TEACHING/LEARNING OF ENGLISH IN ENGINEERING COLLEGES: A REVIEW

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Abstract

Effective communication skills make a student reach greater pavilions in life else his career gets hindered. Many Information Technology (IT) and Multinational Corporations in India recruit engineering candidates with good English communication skills and so students of engineering courses are made to meet with the demands of the corporate world. Mere technical knowledge in a specific field of engineering without employability skills will neither place them in a good company nor provide an opportunity for further education. Lack of good communication skills will hamper them in excelling in their place of work. Proficiency in English is considered as one of the most significant attributes for employment. For attaining this objective, the mechanism employed for teaching plays a crucial role. In such a context, the teacher plays the role of the trainer employing these mechanisms for achieving the laid objectives. This paper attempts to highlight on the material and the transaction mechanism which is not up to the mark for making the students competent to face the job market. The teachers are to be taken into confidence and first on priority basis train them in all the aspects of language pedagogy so that they become competent to make the students proficient in the language.

Key words: *Communication skills, employability skills, multinational companies, employment, pedagogy, transaction mechanism*

1.0 Introduction

Success of an individual rests on the ability to communicate effectively. Communication is the lifeline for personal and professional success of an individual. The wide-ranging Engineering courses offered now started in India from 18th century with optimum standards. Every year an overwhelming number of students walk out with their technical degrees. Most of them qualify with an appreciable percentage but with minimal communication skills due to which they fail to procure a job in Information Technology (IT) and Multinational Corporations. Mere technical knowledge in a specific field of engineering without employability skills will not be sufficient for procuring the right job. Lack of good communication skills hampers the students in excelling in their place of work. Proficiency in English is considered as one of the most significant attributes for employment. For attaining this objective, the teaching mechanism plays a very crucial role. In such a context, the teacher is expected to play the role of a trainer employing the specific teaching mechanisms for achieving the laid objectives.

1.1 Status of English in Engineering Institutions

English proficiency is significant on account of the upper hand of English-speaking countries in their economic status, commercial transactions and technological advancements. English has become an inseparable entity in engineering colleges as it forms to be the basic building block for transacting the knowledge which they acquire in their core subjects both orally and

in writing. Other than English, students are exposed to the lectures on core subjects which are purely technical and content oriented.

The engineering degree can be divided into two primary components; the technical component comprises of the knowledge of physical and mathematical principles, analytical techniques and modelling along with a set of generic skills. A student at this stage should be trained to develop commitment to learning, interpersonal skills, develop the skill of utilising time and resources effectively, use the feedback constructively, develop problem solving, critical thinking and stress management skills.[1] If the students are made to develop all these abilities in them, they will be in a position to handle any situation they face during the course of their personal and professional life. There is a little anguish that the engineering students, who are academically brilliant nevertheless, find it difficult to express themselves fluently in interviews, group discussions and do not get selected for higher education in other countries.

The learners are in the requirement of life long skills, these skills should be honed by the language teacher. It is the language class which relaxes them by providing a scope of interacting with the teacher directly and is groomed in many aspects related to self expository techniques. The student being not aware of the development of functional aspects will be in an illusion that English is very easy and can be mastered without the involvement of the teacher. Neither the teacher nor the taught try to understand the fundamental objective behind the inclusion of English in the syllabus; due to which the students give significance to the content in the prescribed lessons. On the other hand, a good teacher exposes the students to the different language skills through the content.

1.2 Objectives of Including English at Engineering Level

English is included in the engineering curriculum to incorporate technical or specific oral and written presentation skills in the students, it is to incorporate proper expository techniques. The student with excellent subject knowledge fails to present it if proper guidance is not provided. After procuring the academic qualifications, the students are expected to be part of a professional organisation, they should maintain an appropriate decorum to fit themselves in the organisational structure. Language grooms them in this area to fit into a professional fervour.

A student of the under-graduation stage possesses the knowledge of the fundamental aspects of the language. So, they should be taught the usage of appropriate structures and vocabulary to make their presentations effective. The students are not aware of the use of proper tenses and voice while presenting orally. The basic difference between written and spoken form is not known to the students and they write the way they speak without understanding the complexity of writing over speaking. They007 should be taught the difference existing between written and spoken communication which is interchangeably taken as interactive mode.

A student at this stage should be developed into a good listener, in capacity to listen to the specific vocabulary and structures. Reading is also a significant skill necessary to survive in the professional world. Reading skill is a study skill which comprises of skimming, scanning, note taking and note making. All these things are essential for the professional development of the students which can be developed by involving them in the teaching/learning process.

All these objectives are intended to develop proper communication skills in a professional context to enable students to compete for engineering or technical career and also perform effectively in their chosen profession.

1.3 Success of the Specific Objectives Framed

The objectives framed can be achieved by the application of the pedagogy which is pragmatic in its approach. The teaching-learning process is expected to be learning centred. Procuring a job will not be a problem if the objectives laid are accomplished. On the contrary, many of the brilliant engineers and software professionals fail to make an impact on the global market mainly because they lack the required communicative competence. It is time to realise that the engineers should know not only engineering skills but also English to present the engineering skills. The ignorant attitude shown towards English should be replaced with proper focus on the development of language fluency for academic and professional survival. It may not be an exaggeration to say that communication skills in English are needed for sheer survival. The objectives framed should be seriously considered and a plan of action should be prepared keeping in view the expected behavioural change in the students as the main objective.

Himanshu Aggarwal, CEO, Aspiring Minds, said "Looking at state-wise distribution of employable talent, we can see that while certain states produce huge quantity of engineers, the average employability is significantly low." It is clear that states need to be conscious towards better education quality rather than building more capacity."[2]

1.4 Classroom Atmosphere

The Indian classrooms are multi-linguistic, heterogeneous and with varied educational and socio-economic background. The classrooms are overcrowded with all the above said diversities. Overcrowded classrooms will create a hurdle in the achievement of objectives. A student at this stage is very fragile and timid or over exited as per their background. This generates many challenging situations which remain unanswered. Above all these, the classrooms are devoid of the required infrastructure mandatory for developing specific skills in the students. A teacher here should make a student comfortable in the use of appropriate tool so that they can integrate whenever the need arises.

1.5 Current Transaction Mechanism

It is a major challenge teaching English at engineering level as the students are to be made skilled to present the knowledge, they acquired in their core subjects. While everyone agrees that adequate communication competencies are crucial for good engineers, teaching of English in engineering colleges in India has always held an uncertain status. Much attention has not been given to these curricula. Language learning is a skill-oriented activity and needs an entirely different pedagogic approach from the one used for other conventional courses. They have English with the course title Professional Communication in English or Business Communication and Professional Development at the undergraduate level. In most of the cases, it is either a one or two -semester course, comprising of both theory and practical classes. The Communicative English course is divided into Theory and Laboratory sessions.

The laboratory sessions are intended for involving the participation of the students to a major extent. Usually the laboratory is divided into two parts one is CALL and the other one being

Communication Skills Laboratory. Through CALL the students are exposed to licensed software which gives inputs to the students to present confidently on a given topic as part of JAM, Role Plays, Presentations, Group Discussions, Debates and mock interview sessions. The lab activities cater to the development of effective speaking and listening skills in English along with soft skills. They are groomed in such a way that they smoothly fit themselves very efficiently during the phase of transition from college to workplace.

Initially the faculty should be oriented about the syllabus, the objectives behind designing of the syllabus, and how it should be transacted in the classroom to make the students industry-ready. The teacher should undergo a vigorous training as the level they are going to handle is challenging. The faculty is expected to be highly proficient, creative and dynamic. They develop a frame of mind towards English to be irrelevant. The students need English for the development of technical presentation skills and employability skills more specifically from third year onwards as they become aware of their needs and will be desperate to learn. Therefore, there is an urgent need to find a workable solution so that, the students in professional colleges get an opportunity to acquire the skills needed for professional excellence.

1.6 Conclusion

Engineering courses are professional courses which aim at the development of professional skills in the students. They are supposed to be made industry-ready. The student should be prepared emphasizing the skill development for the purpose of professional and overall development. All these become productive if the content prepared for transacting in the classrooms is utilized rightfully keeping the objectives in view. Students learning depends on their age, attitude, motivation, personality, learning approach and their previous education, knowledge, abilities and learning experiences.

Most students in India entering English medium schools have limited exposure to English language and have not generally developed adequate conversational and interpersonal skills in English by that time. Therefore, they require adequate time to develop the required skills for successful learning in the regular classroom situation. Learners who have had substantial exposure to English language before entering a school require less support and time before they are fully integrated into the regular classroom. According to Archibald, for learning a second language the student should be immersed for about 10000 hours in the target language to attain fluency, but in actuality they are exposed to English only for 7200 hours. In learning a language, the aim is to enable the students to utilize the language in day-to-day tasks and also meet the academic demands. The linguistic competence is crucial for the students and teachers as well. The teaching-learning process should ensure that learning does take place and the learners do achieve their long-term goals which include learners' ability to communicate in the target language outside the classrooms and realize various professional/career opportunities. Although, the technical universities provide courses semester wise, the insufficiency of them does not lead to success.

The students learning problem is compounded by the lack of appropriately trained English language teachers at all levels. Focus on improving English language proficiency of the teachers could help in improving the situation as students may have very little to learn from

their teachers if they themselves are not truly proficient. The English proficiency of teachers in rural areas and even in various English medium schools is far from satisfactory. A mere university degree in English or a degree in education does not really guarantee proficiency of the teachers in English language teaching. Besides university degrees, the teachers must qualify benchmarked proficiency tests in order be considered eligible as teachers of English because the need of the hour is to teach English as an international language solely for the purpose of academic and professional communication. Teachers of other subjects also should be trained in the methods to be adopted for teaching and should be made proficient in English as learning of English is not necessarily restricted to English classes but will have to happen through various subjects which are part of the qualifying examinations.

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