

COMMUNICATION SKILLS – A PREREQUISITE FOR SUCCESS IN THE GLOBAL MARKET

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Abstract: *Communicating with others is an essential skill to move up on the corporate ladder. Effective communication is all about conveying messages to other people clearly and unambiguously with as little distortion as possible. Keeping in mind the present scenario where mastery over the English language has become the main ingredient for good communication skills, this paper has been prepared. The paper discusses three issues: a) the advent of the English language into our country and the position English enjoys today, b) the importance of mastering the basic skills of the language and c) the role of the teacher and the student in mastering the skills.*

Introduction:

The ability to communicate is the primary factor that distinguishes human beings from animals. It is the ability to communicate well that distinguishes one individual from the other. If one speaks and listens well, there is no scope for misunderstanding. Communicating well allows people to feel closer to the individual and as a result, there are better relationships. It is an undisputed fact that English is the passport to success in today's corporate world which requires not just graduates but effective communicators. Good communication skills are indispensable for the success of any individual. A person with good communication skills faces all challenges of life in a confident manner. He is able to compete in the global market without fear. The lack of communication skills has a negative impact on the life of the individual. He loses self-confidence and fails to shed his inhibitions. Language is the principal source of communication and creativity. Language gives us a sense of identity and unity. When we talk about communication skills, no doubt we are referring to communication in the English language.

The Advent of English in India:

English started penetrating into India way back in 1612 when English businessmen first came to India on behalf of the East India Company. Eventually, the British took control over India and no doubt replaced Sanskrit Education and Arabic Education with English Education. Emphasizing the importance of English in his famous 'Minutes on Indian Education' in 1835, Macaulay observed:

'It stands pre-eminent even among the languages of the west... We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect'(qtd. in Mishra: 33).

The British lured Indians into receiving English education by giving them preference in government jobs. Independence from the British rule in 1947 did not free Indians from the clutches of the English language because English had already permeated into every field of education. Right from that time there have been two extreme views with regard to the place of English in India. There are people who acknowledge the indispensability of the language and consider it a legacy and a boon from the British. There are others, who, considering English as a curse on our tradition and culture, advocate a ban on the use of English as an official language.

The Present Scenario:

Analyzing the importance of English in post-colonial India, S.K.Verma and Krishnaswamy have remarked:

‘Though some thought that it was unpatriotic to learn the language of the rulers, there was a growing realization that the English language was not the language of the English rulers alone and that a knowledge of English was and is necessary for the economic, scientific, technological and literary progress of India, since English is the most effective catalyst for progress and modernization’ (343).

When the constitution of independent India was framed in 1950, the Indian Parliament decided to retain English as the official language along with Hindi at least until 1965, when this decision would be reversed. However, in 1965, no alternative could be agreed upon and English continues to be the ‘associate official language’. Whether we like it or not, modern means of communication like the Internet, email, and mobile phones have become more accessible throughout the world. According to David Crystal, “English is the main language of popular music, and permeates popular culture and its associated advertising” (106). It is estimated that 75% of all internalized communication in writing, 80% of all information in the world’s computers and 90% of the Internet contents are in English. Indeed, English is riding high on the popularity wave.

English has become the language of administration and higher education. It is the language of science and technology, the language of trade and commerce and the language that assures cosmopolitanism. It is a means to get international recognition. It will help get a decent job, promotion and even favor in the eyes of everyone. The upsurge of MNCs and BPOs has propelled students to prepare for placement there. What institutions and industries need today are persons with the art of articulation with expressive creativity.

The Four Basic Skills of Language:

Communication is a complex process. The primary objective of teaching English is to enable the learners to use it when they need. Learning a new language means developing skills that allow us to process what other people say in that language and to communicate what we want to say in the target language. In teaching English, the teacher aims at developing four abilities- ability to understand, to speak, to read and to write. The concept of the four basic skills is not a new one as language educators have long used it.

We probably spend more time using our listening skills than any other skill. It is assumed that students acquire this skill automatically. Hearing, understanding and judging are also involved in the learning process. In other words, listening to understand enhances developing other skills to a great extent.

Speaking is more than just pronouncing words. Speaking skill involves use of the body language to improve the effectiveness of the message conveyed during an oral interaction. Speaking can be mastered only with practice. The clarity of thought is reflected in the way of speaking and choosing the right words.

Reading develops independently of Listening and Speaking skills. Reading skill involves being able to identify the words and their significance in the text. It also includes skimming and scanning sub-skills that make a casual reader a good reader.

Writing is the presentation of thoughts in a structured way. Writing skills include how the thought process is converted into structured sentences and written. They also include understanding how to connect ideas logically within a sentence.

It is believed that receptive skills are easier to acquire than productive ones. This does not mean that teachers should focus their attention on teaching only the productive skills. All the skills should be given equal attention to. The teacher need not teach one skill at a time. It is wise to teach the skills through an integrative approach. None of the four skills exists in a water-tight compartment isolated from the others, and progress in one will tend to aid progress in the others.

Accuracy or Fluency?

A classroom activity may aim either at accuracy or fluency, a distinction first made by Brumfit (1984). An accuracy-oriented activity such as pattern drills is usually used in the teaching of a new target item. A fluency-oriented activity such as extensive reading aims at developing students' spontaneous communication skills in using what they have already learned. Accuracy and fluency must be mastered in order for learners and users of English to process the language effectively to achieve true proficiency. More often than not, the learner is placed in situations where he must use the language as an instrument for satisfying immediate communicative needs. At such times, the criterion for success is functional effectiveness rather than structural accuracy.

The Role of the Teacher:

Students are inspired and influenced by teachers. Having understood the vital role played by communication skills, the teacher should take effective steps towards improving his own communication skills which only can help him enhance students' communication skills. Professional development refers to activities that enhance professional career growth. Such activities include individual development, continuing education and the like. So, to keep abreast of the emerging trends in teaching and in the subject, teachers should attend conferences and present papers periodically. Every teacher brings in new ideas and methods which can be implemented in the classrooms. Professional competency includes being adept

in technical skills as well. The teacher should be well-equipped to use all the technical aids available.

It is the duty of teachers to mould students into well organized and approachable professionals. The teacher can adapt a student-centered approach to teaching. In this way, the student is made to speak most of the time and involve in activities. The teacher should motivate the students to use the language as much as possible. This is based on the premise that students work much better in an atmosphere where there is high motivation than where there is none. Students should be assigned tasks which elicit language from them. Repeated exposure to the language will prove to be beneficial. Rather than passively absorbing information, learners should be made to negotiate meaning and assimilate new information through interaction and collaboration with the teacher as well as their classmates. Activities should be given in order to foster fluency and accuracy. Ample opportunities should be created for the students to use English inside and outside the classroom.

When the students become language-conscious and classroom-conscious they feel miserable in communicating. This causes fear of being ridiculed when they commit mistakes. This thought cripples their creativity and paralyses their thought-process and communication. So teachers should encourage them to be idea-conscious. To achieve this purpose and to boost the level of self confidence of students, they can be made to come forward to share whatever they want to with their classmates. When students come forward and share their experiences, feelings, interests, facts, news and even jokes with their classmates, they try to become less hesitant and more confident. Initially what they do might be literal translation but later on they will get to use correct sentences. Students should also be taught the nuances of communicating - maintaining eye-contact, being loud enough and clear enough to be heard and understood, avoiding mannerisms and being coherent. This raises their self-esteem and improves their knowledge.

Above all, the teacher should understand that not all students are alike in their level of competency. The strategies adopted should suit different levels of students keeping in mind their strengths and weaknesses.

The Role of the Student:

Effective communication skills can be developed only through personal effort. 'One may lead a horse to the pond but even twenty cannot make it drink' is an old saying. Students should be interested in developing communication skills. It is very indispensable that they make use of the resources available. They should be receptive and interactive in the classroom. They should involve themselves in all language activities in the classroom. Self-determination is a pre-requisite for classroom activities to be intrinsically rewarding. Students should be self-initiating and self-regulating when it comes to putting into practice what they learn.

To become effective communicators, students should be good listeners first. Just as a child learns to speak after listening to his close ones, so do those who learn a new language. Paying attention to the speaker helps the listener establish a rapport with him. The conversation

which ensues is fruitful. The better at listening a learner is, the more productive he will be in his career.

To achieve proficiency in the language, a sound vocabulary is mandatory. Vocabulary is a major component of language learning. 'Vocabulary is the Everest of a language' says David Crystal (117). A person's competence, smartness and success are determined by the wealth of words that he uses. A sound vocabulary facilitates a great range of thought, assures a bright future, increases confidence level and guarantees success in life. We might not be able to formulate ideas if we don't know the right words.

Learners can enhance their vocabulary by reading. Reading enables them to become familiar with various structures. It leaves an indelible mark on the thinking process of the individual. After thinking, the individual expresses his or her thinking. Writing or speaking is the output of the thinking process. Good readers are often very good communicators.

Conclusion:

It has to be understood that effective communication requires more than the mastery of the language. Etiquette is considered a recipe for success. In the recruiting process, communication plays a vital role. During interviews, qualification becomes secondary pushing presentation skills to the front. When an individual communicates with another, he should take into account his body language which includes posture, appearance, facial expression, eye-contact, space and distancing, gestures, tone and voice.

Due to the unprecedented importance given to good communication skills, it has become imperative on the part of students to master them. Not being able to articulate is considered to be a major handicap for them. 'Practice makes a man perfect'. So students should understand this adage and improve their communication skills. As teachers of English, let us help students discover the astonishing power of the English language.

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