

THE FOUR PILLARS OF COMMUNICATION: LANGUAGE SKILLS OF PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Language is an effective tool of human communication system. It is the basis for social, cultural, aesthetical, spiritual and economic development and growth of every human being. It is the destiny of any professional who is hardly in need of an excellent command over English language. Every organization demands effective and excellent professionals for the escalation and expansion of its existence. There is a bumper harvest everywhere, but efficient servants are insufficient as far as job opportunities particularly in educational institutions are concerned. The most important reason is their lack of communication skills in English though they have immense knowledge in their own discipline. Why couldn't educational institutions be successful in making their products speak English correctly and fluently? Is it because of the ineffective techniques and methods employed in the process of teaching English at schools and colleges? Of course, it might be. But the prime factor is that the students are not given adequate training in mastering the language skills.

Through multimedia and modern technology we can offer students not only affluent sources of authentic learning materials, but also an attractive, animated pictures and pleasant sounds, which to a large extent overcome the lack of authentic language environment and arouse students' interest in learning English. Unless teachers give up their old school of thought, the present scenario of English language with regard to its poor skills cannot be overcome. The present educational system as well as the methods of teaching faces a total fiasco as it has failed to produce proficient educators with a powerful knowledge of the four skills in English language.

The present study is aimed at the factors affecting the language skills of prospective teachers and implies that gender, locality and parents' education are not the major determining factors affecting the communication skill of the prospective teachers. The study results show that there is significant difference in the language skills with regard to the teacher-educators' use of language and other teaching techniques either at the school or graduate or at B.Ed degree level.

Keywords: Prospective Teachers, Communication Skills, LSRW Skills, Multimedia Technology.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a divine gift serving as a vehicle for expressing one's thought and feelings. It is an effective tool of the human communication system (Sampath, 2004: 45). It is the basis for social, cultural, aesthetical, spiritual and economic development and growth of every human being. A person is guesstimated by the way he uses the language, either in a florid or stumpy style. Language, one of the powerful factors, distinguishes the people across the world. English is the most important Lingua Franca which is spoken far and wide. To develop international understanding and foster brotherhood feeling, language

becomes an essential instrument. It is the mother tongue of more than 320 million people and another 200 million use it as their second language. English became an integral part of Indian Educational System as it has been playing a vital role. The neglect of it would be a heavy loss not only in the field of science and technology but also in the human development.

Significance of the Study

It is the destiny of any professional who is hardly in need of an excellent command over English language. Every organization demands effective and excellent professionals for the escalation and expansion of its

existence. There is a bumper harvest, but efficient servants are insufficient as far as job opportunities in educational institutions are concerned. The most important reason is their lack of communication skills in English though they have immense knowledge in their own discipline. Only a very few is able to converse in English. Most of the students are not even able to understand what others speak in English. Many a pupil feels shy to speak in English.

Why couldn't educational institutions be successful in making their products speak English correctly and fluently? Is it because of the ineffective techniques and methods employed in the process of teaching English at schools and colleges? Of course, it might be. But the prime factor is that the students are not given adequate training in mastering the language skills. Although aims and objectives have been formulated and ways and methods are suggested to teach English language skills, no college or school is ready to translate them into action. The teacher-educators in colleges of education spend more than 200 hours per year in teaching English yet they fail to make their student-teachers proficient in mastering language skills. Students learn theoretically, not practically though a lot of materials and equipments are accessible to train them. Rafeedali's studies on computer based technology and its pedagogical utility states that most of the higher secondary school teachers are not using computer resources in their teaching-learning process and they do not apply information technology resources in the classroom interaction for the evaluation (Rafeedali, 2009).

Teachers and Multimedia Technology

Modern technology bestows a conducive language learning environment and an affluent source of authentic learning materials to the learners of English. So the language teachers may make use of them to cultivate good language among their students. It is the need of the hour that teachers ought to come forward to develop a positive attitude towards technology. Teacher educators should recognize the new skills and train prospective teachers to develop and welcome a partnership with electronic education and help them move with innovative teaching techniques (Kumaraswamy 2002).

Technique in teaching is a factor which promotes and effectuates learning through teaching with different devices; it is the skill of the teacher in manipulating the devices so that the psychological processes of the learner may be stimulated to effective reactions, particularly in dealing with the subject matter that is to be learned (Sharma, 2007:101).

Teachers must realize the constant influence of several communication media inside and outside the classroom and know about the visual experiences which are very effective because the impressions created by the sense of sight, cannot easily be effaced. The visual attracts the attention of students and holds it for a long time. Research and experience state that people learn 83.0% through sight and remember 50% of what they see and hear. (Sampath et al 2004: 26-27).

The experience of the researchers and the facilitators support the belief that interactive multimedia materials which integrate language skills and content-specific tasks result in increased motivation to learn and improved performance. (Johanna Klassen & Philip Milton, 2010: 292). Just like TV, the readily observable peculiarity of the use of multimedia systems is that they "attack" two senses at the same time: sight and hearing. This characteristic makes multimedia systems a crucial resource when working with autonomous learners. The use of all or part of this equipment may represent an advantage for the improvement of the teaching-learning environment.

Teaching Language through Technology

Technology plays an important and pervasive role in modern business and everyday living. It is not only perceived as a catalyst for change, but also change in teaching style, change in learning approaches, and change in access to information. Yet research indicates that teachers are both threatened by change, and conversely not impressed by change that appears to focus on what the technology can do rather than on learning (Watson, 2001).

The application of multimedia approaches in the learning process can promote active learning. Nevertheless, they assert that active learning is best achieved when the lessons are interactive. Echoing similar sentiments, Vigna

(2003) states that interactive learning approaches develop motivation and interest in learners. A study conducted by Bonwell and Eison (1991) further suggests that interactive learning strategies are helpful in promoting the development of skills. Information presented in audio, video, graphic, animated, and verbal formats can be integrated to create an authentic, vivid, attractive, and multi-sensory language context. This can be a motivating and effective way to learn a second language, especially when they have very little or no access to L2 input in daily life (Sun & Dong, 2004).

Al-Seghayer, (2001) says that several studies, in recent years, have investigated the effects of presenting information using multiple modalities, such as text, audio, still pictures, and dynamic videos, on L2 learning. Students and teachers should be able to use different media in their classrooms through different technologies. Media provide teachers and students with creative and practical ideas. They enable teachers to meet various needs and interests of their students. They also provide students with a lot of language practice through activities using newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, movies, books, Internet, etc, and tasks which develop reading, writing, speaking and listening skills (Tafari, 2009).

Krashen (1989:5) in 'Language Acquisition and Language Education' stresses that while anxiety and lack of motivation can impede language learning by acting as filters locking comprehension, the novelty factor or the very appealing features of multimedia renders autonomy and creates greater participation from the students. Butler (1997) points out that, "Through the use of the Internet, word processors, multimedia, hypermedia and drill and practice programs, students can engage in individualized instruction designed to meet their specific needs.

As there is a vast scope for teachers to teach language using technology, they should give up their old school of thought and overcome their students' poor language skills. However, it is pitiable to state that the present educational system as well as the methods of teaching faces a total fiasco as it has failed to produce proficient educators with a powerful knowledge of the four skills in English language. This existing issue motivated the authors to take up this

piece of research work. The major purpose of the study is to discover the reasons of failures that the student-teachers face with regard to their poor language skills and make them realize the importance of the four pillars of communication.

Objectives

1. To find the level of language skills among the prospective teachers.
2. To find out whether there is any significant difference in prospective teachers with regard to achievement in language skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing, with regard to the selected background variables.

The background variables are sex, locality, parents' education, and the use of language at the B.Ed level, the use of language laboratory and oratory techniques (seminar, debate, symposium, role-play extempore, group discussion etc.) and their medium upto degree level.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis for the present study is that there is no significant difference in prospective teachers in their language skills with regard to the background variables.

Methodology

The survey method is adopted in this study.

a) Population and Sample

The present study is conducted on the sample of 325 prospective teachers from the population of 3500 student-teachers of various new born Colleges of Education in Kanyakumari District located at the southern part of Tamilnadu. The sampling technique employed in this study is random sampling.

b) Tool used

A self-made tool was developed by the authors to scale the prospective teachers' level of the language skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. The type of questions asked to test the listening skill was comprehending the message from the video-clip projected, Word power, Distinguishing a phrase and a phrasal verb and Understanding BBC news. To test the speaking skill, talking on current affairs, involvement in

group discussion, extempore and pronunciation were asked. Reading a passage and answering the questions, Skimming and Scanning a news paper and checking eye-span while reading were the questions asked to test their reading skill and lastly the writing skill was tested by a few questions such as Punctuation, Word order, Letter writing and Hints developing. The score for each item is given as follows:

- Excellent = 9-10 marks
- Good = 7-8 marks
- Average = 5-6 marks
- Poor = 4 and below

c) Statistical techniques used

SD and t- test for independent means were the statistical techniques employed in this study.

Data Analysis

Table 1 shows that more than three-fifth of the prospective teachers had poor language skills except in listening skill which is comparatively at higher level.

The Table 2 shows that more than two-fifth of the prospective teachers' communication skill is poor and only about one-fifth of them is either good or excellent.

The Table 3 shows that no significant difference exists in the prospective teachers' communication skill and its dimension with regard to gender.

The Table 4 shows that significant difference exists in the prospective teachers' communication skill and its dimension with regard to locale except the speaking skill.

Language Skill	The level of language skills in prospective teachers (N=325)							
	Excellent		Good		Average		Poor	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Listening	14	4.3	31	9.5	89	27.3	191	58.7
Speaking	12	3.6	23	7	39	12	251	77
Reading	24	7.3	46	14.1	58	20.9	198	60.9
Writing	24	7.3	39	12	54	16.6	208	64

Table 1. The level of language skills in prospective teachers

The level of prospective teachers (N=325)							
Excellent		Good		Average		Poor	
No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
4	1.2	66	20.3	109	33.5	146	44.9

Table 2. The overall performance (communication skill) of the prospective teachers

Dimension	Gender	Size (N)	Mean	SD	t value	P value
Listening	Male	136	4.94	1.499	.319	.750
	Female	189	4.89	1.430		
Speaking	Male	136	4.60	1.416	.082	.935
	Female	189	4.61	1.382		
Reading	Male	136	5.1912	1.66228	.441	.659
	Female	189	5.1058	1.76232		
Writing	Male	136	5.1103	1.68071	145	.885
	Female	189	5.1376	1.66699		
Communication skill as a whole	Male	136	19.84	5.067	.174	.862
	Female	189	19.74	4.915		

Table 3. Differential analysis on the scores of communication skill with regard to gender

Dimension	Locality	Size (N)	Mean	SD	t value	P value
Listening	Urban	176	5.12	1.612	2.833	.005**
	rural	149	4.66	1.211		
Speaking	Urban	176	4.68	1.407	1.027	.305
	rural	149	4.52	1.378		
Reading	Urban	176	5.3352	1.81615	2.221	.027*
	rural	149	4.9128	1.57228		
Writing	Urban	176	5.3182	1.74386	2.267	.024*
	rural	149	4.8993	1.55418		
Communication skill as a whole	Urban	176	20.45	5.270	2.654	.008*
	rural	149	18.99	4.486		

*Significant at 5% level **Significant at 1% level

Table 4. Differential analysis on the scores of communication skill with regard to locale

The Table 5 shows that no significant difference exists in the prospective teachers' communication skill with regard to parents' education.

The Table 6 shows that significant difference exists in the prospective teachers' language skills with regard to oratory techniques.

The Table 7 shows that significant difference exists in the prospective teachers' language skills with regard to the use of language lab.

The Table 8 shows that significant difference exists in the prospective teachers' communication skill with regard to the use of language at the B.Ed level.

Dimension	Parents' Education	Size (N)	Mean	SD	t value	P value
Listening	Educated	296	4.92	1.473	.322	.748
	Illiterate	29	4.83	1.311		
Speaking	Educated	296	4.60	1.425	.071	.943
	Illiterate	29	4.62	1.049		
Reading	Educated	296	5.0878	1.67910	1.805	.072
	Illiterate	29	5.6897	2.03722		
Writing	Illiterate	296	5.1318	1.66912	.193	.847
	Frequently	29	5.0690	1.70987		
Communication skill as a whole	Illiterate	296	19.74	4.995	.174	.862
	Frequently	29	20.21	4.799		

Table 5. Differential analysis on the scores of Communication skill with regard to Parents' Education

Dimension	Oratory techniques	Size (N)	Mean	SD	t value	P value
Listening	Frequently	37	6.70	1.898	8.839	.000**
	Very rarely	288	4.68	1.216		
Speaking	Frequently	37	6.51	1.880	10.154	.000**
	Very rarely	288	4.36	1.105		
Reading	Frequently	37	7.6486	1.25203	11.044	.000**
	Very rarely	288	4.8194	1.49169		
Writing	Frequently	37	7.0541	1.61496	8.183	.000**
	Very rarely	288	4.8785	1.51041		
Communication skill as a whole	Frequently	37	27.92	3.954	13.049	.000**
	Very rarely	288	18.74	4.039		

**Significant at 1% level

Table 6. Differential analysis on the scores of communication skill with regard to oratory techniques

Dimension	Use of language lab	Size (N)	Mean	SD	t value	P value
Listening	Frequently	52	6.08	2.008	6.315	.000**
	Very rarely	273	4.69	1.210		
Speaking	Frequently	52	5.73	1.991	6.793	.000**
	Very rarely	273	4.39	1.132		
Reading	Frequently	52	6.8269	1.93747	8.524	.000**
	Very rarely	273	4.8205	1.47305		
Writing	Frequently	52	6.5192	1.91476	7.037	.000**
	Very rarely	273	4.8608	1.48114		
Communication skill as a whole	Frequently	50	25.54	5.711	10.228	.000**
	Very rarely	275	18.73	4.031		

**Significant at 1% level

Table 7. Differential analysis on the scores of communication skill with regard to the use of language lab

Dimension	Use of language at the B.Ed Level	Size (N)	Mean	SD	t value	P value
Listening	English	56	6.02	1.977	6.651	.000**
	Bilingual	269	4.68	1.207		
Speaking	English	56	5.70	1.953	6.899	.000**
	Bilingual	269	4.38	1.125		
Reading	English	56	6.6071	1.98795	7.603	.000**
	Bilingual	269	4.8364	1.48977		
Writing	English	56	6.1964	1.89180	5.504	.000**
	Bilingual	269	4.9033	1.53259		
Communication skill as a whole	English	56	24.52	6.347	8.690	.000**
	Bilingual	269	18.80	3.994		

**Significant at 1% level

Table 8. Differential analysis on the scores of the use of language at the B.Ed Level

The Table 9 shows that significant difference exists in the prospective teachers' communication skill with regard to the medium upto degree level.

Findings and Interpretations

The study shows that no significant difference exists in the prospective teachers in their communication skill with regard to gender, locality (except in the speaking skill) and education of parents. It implies that gender, locality and parents' education are not the major determining factors affecting the communication skill of the prospective

Dimension	Medium upto degree level	Size (N)	Mean	SD	t value	P value
Listening	English	51	6.29	1.911	8.081	.000**
	Tamil	274	4.65	1.195		
Speaking	English	51	5.71	1.942	6.536	.000**
	Tamil	274	4.40	1.160		
Reading	English	51	6.8627	1.80022	8.624	.000**
	Tamil	274	4.8212	1.50242		
Writing	English	51	6.5686	1.83581	7.229	.000**
	Tamil	274	4.8577	1.49413		
Communication skill as a whole	English	51	25.43	5.866	10.130	.000**
	Tamil	274	18.73	3.995		

**Significant at 1% level

Table 9. Differential analysis on the scores of the medium upto degree level

teachers. But there is significant difference in the language skills with regard to the teacher-educators' use of language at B.Ed level. The mean scores indicate that the prospective teachers who were taught only in English for the whole year are the better benefactors than their counterparts who were taught in bilingual language. This may be the fact that in a few institutions educators love to talk incessantly in English with the prospective teachers and this might have paved a way for them to develop an affinity with the language but, on the contrary, bilingualism in the English classroom really obliterates or even kills the spirit of learning the skills of English language.

There is significant difference in the language skills with regard to the prospective teachers' medium of instruction upto the degree level. The mean scores show the fact that those who are exposed to English ambiance from their first step to degree level, have a flavour over the language. The teacher and taught might have had excellent interaction in English during the process of teaching and learning both in and out of the classroom. Whereas, those who had no opportunity to have their education in English medium up to degree level have been tremendously failed to achieve communication skill in L2. The investigators find a significant difference in the language skills with regard to the teacher-educators' frequent use of language lab to teach the prospective teachers' the different language skills. The mean scores show that those who have frequently used the language lab for learning the language skills, enhanced more favourable attitude towards English language skills than their counterparts who had a rare chance of using it.

There is significant difference in the language skills with

regard to Oratory techniques used by the teacher-educators in teaching different language skills. The mean scores show that the teacher-educators' frequent application of Group or oratory techniques such as Seminar, Debate, symposium, role-play extempore, Group Discussion etc strengthen the prospective teachers' flow of language more profoundly than their counterparts who had only rare opportunity in learning English through the oratory techniques and that's why their score in the language skills is very poor.

Educational Implications

In Tamilnadu, there is a mushroom growth of colleges of education seen far and wide. They generate more than sixty six thousands of teachers every year. The new born teachers come out with a crown of B.Ed degree but without proficiency in communication and the application of multimedia in education. The principal reason for this painful situation is due to lack of oratory techniques they had at the time of training. There are no special efforts to train the prospective-teachers in their language skills and there is no practical examination conducted so far on language skills. An affluent communication skill cannot be harvested unless the language skills are sown in them. So the government has to take strenuous efforts to look into this matter and realize the state of teachers and come forward to conduct compulsory examination on this area.

It is the sole responsibility of the teacher-educators to play a vital role in leading the prospective teachers towards the goal of achieving language skills by any means. So the teacher-educators must avoid conversing with the prospective-teachers in bilingual language while teaching. None can repudiate the issue that it is due to the lack of using multimedia devices in teaching language skills, healthy transactional exchanges in various situations like greetings, apologies, and complaints could not be developed very effectively and successfully. So it is a pivotal requisite that the AV aids should be inter-woven with the lectures of teacher-educators.

The prospective teachers, in the present day, are in the world of sophisticated technology. They cannot simply brush aside this advanced technology that they visualize around them. Instead, they should equip themselves with

profound knowledge of multimedia applications in education in order to develop their future students with proficiency in English language and prosperous in communication skill and to face the ensuing challenges and make them constructive citizens. Teaching language skill through multimedia invokes the students' interest and makes their learning easy and effective. Teachers should be aware of teaching language skills to mould their students in all facets of their life.

The colleges of educations should have farsightedness and produce teachers with high proficiency that they must acquire the language skills to develop their skill of communication. It is essential to provide a well established language laboratory to assist teacher-educators to teach the prospective teachers the language skills with ease. Efficient educators who have outstanding command over English language should be appointed rather than appointing qualified teachers as per the norms of NCTE. These educational institutions are like a jewel case, when it is opened numerous colours of stones should radiate light of knowledge and skills.

Conclusion

Teaching of English is nothing but conquering the skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. They play an imperative part in the development of the students' overall personality, thereby enhancing their career prospects. As students do not have competence with these four pillars of communication skill they fail to get hold of good profession. Who is responsible for this cause? It is injustice to lay the blame on students. Affording quality of teaching these skills is on the part of the proficient teachers either it is at the school or at the college level. Students live in the world of illusion that they do realize the importance of language skills but they learn little English for the examination point of view. It is highly regrettable to state that the competency in developing language skills is lacking among prospective teachers who are going to be the class-room sculptors of the future citizens. This is the true portrayal of the present educational scenario.

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