
Teachers' and Students 'Perceptions Regarding Actual Practice of English Language in Degree Colleges of Haryana

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Abstract:

This paper investigates the perception of teachers and students regarding communicating and interacting in English in the classroom of English language. The present study focuses on the causes and problems of students' poor communication skills in English. It is argued that discussion, interaction and maximum exposure of the students to English language can enable them to participate in dialogues and interactive activities in the classroom than the practice of mugging up content and rules of grammar in English. The behavior of students and teacher in the classroom and their perception of the same is influenced by number of factors. It is tried to know if language teachers enable their students to gain parity with the world's standards in skill development especially that of communication in English.

Keywords: Behavior, exposure, language, communication, influence, mug up, receptivity.

Introduction:

The present study was undertaken in the context of English language lectures at a small faculty in the Government College of Haryana where English is taught and learnt as a second language. The focus of this paper is on investigating the problems and causes of poor receptivity of English language and the difficulties that the students face in English language lectures. They feel inability to comprehend lectures in English. In the present research the main objective is to find out how a language teacher having proficiency in English makes it possible to give maximum exposure to his students to English. This is not experimental study and its aim is not to prove direct relationship between interaction and content learning. It is tried to collect proof through investigation to what extent the practice of dialogic interaction in the English classroom of U.G students of Arts and Humanities in a degree college of Haryana can be feasible. The present study examines the extent of practice of communication in English in a class room of undergraduate students, the learners of English as L2 and the factors that influence the interaction, communication and learning ability of the students under study. Data was collected through questionnaire as well as interview of both the students and their teachers of English language studying the perceptions of both the students and teachers about lectures of English as a second language and actual practice in English class. The actual nature of the prevailing situation is explored and suggestions are given to improve the things.

This paper has its limitations including the methodology and findings related to students and teachers' perceptions regarding teacher-student interaction and the features by which that interaction is influenced. Students in a college of Haryana feel uncomfortable using English as a medium of communication. Even teachers find it difficult to teach students the basics of the language effectively. It is investigated why teaching and learning of English in educational institutions of Haryana is rather inadequate and unproductive. Today the individual needs English language to become an effective member of society. How effectively the society functions depend on how efficiently it learns to use language for communication.

Context of the research:

This study is based on the students of Arts and Humanities of undergraduate classes who have got their school education where the medium of instruction was either Hindi or bilingual. The students belong to the society where they need English not for communication between its members. But in the modern world of globalization and competition it has become essential for them to develop competency in English.

Literature Review:

Oral interaction between teacher and students and among peer groups is considered to be important and that is helpful to create a suitable learning environment. Learners development also depends on that. (Hall and Verplaetse, 2000). Interaction in content classes also helps learners' academic English language competency when they are given opportunity to do practice of English language to be fluent in speaking and comprehending the academic talk. (Verplaetse, 2000). Hence, the learner's academic communication skills are enhanced and their English language develops through interaction in English. The present study is located within the principles of perspectives to teaching and learning through interaction and these perspectives are made on the premise of sociocultural perspectives toward learning situated within the broader English Language Reception studies. The main focus of present study is on social and contextual factors as Firth and Wagner (1997) also argued for sociolinguistic perspectives. In recent years studies based on the sociocultural perspective have emerged as dominant (e.g. Nassaji & Wells, 2000; Hall & Walsh, 2000; Lantolf, 2006). The present study focuses not only on the content learning but also on language learning. If teachers of English teach through dialogue not through monologue, teachers may lead discussion that may be important for learners in the classroom. Here the teacher's role is most challenging and he should exploit present understanding of his students and he can make clear thoughts and knowledge of his students using appropriate questions. (Rojas-Drummond & Mercer, 2003: 101). The best platform for content and language learners is that both the teacher and the students contribute mutually to the discourse. (Swain & Lapkin 1998).

Objectives of the Study:

- (1) To deal with the practical problems in language 2 class room.
- (2) To know the factors responsible for poor receptivity and unintelligibility of English language spoken by Haryanvi teachers and students.
- (3) To suggest the use of a variety of teaching procedures to make language teaching and learning more effective.

Hypotheses:

The following hypotheses may be applied to the present study:

- (1) Language teaching has always been more of an art than a science.

(2) The learners' communication skills in English are enhanced through interaction in English.

(3) A good teacher doesn't depend on text books only and teaches what he feels his students ought to learn about the L2.

Methodology:

Data for the present study was collected using two kinds of questionnaires. Only 60 students and eight teachers were included in the survey. Interviews were also held with the teachers and students. Classroom observation helped a lot in reaching the climax of the study. Students' group interviews were conducted while the method of semi structured interviews was applied on teachers.

Data Analysis:

The quantitative data which was collected from questionnaire surveys of both students and teachers were analyzed using SPSS. Simple descriptive techniques like Microsoft excel was used to analyze other students' responses. The area of the present study was limited to 60 students and 8 teachers so that the analysis of data can be managed properly. The source of the qualitative data was group interviews, teachers' interviews and observation of classroom lectures and the field notes of researchers used as supplementary data for additional information. The group interviews of the students in question were conducted in both English and Hindi while the teachers were interviewed only in English. The questions included in the questionnaire were related to the problems in comprehending lectures delivered in English, reasons and suggestions, enhancing communication skills in English, teachers' ability to engage his students in maximum language activities and enabling his students for interacting in English with their teachers, peer groups and when present among seniors.

Findings:

These questions were framed keeping in mind the objectives of the present study. The collected data was analyzed arranging the findings of survey and interview.

Table 1

Reasons given by students for not communicating in English

Reasons	Percentage
Language problem	83
Shyness to speak English	90
Inability of teachers to motivate to speak in English	60
Fear of speaking wrong English	85
Lack of opportunity given to communicate in English	70

83% of students said that they don't communicate in English as they have problem in speaking English. Shyness to speak English is found the major reason of poor communication skills and their percentage is 90 while 85 percent of the students don't interact in English because of the fear of speaking wrong English .60 percent students claimed that their English teachers don't motivate them to interact in English.

When the students were asked any other reason, some of them mentioned that they do not interact in English because other students laugh at them if their sentences and pronunciation was not correct.

Besides it speaking wrong English will leave bad impression on their classmates and teachers.

Table 2

Reasons given by teachers why students don't speak in English

Reasons	Percentage
Weak vocabulary	90
Follow translation method	80
Lack of pragmatic competency	75
Faulty examination system	90
Cultural influence	70

90 percent teachers were of the opinion that students' weak vocabulary and faulty examination system are responsible for poor receptivity of English language and poor communication skills of students. It was stated by 80 percent teachers that students feel helpless in interacting in English as they start translating that what they want to speak. 75 percent teachers believe that students hesitate in asking questions or answering in English because of cultural influence.

Some Practical Aspects of Classroom Teaching Observed during the Study:

Learning the skills of English language for the purpose of interaction and communication has never been seen as the primary objective in the teaching of English. English is taught and learnt in the degree colleges of Haryana as a subject not as a language. If the teaching of English in Haryana has remained unsatisfactory, it is because of this failure to see English as an additional language, to be learnt entirely for its practical benefits and to be used in communication. The techniques of teaching additional language are needed to be given a fair trial. It is found that the teaching of English has remained idealistic till date. The free expression of the students is killed when they are forced to mug up the content and reproduce the same in their answer sheets during examinations. They are not encouraged to express their original thoughts.

The conditions in which English is being taught in degree colleges of Haryana don't let teachers the most effective use of the text book. Even with the best of intentions the teacher often becomes a prisoner of the system. There is a tendency, in the first place to emphasize 'coverage of the syllabuses. The effectiveness of teaching is judged in terms of the adequacy of preparation for the examination which is, essentially, a test of knowledge of the content rather than language proficiency. The teaching of English in the colleges of Haryana seems a race. A language textbook should illustrate the language as it is actually used at the time but the students are being taught Shakespeare's 'Macbeth'. Such a text can't provide occasions for the practice of as many of the skills of language as are considered to be worth developing.

The tendency is to set direct questions from the exercises given at the end of lessons of a prescribed textbook. Students mug up the readymade answers and reproduce them in the examinations. Even questions on précis making, translation and grammar are set from the exercises of the prescribed text books. That's why students don't take interest in any other activity related to English language and English is being taught as a subject.

Recently, attempts have been made to provide other kinds of bases of language syllabuses; for example, people are trying to devise functional syllabuses, utilizing the different communicative functions of language. But, the text book, however carefully designed or produced, can normally achieve very little without the intervention of the teacher. The objectives and instruments of language teaching may have been conceived at other levels, but the teacher must deliver them in the classroom.

Cultural Influence:

Some students believe that they don't want to challenge their teachers. Even asking questions or removing their doubts is not considered appropriate during the time when lecture is being delivered by the teacher. Thus following their ancient culture when teacher was worshipped and highly respected. The tendency is not to ask questions as it was their belief that interrupting the teacher may annoy him. Students living in closely knit community have inculcated this culturally bound thinking. It was observed during interview and survey that the students are passive in the classroom and they believe in their teachers' authority. They don't adopt a receptive role in the class room and depend on their teachers concerned to provide the important information to qualify their exams and they behave in this way because of their sociocultural values. They don't want to be exposed that they are poor at speaking English.

Suggestions:

1. Teaching and learning languages must be a creative activity and the teacher must have the freedom to improve, or deviate from conventional modes or procedures. Teaching is an art. There is in teaching, as in all art, an essential discipline which has to be recognized. The freedom to violate rules is earned only by those who have mastered them.
2. All language learning and teaching is based on activity; the richer and more varied the activity, the more effective the learning is likely to be. Students studying in public schools speak English fluently. They communicate in English better than the graduates of any college because they have maximum exposure to English.
3. It must be compulsory for all teachers and students to speak in English only. Besides it, they should be given maximum activity in the class room. Gradually they will stop feeling shy in speaking English. In this age of email and fax, language demands for simplicity and clarity. They must be encouraged to be active participants in language activities.
4. If we want language teachers to function effectively and teach English not as a subject but as a language, we must be prepared to introduce certain changes in the examination system for, clearly, the existing system will not allow the kind of teaching which we envisage.
5. Testing oral communication must be a part of examination.
6. A language teacher must know exactly which concepts from linguistics can be applied in language teaching, and at which point they can be applied. This involves considerable understanding of both linguistics and language teaching.
7. The language teacher should not limit himself to deliver lecture only. Students' participation in the classroom is essential. Recently, attempts have been made to provide other kinds of bases of language syllabuses; for example, people are trying to devise functional syllabuses, utilizing the different communicative functions of language. But, the text book, however carefully designed or produced, can normally achieve very little without the intervention of the teacher and the students.
8. A teacher must be allowed to devise his own plan, working from first principles, and using his knowledge of the language, the process of language learning and the students. He may even wish to put the textbook away, on occasions, and teach what he feels his students ought

to learn about the language. It is only the teacher who can assess whether certain assumptions about the students, their interest, their needs for learning the language, their ability to use it etc. are valid or not. He alone can judge whether the curriculum-maker and the text book producer have correctly gauged the problem which the students face in learning the language.

Even the most carefully designed language courses can, for no reason that one can predict, fail to interest the learner – and in that case, no learning will take place. The teacher, however, can devise suitable procedures for getting the students interested in the materials that will provide the learning.

Conclusion:

Students' low proficiency in English, shyness, fear of speaking and exposing their weakness, students' reluctance to interact with their teachers during lecture, teachers' outdated method of teaching using monologue and cultural or religious values of the students are found the main causes that are responsible for poor receptivity of English among the students of undergraduate classes of colleges of Haryana. In this study the problems regarding practice of speaking English fluently has been investigated. I have tried to identify the existing situation in degree colleges of Haryana. The inborn ability that all human beings possess has to be developed and sharpened through practice. Although some positive changes have taken place in education, the syllabuses, text-books and testing procedures have remained unchanged. It is observed that the best way of learning English and having fluency in speaking English is to interact with the members of a speech community and learn it by the natural course of conversation in different situations. It is true that teaching and learning is a process of interaction and the class room is a miniature 'society with its own pattern of behavior, its rules of communication and so forth. The teacher along with his students has to become a member of this 'community' and motivate the students to be active participants in all activities of language learning.

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