

Developing Communication Skills: A Diagnostic and Remedial Approach

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Abstract

The enhancement of the language skills of the Non-native speakers depends upon the training offered to them. In the process of learning the English language, the learners have to develop themselves in many respects such as using proper sentence structures, correct pronunciation and proper body language. The teachers while teaching the slow learners have to use different methods to keep the learners on the track. One such method is experimented in our paper, where the role play of two learners is recorded and feedback is offered for improvement. In the second and third practice, it is found that considerable improvement has been achieved.

Keywords: Communication Skills, diagnostic, remedial, Tertiary level, Extended classroom activity

Introduction

English is an international language and it has become the most common language. It is used for multifarious purposes. The English words are being mixed with one's native language during the process of communication. When that is the state of English language, it is questioned whether it has been mastered by everyone.

‘English? Easy! I could speak it perfectly by the time I was five.’

‘I wish I could learn English properly, but it’s such a difficult language.’

- **John Seely**

The first one is expressed by the Native Speaker of English language. Learning English seems to be easier for the Native speaker because it is the language of the speaker’s environment. There is actually no difficulty in learning one’s native language due to the availability of different resources.

But, the second one is expressed by a Non-native speaker, whose mother tongue is not English. As far as the Non-native speaker is concerned, the reasons for the intricacies in learning the language can be presented as follows.

i) The language is quite new to the learner. He has to learn from the alphabet and start mastering the rubrics.

ii) English is not the learner’s language of environment.

iii) Even though English is taught from earlier school classes, the application part of the language is missing to a greater extent.

iv) The learners’ lack of interest.

v) The teachers’ lack of involvement in teaching.

The students who had been trained well at schools are generally good at language. Particularly, they are good in the speaking skill. In general, the categories of students noted below are poor in English.

i) The first-generation students.

ii) The students whose parents are not highly educated.

iii) The vernacular medium students.

The students with average language skills after completing their school studies, get admitted in various tertiary level institutions. They also select engineering as their course. At this juncture, they encounter a lot of problems in understanding the subjects taught in English. Though the syllabus has been framed in such a way that there is scope for training all the LSRW skills. As certain students have poor language skills, they find it very difficult to cope with the

subject. They have great difficulties in writing general essays, paragraphs on scientific and technical topics and so on. The teachers handling English too, have difficulties in training the students. They don't have sufficient time for offering a full-fledged training. However, they manage to train the slow learners by way of extended class hours. The role of English teachers is focused towards completing the syllabus and also to train the students to use the language for their practical lives.

Hence, it is necessary to chart out different methods for training the students in English. One such method is experimented by the authors. It is practising the learners in role plays.

The paper aims at training the learners in role plays. For experimenting our method, two poor speakers, studying I year B.E. Programme are identified from the authors' classes and role play practices are video-graphed. The topic given to them was 'Assignment'. Points related to the topic were given to both speakers. One was directed to ask questions and the other was asked to answer the questions. As the speakers are poor in language skills, they have some reservations to speak. They actually have problems in questioning and answering. But, they were not given any help at the initial stage. Their dialogue was video-graphed. The points given to them on the topic 'Assignment' are as follows.

- i) Topic of the assignment.
- ii) Date of announcement.
- iii) Topic - easy or difficult.
- iv) Reference books available.
- v) Where to get reference books?
- vi) Whether to use paper or notebook?
- vii) Date of submission.
- viii) Date extension possible?
- ix) Marks for the assignment.

Pre-feedback Task

The video of practice 1 is the dialogue of the speakers without any preliminary training.

Video of Practice 1

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4HPVRY1T7s&feature=em-share_video_user

The learners were asked to converse with each other with the points given to them on 'Assignment'. After the recording, the video was played step by step and the problems were identified. The problems are noted below.

- (i) Low confidence level.
- (ii) Low audibility due to their nervousness.
- (iii) Acute problems in constructing sentences.
- (iv) Lack of fluency.
- (v) Problems in pronunciation, accent and intonation.
- (vi) Problems in body language.

For example, relating to the problems in sentence construction, the learner who poses questions, out of nervousness uses the statement like this.

'Have we to use paper or pen for writing assignment?'

But the point given is 'whether to use paper or notebook for writing assignment?'

The dialogue between the two learners clearly states that they are very poor in language skills. The English teachers in general, are quite comfortable with the above average students. But, training the slow learners is actually a herculean task. At tertiary level, the teachers undergo difficulties in training the slow learners. As English teachers, when they deal with a heterogenous group, they cannot outrightly put aside their responsibilities of shaping the slow learners.

Post-Feedback

The video of practice 2 is the dialogue attempted by the speakers after a feedback.

Video of Practice 2

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ns_Jdy9S2HM&feature=em-share_video_user

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Prof. N. Lakshmana Perumal, Sheeba Manodh and M. Chithra Editors. *Effective Strategies, Innovative Methods & Integrated Pedagogical Approaches to Learning and Teaching English in Heterogenous Classrooms*

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The post feedback video shows considerable improvement in the learners' dialogue. They are

- (i) Improvement in the confidence level.
- (ii) The audibility has increased.
- (iii) Improved sentence structures compared to video 1
- (iv) Fluency has improved.
- (v) But still, there are problems in pronunciation, accent and intonation.
- (vi) Slight improvement in body language. But, still the learners have to be trained.

As the initial focus is on general aspects with regard to the language skills, the authors have not taken pronunciation aspects and body language at this juncture. An overall impression is, video 2 shows a comparatively better performance than video 1.

What happened in between video 1 and video 2? The Feedback is actually a magic wand. The trainers offered feedback touching upon all areas of their dialogue with respect to the topic 'Assignment'. The learners too could understand their problems. The feedback helps the learners to get an exposure to the language with respect to this context.

Post-Feedback

The video of practice 3 is the dialogue of the speakers after the second feedback.

Video of Practice 3

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFrODSbGAXg&feature=em-share_video_user

The third dialogue was done with utmost improvement. The speakers were able to deliver the content satisfactorily. There is a vast difference between video1 and video 3. Again, the second feedback had helped the learners to improve still further. In video1 and video 2, by mistake it is stated as 'Have we to use paper or pen?'. But in video 3, the speaker corrects it and poses his question as 'Have we to use paper or notebook?'

This paper attempts to diagnose the problems and explores remedial measures by offering feedback. Depending upon more practices, more improvement can be achieved. Further, it can

be thought of improving the pronunciation aspects and body language too. A single training cannot yield a full-fledged improvement. Hence, the trainer should plan for more training in role plays, presentations, narrations and so on. Due to time constraint, the trainer has to offer training as extended classroom activities.

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