

Perfecting Communication Skills of the Students

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Abstract

Communication is a process of sharing information through speech, writing, gestures or symbols between two or more people. The focus of the present paper is oral communication and the language under consideration is English. The teacher should adopt a student centered approach. The learners should be encouraged to do things in the class which result in developing their communication skills. The trainer has to focus on both the linguistic and paralinguistic features of the communication process while enhancing learners' communication skills. These features involve the effective use of words, forming grammatically intelligible sentences and an appropriate use of voice and intonation. The teacher should encourage and train his students to use positive body language while listening and speaking. In order to hone the communication skills of the learners, it is very important to make the learners comfortable with the language they have to communicate in. Shedding their inhibitions is also one of the pivotal areas of concerns. This paper explores different techniques that could be useful while training students in communication skills.

Communication is a process of sharing information through speech, writing, gestures or symbols between two or more people. The focus of the present paper is oral communication and the language under consideration is English. The major elements of a communication process are sender, receiver, message and feedback. Effective communication is a two way process. It involves both expressive (speaking) skills and receptive (listening) skills. It entails receiver's understanding of the message sent by the sender and his feedback to the sender. Listening plays a

very important role in the language learning process. It is the most primary of the four basic skills of any language i.e. Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Listening paves way for speaking. One can never be a good speaker if one is not a good listener. An effective communicator is first a good listener and then a good speaker. According to Tickoo (2003), *‘Good listening skills not only lay the foundations of good speech, but they grow best through effective communication’*.

The teacher should adopt a student centered approach. The learners should be encouraged to do things in the class which result in developing their communication skills. In order to hone the communication skills of the learners, it is very important to make the learners comfortable with the language they have to communicate in. Shedding their inhibitions is also one of the pivotal areas of concerns. The trainer has to act as a facilitator of the activities which would result in making the learners comfortable with the language and minimize their hesitation. The teacher can divide the class into groups and ask them to engage in free talk i.e. informal talk. They have to communicate only in English. One can get comfortable with the language only if he speaks that language with the people he is comfortable with. We all acquire our first language by listening to and interacting with our parents, siblings and friends. The more you communicate in English with the people you are confident while speaking, more is your comfort level with the language and it results in acquiring fluency. Fluency cannot be taught, it has to be caught. And one can catch fluency while communicating in such informal situations.

Laughter

The technique of laughter can be used in order to enhance students’ expressive skills and minimize their inhibitions. First ask the students to close their eyes and think about the situation when they had a good laugh last time. Ask them to laugh aloud. Ask them to share the situation with the class. Then they could also be asked to perform a joke. Here, the teacher can either provide the joke to the students or ask them to choose their own joke. It is wonderful to watch how creative students can be.

Linguistics

The trainer has to focus on both the linguistic and paralinguistic features of the communication process while enhancing learners’ communication skills. These features involve the effective use of words, forming grammatically intelligible sentences and an appropriate use

of voice and intonation. The learners can be made to read a dialogue in which the focus is on the use of one particular grammar topic. Then the students are given situations where they need to use this understanding of the grammar topic. For example, the students could be made to read the following dialogue where the focus is on the use of quantifiers before countable and uncountable nouns.

Vocabulary

Words are the building blocks of language. The world perceives people with rich vocabularies to be more creative and more intelligent. Such people use the right words at the right place. The teacher can encourage the students to speak better words than they use. The teacher can train his students to get rid of the hackneyed and overworked words in everyday speech like said, have, good, bad etc. by replacing them with appropriate synonyms. For example, the word smart can be replaced by ingenious, resourceful, adroit or astute. It is equally important to master idiomatic expressions. The expression ‘under the weather’ sounds better than sick, ill or unwell. The teacher can give such expressions in context and ask students to understand their meanings from context.

Pronunciation

The students need to be trained in the area of pronunciation as well. The teacher must expose his students to both the segmental and supra-segmental features of English language. How something is said is often more important than what is being said. Here, the use of the prosodic features such as stress and intonation plays a very important role. These prosodic features express the intentions and emotions of the speaker. To train the students in this area, the students can be given a dialogue to read. They can listen to the same dialogue from the cassette afterwards in order to understand how it is actually spoken.

Body Language

Kinesics also plays a vital role in effective communication. The teacher should encourage and train his students to use positive body language while listening and speaking. For example, They should have a gentle smile on their faces and proper eye contact with the people they are communicating with. They must use double hand and open palm gestures.

One has to be competent in not only the semantics but also the pragmatics of linguistic behaviour. Conversation is not just making utterances using appropriate words and rules of

grammar. It does take place in an active and dynamic context. The participants can be trained in the conversational skills in order to be effective communicators. It is important to use the correct language, but it is also essential to adopt a polite attitude. It is important to speak clearly and slowly while making a phone call, to be sure that the information is understood, and to avoid confusion. The teacher can give the learners practice in how to open a conversation, how to sustain a conversation and how to close a conversation. In order to keep a conversation flowing, it is important to show interest in what the other person is saying. You can use some phrases to show that you are listening to and taking an interest in what is said to you. They don't necessarily provide any extra information, but give you a moment to order your thoughts while avoiding an embarrassing silence. We often take such awkward pauses while speaking as well. This can be due to hesitation or to gain time to think. The students should be trained in filling such pauses with appropriate fillers. For example, Really?, Anyway, Perhaps, Well, let me think etc. An attempt is made to make an inventory of the stock phrases we can use to fill the awkward pauses we need to take for various reasons.

The role of the Teacher/Trainer

The teacher can conduct various activities in the class to enhance communication skills of the students. It would be very fruitful if the teacher creates a purpose for talking while designing activities for his students. He can give students some tasks and speaking is the way to complete them. For example, the students could be shown two similar pictures with some differences and asked to find out the differences between the two pictures. Here the focus is on completing the task successfully and students use language unconsciously and automatically to complete the task.

The activity of 'chain story' is very useful in keeping the entire class attentive. The teacher can begin telling a story. He can tell the first few lines of the story and then pass it on to the students. Then, going round the class, each student has to add to the story and try to complete it. Here the students are expected to use simple past tense as it is a storytelling activity. The teacher needs to encourage students for their encouraging activities.

The miming activity creates a lot of humour and laughter in the class, thus enlivening the class. The teacher gives a student a sentence which describes a simple activity. For example, you are

washing clothes. The student has to mime the activity. The other students try to guess the situation.

Role Plays

The students can be made to listen to a conversational situation first and then asked to simulate the situation. For example, asking and telling directions, at the hotel, hiring a car etc. The students can be given topics for role plays along with some language help. They can be given a chance for pre-discussion before enacting their roles. The students simulate the real world in performing the role plays.

Debate/GD

The students can also be given some topics for debate or group discussion where they are expected to express their opinions. They are provided with the necessary language help. They are given a chance for pre-discussion rehearsal to get them involved in successful discussions.

Six Thinking Hats

The teacher may use the technique of six thinking hats by Edward De Bono in order to enhance students' discussion and thinking skills. The students are divided into groups of six and given topics for discussion. The students in each group are assigned imaginary thinking hats which direct their thinking process. White hat represents facts and information. Red hat symbolizes emotions and feelings. Yellow hat signifies positive rationality. Black hat is opposite of the Yellow hat. It is used for discussing the negative repercussions of the plan. Green hat stands for creativity and unconventional thinking. Blue hat is used for directing the discussion, for switching hats when necessary, for summarizing the major points of the discussion, as well as for making decisions. In a group setting, the entire group is encouraged to use just one hat at a time, thus contributing to an organized and comprehensive discussion, rather than a confused and mixed-up argument.

Conclusion

Giving feedback and correcting the mistakes of the students is equally important. There may be times when teachers need to help an activity by prompting. It should be done sympathetically and sensitively. The teacher should be patient and give students enough time to perform. He should prompt only if it is mandatory in order to keep the speaking activity going. The teacher should motivate the students for their engaging activities. The teacher should never

correct their mistakes while they are engaged in the speaking activities. It should be done after the activity is over.

Everyone likes to do what she/he likes to do. The teacher has to make it a point that the students are enjoying the activities along with the language learning process. He /she should try to bring out the best in the students.

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