



Effectiveness of Functional Approach to Enhance English Language Skills of Government Secondary Schools

Bhavin Mahida

Ph.D. Research Scholar, H. M. Patel Institute of English Training and Research, Vallabh Vidyanagar.

Dr. C.R. Gurjar (Mentor)

H.O.D, Department of English, V.P & R.P.T.P Science College, Vallabh Vidyanagar.

Abstract

The importance of English language learning is widely accepted by people worldwide. It opens many doors of success for the learners with English. But English language learning doesn't happen over night or in short span of time. Its long process and follows certain stages. It starts with schooling and goes on. A School stage is considered as the most crucial stage in the journey of career in anyone's life. School constructs the base for further learning. So in order to build a strong building its base must be strong then only the building will be strong. Secondary teaching is such phase where one must strengthen the basic of English language. At such stage if English language teaching happens using Functional Approach it can be more beneficial to the learners. It gives a chance to learn language natural way, a way one learns mother tongue. English language skills (LSRW) can be learnt easily using Functional approach. It provides chance to use the language directly instead of learning about the language. With functional approach one uses language directly in real situations. It leads to confidence in learner regarding using the language. Many attempts have been made by the Government of Gujarat to improve the conditions of English language teaching in Government schools. They have come up with changes in books, different courses, teacher trainings etc.

Key Words: Functional Approach, ELS, DELL, KMPF, Secondary Education

1.0 Introduction

In this fast changing globalized world English language has become the most important. It has become one of the most required skills in every field in world. It is considered as the most required employability skill or survival skill in today's world. If students want to go into professional courses then they are expected to be good in their communication skills. "English is a widely spoken language today. It has often been referred to as 'global language', the lingua franca of the modern era and currently the language most often taught as a second language around the world." (Vijayalakshmi and Babu, 2014) English is the only language that is taught in every school on this earth. The number of people who speak English is in millions. There are many countries which use English language as their first language or their associate language. Today it is widely

spoken and written language in the world. It has overtaken even Latin in terms of popularity. Before two centuries it was spoken only in England and some other countries around England. But today one in seven people speaks English as their native or second language. Another reason for the increase in English language is that, it is believed that a person who speaks English is considered to be an intellectual person. The use of English language in daily conversation puts a person at different position than others. A person can stand out from the crowd with the help of English. So these are the reasons that can be considered as behind the success of English language.

English in India and in Gujarat is considered as one of the subjects in schools and colleges and most of the students learn it to pass the examination. English as a means of communication has not gained importance yet in Gujarat.

However English language teaching starts from standard 5 as a subject in Gujarati medium schools. But the reality is even after learning English as a subject from standard 5 to 12 in total 8 years students hardly able to speak or communicate in English. There are many factors which are responsible for it. With the extreme demands of English language in the world many initiatives have been taken by Gujarat Government to improve and strength the status of English in Gujarat. Programs like Society for Creation of Opportunities through Proficiency in English (SCOPE), Digital Education and Learning Labs (DELL) (Formerly known as Digital English Language Labs) and Knowledge Management Program for Faculty (KMPF) during 2008 to 2009 have been introduced by the Gujarat Government. This problem of communication can be solved by changing the ways of teaching English language. The way children learn their first language or mother tongue, they never concentrate on specific vocabulary or specific grammatical structures. They learn their mother tongue naturally and in context from the beginning. And this is how they learn their mother tongue without much effort. Then why do we give so much importance to grammatical structure while learning second language? It is acceptable that, knowledge of structure is important but specific attention and remote memorisation of rules and that is also without giving context for using language is wrong. (Coffin et al, 2009)

And learning of English language through functional Approach provides learners with natural way of learning a language. It also gives learners ways to use language in context. With Functional Approach learners know in the classroom how they have to use language in real life. They get real like atmosphere to use language,

whatever they learn in their classroom. Functional Approach also makes learners free from remote memorisation of grammatical rules. Because learners just have to use language directly without bothering about mistakes in grammar. So as per demand of English language in today's world Functional Approach can help learners in better learning of English language.

1.1 English Language in Secondary Education

The status of English in Gujarat or even in secondary education is really needs improvement. Gujarat follows the pattern of 10+2+3 in its education, where standard 1 to 8 is considered as primary and 9 & 10 are comes in secondary education. Secondary stage is considered as most crucial stage in career because here first time students have to face board exams. In government schools in Gujarat English language starts from standard 5. Most of English language teaching happens using the text book given by the government. Students in government schools start learning English late than the English medium students. The text books given in schools by the government follows communicative approach in recent time. Without any doubt communicative approach is one of the best approaches of teaching English. The problem most of the government schools faces is, they get students from very poor background so they lack even basic knowledge in English language. Another problem is they hardly get any chance to practice English language outside of the class due to their background. Majority of teachers who are teaching in such schools are not much familiar and aware about the use and teaching tactics of communicative approach. So even after using books based on communicative approach most of the teaching happens using age old Grammar

Translation Methods. Another big concern is most of the teaching happens in classrooms by keeping in center exams only and hardly any importance is given to use of language in real context. But another thing is newly recruited teachers trying hard to change this pattern of English language teaching. So, in Gujarat English language teaching is going through a major change.

1.2 Functional Approach

There are many approaches and methods invented by scholars to teach English language easily and effectively. Teachers follow those methods and approaches given by language scholars and linguists to teach English language. This continuous process of finding new ways of language teaching has been contributing new approaches and methods in the field of language teaching. Every method or every approach contributed something in this field of language. All these approaches and methods have their merits and demerits. In India English language teaching started its journey with Grammar Translation Method. The first method used to teach languages throughout the world. It was also called a Classical method because it was used to teach classical languages like Greek and Latin and in India it was used to teach Sanskrit and Persian languages. Even today we find that it is used by many teachers to teach language to their students with a few changes in the method. For this method we can say that it had dominated language teaching field for many years. According to D.K Rao and J.M.Kanthi Thilakha (2010, P.221): “If language teachers teach as they taught earlier, then one may not achieve the required goals of teaching English in the present global scenario.” V. Saraswathi (2004) agrees with this and says that: “There is no best method. The history of language teaching presents a fascinating variety of methods.

If there are such a variety of methods, which one are we to choose? There is no definite answer to this question, what works with one learner may not work with another. One may be a wizard in grammar but another may just hate it. Others might enjoy memorizing sentences.”

Bhadauria, (2013) has said that Functional Approach is the informative ability includes knowing the syntactic guidelines of dialect as well as knowing when, where and with whom to utilize the language in a relevantly proper manner. This requires all the more than unimportant information of the structures, language structure and vocabulary; it requires abilities in how to utilize English in important circumstances. The functional view of language was originated in the year 1920, from the works of Bronislaw Malinowski (who was a professor of anthropology at the University of London). His works provided two important concepts to the functional approach of language that are, the context of situation as indispensable for understanding and the reference to social and emotive functions in communication (Yalden, 1987). Firth and Malinowski both have a view that language is a context dependent and sociological in orientation. Firth derived his theory of Context of Situation from Malinowski. Their view is opposed to the view that language is self-contained system and psychological in orientation (Ahmed, 2013). “Functionality is intrinsic to language; that is to say, the entire architecture of language is arranged along functional lines. Language is as it is because of the functions in which it has evolved in the human species” (Halliday, Matthiessen, Halliday, and Matthiessen, 2014).

2.1 Principles of Functional Approach

Following are the principles of Functional Approach given by Achugar, M., Schleppegrell, M. , & Oteiza, T. (2007).

- Learning is a semiotically mediated activity.
- Language and content are inseparable.
- Language users make choices based on their linguistic repertoires and these Choices are related to the situations they participate in.
- Second language development is an expansion of the meaning making Resources.
- Academic language features can be recognized across languages.
- Learning about language by developing a meaning-based metalanguage allows language users to be reflective about the meaning and power of the linguistic choices that others and they themselves make.
- Focused work on analyzing texts allows users to become aware of the meaning and power of language choices.
- Learning is socially distributed and occurs in communities of practice.

2.2 English language skills

Communication skills involve receptive skills and productive skills. Listening and reading are receptive skills while speaking and writing are productive skills. With the advancement in the field of ELT it is observed that in addition to vocabulary and grammar rules, language skills are also equally important. Teachers and researchers have started giving much importance to language skills. So the limits of knowledge has exceed now. Other areas of knowledge such as social, cultural and discourse conventions are definitely to be included in the classroom input.

It is also well a known fact that, in order to communicate well in target language one must have knowledge of four skills. A person acquires its mother tongue with the help of these four skills. It has given a sequence of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. It's a natural order of learning a language. The same way a person learns his mother tongue.

In English language there are four basic skills. Out of which two are productive skills- speaking and writing and the other two are receptive skills- listening and reading. With productive skills a language is produced. When someone writes something or speaks something then the person produces the language. With receptive skills a language is received. When a person reads something or listens something then the person receives the language. These four skills can be learnt integrate. In real life use these skills can't be used separately because one skill is followed by another. But it is a fact that in order to be a good communicator all the four skills are required.

2.3 Reading Skill

"Reading is a receptive language process. It is a psycholinguistic guessing game (Kenneth Goodman, 1967).

Reading as a skill stands at third position in the natural way of learning a language with the help of skills. A person learns it after listening and speaking. Reading is about reading letters and words and then decoding it and then to grasp the meaning out of it. With this skill one can show his literacy. Because reading shows that you have the ability to understand anything. It is important for many reasons for everyone because only through this skill everyone gains most of the knowledge of through the life. It is most important for students as well because they have to do most of the work based on their reading. They have to give exams based on their reading only.

And countries like India where the academic is largely based on the reading skill, it is an important skill. So students required good command over this skill. They must know all the sub skills related to this skill because reading is really a difficult process. The skill of reading is hard to assess, both in class and in the test situation. Although is it often described as a 'passive' skill, it is nothing of the sort: reading often involves multiple processes in which the reader is actively engaged. For example, a question may test candidates' comprehension of a paragraph. Teaching of reading skill or developing reading skill in the students of tertiary level is very important especially in India because students have to pass their examination only through reading so they must be good at reading. They must understand sub skills of reading like reading beyond the lines or reading between the lines or skimming and scanning.

2.3.1 Sub-Skills of Reading

Each skill is sub divided in sub skills. And in order to learn each skill perfectly a person must have acknowledgement of sub skills as well, because it is the sub skills that give minor and detail knowledge about the main skills. So the skill of reading also has sub skills.

1. Predicting

Predicting means to guess the content of the text from its title or its illustrations or to anticipate the end of a sentence, or story, using language they already know.

2. Skimming

Skimming means going through the text very quickly, to get the general idea.

3. Scanning

Scanning means trying to locate the specific information. Letting learners wander over the text until they find information or answer.

4. Gist reading

Gist reading is about reading a text to get an overall but not detailed understanding of the text.

5. Extensive reading

Intensive reading is about reading longer text frequently over a period of time. This happens independently and not in a classroom.

6. Intensive reading

Intensive reading is about reading a text to get detailed information from the text.

7. Inferring reading

Inferring reading is about either guessing the meaning of new vocabulary in a text or new understanding meaning or a message in the text that is not immediately obvious.

3.1 Research Methodology

Research methodology provides information about research design, population, samples, tool for data collection, procedure for data collection and procedure for data analysis. Through this one can have idea about how the research has been conducted.

3.2 Research Design

The present study was an experimental research and specifically One-Group, Pre-test and post-test design.

01 = pre-test 02 = Post-test

3.3 Research questions

1. Will the Functional Approach help to improve English language skills of Government Secondary School Students?
2. How much students will find it interesting to learn English language skills with functional Approach?
3. Up to what extent students will participate actively during the program implementation based on Functional Approach??
4. What will be the achievement of students after learning through Functional Approach?

3.4 Objectives of the research

1. To study the salient features of the functional approach to teach English.
2. To select the language skills to be enhanced through functional approach.
3. To select the language functions for the experiment.
4. To prepare tasks based on functional approach for the selected language functions.
5. To implement the tasks on the sample of the research.
6. To study the effectiveness of functional approach to enhance English language skills of Government Secondary School Students.

3.5 Hypotheses

1. There will be a significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group on the pre-test and the pot-test.
2. There will be a significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group on pre-test and post-test with reference to reading skill.

3.6 Variables of the study

In the experiment, following were the dependent and independent variables.

3.6.1 Independent variables

- Functional approach

3.6.2 Dependent variables

- Achievement scores

3.6.3 Control Variables

- Sample of the research

3.7 Population of the Study

All the students studying in 9th standard of various Gujarati medium schools of Bhavnagar district of Gujarat state were considered as the population for the present study.

3.8 Sample of the Study

From population samples for the present research was selected randomly.

Specifically convenient sampling method was implemented for the selection of sample. First of all a block from Bhavnagar district was selected randomly for the present study. From the selected block two schools were selected randomly. From selected each school 50 students of standard 9 were selected randomly for the present research.

3.9 Tools for Data Collection

➤ **Pre-Test:** A pre-test was prepared by the researcher. Language functions from standard 6 to 9 were used as references to create this test. Especially language functions based on Reading skill were kept in centre for preparing the test. Different tasks, exercises and activities were prepared by keeping in mind the knowledge level and understanding level of the students. There were different types of questions like open ended, short questions, multiple choice questions etc.

➤ **Post-Test:** A post-test was prepared by the researcher. Language functions from standard 6 to 9 were used as references to create this test. Especially language functions based on Reading skill were kept in centre for preparing the test. Different tasks, exercises and activities were prepared by keeping in mind the knowledge level and understanding level of the students. There were different types of questions like open ended, short questions, multiple choice questions etc.

4.1 Process of Data Collection

The research started with creating materials based on functional approach. In order to create such materials text books which are used by teachers and provided by the Government of Gujarat from

standard 6 to 9 were used. Specifically language functions from those books were taken as a reference. After this a pre-test was prepared to know the present learning level of the students. The pre-test was of 50 marks which includes different types of exercises and tasks like open ended questions, short questions, fill in the blanks, match A with B, true and false, multiple choice questions, essay type questions, reading comprehension questions etc. In pre-test language functions based on reading skill were used. A pre-test was implemented on students to collect data. All students studying in standard 9 of Bhavnagar district were considered as the population of the present research. A sample of the research was selected randomly. First of all a block was selected from the district randomly then out of that block one school was selected randomly. From the 9th class of that school 50 students were selected randomly in the present research. Those students were given a test paper to write in it. They were given 90 minutes to write the test. The test was administered before school hours. After that test papers were collected and assessed by the researcher. After the administration of the pre-test intervention program was started by the researcher. The intervention program was divided into 5 hours. The intervention program has teaching of different language functions. It has language functions from standard 6 to 9. They were taught using regular as well as technological aids. Students were helped by the researcher whenever they need help. During this intervention program they were given different tasks, activities, exercises to practice reading skill using different language functions. Intervention program was carried out before the school hours. After intervention program based on the understanding level of the students a post-test was created by

the researcher. Then it was validated by the experts of the fields. As a post-test they were given a test paper where they have to write in it. They were given 90 minutes to finish the test. The post-test was of 50 marks which includes different types of exercises and tasks like open ended questions, short questions, fill in the blanks, match A with B, true and false, multiple choice questions, essay type questions, reading comprehension questions etc. Collected test papers were assessed by the researcher. All the collected data in the form of marks were written in one excel file and then collected data from pre-test and post-test were compared to measure the progress of the students using tallied, tabulated and analyzed quantitatively. Mean, SD, T-test, Percentage, Statical techniques were used to analyze the data.

4.2 Data Analysis and Interpretation

4.2.1 Pre-test and post-test scores

As per the need of the study one group pre-test, post-test experimental research design was selected. The experiment began with the pre-test to measure the present level and need of the students. The pre-test was followed by treatment and post-test. Post-test was administered at last to measure the effectiveness of treatment. The treatment was based on functional approach to develop their Reading skills. The statistical procedures of T-test were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the treatment offered to the participants as part of the experiment.

4.2.2 T-test analysis

After obtaining the data through descriptive statistics further analysis of the scores for the pre-test and post-test for both the skills was done by means of the *t*-test. In the below table it is shown that the overall mean score of pre-test in both the skills is 75.34, whereas the overall mean score of post-test is 85.02. According to

Sheligar and Shohamy (1989) “the *t*-test is used to compare the means of two groups.”(p. 231). In the present study *t*-test

was used by researcher to compare the pre-test and post-test for Reading skill.

4.1 Descriptive Details of the Overall Test Scores

Total group	N	Mean
Pre-test	50	75.34
Post-test	50	85.02

The *t* value obtained through *t*-test helped researcher to decide that the difference found between pre-test and post-test was because of the treatment given. The difference between pre-test and post-test was not due to chance. The *t*-test analysis for the hypotheses for the present study is as follow:

Ha1: There will be significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group on the pre-test and the pot-test.

To test the above hypotheses; Mean and *t* value of the pre-test and the post-test score of Reading skills of the experimental group was calculated which is shown in table 4.2.

Table 4.2: T-test of Pre-test and Post-test mean scores of experiment group

	<i>Pre-test</i>	<i>Post-test</i>
Mean	74.34285714	85.02857143
Variance	75.46722689	66.79327731
Observations	50	50
df	68	
t Stat	5.300238449	
t Critical one-tail	2.382445783	

Table number 4.2 shows that mean score of pre-test is 74.34 and post-test is 85.02. *t*-value between the pre-test and the post-test score of experimental group is 5.300238449. This *t*-value is greater than *t* Critical one-tail value that is 2.382445783 so *t*-value > *t* Critical value one-tail at the significant level 0.01. If *t*-value is greater than critical one-tail value than alternative hypothesis is accepted. So there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the experimental group. So it can be said that the series of tasks of treatment had a significant effect on

experimental group in the area of receptive skills. The difference between pre-test and post-test shows that tasks given during the treatment had positive effect on learners of experimental group. The difference is due to treatment not by chance.

Ha2: There will be significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test mean score of the experimental group in the area of reading skill.

To test the above stated hypothesis; Mean, *t*-value and P value of the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group in the area of reading skill are shown in the table 4.4 given below.

	<i>Pre-test</i>	<i>Post-test</i>
Mean	37.70588235	42.61764706
Variance	7.971479501	19.27361854
Observations	50	50
df	56	
t Stat	5.486973025	
t Critical one-tail	2.394801206	

Table 4.4 shows that mean score of pre-test is 37.70 and mean score of post-test is 42.61. t-value between the pre-test and the post-test score of the experimental group is 5.486973025. This t-value is greater than t critical one-tail value that is 2.39 so t-value > t Critical value of one-tail at the significant level 0.01. So the alternative hypothesis is accepted. So there is significant difference between pre-test and post-test mean scores of the experimental group in the area of reading skill.

From the above table it can be said that the treatment part of the study had positive effects on the experimental group. The difference is due to treatment not by chance.

5.1 Major Findings

In the light of the research questions and objectives the major findings for the present research by the researcher are as under.

- Functional approach provides opportunities to the learners to use language in daily life.
- Functional approach facilitates learners to use language without focusing much on grammar.
- Use of Functional approach reduces burden of learning grammar.
- Functional approach is really effective for learning English language.

- Functional approach is really effective for developing Reading skill.
- Tasks used in Functional approach to develop Reading skills was interest generating and easy to do.
- Functional approach enables learners to use English language as per their needs in different situations.
- Functional approach is all about learning the language rather than learning about the language.
- Functional approach helps learners to overcome their fear of English as a hard language to learn.
- It seemed interesting and new way of learning English language.

5.2 Educational Implications of the Present Study

The conclusions emerged out of the present study have wide implications for the development of language skills in English, especially the Reading skill through Functional approach, which in turn would facilitate language acquisition. These findings provide guidelines to learners, teachers, administrators and the curriculum framers, regarding the possible ways of improving skills of students in English.

5.3 Conclusion

In contrast with the huge demand of English there is lack of efficient teachers of English. Now they have to research that

which approaches are better for their learners and have to work according to that. They also have to be aware about the recent trends and inventions in the field of English. The syllabuses should be also reframed and should be made more learners friendly and as per their situations and context.

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