



A STUDY ON REASONS FOR LACK OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS AMONG THE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF TELUGU MEDIUM

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ABSTRACT

It has been observed that the students of Telugu medium at the UG level always face communication problems in both the vernacular and English. The problems, moreover, are not restricted to only the oral component; their writing skills are also equally poor. As a result, the performance of these students in academic and other co-curricular activities is well below average which eventually mars their employability chances. In the present scenario, thus, communication skills, in both written and oral forms, hold the key for securing better jobs and carving out successful careers and general need for global communication is even more. The very basic medium of communication, i.e. languages, has remained largely ignored in comparison with the specialized subject areas in all types of syllabi at the UG level.

INTRODUCTION

Language learning essentially comprises the acquisition of four core skills viz. listening, speaking, writing and reading whether we talk of a vernacular or a foreign language like English. In case of a mother tongue, the problem with students is that they take the things for granted and become casual in both the acquisition and use of the mother tongue and in the process deprive themselves of using the mother tongue to its fullest potential for communicative purposes. In case of English language, problems are just about everywhere at all levels of education from primary to UG. Poor transaction of syllabus is, of course, the major reason at the primary stage owing to largely ill-qualified and untrained teachers; but even in case of trained and better teachers, the outcome is still not up to the mark.

It was therefore hypothesized that the reasons for the lack of communication skills in the students of Telugu-Urdu medium students must lie elsewhere.

This study started with an objective of identifying precisely those reasons which prevent the students of Telugu medium students from acquiring good communication skills in general



and English communicative skills in particular and also to recommend necessary remedial measures to overcome the identified problems.

The British Council, the American Center and a handful of other organizations have made some significant contribution in the area of English Language Teaching. But their methodologies are mostly prescriptive than diagnostic. The problem-solution equation is thus by and large missing though educated guesses can lead us to eventual solutions. Some work also has been done by the Indian scholars and teachers in this connection. However, it is largely inferential, generalized and theoretical and therefore does not fully explore the core issues at hand.

CONCLUSIONS & SUGGESTIONS

After having conducted research on the intended areas vis-à-vis the assessment of students of Telugu medium in rural areas in the select colleges in the city of Nellore which has a sizable rural population of students, the study has arrived at the following conclusions:

CONCLUSIONS REGARDING OVERALL LANGUAGE SKILLS ACQUISITION:

On the basis of the study conducted so far, it can be safely surmised that the students of Telugu medium in rural areas essentially start their journey with some handicaps and though there are some exceptions in terms of training, facilities, motivation etc. there is a general lack of atmosphere conducive to achieving basic language-learning goals. Various factors do contribute to this unhappy state of affairs. On the basis of feedback received from students, teachers and society at large, the researcher is in position to arrive at the following conclusions vis-à-vis the research problem at hand:

One of the foremost reasons for Telugu medium students lacking in proper English communications skill is that they are essentially very weak in their language base. There is an overall lack of quality in students so far as proficiency of language is concerned. Students come to degree classes with a very poor English language base in terms of all English Language Skills of LSWR owing to socio-eco-cultural background.

One of the major reasons for the poor English Language base is the absence of proper orientation towards the English Language Learning in Telugu medium schools. That is to say, from primary to middle, from middle to Secondary and from secondary to higher secondary levels, English is treated as only one of the subjects rather than one of the most important skills. English as a global competency is seldom emphasized by all stakeholders. It has been seen that parents are more conscious about Mathematics and Science but appear to be little relaxed about English which paradoxically is the primary language of Science and Mathematics.



Thirdly, and this perhaps is the biggest hurdle, the Telugu medium students have to constantly face the interference of mother tongue as they strive to acquire English Language Skills. One also has to concede that this interference can never be ruled out but through proper teaching methods, can surely be minimized. The English teachers of the Telugu medium classes are too dependent on the grammar-translation method which has its advantages but also disadvantages as the students' first impulses lean towards the mother tongue. On the other hand, the Direct Method which by and large forms the mainstay of English medium classrooms ensures that there is minimal or zero interference of the mother tongue leading to students' first impulses towards English than to Telugu. In the long run this strategy helps.

The medium factor also leaves its impact on the students. In a typical English medium school, all subjects are taught in English language which ensures students' constant proximity with the language. In a Telugu medium school, on the other hand, and even if the teacher of English practices the Direct Method, the students' contact with English would be broken in other subjects which are delineated in vernacular medium. Telugu medium students thus lose the advantage of constant exposure to language which is a given for English medium students.

Constant exposure to language is also missing outside the classrooms so far as Telugu medium students are concerned. Owing to socio-economic conditions in rural parts, from where most Telugu medium students come from, there is a marked absence of exposure to English language which restricts students from practicing their language skills. For them, thus, English is restricted to classrooms only.

Another thing that is contributing to the lack of English language acquisition in particular and communication skills in general is the reading habits of students. Students appear to read only what is prescribed as texts. Students have by and large responded that they are exposed to English books or newspapers but there is an element of doubt about their actually reading the material with passion.

All colleges where the researcher conducted survey and tests are having good libraries and facilities including English Language labs which should help the learners. Even the teachers are keen to help the students. However, it can be surmised that their efforts are not sufficiently matched by students in terms of enthusiasm and hard work.

At the same time, however, it needs to be said that there are not too many concentrated efforts on the part of teachers specifically to improve the spoken skills as they are not the part of the testing mechanism. Therefore though there are facilities like English Language lab or A/V aids, they are sparingly used.



It has been seen that students study only those things which enable their passage in the examination. Since communication is not the component for testing in the present university evaluation scheme, it is not taken seriously by the students. So what should be basically intrinsic has now become optional for students. Students therefore can write in English, because that is how they pass, but cannot speak because that is not required for passing the examination. Teachers should equip themselves with specialized ELT qualifications in order to become good language trainers.

SUGGESTIONS:

This study started to achieve the following objectives:

1. To search out the problems of linguistic skills of the rural and urban students of Telugu medium at the UG level.
2. To find out the causes of the lack of basic linguistic skills among these students.
3. To evaluate the scheme of communicative languages (Telugu & English) in respect of their scope, methods and results.
4. To find the socio-economic and cultural elements vis-à-vis the problem.
5. To search for solutions to the problem and prepare a remedial scheme for effecting improvement in communicative skills.
6. To recommend the remedial scheme as Action Plan to the concerned authorities of the University viz. Board of Studies and the Academic Council.
7. To emphasize upon students the importance of linguistic and literary skills for getting good jobs or pursuing any profession in future.

The present study has so far identified some problems that hamper the acquisition of English language skills for Telugu medium students. It is now imperative to suggest a remedial scheme for effecting improvement in English communicative skills in the students of Telugu medium.

- Since good communication skills depend on sound knowledge of the language, it is most important for syllabus makers to ensure that the English Language curriculum should be designed in such a manner that all the language skills are imparted in totality up to Std. XII or before they enter the University system. The University syllabi, on the other hand, should include advanced skills like appreciation of literature, creative and critical writing, or applied skills like business communication, or project report writing etc. instead of still having units on Grammar and vocabulary.
- Students should be made to learn all grammar and vocabulary-building exercises up to secondary or higher secondary stages so that their proficiency in the language as well

as their performances in the Board examinations and subsequently in the University examination would improve.

- There should be more drilling exercises on all counts for maximum retention.
- English should be taught as a skill subject with more emphasis on practical methods and generous use of English language labs and A/V aids.
- Students should be given more project work for perfecting their skills. For example, for learning skills, they may be subjected to listening to the recorded content for perfecting their pronunciation, stress and accent etc. while for reading skills, they may be given reading assignments leading to book review or some presentations. For writing skills, they may be given project-work and report writing in addition to the usual essay and letter writing.
- Students learn best when the classroom activity is interesting and innovative. It is therefore necessary that teachers should be inventive and innovative in their approach. Pair work and group work, role play, a/v aids, group discussions and classroom seminars could be some of the methods.
- English language, for that matter all languages, provides for teachers ample opportunities for interactive teaching. Teachers are well advised to resort to that.
- Parents must be counseled and involved in the language learning activity to ensure that students get enough encouragement at home.

For spoken skills, some extra efforts must be made as follows:

1. The English lessons must be delivered as far as possible using Direct method only with minimal and only occasional use of the mother tongue from the very beginning.
2. There should be more exposure to audio-visual content from the primary stage itself.
3. English language lab must be compulsorily prescribed.
4. Students should be trained in situational conversation and a regular communication drills should be conducted to instill confidence among them.
5. English-speaking zones can be created in the schools and colleges where students get to practice conversational skills.
6. Competitions like elocution, debates, book reviews, paper presentation, classroom seminars, group discussions, role play etc. should be regularly conducted and all students should be made to go through the rigors.
7. Oral skills must be included in the evaluation scheme with definite allocation of marks.

For college/university level students, there should be counseling sessions to drive home the importance of English in terms of getting good jobs or pursuing higher education. Its



importance as a global competency must be reiterated and focused efforts must be made to provide to students all the necessary facilities.

Fortunately, UGC and other funding agencies are there to help out colleges for the creation of these facilities and all of us should make maximum use of them.

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