

## Self-Motivation as a Predictor of Communication Competence

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### Abstract

The ability to talk effectively and appropriately in classrooms and also outside the class has become an indispensable requirement today. However, for many reasons, students hesitate to talk or speak even when given sufficient opportunities. The only way students can enhance their communicative competence is through consistent practice and dedication. Teachers, in this regard, should give umpteen opportunities to students to exchange their views, opinions, feelings, and ideas on different topics in the class. Here, the teacher's role is cardinal. The teacher should motivate the students positively and encourage them to seize as many opportunities as possible to speak in the class. In this paper, it is argued that motivation plays a key role in the teaching-learning process and teachers should create an innovative climate where students are encouraged to come forward to talk, reveal their feelings and opinions in an environment which does not threaten their self-concept. If these things are taken cognizance of, then the chances of creating a vibrant communicative class where students use English freely without fear of being admonished or ridiculed will significantly increase. Teachers must create an environment of this kind to promote a communicative environment. In this paper, it is argued that only when an environment bereft of fear and anxiety is created, students will show interest in using English to a tangible degree.

**Keywords:** Motivation, communication competence, motivation, interpersonal skill

### Introduction

The ability to communicate in class and in interviews has become so ineluctable that the goal of English language teachers is to impart these competencies to their students. Sadly, there is no magic wand. It is true that the pressing need of the hour is to speak confidently, courageously, fluently, and persuasively. However, how will our students cultivate a plethora of an almost "impossible list" of skill sets of this nature?

The need of the hour today in our classrooms is to ensure each and every student has the requisite communicative competence, and thus, is able to speak effectively, appropriately, and convincingly. However, are we talking about something that is nearly impossible?

Today, we see students struggling to speak coherently in English. They are unable to speak with consistency even for two minutes at a stretch. We can witness pauses, hesitations, and sudden silence (Spitzberg 2006). Of course, students who come from international schools have one advantage over their classmates who do not come from top English medium schools. They are confident and are fluent in speaking English. Even if they do not have all the facts about a certain topic, their fluency becomes an advantage to them. And they can be even "glib"! On the other hand, students who come from rural or town background, despite being good at technical subjects, hardly participate actively in group discussions or debates even if they have more factual knowledge. One more problem confronting teachers is the extent to which he/she needs to motivate the students to speak in the class. A major problem facing teachers is that students use mother tongue even in an English class. In engineering

colleges, teachers have an onerous responsibility of asking students to use "English only" in the class.

The author of this paper, in his teaching career, has observed the following when it comes to communication skills of students.

### 1. Hesitation

Many students hesitate to speak in English in the class due to fear. It is the fear of being ridiculed, though it is obvious that classmates will never ridicule their helpless friend struggling on the dais! However, students think other students will come to know of their incompetence. They think everybody will laugh at them. In the teaching career of this author, he has not come across classmates laughing at their classmate who is struggling to speak. So, this is just a myth of apprehensive students. In fact, classmates are highly empathetic with their "struggling friend" who is on the stage and struggling to speak. Being shy or apprehensive is common, but students should not be bogged down by these factors perpetually. They should be forthcoming in seizing opportunities to practise as much as possible (Mc Croskey 2007).'

### 2. Lack of Knowledge of the Topic

Another menacing problem that students face is lack of knowledge of the topic. This is one of the most important deficits confronting students. Most students do not read newspapers or watch debates and discussions in English on NDTV, CNN-IBN, and India Today TV channels. When the author of this paper was a degree 1<sup>st</sup> year student, he used to religiously watch debates and discussions in English on leading TV channels. Day after day, week after week, he

would devote a specific time watching English language programmes in NDTV and would observe intellectuals like Dr. Shashi Tharoor, Mr. Kapil Sibal and other leading think tanks discuss debate on current topics. As exposure to the best English increased this author too started speaking in English. So, the rule was observe model speakers and practise and do self-assessment. Rigorous practice of this kind helped the author of this paper to improve his communicative competencies.

### 3. Lack of Reading

Today, students are so hooked onto their mobile phones that they hardly read newspapers and magazines. Newspapers and magazines have lots of interesting information. Relentless reading eventually helps any student to be equipped with knowledge and fluency. Students, sadly, do not use mobile phones to read The Hindu new paper. The author of this paper used to read articles written by Ms. Sevanthi Ninan, Mr. C. Rajamohan in The Hindu newspaper 30 years back. An unrelenting bent of Mind of this sort gave supreme confidence to this author to think and share his ideas with others! The million dollar question is how many students are reading The Hindu newspaper?

### 4. Discussion Platforms

Outside the classroom, students must form small groups to discuss and use English. How many students are forming groups and using English? Today, we hardly see students in groups and discussing. They are all glued to their phones and checking whatsapp messages. Instead, they could take up some topics, and discuss in English. Are they doing it? The answer is "No".

### 5. Developing Vocabulary

How many students have a passion for vocabulary? The author of this paper can vouchsafe that very few students have a passion for vocabulary. Students need to collect at least 5 interesting words every day and write them in a notebook and revise every day till the words become part of their knowledge templates automatically. The observation of the author is that students do not read newspapers or novels voraciously. Hence, their vocabulary acquisition is almost zero.

### 6. Obsession with Technical Subjects

Students tend to think that if they are good at technical subjects, everything will be all right. They think English is secondary and not so important. They do not understand that competition is increasing at breakneck speed these days, and for many jobs, it is the command in English that is the deciding factor.

### 7. Lack of Awareness of Importance of Communication Skills

Many students feel that they do not need to focus much on communication skills or interpersonal skills. Communication skills are taken for granted. It is assumed that the ability to speak fluently will automatically come to them. They assume that they do not need to really strive towards communicating competently. Competence in speaking or writing is assumed to be an automatic process. Many students tend to overestimate their communication skills. Teachers should gently sensitise them in this aspect.

### 8. Consistency in Practice

Competence in speaking can be acquired only when students practice every day. One cannot become competent by practising in bouts. Regular, consistent practice is what makes

students competent. Many students practise speaking in English in the English language classes only. What about speaking in English non-English classes? Many students switch over to their mother tongue in non-English classes. They do understand the fact that to be competent in English, one must speak in English most of the time. Take any skilled person. They practice for hours and days and months to become perfect. This is another glaring feature among students.

### 9. Needs of the Job Market

Many students do not realize the significance of interpersonal skills during campus placements. In group discussions and interviews during campus placements, a humongous amount of competence in English is required. Competition is tough. In such a context, the skills that would be most useful are communication skills. Ironically, many students think that they can persuade the interviewers easily with their English. Skills should be practiced consistently to achieve expertness.

### 10. Competence

Students can enhance their competence only when develop the requisite skills like empathy, attentiveness, other-orientation, selflessness, self-efficacy (Morreale *et al.* 2007) <sup>[1]</sup>. Further, they must be taught the importance of paying attention to conversations. Conversational involvement, then, is a critical factor that defines one's competence (Emily Mc Worthy, 2016) <sup>[5]</sup> they need to believe that through motivation, knowledge, and practise, they can enhance their communication competence (Spitzberg and Cupach, 2011) <sup>[4]</sup>.

### Conclusions

Students must realize that however good they are at technical skills, English language skills are indispensable. Only through consistent practice, they can enhance their communication skills. There is no magic wand. They must motivate themselves to interact with one another. Solely depending on the teacher will help them up to an extent only. They must explore opportunities where they can participate in debates, group discussions, and extensive public speaking sessions. They should become autonomous learners. In this direction, teachers must motivate students and encourage them to make mistakes in the classroom. Students should be informed that making mistakes while learning English is part of the learning process. It is the duty of the language teacher to inculcate this courage in the minds of the students. The goal of language learning is to speak competently and with ethical concern for others. Being temperamental or discourteous can be disastrous in human relations. Praising, paying compliments go a long way in enhancing human relationships, and in this regard, students should develop these skills to enhance their communication competence. (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2004) <sup>[4]</sup>.

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