



COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN ENGINEERING STUDENTS-A YARDSTICK TO EVALUATE THEIR TECHNICAL CONTENT

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ABSTRACT



Communicative competence is the most necessary aspect of communication. It is considered as a benchmark to successful communication. The present paper highlights the importance of the communicative competence required for engineering students and some promising practices to gain proficiency and command over the language. The four elements of communicative competence; linguistic, socio-linguistic, discourse and strategic and their approaches develop felicity of language. The pedagogical help and implication of certain innovative methods discussed are easy to be implemented in the class as well as ELL. Acquiring communicative competence is an ingenious process which helps in building spontaneity, grooming soft skills, removing cultural barriers and inhibition. All the activities proposed are learner centered and endeavor for skill development, improvement of conceptual clarity, achievement of conversational fluency. The teacher is a collaborator, mentor and counselor to gauge their strong and weak areas of language acquisition.

Keywords: *Holistic Learning - Felicity Of Language – Linguistic-Sociolinguistic – Discourse- Strategic Competence - Pedagogical Help - Audio –Video Accompaniment - Conceptual Clarity - Interpersonal Relationship - Interdependence of Language And Communication - Nuance of Phonology - Communicative Intent - Participatory Approach - Cross Cultural Variance - Pragmatic Transfer.*



INTRODUCTION

Communicative competence is the yardstick for employability in this competitive world. It helps the budding engineers to prove their mettle, adjust in the multi-cultural environment. The global scenario of multinational companies, BPOs, business markets where proficiency of language is highly regarded, one cannot meet up challenges and obstacles without communication competence. Excellent knowledge of language and presenting in a flawless way will surely help the students to reach various echelons of success.

Engineering students should be skilled in communicative competence to face the outer challenges of the world. To lead in this challenging world, the students need the ability to communicate authentically and efficiently. Lack of communicative competence can hinder their growth chart and consideration for elevations. Communicative competence requires perfect blend of theory and practice. It focuses on skill development, promotes holistic learning. It initiates the real learning process, and enlightens the felicity of language.

The four basic components of communication competence - linguistic, socio-linguistic, discourse and strategic competence. These groom the student to use the language successfully and resourcefully. The techniques suggested below help the student to be trained in the language and use it when required.

ELEMENTS OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

1. Linguistic Competence: words and rules

Linguistic competence asks: What words should I use? How to put them into sentences?

2. Sociolinguistic Competence: appropriateness.

Knowing how to use and respond to language appropriately

Sociolinguistic competence asks -Which words and phrases fit this setting?

-How can I express a specific attitude (courtesy, authority, friendliness, respect)

3. Discourse Competence: cohesion and coherence

Knowing how to interpret the larger context and how to construct longer stretches of language so that the parts make up a coherent whole.

-Discourse competence asks:

- How are words, phrases and sentences put together to create discussions, speeches, debates?

4.Strategic Competence: Appropriate use of communicative strategies

Knowing how to recognize and repair communication breakdowns, how to work around gaps in one's knowledge of the language, and how to learn more about the language and in the context.

-Strategic competence asks:

- How do I know when I've misunderstood?

-When someone has misunderstood me?

What do I say then? How to use correct it?

LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

Linguistic competence: Linguistic competence is use of the knowledge of grammar, phonology, sentence formation, & vocabulary. Technical content is a division of formal communication which requires in-depth technical knowledge and presentation of the information. To overcome this challenging task, one needs to know the expertise of syntax, semantics & phonology.

Linguistic competence helps the engineering students to spruce up their writing skill. The technical content such as business reports, letters, scientific papers, e-mails, project report, etc need to be composed effectively. Views are presented in an effective manner with conceptual clarity. It will help them, to achieve their goal and enhance language skills.

Pedagogical help to the engineering students in enhancing linguistic competence:

1. Practice oriented approach: Practice papers, hand outs focusing vocabulary expansion, sentence structure, spellings, punctuation and grammar. It gives flair of language.
2. Accentuate real life situations: Dialogues, interrogative and statement (or narrative) sentences (role-play) based on real life situations are especially effective for improving grammatical structures. With these, the students will be more enthusiastic to implement according to the context.
3. Language games: A valuable communicative approach such as language games brings practical aspect of communication competence and shows the interdependence of language and communication.



4. Audio –video accompaniment: Audio- video clips will enhance their variegated knowledge of sound system of phonetics. The CALL would cater them all the nuance of phonology to practice sound system. It will endeavor to help the students learn correct pronunciation and overcome MTI (mother tongue influence).
5. Collaborative Peer work: Peer work arouses interest .Peer with better language proficiency will act as models for those with lesser proficiency. Errors are easily identified by the fellow mate who could easily comprehended by group work. Learner's inhibition is reduced as they become self conscious while working with the group.
6. Discussion and Classroom Interaction: It helps to Focus on skill development, comprehension of the text, negotiate meaning by: Student-student interaction, teacher – group interaction and Student –group interaction.

Strategic competence: It refers to usage of verbal accompanied with non verbal communication in appropriate context to avoid any intrapersonal and interpersonal barriers to communication. Strategic competence is about identifying the communication breakdown and focusing on how to overcome. It deals with how to overcome ineffective communication and use contextual communication. Lack of strategic competence may give rise to situations where students with excellent knowledge of grammar and a wide range of vocabulary get stuck and are unable to carry out their communicative intent.

Strategic competence prepares engineering students to communicate appropriately despite any communication problems. It helps the students develop spontaneity when no tailor made sentences are available. Strategic competence helps the students surmount any communication gap, achieve conversational fluency with ease and avoid fillers which distort the communication.

Approach to improve strategic competence in the Engineering students:

1. **Content- Based:** It integrates the learning of language with academic and technical subject matter. Such experiment motivates the students to integrate the language skills –listening, reading, speaking and writing into other subjects. Content based teaching would help to improve strategic competence.

2. **Task – Based:** It aims to provide language users with natural context. A task is entrusted to the group of students which facilitates language acquisition through interaction. This helps the students to assimilate knowledge and use it when required. Critical thinking goes in task based approach which is quite beneficial to gain strategic competence.

3. **Participatory –Approach:** Involving students in discussion will help them to overcome gaps and fillers. Encouraging expressing their views, will build up their confidence and reducing stage fear. Applauding their initiative in discussion will boost their morale.

SOCIO-LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

It is concerned with the ability to use the language and respond it appropriately. It deals with the learners' ability to handle for example settings, topics and communicative functions in different sociolinguistic contexts. The ability to amend expressions and incorporate in the context or situation is called sociolinguistic competence, and devoid of this skill the most eloquent speaker can convey a meaning entirely different from what is intended.

Socio –linguistic competence is a challenging task as there is lot of cross cultural variance, what is appropriate in one cultural environment may be unsuitable in other. Thus, cross cultural communication may pave way to barriers which can hamper effective communication.

The engineering students when go for pursuing higher are ignorant of these cross cultural differences and implies native language rules of speaking when communicating in the foreign language. This process, called pragmatic transfer, results in misunderstandings which can lead to communication breakdown.

TEACHING SOCIOLINGUISTIC TO REMOVE PRAGMATIC TRANSFER

1. Social rules of the language: Example: apologies, requests, invitations, politeness.
2. Non –verbal cues: Comparative study of various non-verbal communications of different countries can help the students understand multicultural environment.
3. Study of culture and cross cultural differences and references.
4. Project works: It provides motivation to explore new culture.

**DISCOURSE COMPETENCE:**

Canale and Swain (1980) define discourse competence as an ability to make larger patterns of stretches of discourse into meaningful wholes.

Discourse competence is related to the learners' mastery of understanding and producing texts in the modes of language skills-listening, speaking, reading and writing. It deals with logical writing using linkers and connectives, coherence and cohesion importance in language learning.

The quality which defines an individual's caliber to read different texts and comprehend it is called discourse competence.

Example: fiction and non-fiction, narratives, instructional guides, business text and other types of written communications, like transcriptions of recorded conversations or technical materials. The better readers can understand these texts, the more textual discourse competence they have. Discourse competence develops writing skill, teaches the technique of paraphrasing, using cohesive devices and linkers.

ACQUISITION OF DISCOURSE COMPETENCE IN ENGINEERING STUDENTS

1. Guided work: Material provided with some assistance by the teacher will help the students to develop the writing skill. It motivates them to take up more writing task in the class. It also reduces their apprehensions related to technical content writing.

2. Encouraging creative writing: Students should be encouraged to pen down their views, opinions or thoughts. It improves their critical thinking and expands their thought process. It is an excellent opportunity to hone their writing skills.

3. Maintaining a portfolio of their writing: It would enable them to check if there is improvement in their writing.

4. Post lesson activities: Activities as instruction will help the learners to gain knowledge of note taking, note making, formal writing...etc.

TEACHER'S ROLE

- Creating basic motivational conditions. Class should be supportive and enthusiastic.

- Generating more and more student motivation. Boost their morale.

- Supportive, understanding.

- Make class more democratic. Allow the students to experiment.

- Let them discover their own resources and appreciate their ideas.

- Don't be prescriptive, in fact encourage peer work.

- Encourage peer work. Involve them in discussion and creative writing.

- Student errors should be seen as a natural, indispensable part of the learning process.

CONCLUSION

The rising competition in this competitive world has given higher prominence to communicative competence. The four elements of communication competence and the techniques will help the students to survive in this competitive world and face the challenges. The implication of the techniques in the class or ELL would build their personality and prepare them for the breakneck competition. They can etch out their path among the multitude of engineers.

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