

The Role and Significance of Communication Skills for Personal, Social and Professional Interactions

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Abstract

English is an important tool for today's national and international communication. It symbolizes in Indian minds, better education, better culture and higher intellect. In present times, English is the most preferred language. Keeping in view the present scope and importance of the English language, there is an urgent need to integrate all four language skills: LSRW (listening, speaking, reading and writing) for practical and functional use of language. The specific purpose of this paper is to help learners to develop the communication skills for Personal, Social and Professional Interactions

Key Words: Techniques, Habits, Presentation, Fundamental tools, Vocabulary, Accent, Intensive Ideas.

Personal Communication Skills

a) Improving Listening Habits

Listening may be defined as the ability to identify and understand what others are saying. This involves the understanding of speaker's accent or pronunciation, his/her grammar and vocabulary and grasping the meaning of the speaker's speech.

If an individual's listening is poor, it will have a negative effect on the fulfillment of the other requirements for speaking, reading and writing. Therefore, listening skill has become an important part of the communication process. In order to become a good communicator, one has to develop listening skill at first. At the initial level the learners should be trained in the sound system of the language so that they may not face any difficulty in pronunciation and understanding of the language. Learners are to be encouraged to know why they are listening and what type of information they require. If the aims and objectives of listening are briefed in advance, the learners can adopt the way to listen to a particular context and can focus their attention efficiently.

b) Enhancing Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication plays a key role in detection of an individual's emotion. Body postures like nodding or shaking of head, crossed legs and arms, and foot kicking indicate that someone is emotionally detached, impatient or showing casual attitude. It depends on the situation in which an action is initiated.

Gestures are also used to convey a non-verbal message. It includes the movements of hands, fingers, head, legs, arms, etc. for example, thumb shows "ok" or "good". Relaxed hands indicate confidence and self-assurance. Crossed arms show a sign of insecurity and lack of confidence. Folding arms show an unwilling state of mind.

Therefore, keeping in view the above discussion, we can say that nonverbal communication impacts a great deal of how we communicate, and can reflect accurately what is going on inside us. The use of nonverbal communication may vary between individuals, different cultures and nationalities.

c) Developing Sound Relationships

Communication means a talk between two or more people. It is a form of interaction that occurs in oral communication. Thornbury defines "Communication is the kind of speech that happens formally/informally, symmetrically, and for the purpose of establishing and maintaining social ties and relationships." He is of the view that communication is a social interaction and always demands specific rules to sustain in order to establish good relationships. The primary focus of communication is to describe common social situations in which speakers and listeners accept one another in terms of ideas and opinions and also to understand its social purpose. If proper principles and norms are not followed in oral communication, an effective communication cannot be maintained in a positive way and may also cause to deteriorate. Such situations do not help an individual to develop sound relationships in his/her society.

d) Developing Two way Communication Techniques

It is very important in a communicative situation to know when to stop talking and start listening. A perfect communication is one in which both the listener and the speaker alternate their roles. The topic of conversation must have a mutual acceptance as it helps in sustaining the talk. It would be better if the conversation is about a topic of interest like weather, current affairs, etc. The closing of the conversation should also be impressive and situation based. We can use certain phrases for conclusion like bye, goodbye, see you then, catch up with you later, etc.

Language is the most commonly used and effective medium of self-expression in all spheres of human life – personal, social and professional. Some commonly used strategies for effective communications are:

- Meeting people, exchanging greetings and taking leave

- Introducing yourself
- Introducing people to others
- Giving personal information
- Talking about people and places
- Getting people's attention and interrupting
- Giving instructions and seeking clarifications
- Making requests and responding to requests
- Asking for directions and giving directions
- Thanking someone and responding to thanks
- Inviting and Accepting and Refusing an Invitation
- Apologizing and responding to an apology
- Congratulating and responding to congratulations
- Paying compliments, showing appreciation, offering encouragement and responding to them
- Asking for, giving and refusing permission

e) Developing the Habit of asking Relevant Questions

Asking relevant questions during or at the end of communication is a tricky business, but questions are the interactive elements of any type of speaking. They encourage a speaker to reinforce his or her message, respond to the concerns of the audience, and support the argument. It is essential to conduct a question answer session at the end of any communicative situation. Effective communicators always consider it a valuable and vital part of their communication/presentation. Most of the speakers usually use questions they are asked to help refine their presentations. Therefore, questions are very important as they initiate communication which is the key to a successful presentation. Handling questions in a systematic and logical way is good for demonstrating confidence, being responsive to the concerns of others and building rapport with the members of the audience.

Social Communication Skills

a) Providing Information

Providing relevant information in a given communication act can enhance social ties and relationships. One should always try to provide sufficient information so that the audience can understand in a clear and coherent way. It is also important to avoid common pitfalls by responding to questions positively and enthusiastically. This will help a speaker to remain brief and focused.

b) Negotiations

Negotiations are made in order to reach beneficial outcomes over different issues. This skill helps an individual to maintain the discipline of the communication. It will encourage the speaker to schedule his or her communication in a right direction and evolve high-priority thoughts.

c) Suggestions

Suggestion is considered a humble act of social communication. The purpose of suggestion is to promote the involvement of various individuals in order to achieve the goals of communication. It helps in creating a culture of participation, motivation, and improved communication.

d) Clarifications

Clarification in communication is important as it resolves the areas of confusion and misunderstanding. It increases speaker's productivity and efficiency. Sometimes speakers make use of complex messages or issues. But appropriate clarification can help a speaker/listener to make sense of such complex issues.

e) Eye Contact in Conversation

Eye contact is important in conversation in a sense that our eyes speak volumes about us and how we communicate. A good eye contact is a skill for effective and vital communication. It shows the speaker's or listener's interest, trust, respect, confidence, assurance, etc.

f) Facial Expressions and gestures

Facial expressions and gestures are used in communication in order to convey a message without the use of words. This type of communication is known as nonverbal communication. It includes the movements of hands, body, eye contact, frowning, smiling, etc.

Professional Communication Skills

a) Good Oral Communication

Language is a means of communication. It is used for interactions and communicates meanings in order to achieve different functions and notions in every sphere of life. Oral communication involves complete communication along with correct pronunciation, accent and the rhythm of the language. The thing that contributes most to oral communication is the speaker's confidence which can be fully developed by mastering the maximum aspects of language learning. Most eminent among them are the recognition of the sound system, correct pronunciation, rich vocabulary and intensive ideas. The thorough acquaintance with the versatility of ideas is possible by listening to the group of people who are very prompt in infusing new ideas into the set subject. Besides this, the appropriate use of language and pronunciation used by the intellectuals in extension lectures, public lectures, seminars, conferences and on television do enhance listening skill and bring forth the spontaneity in the speech. Such activities naturally widen the learners' vocabulary of the target language and improve their oral communication enormously.

b) Confidence in Speaking and Writing

Speaking is indeed a crucial part of the language learning process. A voice speaker uses a limited vocabulary, and encounters difficulties with pronunciation, lacks self-esteem and seems shy, and as a result he/she engages in brief conversation. A writer also confronts certain problems in writing if he/she has limited knowledge of grammar,

inadequate vocabulary, thoughts, novel ideas, etc. But a teacher/instructor has to encourage him/her, provide authentic material, communicative situations in order to lead him/her from dependence to independence. This technique would certainly enhance a learner's confidence in speaking and writing.

c) **Developing Leadership Qualities**

Leadership qualities are associated with effective communication skills. A good leader is one who adjusts his/her communication style according to the kind of audience he/she faces. The mastery of a verbal and nonverbal communication is essential for leadership qualities. An honest effort in addressing the needs of a small group can go a long way in improving the leadership qualities in any organization.

Fundamental Tools of Communication

a) **Role Playing**

Role-play normally involves students playing imaginary people in an imaginary situation. It can often be based on a dialogue or text from a textbook. This technique gives students a chance to use the language they have practised in a more creative way. It is a technique in which learners are given a specific topic or problem and they are asked to discuss its various components and remedial measures. The purpose of using this technique is to support and stimulate students to use their knowledge of English while speaking with divergent categories of people and consequently overcoming the fear and nervousness of speaking before others. It also improves students' speaking ability in using accurate pronunciation and intonation.

The concept of role-play helps the students a great deal during pair/group interactions and discussions. Students feel much freer to express themselves when playing someone else. It also adds interest, and humour. In ordinary conversations and discussions students may be reluctant to give their opinions for fear of criticism, where as in role play, they adopt the attitudes they suppose proper to that part they have been given and are not open to personal criticism. Role –play also provides a wide range of language behavior, from aggression to reconciliation, from persuasion to rejection. If role- play is first introduced in group form, it will offer very little difficulty. Later, it should be extended to individual roles. The advantage of group roles is, however, that activity involves more students and keeps them talking throughout, as they go on with the activity.

Example—1

“The garbage in your area is overflowing and the municipality is not taking any action. Decide what facilities you would like to provide for proper clearing and recycling of garbage.”

Besides a discussion on this problem we could go a step further. Suppose we introduce some role play, by giving the students parts to play like those below. We also tell them that there is going to be a public meeting at the park that evening.

Ayesha

You are an environmentalist who would like to preserve the natural environment. You are willing to provide space at the back of your kitchen garden for storing the bio-degradable products, like tea leaves, vegetable peels, etc. for turning them into a compost heap, so that the manure could be added to the soil to help plants grow. Express your opinions strongly.

Iqbal

You are a parent with two children, who have a passion for drawing. You are in constant need of paper. So you want to recycle the paper to produce hand-made paper and drawing-paper. You are willing to spend some time, energy and money on this venture. Give a proposal.

Rohan

You are an old age pensioner. You would like a park at the place of the existing dust-bins. So you plan to provide for door-to-door service for garbage collection and would like to set up a park. Stand up and express your opinion at the end of the meeting. You have to engage two boys to collect the garbage. So you propose to collect some money towards their payment.

We have now transformed the discussion into a simulation. The students are no longer free to be themselves. Perhaps we won't get more talk, but we will get a very different kind of discussion from the one where the students are merely working out a list of facilities.

b) Body Language

Body language plays a very important role in non-verbal communication. It involves the silent messages communicated through body movements, facial expressions, gestures, etc. Facial expressions are used to convey a repress or suppress emotion. If facial expressions are known properly, they can tell a lot about an individual's emotion. A person's lie or honest attitude can be easily detected from his/her countenance or facial expressions. This type of non-verbal communication involves the actions of eyes, lips, eyebrows, nose and cheek movements. The main purpose of their movements is to show whether an individual is happy, sad, angry or depressed.

Body postures also play a key role in detection of an individual's emotion. Body postures like nodding or shaking of head, crossed legs and arms, and foot kicking indicate that someone is emotionally detached, impatient or showing casual attitude. It depends on the situation in which an action is initiated.

Gestures are also used to convey a non-verbal message. It includes the movements of hands, fingers; head, legs, arms, etc. for example, thumb shows "ok" or "good". Relaxed hands indicate confidence and self assurance. Crossed arms show a sign of insecurity and lack of confidence. Folding arms show an unwilling state of mind.

Therefore, keeping in view the above discussion, we can say that body language impacts a great deal of how we communicate, and can reflect accurately what is going

on inside us. The use of body language may vary between individuals, different cultures and nationalities.

Example—2

Imagine that you are in a family and your father and mother are in need of money. They need your help to meet out the family requirements. What suggestions will you make?

Example

Father: We are facing many problems now a days.

Mother: What happened? Can you tell me one?

Father: You know we are in a rented house and unable to pay its rent.

Mother: Why? Did you leave the job?

Father: Yes. The Manager was not happy with me and told me not to come in the office from tomorrow.

Mother: Don't worry. Let us tell the situation to our son. I hope he will manage.

Father: OK. Let's try.

Father& Mother: Good morning son.

Son: Good morning.

Mother: We have come to discuss a problem with you.

Son: I know the problem.

Father: How do you know it?

Son: I was listening to your talk in the next room.

Mother: So, what have you decided?

Son: I am going to join a multinational company after three days.

Father: Did you receive any call letter?

Son: Yes, today only.

Mother: God bless you. We hope you will perform you duty very well.

Father: Not only duty but household matters also.

Son: I will try my best in minimizing your troubles.

Father& Mother: Our blessings are with you.

Son: Thanks.

Steps

- The teacher should prepare three students to play the role of father, mother and son.
- Then the teacher should check their performance.

- Point out some of the mistakes of the students in the functional use of the language.
- For further tasks the teacher should make it sure that there will be a variety in the use of the language and will link to their daily experiences.
- Other students after listening to the conversation engage themselves in similar tasks.

c) Practice

A Model Dialogue on 'How to Make Pins'

- Pin Maker: Good morning. What can I do for you?
- Ram: Could you please tell us how to make a pin?
- Pin Maker: Sure, but why do you want to know about pins?
- Sham: Our English teacher taught us an essay on 'How Wealth Accumulates and Men Decay' with many examples of pin making.
- Raheem: We came to know that making a pin in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was very difficult.
- Pin Maker: Yes, even today, if you want to make a pin, you have to do many things.
- Ram: Will it help us to gain more knowledge about pin making?
- Pin Maker: Yes, because you have to engage yourself practically in making a pin. It will help you to easily go through some important operations.
- Raheem: Well, tell us what to do first?
- Pin Maker: You have to go to the market and buy some material for making a pin.
- Ram: But it needs money. We have no money. How can we buy material without money?
- Pin Maker: No, you have to spend money if you really want to know how to make a pin.
- Sham: O.k. I have some money. We will buy the material from the market right now.
- Ram: What will be the next step?
- Pin Maker: The Next step is concerned with the preparation. Here you have to ornament the material in a proper shape from point to head. Making a pin needs a lot of time and hard work. This is the real work from where you can learn many skills.
- Raheem: Alright, are there some other steps which will also be beneficial for us?
- Pin Maker: Yes, but the last step is about how to sell a pin. You have to visit many places for motivating people to buy your pins.
- Ram: But, today lots of pins are available in the market and a single pin does not express any value.
- Sham: Yes, pins are made by machines and I don't think that someone will buy a handmade pin because it is difficult to shape it in the way a machine shapes and designs.
- Pin Maker: That's not my business. I just want to make you aware that pin making needs three basic requirements—buying material, making a pin, and selling.

Raheem: Surely, it will help us to know the attitudes and knowledge of people about pin making.

Sham: I think nobody will listen to your silly methods of making pins.

Pin Maker: That's why Goldsmith said "Wealth accumulates but men decay".

Steps

- The teacher should write this dialogue on the board/supply print outs/use power point presentation and ask four students at a time to dramatize the dialogue.
- Then the teacher should ask them to think of another setting. For example 'At the Post Office' and to speak out some sentences.
- Their oral speech must be followed by writing the dialogue on sheets of paper.

Task

Prepare a conversation related to Anna Hazare, Kiran Bedi, and Swami Ram Dev. How they have started an agitation against corruption because corruption is also wealth accumulated and corrupt men decay. We can relate these things to initiate group discussion and oral presentations.

a) Other important functions

Greeting:	(informal) "Hello" (formal) "Good evening"
Leave taking:	(informal) "So long" or "Bye" (formal) "Good Bye"
Acknowledging an introduction:	(informal) "Pleased/Nice/Happy to meet you". (formal) "How do you do?"
Expressing gratitude:	(formal or informal) "Thank you"/ "You are welcome"
Responding to a request, such as:	"Do you mind if I smoke"? "Not at all".

b) Drilling (Classroom situation/Role play)

Salim: Is this a book? (Showing a book)

Karim: Yes, it is.

Salim: Is this a pen? (Showing a book)

Karim: No it isn't.

Salim: What is it?

Karim: It is a book.

- Now **write a similar dialogue using the following objects:**
Chair, table, window, door, shirt, shoe, etc.
- **Role play the dialogue you have written in front of the whole class.**
- **The teacher has to assess the expression of mood and feeling through voice quality of the student, and**
- **Check accuracy of the language and correction if there are mistakes.**

Exercise—2

Students should prepare a dialogue in presence of their teacher. The dialogue should be related to the content of the text. The teacher should monitor the conversation and rules of grammar and provide them feedback so that they may not repeat the mistakes.

Example

Four persons talking about a superstition in a restaurant. One of them begins conversation with a superstition

- Abdul: You see Munira, yesterday I had a test and I was going to the college. I wanted a boiled egg. My mom said “No you can’t have an egg on the day of examination.”
- Munira: Why? What’s the problem in having an egg before going to an examination hall?
- Abdul: You see, she believes that an egg looks like a zero and if I have an egg, I will get zero in the examination.
- Mohan: Oh my goodness! This is too much. Man has landed on moon but where still you like a sound behind.
- Sunita: Let me tell you my experience. Yesterday, I was going to see my younger brother off to the examination hall. My elder sister was also going with me. Suddenly a black cat crossed our way and my sister said, “no way let’s go back home and have a bath”. I said sister there is no time now. Doesn’t matter.
- Abdul: See friends, how odd it is! We should educate them.

Task

- (i) Take part in the conversation in a friendly manner of informal manner and talk about your personal experiences. The focus of the task should be on ‘offering suggestions’ and ‘agreeing’.

Example

Offering Suggestion: How about having anti-superstition campaigns in cinema halls?

Agreeing

- That’s right.
 - OK. What shall we do to overcome superstitions?
 - Shall we go to village to village and talk to people?
 - Yes, that’s a good idea.
- (ii) Oral presentations and group discussions may be initiated in the classroom on superstitions which the students usually experience.

Exercise—3

Classroom language practice involving ‘response, reason, result, reply, condition, consequence, elicitation, etc. For example:

- Rashid: How do you feel?
Sunil: I am terribly hot. (Response)
Rashid: Why do you take off your jacket?
Sunil: I am terribly hot. (Reason)
Rashid: Why did he have to go into hospital?
Sunil: He broke his leg. (Response)

Rashid: What was the result of the car crash? (Reason)
Sunil: He broke his leg. (Result)
Rashid: Why did he do it? (Elicitation)
Sunil: He needed the money. (Reply)

Because you were late, I missed the train.
(Reason) (Result)
If you are late, I'll miss the train.
(Condition) (Consequence)

d) Reading

Reading, of all the language skills opens up before us a new world of experience. We read for pleasure or information. Reading may be defined as a skill that enhances the ability to understand the written language with correct pronunciation. We read reports, articles, notices directions, timetables, maps and graphs to lead a purposeful life. Students can be immensely benefitted if they are trained to read English through different stages of their education. Therefore, the role of teacher in teaching reading is again very crucial.

Reading is an active skill in which the learner should understand what the words mean, watch the paintings, understand the arguments and sometimes counter the arguments. If he/she does not do these things then he/she may forget the essence of reading the content. Students' interest and understanding of the content is very important. Interest plays a pivotal role in reading, if the reader is not actively interested in what he/she is reading then the purpose of reading will be an unsuccessful attempt. The only remedy to this problem is to encourage the learners so that they can react to the topics and share their personal views about the topic.

When a student reads a text in her/his known language, he/she would get a good idea before actually reading. Sometimes the book cover or the title gives hint to a reader before reading a single word. Reader automatically forecasts what she/he is going to read. So, teachers' responsibility is to give students 'hints' so that they can forecast the idea and become more engaged readers.

Once the text is being selected, teacher should choose good reading exercises. The right kind of questions, useful puzzles, common place passages, etc. in order to exploit the reading text into interesting class sequences, using the basic for discussion and other exercises. Any reading text is full of sentences, words, ideas, descriptions etc. and can be used effectively for the development of reading skill. At an undergraduate level, the students are to be able to understand the text with its thought contents, facts and information that it possesses. The conduct of various reading activities in the classroom can help the students to read text with the required goals according to the situation. Reading activities contribute to students' motivation and make student reading a resource for language practice and use in reading, vocabulary learning, listening,

speaking and writing. That is, one can use reading to help students to improve their oral communication, competence in writing, and vocabulary in addition to reading skills.

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