CHAPTER - II

ADAPTING COUNSELLING CUM INTERVIEW METHOD AS A STRATEGY TO DIAGNOSE THE LEARNING DEFICIENCY OF THE ESL LEARNERS AT THE ENTRY LEVEL

2.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the different dimensions involved in admitting the learners at the undergraduate level in St. Joseph’s College (Autonomous), Tiruchirappalli. It tries to identify the learners’ deficiency in learning English through counselling cum interview method at the entry level from the learners’ point of view and to strengthen the rapport between the trainer and the learners.

In the current scenario of higher education, especially in the Art and Science colleges and universities, the learners focus their attention more on major subjects but less focus is on the medium in which they study. Other than the students, who study English literature, the students of other major subjects focus more attention on developing the skills in major subject than on communicative skills in English. So, the students are unable to express their knowledge of major subject through English language skills at the time of entering into a profession/job even after completing their undergraduate courses. Therefore, in order to make students competent in using basic communicative skills in English, physiotherapeutic strategies are adopted by the researcher. In physiotherapy, the counselling cum interview strategy stands first as the preliminary technique before the patients are admitted to the course of treatment.

When a patient meets a physiotherapist for the first time, the therapist needs to know the patient’s illness from various perspectives. So, the patient is advised to
disclose the problems concerning his/her personal inability or illness. In the same way, the student is allowed to disclose the problems in acquiring English language skills from his/her own understanding. Next, the physiotherapist asks for some previous happenings and experiences of the patient. Finally, the physiotherapist uses some diagnostic strategies to find out the problem exactly, and then the treatment or training procedure is planned in the clinical decision-making. Subsequently, the treatment or training is prescribed or executed to the patient.

In physiotherapy, pain management, rehabilitation, mobility and other areas of illness or disabilities are treated by the physiotherapist. Before the start of actual treatment, and of the admission of the patients to the treatment or training course, the initial stage of treatment involves counselling cum interview.

2.2. Definition of Counselling

There are a number of definitions available for the term ‘Counselling.’ Scholars of psychology from various parts of the world have defined it in different ways. Only a few definitions are taken into account in order to get a precise and relevant concept of it.

Counselling implies “professional guidance of the individual by the use of standard psychological methods such as collecting case history data using various techniques of personal interview and testing interests and aptitudes” (qtd. in Britto 48). Donald A. Biggs says that in psychology, counselling refers to “a ‘scientifically respectable’ way of dispensing personal, social and educational information or advice” (Britto 48).
2.3. Types of Counselling

There are three types of counselling. They are:

(i) Directive counselling

(ii) Non-directive counselling

(iii) Eclectic Counselling

2.3.1. Directive Counselling

This type of counselling focuses its attention on various dimensions to find solutions to the problems of the students/clients. E.G. Williamson explains the following six steps in conducting directive counselling (1) Analysis, (2) Synthesis, (3) Diagnosis, (4) Prognosis, (5) Counselling and (6) Follow-up (qtd. in Manivannan 249). M. Manivannan states that “the counselling plays the major role in this method. Therefore this method is known as counsellor-centred method” (249).

2.3.2. Non-Directive Counselling

In this type of counselling, the counsellor makes the student/client understand his/her capacities and abilities, and makes the students/clients solves the his/her problems by himself/herself. According to M. Manivannan, “Carl R. Rogers is the chief exponent of this method. In this method, the counsellor provides an atmosphere in which the client can explore his own thoughts or feelings. In this counselling, counselor takes a catalytic role” (250).

2.3.3. Eclectic Counselling

As documented by M. Manivannan, “F.C. Throne, the chief exponent of this method says that eclecticism is the most practicable and apt approach to counselling.
In this method of counselling, the counselor bases his counselling on concepts taken from various available viewpoints” (250-251). This type of counselling focuses on both directive and non-directive counselling methods which can be done according to demands and situations. The counsellor can make use of the techniques like reassurance, merely giving information, case history, interview, testing etc. to achieve the goal of counselling.

2.4. Need of Counselling Skills for the Language Teachers

As remarked by M. John Britto, “in ELT, the teachers are required to be good counsellors in order to succeed in the mission of making the students learn English. Even though they are not specialized in Psychology or counselling, they should have basic skills of counselling in order to make the target students proficient in communication skills in English” (48-49). Oxford Advance learner's Dictionary defines Counselling as “professional advice about a problem” (347). It also implies that counsellor refers to “a person who has been trained to advise people with problems, especially personal problem”. Counselling at the beginning of the English language training programme is

(1) to discover the difficulties of the learners,

(2) to make the learners disclose whatever notions, perceptions, experiences, expectations and interests are there in the mind of the learners before the start of the English language training course.

(3) to plan the course with care, so that the meaningful interventions are assumed by the language trainers to achieve the outcome from the target learners.

2.5. Need of Counselling Cum Interview in ELT

A few language behaviours and individual characteristics of the learners could be found in a psychological test. As J.B. Carroll states, “A psychological or educational
test is a procedure designed to elicit certain behavior from which one can make inferences about certain characteristics of an individual. The procedure may be very informal, as when it consists of a question that has suddenly come to the mind of an examiner, or it may be very formal” (Davies 46).

The following are some of the needs of counselling cum interview in ELT:

- The counselling cum interview model is designed to identify the learning strategies of the learners, who want to enhance their competence in English language skills.
- The learner is given chance to think about his/her own obstacles in learning English language.
- The learner is able to identify his weaknesses in learning English language skills.
- The learner is able to disclose his/her disabilities to the language trainer/teacher.
- The learner believes that his/her teacher or the language trainer would help him/her in and through the course of English language training programme, to acquire communications skills in English.
- The learner is motivated by the language trainer/counsellor with positive attitude towards himself/herself to learn English language skills without hesitation.
- The teacher would be able to identify the needs of the learners.
- The teacher would also be able to plan or design the teaching methods according to the needs of the learners.
- The learner would be able to understand that his/her problems would be solved in the English language teaching programme.
- The learner is prepared to be co-operative in the process of learning English.
The optimistic rapport between the language teacher/trainer and the learner is built through the counselling cum interview method.

The learner is made to gain awareness of his/her present experience.

The learner is prepared to apply the rational methods for solving the problems related to learning English.

2.6. Counselling Cum Interview Model Owns Three Points of Differences

1) Learning strategy is closely combined with learners’ factors. The language trainers understand the learners’ present language learning strategy before the start of the language training procedure. This emphasizes language trainers to understand learners’ factors before training, such as learners’ preference, self-learning goals, etc.

2) Attitude towards learning English language changes during the course. Learners need to understand the features of target language training such as understanding the nature and feature of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and vocabulary learning, etc.

3) “Classroom activities” only have language learning purposes. This enables the learners to understand and learn new strategies to acquire English language skills.

2.7. Counselling Cum Interview Method

- Counselling is conducted for the students in the first phase by the language trainer on one to one basis.

- The students are asked to disclose their problems in learning English till the completion of higher secondary education.
The language trainer is expected to listen to the problems of the students of English language learning, and document them.

This would make the students feel that their problems of learning English are known to the trainer.

The language trainer also knows the problems of the students before the start of the English language training course.

The language trainer, in some situations, interviews the students to find out the problems of the students in learning English. This interview is conducted for the students, who are really unable to find out their own problems of learning English.

This interview would make the students feel the real concern of the language trainer towards them.

2.8. Interview Questions

Interview is conducted by the language trainer in order to bring out the experience of the learners in learning English at the entry level. Marysia Johnson and Andrea Tyler state, “The oral proficiency Interview is a widely used instrument for assessing second and foreign language speaking ability” (28). The following were some of the informal questions raised during the time of interview with the ESL learners before the start of the English language training programme:

- Can you speak in English?
- Have you ever tried to speak in English in the class with your classmates?
- Have you ever conversed in English with your teacher of English?
- Can you tell me the reasons for not using English to speak with your friends, teachers, parents, classmates and with general public?
• Have you ever participated in any competition in speaking English in your school?

• How do you find learning of English grammar exercises useful in your day-to-day communicative contexts?

• Are you afraid of committing mistakes while speaking in English in front of your friends or teachers?

• Do you feel shy to commit mistakes while speaking in English with your friends or teachers?

• How long have you been listening to speaking in English when you were in school?

• Are you really interested in learning English?

• Are you satisfied with the number of words that you know in English?

• How do you learn English for your examinations?

• Have you written essays in English on your own effort?

• Do you read any English language material other than your subject material?

• Does your teacher in the school converse with you in English?

• How did you learn English language in your school?

• What are the ways in which you want to learn English?

• How was your classroom-ambience conducive enough to learn English?

• How were you drilled in grammatical units?

• In what communication skills were you trained in your school?

• Do you really want to speak in English?

• Have you used English in your communication? If no, why?
• If you get an opportunity to speak in English, will you communicate? If no, why?

• If you learn grammar, will you communicate in English?

• If you learn enough vocabulary, will you communicate in English?

• If you learn sentence structures, will you communicate in English?

• If you get rid of your fear, will you communicate in English?

• If you get rid of your shyness, will you communicate in English?

• If you are given training in pattern drill, will you communicate in English?

• If you are given training in reading, will you read in English in front of others?

• If you are given training in listening to English, will you develop your listening skill?

• If your classmates are encouraging, will you communicate in English?

• If you are provided with good material, will you develop your communicative skills?

• If you are given feedback on your performance, will you change/try to correct yourself and develop your English language skills?

• Will you participate in the language activities voluntarily?

• Will you take personal initiative to develop your language skills?

• If you are given homework, will you complete it on time?

• Will you try again and again till you succeed in developing your language skills?

• Will you continuously try to acquire English language skills even when your classmates and friends pass negative comments on your performance?

• Will you be punctual to the class?
2.9. Observations in the Counselling Cum Interview Conducted for Students

1. Psychological fear in committing mistakes in speaking English language
2. Psychological shyness in practising in front of the peer group
3. Motivation by the teacher to learn English
4. Lack of enough Feedback from the teacher
5. Drill/exercises provided to develop one’s language skills
6. Formative test or Unit test conducted
7. Sufficient vocabulary to use it in communication
8. Speaking opportunities provided to the learners
9. Reading opportunities provided to the learners
10. Listen opportunities provided to the learner
11. Test centered, and not student centered
12. Lack of interaction in the classroom
13. Sentence construction as a difficult task
14. Focus memorization
15. No interventions in the classroom teaching
16. Need of grammar classes
17. Only bilingual method is adopted to teach English
18. Evaluation of the test answer scripts without pointing out the mistakes that need to be corrected
19. No interest in learning English
20. The students’ blind belief in managing with the shallow knowledge of their English language skills.
2.10. The List of Problems Identified Through Counselling Cum Interview Method

- At the school level, the students were motivated to pass their formative and summative examinations only.
- The students were taught with the focus on the prescribed textbooks.
- Students were not given opportunities to exhibit their English language skills.
- Memorization is focused in the language learning.
- Written skill is focused by the teachers in the schools.
- Students felt shy when the opportunities were given to them to exhibit their English language skills.
- Fear of committing mistakes did not allow them to practise their language skills.
- Though some students were optimistic in learning and practising their English language skills, maximum number of students were demotivated.
- Teachers were not given autonomy to extend their language training services to the students.
- The methods in which the language is taught did not suit all the students.

2.11. Classroom Interventions Carried Out

Effective oral communication in English language has become mandatory for academic success at the level of higher education. Students, when they are in the job market, are assessed, evaluated and graded only by their speaking skills. Developing speaking skills is invariably one of the challenges and responsibilities of teachers of English at higher educational institutions. Hence, it is the need of the hour for teachers of English to find out innovative strategies to motivate the students to enhance their speaking skills in English. Counselling is taken as a significant strategy by the
researcher to identify the problems and to solve them through motivation of the students to participate in speaking skills development programmes. Having identified the challenges faced by the students during their participation in the speaking skill tasks, the researcher has used counselling as an experimental strategy to explore its significance in making the students participate in the speaking skill training programmes. The participants were fifty first year undergraduate students, who were below an intermediate level in proficiency in basic English speaking skills. The students took up a pre test on self-introduction orally before counselling and a post test after counselling. The results indicated a significant difference in their speaking ability.

Basic oral communicative skills are very important in today’s highly competitive world. Oral communication is an important skill and essential for success at different levels of life, and for one’s career development. Unfortunately, in English language classroom, speaking skills have been completely ignored, and emphasis is given on only writing skills for the chief purpose of making the students get through the written examinations. Speaking is a demanding task that involves extremely cognitive processes.

In today’s higher education classrooms, heterogeneous environment is a common phenomenon. In such classrooms, only a very few students are able to speak and respond in English. The students are even not participatory in the oral exercises in English. Hence, when students are required to speak, they are unable to exhibit or express even personal information about themselves in English, and they become frustrated and show reluctance to participate in oral communication in English. The main reasons for their frustration and reluctance to take part in speaking activities include lack of motivation, lack of teachers’ understanding of the learners’ level of speaking before the speaking skill training programmes, and lack of opportunity for
the teachers to use diagnostic tools to find out the entry level problems of the students in speaking skills. Moreover, students rarely speak even in their own vernacular language in public performances like seminar presentations in the class, oral competitions, acting in English plays, etc. So, the students in the class feel very strange, nervous and anxious to participate in speaking activities in English. When students are asked to communicate in English, they feel afraid to speak, and many of them express a common response that they have nothing to say.

In a heterogeneous environment, training the students in speaking skills is not an easy task because speaking is the result of composing ideas, and is developed in the mind of the learners. It also involves a number of sub-skills: pronunciation, accent, stress, pause, intonation, tone and delivering with appropriate body language. It is a complex process neither easy nor spontaneous for many second language speakers.

There are various factors that affect the teaching of speaking skills effectively. Classroom management, syllabus completion, time constraint and less effective teaching methods are a few of the factors. As a result, students, who can speak well in English, lack the opportunities to enhance their speaking skill, and the average and below average students struggle to speak a few sentences in English on their own. When these students get enrolled in higher education, with some expectations to develop knowledge on the subject they choose, they are expected to speak fluently in different situations such as seminars, oral presentations in the class, and conversation with teachers, peers and administrators. Such requirements reveal the significance of teaching basic speaking skills in English. Thus, it is very important for the teachers of English to try to use various innovative strategies to teach their students speaking
skills with utmost care. The present study focuses on using Counselling as a strategy and its impact on students to motivate them to participate in speaking activities in order to make them enhance their speaking skills in English.

The investigation, on the impact of counselling was done on fifty first-year undergraduate students at St. Joseph’s College, Tiruchirappalli. The aims and objectives of this initial evaluation were to:

- Investigate the researcher’s experience in counselling and his perception of its impact.
- Compare the students’ psychological fear of participating in the speaking activities in the heterogeneous class before and after the use of the strategy of counselling.
- Compare the teacher-learner rapport to enhance the speaking skills of the students before and after counselling.
- Compare students’ confidence and their involvement in speaking tasks before and after the use of the method of counselling.

2.12. The Study on the Use of Counselling as a Strategy

The present study addresses the use of counselling as a strategy in developing speaking skills of fifty first-year undergraduate students. The objective of the study is to determine whether the counselling as a strategy has any significant impact on the first-year undergraduate students’ speaking skills in English. The study seeks to answer the following question: Does ‘counselling’ as a strategy significantly enhance the speaking ability of the first year undergraduate students?
2.13. The Design of the Study on the Use of Counselling as a Strategy

The design of the study was experimental which involved only an experimental group. The experimental group’s data before and after the ‘counselling’ was analysed and compared to evaluate the impact of using counselling as a strategy in enhancing the basic speaking abilities of first-year undergraduate students in English language.

2.14. The Participants of the Study

The participants of the study were fifty first-year undergraduate students from St. Joseph’s College, Tiruchirappalli, whose ability to speak in English was below that of the students at intermediate level. They belonged to the age group of eighteen and twenty years. The students were from rural and semi-rural background. They participated in the basic speaking tasks of self-introduction, but were reluctant to perform it confidently without fear.

2.15. Procedure

At first, the students were asked to participate in the proficiency test on oral self-introduction in English. Arthur Hughes argues, “Proficiency tests are designed to measure people’s ability in a language, regardless of any training they may have had in that language” (11). The counselling was done after the first self-introduction by the students in the classroom. In counselling, the students were asked to disclose their problems like psychological difficulties, problems concerning the classroom ambiance, course materials, and methods of teaching, problems with the teachers, duration of the course, class hours, socio-cultural problems and problems, related to peer-learners in the class. In the counselling process, the language trainer was able to identify the problems and needs from the student or the learner’s point of view individually. Moreover, the learner was aware that all his or her personal problems related to
English language learning were known to the trainer. The trainer was able to easily motivate, guide and facilitate the learners in the counselling session by suggesting some solutions to enhance their speaking skill in front of their classmates.

A few learners were unable to disclose their problems and difficulties to the language trainer in the counselling, and for them, the trainer converted the counselling into an informal interview. In the interview, the trainer asked questions and made the learners involve in the interview to identify problems and obstacles related to English language learning. Thus, counselling was conducted in a comfortable manner to the learner so that the learners were able to express their language-related problems without any hesitation.

In the summing up counselling session, the students expressed their willingness and wish that they would actively take part in the speaking activities in the future whenever they get opportunities. Thus, a rapport was built between the learner and the English language trainer.

2.16. Data Collection

The primary data collected was based on oral performance before counselling, and it is tabulated below in table-1.

2.16.1. TABLE-1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENTS’ SPEAKING SKILLS BEFORE COUNSELLING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>S. No.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.16.2. Source: Primary Data

Table-1 Illustrates that 4% of the students only introduced themselves completely in English. 24% of the students introduced themselves using Tamil and English language (Bilingually). 44% of the students introduced only in Tamil, and 28% of the students did not come forward to introduce themselves.

2.16.3. Inference

It is clearly inferred that 96% of the students found it difficult to introduce themselves only in English.

2.16.4. TABLE-2

STUDENTS’ SPEAKING SKILLS AFTER COUNSELLING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Particulars related to speaking (Self-introduction)</th>
<th>No. of Students (n=500)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Students introduced themselves only in English</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Students introduced themselves using Tamil and English language (Bilingually)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Students who introduced themselves only in Tamil</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Students who did not come forward to introduce themselves</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.16.5. Source: Primary Data

Table-2 illustrates that only 16% of the students introduced themselves completely in English. 52% of the students introduced themselves using Tamil and English language (Bilingually). 26% of the students introduced only in Tamil and 6% of the students did not come forward to introduce themselves.

2.16.6. Inference

It is clearly inferred that 84% of the students found it difficult to introduce themselves only in English. 16% of the students were able to introduce orally only using English. The table shows a considerable progress in the speaking skills of the learners after counselling.
2.17. Data Analysis

This study was an attempt to determine the effect of counselling as a strategy to enhance speaking skills of the students at the first-year undergraduate level. This part presents the results of data analysis. For this purpose, inferential statistics was used to analyse the data. The data collected from the students’ performance before and after counselling was analysed. Both the data were compared to measure the efficacy of counselling on enhancing basic oral self-introduction of the students. The comparative chart below shows the percentage of improvement of the students in their oral self-introduction task before and after counselling. (See fig.1)

2.18. FIG-1: COMPARISON OF THE ORAL SELF-INTRODUCTION TASK BEFORE AND AFTER COUNSELLING
2.19. Conclusion

Learning is facilitated when learners are explicitly made to participate in counselling cum interview method before the start of teaching English. The above-mentioned observations of the counselling cum interview method have resulted, focusing on the understanding of the learners’ previous experiences, methods, understanding learning strategies, aiming at taking conscious control of diagnosing the problems and the classroom decision-making in the teaching-learning process in an ESL classroom.

Counselling as a motivating, guiding and suggesting strategy is not based on any method of enhancing English speaking skills and is not exam-oriented. It gives special attention to speaking needs of the students and to eliminate their psychological fear. The focus was on enabling a few key elements of students’ speaking: words and sentences presented without fear which develop their speaking abilities. Counselling enables the students to build their confidence and motivation which would go a long way in enhancing their speaking skills.