

# PROBLEMATICS OF TEACHING & LEARNING COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN PROFESSIONAL COLLEGES

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The present critique is an attempt to define, evaluate and discuss the problems of teaching as well learning the subject communication skills in various professional colleges. Various reasons, such as educational, mental, technical and economical are discussed and analyzed. An evaluation of the problems is done from both the teacher's as well as the learner's point of views. Some of the root causes, both theoretical and practical, have been discussed. Some recommendations which can be practically beneficial are also given at the end.*

**Keywords - Communication Skills, Lingua Franca, Pedagogy, Linguistics, Notional Syllabus**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The title, basically, needs no introduction. As it is clear from the title that this paper is related to the problems or obstacles that occur in teaching as well as learning communication skills in professional colleges. Before going into the thick of the things, it is pertinent to clearly explain what the terms 'communication' and 'skill' mean. Communication, as defined by so many authors, is the exchange of information, ideas, facts, feelings, opinions and more importantly attitude between two or more than two persons. It is not only the transfer of information through the most flexible means of communication, i.e. Language (spoken and written), but also through other means of communication such as style, tone, mood and body language. Since communication is 7% verbal, 38% vocal and 55% visual [1], it is obvious that how we say is more important than what we say. Skill is the ability of performing something, which comes from the knowledge of a person. So it is important to learn communication and then one can acquire the skills of communication. So communication is something that we do. And it is necessary to teach both what to do and how to do. If we abbreviate the term 'Communication skills', we get CS which can also be interpreted as 'Common Sense', 'Convincing Speaker' or 'Confident Speaker'. So teaching of communication skills means teaching to communicate in a convincing & confident manner using the common sense. In the context of professional colleges 'communication skills' mean the art of conversation using the foreign language, which is obviously English, since it is rendered the status of 'Lingua Franca'. So the name of subject is also changed to 'Communicative English' recently.

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It has been estimated that around 60% of today's world population is multilingual. So it is fair to say that learning and teaching a foreign language is an important practical pedagogic concern. English has acquired a lot of pedagogic importance in India, because teaching English as a foreign language is now regarded as a norm. In all the professional institutes, except those belonging to Ayurveda, Communicative English is learnt in its various forms and manifestations. For that matter, teaching communicative English is of paramount significance in Indian education system, with more concern to professional degrees such as Medical, Engineering, Management, etc. A technocrat or a manager, so to say of all the professionals, is incomplete until and unless he has good command over and mastery in English.

Teaching Communication Skills raises several questions: Does a professional student's language influence his success or failure in life? What is the impact of the language of the teacher on the student? What methods and techniques are employed by teachers? Does the milieu for learning communication skills is provided? Most importantly what are the students taught: using English to learn it or learning English to use it? What problems hinder the teaching and learning of communication skills?

## III. ANALYSIS

The very first question mentioned above has an obvious answer, i.e. YES. If a professional student has good communication skills, he or she can attain success in his/her career. Practically we see a lot of students not placed in the industries just because they fail in Group Discussion or Soft Skills/HR Interview. Though they are strong in the technical aspect and have a good knowledge of hard skills, yet they are not able to speak confidently and convincingly.

Secondly, it is not exaggeration to say that the language of the teacher has a lot of impact on the student. If the teacher is a good communicator, the students will try to imitate him and will try to speak like him after being influenced by him. Most of the students entering professional colleges after their senior secondary are not good in communication skills because they are taught English by those teachers who are not up to the mark. They are not given practice in communication; rather they are given drills in grammar only.

Thirdly, the teachers employ those methods and techniques which they feel comfortable in. They teach subjectively not catering to the needs of the students. They forget the basic rule, i.e. "we should not teach what we know, rather what the students want." Till the time, in many rural institutes, grammar translation method is employed. Even if the direct or audio-lingual methods are employed, the proper situations or communication environment is not provided them to explore themselves. Varieties of techniques, methods and designs are juxtaposed in the classroom teaching.

The above issue automatically raises the next point, i.e. the milieu for learning communication skills is provided or not. The students are not exposed to the communication milieu in most of the rural colleges. They feel hesitant to communicate and the teacher feels reluctant in using his communication power in order not to confuse the students. This affects the communication environment in both the ways.

The most important issue raised above is very critical and crucial. The students are taught to use English to learn it, not to learn English to use it. In the first case the students are given practice in English grammar rules and drills in some practice exercises. In this case, they are able to learn correct usage of language but not produce

language creatively. In the second case, the students are given exposure in language and then learn the rules involved in the language produced or received. This helps them being creative. But many teaching methodologies followed in classrooms lack the second aspect. Teacher must teach the language not about it.

Lastly, if we dive deep into the problem we find the following:

- The basic problem is Mental Block. The students, specifically those belonging to rural areas, are prejudiced regarding learning English, i.e. they have a clear cut ideology that they can't learn. This lowers their confidence level to such an extent that they hesitate to communicate effectively even in their regional languages. It seems problematic to them to use English language in formal communicational contexts such as meetings, group discussions, presentations, etc.
- The next problem is that of method of developing vocabulary. Students try to go for meaning of the words rather than going for the concept and learning to use the words in the context. This makes them cram the vocabulary which is soon forgotten. At the time of communicating they fall short of words.
- Phonetic problems also baffle the learners. They find difficult to learn the pronunciation, tones and stress features of English Language. Even if they are taught by language labs, they are confused with the dialogues of the native speakers which they hear in the lab sessions.
- Most of the students belong to weak rural background and are taught by many public schools which lack in basic facilities. Moreover, the survival of the rural crowd depends upon agriculture and the natural weather conditions. Mostly it is difficult for them to arrange for reputed and standard private schools. If weather is against them, it becomes difficult for them to send their children to schools.
- Lack of awareness among the students is also a major contributing factor. Many learners are not conscious of the importance of learning English as communication language. They hardly think about their future and career choices.
- Moreover, many students have the attitude to follow the principle of late learning and they develop the psychology to learn English later on in their career. Many of the professional courses introduce communication skills subject in the first year. At that time students find this subject not interesting and not required for them. Later on when they realise the value of this subject, they hardly get time to devote to this area.
- Wrong methods are employed by most of the teachers. As it is said linguistics should be behind every classroom, the teachers without the adequate knowledge of language structures are not able to do justice with their subject teaching.
- Time allotted to Communication Skills subject is also insufficient. Most of the time one semester is given to this subject. But if the details of subject and ways of communication are to be taught ample time is needed.
- Many of the institutes, especially government, lack in language lab facilities. Modern language learning software help teach better. It lays emphasis on language use. Instead of any syllabus students are surrounded with the language only.
- Linguistic variations cause problems for the teachers. Students of different backgrounds with various levels of language varieties are a challenge for the teachers, which most of the average teachers find complex to handle.

- Curriculum design of most the professional courses is also a problem. The curriculum of the most of institutes is focused on teaching about English language not on teaching the language to communicate. Teaching language is syllabus based not communication based. In fact every teacher is a communication teacher if considered.
- Last but not the least many teachers are themselves poorly motivated, because in many institutes they are not even paid a handsome salary.

#### IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

A critical part of learning is for students to have the capacity to communicate what they know, or think they know. The best way for teachers to encourage communication from all students is through classroom discussion or small group work [2]. There has dependably been the idea that you learn best when you really need to explain or disclose an idea to another person. So teachers need to encourage their students to articulate their own insight with the goal that they can take in more productively. Students who listen also get the advantage from listening their schoolmates' clarifications. At the point when students listen to each other, they frequently benefit from listening to ideas being clarified from diverse focuses and in ways that may be closer to their mindset. At the point when students listen efficiently they create queries to further everyone's reasoning and learning.

To have great discussions teachers need to give issues that have various resolutions or ways of resolutions. These sorts of issues are best in re-enacting discussion, innovation and risk taking. When instructors are attempting to promote an important discussion it is critical that they give their students a lot of time to react and consider what they need to say Teachers ought to eschew short answered and yes/no type questions if they want to initiate a value discussion. Detailed and deep level thinking questions are the best decision to evoke students thinking and imparting their ideas. The teacher should also get involved in the discussion to rectify wrong information but should be cautious when calling attention to lapses and mistakes. It is essential to create and keep up an environment that students feel good and easy for taking an interest.

An alternate approach to encourage students to participate in communication act, particularly in the case they are too timid to speak up, is to have them indulged in journal. Research suggests that dialogue journals provide a purposeful activity in which students communicate their thoughts and feelings [3]. It is imperative that teachers gather these journals and react to them. The teacher need not fundamentally assess them, however she/he could ask the students questions to advance their reasoning and thinking. Such as, "Why do you believe that?", "What could be an alternate reason?" and so on. Students can likewise exchange journals to share their thoughts and get reactions from others.

Debates and Level headed discussions is an alternate way teachers can give their students with the chance to perform their communication abilities. Research suggests that debate encourages different types of responses, helps students to develop convincing arguments, and allows teachers and students to learn from one another [4]. This additionally encourages students to back up what they consider and it permits teachers to truly get a smart thought of what sort of conceptual familiarity students have about specific themes.

The following recommendations are given to cope up the above problems:

- Psychological way of learning language should be promoted, i.e. in order to speak good English the students should be made to first think in English. Assuming themselves in various situations and then responding to those situations in English within the thought process is must to ensure quick learning.
- Practical Ways such as practicing in front of mirror, writing daily experiences in diary everyday and communicating with at least one friend in English language should be encouraged. This raises the confidence level of the students and also helps them know their body language. The mirror also acts as the audience.
- Communicative approach should be followed. The students should be taught not according to syllabus rather according to their communication needs. Smart and interactive class rooms are required to help better learning. Modern technology can be of abundant help to the teachers.
- Use of literature can also be made, specifically those pieces which are bowdlerized and abridged. This will help students knowing various ways of communicating their ideas.
- Use of linguistics is must. The teachers should be well read in linguistics and should have the basic knowledge of structures of language. Moreover it should be compulsory for all the language teachers.
- If it is difficult to go for any foreign accent, there can be a focus on Neutral Accent. Indianised English can also be used to initiate the learning process.
- Continuous Evaluation of the students in lab sessions is a must. They should be given grades according to their daily performance.
- Reform in curriculum is also required. British linguist D. A. Wilkins has given the concept of Notional Syllabuses. He defined language using “notions” and “functions”, instead of the traditional categories of grammar and vocabulary [5]. Notional categories include concepts to learn such as time, location, frequency, and quantity. The functional categories include acts of communication such as offers, complaints, denials, and requests. A notional-functional syllabus is a method of systematizing a language-learning curriculum, rather than a method or an approach to teaching. In a notional-functional syllabus, teaching instructions are not organized according to grammatical structures, but rather in terms of "notions" and "functions". In this model, a "notion" is a specific context in which communication is done. A "function" is a particular reason for a speaker in a given context. For example, the "notion" of visiting bank requires numerous language "functions", such as asking about facilities or opening an account and asking for a loan. The concept of ESP (English for Specific Purpose) should also be promoted. The syllabus design should be according to needs of the particular course.
- Time to be allotted to this subject should be extended. There should not be any restriction on students like that of giving early responses and timely reactions.
- There should also not any pressure of marks on the students. If possible the subject communication skills should be totally internal one.
- Lastly Motivation is the key to successful acquisition of language. But only those teachers can motivate who themselves are motivated, as only an inspired soul can inspire others. The teachers should be well paid, resourceful and full of modern facilities, and then they can encourage the students.

## V. CONCLUSION

In nut shell, the problems of learning and teaching communication skills are very many. But many a problem has solution which is in our own hands. Provide the best of the facilities to the teachers, equip them with modern language lab facilities, give them training in language teaching and give them freedom to teach apart from grammar based syllabus, they will be the best motivators. Similarly, develop thinking abilities of the students, make them practice as much as possible without any time constraint, let them come out of the pressure of marks, they will be the best learners without being caught in the vortex of the complexities of the alien tongue.

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