

Original Article

LANGUAGE-BASED ACTIVITIES IN THE COMMUNICATIVE ENGLISH CLASSROOM IN THE SELECTED COLLEGES OF MANIPUR

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ABSTRACT

Studies have indicated that there is a mismatch between the skills and knowledge required in the workplace and the skills and knowledge acquired by the graduates. NEP 2020 emphasises the development of skills required for the global workforce, and the skill of effective communication in English is one of the key skills. According to Widdowson (1988), language skills are developed in three ways in reference to medium (aural and visual), mode (receptive and productive) and manner. The young graduates of Manipur have not developed the communication skills in English, which is one of the key parameters of a skilled worker. The reasons for such a situation are the teaching of literature and the related concepts in place of actual language usage, the emphasis on grammar, reading and writing skills, while listening and speaking skills are neglected. Other reasons also include large classroom size, limited time for language class and lack of adequate infrastructure. Recently, under NEP 2020, Manipur University introduced Four Year Undergraduate Course in which AECC (Ability Enhancement Compulsory Course) in Communicative English was introduced as a compulsory course. In this course, the four language skills (LSRW) are included. There is a shift from a text-based syllabus to an activity-based form of language learning. So, the need for a study arises to assess how language-based activities are carried out in the colleges and what challenges the teachers and the students are encountering. The objectives of the paper are to find out the languagebased activities carried out in the AECC- Communicative English classroom, how well the syllabus aligns with the needs of the students, how frequently the four language skills are taught, the outcomes of the course and the challenges in the teaching and learning of the communication skills. The study seeks to come up with a viable method of teaching English communication skills at the advanced level, taking into account the limitations and challenges in the language classroom.

Keywords: Language-Based Activities, Course Outcomes, Challenges and Limitations, Language Classroom, Role Play, Peer and Group Discussion

INTRODUCTION

Effective communication skills have been a core ingredient in every arena. Without them, it is likely that there is a missing piece in the field. Every individual in any field must possess strong communication skills to ensure the smooth operation of processes. Since English is already the language which is commonly known and used by many, its instrumentation as a medium of communication in any field is a long-standing practice. In the contemporary context, there is a growing interest among young graduates in developing communicative competence in English. With good English communicative competence, they can secure

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positions as skilled workers in the workforce. According to Littlewood (1981), the skills that need to be taken into consideration for developing communicative competence are:

- 1) The learner must achieve that level of competence where he can manipulate the system of the language to use it spontaneously and flexibly for the expression of his intended message.
- 2) The learner must be able to distinguish the communicative functions from the linguistic system.
- 3) The learner must be able to use his communicative skills and develop strategies to communicate effectively in concrete situations.
- 4) The learner must be able to communicate according to the different social circumstances by using generally acceptable forms and avoiding offensive forms.

Nevertheless, studies have indicated that the undergraduate students of Manipur have not acquired the required communicative competence in English. One of the reasons for such a situation is the overemphasis on reading and writing skills in their language education, while the other two skills (listening and speaking) are neglected. Another reason is the emphasis on teaching English literature rather than equipping students with basic communication skills. Other reasons include large classroom sizes, limited time allocated for language classes, and inadequate infrastructure. To address such gaps, it is necessary to explore and investigate the current practice of English language education in colleges in Manipur and assess how language-based activities are implemented in these institutions.

NEP 2020 emphasises the development of skills required for the global workforce, and the skill of effective communication in English is one of the key skills. Recently, under the National Education Policy 2020, Manipur University introduced a four-year undergraduate course, which includes an AECC (Ability Enhancement Compulsory Course) in Communicative English. The course in which the four language skills (LSRW) are equally emphasised aims to educate learners with English language knowledge and to shape them as proficient users of the language. With the introduction of the course, a shift occurs in language learning - from a text-based syllabus to an activity-based approach.

The shift, therefore, necessitates presenting a clear picture of the current state of language learning and the challenges encountered by teachers and students, as well as assessing how languagebased activities are carried out in colleges under Manipur University. The study aims to identify the language-based activities implemented in the AECC- Communicative English classroom. The study examines the extent to which the syllabus aligns with the needs of the students, the frequency with which the four language skills are taught, the outcomes and the challenges in the teaching and learning of the course. The study also aims to develop a viable method of teaching English communication skills at the advanced level, taking into account the limitations and challenges in the language classroom.

LITERATURE REVIEW

[Dobie \(1998\)](#), in his case study, "Encouraging Meaningful Interaction in the Classroom", carried out at Eurocentres Victoria, an English language school in London, found that the students had unusual difficulties in terms of a general lack of willingness to participate fully in free speaking activities, such as ice breakers and activities. The researcher attempted to build up the students' linguistic and communicative abilities through a step-by-step approach, where, as the course progresses, there is less teacher control and more and more learner independence.

[Zimba and Tibategeza \(2021\)](#) in "Communicative Approach Strategies for English Language Teaching" conduct a case study in four government secondary schools in Malawi to find out the communicative approach strategies adopted to teach English and the challenges faced by the teachers and students in using the strategies. It has been found that the most frequently used communicative approach strategies are pairing, debates, group discussions, filling in gaps and dramatisation. The challenges are inadequate class time, lack in teaching and learning resources and crowded classrooms.

Yadav in her article, "Language in School Education with respect to NEP 2020" (2023) examines NEP 2020's impact on language teaching and potential effects on educational practices. A discussion on the advantages of a multilingual approach, which includes fostering cognitive talents, linguistic competency and cultural preservation, is also made. The lack of teacher preparation and resource availability in the wake of NEP 2020 is highlighted.

[Sengamalam and Rosamma \(2024\)](#) highlight the limited English-speaking abilities among the majority of Indian students, which results in difficulty in achieving the communicative skills for employability. The study is conducted on the undergraduate students studying in the government colleges of Tamil Nadu to find out the impact of the use of ABAs (Activity-Based Approaches) in improving their communicative and speaking skills. ABAs are inductive strategies for language learners in which teachers act more like mentors and the learners are encouraged to gain autonomy.

The result is found to be positive.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is dedicated to identifying the gaps and challenges in the language education of AECC. It will also bring to light the experiences of both teachers and students in the classroom, as well as the current language-based activities used, and hence, the findings will be instrumental in developing a viable approach to language teaching to ensure that graduates are equipped with remarkable English language skills in order to secure suitable positions in the workforce.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To find out how the language-based activities are conducted in the language classroom at the undergraduate level.
- To analyse the outcomes of the course and compare students' and teachers' responses.
- To analyse the challenges encountered by the faculty members in developing the communicative skills of the students.

METHODOLOGY

The research is exploratory in nature. The data for this research were collected from the selected colleges in Imphal West and Imphal East districts, affiliated with Manipur University. Manipur College and Kamakhya Pemton College constitute the colleges of Imphal West district, while Standard College and Shree Shree Gourgobind Girls' College represent the colleges of Imphal East district, respectively. For the purpose of anonymity, these colleges are referred to as College 1,

College 2, College 3, and College 4, corresponding to Manipur College, Shree Shree Gourgobind Girls' College, Kamakhya Pemton College, and Standard College, respectively. The research tools include questionnaires for undergraduate students and structured interviews for faculty members who teach English Communication Skills in the respective colleges.

PARTICIPATION AND SAMPLING

College teachers from the selected colleges who teach Communicative English at AECC, along with their students from the first, third and fifth semesters, were the participants. The stratified random sampling method was instrumental in achieving a diverse participant demographic, encompassing gender, age, semester, institutional settings, and teaching experience.

Limitations of the Study

The study could not cover all colleges in Imphal East and West; however, a total of four colleges, two from each district, were selected for the study. Since AECC is a compulsory course at the undergraduate level, a large number of students enrol in it, and the researchers cannot cover all the students who offer the same.

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

QUESTIONNAIRES

Quantitative data, in terms of students' perceptions of the syllabus, content, teaching approaches, challenges faced, course outcomes, and suggestions for improvement, were collected through structured questionnaires distributed among students.

INTERVIEWS

Qualitative insights into the implementation of activity-based methods or other teaching strategies were gained through structured interviews with teachers, who discussed the methods' effectiveness, challenges, and strategies for overcoming barriers.

PROCEDURE

A sequential explanatory design was employed in the study, where quantitative data were initially collected through questionnaires, followed by qualitative data obtained through interviews and observations to validate and expand on the quantitative findings.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1

Table 1 Frequency of Language Skills Taught in the AECC (English Communication) Classroom							
Sl No.	Language Skills	College 1 Mean Score (MC)	College 2 Mean Score (GG)	College 3 Mean Score (KP)	College 4 Mean Score (SC)	Average Mean Score	SD

1	Listening	2.93	2.73	4.42	2.53	3.15	0.86
2	Speaking	2	4.21	3.8	3.21	3.3	0.961
3	Reading	4.06	4.26	4	4.17	4.13	0.115
4	Writing	4.43	4.3	4.1	4.36	4.29	0.141

The overall mean scores shown in Table 1 indicate that the frequency of teaching listening and speaking skills is moderate as the mean score is between 3 to 3.5 while the frequency of teaching reading and writing skills is high, as the mean score is above 4. The low SD in reading and writing skills shows high consistency and the high SD in listening and speaking shows diverse engagement levels.

Table 2

Table 2 Frequency of Language Activities Carried Out in the AECC (English Communication) Classroom							
Sl. No	Statement	College 1 Mean Score	College 2 Mean Score	College 3 Mean Score	College 4 Mean Score	Average Mean Score	SD
1	Teacher(s) explains the concept and makes us note down the points.	4.62	4.7	4.51	4.29	4.50	0.177
2	Teacher(s) delivers lectures as well as interact with us.	4.56	4.79	4.33	4.44	4.51	1.709
3	Teacher(s) makes us do language exercises.	3.5	3.74	3.8	3.12	3.47	0.3085
4	We form pairs and practice conversation in English.	2.37	3.35	3.33	2.76	2.95	0.475
5	Teacher(s) asks us questions and correct our mistakes through our mistakes.	4.37	4.26	4.28	3.97	4.17	0.173
6	Teacher(s) introduces debates in our classroom.	2.5	2.69	2.95	2.78	2.73	0.187
7	There are group discussions in the classroom.	2.69	3.47	3.38	3.34	3.28	0.357
8	The activity of role play is carried out in the classroom.	2.31	2.86	3.17	2.36	2.67	0.412
9	Teacher(s) provides authentic study materials to improve our communication skills.	2.62	2.86	3.47	1.82	2.69	0.682
10	Teacher(s) explains what is close reading and comprehension.	4.31	4.52	4.14	3.76	4.09	0.321
11	Teacher(s) provides materials and exercises for close reading and comprehension.	3.62	4.08	3.48	3.85	3.8	0.263
12	Teacher(s) explains how to summarise, paraphrase and analyse a reading material.	4.06	4.52	4.33	3.59	4.02	0.403
13	Teacher(s) provides materials and exercises for summarizing, paraphrasing and analysing a text.	3.5	3.91	4.19	3.46	3.72	0.348
14	Teacher(s) explains what are the different types of letters writing.	4.69	4.04	4.09	3.85	4.07	0.363
15	Teacher(s) provides exercises where we practice writing different types of letters.	2.56	3.04	2.8	2.58	2.74	0.224

The above Table 2 demonstrates that the average mean score is highest in terms of the teachers' explaining the concept and making the students take down notes (4.5) and delivering lectures as well as interacting with them (4.51), indicating a high frequency of these teaching activities. The lowest mean score is witnessed in forming pairs and practice conversation in English (2.95), introduction of debate in the classroom (2.73), role-play activity (2.67) and providing authentic study materials for improving communication skills (2.69) and practice in letter writing (2.74). This low mean score shows a low frequency of the mentioned language activities. The high SD in statement 1 indicates diverse responses, while the low SD in the other statements implies high to moderate consistency in the responses.

Table 3

Table 3 Students' Response to the Outcomes of their Course in AECC (English Communication)							
Sl. No.	Statement	College 1 Mean Score	College 2 Mean Score	College 3 Mean Score	College 4 Mean Score	Average Mean Score	SD
1	The English Communication course enhances communication in all the four skills.	3.93	4.39	4.04	3.56	3.94	0.341
2	I can interact in English fluently in my day-to-day activities.	3.12	3.39	1.9	2.82	2.8	0.648
3	I can comprehend and understand any text written in English.	2.6	3.3	2	3.95	2.96	0.845
4	I have enough confidence while conversing in English.	4.15	4.08	3.76	3.41	3.63	0.338
5	I develop critical thinking skills and soft skills from the course.	3.44	4.08	3.71	3.43	3.64	0.305
6	My vocabulary in English has improved.	3.62	4.26	2.66	2.82	3.2	0.743
7	I will be able to comprehend the different modes of communication and overcome the barriers of communication.	3.37	3.82	3.8	3.27	3.52	0.285
8	I have acquired the skill and confidence to perform effectively in group discussion and interviews.	2.68	1.78	2.61	2.62	2.42	0.429
9	I have developed the ability to analyse and interpret a text effectively and write summary and even paraphrase.	3.5	4.08	3.71	3.07	3.5	0.421
10	I have developed the ability to write different types of letters and the basic skills for composing email.	3.06	2.5	2.9	2.24	2.81	0.475

In the above table, the highest mean score is found in students' enhancement of communication in all the four skills (3.94) after the completion of the AECC course followed by gaining enough confidence while conversing in English (3.63) and developing critical thinking skills and soft skills from the course (3.640). The lowest mean score, indicating a lack of improvement, is found in the students' acquisition of the skills and confidence to perform effectively in group discussion and interviews (2.42) and in the use of English in their day-to-day conversations (2.8). The high SD in statement no. 3 and 6 indicate diverse responses, while the remaining statements with low SD show high consistency in the students' experiences.

Table 4

Table 4 Students' Rating of Their Development in the Four Skills (LSRW) After the Course. (1 Being the Lowest and 5 Being the Highest)							
Sl. No.	Language Skills	College 1 Mean Score	College 2 Mean Score	College 3 Mean Score	College 4 Mean Score	Average Mean Score	SD
1	Listening	2.75	1.97	1.29	2.41	2.1	0.63
2	Speaking	3.125	3.17	2.52	1.68	2.62	0.695
3	Reading	3.75	4.48	3.62	3.53	3.8	0.432
4	Writing	3.62	4.43	4.19	3.78	4	0.371

As illustrated in the above table, the average mean score is highest in writing (4) and reading (3.8) skills, while it is lowest in listening (2.1) and speaking (2.62). The SD shows moderate to high consistency, indicating that the responses are consistent.

Table 5

Table 5 Challenges You Face While Learning Communicative English and Also Using English as a Means of Communication							
Sl. No.	Statement	College1 Mean Score	College2 Mean Score	College3 Mean Score	College4 Mean Score	Average Mean Score	SD
1	The syllabus does not cater to my needs.	2.69	3.04	2.42	2.56	2.62	0.265
2	There are not enough authentic learning materials.	2.62	2.82	3	2.68	2.78	0.168
3	I have fear of making mistakes.	3.93	3.04	3.04	2.92	3.23	0.468
4	I feel shy while expressing myself in English.	3.88	3.52	3.8	3.07	3.56	0.205
5	I lack grammatical knowledge for meaningful communication.	3.06	2.91	2.9	3.02	2.98	0.079
6	I don't have enough vocabulary knowledge to have meaningful communication.	2.81	2.73	2.8	2.9	2.83	0.069
7	More time is allotted to lecture in the language classroom.	3.62	3.44	3.8	3.22	3.52	0.428
8	The time allotted for language activities is not enough.	3.06	2.95	2.8	4.12	3.23	0.601
9	The allotted duration for Communicative English is not enough.	2.81	2.47	3.52	3.7	3.125	0.581
10	The large number of students in the classroom causes problems in the language exercises and activities.	3.75	4.21	2.61	3.92	3.62	0.701
11	The students in the classroom are inactive and not participatory in the language exercises.	3.37	2.39	2.76	2.43	2.64	0.453
12	There is lack of motivation from the teachers concerned.	2	2.17	2.28	2.48	2.16	0.201
14	There is no adequate infrastructure for learning English language.	2.19	2.56	2.85	2.48	2.53	0.271
15	I keep switching back to my mother tongue when it gets difficult to express in English.	3.59	4.1	3.8	3.14	3.66	0.443

The above table shows that the average mean score is high in the students feeling shy while expressing themselves in English (3.56), more allotment of time in lecture in the language classroom (3.52), large language classroom size (3.62) and switching back to mother tongue (3.66) while the least means score is found in the lack of motivation from the teachers concerned (2.16). High SD is found in statement 10 which indicates diverse response while the low SD in the other statements manifests high consistency in the level of challenges faced by the students.

Table 6

Table 6 Comparison of Teachers' Response and Students' Response on the Frequency of Language Skills Taught in the AECC (Communicative English) Classroom			
Sl. No.	Language Skills	Teachers' Response Mean	Students' Response Mean
1	Listening	4.83	3.15
2	Speaking	3.91	3.3
3	Reading	3.75	4.13

4	Writing	4	4.29
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The above table shows that there is a gap between the teachers' response and students' response in the frequency of teaching listening and speaking skills while the responses on reading and writing is similar.

Table 7

Table 7 Comparison Between the Teachers' Responses and Students' Responses on the Expected Outcomes After the Completion of the Course in AECC (English Communication)				
Sl. No.	Statement	Teachers' Response Mean	Students' Response Mean	
1	The English Communication course enhances communication in all the four skills.	4.08	3.94	
2	The students will be able to interact in English fluently in their day-to-day activities.	3.58	2.82	
3	The students will be able to comprehend and understand any text written in English.	4	2.96	
4	The students will gain enough confidence while conversing in English.	4.08	3.63	
5	The students will develop critical thinking skills and soft skills from the course.	4.16	3.64	
6	The students' vocabulary in English will be improved.	4.41	3.2	
7	The students will be able to comprehend the different modes of communication and overcome the barriers of communication.	4.16	3.52	
8	The students will have acquired the skill and confidence to perform effectively in group discussion, interviews.	4	2.42	
9	The students will have developed the ability to analyse and interpret a text effectively and write summary and even paraphrase.	4.03	3.5	
10	The students will have developed the ability to write different types of letters and the basic skills for composing emails.	4.08	2.81	

The above table shows wide gap in the responses of statements 2, 3, 6, 8 and 10 while there is not much gap in the remaining statements.

Table 8

Table 8 Comparison of the Students' Development in the Four Skills after the Course			
Sl. No.	Language skill	Teachers' Response Mean	Students' Response Mean
1	Listening	3.9	2.1
2	Speaking	3.41	2.62
3	Reading	3.5	3.8
4	Writing	3.6	4

The above table shows wide gap in the responses of statement 1 and 2 while there is not much gap in the remaining statements.

Table 9

Table 9 Section C: Challenges in Teaching Communicative English in the Classroom			
Sl. No.	Teachers' Statement	Teachers' Responses Mean	Students' Responses Mean
1	The syllabus does not cater to the students' needs.	2.41	2.62
2	There are not enough authentic learning materials.	3.8	2.78
3	They lack grammatical knowledge for meaningful communication.	3.083	2.98

4	They don't have enough vocabulary knowledge to have meaningful communication.	3.25	2.83
5	More time is dedicated to lecture in the language classroom.	3.25	3.52
6	The time allotted for language activities is not enough.	3.67	3.23
7	The allotted duration for Communicative English is not enough.	3.58	3.12
8	The large number of students in the classroom causes problems in the language exercises and activities.	3.33	3.62
9	The students in the classroom are inactive and not participatory in the language exercises.	2.75	2.64
10	There is no adequate infrastructure for teaching English language.	3.08	2.53
11	The students keep switching back to their mother tongue when it gets difficult to express in English.	3.16	3.66

The above table shows wide gap in the responses of statements 2, 4, 7, 8 and 10 while there is not much gap in the remaining statements.

DISCUSSION

TEACHING AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE LANGUAGE SKILLS

The comparison of the teachers' responses and students' response on the frequency of the language skills taught in the AECC (Communicative Skills) classroom and students' development in the language skills after the completion of the course indicates that there is a gap between the responses of the teachers and the students in listening and speaking skills which has not much gap in case of reading and writing skills. The low mean score of students' development in listening (2.10) and speaking (2.62) calls for the need to reassess the teaching of both skills.

FREQUENCY OF THE LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES IN THE AECC (COMMUNICATIVE ENGLISH)

It has been found that the teachers mostly indulged in explaining the concept and making the students take down notes. Moreover, a high frequency of language activities is witnessed in reading and writing skills, especially in theory, while language exercises are minimally practised in the classroom.

Comparison between the Teachers' Responses and Students' Responses on the Expected Outcomes after the Completion of the course in AECC (Communicative English)

The teachers' claim that the students will be able to interact in English fluently in their day-to-day activities is found to be limited and low in the case of the students' response mean. The same gap is witnessed in the students' acquisition of the skills and confidence to perform effectively in group discussion, interviews and students' ability to write different types of letters and the basic skills for composing Emails. This finding indicates the need to bridge between what teachers expect and how students perform, while having pedagogical implications.

CONCLUSION

The shift from a text-based syllabus to an activity-based form of language learning is challenging for both teachers and students of Manipur. The above discussion clearly encapsulates the language activities carried out in the classroom, the expected outcomes and challenges faced by both teachers and students. The challenges in terms of large classroom size, lack of proper infrastructure and less time duration for AECC (Communicative English) need to be addressed by the concerned authority. However, with the limited infrastructure and the large classroom size which is a common problem across the colleges in India, teachers can still employ certain language activities which can be carried out in such situations. Innovative and creative methods of teaching, where peer, group, and clustered exercises are encouraged, can be employed by language teachers.

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