CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

In the present globalized world, English is increasingly becoming the medium of interaction and communication in all domains of our life, both in local and global contexts. As English is being used in almost all the countries in the world today, it will not be wrong to say that the demographic spread of English as an international language has been phenomenal. English is being used as the most dominant language in the field of education, science and technology, information technology, industry, travel, trade, transport, business and commerce, aviation, entertainment, radio, television, diplomacy, multinational companies, e-commerce and social media. English is the global link language connecting people to people and nations to nations, making the world a global village. The use of English in different walks of our life has been accelerated to a great extent. According to Kachru et al (2008, p: 7), if the 21st century is dominated by technology and digitalization, it is equally dominated by English. “The numbers of South Asian users of English now exceed the combined population of the inner Circle of English-the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The Asian continent, particularly South Asia and China have altered the international profile of world Englishes”. Hence, there is a huge demand for learning English world over. In almost all the countries in the world, English is being taught either as a second or a foreign language.
The present study aimed at developing speaking skills of students in ESL (English as a Second language) context at the undergraduate level, in Andhra Pradesh. The study was conducted in a semi-urban setting and the students were from regional medium background. These students were pursuing their 1st year under graduation in BA/BSc/BCom programme. At the undergraduate level, majority of the learners move into English medium education irrespective of the medium they studied up to the intermediate level. While experiencing the demand for English for both employment opportunities and higher education, these students are aware of the need for English are eager to achieve the required proficiency in the language. The proficiency of these students in English is indeed very poor in spite of the fact that they have studied English as a second language both at the school and the college level, for over 12 years. Besides, the performance of these students is good in other curricular subjects, whereas their performance in English is not up to the expected level.

Normally, immediately after completing the three-year degree course, most of the students are either in search of jobs or they pursue higher education. In both cases, they require to have a good proficiency in English. However, these students’ aspirations are thwarted most often for lack of proficiency in English. Even if these students have proficiency in English, it is unintelligible due to the heavy influence of mother tongue and they are out of the race even before they want to do something.
1.1 Communication – a Basic Need

Communication is a very basic human need that helps us to be in contact with other people in the society. Without communication, people may be isolated and confused. It is found that only in humans, language is used as the medium of communication and to share information. Gray and Wise (1959) have aptly said, “It is through communication that individuals are integrated into societies; it is through communication that the cultures of those societies are established and perpetuated” (p: 1). There is no doubt that during the last two decades, the rate of communication among people has grown exponentially and widely spread more than ever before. Though there are other media of communication, speech is the primary and the most natural way in which we use language to communicate. According to „Ethnologue”, a database maintained by the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Dallas,

“...there are today about 6,800 distinct languages in the world. Yet, just five languages Chinese, English, Spanish, Russian, and Hindi – are spoken by more than half of the World’s population … while most other languages are primarily communicative channels within, rather than across, national borders. Today English is big business and the most commonly taught foreign language all over the world”.

(Svartvik and Leech, 2006, p: 1)

The above observation clearly indicates that amidst of thousands of languages in the world, English is the only language which is accepted for global communication all over the world. Indeed, today English has become the international link language for innumerable reasons.
The following picture elaborates on the users of the English language across the world (Adopted from „English as a global language” (David Crystal, 2003, p: 61).

![Diagram of English language users](image)

**Expanding Circle**
- **Outer Circle**
  - **Inner Circle**
    - e.g. UK, USA
      - 320 – 380 million
    - e.g. India, Singapore
      - 300 – 500 million
    - e.g. China, Russia
      - 500 – 1,000 million

Figure 1: Users of English (adapted from Crystal, 2003)

It is clear from the above picture that Crystal approximately estimates that there are as many as 320-380 million people in the world who speak English as a first language, 300-500 million people, who speak English as a second language or a foreign language, and about 500-1000 million people who use English as a foreign language. The number of English users as Crystal estimated, at the end of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, is widely spread, more widely spoken and written than any other language in the world.
1.2 English as an International Language

“English is a language – the language on which the sun does not set, whose users never sleep.” (Quirk, 1985, p: 1). It is true in today’s world. A few centuries ago, English language was spoken by monolinguals in a small island but now English has emerged as one of the most important world languages and seems to be the key which opens up awareness for scientific and technological development. As the knowledge of English increases, the understanding and the communication among the nations becomes easier. As a result, the political and ideological barriers among the nations have been reduced. The recent literature on world Englishes debate shows that English is widely used as the lingua-franca in many multilingual societies such as in India. It is evident that majority of the Commonwealth and Gulf countries use English for the purposes of mutual communication and business.

In the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, the human race has arrived at the age of globalization and global communication. The global communication is bringing the nations and people together and making them a global community. At this juncture, English has become an effective means of communication worldwide increasing better understanding among the people of the world and breaking down the barriers, thereby bringing people closer and making them more collaborative and interdependent. Take for example the social media platforms such as face book, twitter, whatsapp, instagram and the like. Instant communication, sharing of ideas and views with people from across the world either through messaging or through voice mail, skype or video chatting has become a common phenomenon in our everyday life. In view of all these, English is now being paid more attention all over the world and more and
more people are joining the race from both cities and villages to avail the opportunities that comes with English.

1.3 The ESL Curriculum

English is taught as a second language in India and it is used as the additional official language, next to Hindi by the union government of India. English is taught as a compulsory second language from the primary level of education onwards. People in India wish to learn English for several reasons, basically to acquire knowledge, to pursue higher studies and take up professional assignments at both national and international levels. While these are the primary reasons for learning the English language, there are many other purposes for acquiring proficiency in the language viz., to communicate globally, to know about people and their societies, to understand foreign culture and literature and so on.

As mentioned above, the various reasons to learn English decide the goals and objectives of teaching learning of English as a second language. The need of learning English has been recognized at all levels of education, from primary to postgraduate level and further studies. As English opens many avenues for employment in the international job market, especially in the sector of Information Technology, the need for communication skills is greatly recognized in the field of international business and the ability to communicate with the international community has become vital for survival of business organizations. In contrast, engineering education which generally gives less significance to language learning and communication ability, is now emphasizing on modifying English syllabus in order to incorporate some
components of communicative activities to develop students’ speaking skills such as just-a-minute talks, group discussions, debates, mock interviews and role plays. In fact, such activities have become the buzz in engineering institutions now-a-days. Following the fashion, other streams of education such as management studies etc. have also carried out necessary changes in their syllabi to incorporate components that help to develop oral communication skills in students.

During informal interaction with college teachers, the researcher came to know from some of them that despite their sincere attempts to enhance communication skills among undergraduate students, the outcome is dismal as evident from students’ language performances both in written and spoken mode. We need to remember that language is the medium for thinking. Many established educational philosophers and psychologists such as Lev Vygotsky, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Jean Piaget have stated that a language is a tool for the development of critical, creative, and metacognitive thinking. In fact, language learning includes development and application of cognitive processes. These cognitive processes enable learners to master various skills and elements of language such as the ability to decode phonological code, ability to seek clarification in a conversation, ability to understand the meaning of a word in a context, ability to produce coherent and cohesive discourses, the pragmatic competencies and the like. Given the role of language in learning, thinking, communicating, and constructing knowledge, language curriculum is a suitable platform for developing student’s ability to think critically about the received information i.e. to analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and use information through the medium of language (cited in M.A.V.S. Narayana Swami( 2014).
Therefore, English syllabus for undergraduate students should be incorporated with suitable speaking tasks and activities and teachers while transacting the lessons in the classroom should conduct these activities to develop speaking skill among learners. In order to learn a language, learners need to be involved in the use of the language and regular participation will boost their confidence to articulate in the language.

Therefore, teachers need to organize speaking tasks and activities and encourage students to participate and express their ideas in the target language so that they develop knowledge of the language and also the confidence to speak in the language. It is said, practice makes perfect. If an environment to speak in English is not created in the classroom and students are not given the opportunity to use the language in speech, where else will they get this opportunity? When confronted to speak in English, students will be obviously forced to apply their mind and think about how to construct sentences, choose relevant words, vocabulary and content and utilize their knowledge of the language to express their thoughts. Unless one is thrown into water, one does not learn how to swim. Similarly, unless faced with the challenge to speak, students are unlikely to develop the courage and confidence and construct language chunks to speak in English.

1.4 Importance of Spoken English

It is said that language is primarily speech and that speech is primary, writing secondary. This implies that speech has primacy over writing. Speech enables us to instantly communicate to others our thoughts, views, ideas and needs and to obtain advice, information, and suggestions from others for solving
problems. In our day to day life, we need to know and inquire about several things, receive and share information regarding myriad matters. Today we live in a world that is highly developed scientifically and in information technology, a world that is almost always being bombarded with all kinds of information. Today, it is difficult to live without depending on others, without the help and support of others, connectivity and collaboration with others. We need to communicate with people who live around us or away from us, in India or outside India, in other parts of the world. Hence, we need a language to communicate effectively and it must be intelligible to all. This is why we need for a language that enables us to communicate with people at the regional, national and international level. This is when the knowledge in the English language, in speaking skill to be specific, becomes essential to communicate with the global community. Speaking skill in English is also required for better career prospects, employment opportunities and upward mobility in society. This need for communicating in English is felt all the more when students reach the tertiary level in their education.

1.5 Undergraduate Students’ Need for Speaking Skill

It is common knowledge among the undergraduate students in rural and semi-urban colleges that they are deficient in English speaking skills. They are aware of the fact that both at the school and college level, they have had inadequate teaching of speaking skill to meet the communicative needs of the present day learners. As assessment of speaking skill is not part of any examination, teaching of this skill is never given due attention both in English curriculum and in classroom teaching. Students are aware of the importance of
speaking skill, but in the absence of any opportunity to learn and cultivate this skill, they feel helpless. Because of this negligence, a huge number of students are passing out of the colleges and universities every year without acquiring the required amount of speaking skill, which is very essential for them. They realize the value of speaking skills at the time of job interviews and admission interviews. They know that after completing graduation, when they will appear for these interviews, they will be required to speak in English. It is not alone their good grades and certificates but also good performance in interviews which will take them forward in life.

The researcher observed that most of the graduates passing out of regional colleges are unable to speak on their own even a few sentences in English in real life situations. Due to the lack of proficiency in speaking skill, these graduates and postgraduates, and even students passing out of professional courses such as management, pharmacy and engineering, are enrolling in private spoken English institutes to improve their speaking skills to secure jobs. This is why, spoken English coaching centres are mushrooming in and around Hyderabad and there is a great rush of students there. In view of this, the researcher strongly felt that undergraduate students in regional colleges should be provided with adequate teaching, training and practice in speaking skills so that they can develop English speaking proficiency and fulfil their goals in life. The researcher believed that if these students could receive the required instruction and speech training and got the opportunities to speak as part of their undergraduate English course, it will benefit them immensely. They will be able to acquire the required skill and proficiency in English
speaking while pursuing their graduation itself with the available resources within the prescribed syllabus.

1.6 Teaching of English at Undergraduate Level in A. P.

In the state of Andhra Pradesh, English is taught rather as a compulsory content subject at the primary, secondary and the undergraduate levels than as a language with the objective of developing the four language skills among students. The syllabus of English for the undergraduate level is prescribed by Andhra Pradesh State Council of Higher Education (APSCHE). It is prepared in accordance with the goals and objectives of the curriculum, under the guidelines of APSCHE. Though the aim of the course books is to develop students’ overall fluency in English, the focus always remains on reading, writing, and grammar, without considering the listening and speaking skills. This results in poor communicative ability of undergraduate students that hinders them from using the language for communicative purposes in their day-to-day life. It is also found that the prescribed syllabus and the content of the course books are not much relevant to the current needs of the learners.

Further, the dependency culture is the major defect in the teaching-learning process where students completely depend on the teachers for acquiring knowledge in the subject. The teacher is the main source of exposure for the students to acquire speaking skill in English. Unfortunately, the teachers only paraphrase the contents of the textbook through translation method and lecturing thereby transferring content knowledge to students. Thus, the textbook becomes a constraint on and hindrance to purposeful classroom activity (Ramanujam 2003, p. 9). The textbooks are content-based and the
learning is memory-oriented. These students are tested within the frame of the prescribed syllabus and the textbooks are limited to test the students’ memory only. It is also observed that the teaching of English as a Second Language continues based on traditional approaches, methods and textbooks. Thus, students are exposed to the ‘classroom English’ and ‘textbook English’ only and their main problem is what to say when and how in an Indian setting (Verma, 1994). Although in principle, the curriculum emphasizes developing students’ overall proficiency in the target language implying that all the four skills need to be given equal attention, in practice it is not followed by the teachers. If such a situation continues against the background of a globalized world where English is given more importance than any other language, students cannot be prepared adequately for the present day job requirements. Therefore, there is a need to start from where learners are i.e., taking into consideration their languages, aspirations, motivation, and capabilities and build on them (Mathew, 1997).

1.7 Learners and Teachers at Undergraduate Level

It is observed that most of the students who join the traditional degree courses are generally from the socially and economically backward sections of the society in the rural and semi-urban setting. Due to their poverty, most of the students are even unable to buy textbooks prescribed for the course. It is also observed that these students are even not regular in the college as they work for part-time to support their parents and family. Most of the time in a day, they communicate in their first language only and they have very little exposure to the target language. The classroom is teacher-centered and
teachers also frequently use the regional language Telugu to translate the lessons. Teaching is usually imparted in the traditional lecture method or is guided by the structural-approach rather than any innovative learner-centered approaches.

In colleges of Andhra Pradesh, most of the teachers are not professionally trained to teach English using the latest pedagogical approaches and methods. Most of the teachers themselves are not very articulate in English. They believe that the textbook and the lecture method would help students to acquire communication skills. The designers of the English curriculum have prescribed to set up a language laboratory in every institution to enhance the communication skills of the students. But in practice, language labs are not provided in most of the degree colleges. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005) suggested an eclectic approach to the teaching of English which may be the best among the methods and approaches, depending on the given students, situation and available resources. However, finding an innovative, dynamic and pedagogically informed teacher in these colleges is indeed rare. Teachers teaching in these colleges should have the basic knowledge of ELT (English Language Teaching) and awareness about SLA (Second Language Acquisition) theories such as Chomsky’s “mentalist” theory, Vygotsky’s “Zone of Proximal Development” (ZPD) and sociocultural theory and Piaget’s theory of “constructivism” to teach the second language effectively.

1.8 Background to the Study

It needs no reiteration that speaking skill is one of the basic language skills and is essential in our day to day communication. India being a multilingual
country, acquiring speaking skill in English is equally essential for communicating with fellow Indians from other parts of our country as it is at the national level. The need for mastery in English speaking skills has increased manifold, more than ever before in the present globalized world. It is the most important link languages in the world today for international communication. Speaking ability gives a quick impression of a person whether s/he is a competent user of English or not. Today, the ability to speak in English has become inevitable for students who want to pursue higher education, secure jobs in Multi-National-Companies (MNC) and in many other fields. In spite of its importance, unfortunately, speaking skill in the context of teaching-learning of English is being neglected from the primary level to the tertiary level of education. Due to this negligence, many students are leaving schools/colleges with poor speaking skills in English.

In order to have the hands-on experience, the researcher examined the English course books from the primary level to the tertiary level in Govt. schools. He also interacted with several English teachers and students of primary, secondary and tertiary levels to obtain their views on the textbooks. The researcher found out that in the textbooks, the emphasis was laid primarily on reading and writing skills but the listening and speaking skills are given less importance or rather neglected, although these two skills are equally important and are necessary to be acquired by the learners. Hence, this study was taken up to objectively examine, in particular, the different aspects of the teaching learning of speaking skills at the undergraduate level and to find out an effective way of teaching speaking skills to undergraduate students to improve their speaking skills and enhance their overall oral proficiency.
During the interaction with the students and teachers, the researcher also found out that the teachers hardly encourage students to communicate in English either among themselves or with the teacher. On the contrary, if ever students speak in English in way of answering questions, they make mistakes, but majority of the teachers rarely provide corrective feedback or oral inputs to students on their deviant utterances or speaking performance. The researcher felt that if students would be engaged in speaking tasks and activities and receive an adequate amount of corrective feedback on their speaking performance, it would enhance their speaking skills.

1.9 Rationale for Teaching Speaking Skills

The explosion of information technology and digitalization in the contemporary world and the fierce competition in all sectors of public life has driven people to explore the best possible ways and avenues to be successful in life and to be ahead of others. The struggle for survival and success leads people to be more skilled in both technical skills and communicative skills. In a multilingual country like India, our societies in every state are becoming increasingly multilingual and multicultural as more and more people move over from their native places to settle in other parts of the country. People choose different professions according to their interests, needs, availability of work sources and mainly on the basis of their academic qualifications and suitability for the job. For example, the conductors in public buses, sales representatives, bank employees, central government employees, teaching professionals and police personnel need communication skills other than their educational and technical skills to be successful in their professional life.
While doing their job, they need communication skills in English to communicate with people from varied linguistic backgrounds. Managers and sales representatives are the key personnel in all business firms from the national level to the international level. They have to communicate effectively with their customers to sell their products in order to reach their targets. The Police personnel play a very significant role in our society as watchful public servants who assist in solving civil and criminal problems in everyday life. At the times of elections, political meetings, celebrations of festivals, mass protests, public riots and many such occasions, police personnel are required to deal with different types of people and situations. They need to oversee smooth run of events and tackle people and problems to safeguard people’s life and property. Hence, they need effective communication skills to be successful in dealing with people and communicating with them. Like these professionals, people working in almost all other professional fields need to have good oral communication skills in their personal and professional interest.

Teachers who are considered as the pillars of the nation and life centre of education play a key role in motivating and inspiring students to do well in their studies. They can influence and encourage students to set goals and work towards achieving those goals. The point of reference here is developing good speaking skills among students. For this purpose, teachers themselves should have good communication skills so that they become the model for the students and through their teaching, help to cultivate this skill among students. Way back during the 1960s, the Kothari Commission (1964-66) stated that English is one of the compulsory subjects offered in the undergraduate
programs in all the state universities. It was viewed as a language used not only for administrative purposes but also for availing employment opportunities. In addition to this English was identified with the development and progress of every society and was important in expanding intellectual ability, upward mobility and global perception of the learners. Today, after almost half a century, the role and status of English has grown exponentially and it has become inseparable part of our everyday life as the language of the computer, internet and mobile phones. Similarly, the need for speaking skill has grown and permeated into every sphere of our professional life and our students should not be deprived of availing the benefits that come with English speaking skill.

Recently in India, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) in association with World Bank conducted a survey and published the report in April, 2011. The survey report authored by Blom and Sacki (2011) revealed the following in the context of engineering students:

… the authors find that employers perceive Soft Skills (Core Employability Skills and Communication Skills) to be very important. Communication in English has the smallest skill gap, but remains one of the most demanded skills by the employers … These findings suggest that engineering education institutions should refocus on the assessment system, teaching-learning process, and curricula for better communication skills. (Blom and Saeki, 2011, p: ii).

Comparing with the engineering students, the degree level students are found to be less proficient in communication skills and need to develop this skill to be eligible for employment or higher studies. Hence, speaking skill should be
taught to them effectively as part of the undergraduate course. English speaking environment and opportunities need to be created by the teachers in the classroom by way of speaking tasks such as small talks, short dialogues, telling/retelling of stories, skits, extempore and the like. Students have to be motivated and encouraged to participate and do the tasks to improve their speaking skills. However, it is necessary to state here that, organizing speaking tasks and activities alone is not enough. Teachers have to play a very proactive and dynamic role in monitoring students’ speaking performances. They have to provide students with oral corrective feedback about their errors and other limitations and point out the correct forms. Otherwise how would the students know about their linguistic deviations?

Through oral corrective feedback, teachers can teach not only the communicative language functions but also the other concepts/items such as body language, politeness, intelligible pronunciation, and the interaction skills. If these functions are practiced in a course of time, the learners would be able to communicate in English in any real-life situation effectively. Hence, it is believed that offering corrective feedback on speaking errors of students would be effective in developing speaking skills among the degree students in regional medium rural colleges of Andhra Pradesh.

1.10 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study are as follows:

- To investigate the teachers’ and students’ perceptions, levels of motivation and attitudes towards speaking skills
• To find out the methods and strategies that teachers use to teach speaking skills and to analyze their effectiveness for undergraduate students

• To find out an effective way of teaching speaking skills to undergraduate students to enhance their speaking skills

1.11 Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. Do English teachers in regional language medium colleges teach speaking skills to undergraduate students?

2. Which methods and strategies do English teachers use to teach speaking skills to undergraduate students?

3. Do teachers conduct speaking tasks and activities as part of classroom teaching to enhance students’ speaking skills?

4. Do teachers provide corrective feedback on students’ speaking performance?

5. Does oral corrective feedback help to enhance students’ speaking skills?

1.12 Research Hypotheses

The present study is based on the following two research hypotheses:

• Involving undergraduate students in regular speaking tasks and activities during classroom teaching would help to enhance their speaking skills

• Providing oral corrective feedback on students’ speaking performance would enhance their speaking skills
1.13 Organization of Thesis

This study is presented in a thesis consisting of five chapters with the following structure:

Chapter-I: Introduction

This chapter discusses the importance of the English language in the present world, the background of the study, the research problem, the rationale for the study, and the need for English speaking skills among degree students in regional language medium rural colleges. It also presents the objectives of the study, the research questions and research hypotheses. Finally, it presents the limitations of the study and organization of the thesis.

Chapter-II: Theoretical Background and Review of Literature

This chapter provides the theoretical underpinnings and reviews related literature relevant to the study. It discusses different strategies and techniques for teaching speaking skills and highlights the importance and effectiveness of oral corrective feedback in teaching English in general and speaking skills in particular.

Chapter-III: Research Methodology

Chapter III discusses the research design that includes the setting of the study, the sample of the study, the description of tools which were used for data collection, the research methodology, the intervention programme, and the methods used for data analysis and interpretation.

Chapter-IV: Data Analysis and Interpretation

This chapter discusses the triangulation of the data, its analysis and interpretation. The researcher makes use of both qualitative and quantitative
methods of data analysis. Most of the data is presented in the form of figures, tables, and various statistical instruments.

**Chapter -V Findings and Conclusion**

This is the fifth and the final chapter and presents the findings of the study, the conclusions and offers suggestions for the teachers and students. It also discusses the implications of the study for all stakeholders and the scope for further research.

**1.14 Conclusion**

This introductory chapter began with discussing the importance of English as an international language. It also discussed the importance of English speaking skills for degree level students and their poor proficiency in speaking skills. The chapter further discussed the perceptions of teachers and students about their speaking skills at the undergraduate level and how this skill can be enhanced among students. Further, it presented the objectives of the study, research questions, research hypotheses and limitations of the study. The next chapter will deal with theoretical background of the present study and the review of related literature.