

Interaction: A Viable Pedagogy to Develop Communicative Competence in English Language of the Students of Regional Background

Author's Name – Dr.. Sangeetha Noval

Asst. Prof.- Bhartiya Skill Development University

Email – sangeetha_noval@yahoo.com

Mobile – 7877609387

Abstract

Using interaction as a tool to enhance communicative competence could serve to be an effective pedagogy in teaching ESL. The ESL learners need to be exposed to language and be given opportunities to use language to develop their skills. An ease could be attained by learners in using language if they are amply engaged in situations in classroom where they can convey and receive authentic information serving their interest and purpose as well. Such exchanges can be termed as interaction which serves to be the basic unit of any discourse. It involves expression and comprehending of thoughts and ideas. One listens to and responds to others thereby working out interpretations of meanings through this interaction in a context. Such engagements help students learn and communicate to others by listening, talking, and negotiating meaning in a shared context;

Teaching of ESL requires a lot of innovation and imagination on the part of a teacher. It is the role of a teacher to create and stimulate student's interest and creativity by providing various opportunities in classroom where interaction can naturally blossom. The language which the students learn in a formal fashion in the classroom during their interaction would facilitate them to engage themselves in interactions in real life situation so as to communicate effectively in varied social contexts.

It is the duty of teachers to judiciously select from various strategies to create opportunities in order to facilitate interaction in the classroom. This paper would highlight certain strategies which could be employed by ESL teachers to generate interaction in the classroom. Engagements of students in such activities would not only result in spontaneity and ease in producing language but also develop illocutionary competence of the learners.

Key words: *Interaction, ESL, Communicative Competence, Illocutionary Competence, Discourse*

Communication is all pervasive and an indispensable skill. The growing utility of communication skills in *English Language* has created a great demand for effective pedagogies for its teaching. The learners aspire to use the language not only as words with accuracy but also with spontaneity. Fluency in speaking English language has become a prerequisite for success and growth in life. Communicative competence has become a mandatory tool to achieve not only the educational goals but also to fulfil their social purposes. Competence in communication skills is the degree to which a communicator's objectives are attained through effective and appropriate interaction. The ESL teachers are endeavouring hard to achieve success in helping the ESL learners attain a proficiency in their communication skills. One such approach which has gained prominence in improving the communicative skills is the CLT approach. This approach has been widely implemented since the last decade as it describes a set of general principles grounded in the notion of developing the communicative competence of ESL learners in addition to developing procedures for integrating all the four skills i.e. reading, writing, speaking and listening. According to William Littlewood "one of the most characteristic features of CLT is that it pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of Language"

Among the various pedagogies employed to teach English language to ESL students the *interactive* pedagogy of teaching can serve to be effective as it endorses the CLT approach. It aids in developing the communicative competence of the students by improving their ability to express, interpret and negotiate meanings in a shared context in the classroom. As per the Merriam Webster dictionary, the word *Interact* is defined as "to talk or to do things with other people." It refers to communication between two or more speakers. Today the emphasis has shifted from reading and writing to listening and speaking. Undoubtedly all skills are important to gain a command over the language; nevertheless, *speaking skills are* essential as a person has to communicate frequently at his workplace to perform his role in the activities of his/her life. A student would be unable to speak if he/she is not exposed to a good amount of language. The goal of teaching speaking skills is to improve the communicative competence of the ESL learners. Richards and Rodgers (2001:161) in their analysis of the theoretical base of communicative Language Teaching offer the following four characteristics of a communicative view of language:

- Language is a system for the expression of meaning.
- The primary function of language is for interaction and communication.
- The source of language reflects its functional and communicative uses.
- The primary units of language are not primarily its grammatical and structural features but categories of functional and communicative meaning.

The aim of teaching a language using such pedagogy is to develop the ability in the learners to communicate productively as well as creatively and this necessitates the experience of using language in a given context. Such a method complements the principles of the CLT approach by David Nunan (1991) in *Language Teaching Methodology: A textbook for Teachers*.

- Learners learn language by using it to communicate.
- Authentic and meaningful communication ought to be the goal of classroom activities.
- Fluency is a significant dimension of communication.
- Communication involves the integration of different language skills.
- Learning is a process of creative construction and involves trial and error.

It is role of a language teacher to create an atmosphere which can facilitate interaction in the class rooms. Like any other, skill, learning language is also one which can be attained only when the learners perform the same. The challenge is even larger on the part of the teacher when it involves learners from rural back ground. The learners coming from rural background also face a challenge as they experience what is referred to as "language shock". It poses a struggle in front of them to learn the English language trying to maintain a sense of identity related to their native culture and also aspire to become a speaker of English. The teachers at the foremost, need to understand that students coming from rural background do not lack in any of his faculties compared to the students from urban areas except for their linguistic skills in English due to the lack of an exposure to English language. As educators, we need to realize that language acquisition takes place in a congenial and cordial atmosphere. Learners cannot achieve in an unwelcoming and hostile environment. Many children are made fun of when they try to speak English; so they end up to be silent and withdraw themselves from participation. This further interferes with their learning and achievement. Therefore, the ESL teachers should understand that due to negligible opportunities for spoken interactions, these students find it difficult to overcome their hesitation and so are unable to speak. Such students can be highly benefitted if they are dealt with dignity and are exposed to an environment which is conducive for learning language.

Using *interaction* as a tool to enhance communicative competence could serve to be an effective pedagogy in teaching ESL. A noted CLT expert Berns remarks that "Language is interaction. It is personal activity and has a clear relationship with the society. In this light, language study has to look at the use (function) of language in context, both in linguistic context (what is uttered before and after a given piece of discourse) and its social or situational context (who is speaking, what their social roles are, why they have come together to speak)." (Berns, 1984:5)

The ESL learners need to be exposed to English language and be given opportunities to use language to develop their skills. An ease could be attained by learners in using language if they are amply engaged in situations in classroom where they can convey and receive authentic information serving their interest and purpose as well. Such exchanges can be termed as *interaction* which serves to be the basic unit of any discourse. It involves expression and comprehending of thoughts and ideas. One listens to and responds to others thereby working out interpretations of meanings through this interaction in a context. Such engagements help students learn and communicate to others by listening, talking, and negotiating meaning in a shared context. Teachers should create a classroom environment where the students have real life communication, authentic activities and meaningful tasks that promote oral language. Most people agree that learning anything involves participation.

Interactions are used every day in our world and their mastery is an important skill for ESL learners to acquire. An interaction is the basic dialogue form and thus the building block of conversation. Teachers should encourage students to have confidence to make mistakes in order to acquire communication skills. Perfection of language gives the students a feeling of confidence, satisfaction and security in many real life situations. Such mastery is a wholesome influence that affects the whole life of the learner. The students have to be transformed from passive listeners to active learners. It is the duty of teachers to judiciously select from various strategies to create opportunities in order to facilitate interaction in the classroom. Some of such pedagogies which shall be discussed in this paper would aid in the development of the communicative competence of students coming from regional medium background taking admission in the undergraduate programmes in universities and colleges.

- a. **Ice –Breaking:** It is a general tendency of a class to begin with mutual exchanging of wishes between the teacher and the students and then the teacher begins with teaching of her assigned syllabus. The initial ten minutes of the class hour could be converted into a most productive time for the students by the teacher by having an ice- breaking conversation with students on general aspects, for example, enquire about the reason of a student who had been absent previously or enquire of a student who is on leave that particular day etc. The students immediately crack a cord with the teacher by replying to his/ her queries. Unaware of teacher’s hidden agenda the the students start interacting with the teacher. The teacher at this point should again pose certain questions to students enquiring about how they spend their weekends etc. The students would start sharing information with the teacher. The ESL teacher should promote such conversations which generate natural exchanges. The students at this stage do not hesitate to interact in English language because it seems to be an informal talk to them. They don’t fear their language to be judged because such conversations are not curriculum-centred / syllabus-centric. Such sharing in the class not only motivates a learner to get into an interaction with the teacher but also develops a good rapport with the teacher. Such a relationship further reduces the anxiety and phobia of students and develops a congenial atmosphere for language learning The learners do not hesitate much while interacting formally as he/she is already in the habit of conversing with the teacher. Such informal talks could serve to be an effective strategy not only to get the students initiate interaction in English but also remove their fears, inhibitions and hesitations thereby unlocking the student are potential to learn. The practice of having conversations on general topics, if practised on a regular basis could enhance and hone the interactive capabilities of learners.

- b. **Usage of Proverbs and Quotations as viable tool to generate interaction:**

The ESL teachers can creatively plan certain activities which can generate interactions in the class room. In order to elicit responses from the learners, the teachers can provide with viable ‘comprehensible inputs’. First proposed by Stephen Krashen in his famous Comprehensible Input Hypothesis, the idea of integrating comprehensible input into the second language curriculum has received great popularity for its surprising effects on overall ESL instruction. These ‘comprehensible inputs’ induce the students to think and react, serving to be a basis for interaction in

the class. Comprehensible input doesn't mean that the input contains words and phrases the students already know. Rather, comprehensible input seeks to effectively integrate new and unknown linguistic data (words and phrases) with familiar ones to make the received input a little more difficult compared to the level of students. In other words, a successful comprehensible input provides enough known information for students to understand and interpret new linguistic cues.

Proverbs and Quotations can be very effectively used as 'comprehensible inputs' to kindle the thought process of the students followed by their reactions on them. A proverb is a simple and concrete saying, popularly known and repeated, that expresses a truth based on common sense or experience. They are often metaphorical. A proverb that describes a basic rule of conduct may also be known as a maxim whereas a quotation is something that a person has said or written that is repeated or used by someone else in another piece of writing in speech. The teacher can write either a proverb or a quotation on the black board and ask the students to read them. The students are then asked to explain the meaning in English language thereby helping students to process information and respond to it.

To help students to learn a new language, the teacher needs them to not only understand the theoretical concepts of language, but also interact with it. As proverbs are well known truth of common facts familiar to experience and appeal the students. They provide repertoire of experience and expressions from which second language learners could draw out language models for use in situations which they encounter in life. English proverbs could be a potential source of language acquisition. To achieve this, ESL instructors need to take great care in the ways they communicate new ideas. During the brainstorming activity (i.e.) while deducing the meaning of the thoughts, students are motivated to think, to speak out and present their ideas/responses. They try to formulate sentences of their own, listen to their peers and learn by listening to them as well. This promotes peer interaction leading students to converse with each other formally. There is relatively a free flow of ideas generating a variety of acceptable responses. In this process students will pick up vocabulary and possibly improve upon some aspects of grammar through the practice they get, while speaking and writing. The students are also exposed to well structured ideas which have a well knit language. The responses of the learners should be enthusiastically received by the teacher with positive reinforcement, so as to elicit further responses by students. This kind of an activity produces a positive and rewarding environment where all the students react on the same stimulus though with differing angles. This creates a tension free learning atmosphere as the responses are not used as criteria for awarding marks to the students. This motivates the students to participate actively in the activity which could be used either as an activity in the beginning of the class or it could be a full fledged activity in a class assigned for teaching communication skills. The students may then be asked to write paragraphs on the given proverbs followed by their presentations in the class room.

The teacher can use this as an opportunity to train the students for presentation skills also. This pedagogy could prove to be a holistic approach, where all the four skills viz reading, writing, listening and interacting could be catered to. In addition,

the metaphorical use of language used in proverbs and quotes could be highlighted by the teacher not only to sensitize the students about the pragmatic usage of language but it also aids in their personality development. Pragmatics includes those facets of language that are directly related to the particular contexts and social situations in which the language is being used. In other words, pragmatics encompasses the relationships between real world knowledge (especially of social conventions) and the language being used in a specific context. Mc Arthur views a proverb as a “short traditional saying of a didactic or advisory nature in which a generation is given a specific often metaphorical expression”. They are also referred to as “Wisdom Literature.” The students in the process of language learning also gain insight in values and virtues and get morally and ethically sensitized. (1998, 474)

Apart from merely being a tool to generate interaction, a judicious use of them in speech or in writing would render authenticity in both the exercises. The ESL teachers should prudently select the level of the complexity of the comprehensible input as per the level of the students. This approach of teaching language caters to a holistic development of students as it enriches their reading, writing, listening, interactive skills, vocabulary building, critical thinking, presentation skills including their soft skills and personality development.

The enhanced confidence and developed communicative competence would help the learners gain autonomy and engrain employability skills making them more capable of dealing effectively with the increasing complexities of sustaining themselves in this modern world.

References:

- Littlewood, W. (1981). Communicative language teaching, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.*
- Richard J.C and T.S Rodgers, Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edition.*
- Nunan, D. (1991). Language teaching Methodology: A textbook for Teachers. Hemel Hempstead; Prentice Hall.*
- Berns, Margie.s. (1984) Teaching Languages: Method and Materials.OUP.*
- Mc Arthur, T, ED. 1998. Concise Oxford Companion to English Language. Oxford University Press.*