# INVESTIGATION INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ORAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE FOR POLYTECHNIC STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

*Oral communication and presentation skills are best career enhancers and to be the single biggest factor in determining a student's career success or failure. Experimental approaches to oral communication tend to yield better results, measures, and can include presentations, peer review, role-play, video, plus the use of current presentation software. In business communication making a phone call is the thing most feared by even the most executives. To overcome this fear, the researcher has have assembled a list of telephone tips. Review these tips, plan your calls, practice what you are going to say and start dialing. Finally, Computer Assisted Language Learning provides a wide range of applications such as web-based distance learning, virtual learning environment and mobile-assisted language learning (MALL).*

**KEYWORDS:** Oral communicative competence, Telephone communicative competence, Computer assisted learning,

## I. INTRODUCTION

"An engineer is expected to have different communication skills or acquire during the course for effective performance of jobs like directing, managing, advising, consulting"[1]. It was found that the students of the urban area cope up with situation easily as advanced education facilities like English medium schools and advanced means of communication like internet etc. are available to them. The level of the rural and middle class students is disappointingly low. It seems that they

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**International Research Journal of Humanities, Language and Literature ISSN: (2394-1642)**

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need more time to reach up to the mark; but their schedule doesn't permit them to spend much time on communication skills. The stipulated time in the curriculum is not enough to improve competencies and acquisition of skills. It is difficult for the teachers to give individual attention towards such students, who are in dire need of such guidance. Knowledge and technical know-how are clearly important, but these must be presented with an excellent standard of communication skills, particularly oral. Written assessment of oral Communicative competence cannot properly identify the level of students' oral communication competence acquisition. Peer assessment of communicative competence is beneficial to improve oral communicative competence. It includes getting students to think about the exercise more deeply, recognize others' viewpoints and how to give constructive criticism to peers. Disadvantages include potential bias, reluctance to give low marks for poor work from their peers and the need for clearer guidelines. Self study material on improvement of oral communicative competence will help students in developing their oral communicative competence. For a good oral presentation, the quality of text and the way in which it is presented are equally important. Presenting relevant information through a presentation is an important point to be kept in mind. The speech should be interactive in nature. The audience shouldn't feel that the presentation being made is just an activity of reading out a piece of dry, textual information. Speaking in front of a large audience is quite difficult.  It is necessary to speak precisely and present the topic in a concise manner. Holding the attention of listeners is the key to become a proficient public speaker. Group discussion exercises play an important role in developing the communicative competence. Dissemination of information can be conducted in a proper manner only if you possess good communicative competence. One should be competent about topical knowledge and background knowledge of discourse domain.

## II. ORAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

In the development of communicative competence learnable skills and experiential methods generally gives better results. The student's knowledge base is augmented by allocating class projects for presentations. Many students dislike giving presentations. It is observed that 70% of sampled practicing polytechnic engineers were required to give oral presentations as part of their work. Taylor and Grant says that "Group projects and presentations encourage and enhance the interpersonal skills of the students and should be emphasized early in the education curricula"[3]. Advantages of peer assessment include getting students to think about the exercise more deeply,

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recognize others' viewpoints and how to give constructive criticism to peers. Disadvantages include potential bias, reluctance to give low marks for poor work from their peers and the need for clearer guidelines. As knowledge of communication theory does not necessarily parallel skills in practice, it is important to immerse students in similar work environments. Role-play can focus the student's attention on the differing types of communication required with various groups in potential future work situations. Video/audio grading has been shown to improve presentation skills in students, with one prime example given where student presentations were filmed and then graded with dubbing from the teacher and a feedback sheet. Importantly, this provides relevant educational feedback to the students. The Communicative approach in classrooms provides scope to the learners to develop their communicative competence.

a. Only the target language (English) should be used in class.

   The teacher should ask questions and learners have to answer in the target language. In preparation for this activity, the teacher models extensively the use of complete answers to questions.

b. The meanings should be communicated directly by associating speech forms with actions, objects, gestures and situations.

   The teacher has to read aloud a passage from the book two times. When it is read for the first time, it is read phrase by phrase with a long pause between phrases and the learners write down the words and phrases. The teacher reads the passage the second time in a normal speed and the learners check their work.

c. Reading and writing should be taught only after speaking, and grammar should only be taught inductively.

The learners self-correct their errors with the teacher offering them a choice between what they said and the proper pronunciation. The dictation activity will improve the learners' vocabulary and will gradually develop their competence. As per Leech, Deuchar and Hoogenraad, "The self-correction strategy will improve the learners' strategic as well as the grammatical competence"[4]. Speaking is using background and linguistic knowledge to create an oral message that will be meaningful for the intended audience.  It is taking thoughts and putting them into words and saying them, with much of this process being done unconsciously.  There are, of course, special characteristics that distinguish oral production, speech from written production. It is greatly conditioned by the time factor: it involves language produced spontaneously, repetitions, self-corrections, under normal circumstances; it disappears, leaving no record but traces in memory.

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Another important distinction is that it is directed at a specific audience in a face-to-face situation where we can make use of the here-and-now and we can get immediate feedback from the listeners. The speaking skill we often mean knowing a language. For example, just as you could know the rules for playing football but not be able to put that knowledge to practical use by playing the game your-self.

**Pronunciation:** The relationship of pronunciation and speaking is obvious. We cannot speak a language without pronouncing it. However, in work with speaking in the class-room, pronunciation is not always given sufficient prominence, leading to numerous difficulties for speaking. Pronunciation can produce communication static both creating an obstacle to our listeners' comprehension and leaving us with inhibiting feelings about interaction.

**Disposition towards Speaking:** Basic pronunciation aspects of speaking are practice the communicative activities in the classroom are important for any degree of fluency to develop. However, practice depends on willingness to speak. Students have three main alternatives regarding speaking: to withdraw and refuse to speak, to speak because the teacher requires it and to speak because they really want to. Making students feel interested in speaking is main functions in working with speaking is to encourage more students to choose the third option to speak because they want to.

**Speaking Easier: T**o create a positive atmosphere in the learning, speaking is one of the skills. Making speaking easier seems to have more to do with the affective side of the learning process than cognitive. Along with linguistic content it is more important to focus on students' attitudes. Success in language teaching depends less on materials, techniques and linguistic analyses and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom i.e. on the affective factors.

**Voice:** Students should do the following activity to develop awareness of their voice. Students fill out the questionnaire and then compare their answers with others.

**My Voice**

1. How many different ways have I listened to my own voice?
   - On a voice recorder?
   - On a video film?

- On an answering machine?
- With a microphone?
- Any others?

2. Am I a fast or slow speaker of my own language?
3. When do I speak faster?  and when slower?
4. Do I tend to speak softly or loudly?
5. When I speak in English do I change the speed or the loudness?
6. Is my voice different at different times of the day?
7. Has anyone every commented on how my voice sounds to them?
8. What is it that makes their voice attractive to me?

Further awareness work could be done with video.  Select a short section of a film with interesting voices and have students only listen to it and try to discover as much as possible about the speakers just from their voices.

As voice carries pronunciation, it can be useful to deal with it directly in the language and learners generally find voice exercises fun.  They can choose a favorite word in English and in pairs try to say it to each other in different ways.  Working with video, they can watch a short conversation, transcribe it or use a prepared transcription and then imitate the way the actors speak, trying to match their voices as closely as possible.  Focusing on trying to imitate the voice they have heard make them be less worried about making mistakes with their pronunciation, leading to more natural sound.

**Listening:** A second step in making speaking easier is has to do with listening. It is impossible to separate speaking from listening.  Active listening encourages us to do the following: Empathize with the speaker, listen with attention to what the speaker says (both the verbal and nonverbal language), show understanding nonverbally, responds non-judgemental, echoing in different words what you hear or sense, stay with the speaker, keeping yourself out.

**Speaking Takes Time**: A third consideration for facilitating speaking is to have patience.  We speak only after we had a good deal of exposure to the language and felt ready to speak.  Leave time for students to use ability to retain internal images of sounds.  When speaker says a word or phrase, learners let it echo in their minds for a few seconds in the voice of the speaker, then in their own voice, they say it silently, then finally aloud.

**Creating an Atmosphere for Speaking:** A fourth way to facilitate speaking is with its concern for creating an atmosphere of support and interdependence. In this respect, cooperative learning

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is an approach to general education which can greatly benefit the development of speaking. As learners work together and get to know each other better, speaking is less intimidating. Many types of activities of cooperative learning are effective preparation for real interaction, and they have built-in mechanisms to solve some common communication problems. For example, each person in a small group discussion task has a set of written chips and for the given task when someone wants to talk, he or she must put a chip in the centre. Same person cannot talk until everyone has contributed so this prevents students from remaining silent and avoids conversational monopoly.

Practical steps towards make speaking easy are:

1. Can you begin to notice more about the way you speak? Start by noticing your words. Do you say more than you need? Try to notice this at the moment you do it.

2. Observe the tone of your voice, including intonation, timbre, softness, harshness. Notice the volume at which you speak, and also how fast you typically speak. What causes this?

3. Find it helpful to look on silences and pauses as part of the words, rather than as something separate.

4. Find it useful to distinguish between my first voice (my choice of words) and my second voice (everything else including my volume, tone, speed, body language, gesture, transmission of feelings). Try to monitor both your first and second voice. Try to notice when they say the same thing, and when they give different messages.

5. From time to time during the day, when giving explanations or instructions in your class, make some changes just to confirm to yourself that you have choices in addition to your habits. Experiment with small changes of your own.

## III. TELEPHONE COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

In business communication making a phone call is the thing most feared by even the most executives. To overcome this fear, the researcher has assembled a list of telephone tips. Review these tips, plan your calls, practice what you are going to say and start dialing.

**Conversation Outline:**

1. Say "hello" and acknowledge (write down) the name of person you are speaking with. "Hello, my name is .... and, your name?"

2. Tell them why you are calling and who you wish to speak with.

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3. If you are conducting a follow up call, quickly describe your previous communications. "I am calling about the production engineer position and I would like to speak with the head of the production department, please."

   "I saw on the Internet that your firm offers some production engineer positions, is there a specific person who could tell me more about these positions? Good. Could I have that person's name, email address, phone and fax number please?"

4. Assess the status of your candidacy, ask if any documents you faxed or mailed were received, and focus on identifying the appropriate next step. I e-mailed my resume to ... of your human resources office. Can I speak with Mr./Ms. ...? I would like to confirm that my resume was received and clarify what my next step should be.

5. Ask to see the appropriate person

   "I'd like to schedule an appointment with Mr. /Ms. ..."

6. Request an appointment for an interview or information conversation. "Yes, I understand that decisions regarding formal interviews won't be made for a few weeks. In the meantime could you refer me to someone in a production engineer position? I would like to informally learn about what it is like and ask questions about their experiences. Who would you suggest I speak with?"

7. Thank the person you are speaking with and confirm spelling of all names, mailing and e-mail addresses, phone and fax numbers.

   "Thank you so much. You have been very helpful. If I have additional questions     would it be appropriate to call you again?

You can always call back if you don't get the results you expect. Once you have developed your conversation outline, you need to know how to use it effectively. Here are some true tips: In some cases, receptionists and secretaries will try to screen out your call. If they find out you are looking for a job, they may transfer you to the Personnel Department or ask you to send an application or resume. Here are some things you can do to keep from getting screened out.

1. Call Back: Call back a day later and say you are getting ready to send some correspondence to the person who manages such. You want to use the correct name and title and request that they give you this information. This approach usually gets you what you need. Say "thank you" and call back in a day or so. Then ask for the supervisor or manager by name.

2. Call when the Secretary is out: You are likely to get right through if you call when that receptionist is out to lunch. Other good times are just before and after normal work hours.

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Less experienced staff members are likely to answer the phones and put you right through. The boss also might be in early or working late.

3. Get the name of a person: If you don't have the name of the person you need to speak to, ask for it. For example, ask for the name of the person in charge of the production department if that is where you want to work. Usually, you will be given the supervisor's name and your call will be transferred to him or her immediately.

When you do get a name, get the correct spelling and write it down right away. Then you can use that person's name in your conversation. Depending on the type and size of the organization you're calling, you should have a pretty good idea of the title of the person who would hire you. In a small business you might ask to speak to the "person in charge." In a larger one, you would ask for the name of the person who is in charge of the department that you would be working in. It is always better to be referred by someone. When a friend of the employer recommends that you can call, you usually get right through. If the receptionist asks what your call is regarding, say:

"A friend of Mr./Ms.___ suggested I give him/her a call regarding a personal matter."

Once you are connected to Mr./Ms.___, immediately give the name of the person who suggested you to call. For example:

"Hello, Mr./Ms.___. Jayant Roy suggested I give you a call."

If you are calling someone you know, you would normally begin with some friendly conversation before getting to the purpose of your call then you could use your phone script by saying something like:

"The reason I called is to let you know I am looking for a job, and thought you might be able to help me. I am looking for a position as. . ." (Continue with the rest of your phone script here). Use your own judgment.

The primary goal of a phone contact is to get an interview. To succeed you must be ready to get first and even the second rejection. Ask third time for an Interview. You must practice asking for the interview as follows.

**You:** When may I come for an interview?

**Employer:** I don't have any positions open now...

**You:** That's OK; I'd still like to come in to talk to you about the possibility of future openings.

**Employer:** I really don't plan on hiring within the next six months or so.

**You:** Then I'd like to come in and learn more about what you do. I'm sure you know a lot about the industry, and I am looking for ideas on getting into it and moving up. Although this approach does not always work, asking the third time works more often than you would believe! It is important to learn how to do this, since overcoming reject-tions is possibly the most important part of getting to "Yes."

If the person agrees to an interview, arrange a specific date and time. If you are not sure of the correct name or address, call back later and ask the receptionist, Some-times the person may not seem helpful or you may have caught him or her at a busy time. If so, take another approach. Ask for names of other people who might be able to help you. Find out how to contact them. Then add these contacts to your job search network. Ask if they would mind if you keep in touch. Maybe they will hear of an opening or have some other information for you. Many people get their best leads from someone they have checked back with several times. It is important to follow up with each person you contact. This can make a big difference in their remembering and helping you in the future. It is just good manners to send a thank you note to someone who helped you.

**Tips for Interviewing over the Phone:** Get your thoughts in order. Be prepared to tell the prospective employer why you want the job, and why you are qualified for it. Gather more information about the company. Do your homework. Take time to conduct preliminary research on prospective employers which give you a competitive edge when it comes to securing an opportunity to interview in person. Be prepared and create a sheet for every job for which you apply, and keep it close to the phone for easy accessibility and have a copy of your resume on hand.  Speak formally and approach the phone interview with the same business etiquette as you would a face-to-face interview and you come across as friendly and enthusiastic. Listen carefully and you show the interviewer that you have good communication skills, it will give you time to decide how you want to answer a given question.

The growth of mobile phone users is increasing. As more people go wireless, the chance of these devices to intrude and interrupt others' privacy increases[5]. Here are some tips to remember: When riding on public transportation, avoid loud and animated conversations by keeping your voice low or to a conversational level. Be sure to avoid extended calls. Turn the ringer as low as possible to avoid disturbing others. Remember that the people you are with usually take priority over a phone call. Having a conversation in their presence can be viewed as being rude and make the person feel unimportant, and make you look bad. If you have to make a call, make sure to

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take it to another location that will be less disruptive. Inform the person that you are calling that you are using a mobile phone, then if the connection fades or drops, the person will know to wait to see if the clarity returns or that you will be calling back.

## IV. COMPUTER-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING

Computer Assisted Language Learning provides a wide range of applications such as web-based distance learning, virtual learning environment and mobile-assisted language learning (MALL). Vocabulary acquisition using flash cards is the basic use of Computer Assisted Language Learning. It is a very simple programme which makes use of spaced- repetitions, a technique in which the learner is presented with the vocabulary items which are expected to be in the memory of the learners for an increasingly longer intervals until a process called long-term retention is achieved.

Preparation of CALL software deserves a careful consideration of pedagogy. Lewis A., Atzert S. mentioned that "the CALL software needs to inter-relate comprehension, speaking, reading and writing skills and should reinforce each other in ways that the learners will find them comfortable to learn"[6]. With the advent of internet, a significant change occurred in the use of communication technology in language teaching. Teachers in classrooms could display the full text in a full page and could make comparisons with other texts in a different web site. With internet and the establishment of many new web sites, the learners could involve themselves directly in the language learning processes individually or with online support. The teacher's role remains to be a role of a felicitator. There are 500 websites where links to online exercises can be found, along with links to online dictionaries and encyclopedias, translation aids and other miscellaneous resources of interest to the language teacher and learner. As a result today, language teachers are using a lot of web applications to teach the target language effectively.

## V. CONCLUSION

The stipulated time in the curriculum is not enough for the students to improve competencies and acquisition of skills. It is difficult for the teachers to give individual attention towards such students, who are in dire need of such guidance. The improvement of communicative competencies needs planned learning and use of self study material. The Communicative approach in classrooms provides scope to the learners to develop their communicative

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competence. In the development of communicative competence, experiential methods generally give better results. In business communication, making a phone call is the thing most feared by even the most executives. To overcome this fear, the list of telephone tips is very useful. Computer Assisted Language Learning will provides a wide range of applications such as web-based distance learning, virtual learning environment and mobile-assisted language learning (MALL).

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**International Research Journal of Humanities, Language and Literature ISSN: (2394-1642)**

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