



REINFORCING COMMUNICATION SKILLS THROUGH LEARNER CENTERED/LEARNER CENTRIC TELEPHONE TASKS/ACTIVITIES: AN EXPERIMENT

S. MEENA RANI^{1*}, J. JAYACHANDRAN², P. RAMANI³

¹Research & Development Centre, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

²Department of English, Anna University College of Engineering, Villupuram, Tamil Nadu, India

³School of Education, Sastra University, Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, India



ABSTRACT

In this globalized era telephone is the most important means of instantaneous communication in the fields such as engineering, science, technology, trade and commerce. For result oriented interaction in the business world it is imperative for the learners to develop effective telephone conversation competencies. Mastery of telephone etiquette enhances the image of not only the individual but also the organization which is represented by the individual. To ensure effective communication good telephone habits and conversation skills have to be developed through intensive training for the undergraduate engineering students. This research paper is an attempt to enhance the learners' telephone conversation proficiency by student centric activities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Modern technology provides faster and efficient ways to communicate with others. Communication undergoes constant change with the emergence of advanced technologies and this necessitates developing diverse set of competencies among the learners. In the globalized era telephone skills have become the core of competencies in every field of activity, engineering, science, technology, trade and commerce for instantaneous communication. Hence developing effective telephone communication competencies is imperative for result oriented interaction in the business world. Though telephone conversation plays a crucial role in the professional life of engineers many of them fail to acquire requisite competencies, as emphasis on the use of telephone

not been given due credence in the English as a second language (ESL) curriculum. Consequently the engineering graduates encounter a variety of problems while speaking over the phone.

Developing English language proficiency competencies does not necessarily mean proficiency in telephone skill. There is a misconception that developing communication skills would automatically result in acquiring telephone communication skill. Interacting over the phone is entirely different experience as there are no visual contacts or visual clues. It is also crucial to follow a proper technique when having telephone conversations, as it is an essential tool to achieve our goals in a phone call, either as its senders or its recipients[1]. Effectiveness of the communication on the phone lies exclusively on the tone, pitch,

volume, modulation of the voice and the spoken words. A combination of good verbal skills and polite and friendly tone are the keys of effective telephone conversation. Learners have to develop telephone skills for employer contacts, interviews and other professional activities. Telephone conversation is an active, productive and creative skill. The conversation should manifest itself in clarity of thoughts expressions, brevity and precision. To ensure effective communication good telephone habits and conversation skills have to be developed through intensive training for the undergraduate engineering students. Mastery of telephone etiquette enhances the image of not only the individual but also the organization which is represented by the individual.

A telephone conversation is a complex process with special challenges. Professional environment necessitates professional standards in all forms/channels of communication. Understanding of technology for effective communication is a necessary skill for managers. The subject of communication must include the nuances and etiquette of communication through telephone, short messaging service, e-mail, social networking, chats, video conferencing, conference calls etc [2]. As telephone plays a crucial role in the world of work, the engineering graduate should also need to be equipped with strong telephone conversation skill. The students must be empowered with common communication styles telephone etiquette, confidence over phone call\telephone handling, inbound\outbound calling, cycle of calls, active listening, script writing, customer service and sales technique, presentation skills, clarity, oral/written, making customer understand, understanding the customer[3].

2. Objectives of the study:

This study has been undertaken

1. To seek to understand the special nuances of the telephone skills and etiquettes
2. To gain a fair knowledge of common phrases used for telephone tasks in work places
3. To identify the skills related to areas and possibly reinforcing these skills.

3. Method

The sample population consists of 55 students of third year Electronics and Communication Engineering department. A pre-test was conducted to identify the level of proficiency of the learners. The students were divided into pairs and were asked to perform role plays on different professional settings such as making appointments, enquiry and seeking clarification.

It is observed that most of the students lack important qualities such as being polite, being friendly, being empathetic, being proactive, forthcoming, helpful, courteous the essentials of telephone conversation. The conversations were initiated abruptly without proper greetings. Moreover the learners were not able to identify themselves or address the caller properly. The majority of the learners were not aware of the common phrases used in business telephone communication. Also not many were able to succinctly convey the message, and comprehend and respond appropriately, too fast while speaking without any pause. Inadequate exposure to the telephonic skill, low confidence level and poor language skill can be attributed for the underperformance.

On the whole the learners were not able to demonstrate knowledge of essential skills required to communicate effectively over the phone which undoubtedly necessitates a specialized training to develop the telephone skill proficiency of the learners. The teaching methodology should be devised so that it must integrate skill related learning experiences[4].

The training for the learners envisages the following instructions. Instruction to the students comprised of two parts. The first one is making aware of the common phrases used in the business context and the second part involves training with sample telephone conversations in variety of contexts to be probably encountered in the work place by the learners such as taking a telephone interview, seeking clarification, making enquiry etcetera Any number of real life context/situation can be brought into the classroom in the form of role play. As the role play is a vital tool to practice

the conversation by encouraging participation and reducing inhibition, it was used as a project tool.

Initially the students were trained on the following common phrases used universally from initiating the conversation, transferring the calls, taking and leaving the messages, seeking clarification and ending the conversation with practical training. This approach facilitated the students to overcome their inhibition and also made them fluent in the conversation.

4. Common Phrases in Telephone Conversation

Making a call

Hello, this is Jeyasree from Telekids.

Asking for somebody

May I speak to Mr. Chandran please?

Please could I speak to Mr. Manish?

I would like to speak to Mrs. Sumithra, please.

Can I speak to Mr. Vimal please?

Reasons for calling

I am calling about the delay in payment.

Could you tell me status of my application?

I am calling to fix appointment with Mr.Kiran.

Taking a message

I am sorry but Vishnu isn't at his desk right now, can I take a message.

Mr. Vinodh is in a meeting, would you like me to take a message?

I am afraid Ms. Aparna is away this week, would you like to leave a message?

Mr. Ravi is unavailable at the moment. Can I take a message?

Asking the caller to call back

I'm afraid she is busy right now, would you mind calling back later?

Asking to leave a message

Would you mind taking a message?

I would like to leave a message?

Leaving a message

Please ask Mr. Manoj to contact me about the contract.

Please let Mr. Kailash know that the consignment has been sent.

Passing on the message

I will let Mrs. Anu know that you called.

I'll make sure he gets your message.

Calling back

OK I'll call back later.

Clarifying

Spelling

Could you spell that please?

How do you spell that, please?

Repeating

I'm sorry, could you repeat that please?

I'm sorry, I can't hear you, and could you please speak up a little?

Would mind speaking a little slower?

Asking for name/company

Could you please repeat your name?

What was the name of company please?

Asking when somebody is available?

When will he be available?

When is a good time to call?

Asking somebody if they can call back later

I'm a little busy at the moment would you mind calling me back later?

I'm afraid I can't talk right now. Would you please call me back later?

Could I call you back later? I'm bit tied up right now.

Asking to connect

Could you please put me through to Mr. Krishnan the sales department?

Could you please connect me with the production department Ms. Kamala?

Ending the conversation

Give my regards to....

Thank you for calling

Thank you very much for your help

After the learners gained confidence they were made to perform role plays on advanced level of conversation. Initially the students were provided with dialogues and were made to practice repeatedly.

Clarification over the phone

Venkat: Pentasoft. This is Venkat.

Akash: Hai Venkat, this is Akash from Third Hand Testing. Do you have a minute to answer a couple of questions regarding MSN assignments?

Venkat: How can I help you?

Akash: We originally agreed upon 5 testing procedures, but our program manager received a mail indicating 4 testing procedures. Is the 4 correct number?

Venkat: Yes it is. We found that we can do the last one here.

Akash: Great. That makes our job little easier.

Venkat: Do you have any other questions?

Akash: No, that's all I had. Thanks for your time.

Venkat: No problem. Good bye.

Akash: Good bye.

Telephone conversation about delay in delivery of Tyres

Secretary: Hello, PR Tyres. This is Nivetha speaking. How may I be of help to you?

Rajesh: This is Rajesh calling. May I speak to Mr. Kannan, please?

Secretary: I am afraid. Mr. Kannan is out of the office at the moment. Would you like me to take any message?

Rajesh: Actually this call is rather urgent. We have not received the shipment of tyres that was supposed to arrive last Friday. I spoke to Mr. Kannan yesterday about the delay in delivery. Did he leave behind any message with you?

Secretary: As a matter of fact, he did. He had spoken to the delivery department and they assured that the shipment will be delivered by tomorrow morning.

Rajesh: Tomorrow morning. O.K. Fine.

Secretary: Is there anything else I can help you with sir?

Rajesh: No, Thank you. Good bye.

Secretary: Good Bye.

Later, the learners were just introduced the context and were asked to prepare and perform on their own.

Finally after administering the material and training the learners over a period of three months the researcher by personal observation and informal student interviews has arrived at the following findings:

- The whole processes have helped the students to shed their inhibition and induced a certain level of confidence.
- The learners have undoubtedly mastered the telephone etiquettes.
- The experience has facilitated the students' to converse appropriately in variety of contexts.
- The role play indisputably facilitated the integration of listening, and speaking skills along with thinking skills for successful telephone communication.

- The process has not only enhanced the telephone conversation skill but also enriched the knowledge about the workplace communication in general.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the research show that the objectives of the research are achieved to a great extent. The instructions on telephone skill lead to the improvement of learner's telephone conversation proficiency. Also it is evident through this study that student-centric/student-centered activities resulted in greater realization of the goals/objectives.

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