The Teaching of Functional English for Enhancing Employability Skills among the Undergraduates in Nagaland, India

Miss Arenkala Kichu
M.A (Linguistics), M.Phil (ELE)
Ph.D Research Scholar (pursuing)
English Language Education Department
The English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), Shillong Campus
Shillong, Meghalaya

English is considered to be the link language and it has spread in almost every part of the world and every sphere of life. English Language learning is believed to play a vital role in equipping learners with knowledge, skills and attitudes required for employability. Students have not only realised the role of English in shaping their careers but also become aware of the fact that they cannot dream of a brighter career by keeping themselves away from English. This current paper is a pilot study about the functional way of teaching English language by using Task-based approach in the classroom which aims to improve communicative competence for employability among the undergraduate students in Nagaland.

Task Based Instruction (TBI) or Task Based Language Learning (TBLL) is considered to be a part or branch of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The main foci of Task Based Instruction are the use of authentic language and asking students to do meaningful tasks using the target language. Now, what is a ‘Task’ here? Many have defined task but, one of the simplest definitions is given by Skehan (1996a). He defined task as an activity in which: meaning is primary; there is some sort of relationship to the real world; task completion has some priority; and the assessment of task performance is in terms of a task outcome. For example, tasks like visiting a doctor, booking a hotel room, booking a flight ticket, practice teaching and many more. Some major scholars are Prabhu, Long, Ellis, Pica, Nunan and many others, who have done research in this area. Prabhu, in his research also commented that his students could learn better with tasks rather than those classroom exercises/ activities which have no direct connection with real-life situations.

Many researchers like Bhanu and Thiyagarajan, in their works commented that in order to prepare students for the best communication practice, and to face the industry needs, it is necessary to involve them through the tasks. They also believe that this approach helps and allows the students to react in real communicative event and involves giving the best output.
They also talked about the importance of tasks in learning new vocabulary, enhancing confidence and help them in meaningful communication. It is believed that tasks also create interest among the students’ observers and eagerly waited for their chance to do the tasks. These are some works which the researchers have done in different parts of India. The main aims and objectives of the present research is to examine whether task based approach used in the classroom enhances employability skills and the research also attempts to talk about the employment status of the alumni of the institutions.

Many scholars from Nagaland like Aier and Changkija commented in their works that, the competency level in Nagaland is much to be desired, even after years of English being the official language and advent of education in the Naga area. However in recent times, the researcher observed that the educational trend is slowly changing with the introduction of different subjects. One of the subjects is Functional English which was introduced at the undergraduate level 2001. Since one of the main aims of the Functional English course is to prepare the students for entering the job markets according to their aptitude and interest, the research interests in knowing whether the aims and objectives of the course are fulfilled. If it is fulfilled, this subject could be one of the answers to the puzzles of low competency level in Nagaland.

The research respondents are the Functional English undergraduate students of Kohima College and Fazl Ali College. The data was collected from two colleges since this subject is taught only in these two colleges. The research respondents are 26 undergraduates and 30 alumni. The research tools are an opinionnaire for the undergraduates and a telephonic interview with some of the alumni of Fazl Ali College. The opinionnaire and the telephonic interview are analysed in the following paragraphs.

When the students were asked about the Functional English course, they opined that they are satisfied with the objectives of the course since it helps them to improve their proficiency in the language. They believe that this course will make them become employable after the graduation. They are also satisfied with the teaching methods used by the teachers to teach this subject. The teachers use tasks like mock interview, booking a hotel room, booking a flight ticket, teaching practice, tourist guide, counselor, T.V anchor, journalist, newspaper editing, radio jokey, disc jokey, language trainer and so on. Through these tasks, the learners are taught
how to use the language effectively and comfortably by focusing more on the components like remedial grammar, phonetics, public speaking, communication skills, presentation skills and writing for specific purposes, especially for journals, newspapers, magazines, radio, report and so on.

The students of one of the colleges are of the opinion that the facilities provided by the department are satisfactory. The facilities like language laboratory, software, internet, microphones and the opportunity to travel and visit different T.V. and radio studios to Guwahati and in Nagaland, make the learners use and learn the language in real life situations. When asked about the methods used by the teachers, the learners are excited when activities are used inside the classroom unlike other subjects. They learn more by enacting different professions and situations, which allows them to use their own language and hence make them confident and ready to enter job markets or well equipped for further studies. However, the learners in both colleges are of the opinion that this subject helps them to be more confident and believe that it would make them employable citizens.

In addition to this, some of the research respondents are the alumni of Fazl Ali College. A majority of the alumni opined that it was this Functional English that polished them and hence, earning a living out of the skills that they have acquired during their undergraduate session. Some of the professions that they are into are counselors, teacher trainers, airhostesses, radio Jokies, news readers in Kohima, newspaper editors, civil servants and some of them are pursuing their higher studies with more confidence in various parts of the country, India.

A majority of the previous Naga researchers had a common concern about the Naga learners as to why the competency level is much to be desired. But the researcher believes that the introduction of this subject would be a major contribution to the system of education in Nagaland. Supplementing this line is the result of the alumni in Fazl Ali College, where a majority of them are employed and a few are pursuing their higher studies with more confidence in the language. The alumni also believe that the method used by the teachers to teach this subject is a major contribution to being equipped with necessary skills which made them the employable citizens of the country. Therefore, Task-based approach might be one of the effective approaches to enhance the employability skills, which ultimately leads the learners to become employable citizens, once the learners graduate from the institutions.
The teachers also believe that this course will definitely help learners towards immediate employment in a number of career avenues in and outside Nagaland. With the growth rate of 5-30 per cent of talent demand in Nagaland, the state needs more citizens to tap the potential of the job market within and outside the state. Even though a state has talent demand, if a person is not well equipped with employability skills, he may not be employable. Therefore, a careful designed and well-planned syllabus is required to make a skillful citizen. To conclude, it is believed that this pilot study will pave the way for a better English teaching and learning in the state in particular and nation as a whole.
References


Selinker.L (1972) *Interlanguage IRAL, 10, 209-231*


Temsunungsang. T (2009) *Aspects of the Prosodic Phonology of Ao: An Inter-Dialectal Study*. *Ph.d diss*, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad