

Exploring Dialogue-based Writing Task for Developing English Communication in India

Abnish Singh Chauhan* 

Professor & Founding Head,
Department of English
Principal,
BIU College of Humanities & Journalism
Bareilly International University,
Bareilly, U.P. India.

ABSTRACT

Indian learners at all levels of education, from school to university, encounter serious obstacles in effective communication in classroom and real-life situations. The primary obstacle to their English communication is the lack of competence in constructing effective dialogues. For most of the learners, such an obstacle occurs due to the lack of a supportive environment, the dearth of English-speaking friends and the dominance of their native language. The study presents the potentiality of dialogue-based writing task as a solution to improve English communication of such learners and examines whether dialogue-based writing task, in which characters in a story communicate with each other directly, helps the learners overcome the gap in their personal and professional development. Accordingly, two sample tasks on dialogue-based writing are given in the paper expecting the learners to generate their own dialogues on different themes, thus stirring them to practice and polish their English communication. Moreover, the paper promotes dialogue-based writing task as an effective pedagogy, which supports the curriculum and assists the learners in gaining higher communicative competence in English. By emphasizing this type of active participation, the study also emphasizes the significance of task-based learning (TBL) in the development of communication skills, which brings about overall educational goals of language learning in India.

Keywords: Dialogue-based Writing, Task-based Learning (TBL), Pedagogical Strategies, English Communication, Language Learning, Competence Building.

1. Introduction

Effective interaction at the personal and professional levels occurs when the communicators know the art of oral and written communication. Oral communication is given prime importance in today's world, but written communication is ignored even though it has the

* Author: Abnish Singh Chauhan

Email: abnishsinghchauhan@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3358-6760>

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ability to foster communication skills of both the parties— the sender and the receiver of the message. Dialogue, being “a written composition in which two or more characters are represented as conversing” (Chauhan 85)¹ is a tool of importance for the communication of thoughts and feelings between the communicators. It is “one of the most natural ways” (Chauhan 196)² of communication. At its most basic level, a dialogue is a two-way affair that allows the flow of information, ideas, or opinions from one party to another. It is a process wherein the characters are co-creators of the message. Therefore, it not only develops understanding but also strengthens relationship between the communicators of “various nations worldwide” (Om and Som 1258).

In learning English communication, the practice of writing dialogues provides a distinct way of achieving competence. As much a part of everyday life as it is, the communicators realize the enormous effort and expertise needed to craft effective and interesting dialogues. In fact, the skill of writing dialogues demands constant practice across a variety of linguistic skills, including vocabulary, grammar, tone, and structure. This is especially true for individuals with English as a second language (ESL), where inadequacy in writing dialogues can undermine the capacity to communicate with ease and confidence. “ESL students need to learn the English language and to use that language for learning. Their success as learners depends both on the acquisition of English language skills and academic content (Jaipal 1).

In India, learners face extreme level of challenge in attaining competence in effective communication in English. At school, college and university levels, learners often complain of inability to engage in fluent and meaningful interactions. Besides, cultural and contextual factors, such as limited interaction with English speakers and dominance of local languages contribute to these challenges. As a result, learners are unable to perform effectively in both formal academic and informal social situations, where effective communication in English is necessary.

Lack of communication skills in English is not only a question of linguistic ability but also a matter of a lack of interactive use of language tool. This requires educating learners not only to understand English but to actually use it in practice. Consequently, dialogue-based writing comes out as a good practice to fill this gap. When the learners write dialogues between characters, they engage in a writing activity that mimics real communication. This activity engages them in a critical analysis of language use, grammar, structure, and context while

offering a secure platform in which to experiment with their communication skills “required in the international professional field” (Riemer 91).

The present study attempts to investigate the effectiveness of dialogue-based writing task in helping the learners to develop effective English communication in the Indian context as “young writers rely on a conversational model of communication” (Andrews et al. 87). This study seeks to evaluate whether such task-based learning, in which the learners are requested to write real and interactive dialogues, can enhance their effective communication skill in personal as well as professional life. By presenting two practical examples, this paper demonstrates how the learners can develop their own dialogue examples on a variety of topics, thus providing them with the opportunity to apply their learning in practical terms. Furthermore, it promotes the inclusion of dialogue-based writing task in curricula as a way of increasing student engagement and communication skills. This study advocates for the incorporation of dialogue-based writing assignments into the educational system in order to equip the learners to progress towards language proficiency. Through repetitive practice and continuous exposure, the learners can develop the skills and confidence needed to manage the intricacies of actual communication, thereby enhancing academic performance and also future employment.

1.1. Research Questions

- How does dialogue-based writing task assist in developing English communication among Indian learners?
- What particular skills do the learners acquire by participating in dialogue-based writing activity?
- How do the learners perceive the effectiveness of dialogue-based writing task in strengthening their capability to communicate clearly and creatively in English?
- How does task-based learning assist the learners in comprehending the subtleties of actual communication in their language acquisition process?

1.2. Research Objectives

- To study how dialogue-based writing contributes to English communication proficiency among Indian learners.
- To analyse specific language components that are developed through task-based learning by the learners, including sentence structure, vocabulary, fluency, and creativity.
- To explore the problems that the learners encounter during dialogue-based writing task and how they can be resolved in schools, colleges and universities.
- To assess the effects of task-based learning on the learners' critical thinking, self-expression, and comprehension of communicational dynamics in English.

1.3. Research Methodology

The study will employ a task-based approach to establish an in-depth understanding of the role played by dialogue writing in increasing the communication competence in English among the learners. The research will basically be exploratory and aim at comprehending the effects of dialogue-based writing tasks on the learners' creativity and communication skills.

Utilizing this methodology, the study will provide insights on how dialogue-based writing activities contribute to promoting English communication competence of Indian learners. The study will further present feasible guidelines for language educators who are trying to include dialogue-based writing assignment in the curricula as a means to facilitate the communication gap between class studies and out-of-classroom applications.

2. Dialogue-based Writing Task

Dialogue-based writing task is an important method for developing communication skills. Dialogue itself is essentially the exchange of communication between two or more individuals. This give-and-take process helps develop a better sense of language structure, subtleties, and usage. Whether the dialogue occurs in a story, a novel, a screenplay, or an actual communication, it is an important vehicle for the exchange of ideas, feelings, and information. For the learners of English communication, writing dialogue provides a chance to engage in productive practice of these skills within language learning and, therefore, "a variety of

assigned writing tasks are essential for developing students' expressive abilities in various types of writing” (Peyton 142).

The functions of dialogue-based writing task in language acquisition go way beyond generating written material. Writing dialogue engages the learners in investigating various modes of expression, which enhances their confidence and effectiveness in communication. Besides, it enhances critical thinking as it encourages the learners to interact with language in a creative and logical way. Specifically, writing dialogue enables the learners to rehearse how to communicate with people using English in a natural way.

Furthermore, dialogue-based writing task prepares the learners for real-life situations that they can face in their working and personal lives. It also offers a space where the learners can interact with the language more socially and dynamically, replicating how actual communications happen in life. This task-based learning gives the learners a feeling of bonding with English communication they are learning, which makes it more meaningful and usable in their own lives. For Indian learners, in whom English may be acquired as a second or third language, the skill to handle intricate communication and interaction in English is most important as it requires “to create an enriched learning environment that promotes communicative competence” (Mashhura 48). Dialogue writing, therefore, presents a valuable means of enhancing communication skills across different settings, both academic and non-academic.

3. Role of Dialogue-based Writing Task

Dialogue-based writing task plays a number of significant roles in learning English communication. It not only enhances the technical writing of the learners but also their interpersonal communication skills. The following five essential roles of dialogue-based writing are essential for enabling the learners to attain a deeper sense of English communication:

3.1. Progressing the Story

One of the most important roles dialogue plays in communication is in moving the narrative along. Dialogue acts as a progress vehicle as it provides opportunities for characters to reveal significant information, express feelings, and advance the plot, shedding “light on what makes narratives engaging” (Santos 1833). Writing dialogue for a situation prepares the learner to consider how words can get a story forward, be it real or imaginary. This enforces the

functionality of communication as a means for action and decision-making, in that it evokes a sense of how the dialogues drive effective exchanges in English.

3.2. Characterization

In writing dialogues, the characters are given life by what they say to each other. By writing effective and realistic dialogues, the learners can control the traits, motives, and emotions of the characters. It also enables them to see the significance of tone, vocabulary, and sentence structure in creating the persona of a character. In addition, the learners learn to note how the words and responses of individuals reflect their personalities, cultural backgrounds, and experiences, embracing “different perspectives” (Little 372). This task-based learning improves English communication since the learners are encouraged to think about how language can represent individual differences “for the reproduction of the material” (Chopra 103).

3.3. Self-Expression

“Self-expression can be revealed and recognised through different modes, and on different platforms” (Tshivhase 374). Accordingly, dialogue-based writing task gives the learners a significant opportunity for self-expression. The dialogue between characters tends to reflect the writer’s thoughts, experiences, and feelings. Through writing dialogues, the learners can imaginatively examine various points of view, social contexts, and individual beliefs. This exercise of self-expression not only enhances their writing skills but also enables them to have more control over their use of language. Additionally, self-expression through dialogue-based writing tasks impels the learners to express their thoughts more effectively and creatively, giving them the confidence to use English.

3.4. Building Writing Skills

“The art of writing demands two things- competence of the subject and deep knowledge of the stylistic process for arranging the subject in a proper form” (Singh 29). In view of that, writing dialogue is a good practice to hone overall writing ability. By considering vocabulary, sentence construction, grammar, punctuation, and the communication flow, the learners have a better grasp of language mechanics. This task-based learning also familiarizes the learners with the art of effective writing and helps in keeping the readers interested.

3.5. Developing Understanding

Through dialogue-based writing task, the learners are able to learn more about the individuals they come in contact with in their own lives and accordingly “articulate their problems with the writing process” (Beattie 161). Writing dialogues compels the learners to envision communications from others’ viewpoints, making them realize different viewpoints, emotional reactions, and social backgrounds. This can result in greater empathy towards others and better comprehension of the way people communicate in different environments. In a multicultural and multilingual country like India, where individuals from different regions and backgrounds tend to interact with each other, comprehension of the dialogue-based learning of English communication is pivotal in establishing relationships and resolving conflicts.

4. Features of Dialogue-based Writing Task

Effective writing task using dialogue comprises a number of significant features that enable the exchange to take place naturally and serve its intended function. These features are crucial in creating compelling, realistic, and effective dialogues for enhancing English communication of the learners. With the mastery of these features, the learners can sharpen their skills to communicate clearly, express themselves creatively, and interact effectively in both personal and professional activities:

4.1. Back-and-Forth Interaction

A significant attribute of dialogue-based writing task is the action-oriented exchanges of information between various characters. But, the condition is that the dialogue must appear natural when pieces of information are shared by characters. All characters must also get a turn to express what they are thinking and reacting towards the other “during speaking turns” (Duncan 161), unfolding the communication in a systematic and realistic manner. This approach can support the participatory nature of communication, forcing the learners to realize how dialogues take place under normal circumstances.

4.2. Clarity and Conciseness

Although dialogue can be an everyday form of communication, it ought to remain clear and concise. Sentences too complex or rambling may obscure the understanding of the reader or draw attention away from the message the writer intends. “When writing is direct and free of

complicated language, the writer's meaning has less of a chance of being misinterpreted” (Purdy 82). In writing dialogue, the learners pick up the virtue of brevity and lucidity in passing their messages successfully. Writing clear and concise dialogue helps the learners streamline their thoughts and communicate them effectively.

4.3. Complete Message Delivery

Every line of dialogue must convey a full thought or concept. Fragmented or incomplete sentences may cause the reader to wonder what the writer means, reducing the effectiveness of English communication. Effective dialogue writing makes sure that every exchange conveys a full message— statement, question, imperative structure or emotional response, appearing “to be spontaneous or impromptu” (Wren and Martin 348). This creates an awareness in the learners about how to convey their thoughts fully and clearly.

4.4. Logical Order of Ideas

The flow of communication should be sensible and logically sound. Characters must react to each other in a manner that suits the context and topic of communication, putting “the words in the right order” (Raman and Sharma 194). In doing dialogue-based writing task, the learners are taught to keep things coherent and ensure that ideas are ordered logically in each communication. Not only does this enhance dialogue-based writing capacity, but also overall English communication.

4.5. Striking and Animated Expressions

One of the most important features of good dialogue is that it has the capability to engage the reader with livelier and attention-grabbing verbal and non-verbal communication. The good bonding between the communicators and the effective use of the appropriate text along with proper intonation, having “facial expressions, lip motions, eye gaze, head motion” (Cassell 1) and other gestures, lead to striking and animated expressions. In other words, good dialogues employ striking and animated expressions to transmit emotion, action, and other things. This makes the learners explore multiple ways of transmitting meaning and spirit of the message and also enhances their communication skills.

5. Strategies for Dialogue-based Writing Task

“Writing is an art done under particular conditions that necessitates more elaboration and clarity compared to other skills” (Foroutan et al. 35). To assist the learners in improving the writing of their dialogues and enhancing the quality and effectiveness of their work, the following strategies may be used. These strategies aim to make the dialogues real, readable, and engaging and enable effective communication in English. Through this task-based approach, the learners can write more realistic and lively messages that would truly enhance their English communication.

5.1. Maintain Correct Length

A proper dialogue should not be too short or too lengthy “and have more casual, informal, ordinary words” (Hegarty 18). It should be as smooth as the flow of the river, with both the characters having enough space to utter what they have to say without the discourse becoming too lengthy or exhausting to read. A dialogue that is too short can be superficial, and a discourse that is too long can distract the reader. The balance should be made so that the interest is maintained and information is conveyed effectively.

5.2. Promote Realism

Since “the international realist community places value on the importance of in-depth conversation of realist research” (Francis-Auton 3), effective dialogue is based on realism. To produce dialogue that will be realistic, it must reflect the natural rhythms of human speech. Writers must incorporate aspects such as pauses and brief sentences with courtesy and consideration, which are characteristic of effective communication. This creates a sense of spontaneity and realism, and the reader can become engaged with the dialogue and interested in the characters created in the story.

5.3. Use Punctuation Marks and New Paragraphs Properly

“Punctuation is one of the most important aspects of written English, and yet it is one that is taken the most lightly” (Ginting 82). Proper punctuation is required for clarity and correctness. Every line of dialogue uttered must have proper punctuation marks to clearly and correctly indicate the words of the communicator. Furthermore, when a new communicator begins to express, a new paragraph must be introduced for grabbing the attention of readers. This

formatting rule makes it simple for readers to grasp the communication in English, making the flow of dialogue smooth and easy to comprehend.

5.4. Use Contractions and Colloquial Language

In actual speech, contractions such as ‘don’t,’ ‘can’t,’ ‘shouldn’t’ etc. are utilized extensively. Except for a character who is intended to be extremely closed or restrained, contractions need to be employed to incorporate the tone of open or natural speech into the dialogue. Open or natural speech makes characters more authentic and more human and provides realism to their communications, as people tend to talk more informally and casually in actual situations.

5.5. Use Action Beats Instead of Overused Phrases

Instead of employing the overused phrases in dialogue-based writing task— ‘he said’ or ‘she said,’ which could turn out to be too repetitive, action beats can be employed to differentiate communicators. For example, instead of ‘Krishna said’ or ‘Radha said’, it would be appropriate to say, ‘Krishna smiled’ or ‘Radha sighed.’ Such actions not only differentiate communicators but also provide context to the physical actions or emotional reactions of the character, which helps in making the dialogue richer.

5.6. Employ Vocabulary Appropriately

Vocabulary learning is “a basic learner need for communicative language learning” (Leech 112). Therefore, appropriate vocabulary, specific to a given field or group, is required to be learnt for making dialogue more realistic and appropriate to the situation. For instance, between two businessmen, there would be business vocabulary, and between the learners, there would be academic vocabulary. But there has to be a balance in its use in the task-based learning. The familiar words should be used in dialogue writing for developing understanding between the communicators easily. Moreover, the words must be used correctly and appropriately to create clarity while making the dialogue more vibrant.

5.7. Identify Communicator Clearly

In longer dialogue or where there are multiple characters communicating, it is necessary to keep track of the communicators to ensure clarity and to have “opposite opinions naturally” (Wren and Martin 348). This can be achieved by stating the name of the character or a descriptive action after the every two lines of speech. For instance, instead of repeating the

words ‘he said’ or ‘she said’ over and over, the writer can state the name of the character with its action: ‘Radha leaned forward’ or ‘Krishna smiled.’ In this way, the reader comes to know who is communicating and how the message flows in the global society.

5.8. Write in Plain, Simple Language

Dialogue-based writing task demands imagination and creativity. Caution should be taken to ensure that the words chosen for the task are as simple and easy to comprehend as possible. “Clarity of expression is based— among other things— on word choice” (Koneru 153). Too much complicated and ambiguous language can leave the reader bewildered and consequently weaken the message. By implementing these strategies, the learners can significantly enhance the quality of their task-based learning. These strategies not only allow the creation of realistic and effective communication but also enhance the development of useful skills in English.

6. Sample Tasks for Developing English Communication

Effective communication is an essential ability for English learners, as it enables them to convey ideas, ask questions, and have useful interactions “in an easy, familiar and natural manner” (Wren and Martin 348-349). Dialogue-based writing task is a useful method for the learners of India to practice and develop their English communication. Therefore, two sample tasks are given here for enhancing their understanding in the field:

6.1. Sample Task 1: Opening an Account at the Bank

The following dialogues in English show the process of opening a bank account, with emphasis on the exchange between a customer and a bank clerk, and subsequently with a manager. The communication shows some aspects of a normal bank procedure and emphasizes the need for clear and concise communication. The learners can undertake such tasks to see how communication progresses in a professional environment.

A Clerk: ‘Namaste, can I help you?’

A Customer: ‘Namaste. Yes, I want to open an account at your bank.’

A Clerk: ‘Would you kindly come inside and speak to our Manager?’

A Customer: ‘I will do so.’

Manager: ‘Namaste. Sit down, please. What may I do for you?’

A Customer: 'Namaste. Would you kindly assist me in opening an account? I'm Virendra Astik, Poet and Critic.'

Manager: 'Oh, yes, gladly. Happy to meet you, Mr. Astik. I'm Virendra Nirjhar. (They shake hands). What type of account would you like to open, Mr. Astik?'

Mr. Astik: 'A Savings Bank Account.'

Manager: 'As per the bank rule, there is the need of someone to introduce you for opening the bank account. Is there any employee, who knows you, present in the bank?'

Mr. Astik: 'I'm afraid nobody in the bank knows me. (Looks around). Is it enough if one of your customers introduces me?'

Manager: 'Oh, sure. Well, in which case, the man standing behind the table over there, a head of a village, happens to be one of my good friends. I can request him to introduce you. He's been with us for years. I will request him to come inside for a minute.'

Mr. Astik: 'Thank you, I appreciate it.'

Manager: 'By the way, would you prefer to open a joint account or an account in your sole name?'

Mr. Astik: 'I would prefer a joint account with my wife. Also make it 'either or survivor,' so that either of us can use the account.'

Manager: 'Is your wife present with you at the bank?'

Mr. Astik: 'Yes, she's waiting outside at the counter.'

Manager: 'Do you prefer to have cheque book? If yes, then you would be required to deposit at least Rs. 2500/- and keep that amount in your account.'

Mr. Astik: 'Yes, I will do it.'

Manager: (Motions to the gentleman standing at the counter to step in) 'Namaste, Raja Awasthi.'

Mr. Awasthi: 'Namaste, gentlemen.'

Manager: 'Mr. Astik would like to open an account with us. Would you kindly sign this form for him? We only need someone to introduce him to us; it is a formality.'

Mr. Awasthi: 'I'm glad to do so.' (Signs the form)

Mr. Astik: 'Thank you, Mr. Awasthi.'

(Mr. Awasthi leaves)

Manager: 'Kindly fill in these forms in duplicate and sign in these boxes. Your wife can be called in, so she too can sign in these boxes.'

Mr. Astik: 'Right, Sir.'

Manager: 'Now your account is opened. You may take your ATM Card and Passbook from the next counter.'

Mr. Astik: 'Thank you. Good day, Sir.'

Manager: 'You are always welcome. Good day, Mr. Astik.'

This English communication illustrates the functional uses of opening a bank account. The learners would be able to examine how polite and direct communication is employed in a formal environment. It also presents an opportunity to practice banking vocabulary, sentence organization, grammar, articulacy, and creativity.

6.2. Sample Task 2: A Visit to a Zoo

Here the situation is framed to prompt the learners to consider the context, organization, and tone of the dialogues for enhancing their English communication.

Visitor: 'Namaste. Is this the zoo entrance?'

Ticket Seller: 'Namaste. Yes, it is. Welcome! How many tickets would you like?'

Visitor: 'I'd like two tickets, thank you. How much do they cost?'

Ticket Seller: 'For adults, the ticket costs Rs. 150/- per person. For children, it's Rs. 80/-.'

Visitor: 'Wonderful! I'll buy two tickets for adults. Can you inform me about the special features today?'

Ticket Seller: 'Of course! We have a new tiger show at 2 p.m., and there's also an elephant feeding session at 4 p.m. You can find the schedule at the information desk.'

Visitor: 'That's interesting! Where do I go first?'

Ticket Seller: 'Go to the bird sanctuary. It's to your right as you go in. Enjoy!'

Visitor: 'Thank you!'

This discussion introduces a typical situation in a trip to the zoo, where the customer enquires about ticket prices and other things. Such tasks can be done by the learners for improving their English communication.

"The ability to communicate with others is one of the most important human social functions" (Greenaway 171). The task on dialogue-based writing for human social function, like the ones given above, gives the learners different scenarios to practice and hone their communication skills. Through this task-based learning, the learners can learn how to apply language tool in a formal or informal setting for developing their English communication.

7. Conclusion

In the Indian context, where English is learnt as a second or third language, dialogue-based writing task is an effective way to nurture communication competence. It not only motivates the learners to interact actively with the language but also fosters understanding, enabling them to improve their ability to communicate clearly and creatively. As this paper has shown, dialogue-based writing task serves several purposes— enhancing word power, developing storytelling, improving writing skills, enabling self-expression, building confidence and refining critical thinking. Through character development, plot progression, or encouraging interactions, dialogue-based writing enables the learners to investigate various aspects of English communication in a formal yet ingenious manner.

By following a set of specific guidelines, including roles and features, and introducing effective strategies for dialogue writing, the learners are able to create real and interesting dialogues that reflect the subtlety of actual communication. Not only does this method improve their linguistic skills, but it also imparts greater awareness of human communication, allowing them to better identify and react with the intricacies of communication studies. As such, writing tasks focusing on dialogue constitute an important element in the complete development of English communication.

Including dialogue-based writing task in educational curricula fills the gap between learning and application in the schools, colleges and universities of India. It gets the learners ready to face both personal and professional communication in English, providing them with the skills needed to excel in different real-life situations. As an integral part of communication learning, this task-oriented study in English enables the learners to not only develop eloquence but also to gain confidence to communicate meaningfully and productively in various communication settings.

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