IS THE ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IS STILL A PERENNIAL PROBLEM TO THE RURAL STUDENTS OF TAMILNADU

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ABSTRACT

Oral communication is a complex and multifaceted language process. The proponents of various approaches to English Language Teaching claim that, the ultimate aim of language teaching is, to help learners take part in meaningful communicative interaction. But this does not happen in the majority of students. The proficiency of learner's level in English, especially in rural areas in abysmally low. We have to explore ways of enabling them to acquire adequate competence in English. Task-oriented classroom interaction encourages and enhances oral communication.

KEYWORDS: Acquisition, Perennial Problem, Rural Learners, Competence, Task-Oriented Activities, Multi Faceted Process

INTRODUCTION

At present English is taught as one of the compulsory languages in almost all educational institutions in India, owing to its status as an international language. Our students in all the Tamil medium schools in Tamil Nadu, India, have been learning English from standard one onwards. Yet they feel handicapped to express themselves or to converse better in English even after completing twelfth standard or graduation. Where does the problem lie? Is it with the language or with the system or with the learners? Is it with the teacher or with the methodology? On the contrary, English has taken the roots in the Indian Soil as an unchallenged Second language and is considered, 'The language of opportunity', ' The window of the world', 'The language of higher education' and the language of power, Prestige and modernity. It may not be an exaggeration to conclude that "English teaching in India is the world's largest democratic enterprise of its kind."(1994)

Negation of Democracy

It is observed rightly by the University Education Commission (1948-49) which states that English has 'become so much a part of our national habit', pointing out at the same time that use English 'divides the people into two nations, the few who governed, the one unable to talk the language of the other, and mutually uncomprehending, which is the negation of democracy'. Thus, when "the largest democratic enterprise" fails to serve everyone uniformly it inevitably ends up with the 'negation of democracy'.

Such a kind of 'negation of democracy' is not restricted to the border society alone, but reflected in its microcosm, namely the English classroom. However, there is a difference to be noted here. In the macrocosm, many do not learn English because they do not go to schools and colleges, while paradoxically, enough in the microcosm many do not learn

English though they go to Schools and Colleges. The learning of English in the classroom has restricted in the achievement of varying degrees of Competence-the two extremes being represented by those who gain the maximum and those who fail to gain anything out of the process respectively. This problematic variety of learners of English in every classroom is represented as a disadvantageous learner, whose profile can be drawn as mentioned below:

- A disadvantaged learner is one who sits in the back of the class in the back rows to hide himself/herself from the teachers.

- She /He is a passive participant in the classroom.

- Sits anonymous in the class. Typically, shows no enthusiasm for learning.

- Hesitates to speak and is reluctant to participate in oral interactions and not confident of oneself.

- She/ He is usually the one who is not asking questions. Even when asked, hesitates to answer the teacher's question takes a long time to come out with answers. Has an attitude of avoiding failure rather than that of striving for success.

- Often this person has to share chores at home-that of her mother, father etc.

- Comes from a rural Semi-urban background or slums in cities and has had schooling mostly in Government or Municipal schools.

- At school, socializing with the members of his/ her group; are only with intra group movement and not with inter-group movement.

- She /He has very modest career aspirations tending to question her own worth, fearing challenges and tending to cling to the familiar. (V. D. Singh, 1994)

It can be summed up by saying that a disadvantaged learner is one who is unfavourable circumstances, underprivileged, culturally and intellectually deprived, economically backward, impoverished and who is an academic underachiever because he is unmotivated.

The Sociolinguistic Context of ELT in India

The study of the teaching and learning of any language has to be made keeping in view the fact that language is a social phenomenon. The study of language in its social setting shifted the emphasis from an abstract study of the rules of language to concrete acts of language use. English is a foreign language for us and it has little intimate and emotional relationship with life in Indian context. So the aim has to be definitely utilitarian and non-emotional. It reconfirms that the demand of English in our country is not for literary, but for linguistic and practical purposes. Therefore, the important aim of teaching and learning English must be the acquisition of language and not the skill of literary appreciation.

ELT in the Regional Context/ Tamil Nadu

The acquisition of English as a second language is a real problem for the rural students of Tamil Nadu. The reasons are many and manifold. But the most obvious and glaring reason is the use of faulty methods of teaching which still continues to exist, in our educational curriculum. The Grammar translation method has been extensively

practiced by teachers Schools and Colleges, laying much emphasis on writing; consequently it has not made any impact on the overall strategies of communicating in English as a foreign language. These methods are considered language learning/ teaching a mechanical process without considering its cognitive aspects. In other words the method could make no significant contribution in relation to the ability of developing rural students' oral communicative competence. The learner is considered a mere appendage in the learning /teaching process.

Need for the Paradigm Shift

This is the age of communication; in fact, to communicate is to survive. Hence the communicative materials/ methods with its learner-cantered focus can help in equipping our students with adequate skills to use language in real life situations/ different situations. Communicative language teaching emphasizes that the goal of language learning is communicative competence.

Communication involves interaction between the encoder and receiver. The efficiency of communication necessarily depends on the extent to which conventions of communication are shared by both. If there is an incompatibility with respect to any of the ingredients, communication breaks down. As Deverell points out, "Communication between human beings is necessarily imperfect. Most often, we are not able to say what we mean; many times we don't mean what we say, this may be deliberate or involuntary, depending on the purpose of Communication". (1973)
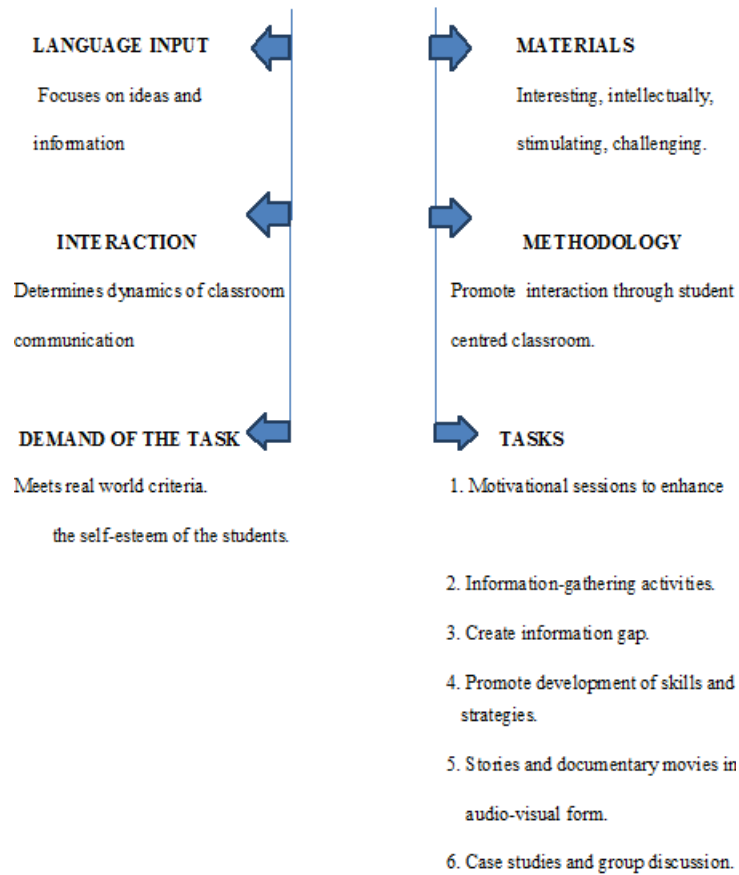
Table 1: Difference between the Traditional Approaches and Communicative Approaches

Characteristics	Traditional Approaches	Communicative Approach
1.Focus in learning	Is on the language as a structured system of grammatical patterns.	Is on communication.
2.Selection of language items	Is done on linguistic criteria	On the bases of what language items the learner needs to know in order to get things done.
3.Sequencing of language items	Is determined on linguistic grounds	Is determined on other grounds, with the emphasis on content meaning and interest.
4.Degree of coverage	Aims to cover the whole picture of language structure by systematic linear progression.	To cover only what the learners needs and sees as important.
5.View of language	Language is seen as a unified entity with fixed grammatical patterns and a core of basic words.	The variety of language is accepted and seen as determined by the character of particular communicative needs.
6.Type of language used	Tends to be formed	Genuine everyday language is emphasized.
7.Language skills emphasized	Reading and writing	Spoken interactions and regarded as important as reading and writing.
8.Teacher-Pupil roles	Teacher centred	Student centred
9.Attitude to errors	Incorrect utterances are seen as evictions from the norms of standard grammar.	Partially correct and incomplete utterances are seen as such rather than just 'wrong'.
10. Similarity / dissimilarity to natural language learning.	Reverse the language learning process by concentrating on the form of utterances rather than on the content.	Resembles the natural language learning process in that the content of the utterance is emphasized rather than the form.

Characterestics of a Communicative Classroom

The learning environment is the arena wherein a complex pattern of relationships is woven to create a context within which exchange occurs. That pattern derives from the relationships among language input, the process of interaction and demands of the (figure given below):

FIGURE

LANGUAGE INPUT	**MATERIALS**
Focuses on ideas and information	Interesting, intellectually, stimulating, challenging.
INTERACTION	**METHODOLOGY**
Determines dynamics of classroom communication	Promote interaction through student centred classroom.
DEMAND OF THE TASK	**TASKS**
Meets real world criteria. the self-esteem of the students.	1. Motivational sessions to enhance
	2. Information-gathering activities.
	3. Create information gap.
	4. Promote development of skills and strategies.
	5. Stories and documentary movies in audio-visual form.
	6. Case studies and group discussion.

Classroom Challenges

Our nation was a pioneer in higher education, and students from all over the world came to Nalanda University centuries ago, much before the first-European University came up. To a great shock and surprise, there is no Indian University in the Top 100, according to the QS World University Rankings 2015.

Begin with the Basics, school is the first organized situation where children can explore themselves and face competition. It is the platform where each of them discovers their individuality and interests. Education is the tool given to a child to cope with growing knowledge.

The biggest problem in our country is that education focuses on creaming. Our education system has become so muddled that it has lost its essential ability to bring back ethics and morals into academics. Education has to encourage an attitude of enquiry. It is the same reason why some students, after graduating in professional courses, do not feel as professional as they are required to be. This is why Indian with its humongous youth population is largely helpless in tackling unemployment. We are not creating clear communications, elite entrepreneurs, but creating workers.

Facilitating Learning

Having a more student centered classroom helps learners become more independent. An independent learner is an incredible asset. The teacher of English has to design his/her own lessons and make them interesting by using drama, poetry songs and the like. It opens the mind to endless possibilities of teaching creatively, of thoroughly enjoying one'

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s job and of doing something meaningful and beneficial. Classroom activities like debate, just-a-minute, group discussion, etc. would really have a better way to be clearer communicators.

Learning Opportunity

Argumentation is a valuable learning tool and it is all about asking 'why' and exploring the answers in a perfect and meaningful way. It also evolves listening carefully the opposing views before one responds to it. Careful listening is a very meaningful and needed still to be developed among the students/ learners. A well designed interactive class concentrates on good discussions, strong, clear conversations and argument session which will help the learners to be confident without butterflies in the stomach.

Tune to E-Learning

With advancing technology the process of teaching and learning has experienced an immense impact coupled with new dimension. It has completely changed the atmosphere of the classroom. Students prefer carrying digital text books which contains the entire study material. They do not give attention to lecdem method or teaching through an interactive board. Their interest in e-learning helps them vibrant, curious and effective. For example, if a student takes one hour to get a grasp of a topic from the textbook, he/ she can do it in 15 minutes through the tablet. The purpose oriented class on communication will have documentaries with sub-titles, Digital presentation, video clips which can ignite the learners to learn better English, accent and pronunciation of the native speakers.

Challenges

Traditionally, technology has been seen as a negative symbol to studying. Several colleges prevent the use of mobile phones and tablets inside the campus and classrooms. Their anxiety is understandable, often students use their phones for texting classmates or friends rather than paying attention to what is being taught. To address the issue, the students can be given the enabled device which will not allow them to access anything apart from their textbook and reference material. Moreover, it is important to make the key stack holder's viz, parents, teachers understand that the tech devices in the classroom will be a learning tool only and never be a distraction. Hence the teachers will have to evolve from being the sage on the stage to a mentor-on-the-site.

One has to move away from the term 'teaching' and low focussing on a holistic learning experience, as it incorporates so much more than a teacher disseminating information from the front of the room.

Lack of English Skills Haunts College Students/ Graduates

Until graduates start hunting for a job, they do not realise how much of a role communication played in the hiring process, Then they realise that they should have learnt English much earlier.

Performance of the Students from the Rural Background

We conducted the test to measure their fluency, pronunciation, listening and comprehension of the English language, they had the least/ average mean score, in all parameters. Of the total 120 participants from the rural background only 2 per cent were able to express himself/ herself spontaneously, fluently and precisely with the ability to differentiate finer shades of meaning in complex situations.

A majority of the students from the rural are unable to speak fluently or comprehend are unable to speak fluently or comprehensively. English is not being taught well at the grass root level; rather they are well trained to recite what was in a school/ college text book.

Learning Strategies

One of the prominent reasons for this perennial problem is that is that the poor learning habits of the rural students such as learning the rules of grammar by heart, memorizing some vocabulary items and dialogues from their textbooks in order to improve their oral communicative competence. It does not help the rural students with the adequate communication strategies which could enable them to communicate successfully with competent speakers of English in real communicative situation. Therefore, students should be made to realize the successful oral communication not only involves how accurate the speakers are, but how clear they make themselves.

Therefore, rural students need to be aware of the following four components of communicative competence in order to enable them to communicate successfully.

- Grammatical competence   ⎤   Linguistic competence
- Discourse competence   ⎦

- Sociolinguistic competence   ⎤
- Strategic competence   ⎦   Functional competence

It is suggested that the linguistic competence should be taught implicitly whereas the functional competence should be taught explicitly during spoken English classes. Rural students encounter most of the difficulties while communicating in the target language and lead to communication breakdown result from their lack of social, cultural rules and strategic competence therefore rural students need to be trained how to resort to risk taking strategies which help students to expand their message they want to convey without resorting to their first language equivalents.

Moreover, rural students need a course that will focus on the conversational skills based on the guidelines which were suggested by Dornyei and Thurrell (1994) as follows:

- **Conversational Rules and Structures:** Openings turn taking, interruption, topic shifting, adjacency, pairs and closing.

- **Conversational Strategies:** message adjustment or avoidance, paraphrasing, approximation, appealing for help; ask for repetition, asking for clarification, using interpretive summary checking and the use of fillers.

- Functions and meanings in conversation.

  - Language function such as making suggestions and asking for information

  - **Indirect Speech Acts:** These are linguistic forms that include an action or a function. For example, could you open the door please?

It is not a real question, but rather a request to open the door.

- Same meaning- different meanings this issue deals with the surface and the real meaning of the utterance.

For example, the compliment, what a nice car you have! Might mean I do know that you are so rich or I hope you will let me borrow it next Sunday.

- **Social and Cultural Content, Including:** Participant variable (status) the social situation, the social norms of appropriate language use of formal/ informal, and cross cultural differences.

Lack of Exposure to the Target Language and Its Culture

It is important to realize that rural students cannot improve their oral communicative competence unless they are encouraged to communicate with competent speakers of English. Moreover 'groups' and 'pairs' activities can help them develop their abilities to speak instead of making them wait for their turns to react in the classroom. At the same time, teachers can find real life situations which can help their students to communicate better and also enrich their knowledge of the culture of the target language. For Eg:

- Arranging for their students to visit some organization where there are native speakers of English such as the British Council, the American Language centers, oil companies, Agricultural projects, Industrial factories, hospitals and travel agencies.

- Encouraging them to watch the documentaries with subtitles.

- Inviting experts from the countries through which rural students can meet them and communicate with them.

It is believed that the social distance may cause breakdown of communication and misunderstanding and therefore teachers should teach explicit some situations where students might have problems as a result of the cross cultural differences. They should try to help the rural students to overcome the culture shock that may create some deep psychological panic, crisis or even hostility towards the target language and its culture. But these cultural differences should be introduced in small doses, students may become defensive, particularly the female students

Attitude towards Errors

Learners should not be made conscious of the errors all the time because they will not be able to express their ideas in real communicative situations. Therefore, teachers should feel that those errors are positive signs of learning and that the students should be encouraged even if they make errors, because learning will take place if they are encouraged, or else they will become defensive learners. It is suggested that teachers should respond to errors with more tolerance and adopt positive attitudes. At the same time, teachers should try to analyse their students' error and make some remedial tasks, and should make it clear to their students that errors are not a negative sign and that they should not feel embarrassed wherever they commit errors in terms of communication.

CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, it is hoped that this paper dealt with the main reasons behind rural students' low oral communicative competence which apparently lead to their communication breakdown in real communicative situations with competent speakers of English. Moreover, the suggested platforms of innovative teaching can very well be modified as per the needs of the learners to reach the acquisition is the target language. "It is important that special opportunities are made available to help the weaker sections of our society to acquire adequate competence in English so that they do not remain forever disadvantaged in areas of English-based higher education and in terms of upward social mobility" (Verma, 1994).

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