



COMMUNICATIVE CHALLENGES FACED BY ENGINEERING STUDENTS – A DIAGNOSTIC STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Engineering is one of the largest fields of study in the world. Most of the research works, articles and papers are recorded in English. The English language is the Lingua Franca of aviation, expertise and international business. The writer experienced that while teaching in engineering college, students coming from rural areas and vernacular medium backgrounds face lot of difficulties during placements. Communicative skills are required for an engineer who aspires to prosper in the global arena. The students, though technically outstanding, find themselves incompetent for jobs because of their lack of proficiency in all the four skills namely reading, writing, listening and speaking. This not only affects their prospective and bright career but also diminishes their image as an engineer. This paper henceforth focuses on the apprehensions and problems faced by the students while learning English. This study is of great prominence to help the students develop effective communication skills.

Keywords: *Apprehensions; Aviation; Diminishes; Expertise; Lingua Franca; Proficiency; Prominence; Prospective*

INTRODUCTION

Two decades ago engineering students were mainly focused on technical knowledge and skills. But with the growth and development in every field, the need for effective and proper communication is being felt and demanded. Multinational companies absorb students who have good command on communication skills. The writer is a faculty in Engineering College teaching Communication skills and also the

coordinator of Training and Placement cell in a rural place. The writer experienced that the students are extremely fabulous in technical area but very weak in communication. They clear the aptitude test and technical interviews but fail in the personal interview. The reason is the students are unable to express themselves properly. The questions asked in the interview are very simple and relevant. But then the students are not able to satisfy the members of the interview panel. The reason is lack of proper communication skills. The students are lost for words. They cannot construct proper sentences. The writer interacted with students and found various reasons for their ineffective communication. It was also further noticed that parents and teachers stress importance on science subjects and hardly any preference is given on languages particularly English.

No one can deny the fact that English is the international language for communication. It is used as a bridge language in research, technical, economic, scientific and international business. In professional courses like Engineering lectures are conducted in English. Most of the theories are in English and taught in English. Further, if a student wants to pursue higher studies or study abroad then proficiency in English is mandatory.



Importance of English in engineering field

Initially, the engineers were expected to do technical things behind stage. The need for proficiency in English was not felt. The engineering curriculum also did not emphasis on communication skills in English. Ardeo, J. M. (2008)

With due course as India became a part of the global economy and English being the link language of the global business, the companies of India are concentrating and absorbing those candidates who possess good language skills of English. Mane, V. S. (2012)

Again, English is the medium of interpersonal communication in the corporate and to have good command on English language is all the more a necessity.

Engineers have to work in teams and this team work demands mutual cooperation and understanding within and outside the organization. In order to understand and co-ordinate with co-workers and execute their projects engineers need to acquire and be masters in all the four skills-listening, speaking, writing and reading. Malavika Mohapatra, S. S. (2014)

It would be totally wrong to depend only on technical knowledge and skills, which are not adequate to progress in one's professional career. Excellent communication skills and sound domain knowledge in English is indispensable to forge the most out of the globalised job market.

For career growth and prospects an engineer has to communicate in English. In

professional life he has to conduct meetings, participate in group discussions, give technical presentations and also be an expert in professional writing for which mastery in the English language is obligatory. Rierner, M. J. (2007)

Communicative apprehensions and problems of the engineering students

The question arises why the students are not able to acquire proficiency in communication skills. The reasons are:

Vernacular medium background

Many students come from vernacular medium. Most of the teachers of vernacular medium schools have low levels of proficiency in English and therefore they do not teach the subject with quality and purpose, but teach for name sake.

Again, though they are required to teach in English, they frequently use mother tongue or the local language while teaching English. At the end of the explanation they handout summaries and notes in English. Juhana, J. (2012)

Fear of making mistakes

Students fear of making mistakes. Those who come from vernacular medium background experience psychological disturbance. They find it hard to adjust to English medium colleges. They feel shy and are unassertive. They develop inferiority complex.

Fear of being laughed at

The students do rote-learning to pass examinations. Albert P'Rayan, R. T.(2008) When students are accustomed to such kind of environment, they find it very difficult to



express or converse in English and are lost for words in real life situations. This inability to express their thoughts clearly in both written and spoken forms leads to a high communication failure potential. Once students go for higher education, they are definitely disadvantaged. It is observed that students are unable to adapt themselves to the institutes of higher education and also not comfortable in communicating in English which not only affects their academics but also their career in future.

Shyness of the students

Students come from different backgrounds and speak various languages. They feel shy and fail to come out of the shell as they presume that their errors may be found by others which may diminish their stature and image. They feel very comfortable and easy to converse in their own mother tongue. Ragam, S. P. (2015)

Lack of confidence

It is very disheartening to note that students compare themselves with their peers. Comparisons on procuring grades, the amount of study material they mastered, the skills of computer coding, how fast they could learn a new topic or how much time they take to complete their assignments. The students also compare their proficiency in communication skills. To be precise, the students measure themselves 'not often accurately' against their peer group. All these lead to lower their confidence.

Inappropriate teaching methodology

At the college English is taught neither like a subject nor with a motive to build up the communication skills of the students. There

is no proper way of teaching the subject. Students are not aware of the importance of the subject. They bunk the classes of English. There is no uniformity while teaching the subject. Again, all the faculties are not up to the mark. Procuring a university degree in English does not really assure the proficiency of the faculties in the subject. The students' motive is only to pass. Thus the teaching methodology does not help the students to enhance their communicative proficiency.

Lack of motivation from faculties

It is noticed that a faculty in an engineering college has hardly any excitement to teach as it is remedial in nature and rarely any scope for professional growth. The students' difficulty is all the more aggravated by the lack of appropriately trained English language faculties and the students do not find interest in learning English.

Socio-economic background of the family

It is found that parents, who are illiterate, do not know the importance of English. It is observed that lower socio economic status families usually strive hard for catering academic support for their kids. Time constraint and dearth of finance makes it all the more hard for the parents and they cannot provide a conducive atmosphere for learning. Parents of this group cannot afford technology, home tuitions and reading materials which negatively affect the academic performance of the children. Students experience additional challenges like difficult learning situations and poor motivational conditions which add to their low performance.



Lack of opportunity to practice communications skills

It is found that in vernacular medium schools English is treated as a foreign language and is taught only as a subject. Meaningful interaction seldom takes place and communication skills are neither practiced nor stressed. It is also observed that students do not speak in English or listen to it daily. Speaking in English is not compulsory in many English medium schools and not needed in vernacular mediums. This affects tremendously the Basic English learning skills of the students. Rus, D. (2015).

Grammar is taught in a rote method

Grammar is not taught in an interesting and motivating way. It is taught only to complete the syllabus and neglected in real life situations. Children are ignorant about the importance of grammar. It is taught in the deductive method where students are only passive listeners. The students by heart the definitions and do the exercises without comprehending the rules of grammar. They find it very boring and monotonous. Lack of sufficient knowledge in grammar affects the academics and career of the students.

CONCLUSION

Engineering is one of the prime fields of study. For an engineering student fluency in English language is of utmost importance both for academics as well as for prospective career. Seetha, S. (2012). Good communication skills are the need of the hour. A student may be technically and academically outstanding but then at the bottom level lays effective communication

skills. Lack of proper communication skills contributes to the low profile of engineering students in general. On the other hand excellent communication skills are considered to be one of the best career intensifiers.

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