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Research Paper

“Improving Four Skills of English”

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ABSTRACT

English is a true international language. It is the language of science, technology, trade, commerce and what not. Therefore, English has become essential for personal growth. Therefore, people are striving to learn it all over the world. There is English-phobia in India, at least as far as masses are concerned. However, it is just another language. It is as easy or as difficult to learn any other language. Most of the Indians are polyglots. They know at least one language other than their mother tongue. It shows that they do not have any irrational fear regarding learning a language other than their own. However, it is not at all difficult to learn English. Learning a language means learning the four skills of that language, namely listening, reading, writing and speaking. Therefore, the present paper puts emphasis on learning these four skills of English. It aims to communicate to the readers that it is quite easy to learn English by listening, reading, writing and speaking English daily as much as possible for one.

KEY WORDS:

English, listening, reading, writing, speaking.

INTRODUCTION:

English is the lingua franca of the world. It is truly a global language - a window upon the world. English has got the privilege of being official language in at least seventy five countries with a total population of over two billion. About 375 million people all over the world use as their first language and the equal number of people use it as their second language. About 750 million people speak it as a foreign language.

It is the main language of books, newspapers, airports and air-traffic control, trade and commerce, academic conferences, science, technology, diplomacy, sport, international competitions, advertising, internet etc. In fact, no field today can do without English. Therefore, it has become imperative today to learn English.

Now the question is it difficult to learn English? The answer is emphatic 'no'. It is as to learn as any other language. In fact, English is easier than many other languages. However, there is 'English phobia' among Indian students due to many reasons; one being the lack of good English teachers. Still, one can learn English on one's own and get proficient in it. Learning a language means learning the four skills of that language, namely listening, reading, writing and speaking. Now, we will see to acquire the four skills of English.

How to acquire four skills of English? : To learn English, one has to acquire its four fundamental skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Of these, speaking and writing are productive skills, while listening and reading are receptive skills. Similarly listening and reading are oral skills and reading and writing are written skills. Now, we will elaborate a bit over these four skills of language.

Listening is the most basic skill of any language. The following are the types of listening.

- 1)Intensive Listening: This kind of listening aims at detailed comprehension of meaning and linguistic exercise.
- 2)Extensive Listening: It is for comprehension.
- 3)Casual Listening: It is for no specific purpose.
- 4)Focused Listening: This is an intensive listening done for the purpose of finding out specific information or for transacted business.

Good listener makes a good speaker. This statement brings out the importance of listening. To acquire this skill, one needs to listen to English every day as much as possible. Besides lectures in school and college, radio and TV are good sources for this activity. Listening to a good English speaker helps us immensely to become a good speaker of English. Questions by a teacher before, during, after a lecture make students listen attentively. Making students listen to a audio clip and then asking questions about it also proves helpful in this activity.

Another important skill of language is speaking. A good English speaker is in great demand today. As mentioned earlier, speaking i. e. oral communication skills goes hand in hand with listening. A good speaker is first a good listener. Shyness and fear are the greatest hurdles in the way of speaking English. The strange thing is that these not the hurdles when an Indian student learns a new language other than English. But it is always different with English. An Indian student does not speak English for the imaginary fear of making mistakes. (S)he feels shy of speaking English for he fears that (s)he would become butt of laughter and ridicule, if (s)he makes any error. Therefore, the most important thing is to eliminate this fear and shyness from the minds of students. They should be encouraged and helped to treat English like any other language

in the world. This will create confidence in them to speak English. Teacher should use novel teaching methods like ‘question-answer method, group discussion, seminar, dramatization etc. to boost this activity. English teacher should better use direct method and make it mandatory to the student to use English while in the campus. Before all this, an English teacher should have made students realize as to how simple it is to learn and speak English, and also how it is one of the most melodious languages of the world as it has time rhythm, because of which it gives us great pleasure when we speak English or listen to a good speaker of English. Martha Graham, an American dancer and choreographer who is widely considered to be one of the greatest artists of the 20th century, said, “I believe that we learn by practice... Practice means to perform, over and over again in the face of all obstacles, some act of vision, of faith, of desire. Practice is a means of inviting the perfection desired.” What she said perfectly applies to speaking English. The only way of learning to speak English is by speaking it. Therefore, we should go on speaking English with whatever vocabulary of the language we have; the rest will follow. If we keep speaking while working on other skills of the language, one day we will certainly become proficient in it, as this old saying goes: ‘Practice makes perfect’. Therefore, one should speak English everyday as much as possible. Thinking in English also helps to acquire this skill of the language.

Reading is a receptive skill. It includes both decoding a message and understanding it. There are various kinds of reading. They are as follows.

- 1) Skimming: Skimming is a quick reading that notes only main points. This kind of reading is done to decide whether to read something or not.
- 2) Scanning: It is a quick reading done for a specific piece of information. Like skimming, it too is not a thorough reading.
- 3) Extensive Reading: It is a kind of reading done for the purpose of overall understanding of the text and pleasure.
- 4) Intensive Reading: It is a thorough reading with great attention to all details. The purpose of this kind of reading is complete comprehension or analysis of a text.

One who is learning English needs to know these types. However, he should not be bothered by these. He should keep reading English text every day. One benefits more by reading newspapers, magazines and even comics, rather than textbook, as informal English is used in them. One should read at least a page in English every day. While in school, students should be taught to read at appropriate speed with comprehension. When you read a newspaper or magazine, you should note down a word/expression which is unfamiliar to you. Later you should look that word/expression in a good dictionary. After that you should frame your own sentences in English using the word/expression. This helps us greatly in increasing our vocabulary, which in turn improves our written English. Silent reading is helpful in comprehending what has been read, while loud reading improves our speaking skill. Therefore, one should do both kinds of reading every day.

The skill of writing depends on listening, rather more on reading. Like speaking, it also is a productive skill. Writing in English daily helps one to improve his/her overall English. Keeping a personal diary is a good way of improving one’s writing skill. One can write about his/her daily experiences in the diary. After some days, if he/she goes back to the diary, they themselves will find out the errors in their past writing. This is an indication of their improvement in English. It will boost their confidence and encourage them in their efforts to acquire proficiency in the language. Besides being a useful tool to improve one’s writing, a personal diary can also become one’s confident friend, which is a necessity for our mental health. One needs to study at least the basic grammar of English, for instance word classes, tenses, basic sentence patterns. As mentioned above reading newspapers and magazines also proves helpful in improving one’s English. Reading is essential also for increasing one’s vocabulary. We can build and increase our vocabulary by reading English newspaper(s) regularly, as a newspaper is a good source of informal words, in fact informal English. While reading a newspaper, when we come across an unfamiliar word, we should jot it down later to look that word up in the dictionary. When we look up any word in a dictionary, we must take into account its pronunciation, part of speech, whether it’s a formal/informal word, various meanings, word(s) it can go with, its use in idiom(s), if any; its synonyms and antonyms etc. A good dictionary, like ‘Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary’, provides all this information. As many words are used with different meanings in different contexts, a learner should study when to use the word with what meaning. He should form five sentences using that word with its particular meaning. He should form at least five sentences each for each of the meanings of the word. This is how one can internalize a word. This, I think, is one of the methods of increasing one’s vocabulary.

Thus, if we listen to English, and read, write and speak it daily, we will certainly acquire proficiency in this global language.

CONCLUSION:

From the above discussion we come to the conclusion that one can acquire four skills of English, namely listening, reading, writing and speaking if (s)he practices these skills daily for at least a few months. It means every day one must listen to English, read something written in the language, write something in it and try to speak it as much as possible. As anything can be learnt by doing it, English too can be learnt only by using it every day.

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