

THE METHODOLOGY OF TEACHING ENGLISH TO ENGINEERING STUDENTS THROUGH ENGLISH NEWSPAPERS

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Abstract

The position of English as a global language is being strengthened day by day with the advent of modern communication systems and the concept of globalization gaining ground in the recent past. Existing learning theories such as behaviorism, cognitive and constructivism had been in trend, before the arrival of computers and internet. The latest trends in Engineering studies can be accessed only if the learners have a good comprehension skill in English, as most of the newest science and engineering theories are written in English. Multilingualism is also the need of the hour as it provides additional advantage to people trotting the globe. Thus, the application of Information and Communication Technologies in language learning can motivate the learners to be prepared for the advanced digital age.

Keywords: *communication, globalization, technology, language learning, multilingualism, Engineering*

Introduction:

“Technology reorganized our lifestyles, ways of communication and ways of learning”
Language teaching methodology has been mysterious for a long time for educators. Numerous approaches available are superior to the other. But most of the methods prove to be insufficient and the real teaching and learning situations differ from environment to environment. Larsen & Freeman (2000) classifies language teaching approaches into nine categories such as Audio-Lingual Method, Grammar-Translation Method, Direct Method, Total Physical Response, Community Language learning, Communicative Approach, Suggestopedia, Silent Way and Natural Approach. The teacher has to merge different approaches cleverly to suit limited needs and to perform the preferred goals of the learners, taking into account their expertise levels.

A recent survey shows that oral communication skill was ranked as the most important transportable skill among other presentation and writing skills. Students sometimes recognized the level and the need to develop oral and written communication skills. Curry, Sherry and

Tunney (2003) state that graduates require transportable skills that are vital to them in their careers .

The traditional ELT methods are not enough in order to teach communication skills. They have to be supplemented with a different knowledge base and have to borrow heavily from behavioral sciences and management. The focus is on the use of English for the communication and also for using influential techniques. The factors affecting the decision making process and the diverse methods of scrutinizing the receiver's personality and are the part of the teaching and learning process.

The on-campus recruitment process in engineering colleges consists of four stages: 1) Aptitude test 2) Technical Round interview 3) Group discussion and 4) HR interview. The four stages comprise the candidates' technical knowledge, critical thinking, verbal reasoning, communication, analytical and group skills are reviewed and at each stage the unsuccessful candidates are filtered out. Educational institutions which provide employability skills in their students are flourishing in getting most of their students placed in top most companies. Trainers have been employed for developing communication skills and to train their students on full-time basis, in many engineering colleges.

Technology in Education:

The multiplicities and unpredictability of the field include the materialization of new learning paradigms and expertise that is required to estimate the quality and the strength of such scholarly activities. CALL activities totally exploit the improved technology to produce extremely interactive learning environments, offering successful support for the acquisition of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. New technologies such as high-speed networks allow access to materials and learners to the speakers around the world and these enhance learning opportunities beyond anything previously possible. It is to be designed according to the students' attitude.

According to Gnana Gandhi S.Mercy (2011), multimedia computers have to be adopted as a better option, which are configured with the right software, permitting the students to view websites, to listen to T.V. or Radio programmes, to read the world's great literature, to facilitate person to person communication through e-mail, chat, internet phone, low- end video conferencing and many more. Voice recognition software allows the students to choose and to practice better idea of their accuracy. If an institution has electronic classrooms, the instructor with a laptop, demonstrates the orientation features and a good instruction sheet will take care of the rest. The students those who have not finished the work at time can continue their work at home.

Computers should be used to make classes more effective. There are two ways to use them. One way is for the teacher to present pictures, videos and written text with or without sound. The presentation can be programmed in advance or handled manually. No doubt the second method of using computers, direct the students a better understanding of computers and language learning. Here, the students work individually on their own interest and the computer provides materials to study and students can interact with the computer. The present day engineers need excellent skill in communication, decision making and teamwork. Competencies in business acumen, marketing and public relations are also desired. However the academic educations provided by most of the universities fail to inculcate these skills in their professionals. Technical knowhow is very important to every student and must be presented with an excellent standard of communication skills particularly oral. Therefore, promotion of oral skills should get

due consideration in language learning process. It sustains the interests of students and motivates them to be active participants and helps them immensely to cope with the future work place needs.

Technical English in Engineering Colleges

In the field of Technical English in Engineering Colleges, the teachers' aim is to make the students acquire communication skills, listening skills, reading skills and for the use of English to meet the demands of business. Communicative language teaching enables students to perform spontaneously, but it cannot guarantee linguistic accuracy. Widdowson says, "The learning of a language involves acquiring the ability to compose correct sentences. This kind of ability of the learner depends upon knowledge of the grammatical rules of the language being learned". Tense errors are the commonest and are difficult to remedy. The students are also confused at the use of proper tense forms and are demotivated. Teaching language is viewed as a more hard task than teaching literature. In literature, we have the freedom to explore into any genre and interpret it according to literary Language. But, the instructor is expected to work within the rigid framework of the principles of grammar, when it comes to language, especially grammar. The instructor always focuses his / her attention on the basic forms of grammar. As a result, his/her enterprise gets drowned. When the students join the first year of technical courses, they are already exposed to the theoretical nuances of English grammar. Of course, there are also students from vernacular medium, who struggle to speak and write fairly good English. The syllabus of their first year course of subjects includes English, called as Technical English and the major part of their study is grammar that is taught with technical examples.

Communicative language teaching enables students to perform spontaneously, but it cannot guarantee linguistic accuracy. In learning grammar, students face a dilemma. They need to know the rules which are tested in their exams. On the other hand, there is a good need for effective communication in English. So, the instructors have to find out for the ways of combining form and meaning in teaching foreign language. Many of the students of technical courses are from vernacular medium and it is found difficult to explain the syntactic and semantic structural aspects of grammar. The students are also confused about the use of proper tenses and are demotivated. Teachers of grammar facilitate learning in grammar and make the students discover on their own. Tenses are the jewels in the crown of grammar. Every sentence has a verb, without which, there is no sentence. The tense of the verb can be present, past and future, with other divisions in each tense. The use of tense depends on the time that the writer or the speaker wants to refer. The problem is that the students though know a great deal about the names of tenses, they find it difficult to understand the time aspect that each tense indicates. So, the focus is on the difficulties faced by an instructor and learner to understand the paradoxes involved in the study of tenses.

The fact that the purpose, the lay out, the discourse and the vocabulary of texts that deal with technically oriented subject matters are different from literary or newspaper texts, for example, these features justify the need for didactic approaches that are different from those applied to texts on general, social or literary topics. The term 'Technical English' is commonly used to refer to texts that deal with 'technical subjects' and to denote texts in which the discourse is different from that used in literary texts or texts on various social subjects.

Oral communication:

Oral communication in English is the most important skill across the globe, assessment of oral communication skills do not form a part of the summative assessment format in most Universities. Phonetics is taught in theory, but not in practice. McCarthy (1967) pointed out: the pupils are to be taught to pronounce a foreign language acceptably, and if they are to understand in their turn how phonetic theory can be profitably applied. If the assessment of pronunciation is considered for awarding grades in English language teaching and if students and teachers take it seriously, accent and intonation can be improved to meet their future needs. If this can be done honestly in formative assessment mode, it will serve the intended purpose.

In formative assessment the students are made to involve in the assessment process unlike traditional assessment thus allowing them to watch and assess their own performance. They feel a sense of accomplishment and notice their level of improvement. Online assessment is also becoming popular where the students add textual feedback and can pose questions on the web. One of the best methods for relaxed language learning, especially for engineering students is the access to a well-equipped Language Learning Centre. This centre is equipped with Internet, multimedia, DVD Library, Lending Library, reference library, journals, magazines etc. This is different from the usual language laboratories in that formal language practice is not imparted in LLCs, but the learners are allowed self-access at their leisure hours in a connected atmosphere.

The teacher, whenever present may act as a guide, not as an instructor. Cooperative learning can also take place effectively. Activity-oriented teaching using latest language learning technology is also possible. A Lab Assistant can take care of the centre which is to be kept open from morning to late evenings. Since language learning is a continuous process, students will be able to make use of the LLCs even after they finish their summative examinations in English, and continue learning for the advancement of their language skills which will keep them in good stead to face occupational avenues after they complete the courses. Therefore, it is essential to adopt modern technological avenues in language learning as well. MS office (word, excel and Power Point) is essential as tools for easy communication. So also web pages are to be utilized. Theory without practice is unproductive. Video/audio grading with teachers comments can help learners realize their mistakes and correct it. It is an undisputed fact that language learning takes place best in the social context. Since this social context is missing in learning English as a second language, 3-D Virtual Reality (VR) technology is used to teach language skills in a social context.

Teacher as A Tutor:

It is imperative to carry out needs analysis to determine the specific reasons for learning the language or to specify exactly, what students need to achieve through the medium of English. Techniques and procedures for collecting information to be used in syllabus design are referred to as a needs analysis. The teacher is now able to find out the potential knowledge and abilities that the learners possess at entry level and what they do not know and cannot do in English.

It is necessary to analyze how far could the teachers conduct the activities as needed in a learner centered syllabus in their classes. The variables measured in the first section were, to find out, to what extent activities like: Grammar and vocabulary building, group discussions, reading practices, business communication, conducting paper presentations, and technology assisted language learning were being conducted by the teachers in the classrooms. It is seen that due to the various administrative and teaching related constraints the teachers are unable to bring much

constructive changes to the learning process. The academic needs as mentioned by teachers as indicated from the above responses are prioritized as follows:

1. Need for interaction with syllabus designers and experts from the field of ELT.
2. Need for effective teachers-training programmes and professional development workshops.
3. Need of extension of language courses to further semesters in the B. Tech program.
4. Need of creating a positive learning environment and including activities based on intrapersonal and interpersonal skills.

Data Analysis:

An analysis of the objective data collected from this section indicates that teachers lack proper training in conducting technology related activities in language classrooms. Many teachers need training in using relevant software for language learning and to facilitate interactive activities that would develop students' personality, like leadership skills, team activities, and interpersonal skills.

The results shows that technology related teaching activities along with personality development sessions are very much necessary and those should be implemented by giving proper training to the faculty and language instructors of the colleges.

Using Learner Centered Activities in Percentages as per the teacher's report.

ITEMS	NEVER	SELDOM	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
(a) Conducting grammar practice sessions and error analysis	-	-	-	60%	-
(b) Technical vocabulary exercises	-	-	-	-	45%
(c) Listening skills with relevant learning software	-	25%	-	-	-
(d) Mock speaking sessions for oral practice	-	20%	-	-	-
(e) Reading activities	-	-	35%	-	-
(f) Writing skills practice	-	-	45%	-	-
(g) Promoting paper presentations	2%	-	-	-	-
(h) Conducting internet related language learning activities	4%	-	-	-	-

Based on the findings of the study it is recommended that learners be involved more in interactive sessions in classrooms so that they are able to strengthen their communicative competence. Additionally, teaching technical and business communication and technology assisted language learning are areas that should be taken up on a priority basis while learning English for engineering purposes. Thus, designing tasks and activities accordingly would help to achieve the goals and objectives of the course. It is also recommended that teachers are given enough opportunity for professional development so that they gain knowledge on effective teaching strategies that can be implemented at the classroom level, in the engineering context.

Conclusion:

To summarize, research findings show that a host of similar challenging problems exist in different engineering colleges in India. This study tries to seek alternative measures to overcome them. The level of students varies and tasks and assignments to suit different levels can be given to assess the ability of the students of a particular level. In the initial years when communicative English is introduced to them as in engineering colleges of Tamilnadu the students come to the class with different temperament. Students need not understand all that is taught by the teacher teaches in the classrooms. Mismatch at the learning process level is evident in such situations. Oral English teaching is also to be based on the limitations of the learners. The beginners will have to be given adequate support through scaffolding. Multiple Intelligence theory states that children should be evaluated by what they can do, not by what they cannot do.

The engineering institutions of the our state run short of qualified teaching staff in English for Specific Purposes. It is necessary for the teachers of technical institutions to pursue a particular teaching strategy. Their personal conviction must be appropriate and effective in the given situation of teaching- learning environment. It is not only desirable to have a policy but also necessary to explain to the learners how such a strategy can lead the students to the targeted goals. It is probable that the learners often fail to understand why they learn the content assigned to them. If the purpose is explained to them, they may be motivated to learn it with interest. In such a scenario e-learning can ease the situation to some extent. This can also bridge the gap between urban and rural students in accessing latest knowledge and information.

English does not remain as a subject always but an interdisciplinary aspect to improve the social status of our lives. English incorporation as a subject into the Engineering curriculum thus needs to develop the humanistic aspects in academic field and develop their personality. Learning proper English would give them a good grasp on the current usage of technical language which would make them into informative and socially responsible engineers.

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