



COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF THE CURRICULUM OF ENGLISH IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF MANIPUR, NORTH-EAST, INDIA

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Abstract

English and Meiteilon/Manipuri are the official languages of the state of Manipur, North-east India. English is introduced right from the primary stage up to high school as a compulsory subject in the school curriculum by the Board of Secondary Education, Manipur (BOSEM). The curriculum framed by BOSEM gives emphasis on all the four language skills- Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. However, the acquisition of all the four skills inside the classroom is not possible as the skills of reading and writing are given more importance. There is very little room to enhance the communicative skill of the learners. The paper is an attempt to study the curriculum of English of class X prescribed by the Board of Secondary Education Manipur (BOSEM) and it will highlight the major problem encountered in teaching English as a second language in the schools of Manipur. The study will also examine the implementation and effectiveness of the communicative approach in teaching English as a second language in the context of Manipur.

Keywords: Meiteilon/Manipuri, Acquisition, Second Language, Communicative Approach, Curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

Manipur, one of the north-eastern states of India, is a multilingual state inhabited by various ethnic communities. The Meiteis/Manipuris comprise the major population of Manipur and live mostly in the valley or the central plain, while majority of Nagas and Kukis inhabit the hills. In Manipur, there are 33 recognised tribes which fall broadly under the ethnic groups: Nagas and Kukis. People living in Manipur speak a variety of Sino-Tibetan languages, namely Meiteilon/Manipuri, Thadou Kuki, Tangkhul, Hmar, Vaiphei, Mizo, Paite, Kom etc. The various tribes use their own dialect to communicate among themselves. However, Meiteilon/Manipuri is used as a means of

communication for almost all the communities since Meiteilon/Manipuri is the *lingua franca* of the state. There are also people who do not understand Meiteilon/Manipuri and use English as a means of communication. Due to the diverse and multicultural setting/environment, there is the possibility of having linguistic tension among the various communities who speak different languages. As a consequence, the linguistic barrier in the state creates a complex situation where there is a need for a common link language that can bridge the gap.

Learning a language is a slow and long-drawn-out process and a matter of skill. It involves practice, acquisition and various factors namely imitation, dialogue, story telling, question-answers and the

influence of the environment. The teaching and learning of a language should be closely connected with the students life as development of language is possible only when one practices in real situations. The living interest in learning and teaching the target language can be created naturally if the learners are properly motivated and exposed to authentic situations. The principle of interest is also essential in the learning process as it stimulates the will to learn. In order to create interest, the language teacher should select a method which pays emphasis on children's activities, their spirit of play, competition and contest. Language learning aims at achieving the desired aims- the acquisition and mastery of the four language skills namely, the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. The aims in turn are ultimately connected with that of methods and devices used to achieve the aims. Correct language learning skills are largely a question of habit formation and habits are formed through practice. Since speaking is a skill that grows by exercise, practice is necessary in learning a language. Mastery of a language does not mean knowing merely the rules of grammar but involves the mastery of the four basic skills of language. Oral course should be an integral part of the course in language and should predominate because it makes the language living and its learning easy and interesting task. It also helps to retain the words longer in memory. Oral course is emphasised for another reason also as it helps the child in learning correct pronunciation and intonation.

Role of English in Manipur:

English and Meiteilon/Manipuri are the official languages of the state. Except Meiteilon/Manipuri, the tribal dialects of Manipur do not have their own script. As such, English is used as a script for writing purposes for the tribal dialects. Knowledge of English becomes essential for the people of Manipur so that the socio-political and linguistic differences can be minimised. In Manipur, English is taught as a subject and also used as a medium of instruction in the schools. The education system in Manipur offers three languages as part of the school curriculum, namely English, Hindi and one of the Modern Indian Languages (Manipuri, Tangkhul, Mizo, Kom, Paite and many more). English

is introduced right from the primary stage up to high school as a compulsory subject in the school curriculum by the Board of Secondary Education, Manipur (BOSEM). The curriculum framed by BOSEM gives emphasis on all the four language skills- Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. However, the acquisition of all the four skills inside the classroom is not possible as the skills of reading and writing are given more importance. There is very little room to enhance the communicative skill of the learners. So, when the students pass out from schools they struggle to communicate in English despite studying it for many years. The main reason for the learners inability to develop the communicative skill is the lack of exposure to real life situations in and outside the school. Providing a meaningful context for learning English as a second language is very important in the context of Manipur where English is one of the official languages of the state.

In most second language situations like Manipur, the English teacher is primarily a teacher of literature. As a result she/he may not prove to be an efficient teacher of language unless she/he has been trained. The content of the language teaching is also designed to meet the internal rather than the external function of the language so as to enable the students develop an awareness of their own culture. Due to various factors like lack of trained teachers to teach spoken English, acquisition-poor environment to improve the speaking skill of the learners, inadequate audio-visual materials and lack of practice inside the classroom, communication is an area of difficulty that Manipuri learners of English face while using English. They are comfortable in writing but find it difficult to communicate freely using the target language. This may be due to the reason that in Manipur, the formal language of communication is either Meiteilon or tribal dialects. In the schools also, there is lack of provision to learn spoken English as the curriculum framed by BOSEM emphasise on learning English language through English literature.

A case study of the the curriculum of English of class X prescribed by the Board of Secondary Education Manipur (BOSEM) will highlight the major problem encountered in teaching English as a

second language in the schools of Manipur. The study will also examine the implementation and effectiveness of the communicative approach in teaching English as a second language in the context of Manipur.

COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

The Communicative Approach in language teaching starts from a theory of language as Communication. The exponents of this approach felt that since language is essentially a tool for communication, the learning of various codes should be abandoned and the learners should be encouraged to engage in communicative activities. The Communicative Approach is based on the idea that learning language successfully comes through communication in real situation. When learners are involved in real communication, their natural strategies for language acquisition will be used, and this will allow them to learn how to use the language. The Communicative Approach to foreign and second language learning developed in both Europe and North America in 1970-80's by laying emphasis on the works of anthropologists, sociologists and sociolinguists. The movement began as a largely British innovation, focusing on alternative conceptions of a syllabus. Since the mid 1970s the scope of Communicative Language Teaching has expanded. The proponents believed that communicative proficiency is more important than mere mastery of structures. They also paid systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language. During the 1970's, British applied linguists like Widdowson, Firth, Halliday and others explored the most fundamental dimension of language namely the function and communicative potential of language. As observed by Halliday, Communicative Approach to language teaching aims at developing the communicative competence of the learners which would include the learners acquiring the knowledge of communicative functions of the language and the linguistic means to perform the different kinds of functions. Halliday (1975) also points out seven basic language functions:

1. The Instrumental Function: the function of language is to get things;

2. The Regulatory Function: the function of language is to control the behaviour of others;
3. The Instrumental Function: the function of language is to express interaction with others;
4. The Personal Function: the function of language is to express personal feelings and meanings;
5. The Heuristic Function: the function of language is to learn and discover;
6. The Imaginative Function: the function of language is to create a world of the imagination; and
7. The Representational Function: the function of language is to communicate.

Communicative Approach is an approach and not a method that aims to (i) make communicative competence the goal of language teaching and (ii) develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication. It is not restricted to grammatical or linguistic competence but focuses on all the components of the communicative competence of the learner. The proponents of Communicative Approach are also of the view that language learning is essentially learning to communicate in the target language and that selection of instructional materials should be based on a systematic analysis of the learners need for the target language. In this approach, interaction is emphasised as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. If a learner has only the knowledge of language rules and forms, then the learner is said to have 'linguistic-competence' and if the learner also has the knowledge that enables him to communicate functionally and interactively then the learner is said to have 'communicative competence'. According to socio-linguist Dell Hymes, who coined the term 'communicative competence' in 1966 in reaction to Naom Chomsky's notion of "linguistic competence", the purpose of teaching language is not only to master the inherent grammatical competence but also to develop the ability to use grammatical competence in a variety of communicative situations. It is an ability not only to apply grammatical rules of a language in order to

form grammatically correct sentences but also to know when and where to use these sentences and to whom. In fact, Dell Hymes brings in the sociolinguistic perspective into Chomsky's linguistic view of competence.

MAIN FEATURES OF COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

The main features of Communicative approach are as follows:

1. It is primarily an oral approach.
2. It is a learner-centered approach in which students are encouraged to interact freely with each other through dialogue, conversation, discussion, role-play etc.
3. The teacher's role is to facilitate the communication process between all the learners in the classroom and to help the learners to discover the rules underlying the functional expression or structure, its forms in speech and writing. The teacher should also create meaningful and authentic situations to demonstrate or illustrate the the rules underlying the functional expression or structure.
4. It is a task-based approach in which the learners actively participate in the teaching learning process. In this approach, the students are made to engage in such communicative activities as information sharing, negotiating of meaning and interaction. Functional communication activities include such tasks as comparison of sets of pictures or drawings and identifying similarities and differences, working out chain of events, finding missing features in a picture, giving instructions, following directions, solving problems from shared clues, identifying and describing things, shapes and sizes, moments, situations etc.
5. In this approach, selection and grading of language items are done on the basis of learner's needs. The teacher identifies what language items the learners need to know in order to get things done, unlike other approaches which focus on linguistic activities.
6. Communicative competence is considered as the desired goal. Hence, genuine everyday language is emphasised.

7. The role of mother tongue has been minimised as both the teacher and the students use the target language during the entire communicative activities. However, judicious use of mother tongue is accepted.
8. Errors are seen as a natural outcome of the development of communicative skills and hence tolerated. Accuracy is judged depending on the context and fluency in speaking is demanded or encouraged.

CURRICULUM OF ENGLISH IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF MANIPUR

The Curriculum of English of class X prescribed by the Board of Secondary Education Manipur comprises of three text books: (i) *English Literature Reader*, (ii) *English Course Book* and (iii) *Grammar & Composition of Contemporary English* to cater to the learner's interest and his/her communicative needs. The Board of Secondary Education, Manipur has prepared, structured and written the two text-books under the guidelines of National Curriculum Framework 2005.

(i) *English Literature Reader*

The *English Literature Reader* focuses on the development of the ability to understand the underlying input and appreciate the literary pieces. The two sections deal with a variety of themes, styles and modes of narration representative of British, American and Indian character. Each piece carries a glossary of difficult words/phrases and the exercises followed are designed to enhance comprehension and also develop the analytical and creative abilities of the learners. The exercises call for not only individual work but also for pair work and group discussion through which the interactive skills can be developed. The text book is divided into two sections, namely Prose section and Poetry section. Both the Prose section and Poetry section contain seven lessons each.

(A). Prose section: Each prose lesson contains the following:

1. Introduction
2. Reading of the story
3. About the Author
4. Word Notes

5. Comprehension
6. Think and Write
7. Discuss
8. Vocabulary
9. Writing Practice
10. Listening Practice

(B). Poetry Section : In general, the lesson under this section contains the following:

1. Introduction
2. Reading of the poem
3. Word Notes
4. About the poet
5. About the poem
6. Comprehension
7. Appreciation*
8. Discuss*
9. Think and Write*
10. Writing*

*- Out of the seven lessons, five lessons contain the appreciation and Discussion exercises while two lessons do not have it. Think and Write exercise is present in six lessons and only one lesson do not have it. And Writing exercise can be seen in only one lesson.

(ii) English Course Book :

The *English Course Book* has been designed to develop the skills of writing and also to make them aware of the rules of grammar. To enhance the writing skills, focus is laid on letter writing, essay writing, note-making etc. To develop interest in the language, the foundations of grammar needed for higher academic purposes are also dealt with. The *English Course Book* is divided into five units. Three units contain three sub-sections each and two units contain two sub-sections each. The reading input has been designed to develop a thinking process leading to make use of ideas in real life situations. The text has various themes such as Conservation of Our Environment (Unit I- Environment), Sports (Unit II- Games and Sports), Exploration (Unit III- Adventures), Renowned Personalities (Unit IV- Personalities) and Growing Industry (Unit V- Tourism).

(iii) Grammar & Composition of Contemporary English:

The book is divided into two sections- Grammar section and Composition section. The grammar section contains lessons on Sentence Formation, Active-Passive, Finite- Non-Finite, Degree of Comparison, Articles, Preposition, Determiners etc. And the Composition section makes the students familiar with Letter Writing, Notice Writing, Note-Making and Essay writing etc.

Problems and Ways to incorporate Communicative Language Teaching:

The curriculum framed by the Board of Secondary Education gives emphasis on all the four language skills- Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. The curriculum tries to learn language through literature. However, the problem seems to lie in the classroom activities. In Manipur Secondary Schools context, the overall settings seem to focus on passing the exam, thus leading to a teaching setting which is particularly exam-centric. The Communicative Approach is hardly applied in practice. Both the teacher and the students are engaged in the comprehension of the language in the form of reading and writing. The teacher usually writes the answer on the blackboard and the students copy it down. Classes are engaged in Question- Answer exercises, Fill in the Blanks exercises and Choosing the Correct Options kind of exercises only. Communicative interaction is hardly seen in the classroom. Activities involving discussion and dialogue are usually skipped due to time constraints. In a practical view, it is not possible to follow all exercises mentioned at the end of the lesson (Think and Write, Discuss, Vocabulary etc). In the case of teaching of English as a Foreign Language, the teacher has some freedom in selecting the literary text in relation to the needs and expectations of the learners. In Manipur, English is taught as a Second language and not as a foreign language. Teachers have to focus on the curriculum framed by the Board and he/she has no authority in choosing a literary text other than the lessons prescribed in the syllabus. However, the teacher can select the appropriate language teaching method, teaching techniques and classroom activities. Here, the role of the English teacher as a facilitator in adopting Communicative Approach in the classroom is highly emphasised. He/she should act as a

classroom manager and must aim to coordinate the activities given at the end of each lesson so that they form a coherent progression, leading towards greater communicative ability. The teacher should create a situation in the class where the students can engage in pairs or group and turn it into a communicative interaction.

(i) **English Literature Reader**

The *English Literature Reader* has chapters with specific themes and concepts which will enable the teacher to make the classroom a communicative one. The teacher should contrive situations for each section prescribed in the curriculum where the students can engage in the activities in order to improve their communicative competence.

Prose Section

1. Short Stories:

The themes and settings present in the short stories captivate the imagination of the students and sometimes it leads to open-ended questions. The open-ended questions enable students to predict outcomes, make comparisons and contrasts, and draw conclusions. The teacher should make use of this open-ended discussion and make the class engaged in analysing the main idea and supporting details, including who, what, when, where, and how. For example, in the prose section, the sixth chapter "The Diamond Necklace" written by Guy-de-Maupassant in the *English Literature Reader* contains comprehension part where there is a Question-Answer exercise. Instead of writing the answer on the blackboard, the teacher can make the students engage in a communicative setting by pairing up or dividing the students into groups. One group can play the role of asking the questions while another group can answer the questions. In this way, the teacher will be able to create a communicative environment for the students so that they develop their linguistic and communicative competence. The same chapter contains a 'Discuss' section after the text. This section requires the class to engage in debate on the topic 'In Life we should be content with what our life provides us. If we yearn for what is beyond us we will fall on bad days'. Since

Communicative Approach focuses on authentic settings and materials, the teacher can utilise this topic to help the students in expressing their views regarding their lives. The teacher can divide the class into two groups- one group supporting the statement and the other group opposing the statement. This will create an opportunity for the students to enhance their communicative skills by engaging themselves in the debate. It will also facilitate vocabulary enrichment.

2. Drama:

While teaching drama, the teacher can also make the class into a communicative one. Since drama is re-enactment of incidents and situations, students get the opportunity to expose to more meaningful and realistic situations. The students can engage in role-play of the characters and engage in the dialogues. They may be asked to enact a particular scene in the class so that the teacher can assess if the desired aim of teaching English to communicate is achieved or not. With the help of such communicative activities, the teacher also gets the opportunity to correct mistakes and errors while speaking. At the same time, the pronunciation of the students can also be corrected. This will help the students improve their competence level with regard to their receptive and productive skills.

3. Poetry section:

Poetry makes students familiar with rhythm, rhyme, figures of speech like simile, metaphor, irony, personification, imagery etc. As a facilitator, the teacher may ask the students to recite the poem in the classroom and encourage them to read with proper stress and intonation. Such kind of activities will help the students in enhancing their communicative skills in the target language.

(iv) **English Course Book :**

The *English Course book* prescribed by the Board contains varieties of subject matters with authentic settings and materials from the history and culture of Manipur. The chapters like 'A trip to Dzuko Valley', 'Sagol Kangjei', 'Tourism in Manipur'

make the students connect more easily with the subject matter since the students have some prior knowledge about these topics. As such, the use of well-known learning materials will provide the proper and authentic situations inside the classroom and the teacher, in turn, will be able to make the students learn English in an easier way. With the help of such lessons, the teacher can also make the students engage in communicative activities like giving lectures on specific topics, organising oral presentation of pictures etc. This will enable the students learn the basic skills of language naturally. In this way, the learners can improve their communicative and cultural competence.

(v) Grammar & Composition of Contemporary English

The grammar class can also be made an interesting one if the English teacher is well acquainted with the methods of teaching grammar like the inductive and the deductive method. While teaching grammar, instead of asking the students to memorise the rules of grammar, the teacher may ask the students to perform the activities and ask them to respond in the appropriate manner. The grammar book contains chapters on essay writing, note making, letter writing and notice writing. In order to teach composition of such types, the teacher can create a situation inside the classroom, where instead of making the students write the essay, letter, note or notice on a particular topic, students are asked to present the topics in the form of oral presentations. For example, the students can do oral presentation on the topics 'Diwali', "Christmas", "Independence Day" etc. The teacher can decide whether the whole class need to present on a single topic or different topics for each students. Creating the situation and deciding ways to engage the students depend on the teacher's knowledge and understanding of the need of the learners.

CONCLUSION

Literature plays an important role in teaching the four basic language skills - Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking. When the English teacher uses literature as a tool to teach English, these skills should never be taught in isolation but in an

integrated way. The teacher should utilize the literature lessons prescribed by the BOSEM not only for developing the writing skills but also for enhancing the oral skills of the students. While teaching English through literature, some group activities such as general class discussion, panel discussions, small-group work and debates, can be used in the classroom. Such group activities may develop and enhance the communicative competence of the students. The teacher, as a facilitator, should provide the required authentic situations inside the classroom and it rests on the English teachers to use the communicative approach in the schools of Manipur to enable the students develop proficiency in spoken English.

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