

PROFESSIONAL NEED FOSTERING REFLECTIVE SUPERVISION: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Learning of English in this Age of International Travel has undertaken a new meaning under the combined effects of globalization and soaring aspirations of the aspirants. And the greater the aspirations the greater are the needs. In such a situation the demand of gaining self-competence in the skilful use of communication in English is also at an increase on a never before scale.

Keeping in mind “communication skill” as ruling paradigm in the current ELT scenario in India, with particular reference to the rural areas of West Bengal, the goal is to make an empirical study of how the learner’s professional needs coupled with inner urge to be competent in the use of English language, can be made the basis of developing their communication skill in English.

This has been done by experimenting learner’s psychology about the need to develop English communication skills Upon examination of certain cases it becomes clear that (rural) learners , with specific needs, attempted to use the language to bolster their inner urge of high hopes and aspirations along with intense professional requirements. Through showing (two) case studies this research attempts to highlight the study in point. This will allow for more individual consideration of (rural) learners and may direct further research on the reciprocation of inner impulse and social need.

KEYWORDS: Globalization, Soaring Aspirations, Self-Competence, Psychology, Inner Impulse

INTRODUCTION

Everywhere around us we keep listening to people talking about globalization and its effects, of the world becoming a “global village” and the various influences of cross cultures. Of these, the influence of communicating in English specifically has been the major one. The colonial rule by the British and the intensive and extended teachings by the Missionaries remains at the foundation of such an overt influence of English, with particular reference to West Bengal (then Bengal). And with its successive growth in the sphere of social administration it gradually spread across the other functional wings of society. Repeated experimentation with the implementation of English at the school standard (different stages at different points of time) the influence/the discussion gained momentum. English being realized to have gained the status of the “link language” intensified the cravings to learn the effective use of the language. Moreover, ability to communicate well set a benchmark to climb the ladders of aspirations. The cravings increased by and by with the rising demand of good communication skill as one of the eligibility criteria for a prospective career. The eligibility criteria in the job advertisements of various sectors are cases in point.

My contention in this paper is, as mentors in the language classroom we can utilise this professional need of the learners as the base and guide them reflect upon themselves and know their limitations while facing the world at large. This would in turn leave no other alternative for them but to fight their causes in order to escalate and achieve their dreams. The language teacher need to create a favourable atmosphere for the learners, with self-motivating and entertaining content, in imparting the skills of effective communication in a situation. This would lead them to develop self-competence and self-efficacy in the use of English (L2). The paper, in particular, concerns the learners in the semi-urban and rural areas of West Bengal, at the undergraduate level. The paper would take a discussive mode to deal with the case in point. The contention of the paper is supported by a case study from classroom situation, of the students pursuing Engineering course in a rural set-up.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- Creating an awareness of a favourable learning situation with minimum teacher guidance
- Creating an awareness of utilising the professional need of “good communication skill” as the tool of developing the need.
- Raising self-competence and self-efficacy (in communication skill) as the key to improvise effective communication
- Inspire change in social interaction skills and value systems among the learners
- Inculcate among the learners, the necessity of knowing oneself to fight ignorance and gain confidence as part of lifelong learning

DISCUSSIONS

This paper while measuring some of the key issues in developing communication skills in the learners , particularly the semi-urban and rural learners , analyses certain understandings within the socio-cultural paradigm that would not only help them meet the professional standards but this in turn would also lead to self-introspection of their pitfalls.

Anne Isabella Thackeray Ritchie in her novel, Mrs. Dymond says:

“..give a man a fish and you feed him for a day ; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime..”

Now, as the professional need started serving as the impetus the demand/need to make an effective use of the language soared higher and higher. English here is taught at two levels – first language (L1) and second language (L2) So the difference in gaining competence over its use is distinctly noticeable. The situation is all the more complex when it comes to the teaching / learning of English (L2) in the semi-urban and rural areas of West Bengal. It thus paved the way for gaining competence in the skilful use of English in order to meet the professional need While building professional requirements it gave an insight to the learners about their pitfalls and loopholes. They started reflecting upon their lacuna that stood in between their aspiration level and their achievement level. The gap was wide enough to be bridged. Yet it was to be minimized if not met. Widely spreading of various Spoken English Institutes at every nook and corner could be witnessed. It is to be noted, these Institutes opened under the banner of improving “spoken English”...the skill in speaking. But, “communication skill” does not talk of speaking skill only.it encompasses the other three skills as well, namely,

Listening , Reading and Writing along with Speaking (LSRW). It would not be impertinent, perhaps, to say that in today's global scenario it also includes how effectively we can use these four skills in any given environment. That is, to say good communication skill is not only the use of / communicating in English (L2) but proper use of English in a proper way in any situation/context at any location. Language, as we know, is a combination of 'what' and 'how' of expression.

Let me now refer to the case in point

Name of the Learner: Gita Roy (Assuming)

Level: First year

Age-Group: 18-20 (Adolescent)

During the first year of the curriculum it was observed in the language classroom that Gita is, exceptionally, an inactive participant To add to it she was introvert. She remained passive even after repeated encouragement. The Theory based classes did make her take the lecture notes but, in times of practical classes that would actually make her participate, it was noted that during such class sessions she scribbled, scratched or sketched in her exercise book.

This led me to talk to her on various occasions on and off the classroom situation. As a part of the teaching-learning process and sometimes as a mark of courtesy greetings on my part became a must. I asked her to greet. She did. But, hardly, did I receive such greetings coming spontaneously from her. It was gradually noted that somewhere she was not at ease. It was visible. Time moved on and after a gap of a semester she was back to language classroom as part of course curricula. Video clippings, power point presentations, YouTube downloads and such other classroom realia failed to draw her participation The same attitude was there again. But, this time there was something else that could be perceived in her attitude. This was a time I felt the dire need to talk and counsel her She confided. To all my astonishment this inactive participant nourished a dream of soaring high in her profession. It was so beautiful a dream that she fancied but one of the obstacles was lack of (good) communication skill. Thorough counselling and sometimes by assertive approach Gita started uttering broken sentences-- which was a great boost to me as a mentor. At this juncture, she was made to realise that she can overcome her barriers provided she possesses the will-power. The various video clippings of Interview Sessions, importance of correct mannerisms in sharp comparison to failure in an interview session (read failure in achieving dreams) due to ignorance started creating an impact on her.

It was a time when the students were taken to an educational tour to a highly reputed multinational company – the company of their dream. The company organized a small seminar on the need of good communication skill which they emphasized to be the key to the doorway of achieving one's high hopes combined with good grasp on one's subject. Along with this 6 short games were played on the use of English in simple terms. It worked wonders The ball, of reflecting upon oneself and attempting to minimize the pitfalls, set rolling. Gita was on her toes to fulfil her dreams and achieve her high hopes. She turned out to be an active participant fumbling, nervous, yet, making her way through. I remember the day, the entire class – her fellow mates applauded to their heart's content after her presentation. It was simply amazing and a joyous experience as a language teacher. Gita has now successfully completed her B Tech course. To add to this on a brighter note, Gita is now placed happily in a reputed multinational organisation. What could be more rewarding to any language teacher than seeing her student rejoice !!!!

That inner urge was undoubtedly there in Gita .The inner aspirations were there but somewhere it was to be coupled with right tuning. Here, in this case, it was a dreaded feeling / an apprehension to meet with failure.

The professional requirements are to be met definitely ---‘constant’ but her choices could serve as ‘variables’. The former was the ‘demand’ and the latter was the ‘need’. The ‘demand’ (read necessity) served as the catalyst / as the driving force that led to self-motivation to know and learn. And while learning, may be, with lesser interest at the initial stage, the apprehension/disliking towards the subject (here English) fades out and the tough gets going.

What I feel here, the age old maxim holds good, which says “Necessity is the mother of invention”. The job requirement of “good communication skill” is the necessity whereas knowing oneself is the invention --- knowing one’s strengths and weaknesses is not enough , it has to be clipped and shaped accordingly. Then only the invention would take its colour.

Gita is only one of many such learners. A little patience, keen observation and records, little flexibility in terms of teaching learning strategy, approachability and controlled guidance when combined with knowledge expertise of a language teacher, rather a mentor, is bound to bring about a metamorphic change in the attitude and eagerness to learn. Gita and her lot start taking initiatives to explore the so long unexplored avenues of knowledge, for example writing emails, browse through the search engines, solve online data entry (applications/registrations etc), take online tests and so on. Gita might be a little ahead in using the computer as she is a B Tech student; but, like her in other academic courses at the same level and age-group it would build immense confidence. As part for the whole, Gita can take part in social interaction with added value systems to her self-confidence and self-competence.

Building independent opinions, improved pronunciation through social interaction would enliven her spirit all the more and she can construct her own learning environment. The teacher thus, even with little or no formal guidance, can facilitate the process of learning the use of English among the learners in a rural set-up, provided the learners are given free access to learning situations. Free access to learning is more motivating in itself.

Coming back to the start point, if the learners can be shown the way how to fish (how to achieve one’s dreams) than to feed him (impose learning) is what I perceive a better option.

A century back, when Pestalozzi wanted to psychologise education, not much heed was paid to it; but in today’s learner centric education, the psychology of the learner is at the base of education.

Swami Vivekananda stated:

“You Cannot Teach a Child to Grow. You can Help Him. A Child Teaches itself. The External Teacher Offers Only the Suggestion Which Arouses the Internal Teacher to Work.”

While serving as a mentor to the learners at the undergraduate level, the language teacher need to keep the age factor in mind particularly as, perhaps, the most important wing of psychology. In order to help them make a self-analysis the teacher needs to be all the more careful. A very important stimulus to self-analysis, of these age-group learners (they are adolescents at this juncture) is their need/high demand to hold a respected position among their peer group and to find a good companion and friend as much as their objective of realizing “big dreams”. So arousing the inner urge to combat their language barriers and that too in front of their peers is not that easy. Hence, their professional objective if can be made the basis of stimulating the process of developing the communication skill then it would serve both the purposes. That keen demand of an attractive life style, striving to master new areas of knowledge and new skills, acquire a new position in the society would meet if the professional eligibility is met. This in turn would help them imbibe from personal failures and success while facing the competition. Dissatisfaction with oneself, yet, the desire to carry out the plans would

pave the way to learn and fulfil automatically. The teacher, with minimal interference, need to create that atmosphere of learning and provide the learners free access to for a productive process of comparison and evaluate one's own specific features and see his own shortcomings and achievement scopes. It is precisely in such situations hyper-sensitivity, suspiciousness, lack of confidence and such other barriers in their learning of English (L2) that they can fight and is transformed into self-education.

Mental assimilation of the various aspects of reality/experiences so gathered are now interwoven with the existing circumstances, profession in demand, relations of friendship, love, dreams of parents along with their severe urge for recognition and respect. The teacher would need to facilitate this process of learning by helping them access favourable situation and learn at their own style and speed.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, I have tried to focus on making the utmost utilization of the professional demand of “good communication skill” as the foundation of learning the use of English (L2) not only in professional network but in all possible socio-cultural set-up My contention remains in guiding the learners to self-directed learning provided by free access to learn at their own style and pace. I intended to highlight the decisive role of the learners themselves, in their process of thinking may be attributed to teaching. However, the language teacher has minimal interference– no imposition of learning. Self-orientation to learn is a primary and most important condition for developing the LSRW skills of communication, especially in a rural set-up.

However, the paper does not aim to raise sympathy for the plight of (most) of the rural learners. It aims to help them be at par with the learners with better skills in communication and create a base to enter the world of competition in the context of globalization and high hopes and aspirations. For this a consecutive record, which can be conveniently kept in the form of short entries/ diary records, is helpful for a language teacher (mentor) that tracks the tendencies of change and development in the learner's personal qualities and self-education.

Yet, it needs to be mentioned that the study does not cover the full range of analysis and observations. A follow up of the same is intended and the process of such findings is a continuum.

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