent to the readers and hearers.

Functional Competence

Functional competence refers to the ability to accomplish communication purposes in a language. There are different kinds of purposes for which people commonly use language.

Grammatical Competence

Grammatical competence is the ability to recognize and produce the distinctive grammatical structures of a language and to use them effectively in communication.

Interactional Competence

Interactional competence means knowing how to initiate and manage conversations and negotiate meaning with other people. It also includes knowing what sorts of body language, eye contact and proximity to other people are appropriate and acting accordingly.

Lexical Competence

Lexical competence is the ability to recognize and use words in a language in the way that speakers of the language use them. Lexical competence includes understanding the different relationships among families of words and the common collocation of words.

Socio-linguistic Competence

Socio-linguistic competence is the ability to interpret the social meaning of the choice of linguistic varieties and to use language with the appropriate social meaning for the communicative situation. "Sociolinguistic competence requires an understanding of the social context in which the language is used." (Savignon, 1983, p.37). Native speakers know the socio-cultural rules of appropriateness and use them to
communicate successfully in different situations. One of the goals of intercultural analysis is to make exploit the rules of a culture and literally help non-native to understand and adapt more easily to patterns with which they are unfamiliar.

Socio - Cultural Competence

Socio-cultural competence is essential because language and culture are closely tied to one another and have a profound influence on both verbal and non-verbal communication. For example the significance of the length of a pause or a change in tone depends on and can vary by culture. Other components of communication such as the degree of formality in one's speech or one's body language also hold different meanings

depending on the culture with which a person identifies himself. A variety of daily and intellectual contexts must often be taken into consideration in order to understand the meaning of something that is said. Such contexts can differ greatly from one culture to another, which often makes it difficult for new comers to effectively communicate with other members of their new culture. Developing an understanding of general cultural contexts and their implications will enable someone who was not raised in a particular culture to fully comprehend speech or text in that culture's language and to use the language more easily. That is the basic idea behind socio-cultural competence.

Through the influence of communication language teaching, it has become widely accepted that communicative competence should be the goal of language education and central to good class room practice. If the goals of language teaching are to enable the learner to communicate with both native and non-native speakers in English, then it is important that norms of language behaviours of different cultures should be taught in the English language classroom. This means that the learners must not only be linguistically competent, but also communicatively competent to accomplish their purposes.

Strategic Competence
According to Richards and Rodgers, strategic competence is one which refers to the coping strategies that communicators employ to imitate, terminate, maintain, repair and redirect communication. There is no such person as an ideal speaker or hearer of a language, one who knows the language perfectly and uses it appropriately in all social interactions. The strategies that one uses to compensate for imperfect knowledge of rules or limiting factors in their application such as fatigue, distraction and inattention may be characterized as strategic competence.

The strategies that one uses to sustain communication include paraphrase, Circumlocution, repetition, hesitation, avoidance and guessing as well as shifts in register and style. "The ability to communicate within restrictions includes an ability to adapt one's communicative strategies to a variety of changing and often unexpected interpersonal conditions" (Savignon, 1983, p.43). Rephrasing, repetition, emphasis, seeking clarification, circumlocution, avoidance and message modification are among the strategies that people use to meet the demands of ongoing communication.

Objective of the Study
The objective of the study is to discuss and analyze the problems faced by the students while conversing in English and to suggest the ways and means in which the communicative skills of the students can be developed by the teacher through learner - centred activities. It aims to create a conducive atmosphere in the classroom and a cohesive learner group with appropriate group norms. "Natural language use will come only when barriers are broken down - pride in status and superior knowledge on the one hand and on the other, defensive attempts to please, to succeed by giving what the authority figure wants, and to hide one's weaknesses and one's real feelings" (Rivers,

1983, p.112). Enhancing the learners' competency, increasing the learners' expectancy of success and increasing the learners' goal-orientedness are the other objectives of this study. It also emphasizes the need for protecting learners' self-esteem by increasing their self-confidence, promoting cooperation among the learners, creating learner autonomy and for providing motivational feedback to the learners. "Both teachers and students benefit from learner autonomy. If students are more independent, then teachers can dedicate more class time to working on general weaknesses or invaluable oral work. It helps with mixed ability classes too. The more autonomous learners are, the more they learn, the easier they are to teach." (Harding, 1993, p.43)

Further it attempts to make the second language learners acquire the skill of communication naturally, gradually, automatically and unknowingly through learner-centred activities which would enable them to shine in their career.

Mastering communicative competence is the foremost objective of the researcher. The ability to use the linguistic system effectively and appropriately in academic, occupational, social and recreational purposes to come up in the ladder of success are the other objectives of the researcher.

Hypothesis
- Communication skills in English can be developed only when the learning environment is conducive.
- Learner - friendly environment can create a congenial atmosphere to learn the language unconsciously.
- Learner - centred activities through the specifically designed course can make the learner competent in English language.
- Communication skills in English can unconsciously be improved through learner - Centred activities given in the Prototype course.
- Learner - Centred activities can pave way for learner - autonomy and subsequently can lead to self-learning to gain communicative competence in English.

Methodology
The researcher administered the learner-centred activities to a select group of students. They were assessed in the use of language, choice of words, grammar, selection of words, coherence in content, introducing an idea, developing an idea, concluding an idea, emphasizing a point, pronunciation etc. A pre-test analysis was done and their performance was categorized as good, fair and poor. Entry behaviour and exit behaviour were tested and rectified through role play, dramatization and learner- mediated activities.

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