ABSTRACT

The present study attempts to investigate the problems of oral communication skills of Erukala tribal learners at secondary schools of Telangana state and examine the effectiveness of culture-based materials for developing oral communication skills in English. Tribal learners in general lack effective communication skills, particularly in English, due to the fact that they are cut off from the mainstream society and do not have access to the target language. For them, communicating in English is always a distant dream. There are innumerable reasons for this situation. Following Martin and Lixian (1999), it is assumed that Erukala tribal learners are not able to learn English communication skills because the learning materials being used are not based on the culture and the social world of the learners. Eli Hinkel (1999, p.2) claims, “second/foreign language can rarely be learnt and taught without addressing the culture of the community in which it is used”. As a result, the Erukala learners feel like fish out of water as the materials of the prescribed textbooks (Our World through English, published by Government of Telangana, Hyderabad) are drawn from the mainstream cultures. The gap between the learners’ cognition and the culture presented in the textbooks has remained unchanged producing discouraging learning outcomes for the Erukala tribal learners. There is also an imbalance in the distribution of time in teaching and assessing the four language skills in the language classroom. More importance is given to the reading and writing skills compared to the listening and speaking skills. Learners are mostly tested on the basis of writing and reading skills. Hence, there is a need to develop the oral communication skills.

The Erukala tribal learners in government (Zilla Parishad) high schools of Suraram and Qutubullapur, Ranga Reddy district in Telangana, learn English as a third language from class III. Even after being exposed to several years of English
instruction, they still struggle to communicate in English and have a very low proficiency in oral communication skills. Therefore, the present study tries to examine and identify the major issues related to the materials responsible for the learners' inability in oral communication skills. The study also focuses on building confidence and self esteem among the learners which have a direct bearing in developing their oral communication skills in English. Culture-based materials draw the attention of the learners and make them communicate freely without fear and hesitation. They also engage the learners to participate in communicative activities which directly reflect the culture used in their real life situation.

The study is based on the following hypotheses:

- Culture-based materials will help improve oral communication skills of the Erukala tribal learners.
- The teaching materials presently used in the secondary schools of Telangana are not relevant to the Erukala tribal learner's culture, social and real-life situations.

The study answers the following research questions:

- What is the impact of culture-based materials on oral communication skills of the Erukala tribal learners?
- In what ways are the present teaching materials suitable / not suitable to the needs of the Erukala tribal learners of Telangana?
- What kind of problems do the Erukala tribal learners face with regard to the existing learning materials while learning English language?
To what extent will the learners’ culture-based materials be effective in developing oral communication skills of the Erukala tribal learners at secondary schools?

The research procedure was divided into two stages. The first stage was a preliminary study and the second stage was a main study. During the preliminary study, the researcher interacted with teachers and learners to know their attitudes and perceptions on English language teaching and learning in the classroom. Through classroom observation and interaction, the learners’ proficiency level in oral communication skills was elicited. The preliminary study helped the researcher understand whether there was any need to change the teaching materials or methods to meet the required proficiency of the target language and what methods and materials were being used in the classroom.

The present study adopted both the qualitative and quantitative methods to collect and analyse the data. The researcher used the following research tools, i.e. questionnaire to teachers and learners, classroom observation with a check-list, informal interaction with teachers and learners, pre-test, intervention and post-test. The pre-test and post-test were mediated with an intervention for developing oral communication skills in the context of the Erukala tribal learners’ own culture-based materials. Thirty Erukala tribal learners from four different secondary schools of Rangareddy district were taken as subjects of the study. A pre-test was administered to know the existing proficiency level of the learners in oral communication skills. Speaking tasks such as reading aloud, expressing oneself, description and narration were given to them in the pre-test. Their oral performances were audio-recorded and transcribed for the analysis. The results of the pre-test indicated that their performance in oral communication skills was very low. Most of the learners had great difficulty in
expressing their ideas in English. Taking into account the low proficiency level of the learners in the pre-test the researcher decided to do an intervention to enhance their existing proficiency level in oral communication skills.

The intervention was conducted among the Erukala tribal learners by using their own culture-based materials. The researcher adopted and translated a few texts/stories from Telugu to English. The learners were divided into two groups namely the control group and the experimental group. The intervention was carried out with the experimental group with their own culture-based materials, whereas the control group was taught using the prescribed textbook. This intervention was done for sixty days by the researcher. After completion of the intervention, it was found that there would be an improvement in oral communication skills of the learners of experimental group in comparison with the learners of control group.

The speaking tasks which were conducted in the pre-test were used for the post-test as well. Their oral performances were audio-recorded. Then the recordings of the post-test were transcribed for analysis and compared with the data of the pre-test to know whether the learners’ own culture-based materials enhanced oral communication skills of the learners of the experimental group. A similar comparison was also made between the performance of the control group and the experimental group from which it was found that the learners of the experimental group had noteworthy improvement in their oral communication skills, particularly in reading aloud, expressing oneself and family, description and narration.

The majority of the learners of the experimental group could speak without fear, shyness and much hesitation. Their communication had also relatively less pauses and repetitions, and they could speak continuously without causing any difficulty for the
listener to comprehend. They also built evident self-esteem to use the target language for communication. The findings of the study suggest that the culture-based materials are effective in enhancing the Erukala tribal learners’ oral communication skills to a certain extent (if not to a great extent) within a short period of sixty days of teaching. The study implies that the Erukala tribal learners’ culture-based materials should be taken into account as a source for developing oral communication skills in English and teachers also should be encouraged to use these materials.

Findings from the questionnaire indicate that the learners could not understand the classroom instruction. They were also hesitant to speak English in the classroom. They used Telugu to speak with friends and teacher. There was very less importance given to oral communication skills in teaching and learning process. The textbook materials are mostly irrelevant to the learners’ culture and are not comprehensible, and they are mostly boring to the learners. The teachers and learners said that the learners’ culture-based materials should be made part of the textbook.

The findings from the classroom observation reveal that the medium of instruction was in bilingual method and teaching learning process was teacher-centered. Use of target language, importance to oral communication skills, learners’ participation in the classroom and teaching materials were very low in the classroom whereas use of regional language (Telugu) and focus on content were very high.

The findings from the informal interaction with the learners and the teachers show that the teachers and learners responded positively and said that the culture-based materials would enable the Erukala tribal learners to learn English in general and oral communication skills in particular. Further, the teachers suggested that materials
based on the learners’ culture, social and real life situations can be incorporated into
the textbooks.

Over all, the findings indicate that culture-based materials would have a positive
effect in developing oral communication skills. Therefore, the study has implications
for the teachers, material designers and teacher educators. The implications are: The
learners’ culture based materials may enhance oral communication skills. The non-
Erukala teachers may understand the learners' culture-based materials for developing
learners' oral communication skills in English. Material designers may get insights to
incorporate culture-based materials which provide scope for developing oral
communication skills. Teacher educators may be enlightened to train teachers on how
to use learners' culture-based materials to teach oral communication skills and other
language skills as well.

Design of Chapters

Chapter One Introduction begins with a discussion on the significance of English
language in the present world and the status of English in India. It also discusses
English Language Teaching in India. It is followed by background of the study,
statement of the problem, rationale of the study, aim and objectives of the present
study, research questions, hypotheses and possible outcomes of the study. The chapter
ends with conclusion.

Chapter Two Review of Literature begins with a discussion on culture and language.
It presents an understanding of language and culture, followed by a discussion on the
relationship between language and culture. It also presents the available research on
culture and language. Then, it presents and discusses oral communication skills which
is followed by importance and understanding of oral communication skills. The
chapter also presents and discusses the studies relevant to oral communication skills. It also discusses the theories on language, culture and oral communication skills. It ends with conclusion.

Chapter Three presents *Research methodology* used for the current. This chapter begins with type of research the study has adopted and presents the setting of the study, sample of the study, learner profile, teacher profile and procedure of the study. It discusses the research tools, procedure of data collection and evaluation criteria for oral communication skills. It ends with conclusion.

Chapter Four *Data Analysis and Interpretation* begins with a discussion on preliminary study. Then, it presents the analysis of the data collected through research tools such as questionnaire, classroom observation, pre-test, intervention, post-test and informal interaction with teachers and learners in the preliminary study and the main study. Further, the scores obtained from pre-test and post-test are analysed and compared at the end of the chapter.

Chapter Five *Conclusion* presents and discusses the findings obtained from each research tool. It also presents key findings obtained from each tool. It is followed by implications and limitations of the study. It ends with scope for further study.