



TEACHING ENGLISH FOR ENGINEERING STUDENTS A CHALLENGING TASK

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ABSTRACT

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This paper "Teaching English for Engineering Students a Challenging Task", deals with designing, analyzing and executing the syllabus for a professional group of students keeping in view their career. Most of the affiliated colleges need to stick on to the syllabus of their respective Universities. The General English that the students learn at the first year of B.Tech seems to be inadequate in sufficing the needs of the students as employees. Hence many of the non-autonomous Professional colleges opt for the co-curricular activities to improve the skills of the students. The syllabus that is meant for such students should be a comprehensive one focusing on improving their communicative Efficiency by integrating LSRW skills. Apart from this, the major concern is to increase the employability skills of the students. So the verbal ability of the students has to be improved along with their communicative efficiency. Verbal ability coupled with communicative efficiency yields fruitful results. Thus the paper discusses the needs of the targeted students, the syllabus to be taught, and the challenges that are faced in executing it.

Keywords: *Teaching Engineering students, General English inadequacy, Designing syllabus, analyzing, executing, improving communicative efficiency, integration of skills, and focus on verbal ability*

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INTRODUCTION

English is an international language and is used in maximum countries. English is the only language which truly links the whole world together. The entire encyclopedia's literature is available in English. It is a universal language. For the users who use internet, English is the main language of communication as all the information is available in it. One of the main reasons of English being used as important language is due to its demand in the modern life. Such reasons motivate them to learn and grow with it. It is a language of universities, Institutions, Tour and travel. In most jobs and business organizations it is mandatory requirement to know how to speak English. It is evident that English is necessity of time and society. English has also become easy to be learnt due to availability of books, websites, resources, teachers etc. English is an important language as it is used in Teaching-Learning process.

NEED FOR ENGLISH FOR THE ENGINEERING STUDENTS

The general English that has been part of the syllabus for the engineering students seems to be inadequate for them to meet the specific purpose of employability. Any company which wants to recruit the students looks for some pre-requisites in them. The students need to have sound technical knowledge and good communication skills in both written and spoken. Since the insistence on grammatical English has got shifted to functional English, students started managing things. But when it comes to written part, most of the students are not able to write grammatically correct sentences. The written skills demand grammatically correct sentences. The syntactic errors are not spared by anybody. Moreover the syntactic errors are considered grave mistakes and they are looked down upon as unskilled and unscholarly.

When we learn a language especially English there are four skills that needed to be taken care of equally that is listening skills, speaking skills, reading skills and writing skills. Listening skills could be enhanced by focusing on making the students listen to the sounds of that particular language. This would help them with the right pronunciation of words. To equip students with training in listening one can think

about comprehending speeches of people of different backgrounds and regions. This intensive listening will ultimately help a student to understand more on the accents to be used and the exact pronunciation of words.

To enable oneself to express fluently in a language one should think improving their speaking skills this could be improved by understanding para-linguistic attributes such as voice quality, volume and tone, voice modulation, articulation, pronunciation etc. This could also be further enhanced with help of debates and discussions.

Reading skills helps the students to guess the meanings of the words in the language from the context and grasp the content and draw conclusions. This could be done by skimming texts and reading and understanding of textual materials. The students should also make it a point to familiarize with the jargons and new words.

To write flawless language one should excel in the writing skills with the help of various methods. Importance should be given to composition and creative writing. One should also make sure of coherence and cohesiveness when it comes to writing a language.

With the help of above mentioned strategies one may improve and improvise their LSRW skills to any desirable extent that the overall communication skill of a person will be enhanced and enriched. Importance of English language learning has been the need of the hour these days in India and other non native speaking countries, which is where there lies an importance of guiding the students on the language focusing on LSRW method of learning a language.

WHAT A STUDENT SHOULD LEARN?

There is a difference between a native speaker of English and non-native speaker. Linguists have been investigating a native speaker's knowledge for many years and perhaps the most famous work in this respect is that of Noam Chomsky. His suggestion is that a native speaker has, somewhere in his brain, a set of grammar rules which he can use to make sentences with. Chomsky calls the grammatical knowledge *competence* or in other words a subconscious knowledge of the grammar rules of his language, which allows him to make sentences in



that language. Hymes replaced Chomsky's competence with *Communicative competence*.

Anyone who uses language well has a number of different abilities. He may read books, write letters, speak on the telephone, listen to the radio, etc. In the most general way we can identify four major skills: **listening and understanding, speaking, reading and understanding and writing**. Speaking and writing are obviously skills and involve some kind of production on the part of the language user. Listening and reading are receptive skills in that the language user is receiving written or spoken language. But they are, of course, skills which involve language use because of the interaction with the context that we have just considered.

SYLLABUS DESIGN

Before any teaching is done in a classroom, and hopefully before any materials are written, a decision has to be taken about what the students are going to learn. Often decisions about this will appear in list form. The list may contain grammatical terms (eg: the present continuous, the past simple etc.) items of language (e.g., 'there is/there are') different situations (at the railway station, at the bank, etc.) or language functions (e.g. apologizing, agreeing etc.). the syllabus, in other words, is the framework for a course of study listing the contents of that course. Once a syllabus exists materials can be written and teachers can decide how long they need to spend on various parts of the syllabus and how long they will need in class to complete it. While designing the syllabus we should look at three main areas: *needs, situation and students*.

If we know what our students are going to be in future and in which job that they are going to settle in, it is comparatively easy to take syllabus decisions since the needs of the students are clear. It is easy to design syllabus for homogenous group of students. We will also be able to decide on the themes and topics of the teaching material, and the things we ask the students to do in the class. So teaching for specific needs is simple and is not difficult to go with.

The problems arise when the students do not belong to homogeneous group. But when it comes to the Engineering graduates, though their profession has been determined and we know that

majority of the students are going to be in this profession designing syllabus as per their needs is not being done because of various constraints like time, standards of the students, culture etc. Hence the syllabus for these students should be a distinct one which enables them to go for any competitive exam or get ready to meet the industrial needs. So their learning of language is for a specific reason and it should incorporate LSRW skills. Confining to a particular method of learning will not help them. Hence they should neither stick on to the traditional method nor the modern one. It should be both. Thus grammatical method of learning should be combined with functional mode of learning. The time allotted for learning is also important to the language class. The students can be expected to achieve more if they have a greater number of hours to learn in. A lot will depend, too, on how the classes are sequenced. Does the class meet once a day or twice a week? In the former case it will be easier to assume that the students remember what went on in the class before. At the same time, though, they do not have an equal amount of time to digest what they have learnt as do those studying with less frequency.

FUNCTIONS

Recently a lot of emphasis has been placed on the functions of language and many writers and materials producers have suggested that they should form the basis for a language learning syllabus rather than the traditional grammatical item such as the present simple, continuous etc. It has been suggested that traditional syllabuses and materials failed to teach the use of language: what they seemed to be doing was teaching the grammar of the language without giving the students knowledge of – or practice in – how it was used. Functions, on the other hand, are areas of language where the language is actually used to do things. "Most importantly, though, functions are expressed through the use of grammatically based language: without some understanding of grammar students would not be able to do anything more than utter separate items of language for separate functions. The expression of functional language is only possible through the use of grammar of the language" (Harmer: 23).



COMMUNICATIVE EFFICIENCY

Hymes has put forward the concept of communicative competence which means that the speaker knows about the grammar of the language, and knows especially what is appropriate in certain situations. It was this knowledge that enabled him to select the language he wished to use. Expecting our students to have the same kind of competence is something we are not supposed to do. Communicative competence is knowing what is appropriate in certain situations. And it is doubtful whether we can expect, in a classroom, to teach our students communicative competence, because the classroom may be far from the target language community, and it is doubtful whether we can give this knowledge. What we can aim for, is communicative efficiency. Here we will expect our students to be able to express what it is they wish to say. In other words, if they wish to express disagreement we can ensure that they are able to do so and that their meaning is understood. We can take an English standard and teach students how to convey their thoughts and purposes efficiently. We are not teaching our students to be model Englishmen or Americans, but to use the tool of the English language to communicate.

INTEGRATING SKILLS

Of the four basic skills i.e., LSRW no skill can be ignored. Students who are well versed in these skills dominate the rest of the people where ever they are. The teacher has to emphasize on the fact that no skill exists by itself. Unless all these skills are acquired and learnt, the targeted communicative efficiency cannot be reached. Absence of any one of these skills leads to a major setback in the students' career. Hence integration of all the skills is essential.

Vocabulary

Language as we know is something specific to human, that is to say it is the basic capacity that distinguishes humans from all other living beings. Language therefore remains potentially a communicative medium capable of expressing ideas and concepts as well as moods, feelings and attitudes. Language is learnt through use and practice. The more one is exposed to use of language, the better one learns. Every language has a set of words contributing to its vocabulary. The

ways in which words can be meaningfully combined is defined by the language's syntax and grammar. The actual meaning of words and combinations of words is defined by the language's semantics. Hence it is essential to improve the vocabulary of the students. But they are supposed to learn not mere functions of language but the words which enable them to get through any competitive exams. Hence students should be taught various strategies to learn vocabulary like the root words, group words, synonyms, antonyms etc.

CHALLENGES

The challenges that are met during the execution of the syllabus in the engineering colleges are

- Time constraint – like allocation of less time for the language classes.
- Low motivation levels – the student motivational levels to learn English is rather very low. The negative attitude of the students that English is not as important as their core subjects.
- When communicative English is introduced as a co-curricular subject apart from the regular syllabus, students tend to neglect as it does not carry any credits.
- Improving communicative efficiency is a herculean task as the students from rural background tend to speak in their mother tongue than in English.
- The large number of students in a class is a major hurdle to assign tasks to the students.

CONCLUSION

Success and communication are very closely related with each other. In today's competitive world, good LSRW skills provide the right key to success. These skills are required to maintain relationships and better understanding which are vital in both personal and professional life. Lack of communication skills will certainly affect the future of any student these days as most of the careers and job opportunities have made it mandatory that employees should be proficient in the English language. Hence it has become essential for the engineering colleges to have special training sessions for the students to improve their English communication skills.

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