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**PROCEEDINGS OF
SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA :
ROLL OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
AND TRAINING**



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INDEX

S.NO	TOPIC	PAGE NO
1	ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORKERS ON OLDAGE CARE KONGALA RAMARAO, MAKKENANA SRINIVAS, V.CHINDRASHEKAR DR.YELURI ASHOK KUMAR	1
2	POVERTY IMPACT ON DIFFERENT STAGES IN HUMAN LIFE. RAVULA ROHINI DEVI	5
3	Making students as effective communicators through the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing JOHN Kand Dr. P NAGA SURESH KUMAR	10
4	CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SKILLS IN EDUCATION AND EMPLOYABILITY OF NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2016 Dr.BONGALA DEEPA	14
5	TEACHING LSRW SKILLS THROUGH LITERATURE FOR UG STUDENTS NEERUKONDA VISWASARAO	17
6	TEACHING OF LSRW SKILLS FOR THE STUDENTS TO ENHANCE COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN ENGLISH Dr.Sr.Shiny K.P.	22
7	ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN SKILL DEVELOPMENT P.Hemalatha	27
8	SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA: Present Situation of Vocational Education K Vijaya Kumari, Mr. E.POLERAIAH	34
9	Need for Vocationalisation of Education in India U.Sivalakshmi, Dr.P.Renuka	46
10	Skill Development and employability B. SUBHASHINI	50
11	Patterns of Skill Development in India: An Overview Dr. A.Srinivasacharyulu, Dr. M.Galaiah	53
12	Importance of vocational education for secondary school students MS. Asia	69
13	Skills development of women through vocational training P.Rajasekar M.A., MPhil, Dr.A.V.V.V.Malleswaramma	78
14	Skill Development in Women Through Vocational Training Smt K.Vijaya Lakshmi	81
15	The Skill Development in India - Education and Training Dr. S Ayyappa Nair Nenavath	83
✓16	TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS AND PROBLEMS OF SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNER Dr. G. Sujatha,	88
17	SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA: ROLL OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING Smt. Sunkara Lalitha Smt. V. Baby Rani	93
18	SKILL DEVELOPMENT- AN EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN UNORGANIZED SECTOR Dr.K.Ravi Teja, M.Kutumba Rao	99
19	The skills journey: A long history but no destination in sight M.Dasu	104
20	Higher Education and Skill Development: An Indian Point of View P. Dinesh Babu	107

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TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS AND PROBLEMS OF SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNER

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ABSTRACT:

A pedagogically influential analysis of communicative competence is found in Canale and Swain (1980) in which four dimensions of communicative competence are identified: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence. Communicative abilities include linguistic skills. There are four basic skills which every learner must master, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening and reading are passive skills whereas writing and speaking are active skills. First comes speaking. The learner understands the streams of sounds and learns to discriminate between different sounds. Then only he will be able to speak. After speaking comes reading. Last of all comes writing which includes all the skills. Our approach throughout the whole course should be balanced and aimed at the proper development of the four language skills incorporating a multi-skill approach. We, Indians, are not native speakers of English. We use English as a second language. Learning is not as natural to us as it is to the native speaker but an activity in formal classroom teaching. The native speaker of English imbibes the language, and becomes familiar with the components of English in the natural process of growing up. For us learning English is essentially a deliberate effort at developing a command and control of the different components of the language; its phonology, its morphology and its syntax. From the moment of his birth, the native language child is exposed to the sounds of the language. He is thus in constant contact with these sounds for most of his waking hours. Most of the

language he hears is directed at him by other people. Without any conscious effort he learns the essential components of his language. The two significant factors in the process of language acquisition are that the child is exposed to spoken language and that he hears linguistically uncontrolled language.

Reference: Canale, M. and Swain, M. 1980. "Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing" *Applied Linguistics* 1.1:1-47.

KEYWORDS: Communication Skills, listening, speaking, reading, writing, problems, second language learner.

Introduction:

Today the English language has pervaded all walks of life. Krishnaswamy and Lalitha Krishnaswamy (2006:153) say that "English has become a global commodity like oil and the microchip and without petrol, computers, and the English language, the world will come to a halt. It is no longer a language of national or cultural or class identity; it has become a language of technology, of communicational necessity." "English language is the global medium of communication, of the computer and the Internet; it is estimated that nearly eighty per cent of all websites use English and three-quarters of the world's mail, telexes and cables are in English. Communication skills in English and computer skills have become interrelated and interdependent. Even countries like China, Japan, France, Spain where it was not used before that are strong in computer technology and hardware are forced to use English. The

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whole world has been giving importance to English language. The knowledge revolution in the present age, the importance of English for career purposes and employment opportunities demand a greater need for learning English. As a result of the widespread use of English, the very character of the English language is changing; it is slowly being stripped of its culture, class, and even race. (Krishnaswamy and Lalitha Krishnaswamy 2006:154). It has become a tool for international communication and a fairly high degree of proficiency in English and excellent communication skills in speaking and writing enhance students' employability. The career purposes of the language have been gaining importance.

Integrated approach:

Language is often called a skill rather than a subject which is learnt by constant practice. It is more a matter of doing than of knowing. The two language skills namely listening and reading require less exertion on the part of learners. These are called receptive skills because when listening or reading, the person is at the receiving end of the communication channel. Speaking and writing, on the other hand are active skills. The person is at the transmitting end of the communication channel. These are productive skills, and the skills overlap as language is not an amalgamation of diverse skills but it is one integrated skill. In most cases we have to use more than one skill simultaneously. For example, if we are engaged in conversation we have to listen and speak. Writing in most languages is a representation of speech sounds, which in turn represent the meanings. In early stages, the written medium cannot be taught meaningfully without reference to the spoken medium. Since the learner has to learn language from others, he has to gain language experience first through skills of comprehension, listening and reading before he can learn corresponding expression skills. The

comprehension skills are learnt before expression skills. The written medium is dependent on the spoken medium. Reading also forms a good basis for writing. No skill can be learnt in isolation because they are interrelated and interdependent. What is learnt through one medium can be transferred to the other. The complex nature of language skill shows that teaching of one skill overlaps the other and thus exercise of one skill facilitates the learning of the other skills also.

Listening:

Familiarity with the sound system and an ability to articulate English sounds prepare the students for listening to utterances with understanding. Listening should precede speaking. It paves the way for them to develop oral fluency and accuracy. Listening is a receptive skill and speaking is a productive skill. Listening is concerned with decoding a message and understanding. It is a skill that can be developed through systematic teaching. It can be cultivated through listening practice, both intensive and extensive. Practice is primarily for language items as part of the language teaching programme. In India, our students are hampered in their ability to listen for meaning by certain weaknesses like: (a) inadequate range of words and phrases that are understood, (b) inability to maintain attention, (c) inability to understand pronunciation other than personal or regional pronunciation, (d) inability to understand fast speech, (e) inability to understand against background noise through acoustic /electrical interference. The students can enrich their vocabulary through reading and by looking up unfamiliar words in dictionaries with phonetic transcription. Dictation is an admirable exercise for sharpening attention and the teacher can adjust his speech and clarity to the capacity of the class and gradually speed up. The

development of other skills would be easy if they are based on aural foundation.

Speaking:

Practice in listening should precede practice in speaking. The student should be able to recognize a sound before they attain the ability to produce it. Listening should be sharpened with particular emphasis on grammatical and lexical items. To give practice in speaking, the teachers may start with dialogues. Reading aloud can be adopted. Some of the drawbacks generally noticed in our students are: misplaced stress on syllables and words, or absence of stress at all, confusion between sounds with meaningful contrasts, failure to discriminate between long and short vowels or diphthongs, interference of the phonological system of the mother tongue of the learner, failure to aspirate initial /p/ /t/ /k/, production of the harsh sounds /r/ in words like wonderful, far, etc., and misapplication of lexis and idiom. The teacher should keep in mind that an unintelligible utterance becomes unacceptable because of grammatical, lexical and syntactic inaccuracies. What is important is that a student who learns a second language should be able to feel that he has the basic machinery to say what he wants. It is not an easy thing to instill this confidence in the student; it calls for considerable preparation and creative thought on the part of the teacher. To communicate effectively a speaker must know not only how to produce grammatical utterances of a language, but also how to use them appropriately. The speaker must know what to say, with whom and when and where. (Cooper 1968:39). Providing maximum opportunities to learners to speak, improves writing skills also as both the skills aim at expression.

Reading:

Reading is a decoding process and it is a very complex process involving many physical, intellectual and often emotional reactions. It entails the ability to recognize graphic symbols and their corresponding vocal sounds. There are two types of reading skills: the skill of reading aloud and the skill of reading silently. The second-language teacher should pay attention to silent reading. The process of reading has three stages, the recognition stage, the structuring stage and the interpretation stage. The student who wants to learn English will have a lot to read and only silent reading enables him to do it at some speed. The students must have practice in both intensive and extensive reading. An efficient reader must possess the skills like: (a) ability to skim and dip, (b) ability to read fast with good comprehension texts that are easy in language and content, or difficult texts that are familiar; (c) ability to read slowly but with excellent comprehension, difficult texts on professional, academic and technical subjects in which he has a special interest and requires specialized knowledge; (d) ability to use works of reference, (e) ability to size up the book quickly. Exposure to written communication helps the learners to develop the real communicative competence.

Writing:

Learning to write a second language is not merely learning to put down on paper the conventional symbols of writing system that represents the utterances one has in mind, but it is also purposeful selection and organization of ideas, facts or experience. It is a slow and arduous process. The student who learns to write English has not only to cope with the script of the language but also with the problems of ease and fluency of expression, of grammatical and lexical accuracy and of the appropriateness of the style of writing, as demanded by the

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occasion or situation. Learning to write therefore is learning to use grammar with ease and facts in some sequential order as tools. The main aim of a writing course is to train the student in expressing himself in good English. The teaching of writing course should cover the widest possible range of kinds of writing. The teacher must see that progress is achieved in successive stages. No exercise should be set that is too difficult for the student; any task assigned to the student should be adjusted in its presentation to an appropriate level of difficulty and should be capable of being tackled within the language the student knows. The grammar teaching that is done should be relevant to the needs of the composition. The students should be encouraged to write a draft of the exercise first, revise and then rewrite it. The teaching of English at the college level was scarcely even intended to provide language instruction. Although exposure to literature can, and frequently does, result in consolidation and sharpening of language skills, it is doubtful whether college teaching ever had the imparting of language skills as a conscious aim (UGC 1977). Some of the suggestions for the teacher to bring the task to the level of the class are useful. The teacher can (i) limit the length of the written material to be produced, (ii) increase the amount of class preparation for the task, (iii) provide guidance on the final form of the written work, (iv) encourage students to collaborate in the actual process of writing, (v) allow cross-checking between the draft stage and the writing of the final product, (vi) limit the complexity of the writing task itself, and (vii) can demand that the task be completed either slowly or quickly. (Broughton et al. 1978:121). The students' written work should be gone through by the teacher. This will enable him to assess the students' level of achievement and prepare for the tasks ahead. Besides correcting the students' composition, the teacher should take practical steps to remedy weaknesses in writing generally

seen in a composition class. The weaknesses that can be remedied are: (a) inadequacy of lexical range; (b) misapplications of words and phrases; (c) grammatical faults; (d) misspellings; (e) faulty punctuation; and (f) use of words that are outdated.

Problems of Second Language Learner:

Learning is not as natural to us as it is to the native speaker but an activity informal classroom teaching. The native speaker of English has imbibed the language, has become familiar with the components of English in the natural process of growing up. For us learning English is essentially a deliberate effort at developing a command and control of the different components of the language; its phonology, its morphology and its syntax. From the moment of his birth, the native language child is exposed to the sounds of the language. He is thus in constant contact with these sounds for most of his waking hours. Most of the language he hears is directed at him by other people. Without any conscious effort he learns the essential components of his language. The two significant factors in the process of language acquisition are that the child is exposed to spoken language and that he hears linguistically uncontrolled language.

The child's exposure to language enables him to internalize the grammar of his language. The learners of second language are not so much exposed to the language they attempt to learn as a child acquires his mother tongue. If exposure to language enables the learner to become acquainted with linguistic structures, opportunities to use these structures, if made available to him, will make it possible for him to speak the language. Perhaps he will make mistakes in his utterances, especially in the beginning, but these mistakes will become useful to him if he gets the feedback that enables him to learn from them. In the case of the second

language learner, the feedback should be the responsibility of the teacher. The teacher's correction of mistakes through the feedback should be cautiously and sympathetically carried out.

A very significant factor in language learning is motivation. The child acquiring his mother tongue has his strongest motivation or urge to learn as his basic needs remain unfulfilled if he cannot express himself in his mother tongue. But the second language learner has his motivation in the need to communicate whatever be the level of communication he wants to reach. Emphasis should be laid on the communicative use of language.

The duration of exposure to the language is also one of the factors of importance in second language learning. In India English is taught as a second language in schools and colleges for five or six hours a week. In the existing system we begin to teach English at the fifth standard when the innate capacity of the child to learn a new language is considerably reduced and the child has to exert more to learn English. Perhaps the duration is hardly adequate; also the courses are spread over years. Another factor that hinders language learning is classroom conditions. These conditions include the number of students in a class, the physical arrangements for the class, teaching materials, library, etc. The second language classes should be of right size. The two vital factors in a second language learning situation are the student and the teacher. The teacher has problems to tackle when he is faced with the task of teaching a class of students who show varying capacities of assimilation. In India even at the college level a large number of students have to be given elementary lessons in the language. They, as well as the students who have a better standard, feel that the lessons and methods adopted are not appropriate to their age or status. The result is a kind of general resentment. Some of the students are weakly motivated owing to their social and family backgrounds. The teacher must himself stimulate and sustain motivation.

Like the student the teacher himself is a variable factor in the scheme of teaching a second language; his skill and personality are instrumental in creating the necessary conditions for learning. He should be proficient in the language; his knowledge and expertise in methods and techniques of language teaching should be of reasonably high standard. The language teacher must be educated, at least to the levels of his peers. He must have the general preparation of a teacher. He must know the target language well enough to be imitated by his students. Every second language teacher has a serious problem to cope with the student's bilingualism. The habits of the speech in the first language, its syntactical structures, its phonological system, etc., can become impediments to the learning of English.

They can be overcome through sustained remedial teaching. The problem is that the students, and especially students in developing countries, who have received several years of formal English teaching, frequently remain deficient in the ability to actually use the language and to understand its use, in nonnal communication, whether in the spoken or the written mode (Widdowson 1983).

Teaching English as a second language in India is thus beset with problems such as poor motivation, inadequate exposure to the language, poor classroom conditions, lack of teaching aids and materials, incompetence of teacher's bilingualism and its effects on the learner, etc. However, some worthwhile teaching is possible if the right relationship is established in the attitudes of the learner, the teacher, the learner's parents, and through this relationship the learner is properly motivated.

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