



# VRS & YRN COLLEGE

(Affiliated to Acharya Nagarjuna University)

Vodarevu Road, Chirala – 523 157.

Prakasam District, Andhra Pradesh.



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## Developing English Language Skills in Non - Native Scenario

### Abstract :

Language is a tool for communication. In order to become a good communicator in English one needs to be proficient in each of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. These four skills give learners opportunities to create contexts in which to use the language for exchange of real information. Listening and reading are the receptive skills because learners do not need to produce language, they receive and understand it. These skills are sometimes known as passive skills. The productive skills are speaking and writing because learners are applying these skills in a need to produce language. They are also known as active skills. The careful thinking out of a detailed and well defined objectives for the lessons will do more than almost anything else to improve a teacher's work and to make it effective. Listening is a receptive language skill which learners usually find the most difficult. Listening skills could be enhanced by focusing on making the students listen to the sounds of that particular language. This would help them with the right pronunciation of words. To equip students with training in listening, one can think about comprehending speeches of people of different backgrounds and regions. While speaking we communicate with others, to express our ideas, and to know others' ideas as well. This skill could be improved by understanding para-linguistic attributes such as voice quality, volume and tone, voice modulation, articulation, pronunciation etc. This could also be further enhanced with the help of debates and discussions. Reading is a learning skill which helps you improve all parts of the English language – vocabulary, spelling, grammar, and writing. The

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students should also make it a point to familiarize themselves with the jargons and new words by making reading a habit be it reading newspapers, articles, books, magazines etc. Writing provides a learner with physical evidence of his achievements and he can measure his improvement. It helps to consolidate their grasp of vocabulary and structure, and complements the other language skills. To write flawless language one should excel in the writing skills with the help of various methods. Importance should be given to composition and creative writing. One should also focus on coherence and cohesiveness when it comes to writing a language. With these four skills addressed equally while learning English, the learners can be assured of having good communication skills, a great necessity in today's competitive world.

### Key words :

Communication, four language skills, well-defined objectives, listening, speaking, reading, writing, good communication, competitive world.

English, although a foreign language is now as much an Indian language as any other. English is being taught in our schools and colleges for many decades. It occupies the position of associate official language. It is used widely as a link language in offices and among the educated people. It is not only a compulsory subject at school, college and university but is also the medium of instruction to the large extent. It is the language of science and technology. It occupies the position of a second language in the school curriculum and for higher education. En-

English language has been assigned the role of library language. This contemporary position of English in India shows English language teaching occurring at all levels of education, mainly as a second language. English has become the language of governments, education, advancement, jobs and a symbol of self improvement. The new ideas about language, the dimensions of usage and the new development in educational technology have given rise to branches in the use of English. Though the use of English as a medium of communication in India dates back to the colonial days, the native non-English speaker especially from the rural inland, frets and fusses when exposed to a situation where he has to communicate inevitably in English. Similarly, teaching English to the Indian students is the biggest challenge.

Nowadays English has a special and predominant role in the communicative sphere of the world. It has also a special identity in the field of education. A language is a medium of communication and interacting verbally in our day-to-day life situation in family and society. But in India English is a foreign language. It is different from mother tongue. The teaching of English is highly desirable for an English teacher. English is everything ... English is not a subject, English is our life. Yet, clear cut objectives should be stated, so that good planning can be done and right type of methods and techniques of teaching can be adopted. The four skills of language are a set of four capabilities that allow an individual to comprehend and produce spoken language for proper and effective interpersonal communication. The English language teaching has four objectives to develop four skills. These skills are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In the context of first-language acquisition, the four skills are most often acquired in the order of listening first, then speaking, then possibly reading and writing.

The objective of teaching English has two main aspects: Language aspect which includes words, sentences, pronunciation, spelling and grammar and literature aspect which includes words, sentences, expressing ideas, feelings and experiences. Skill objectives include: to develop the skill of listening, to develop the skill of speaking, to develop the skill of reading, to develop the skill of writing, to enable the students for the use of grammar correctly, to enable the students to analyze the elements of language and establish the appropriate relationship among linguistic components. Cognitive objectives include to acquire knowledge, to diagnose the weakness of speaking and writing English, to compare and illustrate linguistic components, to classify the elements of English language, to understand the meaning of prose, poetry, story and drama by reading. In order to teach English correctly and properly English teacher must know the aims and objectives of teaching English. For many decades teaching English whether for beginners or for the advanced learners has been a challenging pursuit for the teachers of English especially the area that covers the acquisition of four skills of language – listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Listening is the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the communication process. Listening is the key to all effective communication. Without the ability to listen effectively, messages are easily misunderstood. As a result, communication breaks down and the sender of the message can easily become frustrated or irritated. Listening, as Howatt and Dakin (1974) define, is the ability to identify and understand what others are saying. This involves understanding a speaker's accent and pronunciation, his grammar and his vocabulary and grasping his meaning. Listening plays an important role in second language instruction for sev-

eral reasons (Rost, 1994). Listening plays a vital role in daily lives. People listen for different purposes such as entertainment, academic purposes or obtaining necessary information. As for foreign language learning, listening is of paramount important since it provides the language input (Rost 1994:141-142). Without understanding input appropriately, learning simply cannot get any improvement. In addition, without listening skill, no communication can be achieved (Cross, 1998).

The main objectives of listening are to take organized notes on lectures and listening passages, identify and distinguish main ideas from supporting details, make use of contextual clues to infer meanings of unfamiliar words from context, identify speaker's purpose and tone, make inferences and predictions about spoken discourse, discuss and respond to content of a lecture or listening passage orally and/or in writing, utilize digital literacy tools to develop listening skills, reflect on and evaluate learning and performance, and set goals for progress, demonstrate behavior and attitudes appropriate to a environment. As for that, language learners, especially those who learn English as a foreign language in a non-native setting, find it difficult to acquire good listening skill. In fact, students often take the wrong way when listening and this leads them to the poor result. It should be noted that the learner's perception of their listening problem and strategies can affect their comprehension both positively and negatively (Wenden, 1986). According to Yagang (1994), the problems in listening were accompanied with the four following factors: the message, the speaker, the listener and the physical setting. Many learners find it more difficult to listen to a taped message than to read the same message on a piece of paper, since the listening passage comes into the ear in the twinkling of an eye, whereas reading

material can be read as long as the reader likes. The listening material may deal with almost any area of life. It might include street gossip, proverbs, new products, and situations unfamiliar to the student. Also, in a spontaneous conversation speakers frequently change topics. The content is usually not well organized. In many cases listeners cannot predict what speakers are going to say, whether it is a news report on the radio, an interviewer's questions, an everyday conversation, etc. Messages on the radio or recorded on tape cannot be listened to at a slower speed. Even in conversation it is impossible to ask the speaker to repeat something as many times as the interlocutor might like. If listening materials are made up of everyday conversation, they may contain a lot of colloquial words and expressions, such as stuff for material, guy for man, etc., as well as slang. Students who have been exposed mainly to formal or bookish English may not be familiar with these expressions. In spontaneous conversations people sometimes use ungrammatical sentences because of nervousness or hesitation. They may omit elements of sentences or add something redundant. This may make it difficult for the listener to understand the meaning. Ur (1984:7) points out that "in ordinary conversation or even in much extempore speech-making or lecturing we actually say a good deal more than would appear to be necessary in order to convey our message. Redundant utterances may take the form of repetitions, false starts, re-phrasings, self-corrections, elaborations, tautologies, and apparently meaningless additions such as I mean or you know." This redundancy is a natural feature of speech and may be either a help or a hindrance, depending on the students' level. It may make it more difficult for beginners to understand what the speaker is saying; on the other hand, it may give advanced students more time to "tune in" to the speaker's

as long as the and speech style. Lack of sociocultural, may deal with, and contextual knowledge of the target include street language can present an obstacle to comprehension because language is used to express its cultural situations (Anderson and Lynch 1988). Foreign-language learners usually devote more time to reading than to listening, and so lack exposure to different kinds of listening materials. Even our colleagues report on students majoring in English have no more than five hours' regular training per week. Both psychological and physical factors may have a negative effect on perception and interpretation of listening material. It is tiring for students to concentrate on interpreting unfamiliar sounds, words and sentences for long periods. Noise, conversation and environmental noises on the recording can take the listener's mind off the content of the listening material. Listening material on tape or radio lacks visual and aural environmental clues. Not seeing the speaker's body language and facial expressions makes it more difficult for the listener to understand the speaker's meaning. Unclear elements of the message resulting from poor-quality equipment can interfere with the listener's comprehension.

The teacher can at least provide the students with suitable listening materials, background and authentic knowledge, enabling skills, pleasant room conditions, and useful exercises to help them discover effective listening strategies. Redundant listening materials according to the student's level, and provide authentic materials rather than idealized, filtered samples. The materials should progress step by step from semi-authenticity that displays most of the linguistic features of natural speech to total authenticity, because the final aim is to understand natural language in real life. Design task-oriented exercises to engage the students' interest and help them learn listening skills subconsciously. As Ur (1994:25) has said, "Listening exercises are most

effective if they are constructed round a task. That is to say, the students are required to do something in response to what they hear that will demonstrate their understanding." Provide students with different kinds of input, such as lectures, radio news, films, TV plays, announcements, everyday conversation, interviews, storytelling, English songs, and so on. Brown and Yule (1983) categorize spoken texts into three broad types: static, dynamic, and abstract.

Give practice in liaisons and elisions in order to help students get used to the acoustic forms of rapid natural speech. Make students aware of different native-speaker accents. Of course, strong regional accents are not suitable for training in listening, but in spontaneous conversation native speakers do have certain accents. Select short, simple listening texts with little redundancy for lower-level students and complicated authentic materials with more redundancy for advanced learners. Provide background knowledge and linguistic knowledge, such as complex sentence structures and colloquial words and expressions, as needed. Give, and try to get, as much feedback as possible. Throughout the course the teacher should bridge the gap between input and students' response and between the teacher's feedback and students' reaction in order to keep activities purposeful. It is important for the listening-class teacher to give students immediate feedback on their performance. This not only promotes error correction but also provides encouragement. Help students develop the skills of listening with anticipation, listening for specific information, listening for gist, interpretation and inference, listening for intended meaning, listening for attitude, etc., by providing varied tasks and exercises at different levels with different focuses. Some teachers think that listening is the easiest skill to teach, whereas most students think it is the most difficult to improve. We must find

out all we can about how listening can be improved and what activities are useful to this end and then use this knowledge and these activities in our own classrooms.

Teaching speaking is perhaps one of the major challenges for teachers teaching in English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom environment. Like writing, speaking is not linear and easy approach to ensure the best utilization among learners. Since speaking is a real life event and face to face conversation, it needs more sophisticated care, practice oriented session for the students and effective means to implement it in the ESL situation. Even language experts often grope to outline effective and mediocre way to help learners have a good understanding in speaking. "Of all the four skills listening, speaking, reading and writing, speaking seems intuitively the most important: people who know a language are referred to as 'speakers' of that language, as if speaking included all other kinds of knowing; and many if not most foreign language learners are primarily interested in learning to speak" (Penny Ur, 1996:120). Thornbury (2007:100) identifies that the processes of developing speaking skills comprise of three stages which are as follows: Awareness in which teachers implant ideas that learners are entirely aware of the features of the use of target language which is used as a channel of communication, conversation and commitment of something. In appropriation the features of target language ensure appropriation and integration into the language the learners use for day to day conversation. According to autonomy learners earn autonomy and capacity to use those features of language in real life situation like interview, social interaction and classroom environment. Many linguistics and ESL teachers agree on that students learn to speak in the second language by "interacting". Communicative language

teaching and collaborative learning serve best for this aim. Communicative language teaching is based on real-life situations that require communication. By using this method in ESL classes, students will have the opportunity of communicating with each other in the target language. In brief, ESL teachers should create a classroom environment where students have real-life communication, authentic activities, and meaningful tasks that promote oral language. This can occur when students collaborate in groups to achieve a goal or to complete a task.

After a content-based lesson, a discussion can be held for various reasons. The students may aim to arrive at a conclusion, share ideas about an event, or find solutions in their discussion groups. Before the discussion, it is essential that the purpose of the discussion activity is set by the teacher. In this way, the discussion points are relevant to this purpose, so that students do not spend their time chatting with each other about irrelevant things. One other way of getting students to speak is role-playing. Students pretend they are in various social contexts and have a variety of social roles. In role-play activities, the teacher gives information to the learners such as who they are and what they think or feel. Simulations are very similar to role-plays but what makes simulations different than role plays is that they are more elaborate. In simulations, students can bring items to the class to create a realistic environment. In information gap activity, students are supposed to be working in pairs. One student will have the information that other partner does not have and the partners will share their information. Information gap activities serve many purposes such as solving a problem or collecting information. On a given topic, students can produce ideas in a limited time. Depending on the context, either individual or group brainstorming is effective and learners

generate ideas quickly and freely. Students can briefly summarize a tale or story they heard from somebody beforehand, or they may create their own stories to tell their classmates. Story telling fosters creative thinking. It also helps students express ideas in the format of beginning, development, and ending, including the characters and setting a story has to have. Students also can tell riddles or jokes. Students can conduct interviews on selected topics with various people. It is a good idea that the teacher provides a rubric to students so that they know what type of questions they can ask or what path to follow, but students should prepare their own interview questions. Conducting interviews with people gives students a chance to practice their speaking ability not only in class but also outside and helps them becoming socialized. Story telling is a very enjoyable, whole-class, free-speaking activity for which students sit in a circle. For this activity, a teacher starts to tell a story, but after a few sentences he or she stops narrating. Then, each student starts to narrate from the point where the previous one stopped. Before coming to class, students are asked to read a newspaper or magazine and, in class, they report to their friends what they find as the most interesting news. Students can also talk about whether they have experienced anything worth telling their friends in their daily lives before class. Another way to make use of pictures in a speaking activity is to give students just one picture and having them describe what it is in the picture. For this activity students can form groups and each group is given a different picture. Students discuss the picture with their groups, and then a spokesperson for each group describes the picture to the whole class.

Teaching of reading skills is an important aspect of language learning. The learning of this skill is especially essential for acquiring a sec-

ond language. This is also so because most of the teaching-learning material is in the written form, either in the form of books or computer based material. Reading and literacy are thus interdependent. Reading is a skill which enables us to get a message; *f* recognizing the written words (written symbols); *f* getting (understanding) the meaning; *f* used to teach pronunciation; *f* grasping information from texts. Reading is a complex activity that involves both perception and thought. Reading consists of two related processes: word recognition and comprehension. Word recognition refers to the process of perceiving how written symbols correspond to one's spoken language. Comprehension is the process of making sense of words, sentences and connected text. Readers typically make use of background knowledge, vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, experience with text and other strategies to help them understand written text. There are such strategies, each of which can be applied as classroom techniques (Brown, 2001): identifying the purpose of reading, using graphemic rules and patterns to aid bottom-up decoding, using efficient silent reading techniques for rapid comprehension; skimming the text for main ideas for its gist for prediction, scanning the text for specific information, using semantic mapping or clustering guessing when you aren't certain, analyzing vocabulary distinguishing between literal and implied meanings, capitalize on discourse markers to process relationships etc..

Writing is seen as: a purposeful human activity whereby the writer intends to communicate content – represented with conventional signs and symbols – to an audience (i.e. reader). In this definition five elements are of paramount importance: the writer (who), the content (what) the purpose (why), the audience (for whom), the medium (signs and symbols). In addition to these

elements, writing involves many processes, including, the generation and organization of ideas, drafting, revising and editing. The writing task in the classroom can be also seen either as a learning tool (i.e. writing for learning) or as representing one of the main syllabus components (i.e. writing for writing) (Harmer, 2004). Writing for learning concerns those activities that necessitate the involvement of the students in some form of writing: Grammar: providing examples of the target structures, gap filling, transformation exercise, Reading: answering the comprehension questions, summarizing, Speaking: preparing a conversation before an oral performance, jotting down ideas for subsequent discussion about a topic. Writing for writing refers to the writing lesson as a major syllabus strand. It is a self-contained writing lesson that aims at developing the writing skill. There are three approaches to teaching writing: writing as a product, writing as a process and genre writing.

Byrne (1988) states that certain psychological, linguistic and cognitive factors make writing a complex and difficult discourse medium for most people in both native and second language. While, Raimes (1983) thinks that: "When students complain about how difficult it is to write in a second language, they are talking not only about the difficulty of finding the right words and using the correct grammar but also about the difficulty of finding and expressing ideas in a new language. (p. 13)". Hedge (1988:8) suggests some points which students should include in the approach of writing. Learners' writing problems include grammatical problems, mechanical problems, sentence structure problems and problems of diction are linguistic problems that hamper students' effective writing in English. "As verbs take different forms depending on tense and subjects they are used with, they create problems for second language writing students" Sen-

tences reflect various syntactic structures (Reid, 1983). However, incapable learners use run-on, incorrect, and fragmented sentences. Those students who have the problem of writing good sentences structures are unable to produce longer sentences requiring subordination and coordination. According to Zamel (1983:22), cohesive devices are crucial in writing. However, the linking devices have been found to be problematic for English language students. A good writing or composition should consist of appropriate and varied range of vocabularies used along with proper grammar and varied range of sentence structures. Writing in a second language using the appropriate words in the appropriate place is a problem for students. The cognitive problems that students face include problems of punctuation, capitalization, spelling, content and organization. Learners have the problem of structuring the paragraph, topic development of a paragraph, structuring the whole discourse and a theme in a discourse. "Writing is a difficult skill for native speakers and non-native speakers alike because writers must balance multiple issues such as content, organization, purpose, audience, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling and mechanics. There are various types of writing problems. In the light of these problems a number of recommendations can be made: Learners of English language should read a lot. Reading will help them increase their knowledge of vocabulary, grammatical structures, and be informed; to have knowledge of the world as well. Free writing practice is a good exercise for improving one's writing ability. Writing is a skill and therefore it is learned by practice just like any other skill. Note taking is also very helpful in enhancing the way writers generate ideas. Learners should not panic. Everyone experiences writer's block sometimes. They should be en-

couraged to go through writer's block and break it. This will help them be more imaginative and creative writers. With these four skills addressed

equally while learning English, the learners can be assured of having good communication skills, a great necessity in today's competitive world.

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