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INTERNET MATERIALS


SYNOPSIS

“Developing Communicative Skills at the Tertiary Level”

The research paper entitled “Developing Communicative Skills at the Tertiary Level” is concerned with the problems and methods of developing English language skills among First year English Literature (Tertiary Level) students at Devanga Arts College, Aruppukottai, Viruthunagar District in Tamil Nadu.

The problem in developing the skills in English is first analysed and explained for the purposes of the study. Problems in English language skills developing is noted from the outlook of students belonging to this college at Aruppukottai. The way of presenting the skills by the speakers of English and the problem of the native language learners and their English skills are also compared. Various methods are suggested for the development of the four skills, Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.

The main purpose and direction of the study is to find out the status of the tertiary level students of English pertaining to the four skills namely Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. The ideas arrived at are perceptions after careful study of the nature of the students of tertiary level in English. An ultimate introduction is given by specific models of Learning of English skills according to the mentality of the students.

The research project was a close study of the difficulty of students’ skill developing and the problems ahead of over 50 students studying in first year English
Literature of Devanga Arts College, Aruppukottai, and Viruthunagar District in Tamil Nadu in acquiring them.

Evaluation is made between teacher’s presentation and students’ performance. The theory and research work show that underdeveloped or non developed factors in English skills figure prominently in Aruppukottai college select 50 students and the perceptions of English teachers teaching English language and the learning problem is also given as strong evidence for the support of this research.

The following parts of the study is around some of the areas of problems in learning and teaching skills identified significantly by students and teachers in this research project. Hindrance, non available circumstances and the general learning environment prevalent in and Aruppukottai and students’ learning style and approach are fully analysed and a final solution is provided.

The research project remains related to examining the attempts made by teacher/researcher to respond to aspects of complexity in learning and teaching the skills. Close classroom observation and analysis is made by the researcher at Devanga Arts College.

The study suggests that circumstances, the nature of native society and environmental factors are important and essential constituents of problems in learning English skills among tertiary students. It also suggests that teachers rarely get involved effectively to lighten these problems in spite of plenty opportunities they have.

In our country a language other than the national language or the mother tongue plays only a less important role among the public. It is totally different in the
case of the literates. English being an official language has many roles to play in
schools, colleges, and in the governmental departments.

Scholars have tried a lot to develop the standard of our students at all levels. The college students who have already spent four or five years in the learning of English still find it difficult to present it in their life situations. They are far behind in their English communication. So, it is a must that they must get enriched in their communicative skills in order to pursue a higher course or for seeking a job.

The topic “Developing Communicative Skills at the Tertiary Level” aims at fulfilling all the requirements needed to develop the communicative skills of the college students. It supplies materials that could stimulate and motivate them in acquiring all the four skills. It provides natural, authentic and useful activities to develop these four skills Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. It suggests teachers various situations outside the teaching circumstance and class room. The students in these approaches can have a leisurely method of learning of English skills. Here the students can ask questions to the teachers and clear out their doubts. They get enough opportunities to utilize their skills in communication. The teacher should provide the students with the materials for real reading, reading for enjoyment, and for developing the critical aptitude. Great authors like T.S. Eliot and D.H. Lawrence can be exposed to the student community.

The first chapter entitled “Developing Listening Skills” provides all the required suggestions, improvisations to be introduced by the English teacher in order to make his student a great and versatile listener who can profoundly listen to others who speak particularly in English. The various strategies cited there is a guiding
factor both for the learners and the teachers. The various strategies to improve one’s reading capacity are presented.

Top-down strategies are listener based; the listener taps into background knowledge of the topic, the situation or context, the type of text, and the language. This background knowledge activates a set of expectations that help the listener to interpret what is heard and anticipate what will come next. Top-down strategies include a) listening for the main idea, b) predicting, c) drawing inferences and d) summarizing.

Bottom-up strategies are text based; the listener relies on the language in the message, that is, the combination of sounds, words, and grammar that creates meaning. Bottom-up strategies include a) listening for specific details, b) recognizing cognates (equivalents), and c) recognizing word-order patterns. It also provides the methods through which the tertiary level learners can develop listening. A student follows his teachers and imitates his teacher’s command over the words and comprehends the message. Then he will be able to pose questions on the subject he has just listened to. He sheds out his inhibitions and clarifies and gets answers for his problems. It paves way in the development of speaking skills. It is in the classrooms, the students get the chance of developing this skill.

Students’ ability to use English in an all-round way, particularly in listening and speaking, for their future employment and social interactions are based on these two skills. They can improve their ability to study independently and develop their educational quality to meet the needs of social growth and international interactions if they follow the way the teacher/researcher has pointed out. Students should make
an effort hard to meet the necessities for listening. Problems such as inadequate repertoire in vocabulary; their educational background and the attendant nervousness hinder their listening skill. Accordingly students should be encouraged to feel self confident.

The teacher/researcher also exhibited the level of the students of first year English Literature students in the most needed skill listening by conducting a both the pre listening and post listening survey with the help of a questionnaire to find out capacity of his students and the results of which have been presented in detail both in using the chart.

The teacher/researcher presents the essentials of listening. They are as follows and the students have to listen to the talks and lectures. They have to recognize the meaning of words when spoken. Moreover they have to understand dialogues and passages. Then have to grab the key points even when sentence structures are difficult and finally they have to listen to radio and TV programs produced in English.

Various activities have been implemented by the teacher/researcher enabling his students to particularly understand the importance of listening skill in the act acquiring all the other skills. The activities include listening to a mother tongue song, an English song of the most popular one during the 1980s i.e. Boney. M’s ‘By the rivers of Babylon’, and also listening to the recitation of an English poem written by William Wordsworth. The teacher/researcher has provided his students the most famous speeches in the history of mankind made by Burke in the American Parliament on Taxation and by Swami Vivekananda in Chicago in the World
Conference of Religions. Thus the expected results are achieved by the teacher/researcher as far as the listening skills are concerned.

With the wide range of available listening materials and suggestions for listening activities the teachers following the procedures outlined here in the activities can raise students’ ability to self-evaluate with their listening strength. Teachers should especially look for listening activities which are as much as possible devised and controlled more by the students than the teacher as this will certainly enhance the power of every student to march ahead in developing the listening skill.

The skill of speaking involves a practical element which has attracted a great deal of attention in recent years. The importance of helping students to develop realistic and practical competence with speech acts in their target language is now the pursuit of every individual and instructors. The development of speaking skills in a target language has long been a central issue in the minds of learners, teachers, and researchers. The development of oral skills has always been of a paramount importance.

Considerable interest among tertiary students is widely prevalent to develop the language skills as it is the most sought one by the employers of today. They have to speak and act in various situations through English. Their language competence is judged on the basis of speaking skills. The tertiary learners cannot speak English fluently even they have been learning English for the past twelve years.

For the tertiary students the spoken skills are more important than other skills because they want to participate in seminars and later in discussions. They can prepare a paper to present it at a seminar. They can be assessed by both the teachers
and participants of the seminar. At such presentations students without good spoken command have to cut a sorry figure in front of the learned gathering. The spoken skill is needed to answer the questions raised either from the teacher or his classmates. It is very much needed to discuss the study with other students informally, inside the classroom when the teacher is away or outside the classroom. They have to speak to others to get help from fellow students about essay titles. In college days extracurricular activities are open for students. They have to mingle with others by participating in clubs and societies, or even just by talking to others in the hostel. At times of urgency they have to seek other’s help and to ask help they need to communicate.

The students if they want to communicate effectively in spoken English require a combination of good speaking and good listening skills. They should have competency in English pronunciation. They should be familiar with a remarkable structural/grammatical knowledge of the language; should know to use language appropriately. They should note that speaking skills cannot be learned just by studying books. The most important aspect to remember is that ‘practice makes perfect’. It takes a lot of practice to improve one’s professional and academic use of English at a spoken level, and a lot of feedback from others.

The students should speak to others outside the classroom as much English as they can, as it is easily achieved. They have to learn some useful phrases that can be used in discussions. The students can speak a lot on the telephone to build up confidence as at the other end they cannot look at the expressions which certainly relieve them from tension. They can ask the speaker to slow down, to spell
unfamiliar words, to repeat parts of what they have said that they do not understand, or to ask for clarifications, etc.

The college and the teachers should make it compulsory that every student should join a club or society organised by students’ union which meets together each week. Students are syllabus dependent, passive and lacking in initiative and hence the qualities such as independence, individuality and creativity should be encouraged. Students are often too embarrassed or shy to say anything when they do not understand another speaker or when they realize that a conversation partner has not understood them. Teachers can help students overcome this shyness by assuring them that misunderstanding and the need for clarification can occur in any type of interaction. By encouraging students to use phrases in class when misunderstanding occurs and by responding positively when they do, teachers can create a real practice environment within the classroom itself.

The teacher/researcher by conducting the pre speaking and post speaking survey with the help of a questionnaire presented the level of the students of first year English Literature in the most sought after skill of present day i.e. speaking skill. He gave them a number of chances to ask questions and expose themselves regularly to spoken English. He also made a conscious effort to actively engage in real oral communication by interacting in the target language, and now and then he monitored and evaluated their speaking skill.

The teacher/researcher involved his students in many spoken activities such as self introduction, introducing one to the other, conversational activities, activities related to announcement in the railway timings and the bus timings at railway
stations and in the bus terminals respectively. The pronunciation activities and the activities including the stress and intonation were also provided to the students to develop speaking skills.

The teacher/researcher in the introductory part of the chapter entitled ‘Developing Reading Skills’ pointed out the importance of this skill to the students who are placed in the tertiary level and it is really painstaking to realise that this skill is totally a neglected one by the tertiary students as they are without interest in reading. The classroom also does not compel them to develop the reading skill as the curriculum is centered on the completion of syllabi and the final conduct of examinations to issue certificates resulting with a diploma with no development of the skills.

To make the tertiary students realise the importance of reading skill the teacher/researcher presented the ways to develop this skill. Reading requires understanding, or comprehending the meaning on the print. Readers must develop certain skills that will help them comprehend what they read and use this as an aid to reading. Reading skills are specific abilities which enable a reader to read the written form as meaningful language to read anything written with independence, comprehension and fluency and to mentally interact with the message.

The thesis provides the various kinds in the art of reading and its importance has not so far realised by the tertiary students. Fluency skills such as a student should recognise immediately the letters and frequent clusters of letters; learning frequent words; seeing phrases as a whole and the power of using prediction skills within the phrase and in clause are also particularized. The teacher/researcher showed his
students the ways to understand the meaning of the long sentences in English. For instance they have to break it into many parts that contain meanings and then finding meaning for all the parts one by one will make him understand the meaning of the long sentence very easily.

The governing factors in developing reading skill are many in number and they are presented by the teacher/researcher for the benefit of his students. It is the duty of the teacher to let the students know the various reading skills to improve the reading ability. The most important skills in reading are: a) Locating the Topic Sentence, b) Skimming, c) Presumption of the Meaning of Phrases, d) scanning and e) Think Ahead. He has stressed the need for developing the reading skills and shows how students are to read in order to learn new information and new vocabulary. The amount and complexity of reading materials increases a great deal. Students in schools, high schools, higher secondary schools and colleges need to develop listening, speaking, writing, and critical thinking skills. They have to form conclusions and make judgments. The requirements for reading and writing in the current global marketplace are more demanding than ever before. Not only the MNC employees but also almost all employees should have to enter the marketplace with the necessary skills, because companies currently spend a lot of money in the name of the salary for its employees.

The ways how to improve the reading skills are also provided. It directs the students have to set a regular time to read daily for one hour. Regularly reading out loud even by tertiary level students will produce significant gains in reading comprehension, vocabulary, and the decoding of words. In due course of time it will increase their desire to read. The students should get always surrounded with reading
material. With a large array of reading materials in their homes and colleges the students can achieve the best in their tests and examinations. They have to be tempted voluntarily to read by having a large supply of appealing books and magazines at their reading level. The most important need to develop reading is that the students have to develop the library habit. They should be enticed to read more by going to the library every day to get new reading materials.

Here in this chapter the teacher/researcher has indulged his students in many activities pertaining to reading. The students actively participated in the activities such as various advertisements including consumer goods advertisements, job advertisements and course advertisements. An activity related to an American poem ‘Stopping by the woods on a snowy evening’ received remarkable reception from the students as they are all attracted by the theme of the song. The reading comprehension test was conducted by the teacher/researcher to find out how far the students developed their reading capacity. It is presented in a separate chart as annexure in the chapter.

The present day challenge for the English teachers is directing the tertiary level students to engage them in writing in English with lot of enthusiasm. The students should exhibit the same amount of effort shown by them to learn their first language or mother tongue. They misunderstand that the activities that they do in developing their first langue may be applied in the target language. As a result they find it difficult because they lack in linguistic knowledge, the socio-cultural nature of writing, knowledge of genre.
The students should bear this always in mind that writing in English in the classroom can facilitate them in the developing of other skills. They can use the learning of grammar or vocabulary as preparation for a speaking activity. The dialogue they write will give the students time to think and therefore improve confidence and fluency. The truth is that the classroom, now a day, does not provide opportunity to write in order to become a better writer.

Most of the students studying at tertiary level want to pursue their higher education in the target language and so they should go out of the college acquiring competency with writing in the target language. It is becoming relevant to the needs of speakers of other languages. Colleges are the places where the students are to be provided with necessary practices for their future writing work. The instruction and communication in the classroom should be exclusively in English. In tertiary level, the teacher should begin activities to attain team work among students in order to make the classroom a store house of writing for the students. The students may be asked to correct their writings among themselves before they start writing examination or test as this kind of correction by the students will ease the tension among the students. But students in colleges are frightened with writing and rewriting of paragraphs and essays.

The students should know the following components carefully in order to achieve mastery in writing skill. The basic writing skills are also mentioned. They are as follows: When one writes a composition it is important to express the ideas correctly. One should express time at the beginning or at the end of a sentence and the verb should not be separated from the adjacent verb. It is to be noted that frequency adverbs such as often, always, and never come before the main verb. The
student should remember that a good composition has three elements: an introduction, a body and a conclusion. He is to repeat the key nouns throughout the composition. He can use pronouns to refer back to key nouns and the most important thing is that he has to arrange the sentences in a logical order and use linking words to indicate the order. He should know certain stock words and expressions that are commonly used by the efficient writers to connect ideas or show relationships. (“moreover, in addition, for instance, such as”)

It is a common truth that one who could read well and understand things could write better. One has to learn things in such a way that gives progress in communication. Reading rate should be progressively developed to cope up with the writing skill. One has to view all writing by various people before getting experience in writing. It gives him an idea of how writing should be. More reading experience results in developing writing skill. If one is strong in grammar it helps one to get a fluent English sentence structure. So knowing of each grammar rule is a must for a tertiary student. He should have a thorough knowledge of the protocols and semantics in the language structure. Writing something whenever a chance comes to him in a day keeps one’s mind fresh. The student can write about recent news, about a party enjoyed very well.

To develop writing one should read as much as what others have written particularly in books, newspapers and magazines. The students should read; attend to vocabulary; develop strategies to manage a degree of uncertainty; attend to meaning; attend to grammar; generate their own interest to write; and create opportunities to write outside the classroom.
The students should know the different components that are essential for good writing. The vital components of writing such as mental capacity, prewriting, systematic drafting, revising and editing should be learnt by the tertiary students. They have to understand one’s expression in the written form as it contains thoughts. He should know what one puts in black and white is originally in the form of abstract thoughts that emerge in one’s mind. The student should indulge in creative and analytical thinking as they form the basic components of the writing process. The gathering of all the information about the subject from every available source of information is the required one to develop writing skill. The student should finish gathering the information about the topic and then he is to draft his write-up. It requires planning and organizing of the gathered facts. Revising of the draft is the phase of correcting the errors in the written draft. The student investigates the various ways to improve his writing. So he is to revise as it is an important constituent of writing and he can give a second thought to one’s writing. If the student is satisfied with his writing he has to edit what he has written to get the finishing touches checking for minor mistakes if any.

The data containing short open-ended questionnaire was collected to know the students’ actual writing capacity. The interview was given to complement the questionnaire so students didn't feel restricted in their answers. Both questionnaire and interview dealt with problems encountered in the development of writing on various occasions. It was planned to conduct a test in the various parts of writing components to test their capacity. It was found after the evaluation that most of them were not excelling in answering grammar questions. So it was decided to introduce activities related to develop writing skills. The teacher/researcher made the students
indulge in learning to write paragraphs and essays. Many activities pertaining to grammar such as articles, determiners, adjectives, tenses, relative clauses, concord, transformation of sentences, writing comparisons, gerunds, participles, infinitives and writing a précis were given by the teacher/researcher to make his students thorough with grammar related exercises.

A post test to calculate the level of achievement was conducted and the students wrote the test for 1 ½ hours. The result exposed a stunning importance among the select 50 students for they had undergone training and orientation for the past 6 months.

Thus the research study has established that there has been an equivalent share of the four skills in English language, namely Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing (LSRW) in the life of every student who wants to achieve a better position than others in this globally competitive world. The study was a great success because of the contributions of the students’ hard work and cooperation with the researcher and a broader set of questions.