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COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH OF STUDENTS FROM RURAL AREAS OF HINDI SPEAKING REGIONS

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Abstract

In today's globalized world, English has become the language of the world. Though it has its localized forms in various countries, it has a vital presence in all the countries of the world. In every sphere of life, one can find English language in some form or the other. There are various job opportunities in the language; the learner gets the freedom of communication as it bridges the linguistic divide in the country. Moreover, as a second language, in the Indian context, it has been associated with class difference and status. Despite the advantages, Indian students lack expertise in the language, especially in the rural areas. A number of studies have been done in this area that point out the needs and requirements of the students in rural areas, lack of proper resources, and unavailability of teachers, etc. The present research paper focuses on this area from a different perspective, that is, of learners in the bilingual context of Hindi speaking regions, especially of Uttar Pradesh. The key issues affecting second language acquisition of learners in these regions have been identified, comparisons between the first and second language use by the learners have been done to assess the major hindrances in second language learning, and the contribution of the teachers in making language learning a realizable target has been discussed. The findings of the research are based on the data collected through questionnaires, interviews, tests, and class discussions.

Keywords: Language acquisition, Language competence, English as first language, Hindi as mother tongue, rural areas of northern India, bilingual context.

Introduction

Communicative competence refers to the ability of a person to use language in an effective way to communicate successfully. According to Celce-Murcia, Dornyei and Thurrell, communicative competence includes linguistic competence, strategic competence, sociocultural competence,

actional competence, and discourse competence. Canale and Swain (1980) defined it as having a competence in four areas which are words and rules, appropriateness, Cohesion and coherence, and use of communication strategies.

Broadly categorizing, communicative competence can be measured in three different

components, which consists of the grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and the strategic competence (George Yule). The first component is grammatical competence, which involves the accurate use of words or structures. Relying on grammatical competence only, however, will not provide the learner with the ability to communicate in the second language appropriately. This ability is provided by the component called social linguistic competence. It enables the learner to use language according to the social context. The third component is called strategic competence. This is the ability to organize a message effectively and to compensate, via strategies, for any difficulties. It is used when learners use the vocabulary that is already known to them in referring to things that they have no idea of.

To communicate in a language, one needs to have knowledge of its grammar syntax, morphology, phonology, lexis, and appropriate usage. In a simplified manner, it can be said, therefore, that the aim of language teaching is developing the communicative competence of the learner. Developing communicative competence can be considered an important part of the field of second language acquisition.

India is a multilingual country where there are many languages spoken in different places. In the eighth schedule of the Constitution, twenty-two languages are listed. India, therefore, is a multilingual country, having many languages and different cultures that are based on these languages. In the Indian context, people learn English as a second language. In most of the cases, their communicative competence is limited by mother tongue interference. There are also other factors that act as hindrance. These factors become more prominent in a rural set up where the resources are limited and the learner inclination is defined by parameters which are different from urban set ups.

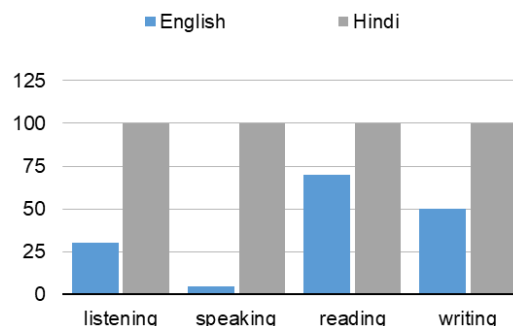
Methodology

For this research, data was collected through verbal interaction and questionnaires. Questionnaires were prepared to know students' aptitude towards learning English as a second language. Through student interaction and through

interviews and questionnaires, an attempt was made to know the basic level of understanding that the students possess in the English language, what is the level of their present communicative competence in the second language, classroom teaching, autonomous learning abilities of the learner, availability of technology to aid student learning, etc. The data collected was analyzed through graphs, and tables for preparation of the final report.

Outcomes

Tests were conducted to judge the level of understanding and basic skills of the students in English, on the parameters of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. 30% of the total number of students responded as good listeners of English. By good listeners it is meant that they can understand the language if someone else is speaking. 70% of them could read any paragraph in English. 50% of them could write in the language to express their ideas. Only 5% of them said that they could speak in the language to express themselves. Here it can be observed that more number of students are capable of reading and writing than listening and speaking. There are some limitations to these findings as the answers of the students were based on their curriculum, which means, that by writing, most of them meant writing the answers related to the course. None of them was interested in creative writing and writing to express themselves as individuals. Similarly, speaking is in relation to providing answers to course related questions orally.



Questionnaire was prepared to assess the abilities of the students in various areas of language learning. The analysis of the questions is given below:

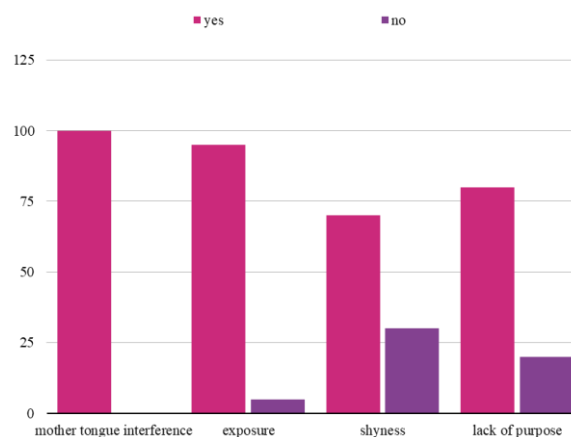
The students were asked whether they used some of the popular mediums of language learning and developing language competence. Around 50% of them used a library. Around 5% of them use the Google search engine in English. Only 1% of the students read newspapers in English and used English sentences in their text messages, while none of them watched any movies or any TV programmes in English. They also do not use you tube videos in English as study platforms. The limitations to these findings were that most of the students using a library were using it for the purpose of collecting course material for the exams instead of using it for general reading purposes.

Popular mediums of learning	Yes (%)	No (%)
Library	50	50
Newspapers in English	1	99
Movies in English	0	100
Any TV programme in English	0	100
You tube videos	0	100
Google search in English	5	95
Sending text messages in English	1	99

In the following questions, students' use of languages in various situations in a bilingual context was assessed. Most of the students used Hindi while speaking to their family members and with friends, or outside class. Only 4 percent of the students used English in the classroom.

Later questions were related to the problems that students face while learning English.

All the students agreed that mother tongue interference and low exposure to the target language are some of the hindrances in second language acquisition. 70% of the students said that they do not speak the language due to shyness. 80% were hesitant due to lack of purpose, as they do not find any use of learning to speak.



In another questionnaire, teachers' contribution towards student learning was questioned through different variables. 90% of the teachers made use of the internet to teach the students. 40% of them used innovative techniques in the classroom, 50% of them used co-curricular activities and were involved in conducting group activities in the class. 90% of the teachers encouraged their students to express themselves in English. Only 5% of the teachers in rural areas could use at least some form of technology in classroom teaching. This is one of the areas that require immediate attention. The use of technology facilitates learning. Therefore, teachers should be given technologically equipped classrooms to teach.

Teacher contribution	Yes (%)	No (%)
Use of technology	5	95
Use of internet	90	10
Innovative techniques	40	60
Co-curricular activities	50	50
Group activities	50	50
Providing motivation	90	10

Conclusion

After the analysis and interpretation of data, it can be observed that the students have very little understanding of the basic skills of English language. However, they are better skilled at reading and writing in the language than speaking or listening.

Students are hardly interested in English outside the classroom or the vicinity of the college. They do not use English in their personal conversations. The language is limited to the course curriculum only. In a rural set up there is hardly any use of technology in the classroom. The students are not aware of the use of internet to enhance their studies. Most of the colleges do not have a good library where books other than related to the course material are available. Moreover, even if such books are present in the library students are not encouraged to read them. The teachers do not encourage students to read such books, as according to them, at their level of understanding, students will not be able to comprehend those books on their own. This happens because the basic knowledge of the language that the students should acquire at the level of the school is not there. Students do not read newspapers, magazines, or any other text outside the course curriculum and hence, their exposure to English language is limited to the college course work. The students hardly make use of technology for learning purposes. The main hindrance is that they don't have such devices on which they can avail the facilities of the internet. Most of the time even if they do have such devices they do not have access to the internet because of lack of money. In a rural set up, it is hard to find colleges equipped with free wi fi services. Most of the students come from families of day laborers, household helps, vendors, small farmers etc. The students have to help their families in making an earning. Therefore, most of them are employed in various odd jobs after the college hours. The libraries in most of these institutes contain books related to course work only. There are hardly any novels, or storybooks, or any other material of interest to the students in the libraries of these institutes.

Another area of interest could be teacher training and education. It should be assured that teachers acquire proper training before joining the profession. As the teachers shape the learning atmosphere of the students to mould them into learned individuals, they should themselves be learned and qualified. In service trainings should be organized for teachers so that they can apply new techniques and methods in their teaching process.

Emphasis must be laid on the use of technology, use of the internet, extra-curricular activities and group activities during the learning process. Students should be introduced by the teachers to various modes of learning, like, watching English movies or any other educational video. Another activity could be to make students watch short movie clips in the class. Later a discussion can be carried out on these movie clips to generate the interest of the student in the particular movie, so that they are stimulated to watch the full movie.

Digitalization of libraries can be a good attempt by the institutions to help the teachers in getting access to the latest research in the area of teaching. Digitalized libraries may also increase the availability of interesting books that the students can select on their own.

Along with this, good public libraries must be made accessible to the students. Such libraries, even if they do exist, are out of reach of the students. Due to economic constraints, students are unable to move out of the rural areas. The government might make provision for student passes to give students travelling allowances to visit different places for educational purposes.

As there are time constraints that require a teacher to finish the syllabus on time, a teacher should encourage teaching based on such games and activities that are related to the coursework. The students can be encouraged to use YouTube videos as study platforms. Reading newspapers is also a good activity to induce learning. If newspapers are not available, teacher can make a copy available to the students and try to discuss at least one headline with them. This will inculcate in them a habit of reading.

Students should increase the exposure to the target language. They should also be motivated to speak in the target language. Mother tongue interference can be lessened with the help of the teachers who can guide them towards better learning. A teacher should motivate the students to use English language outside the class and tell them what benefits they can reap by learning the language, what job prospects are available in the market, and how they can earn a better livelihood by

increasing the competence in the language. The students do not speak in English mainly due to shyness and fear of errors. This pressure from their social group is one of the main reasons for students to not use the language altogether. This is an area where a teacher's assistance is required as the teachers can encourage all the students to speak in English or at least try speaking in English in the classroom and outside it. A teacher can involve students in co-curricular activities, like, organizing debates, extempore, poetry recitation, storytelling, role-playing, etc. in the class. Group activities like word games, songs, discussions, etc., will increase student speaking time in the class, boost the confidence of the students, and add variety to the class. Teachers should try the techniques of scaffolding and providing support to the student in the English language as well as in their mother tongue.

Course work modification can also prove beneficial in the long run. The needs of the students from rural areas are different from the needs of the students coming from urban places. The course should be modified according to the needs of the students so that their interest in learning is maintained throughout the curriculum as well as after the completion of the course.

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