

# Developing Communication Skills in English through Literature

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**Abstract:** Skills can neither be taught, nor learnt, but skills are acquired. Of all languages, English continues to have its domination over other languages, even though it poses no threat to any language. Literature reflects life and it has been aptly defined as the “mirror of literature”. This paper titled “Developing Communicative Skills in English through Literature” begins with an introduction on the importance of English in today’s world of competition and moves with some relevant definitions of literature. It brings out the differences among Approach, Methodology and Technique and list out the approaches to language teaching-learning. The paper throws light on the advantages of the study of literature for communicative purposes and ends with some suggestions for enhancing language skills through literature.

**Keywords:** Language, Communicative competence, Approach & Method, Literature.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Subjects are of knowledge-oriented and skill-oriented. Knowledge-oriented subjects are taught and learnt, but skill-oriented subjects are tried, trained and practised. No one can deny the fact that skills are acquired, not taught or learnt. Enthusiasm is the most propelling force in acquiring mastery over any skill targeted. Learning a language is like learning skills such as swimming, driving and painting. Though language is a tool for communication, it is a powerful tool for communication for any effective communicator.

Mitchell says, “Language development is based on pragmatic communicative needs and that forms of language are used to convey meanings”. (117)

Mastery over skills is acquired by means of constant practice. Scoring high marks is not the indication of one’s language proficiency, because marks are awarded on the basis of what one writes in the exam, not on the basis of what one knows. One can score high marks by learning lessons by rote and reproducing them in the exams. Language proficiency cannot be attained just by studying the rules of grammar or some prescribed textbooks, but by constant practice interwoven with zeal and zest.

## 2. IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH TODAY

Of all languages, English enjoys its unique privileges as native language, official language, semi-official language and second language. The world has shrunk mainly due to the astonishing technological developments. The English left us, but not English. A good command over English is indispensable for any ambitious and aspiring candidate to keep abreast of latest developments in science, technology, business, management, medicine and all other disciplines and to have a rosy future. Mahatma Gandhiji, despite his being against the British reign, he was in favor of study of foreign languages, and English in particular. He said, “I don’t want my house to be walled in all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. I would have our young men and women with literary tastes to learn as much of English and other world languages as they like and expect them to give the benefits of their learning to India and to the world”. (Young India-484)

English continues to be the language of domination, status and privilege in India. One of the major problems of India-Unemployment- has left those who lack proficiency in English in the lurch, as English as an international language is widely used for interaction across the globe in terms of business, trade, aviation and other project-based discussions. Thus English has become a stark necessity. In technical institutes also, study of English is given as much importance as given to study of technical subjects. In interviews, primary importance is given one's communicative competence in English. Language labs are established in technical institutes with the purpose of involving learners in language activities online, besides regular classroom teaching. In software companies, an intensive training on communication skills is given to the newly recruited.

### 3. STUDY OF LITERATURE

We have come across leaders blessed with gift of the gab and enter the hearts of people through their communication skills. One of the main reasons can be honestly attributed to the study of literature. Communicative competence is one of the desirable leadership qualities. Bacon says, Reading maketh a full man; writing an exact man". To be a successful communicator, one must be a full man and exact man too. Reading and writing, the productive language skills can be developed well through study of literature.

Ezra Pound says, "Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree".

Alfred Noth Whitehead says, "It is in literature that the concrete outlook of humanity receives its expression".

Literature is not mere description of something; it is the reality, adding value to reality. It enhances the essential competencies that life requires and provides. Literature irrigates the deserts that human life has already become. Literature is the mirror and central part of life. To study literature is to study life. Great works of literature treat innumerable themes that further result in the birth of further themes that resonate with readers across centuries. Literature thus serves as the gateway to a deeper level of thoughts and ideas.

### 4. APPROACH, METHOD AND TECHNIQUE

Proper approach, suitable method and innovative technique play a pivotal role in making teaching-learning effective and meaningful.

Edward Anthony (1963) define approach, method and technique as follows

"An approach is a set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of language teaching and learning. An approach is axiomatic. It describes the nature of the subject matter to be taught".

"Method is an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material, no part of which contradicts, and all of which is based upon, the selected approach. An approach is axiomatic, a method is procedural".

"Within one approach, there can be many methods, a technique is implemental that which actually takes place in a class room. It is a particular trick, stratagem or contrivance used to accomplish an immediate objective. Technique must be consistent with a method, and therefore in harmony with an approach as well". (63-67)

In language teaching and learning, nothing is considered the best. Approaches, methods and techniques are implemented and experimented in order to find out the effectiveness of the result, the pros and cons and if necessary, to make modifications and ultimately to move towards the best by further understanding level of learners during the process of teaching-learning.

### 5. COMMUNICATION SKILLS THROUGH LITERATURE

Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing are not communication skills, but language learning skills. Communicative competence is attained through mastery of language learning skills. All these four skills are interrelated. Even though there are many approaches to language teaching-learning such as Grammar-Syntax-Organization approach, Lexical approach, Communicative approach, Genre approach, Product approach, Process approach and Task-Based approach, Literature-Based approach has got its own unique advantages over other approaches. In other approaches, the focus is on developing the skills and sub-skills of the target language, but in literature-based approach, learners, besides developing communication skills in English, understand life and human values.

## 6. STUDY OF LITERATURE-ADVANTAGES

Literature-based approach can be used to develop communicative competence of learners of all disciplines. This approach enables learners to develop the following skills.

- Imagination
- Creativity
- Analytical ability
- Gumption
- Ability and agility
- Critical thinking
- Logical reasoning
- Communication skills

Literature enables learners to have a wide and meaningful exposure to the use of language. Language, to whom literature is the cup of tea, is the most powerful tool for communication. John Milton Says, “The man of words is the man of the world”. Expressions without appropriate words turn out to a great obstacle in achieving proficiency in the target language. Literature helps learners in vocabulary acquisition and enrichment of expressions.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Technology has its own unique and tremendous advantages. But as far language teaching-learning is concerned, too much dependence on the use of technology shall not yield the desired output. For example, the frequent use of SMS language even in formal contexts may result in learners losing knowledge over correct spellings. Technology was not much available during the days of excellent communicators such as Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Mrs Indira Gandhi. Most of the leaders, it is a well-known fact, had and have been blessed with communication skills due to their perennial interest in literature. Thus study of literature enables learners to develop their communicative competence.

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