

Communication Skills Laboratory – a Gateway of Engineering Employment

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Abstract: Recent technology has made everything easily accessible within fraction of seconds and this may not be possible without IT sectors and their services all around the world. The role played by English in the mode of communication is incomparable with its influence in the global market. In India, it is considered as a language of inter-state and intra-state communication. The growing demand for English in the world business has necessitated the introduction of English at all levels in the field of education. The government has revised the educational policies and introduced various methodologies and approaches to teach/ learn the language better. This paper aims to analyze the third year communication laboratory course prescribed for student of engineering and technology.

I. INTRODUCTION

English language has undoubtedly attained the status of a global language and a good command over this language is essential to survive in this competitive world. English was introduced in India as a colonial language and reached the premier status of a second language. It has taken its form as an official language and as a consequence, language policies have been reformulated in almost all the states in our country to enrich the language skills of learners at all levels.

II. TEACHING ENGLISH AT TERTIARY LEVEL

Nutan Yadav(2009) points out the fact that the teaching of English in India at all three levels i.e. primary, secondary & tertiary level is still fraught with a multitude of difficulties & obstacles.[1]. Teaching English is a challenge at all the levels. At the tertiary level, it is even more challenging as teachers are expected to prepare their learners to express their thoughts and opinions in English. Most of the students find it difficult to appropriately respond to basic questions in English. The reasons might be due the mother-tongue medium of instruction received in school, social background, learning ability.

III. LANGUAGE SKILLS OF ENGINEERING STUDENTS

Most of the students in the state of Tamil Nadu pursue degree courses in engineering with a hope to get placed in multinational companies which guarantees them a fairly good salary. In order to achieve this goal, they need to have a sound technical knowledge and good communication skills. In spite of their primary school education in English very few possess effective communication skills but a majority of them find difficult to use language in authentic situations. Majority of the students from different socio-cultural background join an engineering college without minimal proficiency in English. They prefer to score high marks in the core subjects and show indifferent attitude towards learning English. They fail to realize the importance of effective communication which is necessary for facing the interview successfully which eventually ensures a placement in reputed companies. In the first year they do not give much importance to technical English I and II. In language classes, majority of the students while away their time and never take English classes seriously and fail to comprehend the objective of the course.

IV. LAB BASED COURSE

Anna University introduced communication skills laboratory course for the third year engineering students in the year 2005, to enhance employability skills of students at the time of placements. The language laboratory plays a vital role in developing the communication skills. The objective of the communication lab course is to improve the language skills of learners pursuing their degree courses in engineering. The purpose of the language laboratory based course is to improve learners' abilities in all the four skills. The course was supposed to ensure learner motivation and interest and further provide the ambience for better learning outcomes. To enhance the listening, speaking, reading and writing (LSRW) skills the university recommended

Globarena software in the lab session. It has a user friendly interface. The contents in the syllabus include oral presentation, group discussion, interview skills, and brain-storming sessions.

With a view to improving the employability skills of graduates, engineering colleges organize soft skill training programs apart from the communication skills course prescribed by the university. However, one cannot be certain that these programmes reach the learners and help them face the interview with confidence. The National Employability report (2014) states that out of 400,000 engineering graduates only 18.33% are employable in India and 73.63% lack English speaking skills. [2]. Many experts from industries identified that the following components such as analytical and critical thinking skills, decision making ability, project planning, persistence, knowledge of contemporary issues, ability to work in a multicultural team, multi-tasking, and generic skills to be the part of information technology and required for successful position in an organization. It is highly essential that learners need to be trained as per the requirements of the industry.

The laboratory course is included in the aspect of making the students employable; the fact is that the students are not employed up to the expected level. Therefore the institutions and multi-national companies should come forward to make the course effective and extend their willingness for interactive sessions to fill the ever-widening gap between the academics and industry. Teachers handle the communication and soft skills laboratory without much knowledge about the relevant skills that would equip the engineering graduates climb the professional ladder. They train the students on group discussions and presentations. On the other hand, soft skill trainers train the students in other areas to compete in the interviews, thus the students trust soft skill trainers than the language teachers.

V. PROBLEMS FACED BY TEACHERS IN THE LAB

In the laboratory session teachers find it impossible to understand the mind set and the socio- cultural background of individual to help the students in developing communication skills within the allotted periods. But, the majority of the students are of the opinion that prepared presentations and group discussions will earn fair grades in examination. This attitude of students is encouraged by the teachers for the desired results than developing communication skills. In addition to that, institutions admit students who are unfit for engineering field to fill the seats. This deteriorates the standard of the students and creates problem for the language teachers.

VI. LEARNERS EXPECTATION FROM LANGUAGE TEACHERS

The learners expect the teacher to provide support and induce a spirit of self-confidence in them so that they would get rid of fear and inhibition which act as a stumbling block in realizing the dream of many budding engineers. Learners expect the teacher to approach them with the language that they feel comfortable while starting the sessions as this would help learners to develop positive attitude towards the language teacher. Majority of the learners also expect the language teacher to provide feedback on their performance which would help them identify the strengths and weaknesses. Such a comprehensive feedback would pave way for self-assessment. Interactive sessions are favoured by learners. Moreover, they look forward to a facilitator who can facilitate language learning.

VII. CONCLUSION

As pointed out earlier, effective communication skills and critical thinking skills have become mandatory for getting placed in companies. Tamil Nadu contributes more engineers to the society every year compared with other states in India. However, one pertinent question remains unanswered. How many engineering graduates have the right skill set which ultimately decides the fate of an engineering graduate? This article has pointed out some of the issues that deserve attention. The lab based course has been introduced with a view to addressing these issues. However, a closer look at the components of the syllabus makes one ponder the relevance of some aspects of the syllabus prescribed for enhancing the language skills of learners.

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