



An Evaluation Of Methods And Materials Of Teaching Communicative Skills – A Study

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Abstract:

In Communicative Language Teaching situation, role of material is not only important but also inevitable. In the traditional context of English teaching textbooks are considered the main source of materials. This paper will provide an evaluation of *Effective Communication Skills (ECS)* has been introduced as a pilot project implemented by the Ministry of Higher Education. The results show that in spite of some shortcomings, there is a general satisfaction about this textbook as it is exclusively produced by the local experts for the tertiary level. The study concludes with suggestions and recommendations for the improvement of the *Effective Communication Skills*. the *Effective Communication Skills* were to promote wider application of accurate and appropriate English usage among undergraduates so as to develop communicative fluency through meaningful language practices and integration of the four language skills. This particular course was developed not fully with commercial purposes in mind; but was rather driven by considerations of the requirements and prerequisites of the target learners and principles of language acquisition. ECS is the end-product of the same ideas to bring out the best in the undergraduates communicative fluency. Since the primary object of this particular textbook was to test-use it as supplementary materials to help enhance under-graduate students' communicative fluency in the public universities in India, it is sincerely expected and hoped that the Ministry of Higher Education will eventually come up with an updated and revised textbook to cater to its objectives and purposes.

Keywords: Course evaluation, communicative english, pilot project, *ECS*

Introduction

Communication etymologically means come and unite together or come and share commonly among all the members in the group, evidently led to human beings evolution, as one and only living being to gain, share and transmit the knowledge to fellow being. In this way communication as the medium to transmit the knowledge from one generation to another which plays a pivotal role in the development of humankind. Generally, the globalization made the people employable everywhere in the world when they are well in communicative skills. Particularly colonization in India made local people employable. Whether it is colonization or globalization, communication is the only way to localization. The industrial revolution in 19th century and Information Technology revolution in 20th century has brought a tremendous change in the way of life of humankind. It leads to technological civilization where everything can be possible if it can be communicated in a proper way. In this way technology and communication go hand in hand for the cause of progress and development of humanity.

Globalization means integration of economies and societies through cross country flow of information, ideas, technology, goods services, capital, finance and people. Connectivity is the quintessence of globalization. In this way communication became the part and parcel of globalization. It shows the importance of it on earth playing a vital role among the people across the different countries in the world. It helps the people to come together and unite. The people will share the ideas, feelings, emotions and knowledge which is the need of the information technology world.

Review of Literature:

Tomlinson (2005) defines materials evaluation as a procedure that involves measuring the value or the potential value of a set of learning materials. It involves making judgments about the effects of the materials on the people using them. Evaluation of materials is always different since 'the needs, objectives, backgrounds and preferred styles of the participants will differ from context to context'. In this connection, Chambers (1997) comments that materials evaluation is a complex process. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) suggested the following checklist for coursebook evaluation: audience; aims; content; methodology; other criteria etc.

Breen and Candlin (1987) recommended an interactive, two-phase guide to help teachers in choosing materials. Phase one poses questions on the usefulness of materials in terms of its aims and content; learner's objectives; teacher's objectives; functions as a classroom resource etc. Phase two focuses on 'more searching analysis' of materials in terms of learner needs and interests; learner approaches to language learning; the teaching/learning process in the classroom etc.

Sheldon (1988) offered 'common core' qualitative criteria so as to make evaluation and selection of coursebook more systematic and informed. His checklists include the following criteria each one with a set of related questions: rationality; availability; user definition; layout/graphics; accessibility; linkage; selection/grading; physical characteristics; appropriacy; authenticity; sufficiency; cultural bias; education validity; stimulus/practical revision; flexibility; guidance; overall value for money etc.

McDonough and Shaw (1997) presented with a two-stage criteria of examination: external and internal evaluation. External evaluation offers a brief overview of the materials from the outside (teachers/students book cover, introduction, table of contents). Internal evaluation inspects a closer and more detailed arrangement of skills; grading and sequencing; types of reading, listening, speaking and writing activities; suitability for different learning styles; learners/teachers adoptability to the materials etc.

Tomlinson (2005) advocated three types of materials evaluation: pre-use evaluation, whilst-use evaluation and post-use evaluation. Pre-use evaluation entails forecasting the potential values of the materials for their users. This type of evaluation often is impressionistic and involves a teacher having a quick impression of its prospective value. Whilst-use evaluation involves determining the value of materials whilst using them or whilst observing them being used. This type of evaluation can be more objective and reliable than the pre-use evaluation as it makes use of measurement rather than prediction. It can measure both the short-term effects concerning motivation, impact, achievability, instant learning etc. as well as the long-term effects regarding durable learning and application.

Mukundan et. al (2011) proposed a tentative English language coursebook evaluation checklist where the list of criteria was divided into two general categories that include 'general attributes' and 'learning-teaching content. General attributes comprise of relation to syllabus and curriculum; methodology; suitability to learners; physical and utilitarian attributes; supplementary materials etc. Learning-teaching content covers general (i.e. task quality, cultural sensitivity, as well as linguistic and situational realism); listening; speaking; reading; writing; vocabulary; grammar; pronunciation; exercises

etc.

In another study, Nimehchisalem and Mukundan (2015) upgraded the 2011 version where the criteria under the two general categories remain the same but the questions under each criterion was revised, upgraded and improved to cater 'to the need for a reliable, valid and practical instrument to evaluate English language teaching textbooks'.

Banumathy, A. (2004) investigated in her study "Needs Analysis: Advanced Professional Spoken English Course for Engineering Students." With the objectives to study, the importance of need analysis in an ESP curriculum, the necessity of revising the syllabus and introduction of the Advanced Spoken English Course focusing on placement.

Objectives of the study

The main objectives of the present study are:

1. To identify the teaching methods followed and materials prescribed in teaching communicative skills.
2. To evaluate the present course material of communicative skills adopted for students in the light of objectives prescribed in the syllabus.
3. To evaluate the methods of teaching communicative skills used by the teachers to students.
4. To suggest the suitable and relevant methods of communicative skills to engineering students.

Hypotheses of the study

1. There is no significant difference among the students of different mother tongue on the methods of teaching adopted by the English language teacher in the class.
2. There is no significant difference among the students of different community on the methods of teaching adopted by the English language teacher in the class.

Indian Higher Education Scenario

Indian higher education is the third largest in the world next to USA and China. During the 60 years of our independence period the expansion of Indian universities raised from 2 to 36 and colleges from 6 to 18,000 with 23,000 students enrolment to 11 million students. The enrolment of students raised to double within five years. Because of globalization, liberalization and privatization of higher education expanded the opportunity and availability of education to the door-steps of students.

Traditionally, Education is knowledge transmission. But now in the competitive world education became as a market commodity with the core values of national development, international standard, value system, accessibility, equity and quality at domestic and abroad and also following aspects influencing current pattern of education:

1. Government is no longer the principal employer.
2. Jobs are based on skills and knowledge.
3. High frequency of mobility in job.
4. Task based remuneration.
5. Knowledge based economy and global demands excellence in performance.
6. Highly competitive and demands excellence in performance.

7. Require continuous up gradation of knowledge and skills enhancement.

The biggest exporters of students to the world countries, the China stands first rank with 10% and India stands second position with 4% of students. The late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi stated that all those studying and working in abroad is better because “Better brain drain than brain in drain”. This helps to some extent to face the above problems at national level.

In the words of Mukth, S.Adi the main problem of higher education for the students in rural areas is the language problem. Education imparted in vernacular languages in rural areas which is drawback to the students who are joining in technical institutions where the medium of instruction is English. But, in the present situation of privatization, liberalization and globalization the knowledge of English language is inevitable and most essential requirement of communication. Hence, this problem needs attention.

There is a shift from teaching heterogeneous groups with different methods and materials to cater these needs AICTE also suggested to follow the ESP (English for Specific Purposes) and EAP (English for Academic Purposes). This pattern was only followed by BITS. And some universities also shifted from their traditional way of concentrating of teaching English means as Literature to Language to satisfy the student needs.

The private, public sector participation in the expansion of higher education particularly in engineering education producing lakhs of students demands accommodating them, which is mostly depended on the communicative skills.

Definition of Communication

The word communication has its origin from Latin verb “*communicare*” means that to impart, to participate, to share. That in turn probably derives from *communis*, the source of English word common a piece of common land which all can share. We can begin to see how general a word communication by origin. Indeed in the early days communication used to include the giving or bestowing of material things. In the course of time it tended to become restricted to the imparting or transmitting of things intangible or abstract. Communication is the word is combination of two words come and unite to share or to transmit and understand the feelings, emotions or ideas. In its simple way communication is the process by which meanings are exchanged between people through use of common set of sound symbols.

Archeological evidences proved that man has evolved as a specific living being not only because of his speculative nature but also transmitted his knowledge among his community. The symbols, drawings of ancient man reveals the evolutionary development of languages as the medium of communication. The evolutionary theories of Darwin “Survival of the Fittest” and “Selection of Nature” are relevant to communicative systems because the wide spread of different languages among different societies, extinction of some of them and the status of world language to English.

The international communicating system of global village changing to symbolic expressions like sea-speak, air-speak, rail-speak, traffic-signals and hyper-text for the development of high tech universal communication. This indicates the demand of an international communication system in the present era of computers, networking, information technology which opened avenues to research in the fields of medicine, pharmacy, agriculture environment, education and so many interdisciplinary fields.

English the window of the world became more important because of its wide spread status across the globe as “lingua-franca’ which is mostly used in the fields of business, diplomacy, science and technological professionals among the countries in the world. As well as English is the language of technical education at national and international levels is serving as the best and only communicating

system to the engineering graduates to work in the arena and to excel in the fields of technology in the universe.

Communicative Skills Development Programs

In the state of Telangana the government has undertaken different measures for the development of communicative skills among the students, The implementation of the soft skill development training programs to the students has resulted enormous change in gaining of employability. Particularly in Andhra Pradesh, the establishment of Jawahar Knowledge Centers (JKC) in the Government degree colleges and Skill Development Centers in the Government Polytechnics helped to develop communicative skills, analytical skills, and technical skills among the students to make them employable. As a result, in the year 2008, total 2181 graduate students were selected for jobs by INFOSIS company in the campus selections.

The AICTE has also identified the importance of soft skills development and started Finishing Schools in IITs and NITs. The expansion of technical education opened doors to private engineering and technical colleges under Public Private Participation from 1992 onwards. This led to more opportunities to the rural and tribal Backward Castes, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Minority community students to obtain technical education. But acquisition of the soft skills became problematic to Non-English medium students as well as to English medium background students those who studied in different types of English medium schools. The All India Council of Technical Education has to take measures to start the Finishing Schools for the developing of communicative skills among the students of all the engineering and technical colleges.

Methods of teaching English

English Language Teaching methodology has been changing almost every twenty years. These changes are based on a variety of factors such as the aims of the learners, the prevailing psychological theories of learning, the linguistic theories current, and the advances and innovations in technology. The Grammar Translation Method, the Direct Method, the Bilingual Method, the Graded Method, the Language Control Method, the Linguistic Method and Communicative Language Teaching are some of the methods that have been widely used in twentieth century in different parts of the world. Each method is developed to meet the new demands of and emerging challenges from learners. Every method attempts to absorb the prevailing beliefs regarding the learning process and the nature of language. The methods listed above are all useful and valid. They are reasonably successful in achieving their specific goals.

One paradoxical fact is that against 350 million native speakers of English, there are 1500 million users of English today. Perhaps no other language is spoken and /or used by such a large number of people. Both the native speakers and users of English are spread all over the world making English a global language in a very real sense. There are certain areas such as civil aviation where English is the only language used throughout the world.

Materials of teaching English

In a broad sense, materials could include 'realia'(real objects such as a pencil, a chair, or a bag) and representations (such as a drawing or photograph of a person, house or scene. Materials of these can of course, be exploited effectively for language learning and advise on their use can be found that deal specifically with the use of visual aids The focus here, however, is primarily on text materials. Such materials include those that have been either specifically designed for language learning and teaching(e. g. textbooks, worksheets, computer software);authentic materials(e.g. off-air recordings, newspapers articles that have been specially selected and exploited for teaching purposes by the classroom teacher; teacher

written material; and learner generated materials.(Ian Mecgrath-2002). Mean while there is a great demand for need-based courses which are also called English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

Needs for ESP courses in India

It is a universal grievance in many states of India that the undergraduate students of various faculties are not able to communicate in English very effectively. It is needless to say that accurate developed communication skills are indispensable for job market today. In India, with the spread of globalization and constant enhancement of international contacts in various fields, a great deal of attention is being paid to the design of ESP courses that can prepare the learners for accurate developed communication skills....

The Emergence of ESP

There is no doubt that a good deal about the emergence and origin of English for Specific Purpose (ESP) has been written so far. However, the most useful and notable information about the emergence and origin of ESP is found in Hutchinson and Water's Centered Approach (1987) English for Specific Purposes: A Learning was published by Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. (Hutchinson and Waters (1987) noted that "There are three reasons common to the emergence of all ESP; the demands of a Brave New World, a revolution in linguistics, and focus on the learner. "They further note that there are two key historical periods that breathed life into ESP.

The universal effect all this expansion and growth were to put forth the pressure on the language teaching profession to deliver the required goods." Thus the second important reason for the emergence of ESP was are evolution in linguistics since revolutionary pioneers in linguistics focused the ways in which language is used in real communication. Hutchinson and Waters(1987) pointed out that one important finding was in the ways in which spoken and written English differ. In other words, given the particular context in which language is used, the variation of English will change. This thought was taken one step father, if language in different situations differ, then modifying language teaching to meet the requirements of learners in ' specific contexts' is also possible. Therefore, in the late 1960s and the early 1970s there were many attempts to describe English in Commerce and Management (ECM), English in Science and Technology(EST), and English in Information Technology(EIT). One must not forget that ECM, EST and EIT are all now part of ESP.

Absolute Characteristics of ESP

1. ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learner;
2. ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves;
3. ESP is centered on the language(grammar, lexis, register), skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities.

Evaluation

Evaluation has been defined in a variety of ways. Stufflebeam et.al.(1971) stated that evaluation is "the process of delineating, obtaining, and providing useful information for judging decision alternatives". Used in this way, it encompasses but goes beyond the meaning of terms "test" and measurement". A second popular concept of evaluation interprets it as the determination of the congruence between performance and objectives. Other definitions simply categorize evaluation as professional judgment or as a process that allows one to make a judgment about the desirability or value of something. One can evaluate with either qualitative or quantitative data (William A.Metherns and Irwin J.Lehmann (1984).

As stated above, the major role of the school is to facilitate learning. The kinds of changes we wish to obtain in pupils are commonly referred to as objectives, or goals. The means we employ to help pupils realize the objectives constitute the educational experiences or instruction. The evaluation procedures are

the means determining the extent to which the instruction has been effective. There is a definite relationship among instruction, objectives, and evaluation. Schematically, we can represent this relationship as follows. (Furst, 1958,)

There are several ways, then, in which evaluation procedures aid the teacher. (1) they help in providing knowledge concerning the student's entry behavior; (2) they help in setting, refining, and clarifying realistic goals for each student;(3) they help in evaluating the degree to which the objectives have been achieved; and (4) they help in determining, evaluating and refining at the instructional techniques.

The effects of work on materials have also been recognized within the academic community. Johnson(1989a), for instance, writing of three phases in the development of applied linguistics, describes the second phase as one in which work on needs analysis, the syllabus materials design, the roles teacher and learner and classrooms interacting brought the language curriculum more closely into line with our new and broader understanding of communicative competence and the processes of language acquisition and use' Acceptance of the appropriateness of materials as field of serious study, from the perspective of evaluation.(Ian McGrath (2002).

Yet, even where teachers have no direct control over textbook selection, it is important that they are able to adopt a critical stance in relation to the material they are expected to use. This implies an awareness of learner needs and contextual constraints and the willingness and capacity in the light of this awareness to make decisions concerning the selection from the textbook of what is appropriate, and the extension /exploitation, adaptation and supplementation of this as necessary.

Ellis (1998) who suggests that the same procedure is followed as was used for selection, acknowledges that this is rarely done, citing as reasons teacher's feeling that after using a course book they know what 'works' and the perception post-use evaluation as a 'daunting' task for which not only time but expertise are needed. Teachers the world over seem to be under increasing pressure and at the end of a term, semester or year, who can blame them if they fail to close the circle? And yet there may be useful lessons to be learned, insights that can feed into subsequent teaching using the same materials and/ or to the process or criteria by which they were selected.

Students can also be involved in post-evaluation. They may have experience of using other materials and therefore are able to make comparisons; even if they have not, they can still express a view on the suitability of the materials they have used. Like in-use evaluation, post-use evaluation is most reliable when it draws on the experiences of several teachers and several groups of learners.

Criteria for Evaluation

Much of the discussion on materials evaluation is posited on the assumption that the evaluator has in mind fairly well defined end-users (learners, teachers (S) and context. As a result, discussions of evaluation criteria tend to be context-related. The importance shifted from general criteria (i.e. the essential features of any good teaching- learning material) to specific (or context-related) criteria.

Evaluation is a process used to determine what has happened during a given activity or in an institution. The purpose of evaluation is to see if a given program is working if an institution is successful according to the goals set for it, or if the original intent is being successfully carried out. To assessment evaluation adds the ingredient of value judgment of the social utility, desirability or effectiveness of a process, product or program, and it sometimes includes a recommendation for some course of action. School surveys are usually evaluation studies, educational products and programs are examined to determine their effectiveness in meeting accepted objectives, often with recommendations with constructive action.(Jhon W. Best and James V.Khan.2006,p.29).

Evaluation has four important attributes utility, feasibility, propriety and accuracy. Utility standards guide the evaluations so that they will be informative, timely, and influential.

Evaluation is the systematic processes of filtering out the relevant data collected through testing and assessment and analyzing it for the purpose of providing students with meaningful and appropriate instruction. It is through this final step of evaluation that the information gathered from various forms of assessment and testing becomes valuable to the teacher and the latter. Without this final step, the data collected is useless. (Diane, K. Brantly 2007,)

Conclusion:

The world became global village with the help of communication technology. The technology, that helps to transfer the information among the individuals, groups, institutions and societies through different technological mediums. The transfer of information an individual expresses as small sounds, cries, feelings, signs, gestures, words, sentences, symbols and pictures shows the evolutionary process of development of learning language. Listening, speaking, reading and writing are the main skills of language to communicate through any system. In this era of information technology communicative skills became primary need of every individual like food, clothes and shelter. There is a need for development of English language as an international communicative system. The advantage is for the individuals, who with their excellent communicative ability in this competitive professional world.

Educational implications

Communicative skills became primary need of every individual like food, clothes and shelter which are essential for living. Hence, there is a stress on language learning at every level including graduation. English has become an international language in communicative process at global level. English language skills among graduates are necessary to migrate to other countries as well as rest of the world for job opportunities. The companies recruiting graduates are essentially looking for those who have better communicative skills. The graduates having excellent communicative skills can only compete in the present world to enter and retain the job. Hence, the study has been undertaken by the researcher to know how far the content, methods and materials are useful in the teaching-learning process of communicative English in the colleges. Based on the findings of the present study, it is imperative to give following suggestions and recommendations:

1. The teachers of communicative English need to be thorough with the objectives of the text materials prescribed for the students to follow the same to develop communicative skills of the students because the materials prescribed are fulfilling all the objectives framed for the purpose.
2. More exercises are to be included in the text materials of communicative English prescribed to students for the rigorous practice of : understanding others' speech, choosing words and phrases, project work, presentations and speaking, developing confidence to interact in different social and professional contexts like group discussions and interviews, note making, letter writing, preparation of resume writing and pace of reading of academic subjects.
3. Discussion and audio-visual methods should be given more priority by the teachers in the teaching-learning process of communicative skills for 1st year engineering students.
4. Teachers should focus more on speaking skills of the students.
5. Students should be encouraged to use English while communicating with family members, friends and teachers to enhance their communicative skills.
6. To improve word power, reading skills and study skills a method of conducting discussions within the student teams is needed to motivate them for presentations in the class.

7. To improve vocabulary in the areas of academic subjects, specific activities and events are to be organized in the campus.
8. Students are to be enabled to differentiate between communicative skills in formal and informal situations.
9. Motivating the students to refer more reference books of grammar to overcome the difficulties in structure of sentences and writing the different genres. Sufficient number of books should be made available to the students in the college library.
10. Language laboratory cum classroom facility will enhance the students learning. In this direction, communicative skills classrooms are to be organised.
11. There is a need to concentrate on the development of study skills with the involvement of the faculty members of the other technical subjects.
12. There is a need to follow 1:20 teacher-student ratio according to the norms of AICTE. It helps to pay attention to individual student.
13. The communicative skills teachers should be regularly oriented towards latest trends and techniques of audio-visual method of teaching to foster the learning in the students.
14. The course material is not the panacea for individual learning difficulties. So, in the process of continuous evaluation, the teachers should identify the areas of communicative skills to be attended for an individual learner and provide more exercises in those areas to empower such individuals with better communicative skills.

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