A CONCEPTUAL STUDY ON TRAINING AND EVALUATION OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

It is rightly said that "A teacher must not only teach but inspire and motivate." And for this, it is very essential for a teacher to teach in an effective manner that can ensure maximum learning output. This paper focuses on the various aspects of teaching, training; evaluation and development of budding managers who need to acquire and improve fluency in spoken and written English at B-Schools to be successful in facing on/off-campus interviews before entering the corporate world. Since communication skills are essential for any individual irrespective of profession, various activities are designed to involve, improve and assess these skills at B-Schools. Apart from general English and Communication, special emphasis is laid on Business English and Communication.
In this paper, keeping in view the above facts, some practical classroom teaching/training activities are presented in a systematic and scientific way so that it can help the trainers, teachers and administrators to think, analyze and implement innovative methods of teaching and training in the areas of English Language Teaching (ELT)

Keywords: English Language Teaching (ELT), Training and Evaluation.

Introduction:

English language holds a prestigious position not only in India but also across the whole world. Whether we are at home, in the state or out of it, in the country or away from it, English is important and it continues to hold an exclusive position. Today, English is the world's most widely studied foreign language. All languages can be learned easily, provided we use a scientific approach. Thus, we must have awareness about various teaching approaches and methodologies. But it is a hardcore truth that ultimately teachers need to decide according to the requirements of the learners.

It is a fact that a teacher cannot learn on behalf of the learner. He can only help create learning opportunities in the class. Learners learn what teachers teach—are an old view now. Teachers are mostly concerned about 'WHAT' is to be taught and they are not bothered about how it is to be taught and 'WHY' it is to be taught. Concentrating on the questions of 'HOW' and 'WHY', teaching can be made more and more effective.

The history of language teaching presents a fascinating variety of methods. The method that works (well) with one learner may not work with another. One may be a wizard in grammar, but another may just hate it. Others might enjoy memorizing sentences. Again, different methods may be appropriate to different contexts. If we start searching for the perfect method or the ideal single solution to the problems of language learning, we are bound to fail. There cannot be one program that can work in every situation. The teacher must recognize what is required in a given situation.

This paper focuses on the evaluation of communication in English and the process of evaluation of the students in detail which includes motivation, design, method, evaluation and feedback used to improve the language skills. To explain the said processes, the teaching experience of MBA at Laxmi Institute of Management is taken into consideration.

Objectives:

As an aspect of teaching and training, for the purpose of conducting these activities, the following objectives are the most important:

- To practice speaking and writing in English;
- To develop confidence and proficiency in the use of language skills for academic, professional, business and social purposes;
- To observe, practice and improve communication skills in English;
- To perceive the overall meaning and organization of the text, i.e., the relationships of the different 'chunks' in the text;
- To identify the central point and supporting details;
- To observe and learn verbal communication (speaking and writing) in English;
- To develop the capacity to appreciate literary use of English;
- To use English creatively;
- To develop the critical analysis skills;
- To practice higher order thinking skills;
- To improve public speaking skills; and to practice and improve presentation skills.

To achieve these objectives, faculty members and students have to put a lot of effort. Though it is impossible to achieve mastery over spoken and written communication within a short span of 2 or 3 years of PG of B School. Importantly, individual attention on the students is not assured, because in a 45-minute class for UG to a 90-minute class for PG, with a size of 60 to 80 students, it is not feasible to focus on each student. On the average, only 1 or 2 minutes per student per session is possible. Therefore, the methodology for teaching/training should be highly interactive at B-Schools.

Literature Review:

Teaching is not telling or transmitting fixed truths to students but providing students with relevant experiences and discussions to enable them to evolve and construct meaning Vernal, (2002). Mostly the higher education courses are run through lectures. There is a need to shift from lectures to compatible methods. Problem solving rather than mere information should be the focus of higher education. Interdisciplinary and participatory approach to problem solving should be promoted in higher education. Teachers don't seem to have moved with the times. Year after the years, teachers are still using the same 'chalk and talk' method to teach. Not much effort being put into bringing innovation in teaching to make learning and teaching both enjoyable and effective (Mohanty, 2002). Dr. A P J Abdul Kalam (2002) opines that empowerment of teachers with technology results in transformation to higher potential for achievement is certain.

Rajan (2002) highlights the importance of value education in higher education. He says 'value education teaches the youth that knowledge and skill are not the only requisite to succeed in life but, a positive attitude and humane way of action. Value education teaches harmony, Independence and leadership. He stresses further on the need of group discussion, debate and public speaking methods of teaching to get socialized and to achieve the leadership. Further it is opined that story writing and dialogue writing on themes of human value such as love, compassion and service mindedness adds value to the overall skill of a budding manager. Mishra (2002) points out that a management educator should be an inspirer and not mere instructor. Further he says that his job is not only to impart knowledge of concepts, techniques and skills and but also to inculcate in them a sense of responsibility towards the nation at large. He suggests that the faculty be put to work at least two months once in a two or three years to get practical exposure of the industry. Also he stresses on the sponsorship of faculty for seminars, conferences at national and international level to have different exposures.

Management teachers use varied teaching methodologies designed to enhance their course content and individual teaching styles. The methods include: formal lectures, assigned readings, case discussions, role plays, seminars, individual / group projects, field studies, etc. Group work is mostly concentrated. In the western countries, in addition to the above, study guide, text books, supplied readings, Tele tutorials and face to face workshops are also being used as supplements / teaching methods. Further to effectuate their techniques use of computer software, audiotapes, videotapes, websites and discussion groups and email discussion groups are significantly utilized.

Communicative Teaching Methodology:

The "communicative approach to the teaching of foreign languages"—also known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) or the 'Communicative Approach'— emphasizes learning a language through genuine communication. Learning a new language is easier and more enjoyable when it is truly meaningful. Communicative teaching is based on the works of sociolinguists, who theorized that an effective knowledge of a language is more than merely knowing vocabulary and rules of grammar and pronunciation. Learners need to be able to use the language appropriately in any business or social context. Grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary are, of course, essential parts of effective communication. With the communicative method, two primary approaches may be taken. Some teachers prefer to teach a rule, and then follow it with practice. Most, though, believe that grammar will be naturally

discovered through meaningful communicative interactions. The communicative approach is a flexible method rather than a rigorously defined set of teaching practices. It can best be defined with a list of general principles.

David Nunan (1991), a CLT practitioner, lists five basic characteristics:

1. An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language;
2. The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation;
3. The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language but also on the learning process itself;
4. An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning; and
5. An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activities outside the classroom.

These characteristics show that the communicative approach is concerned with the unique individual needs of each learner. By making the language relevant to the world rather than the classroom, learners can acquire the desired skills rapidly and agreeably.

Impact of Oral Evaluation:

Oral evaluation is an effective method to improve the skills of students at any level. But the process is very time-consuming and tiring for the faculty in a classroom situation as it involves a lot of exercise to be done by both the students and the faculty. Though evaluation is essential, it is sometimes very frustrating to evaluate and to carefully write the comments on the papers. These comments by the faculty can be generally categorized into four types: instant, delayed, direct and indirect comments. These comments sometimes motivate students, but can also be misinterpreted by the students and this adds to their/our frustrations in the process of teaching/training. To evaluate the students orally with their writing assignments, the following techniques were used:

- Topics of about 350 words were assigned so that seven to eight of them could be evaluated in a 45-minute class, and thus, the faculty could plan on completing the whole class of 60 students in about seven days;
- While the trainer individually dealt with each student in the class, the rest were kept busy in writing their assignment;
- The needs of each student were taken into consideration and they were asked about the difficulties in writing the assignment;

- Comments were given to the students who were not good at spoken and written communication in the process of trying to understand the major problems they faced;
- The students were encouraged to ask questions, respond to questions and were also given a short explanation clarify the issue;
- The comments were recorded in a book or computer, so that it could be referred back at a later point of time; and
- They were not graded, always, as this would limit the scope of improving the students.

The Training Process:
Trainer's Role:

The process begins with the trainer's efforts to think, design, explain and execute the technique in the classroom. First of all, the trainer has to think of an area such as spoken, written or reading. Then one has to brainstorm about the topic to be taken for the practice session. Next is to explain it to the students. After that the teacher has to execute and assign the work to the students.

Duration:

Time is another important factor. The number of hours to be devoted for the assignment largely depends on the level of students—school, college, university, and the size of the class, and the number of pages to be written. For UG classes, a session is usually of 45 minutes and for PG classes, it is of 90 minutes. A 45-minute session for 8-10 students can be taken into consideration, for the sake of individual attention and focus.

Teaching Methodology:

There are different methodologies used in teaching at Business schools. They can be listed such as Lecture, Case-study, Experiential, Simulation, and Communicative/ interactive methods. Out of these, the authors have chosen Communicative Methodology, as this would help in interacting with the students and give the students feedback as required.

Feasibility:

The faculty turned trainer has to check whether it is possible for the students to complete the project within the set objectives and time. The other issues such as the student's capacity should be taken care of.

Students' Role:

Students need to do some homework regarding pre-reading and the after reading activity. They can either organize or re-organize their thoughts before writing the assignment. They have to complete the writing assignment in about 15 minutes and submit it to the

trainer. Then they speak about it without referring to it much. They are also told not to stop in between.

Outcome:

The faculty has to ensure that students have completed and submitted the task in the stipulated time. Since each assignment enhances the knowledge of the students, it becomes a serious business for both the students and the trainers.

Sample 1 clearly shows the errors committed by students in writing and the comments apart from correction by faculty members. Here only one of the many aspects of writing skills is highlighted, since writing is a complex skill and the process of teaching writing is too long to cover in just one article.

Sample 1: Errors in Writing and Faculty Comments
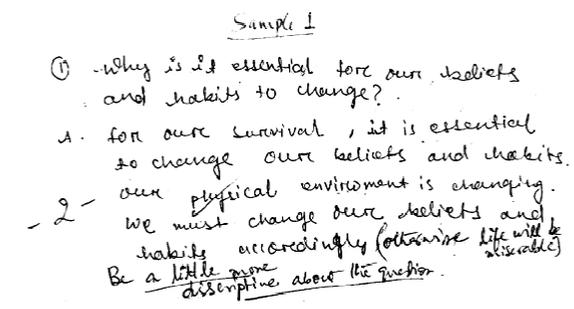
At PG level, apart from Business Communication and other domain subjects, LIMS offers a unique training program called Pre School Foundation Course which aims at improving Communication Skills, various Soft Skills and overall Personality Development. The scope of Pre School foundation programmed is very huge because it moulds 'raw materials'8 into 'finished products'9 before final placement.

Just A Minute (JAM):

This is one of the vibrant activities which instantly stimulates, activates and challenges the students to speak out. The trainer can always correct the students on the spot as the case may be.

Current Corporate Analysis (CCA):

This is a unique activity which tremendously improves the domain knowledge of the trainees and prepares them to make excellent presentations with strong content and in-depth knowledge of management concepts and other subjects. It helps in knowing about various issues in the corporate world along with statistical data in stipulated time and it also improves domain knowledge, reading, writing and presentation skills and the knowledge of various corporate issues.

Extempore/Debate:

This is an interesting activity that ensures total participation of the students. A topic is displayed on the screen using a laptop and an LCD projector. The students are instructed that they should start speaking on the topic displayed immediately. After the students speak for 3 to 5 minutes, as an extension and to increase the complexity, a debate can be initiated involving the audience to interact and cross-question the speaker.

Writing and Speaking on Living and Non-Living Things:

This activity improves not only writing and speaking skills but also allows the listeners to interpret a person in terms of personality, attitude and behavior. This enhances the chances for the students to express their thoughts without inhibitions and at times makes them emotional also. The students are prepared for any behavioral interviews that are conducted by HR Managers in the industry.

Product Design:

This is a multi-faceted activity which fits in any B-School classes. It enhances creativity, content development, visual merchandizing and marketing communication in students, apart from Business Communication.

Various tangible and intangible products—consumables, concepts, consultancy services, etc.—can be designed and presented by the students in front of the entire class and the faculty and the students ask questions to the presenters. It generates a lot of interaction in the class leading to innovative business ideas for budding managers.

Listening and Decision-Making:

This is another interesting activity that improves listening skills. The students have to be instructed to blind fold five students and send them out of the class for the dramatic effect. These blind folded students have to just follow the instructions of the students seated in the class as they enter into the room. For the sake of complexity, each student can give two or three instructions such as 'turn right', 'go straight', 'take this… that…', etc., it is really difficult for the blind folded person to follow this due to lack of listening skills and understanding skills. Extension of this activity could be, giving multiple instructions to a single person from different corners of the class. The result is improvement of listening, understanding and decision-making.

Role-Plays:

These can be practically stimulating and involving. There are two ways of doing this activity. Either the trainer/faculty can go with the copies of role-plays or ask the students to develop in the class by giving adequate time. The themes of the role-plays can be 'time management', 'leadership', 'positive attitude', 'adaptability', etc., depending upon the need and the level of the students. A competition of the various groups in the class that enact these role-plays would

work wonderfully as the students get a chance to perform in front of the class.

Feedback:

This is very important for students because every comment leads to fluency, accuracy and content development. They have to be evaluated and individual comments have to be spelt out and written on their papers. The same have to be conveyed to the students clearly so that they:
• Get to know the mistakes that they commit in speaking and writing; and
• Rectify the same and not repeat them in future.
The trainer/teacher can comment on the following aspects while giving feedback:
• Speaking
• Fluency
• Accuracy
• Formal and informal language
• Content and format
• Listening
• Reading aloud
• Pronunciation
• Dealing with questions and answers
Questions and answers can be discussed individually with the students. The trainer can point out the mistakes and give feedback (on tense, punctuation, vocabulary, structure and content) to each student and make him/her rectify them.

Conclusion:

Keeping in view the above presented critical analysis of a B-School's Approach, the training and evaluation of 'oral and written' communication skills in English is a continuous and critical process. It has to be conducted and assessed scientifically without undermining the importance of 'communication skills in English', by the trainers, other domain faculty members, administrators and decision-makers.

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