



IMPARTING LANGUAGE AND LIFE SKILLS TO UNDERGRADUATES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSES: AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

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Language learning is interwoven with a wide array of skills and consequently innumerable benefits too. Command over language makes one articulate with self-confidence. It is possible to link language learning to imparting life skills by using quotes and excerpts from various genres with the objective of enabling the learner to develop his/her social, emotional and cognitive skills such as the ability to communicate effectively, improve interpersonal relations, develop positive attitude, be empathetic and think logically and creatively.

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Life skills are defined by World Health Organisation (WHO) as “the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.” Exposure to these skills brings about a behavioural change in the learners and addresses a balance of knowledge, attitude and skills, thus meeting the ultimate aim of education which is an overall development of one’s personality. This paper focuses on the innovative use of quotes, excerpts and activities by the language teacher in a class room to enhance language skills as well as life skills among the learners. Keeping all the above mentioned criteria in view, Andhra University College of Engineering has designed a customized text (*Life Through Language*) adopted by its 10 affiliated colleges, with a focus on enhancing the English language competency.

Keywords: *Language Learning, Effective Communication, Life Skills.*



INTRODUCTION

It is quite interesting to note that India, a multilingual nation, is emerging as one of the largest English-speaking countries in the world. English is increasingly being perceived as a must-know language and has now become a ladder for upward social mobility and a window to the world. In India English is seen not only to be the key to economic prosperity, but for the social value as well. Parents, especially, those belonging to the upper and middle classes, expect their children to get the best type of education which they think is possible only through English medium because it is a global language. On the other hand, people from the lower classes emulate the model-setting behaviour of the upper and middle classes. This increasing demand for English has resulted in the mushrooming growth of English-medium educational institutions schools all over India.

Timothy J. Scrase says in his paper *The Hegemony of English in India* "English is not only important in getting a better job, it is everywhere in social interaction. If you can't speak it, then you are nobody" (69). This view makes it clear that English occupies a place of prestige in the world. People belonging not only to a different language group but also to the same speech community make use of English in their interpersonal communication. Scrase states that "English is an international language. You feel humiliated if you can't speak English. People think you are dumb" (69). This view expressed above makes it clear that English language enjoys a respectable position in the Indian context.

ACQUISITION OF LANGUAGE AND LIFE SKILLS

The Russian Philosopher Vygotsky insisted in his book *Mind in Society* the view that learning is a social and constructivist activity and that language is a tool for thinking. He pointed out that social interaction is a major phenomenon in developing language ability. Thought and language are separate at the initial stage but both become dependent during the acts of communication. Meaning is created through interaction. From this view of Vygotsky it can be inferred that abstract thinking is possible through language.

Noam Chomsky says in his book *Language and Thought* that the language of the child grows in the mind as the visual system especially for binocular vision. "Language acquisition is something that happens to a child placed in a certain environment, not something that child does" (29). Lord Herbert says that a number of principles and notions implanted in the mind brings objects from within as a direct gift of natural perception and natural instinct. Vygotskian theory of inner speech states that when children discover that it is helpful to speak aloud about what they are doing they begin to do that. "Speech for oneself becomes internalized and continues to operate as the genesis of thought to become verbal thinking" (Foley 62-75). It is suggested that when an individual faces a difficult task, he externalizes the inner order to regulate himself. It shows that the self-regulated individual has access to object and accept the regulations when he faces the difficulties. Children initiate the process of self-regulation with support from more experienced members of culture.

The first stage is primary inter-subjectivity/mental representation of self and the other (Trevarthen 183). The second stage is named secondary inter-subjectivity. It is an active regulator of all experience "adapted to create new form of communication that leads not only towards understanding language but also to developments in the infant's ideas of objects. The infant's new reactions to persons is voluntary not reflexive" (Trevarthen 183).

This is also referred as holophrastic stage of language development during which recognition of words in target language begins to appear and utterance of multiple words occur. Child starts to see persons as conscious, effective and interested partners in giving and taking of meanings. It shows a growth of independence from caretaker. Interpersonal communication develops in conflict situation with the emergence of individual acts of conscious intent. "Acquisition of a language is mastered first in collaboration with an adult or a more competent peer solely with the object of communicating" (Foley 67).



EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

English is the language of Business, Marketing and other important areas of life. Accordingly, young Engineers are required to possess an ever-increasing range of skills including effective communication to be a part of the global environment of the new millennium. English is the acknowledged passport to better education and employment opportunities worldwide. In such a scenario the need for proficiency in listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in English has become very important. Never has there been a greater need for writing and speaking good English. A marked emphasis is being placed on the need for competent communication skills in the work place. Many employers complain that a significant number of people whom they recruit for jobs are sadly lacking in these skills. This is true even of many young engineers who have just graduated from some of our top universities. Any public display of poor language skills can give a very bad impression of even the most intelligent person.

The range of employment for Engineers and Technocrats is ever expanding. In this ever growing and competitive situation, students of Engineering are expected to possess multiple skills to communicate accurately in different situations. They are required to think creatively and critically and demonstrate both interpersonal and team skills. Soft skill training is most sought after and recruiters are keen on judging the interactive skills. 'Appropriacy' and 'intelligibility' are essential for effective communication.

THEMES

Life Through Language approaches issues such as adaptability, gender sensitivity, health and ethics by integrating them into the instructional content of the chapters. The chapter shape also been designed with a view to enhance the learner's life skills and core skills.

ORGANIZATION

Vocabulary Activities bring new, interesting words and phrases that can be applied when the learner carries out tasks and activities in each chapter. A good dictionary and thesaurus will help expand vocabulary and aid the learner when solving the exercises.

Grammar Boosters are functional in nature and help the learner in enhancing correctness of expression. The thematically structured exercises will expose the learner to pertinent themes that will stand them in good stead, both in personal and academic life.

Extracts and excerpts in the Reading section will develop the learner's ability to address not only explicit statements but also implied meanings. The issues and concerns discussed in the passages will encourage debates on issues of contemporary relevance and enhance the ability to analyse and sensitize the learner to varied situations.

In the Listening section, a variety of discussions on real-life situations, documentaries and day-to-day conversations are incorporated to sensitize the learners to varied situations.

In the Speaking section, motivating conversations linked thematically to the chapters will develop in the learner an aptitude for holding fluent and confident conversations along with efficient note-taking techniques and memory skills.

Stories, essays, paragraphs, letters, emails, reports and presentations in Writing section will equip the learner to analyse a situation and confidently apply the suitable format to obtain successful results in acquiring English language and life skills.

Life Skills and Core Skills provide a detailed analysis of core skills - communication, team work, problem solving, adaptability, integrity, reliability, self-motivation, self-esteem, commitment, stress management and a sense of humour. The exercises will help the learner observe, analyse, combat and succeed.

LIFE THROUGH LANGUAGE: AN EFFECTIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Life through Language has a systematic structure that builds up communicative ability progressively through the chapters. It will enable the learner to manage confusion; frame questions for themselves and others; develop new ideas; support ideas with evidence; express themselves with poise and clarity; and think critically. Acquisition of skill leads to confidence.

Life through Language approaches the study of issues like adaptability, gender sensitivity, health



and ethics by integrating them thematically with the instructional content of the chapters. The themes have been selected with a view to enhance learners sensitivity towards social issues and offers situations that serve to draw out a host to core and life skills necessary to deal effectively with the challenges of life. The themes explored in *Life Through Language* are People and Places, Personality and Lifestyle, Media and Environment, Entertainment and Work and Business, Technology and Society all these themes are general and related to one's own life. So this book is designed for all kinds of learners.

This study closes by stating that the activity based course material for English integrating the four skills of language use is better than content-based, literature oriented texts. Secondly, an ESP based text that uses authentic material may not be the only way to impart English for Specific Purposes (ESP) for students of science and technology. A general context, where themes are more related to life and living can provide a refreshing change to the students and these might generate enthusiastic discussions in the classroom.

It is further felt that students of Engineering, who as future professionals need to communicate effectively and need to be fluent, spontaneous and effective in the use of language skills. This course shows an intermingling of themes relevant for living with language training in terms of LSRW as they could be an answer to the urgent and incessant demand for grooming students for the needs of the industry.

Thus, if a communicative approach is introduced in the Engineering Colleges, there is bound to be a remarkable improvement of overall communication skills of the students of technical undergraduates. This approach is made possible through a Text like *Life through Language*. The material gives scope for presentations, group talks, role plays, etc. Thus the component of introducing oral skills in the classroom has increased, bringing in the necessary change in a language classroom.

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