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Designing Syllabus For Advanced Level Communication Skills In English :

Issues And Possible Solutions

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Abstract

Curriculum design is an essential process that links the teachers and learners. Despite gaining higher scores during their studies, students often encounter problems during industry selection procedures as they lack communication skills. Due to this reason, the curriculum of the communication skills subject is offered to first year students in engineering and final year for other undergraduate courses. It can be considered as an integral and essential course in this changing scenario of globalization and the internationalization of technical education. Over the last two decades, the growth of higher education in Asia-Pacific region is drastic. To design a syllabus, that accommodates the need of the learners, one has to concentrate on the student's potential and combining it with realistic goals. The present research article is an effort to construct an efficient curriculum for Communication skills paper and discusses the issues faced by the researcher while framing the syllabus and it offers some suggestions, possible solutions to overcome the pitfalls.

Introduction

Many students in the Asian countries still lack good communication skills in English even after their graduation. Hence, there is a growing need to design a syllabus for developing the communication skills of the learners at tertiary level, as it will help the learners to be competent in the job market. The present research article discusses the issues involved in framing syllabus for Communication Skills to advanced learners of English and also provides suggestions and outcomes of the syllabus. The syllabus is designed for students of Arts and Science Courses at SRC, SASTRA University, Kumbakonam. The learners undertake this course during the odd semester in the final year of their studies as a single semester course. The course has three credits and it concentrates on both teaching and learning.

AIM:

Many of the students studying for degrees face problems when they opt for higher studies in the Western Universities, where they must pass TOEFL or IELTS examination. Apart from this, the major difficulty is they fail to get placed in the campus interviews due to the lack of communication skills in English. So, it is essential to improve their communication skills in English. Though some of these problems are common, many are specifically for the non-native speakers of English. The objective of a course in Advanced Level Communication Skills in English is to help the non-native learners of English to overcome some of the linguistic difficulties involved in learning English.

THE BACKGROUND:

There has been a tremendous change in attitude towards language teaching and learning, in the previous decades. Some of the most significant of these changes have been brought about by sociolinguists who tried to define communicative competence. Chomsky's (1965) concept of "linguistic competence", an implicit knowledge of formal structures is now accepted and that any linguistic theory must include the knowledge of the social factors that modify these structures. Thus,

Chomsky's concept has developed into a broader idea of "communicative competence", which takes into account the relationship between language and the specific situation (Hymes, 1972). This shift in emphasis, from the formal rules of the language to a language appropriate in a given situation, progressively uses the language for specific purposes and in a closer examination of the precise objectives of the language learner.

On the other hand, there has been a shift from grammatical and situational syllabi towards a more functional or notional approach (Wilkins, 1976). This method takes the communicative factors of language into account from the beginning, without losing sight of grammatical and situational factors. Taking this present state of reasoning about language, with the belief that more attention should be paid to the purpose for which the language is being studied, then, it becomes important in designing any syllabus to investigate the purposes for which the students use English.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is designed to acquaint the learners with various means of communication, familiarizing them with various modes of presenting their ideas, to train them to speak confidently in English with proper stress and intonation. The course also helps in developing employability skills of the students by training them in public speaking and group discussions. It would therefore be useful to suggest that in such a course there should be five main sections. The course materials will be selected depending on the needs and interests of the students. The syllabus defines what the teachers expect the students to do at the end of the course and will therefore provide specifications for the final examination.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

The objective of the course is to impart advanced skills of communication in English to final year students. It enables the students to communicate confidently in English language in all spheres. It

also makes the students to use their language skills to enhance employability. The main objective is to help them achieve clarity and fluency using paralinguistic features of speaking. By conducting task oriented interpersonal and semiformal speaking/ classroom presentation improve the language proficiency of the learners.

METHODOLOGY:

The basic approach to syllabus design is an ESP (English for Specific Purposes) approach, an approach where the teaching content is matched to the requirements of the learners. Bell, (1981) offers a first approximation to language teaching syllabus design as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Language Teaching Syllabus Design
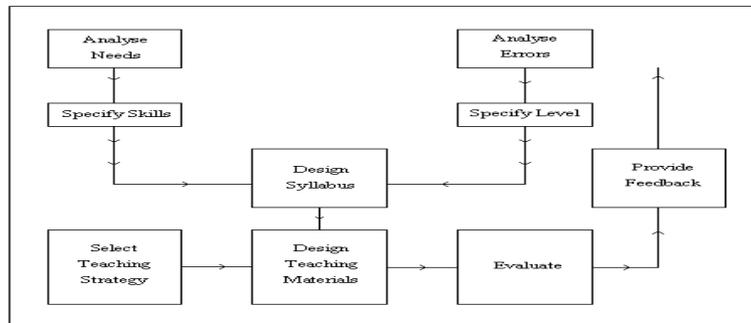
The branch at the left deals with the expected outcome of the learners. The right branch relates to the present competence of the learners and the branch at the bottom deals with educational philosophy. The main emphasis is on the left branch, as it analyses the needs, skills and design syllabus based on the present situation. Munby's *Communicative Syllabus Design* (1978) deals with the most useful model for designing syllabus. It is especially useful for designing the syllabus for Communication Skills in English. A simplified version of the model is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. The Munby Model.
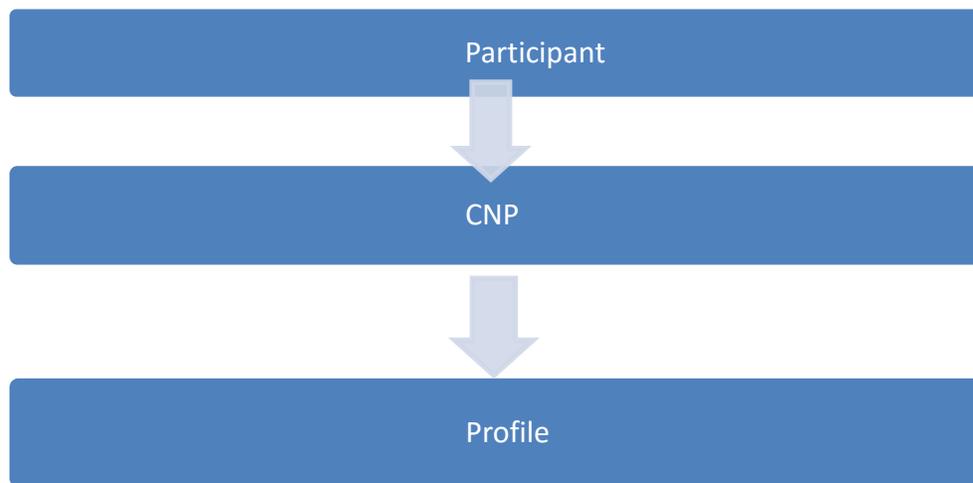
The essential part of the model is the Communicative Needs Processor. Information about the learner, the participant, is fed into the C. N. P. which consists of a number of categories. After these categories have been worked through, one can create a profile of needs - a description of what the learner is e expected to do with the language at the end of the course. The following categories are present in The Munby's Model.

1. Participant - the learners.	2. Setting - the time and place.
3. Interaction	4. Instrumentality
5. Dialect	6. Target level
7. Communicative event and Communicative Key	8. Profile

The participants are the learners at tertiary level belonging to various branches of studies and the setting here is the university lecture rooms, seminar halls, library and examinations. The interaction

takes place between the participants and with the teacher, where they could identify their roles by themselves. The interaction takes place between the learners and their teachers through various means like spoken and written. The channel of communication is face to face, online and print. The dialect focused is the British accents and dialects as well as Received Pronunciation (RP). The level of linguistic proficiency for the learners varies, according to their needs. The Communicative event proposes what the learner has to do with the language, for instance, attend the lectures, to participate in seminars and so on. The profile defines the ability of the learners. Applying this to the specific situation and a look at the communicative event category in detail, for arts and science students in higher education, we find the following:

Settings:

Lectures, Seminars, Group projects, Examinations

Instrumentality:

Spoken – Productive and Receptive (speaking and listening), Written - Productive and Receptive (writing and reading).

Communicative Events:

The learners use their skill in speaking through the activities as shown in Figure 3. This includes the interaction of the learners with their teachers. It is a learner centered approach where the learners play a major role, presenting their thoughts, ideas and try to communicate with their peers using the activities suggested in the Figure 3.

Figure 3. Communicative Events.


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│  │  Role play                        │              │
│  └──────────────────────────────────┘              │
└────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
┌────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  ┌──────────────────────────────────┐              │
│  │  Paired Conversation              │              │
│  └──────────────────────────────────┘              │
└────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
┌────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  ┌──────────────────────────────────┐              │
│  │  Group Discussion                 │              │
│  └──────────────────────────────────┘              │
└────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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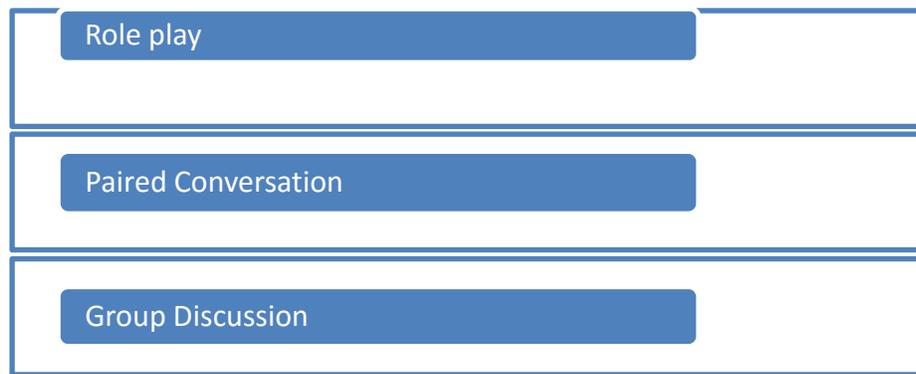
MODEL SYLLABUS:

Unit-I Introduction to Communication

Communication: Meaning, nature, importance and purpose. Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Communication Skills- Essentials of good communication. Listening- Process of listening- Benefits of effective listening.

Unit-II Vocabulary

Word power-Word origin-word choice: right words-collocations, foreign words and phrases in English, one word substitutes-prefix and suffix (derivational and inflectional).

Unit-III Effective Writing Skills

Elements of effective writing- Main forms of written communication- Agenda, Minutes, Memo, Drafting e-mails, Circular, Report writing, Writing of C.V. (Cover Letter).

Unit-IV Academic Writing

Writing proposals for projects, Reviews, Acknowledgement, Designing a manual, Editing and Proofreading.

Unit-V Presentation Skills

Interviews, Public Speaking, Telephonic Conversations, Practicing short dialogues, Group Discussions, Role-play, Pair conversation.

Reference Books:

Communication Skills "A" Level. (2010). Bangalore: Sastra Publications.

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CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE:

The syllabus will help the learners to know the different modes of communication and enables them to communicate with confidence. The practical approach in the fifth unit will enable the learners to achieve clarity and fluency using paralinguistic features of speaking and writing. Moreover, the practical approach of the units will make the learners proficient in academic writing. The syllabus helps the learners to attain language skills need to enhance employability. The syllabus is designed in such a way that it can be incorporated in technical education, where it will improve the learner's skill in the use of technical language.

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