

An Analysis upon the Role of a Teacher in English Language Teaching for Updating the English Classroom with Communication Skills

Neha Rani^{1*} Dr. Sucharan Reddy²

¹Research Scholar, NIMS University, Rajasthan

²Associate Professor, Dept. Of English NIMS University, Jaipur

Abstract – *The rise in popularity of the communicative approach in language teaching since the late 1970s primarily focusing on language for meaningful interaction and for accomplishing tasks rather than on learning rules has intensified debate among teachers and researchers on corrective feedback or error correction in second language learning. The concept of corrective feedback has been under analysis for long especially since Hendrickson's study in 1978 in which he questioned if errors should be corrected and if so which ones, when and how the errors should be corrected.*

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

The present paper is an attempt to study the instructional strategies adopted by English teachers and classroom participation in English. Teacher Talking Time (TTT) was much more than Student Talking Time (STT). Teachers failed to attend to individual needs of the learners and unaware of language games and role-play. Nor were the classrooms feasible for conducting language games and role play activities. In order to improve the situation teachers need to be trained on the latest trends and discoveries in the field through regular workshops. Teachers and administrators' traditional mindset of treating English as a subject and not as skill need to be changed. Physical condition of the classroom also needs to be improved.

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INTRODUCTION

India is a multilingual country with numerous languages and dialects. There are 1,652 languages/dialects belonging to five different language families in this country. There are 22 scheduled languages mentioned in the 8th schedule of the Constitution. Over 87 languages are used in the print media and 71 languages are used in the audio media. However, only 47 languages are used as the media of instruction in schools and English is one of them. English has been accorded the status of associate official language at the national level.

English as a language has been in India for more than a century. But even now, very few can speak English. But in spite of English not being spoken by many people, it has become a major link language at national and international levels and is a commonly used language in

offices, business, industry, preparation of professionals like Doctors and Engineers and in research particularly in the fields of science and technology; and so teaching of English in schools has acquired importance in the education system of our country.

English was the primary language for barely 2.3 lakh Indians at the time of the Census-2001 and about 86 million listed it as their second language and another 39 million as their third language taking the total number of English speakers in India to over 125 million.

As education has an important role in development in India, a number of Commissions and Committees set up by the Government have given their recommendations and suggestions on teaching of English. The Official Language Commission under B. G. Kher recommended seven years of English teaching in school (Kher, 1957). The report of the Education

Commission (1964-1966) recommended teaching of English after the primary level. The Conference on Teaching of English in primary schools suggested changes in the thinking about the proper age and level for teaching of English in schools (Gokak, 1963). The Kunzru Committee (1959) recommended English as a second language. The Central Advisory Board for Education proposed the three- language formula, which was approved by the Conference of Chief Ministers held in 1961 and was accepted as a part of educational policy – English was to become one of the three languages to be taught at upper primary level- But later most states modified this policy and decided to introduce English at the primary level itself.

Language learning is not just a matter of acquiring the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing but it consists of developing a communicative competence where these skills are often used in an integrated manner along with several other abilities that help in conducting a dialogue. The place of English is not merely an educational issue, but it is also an issue of social change, personal advancement and national development.

English in India has become a symbol of people's aspirations for quality in education and a fuller participation in national and international life. The visible indicator of this presence of English is mushrooming of private English medium schools. The pressure of admission in various states in the schools where English is taught from class I or is a medium of instruction from class I itself, shows that English language has acquired an important and an inclusive place in the Indian psyche. It is now a known fact that the English medium schools have become popular as many parents want their children to study in such schools. Education being on the concurrent list of every state, the level of introduction of English has now become a matter of state policy responding to people's aspirations. This has made many states to accede to the demand of early introduction of English in state schools.

The rise in popularity of the communicative approach in language teaching since the late 1970s primarily focusing on language for meaningful interaction and for accomplishing tasks rather than on learning rules has intensified debate among teachers and researchers on corrective feedback (CF) or error correction (EC) in second language (L2) learning. The concept of CF has therefore been under analysis for long especially since Hendrickson's study in 1978 in which he questioned if errors should be corrected and if so which ones, when and how the errors should be corrected (Smith, 2010). Appearing on the surface to be simple and straightforward, these questions have been explored by scholars over time in a variety of L2 classroom settings and have proved quite complicated. A lot of research on CF continues to centre on them.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Language which has been considered man's most remarkable achievement, is so much a part of our lives, like the air we breathe, that very often we take it for granted and as often are not aware of its characteristic features. There are many things about language that are still a mystery and will probably remain so. However, there are aspects we do know. The past several decades have seen a tremendous amount of linguistics as a language, a description of its basic characteristics would make a better understanding of linguistic science. Language is a system. It is not a random collection of items. Patterning is all important. Each language has its own structure, its own system. It has its own unique way of organizing its units into an internal structure.

Teaching Aids - Teaching aids reinforce the spoken or written words with concrete images and thus provide rich perceptual images which are the bases to learning. When these materials are used in an interrelated way they make learning permanent. They provide for a great variety of methods.

They bring the outside world into the classroom and make us teach efficiently. In order to derive the advantages of using teaching aids, a teacher needs the knowledge of different types of teaching aids available, their place in the teaching-learning process and the methods of their evaluation. Teaching aids supplement the teacher and they do not supplant him. The aids alone cannot accomplish the task of education and the teacher always remains the main pivot of all teaching. While using teaching aids the teacher should be clear about the objects of instruction and thus make the right use of the right material at the right place and at the right time. All teaching aids can be broadly classified under three heads namely.

1. Projected and non-projected aids
2. Audio aids, visual aids, audio-visual aids and activity aids
3. Hardware and software

Here the classification followed is audio aids, visual aids, audio-visual aids and activity aids.

CLASSIFICATION OF TEACHING AIDS –

| Visual aids | Audio aids | Audio-visual aids | Activity aids |
|---|--|--|--|
| Pictures, Photographs, Flash cards, Poster, Charts, Diagrams, Graphs, Maps, Cartoons. | Radio, Record Player, Tape Recorder, Compact Disc Player | Sound motion, Picture Projector, Television, Video closed circuit, Tape-slide Projector, LCD Projector | Demonstration, Programmes, Instruction, Teaching Machine, Computer assisted Instruction, Language Laboratory |

THE TEACHER AND THE LEARNER

Our educational system is failing to meet the real needs of our society. Our schools generally constitute the most traditional, conservative, rigid, bureaucratic institution of our time. We, as teachers, have to create a genuinely humane climate in which we have to initiate a process where a young person can find him/herself respected, can make responsible choices, can experience the excitement of learning, can lay the basis for living as an effective, concerned citizen, well informed, competent in knowledge and skills and confident of facing the future. The ultimate aim of education – of all attempts at teaching – is to make the learners capable of doing things on their own. They need to be able to cope with the unpredictable. We as teachers must enable them to do so, and the training we impart should allow them to learn on their own, when the prop of the teacher is withdrawn. Although training the learners to learn by themselves is not a new concept, there has been a revival of interest in helping learners to take on more responsibility for their own learning.

Some of the reasons to advocate learner training are:

- Autonomy or being able to think and work independently is increasingly viewed as a basic human right. The goals society has for educations are ultimately much broader than simply the achievement of certain areas of knowledge and skills. The process of making a learner autonomous is a way of coping with various sorts of differences among them. It is common knowledge among teachers that learners differ in their preferences regarding how to learn.
- Learner training is essential for continuing the process of education. At the college level, education becomes freer and less dependent on the teacher. In such conditions a learner trained to study independently would be able to cope with the situation much better.

Preparation towards Becoming an Autonomous Learner –

The learners find it difficult to become autonomous in language learning due to the complexity of the subject matter. Because of this, pupils need three kinds of preparation which are closely interlinked. According to Leslie Dickenson and David Carver the three areas of preparation are:

1. They need to know how to continue learning a language – methodological preparation.
- The learners need to be given extended practice in organizing their own work:

- How to make notes
- How to answer questions
- How to read and understand, with context clues
- How to work in a group
- How to organize one's written work.
- The learners need practice in correcting their own work, both written and spoken, either from answers provided or from other sources.
- They need practice in keeping records of their own progress.
- 2. The learners need to develop self-confidence in their ability to work independently of the teacher - psychological preparation.
- 3. Finally the learners need to be given practice in taking responsibility for their own learning, that is, such things as initiating activities, making decisions about aspects of their own learning and so on. All this could be called practice in self direction.

Learning –Teaching Strategies -

The training which learners should receive should prepare them to direct the course of their own learning, that is, it should take them from their states of varying degrees of dependence to the state of the greatest of independence or autonomy which is possible in a given set of circumstances.

- Co-operative learning
- Puzzling out things
- Self and peer correction
- Choice of activities
- Trouble-shooting sessions
- Confidence sessions
- Using pupil teachers
- Extensive language activities outside the classroom

Role of the Teacher -

The main concern as language teachers is not to inform our students about the language but to develop their

ability to use the language for a variety of communicative purposes. The teacher will play different roles at the three stages of the learning process.

CLASSROOM PRACTICES

English is now part of the school curriculum. The study of classroom processes is characterized by the material and human resources interacting constantly leading to differences in the school outcomes. Classroom processes refer to all activities of the teacher such as speaking, listening, writing and asking questions etc. which a teacher undertakes in a classroom with the objective of transmitting curricular content to students.

Teacher and student engagement is critical in the classroom because it has the power to define the process which is involved. The curricular inputs are through the prescribed curriculum and textbooks. But learning is also influenced by the ways in which the curriculum inputs are transacted and the conditions in which the curriculum transaction takes place. Thus, every school creates its own unique environment for learning.

The atmosphere in which a language is learnt is vitally important and physical conditions have a great effect on learning and can alter a student's motivation either positively or negatively. The use of charts, labels, children's own work, alphabet charts indicate a print rich environment, which was observed in most of the urban schools and in some rural schools also. Many classrooms had ready-made charts of animals, birds, colours, etc. There seemed to be little effort on the part of the teachers to prepare the material and display it on the walls and change the material from time to time.

Sufficient books were not available in the class library. Big books, small books, big story books with small prints, small story books with large prints, pop-up books, talking books with cassettes, parallel language books were not available in any of the schools visited in the selected states/UT. Though some schools have mentioned that Chanda Mama, Amar Chitra Katha, Folk tales and other story books were available in the school library, these were not a part of the class library.

Classroom transactions with emphasis on teaching methodology adopted by teachers for teaching English language across the selected States/UT were analysed. Learning takes place through interaction with the environment around nature, things and people, as well as through actions and through language. The physical activity of moving, exploring and doing things on one's own or with one's peers or in the company of adults, and using language—to read, to express or to ask, to listen and to interact – are the key processes through which learning occurs. The context in which learning takes place is thus of direct cognitive significance.

It is important to know if the teacher has been able to retain the interest of the children, make the lesson enjoyable with an interesting beginning and ensure students participation throughout the lesson. Also, how does the teacher motivate the children in the beginning of the lesson? Does she use any warm up activities? These aspects were observed during classroom transaction.

In a class, the interaction between the students and the teacher offers double opportunities — one for teacher and other for students. For teachers, interaction with students provides opportunity to comprehend the psychology of young learners and thereby develop more cognitive strategies for better teaching and learning process. Children get rid of their hesitation and involve themselves in classroom learning.

In most of the classroom observations it was seen that the main focus in the class was on question and answer. The teacher asked most of the questions. Students' participation in learning activities was mostly limited to -

- Personal requests asked by the students generally in single words (toilet, water, excuse, go) but not in complete sentences.
- Answering comprehension questions generally textual questions, by writing them on the board; students being asked by teacher to copy answer or get them checked in the written form in exercise books.
- Answering grammar questions just based on memorization and pattern practice.
- Answering few general questions. This is most useful as it connects the child's life to outside world.

Speaking English in the classrooms was hardly noticeable. The words spoken by the teachers were being translated into the native language.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS – TEACHING THE TECHNIQUES OF LISTENING AND SPEAKING SKILLS

Communication is the exchange of information or ideas between two or more people. It is the act of expressing thoughts in a manner that others understand. The development of language learning or teaching from form-based to a meaning-based approach, the move towards an eclectic approach from a rigid method, the shift from teacher-fronted to learner-centred classes, are all subsumed under the broad term COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH. How a thing is done in class is a technique. A technique is 'implementation – that which actually takes place in a

classroom. Listening and speaking are two important aspects of communication. Listening is the absorption of the meanings of the words and sentences by the brain. A closed mind is the biggest hindrance to effective listening. But it is also only one means to an end, and we judge a course communicative or otherwise not only in terms of how it is organized, but also in terms of its methodology.

Communicative Competence-

It is the ability, not only to apply the grammatical rules of a language in order to form grammatically correct sentences, but also to know when and where to use these sentences – in other words, to use them appropriately. Many syllabuses have been developed under the label 'communicative approach', and each syllabus claims that it can achieve the aim of the approach, namely, that of communicative competence. All these syllabuses share certain common features:

- They are all based on a semantically organized syllabus, such as the notional syllabus.
- They teach the language needed in different situations, to express and understand different functions.
- They emphasise appropriacy of language use.
- They also teach the language required to perform different tasks (for example, solving puzzles and getting information)

Techniques used in the Communicative Approach-

In communicative language teaching, information gap tasks are used. An information gap occurs in a situation where one person knows something which other people do not. Information gap tasks are introduced in the classroom using the following techniques:

- Language games: According to Morrow (1981) language games are communicative when they are characterized by three features: information gap, choice and feedback.
- Mind Engaging Tasks: Communicative activities are based on the implicit recognition that a learner learns best when his/her mind is on tasks to be done in the language rather than on language itself. Thus many problem-solving activities are a part of the communicative approach.
- Role Play: Since the ability to manipulate language in a social context is an important aspect of communicative competence, most

communicative materials include role play as part of the activities.

- Retrieving Text Order: The technique involves the use of scrambled sentences and scrambled picture techniques. By doing these activities, learners become aware of discourse features which are distinct from grammatical features. They become familiar with the use of cohesive devices ('and', 'or', 'nevertheless', etc.), anaphoric pronouns (the boy - he, the dog - it) and semantic clues (use of lexical items, topic, etc.) through these activities.
- Group Work / Pair Work: Group work and pair work form an important part of any communicative activity, for peer interaction is an effective means of acquiring some language features which are not available in a formal teacher-fronted class.

Listening and Speaking Skills-

Listening and speaking are two important aspects of communication. Research shows that forty-five per cent of our time is spent on listening to someone or something. It is believed that while most of us speak at a rate of about two words per second, we can hear and process more than eight words per second. This shows that listening is easier than speaking provided we employ our skills usefully to achieve better communication skills. We can use the time we save while listening for observing other crucial tools of communication like body language or facial expressions of a person and try to detect the real intent of the speaker. As children, listening is the first language skill that we acquire. Listening is the basis for all other. Without listening there will be no basis for the other developmental milestone in a human being, be it cognitive or language development. Listening paves the way for productive participation in life for all human being. Nobody will listen to anything if the matter they listen to does not contribute to the improvement of his life. If you are visiting doctor no one needs to force you to listen to his instructions because you know very well that you need to follow his advice to get well.

Similarly, your ears perk up when an announcement over the radio or the television comes up which imparts information you were looking for. Active listening is most natural in these circumstances. People are obsessed with what they would like to say. Everyone enjoys the idea of talking in an informal gathering. It is not unusual to see people interrupting other speakers to say what they are eager to say. If there is something that has to be said and if a person has to say so. The same eagerness, however, is not shown in listening. We have to agree that there is a minority which is an exception. Listening is the absorption of the meanings of the words and sentences by the brain. Listening leads to the

understanding of facts and ideas but listening takes attention despite distraction. A closed mind is the biggest hindrance to effective listening. History repeats itself because no one listens the first time. A clear distinction must be made between listening and hearing. When we listen, we pay conscious attention to what is being said. A good listener learns a language quickly and efficiently. So it is very important to think of techniques which will enable learners to listen better and more efficiently. The best technique for speaking is to learn to articulate meaningful sounds in a foreign or second language is to begin naming familiar objects around us. It is a pedagogic truth that this activity is very close to the way one learns any language. It is a fact that we may know and use an object without necessarily knowing its name in the target language.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Bearing in mind that CF is usually provided for the sake of enhancing learning of the target language, it is important that teachers in particular contexts should know what may work best for the learners. Teachers of English can benefit by taking time to find out how they currently address learner errors. They could do this through observation by a colleague or through audio recording a number of lessons so as to be aware of their practice and align it with the best practice. Teachers are thus encouraged to become aware of correction strategies that benefit the learners most. From the present study, although the learners voiced preference for explicit correction, their uptake shows that if teachers allow students time and provide appropriate cues for the learner to think and engage, more often than not the learner will come through. The least effective technique of correction is simply giving learners the answer. Teachers should therefore embrace correction strategies that provide students with clues for them to generate their own repair such as metalinguistic feedback and elicitation while shunning strategies that simply give the students the answers such as recasts. Pre-service teacher educators need to ensure that the curriculum they use to train teachers of English includes a component on the treatment of learner errors that will prepare the teachers to handle correction in a way beneficial to the learners. In-service professional development (PD) teachers also need to organize PD programmes based on a framework that takes into account the effectiveness of various correction strategies in order to achieve a relevant and effective approach to error treatment that suits the learners. Curriculum designers such as the Kenya Institute of Education need to sensitize teachers on the best practices of CF. This could for example be through revising the conceptual framing with a more research led syllabus that takes into account, the most beneficial forms of correction that could ensure uptake in a particular context.

CONCLUSION

Teaching-speaking is the prime role of second language learning. The ability to communicate in a second language clearly and efficiently contributes to the success of the learner in school and success later in every phase of life. Therefore, it is essential that language teachers play a vital role in teaching speaking, rather than leading students to pure memorization.

How do the concepts of 'notional', 'functional' on the one hand and 'communicative' on the other relate to each other? It is the relationship of means to end. Our aim is to teach communicative ability, and this may lead us at the syllabus design level to specify and organize our teaching content in a semantic way. Semantic syllabuses are a means to an end – a vehicle for arriving at a destination.

The purpose of this study was to explore the extent of uptake of correction by the learners for the various corrective feedback strategies applied by the teachers in order to determine the most effective or appropriate strategy. The findings reveal that errors of agreement and use of the wrong pronouns were the most common and that recasts followed by elicitation were the most prevalent correction strategies used to correct them. The learners expressed preference for explicit correction while the data on their response to the correction strategies showed the use of metalinguistic clues as perhaps the most effective correction type in terms of uptake.

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Corresponding Author

Neha Rani*

Research Scholar, NIMS University, Rajasthan

E-Mail – rohithkumarjangra1@gmail.com