



Necessity Of Teaching Communication Skills In English At The Higher Secondary Level

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Introduction

Day by day, English language is gaining prominence over other regional languages. This increasing popularity of English has caused the extinction of some regional languages in the world. Today English language is gradually occupying the position of royal language among all other popular languages in the world, especially Chinese, Greek and Latin. The growing importance of English in every field of human activities demands the need to study this popular language and to handle it fairly in everyday communication. Obviously, English remains a 'Lingua-Franca' in India. Hence it remains essential to communicate in English language for various purposes including trade, commerce, utilizing library and day-today transaction.

The word 'communication' is derived from the Latin term 'communicare' or 'communico' both of which mean 'to share'. Communication is a social phenomenon in which there is not merely transmission of meaning from one person to another but also it enables one to acquire, exchange, store, retrieve and process information for different contexts. The purpose of language learning is communication. Hubbard, etal, quoted Widdowson's words in A Training Course for TEFL about language use as; "... when we acquire a language, we not only learn how to compose and comprehend correct sentences as isolated linguistic units of random occurrence; we also learn how to use sentences appropriately to achieve communicative purpose"(160). Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines the term 'communicative' as "able to talk easily to other people or relating the ability to communicate, especially in a foreign language".

Today the phrase 'good communication skill in English' has become key word for success in every spheres of life. Communicative English involves all four language skills such as Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing (LSRW). This research is an attempt to study the relevance of introducing communicative English at the Higher Secondary level to the schools of Tirunelveli District.

Significance of the title

Higher secondary level is the level at which one needs to master in his subject area as well as the other subjects connected with his/her field of specialization. Sharma, Vandana observed in her article 'The Art of Communication' as; "Traditional assumption about academic knowledge as an end in itself has undergone a tremendous change in the present global scenario"(40). Growing importance of English urges our present generation to equip themselves with this global language.

Many professionals in multilingual and multicultural, country like India have to face with many problems when they compete with national and international firms. In India, most of the states want to preserve their regional language and they give undue importance to teaching and learning a foreign language, especially, English in schools and colleges. Though English has got the position of official language and medium of higher education in India, still our educational system allows students to write their exams in their first language, even at the Higher Secondary level. Students with poor English background prefer to write in their mother tongue, because it will help them to score high marks in their examinations.

For the protection of first language, some state governments are supporting mother tongue as the medium of instruction. In order to support this, they provide incentives also. For e.g.; Tamil Nadu Government distributes free books and concession in fee for each Tamil medium students in any discipline. National Curricular Framework- 2005 Committee has observed that "A student may be allowed to pass without English if an alternative route for English certification and therefore instruction can be provided outside the regular school curriculum"(Muthukumaran 56). All these conditions diminished the importance of learning English language.

In an article about a workshop organized by Educational Initiatives in Bangalore noted the importance of learning and acquiring language skills. Sudhindra noted an important suggestion evolved at the end of this workshop as; "Language is definitely a key to education, but research has shown that language skills also predict success later in life. In this information age, we want all children to be able to read, understand and communicate well" (5). Today, a person's professional career and his progress in it are largely related to his communicative skill in English. Effective communication skills are needed for our rapid changing knowledgeable society.

With the influence of globalization, many multi-national companies are conducting recruitments in developing countries. They are looking for spirited, talented graduates with excellent communication skills, especially in English. 'Good communication skill' or 'flair command over English' is the well-known slogan in our job market. When looking at the condition of 'job fairs', our students are pulling behind or feared of their lack of command over the English language. It is noted that not only engineering graduates, but also bright students from arts and science colleges are selected by multinational companies. Srinivasan and Priscilla observed this condition in their article 'The Future of Arts and Science Education' as; "the mandatory study of

languages has already given arts and science graduates a head-start in the communicative skills needed in today's world" (1).

The term 'communication skills' involves the basic, traditional skills like: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. These skills involve both productive and receptive skills. Most of our students in schools and colleges are good at their reading and writing skills which are called 'paper skills'. However, they fail in their aural-oral skills, such as Listening and Speaking. This is because of the defective methods of teaching in our educational system. In order to overcome this communicative deficiency of our students, it is necessary to introduce communicative English course with much emphasis on aural-oral skills rather than paper skills.

Area of the study

The researcher has selected the higher secondary schools of Tirunelveli District for conducting present study. These schools offer Paper I and Paper II English at the Higher Secondary First and Second year of their study. They follow only the state Board syllabus. Many students are coming to schools from very rural background. The economic background of the students is also very poor when it is compared with that of their urban counterparts.

History of English Language Teaching in India

English in India belongs to no region or group. Dasgupta Prabal called it as 'auntie tongue' among hundreds of mother tongue (Kudchedkar 70). Though English is an alien language for Indians, it has greatly helped for our freedom struggle, development and growth of our country's economy, mutual understanding between states and countries, development of science and technology, medicine, education, industries, literature, trade and commerce, etc. Now around 350 million Indians use English daily in their life. It is India's national and international language of trade, business, commerce, diplomacy, education, fashion, government, science and technology, etc. Now English is "India's virtual highway to the IT and other market" (Choudhury,Shreesh).

English in Colonial India

Thomas Stephenson, the first English man had arrived in India in 1580. He wrote about the wealth of India, which was monopolized by Portuguese. In 1601, London merchants formed the East India Company under the concern of Queen Elizabeth. In 1757, East India Company got a charter from Mughals for administration and revenue collection in Bengal, Bihar and Oudh. In 1857, Queen Victoria declared herself as the empress of India. Thus English speaking administrators, army officers, educators and missionaries spread English throughout India.

British government made many acts and policies for the exploitation of Indians under the name of helping them. The Charter Act of 1813 provided an annual sum of one lakh rupee for the revival and improvement of literature and encouragement of the

learned natives of India for the introduction and promotion of knowledge of the science among the inhabitants of British territories in India”(Krishnaswamy and Sriraman 44-45). English Education Act of 1835, put forth by Macaulay changed the whole situation. “English became the language of government, Education and advancement, a symbol of imperial rule and of self improvement” (Krishnaswamy and Sriraman 45). The then Governor General, William Bentick accepted Macaulay Minutes and acknowledged that, “the great object of the British government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among India and all the funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English Education alone” (Krishnaswamy and Sriraman 45). All the funds were utilized for imparting to the native population knowledge of English literature and science through the medium of English. Through this, “Macaulay wanted to create a class of people, Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect” (Krishnaswamy and Sriraman 46).

Woods Despatch in 1854 was an important land mark in spreading of English education in colonial India. It emphasized the need to use both English and vernaculars for the diffusion of European knowledge. It recommended for the establishment of universities at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1857.

In 1902, Indian University Commission was appointed to study the condition and improvements needed for Indian education. It has passed Indian University Act of 1904, which decided the academic and infrastructural activities of universities. It bifurcated university, high school and primary education. By 1900, most of the educational institutions in India used English as the medium of instruction.

Calcutta University Commission of 1919 recommended the bifurcation of intermediate class from universities and to establish a separate board for high schools and intermediate in every province. It also recommended that mother tongue should be used as a medium of instruction in intermediate colleges. Abbot – Wood Report (1936-7) emphasized that mother tongue should be the medium of instruction up to high school but English should be taught as a compulsory language at the high school level. Sergeant Committee of 1944 considered mainly of primary education and reiterated earlier committee’s views on language instruction. It recommended that, English should not be introduced as an optional subject in basic schools.

Various policies adopted by British government for the promotion of their diplomacy and education helped greatly for the spread of English education and this created a class of Indians with strong groundings in English.

English in Free India

After independence, the question of language became emotional. Government of India accepted Hindi as the official language but oppositions from non-Hindi speaking states forced them to accept English as the Associate Official Language of India. The first

education commission appointed by free India under the chairmanship of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (1948) recommended that “English should be studied in high schools and universities in order that we may keep in touch with the living stream of ever growing knowledge” (Krishnaswamy and Sriraman 59).

Language planning in free India has started only after 1960s. ‘Anti-Hindi’ riots in South India and ‘Angrezi-Hatao’ campaign in North India urged the government to implement three language formula in schools. This means that,

One should be taught at school

- a. the regional language or the mother tongue when different from regional language
- b. Hindi or any Indian language in Hindi speaking areas.
- c. English or any other European language (Krishnaswamy and Sriraman 62).

Certainly the government cannot implement this uniformly because of the oppositions from some states. In 1966, Kothari Commission recommended that Hindi and English should continue as a Link Language and English should be the medium of instruction in all major universities. It also made a point that language instruction should focus on skills rather than literature.

First English language Teaching Institute in India was established at Allahabad in 1954 with collaboration of the British Council and a Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages was established at Hyderabad in 1958. These institutions are established for teacher training, syllabus revision and revision of teaching methods and materials for improving the standard of English. Ramamurthy Commission suggested that three national level institutions such as Kendriya Hindi Sansthan (KHS), the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) and Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL) should be given the responsibility of the development of Hindi, English and other Indian languages with the consultation of Central Board of Secondary Education and National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). It also made some specific recommendations about the steps to be taken to effect the smooth change from English to other regional languages. That involves “production of University level books in Indian languages and options to be given to students for taken examination at all levels in the regional language media.” (Krishnaswamy and Sriraman 68).

In 1987, Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) was formed by University Grants Commission. This CDC submitted their report in 1989. It recommended a more learner centered and enquiry oriented teaching methods in which, “the learner should engage himself in creative and divergent thinking, problem solving, self learning and to explore new avenues of communication, productive work as well as innovations through such methods as simulation, games, project work and the like” (Krishnaswamy and Sriraman 69) should be included in the curriculum.

CDC'S report on "A Note on New Curriculum" says that,

the new undergraduate curriculum comprises a general English course and a special English course. To cater to the heterogeneous tertiary level student population (the range of linguistic competence is extremely varied, since students from both English medium and regional medium schools come together at this level) the General English course is conceived of as comprising of different units and modules suited to the different levels of learners. The patterning of the course is such that student depending on their linguistic competence at the time of admission, would not only begin their general English programme at different levels, but also reach different levels at the time of graduation. (Krishnaswamy and Sriraman 70)

The National Knowledge Commission appointed by government of India in 2006 recommended that English should be introduced from class I along with the first language with greater emphasis on usage of language rather than rules and grammar. It views that, people recognize that the English language is the critical determinant of access to and opportunities for a better life. Available information suggests that middle income or lower income household spend a large proportion of their modest income on sending their children to relatively expensive English medium schools. But there are a very large number of people who simply do not have the resource for this purpose. The outcome is exclusion. ...There is an irony in this situation. English has been a part of our education system for more than a century, yet English is beyond the reach of most of our young people, which makes for highly unequal access. Indeed, even now, no more than one percentage of our people uses it as a second language, let alone first language. (Pitroda and Singh)

They requested the Prime Minister to formulate a National Development Council for implementing teaching of English language from first standard onwards, in addition to regional language. They felt that this step will ensure that at the end of twelve years of schooling, every student will be proficient in at least two languages.

Today it is difficult to think of success in any career without adequate proficiency in English language communication skills. Though our government has permitted the use of Indian languages in many national recruitment and admission tests, English is accepted as the common medium of examination which has a basic qualification of Higher Secondary. It is felt that good professional education and growth in careers like engineering, medicine, accountancy, business, journalism, law, mass media, politics, IT, etc. may not be possible without good English. In the words of Jayakumar, "gone are the days of Angrezi Hatao' and the new slogan is 'Angrezi Avo' " (34). In his view it would be right if we say that " the teaching and learning of English has a state in shaping the future of India and the English teachers of India have a major role to play in it" (34).

Though English Language Teaching had a long background of nearly four centuries, it still became a nightmare for educationally backward learners, especially in villages and rural areas. Now English has become "...an international commodity like oil and microchip and more than a quarter of the world's people use English; the world has become a global village. English has become necessary for the mobility of social and economic success in the world today" (Krishnaswamy and Sriraman 25). This condition paved the way for the bubbling of spoken English institutions and courses almost every part of our country. Now it is flourishing businesses which provide regular and correspondence course with cassettes, CDs and books. Yet it is not sure that whether they achieve their goals fully or partially.

Some reasons for the pathetic condition of English in India lies in our defective methods of teaching, lack of specific aims in teaching English, importance given to literature than language usage in the curriculum, inadequate materials and lack of trained instructor. This made our educators think over and took necessary steps to reform our educational policies.

Theoretical Background of Communicative English

When we acquire a language, we do not only learn how to compose and comprehend correct sentences as isolated linguistic units of random occurrence; we also learn how to use sentences appropriately to achieve a communicative purpose. (Hubbard, etal. 160)

There are a number of means of communication which help for the effective transaction of meaning. Human beings use language as a tool of communication for centuries because it enabled them to regulate their social behaviour .Communication is the ultimate aim of any language and speech is the prototypal form of communication.

Frequent studies conducted by linguists and theorists helped for the evolution of many approaches in language teaching and learning. An approach refers to theories about the nature of language which serve as a source of practice and principles in language teaching. There are different language approaches which came under three theoretical views, such as structural view, functional view and interactional view. Structural view focuses on language structure and structurally related elements for the coding of meaning. Main target of language learning is the mastery of language elements such as phonological units, grammatical operations and lexical items. Functional view treats language as a vehicle for the expression of functional meaning. It focuses on the semantic and communicative dimension than grammatical characteristics. Communicative movement in language evolved from this view. Interactional view considers language as a vehicle and a tool for the creation and maintenance of social relations.

Communicative approach evolved from the British language teaching tradition of late 1960s. It has faced severe criticism from linguists. But some central tenets of this

approach were accepted. Now communicative principles in language teaching became the central goal of language teachers. International professional co-operation in business and trade increased the popularity of communicative language teaching.

Notional Syllabuses (1972) published by British linguist D.A Wilkins created a great impact on the different approaches in language teaching and learning. He proposed functional and notional syllabus based on communicative criteria. Many theorists conducted research in this field by applying socio – linguistic principles. The concept of ‘communicative competence’ put forth by Del Hymes, a socio linguist, was another notable development in this area. Canale further studied about this aspect and brings out four components of communication. They are grammatical, socio linguistic, discourse and strategic competence.

McDonald and Christopher proposed some implications Communicative Approach for teaching as,

1. Communicative implies ‘semantic’, a concern with the meaning potential of language.
2. There is a complex relationship between language form and language function.
3. Form and function operate as part of wider network of factors.
4. Appropriacy of language use has to be considered alongside accuracy. This has implications for attitudes of errors.
5. ‘Communicative’ is relevant to all four language skills.
6. The concept of communication takes us beyond the level of the sentence.
7. ‘Communicative’ can refer both to the properties of language and to ‘behaviour’. (21)

Communicative language learning emphasizes interactive language learning rather than mere memorization of rules of grammar, semantics, phonology or lexical items. It gives much prominence to student. He has central role in the learning process. The primary goal of teaching is to develop the ability of communication. Here language learning is contextualized and utmost importance is given to meaning. This approach is generally viewed as an active learning approach and active learning strategy.

Communicative language teaching provides much exposure to practice the target language. Here communicative development is predicated and it has slow but steady progress. Principal goal of communicative language training is to develop ‘communicative competence’. This is a broad term which includes grammatical (syntactical) competence, semantic (lexical items) competence, phonological competence, strategic competence (social appropriateness) and fluency.

Relevance of the study

National Knowledge Commission of 2006 stressed the significance of language as a means of communication, medium of instruction as well as a determinant as access. From their study, they came to the conclusion that,

an understanding of and a command over English language is perhaps the most important determinant of access to higher education, employment possibilities and social opportunities. School leavers who are not adequately trained in English as a language are always at a handicap in the world of higher education. More often than not, teaching is in English. Even if it is not, in most subjects, books and journals are available only in English. And those who do not know English well enough, find it exceedingly difficult to compete for a place in our premier educational institutions. This disadvantage is accentuated further in the world of work not only in the professional occupations, but also in white collar occupations. (Pitroda and Singh)

English education has been a part of our educational system for more than a century. Yet it is beyond the reach of most of our youngsters. Free and compulsory education up to high school increased the literacy rate in our country. Educated youngsters are reluctant to do their traditional jobs and aim at white collar jobs. Thus there is a great competition among our youngsters in the job market. They are well versed in their subjects but are unable to express their knowledge in English.

Though we have a long tradition of English language teaching, we fail impart it successfully. Some reasons for failures are,

1. Aversion towards English rulers.
2. Lack of specific objectives and aims
3. Implementation of defective methods of teaching.
4. Defective curriculum
5. Different policies taken by British government
6. Policies of state government
7. Inadequate material
8. Faulty system of examination
9. Lack of clear cut policy
10. Crowded classrooms and shortage of time
11. Socio political problems
12. Lack of motivation among learners
13. Lack of communicative need

It is high time to change our attitude towards English language learning and teaching. As it remains an important link language between states and countries we need to use English in our day to day life. A person who can handle English at ease can manage anywhere in the world.

Methodology of Research

Interviews, observation and interaction with the learners and teachers are the methods used for entering the entry behavior of the current situation for the present study. For this the researcher has met the learners once in a week continuously for six months.

Methodological Tools

Methodological Tools used for this study are Situational Activities, Role Play, Brain-Storming Sessions, Group Discussion, Simulation, Public Speaking, Interviews, Problem Solving, Dialogue Writing, Personality Development, etc.

The existing scenario demands brighter communication skills in English to reach out the international customers as well as people from various walks of life. With an aim of developing the communication skills in English, the researcher has decided to use learner-centered activities to train the Higher Secondary School students of Tirunelveli District. The highest degree of attaining communicative competence in English can be achieved through the learner-centered activities that are to be practiced in the class room. It has no doubt that the learners will definitely being interested in participating the activities as it gives no pain to the learners. The unique approach of developing communicative English at higher secondary level can never go without fetching the favorable result.

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