

Augmenting Inter-Personal Skills in ELT Classrooms Using Digital Tools

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Abstract

Interpersonal communication skills are considered desirable for developing other vital social skills or people skills, soft skills, or transferable skills. An individual who has good interpersonal communication skills communicates well and can be ready to solve crucial problems in his/her private and professional lives. Interpersonal skill is an exchange of data between two or more people and how well a message is delivered using non-verbal messages like voice, facial expressions, gestures and visual communication. On the other hand, interpersonal skills are required for successful communication between a son and his father, an employer and an employee, between sisters, teacher and a student, two lovers, two friends then on. This skill has got to be enhanced within the ELT classroom with an exquisite combination of literature and Technology. This paper aims to spot the required interpersonal communications skills needed for the workplace like verbal and non-verbal communication, active listening, manners/etiquettes, assertiveness, negotiation and conflict resolution and enhance it within the ELT class classroom activity-based pedagogics. Most of the activities are framed using web tools and tested in ELT classroom, especially for MBA students. Therefore the same can be utilized for the students who are getting to be the smarter workforce of the future workplace during this competitive and Technology oriented global world market.

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Introduction

The phrase "survival of the fittest" has been replaced with a new meaning. The fittest aren't just those with the greatest physical strength or those who are lucky enough to have wealth and privilege [2-3]. Today, the fittest are those who can save, cooperate, compromise, listen, like, control, be assertive, communicate clearly and concisely, and project a positive picture of themselves to others [6]. This paper aims to spot the required interpersonal communications like verbal and non-verbal communication, active listening, manners/etiquettes, assertiveness, negotiation and conflict resolution and enhance it in the ELT classroom using activity-based pedagogics. Most of the activities are framed using web tools and tested in the ELT classroom [11-17].

Need for Interpersonal Communication Skills

A larger percentage of our life involves interacting with people, friends, colleagues, relations, and our boss. Interpersonal communication skill is required within the day-to-day life of an individual to reject a suggestion, accept a suggestion, state something, make a press release, overview the conversation, greet each other, say good-bye, comply with some-thing, thank someone, introduce oneself, get to understand one another, offer help etc [18-22]. To be an efficient interpersonal communicator, one must not interfere in another person's business unnecessarily and consider before speaking. One must be ready to listen well while others speak to and don't be a defensive or attacking type but attempt to be neutral [23-32]. Also, an individual must be confident of their ideas and must be hospitable to receive feedback. So, helping today's generation with the nuances of interpersonal communication skills will certainly help them function a far better, smarter future workforce [33-41].

The Benefits of Improving Interpersonal Skills

Good interpersonal communication increases the power to create long-lasting and meaningful relationships and makes effective communication possible. Since they know where they're going and how to get there, people with strong interpersonal communication skills get the results they want [41-52]. Furthermore, it instils faith and motivation to pursue new career opportunities and allow one to get to know others better. It gives you the tools you need to

control and live your emotions in a meaningful way. Strong interpersonal communication provides a person with an ideal environment to flourish [53-67].

Steps to Advance Interpersonal Skills at Every Level

Spreading Happiness

Happiness in the workplace is transmittable and brings a cheerful attitude within the workplace, attracting co-workers [67-70]. Naturally, they wish to be around the person with a cheerful attitude more often. Moreover, it radiates happiness daily, improves one's self-image, and helps build a positive feel. The work atmosphere changes dramatically in a positive direction when everyone feels good about themselves. By providing positive feedback to co-workers, better relationships spread cheer in the workplace when they need to reach targets or achieve a win-win situation. These small victories can go unnoticed, leaving an individual feeling unappreciated and uninterested.

Considering Co-worker's Feelings

Empathizing with the co-workers in their work and their situations greatly influences work productivity because personal life actions are directly connected. Considering others' experiences will help you become a more compassionate teammate and inspire you to demonstrate supportive behaviour. If a worker is having a hard time outside of work hours, the condition needs to be considered before allowing the anger to return calls at workplace interactions.

Becoming a Lively Listener

Most people pretend to be good listeners, assuming that this entails sounding compassionate to others. On the other hand, active listening requires more responding than listening, so a lively listener doesn't just sit back and let co-workers talk to them. One way to become a good listener is to make an effort to interact in the conversation.

Asking Questions

Spending a while to actively hear the conversation naturally follows with asking questions that pertain to the discussion. Allowing the co-worker to end, paraphrase the highlights of the conversation, then asking insightful questions on the discussion will certainly have a good effect. Asking questions shows the act of not merely being polite but dynamically engaging within the situation. Nobody likes to feel that an opinion goes unnoticed or unappreciated. When this happens, the person concerned loses self-confidence, resulting in a breakdown of the interpersonal relationship.

Practising Active Participation

Two powerful verbal ways to signal communication with a colleague are active listening and asking questions. Speech patterns, visual contact, and sensory cues are all used to indicate active participation in a conversation. Active engagement is enhanced by noting the conversation's sound, volume, and tempo and reflecting this accent in conversation. If a co-worker communicates in an immediate, direct manner, mimicking the style will improve communication. Another workmate might appreciate a more light-hearted, joking conversation. It's important to remember that, although humour brings people together, jokes can also be misinterpreted and trigger workplace discomfort.

When making jokes at work, be cautious because some colleagues can find them offensive. Active involvement necessitates the use of reflective visual communication. A good salesperson can read facial expressions, stance, the amount of eye contact made, and hand movements. These salespeople represent these movements back to prospects after having a read on visual communication.

Including and Respecting Everyone

No one enjoys feeling neglected at work, and excluding colleagues alienates people and causes stress. If improving interpersonal skills is the aim, everyone must be included and given equal weight. Going out of one's way to express gratitude and have a conversation with an employee with whom one might not have previously formed a personal connection has a significant effect. When it comes to business meetings and interactions, respect all associates and treat them fairly. Support everyone's thoughts, no matter how large or small, during team meetings. Supporting and appreciating the teammates' efforts makes them feel supported and valued. Even if a thought appears to be weak, merely noting it gives the personal pleasure and prevents them from becoming overwhelmed.

Acting as a Moderator

By acting as a moderator, one can aid in the avoidance of conflicts among colleagues. Many serious problems can be resolved using softening comments like "I know" or "That's true". Don't start a fight by picking sides or favouring some people. Make an effort to understand both sides of a dispute and repeat points made to hear the evidence presented by a neutral third party.

When dealing with workmates, avoid mentioning the most important thing that includes sensitive issues. It would be beneficial to work on interpersonal communication by carefully considering one's thoughts before verbalizing them. When communication breaks down in the

workplace, problems occur. Allowing oneself just a few seconds to consider experiences avoids hasty, sometimes regrettable decisions.

Avoiding Frequent Negativity

It is not necessary to be "the grumbler" at work. Constant negativity and whining will inevitably isolate an individual. Instead, one should focus on the good aspects of the job that keep one interested every day. The inspiration for a cheerful and efficient office comes from strong interpersonal communication skills. Recognizing the need for interpersonal skills is the first step in developing them.

Types of Interpersonal Communication Skills

Verbal and nonverbal communication, active listening, manners/etiquettes, assertiveness, negotiation, and dispute resolution are among the interpersonal communication skills needed for the 2030 workforce. The researchers established basic interpersonal communication skills that are needed in the workplace, including oral, written, presenting, listening, good manners, and business communication etc.,

Improving Interpersonal Communication within the Workplace

Poor communication between employers and workers and inside teams may be detrimental to the company in a variety of ways. Workers may become irritated and distracted from the business objectives if a manager cannot communicate tasks. Morale is often harmed, as is the sense of 'team' that helps projects succeed. For businesses that rely on outside revenue, clients may be a stumbling block. Managers need to maintain genuine open lines of communication and feedback. Managers who uphold the integrity and a positive outlook are more approachable, and problems are resolved faster. When workers can talk freely with decision-makers, office gossip and rumours are less likely to spread. For workers, consistently practising interpersonal communication skills can be a huge help in career advancement and current work satisfaction.

This will obstruct contact and reduce the chances of productive interpersonal experiences. It is important to be aware of how one interacts in writing to improve written language skills and professionalism and comprehend various communication types. Observing others when suspending judgement and taking responsibility for your decisions improves how others view your character and evaluate your values. Taking positive feedback seriously also boosts morale and job efficiency. Improved workplace interpersonal communication can be a good predictor of career and business performance. Managers and workers both have a duty (and good incentives) to pay attention to the development of soft skills and hard skills. Soft skills

cannot be immediately evident when they are lacking, but they may be just as damaging to an organization if they are not present.

How to Acquire better Verbal and Nonverbal Communication?

Verbal communication is a form of communication in which the sender conveys the message to the recipient using language. The two most basic types of verbal communication are interpersonal communication and speech making. A speechmaker is someone who delivers a message to a group of people. To move the company forward, good verbal communication skills are needed to handle people of different cultures, ages, and levels of knowledge, inform, inquire, debate, and discuss various subjects, teach, and learn, and form bonds and establish relationships with people.

To improve one's verbal communication skills, one must learn to be flexible with people depending on the situation and make an effort to use the opportunities given to them in class and during training sessions to overcome their fear of lecturing to a large audience. To become a good verbal communicator, we must first consider the message we want to convey before speaking, and we must communicate concerning the recipient's point of view. It is important to pay attention to what is said and how it is said. Speaking clearly and being mindful of nonverbal aspects such as eye contact, stance, and countenance will help you communicate effectively.

The four types of nonverbal communication are kinesics, proxemics, paralanguage, and chronemics [1]. Nonverbal communication doesn't use words for communicating anything, but communication takes place between sender and receiver using signs. The sender conveys nonverbal information to a receiver using visual communication, posture, gesture, facial expression, tone, eye contact, clothing, office decoration, touch, physical space. The importance of non - verbal communication is that folks react strongly to what they see, and only 35% of data is known by oral, and 65% of data is merely through non-verbal features. Moreover, non-verbal communication reinforces or modifies what's said in words and thereby regulates communication flow.

When talking, keep your arms open because folded arms can communicate defensiveness. Modifying vocal tone to convey precise enthusiasm and punctuating key points would undoubtedly leave a genuine impression on the listener. Greeting others with a smile and a strong handshake, holding hands away from the face and hair, leaning slightly forward to indicate engagement, and paying attention to others are all good ways to start. When messages are serious, slouching posture, smiling or laughing, showing some animation with

hands and facial expressions to project a dynamic appearance, and taking a phone to an interview or meeting generate diversion. Stop fidgeting and limb trembling, as well as making regular or piercing eye contact with interviewers.

Activities to Train Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

Students of the present scenario enjoy the visual way of teaching and group activities. The tasks given below are used in the class. It has helped the students pick up the non-verbal communication actions like maintaining proper gesture, body posture and movement and face emotions. These sample web links can be used for training verbal and nonverbal communication, and other similar youtube videos can also be used to train the same.

Weblinks to Learn Verbal and Non-verbal Communication Skills

Weblinks given below are used in the classroom to train verbal and non-verbal communication at the workplace.

Courtesy: youtube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cIo0PkBs2c>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AAhIFD9czks>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFeCXxe8jpw&t=8s>

Activities

Activities like gesture panel, still act, non-verbal emotions, movie clips and picture prompt, scene replica, good listener, and bad listener are conducted. These activities are conducted to train the verbal and non-verbal communication skills of students in the ELT classroom. Movie clips are used to improve verbal and nonverbal communication. In this movie clip activity, students in pairs are asked to take up any workplace situation wherein the situation involves a conversation between two employees or group of employees or employee and the boss has to be taken up, and any movie scene which has characters depicting office situation and the video has to be muted. The students must speak their dialogue with proper body language by muting the audio, which will be quite interesting.

Picture prompt is used for enhancing verbal communication. Any picture of a workplace can be used for description. The students in groups can be asked to describe the situation, the employer's mindset in that situation, and imagined dialogue for that situation, which can enhance verbal communication and help them understand the office atmosphere. Gesture panel activity is used to train kinesics, a non-verbal gesture, as gesticulations are very powerful in strengthening our message we convey. To begin with, students can be asked to discuss some of the ways we can communicate without words in the workplace. Students need to be divided into panels or groups, and each panel is asked to come up with as many

ways of workplace gestures as they can perform in one minute (Example: handshake, nodding the head, moving the hands while speaking, the proper way of standing or sitting, keeping arms in the right position and maintaining space between people)

Students are put into pairs, and each pair has to create a one-minute scene with a problem in the office that needs to be solved. Neither person in the scene can talk. All communication has to be nonverbal. Eye contact is a strong nonverbal cue that serves four functions in communication [2]. The class has to guess the scene's content by seeing without any dialogue to help them, and the students are reminded to refer to the gestures list. Following web link is used to know the workplace issues, and professors can use similar videos for the same.

Courtesy: Youtube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=58p9HqG8M5M>

Active Listening

Active listening is a communication method that is used in dispute mediation, counselling, and training sessions. It's a fantastic intercommunication ability that any professional should possess. It necessitates the listener's undivided attention, understanding, answering, and then recalling what is being said. Employers rate problem-solving skills second only to soft skills as a key factor affecting undergraduate employability[4]. Listening skills are a graduate quality that is core to employability [4], [5]. Active listening needs to be built gradually, and it doesn't come naturally to many.

Moreover, it helps to show empathy and reflects on other's words and feelings. Also, it checks for understanding and enables follow up questions with the speaker. Building confidence and rapport, expressing concern, and paraphrasing to demonstrate comprehension are examples of active listening strategies. Nonverbal cues such as nodding, eye contact, and leaning forward are examples of active listening. It also contains short verbal affirmations such as "I see," "I know," "Sure," "Thank you," and "I understand."

Active listening assists in voicing one's feelings and reduces a super-official problem to a more simple problem. The listener facilitates an amicable atmosphere by sharing a person's feelings and issue, lowering the severity of the issue and finding a solution to the problem. Paying attention to the speaker and giving them your undivided attention, as well as acknowledging the message, will help you become an active listener. Furthermore, using body language and movements to express focus, giving input, deferring judgement, and reacting appropriately contribute to becoming a good listener. Discriminative listening, comprehensive listening, biased listening, evaluative listening, appreciative listening, and empathetic listening are six listening styles. Smile, eye contact, stance, mirroring, and

distraction are nonverbal indicators of active listening. Questioning, contemplation, clarification, and summarization are verbal indicators of active listening recalling techniques.

Active Listening Teaching Steps in ELT Classroom

The ability to effectively listen as a social construct is inevitably harmed if there is little or no opportunity to communicate. Poor listening habits hamper interpersonal communication and practising active listening. Students' active listening skills can develop as a result of the feedback phase. The listener summarises or paraphrases the speaker's words in the feedback phase.

For example, in the following dialogue, Laura provides feedback to a student by guessing the student's implied message and then asks for confirmation.

"Student: I don't like this college as much as my old one. People are not very nice.

Laura: Are you unhappy at this college?

Student: Yeah. I haven't made any good friends. No one includes me.

Laura: You feel left out here?

Student: Yeah. I wish I knew more people."

Giving feedback with a statement rather than a question helps in active listening, which consoles the mind of the stressful person.

Students are asked to express their emotional state or issue to the other person. The following steps are practised in the classroom to train active listening by asking the students to speak in pairs.

- Stopping what you're doing and looking at the person who's speaking.
- Paying attention not only to the words but also to the feelings and content.
- Showing an interest in what the other person is saying.
- Reiterating what the other person said.
- Sometimes seeking clarity and questioning.
- Expressing opinions only after listening to the other person.

Web Tools for Learning Active Listening

Courtesy: YouTube

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLvZkUP5_KU

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ESujTCel6lM>

Manners/Etiquette

The term "etiquette" refers to proper behaviour that separates humans from animals. Business etiquette may also be described as a set of rules for conducting business with ease, style, and confidence [7]. It's also the art of learning how to act in different situations and deal with different people. Etiquette is a collection of rules for learning how to behave in social situations. Etiquettes are important to prevent unpleasant conflict, transcend office politics, interact effectively with someone who has a different point of view, be coordinated uniformly, avoid workplace friction, avoid employee stress, avoid misunderstandings, improve employee job satisfaction, productivity, get the job done, and make the workplace a happier, stress-free environment.

Following are some web tools used to learn manners of workplace

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3ds-7-EU00>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zex9hKT2XZI&t=12s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jHNNetehfW9w>

Assertiveness

Assertiveness is a specific approach for communicating with people. It is simply the ability to say 'yes' or 'no' when a person wants to without hurting the feeling of others. It is the courage to be oneself and show the world one's likes and dislikes thoughts, feelings, and shortcomings. It is the freedom of maintaining one's prestige in all circumstances. Assertive communication is to communicate honestly with family, friends and colleagues. Several hundred Masters of Business Administration (MBA) students collected reports from former co-workers – including subordinates, superiors, and supervisors – on their strengths and weaknesses as a colleague in one study [8]. Adjectives associated with assertiveness (such as offensive, competitive, constructive, and direct) were found to be relatively common, with a significant number of them appearing in the sample.

Some of the web tools used for learning assertiveness are as follows.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6LcPfnwGec>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MMc8AP9KhEM>

Activity

Students are divided into groups and given a situation, and asked to do role play to be more assertive. Students answers to the questions in response to the situation are discussed.

Situation 1: You have been working in a company for a while, but recently the behaviour of your colleagues towards you has been dubious. You found out that someone else has

deliberately got hold of your social website account and is misusing it to your disadvantage on further exploration. What would be your plan of action towards the problem?

Situation 2: You are a hired professional in the field of accounting function under your boss. Recently, your boss has started gaining money illegally and has given you the task of placing his "dirty" money in a service company. It is to be layered with legitimate income and then disintegrated into the flow of money. But in this entire process of money laundering, you have a great risk of getting caught, and your boss knows it too and still urges you to do it. What would you do in this situation?

Tips for Assertive communication

Make a positive decision to assert yourself in a crisis positively.

Aim for open and honest communication.

Listen actively.

Agree to disagree.

Stay calm.

Take a problem-solving approach to conflict.

Negotiation

People regularly bargain without even realizing it. Organizations, companies, interviews, inside and between governments, and sales and legal proceedings all include negotiation. Negotiation occurs in personal contexts such as marriage, divorce, parenting, and so on. Diplomats, politicians, and brokers are all examples of skilled negotiators. Business managers value negotiation skills because they improve critical thinking abilities and strong communication skills due to learning negotiation skills [9].

Activity

Any formal interview situation in the office is taken, and students are asked to take up the role of the employee and employer and talk. One of the negotiation skills techniques specified as 'Elevator Speech Technique' is explained to the students and asked to answer. Elevator pitch is the ability to persuade the listener within 60 seconds using impressive vocabulary. An Elevator pitch will help a person have a successful meeting. The following are the qualities of a well-crafted elevator speech evaluated from various resources.

- Clear-cut, exact
- Accentuate the crisis to be addressed
- Furnish a milieu
- Be exclusive

- Hub problem
- Mould the pitch – tone, examples

Training Elevator Pitch

To begin with, the usual self-introduction is trained, and other frequently asked questions in the interview can also be trained in this manner. The usual self-introduction will be usually spoken in the following manner.

'I am so and so have completed Masters in English from Arts College, Bangalore. My family consists of four members. My father is a Doctor, and my mother is a housewife. My hobbies include singing, dancing....'

Self- introduction using elevator pitch will be-

"Good morning. I am -----. Currently, I am pursuing my final year at ----- (the college). I can multitask and deal with pressure. I want to secure a job with ----- (company/institute) as my dream concern. I assure to contribute to the betterment of my workplace and society if given an opportunity. I am a self-motivated and disciplined individual. I am always keen to up-skill myself by learning new things whenever I get a chance. I have done my internship from ----- as ----- . Apart from studies, I enjoy participating in drama. I am a player in Badminton too. My strengths are my analytical approach, human touch to situations, appreciable communication, and presentation skills. I believe upon being realistic".

Using elevator speech for self-introduction will help the students gain confidence in speaking and handling the questions posted by employers. This ability of answering will, on the other hand, help the candidate impress the recruiters too.

Tips for Negotiation

- When conversing, students must face the other student.
- While interacting, look the other person in the eyes.
- Use a simple tone of voice and a pleasant facial expression.
- Keep a healthy body posture (straight or relaxed) and listen attentively.
- Request what is needed and explain why you need it.
- If the request is granted, thank the individual.
- If the proposal is not accepted, propose a solution.
- Thank the individual if they accept your compromise.
- If you don't like the other person's solution, suggest a new one and keep negotiating.
- If you need additional time to consider a solution, request it.
- Also, inquire as to when you will be able to speak with the other person again.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict may arise between workmates, managers and subordinates, service providers and their clients or customers in the workplace. Conflict may arise between individuals, such as Management and labour, as well as between departments. Apart from providing diversity training and mentoring various workers, managers must also encourage employees to criticize discriminatory behaviour and reward them for doing so successfully [10]. In practice, this form of interpersonal skills training can assist students in learning about workplace conflicts and handle them. According to Korkindale, there are "points of challenging societies" collaborating with "different assumptions, values, and beliefs" to make the workplace more arduous.

The following web tool is used in the class to learn about conflict resolution.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UpW519lfgbs>

Activity

Creature of Conflict- Activity

Students in pairs are asked to create a flipchart on the theme 'conflict' and talk about the process of creation, and the feelings they had about the image and the class can participate in the discussion on what conflict means to them, how it was to achieve the task and how they felt about it.

Crisis Intervention

A crisis is displayed on the screen, and the students are asked to provide a solution for that in groups. One group of students are press reporters, and the other group provides a solution for the issue. The activity is video recorded and telecasted to the class for encouraging further argument from the audience.

Situation 1

You, along with your colleague, proposed a model for the company for increasing shares of the company. He played a major role in proposing the model while you were supporting him in his work. But it adversely affected the company, and suddenly, the shares went down. Your friend is the major part was asked to resign from the company by the higher officials. The organization didn't know that you were a part of that and hence you were not asked to leave the company. Now you fear that you might be asked to resign from the company if the company gets to know about your involvement. How will you handle this situation?

Situation 2

A customer got into your production facility and took shots of underage workers. The photographs were posted on your Facebook, and the organization started getting criticism. How will you deal with it being an authority?

Conclusion

You would manage any situation more gracefully if you have a well-balanced range of interpersonal skills. To be assertive, you'll need listening skills and nonverbal communication to complement questioning. Nobody is flawless, and mastering these skills will always be an ongoing process. Work hard, show respect for others, and have faith in yourself.

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