

Study of Literature by Students of Engineering Courses

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Abstract

The paper titled “Study of Literature by Students of Engineering” begins with an introduction on the importance of literature for communicative purposes and moves, highlighting the demands the global market has for engineers possessed with communicative competence in English. Mere terminology is not going to help engineers express themselves during all occasions. Literature, the mirror of life is not meant only for the students of science and humanities but also for those of engineering courses in order to have rosy future both in the world of technology with the knowledge of technology, and the world of Reality with the knowledge of literature. Besides pinpointing the vacuum that can be appropriately filled with the study of literature, the paper justifies the incorporation of literature in the curriculum and the importance of study of literature for students of engineering courses. The paper advocates certain techniques that could be implemented in order to enhance the communicative competence of students in English through literature. It highlights the advantages of inclusion of literature in the text material in English for engineering students. The paper ends with the point that literature creates an ambience for engineering students to enlighten themselves with innumerable expressions that make a whale of difference in their communication.

Keywords: literature, communicative competence, creativity, innovation, English syllabus

Introduction

*Let the machines get lubricated with the oil of Literature
Let the electric currents pass through the earth of Literature
Let civil engineering hands help construct homes with hearts
Let the key board of computer delight in pieces of fancy typed
Let the windows of iron gates be touched with the feathers of birds
Let the doors of Technology be screened with cloths of Literature
Let the face of Technology reflect in the mirror of Literature
Let facts be mixed with fun and frolic
Let the buds blossom and flower in the Land of Technology
Let Einsteins and Edisons shake hands with Shakespeares and Miltons
Let the technical minds experience the taste of Literature
Let engineers and technologists see life through the windows of Literature
Let the engineers speak to the world through Literature.*

Literature and Life are inseparable. Successful engineers are those who do things differently, create, invent and implement. To cultivate their creativity, inclusion of literature in the engineering curriculum and in any system of our education is essential, as it provides the platform for students to develop their communication skills through experiences and expressions. Study of literature exposes students to subjects beyond the walls of technology. The paper throws light on perceptions, attitudes and the perceived professional needs of the young engineering buds towards incorporation of literature.

There was a time when the world of literature was not meant for scientists and technologists with some exceptions and that the world of technology was not meant for people of literature, but now the trend has completely changed. Many online courses in languages and technology-based study of languages have brought linguists closer to technology. Similarly, study of literature has become one of the best ways for students of engineering courses to have a wide exposure to communication. Communicative competence in English is an important criterion for academic, professional and personal growth and success of engineers.

Literature- the Mirror of Life

Literature is best defined as the Mirror of Life. When students of engineering courses live in the world of technology, they study their respective subjects. When they step into the world of Literature, they study Life. In English Language Teaching, Literature-Based Approach is one of the approaches for one to augment the

communication competence in English through the study of literature with all its wealth of vocabulary, expressions, experiences and information. Educational psychologists are of the view that anything that is innovative in teaching-learning process sustains the interest of learners. Students of engineering courses feel some sort of gap amidst their regular and routine study of science and technology and the gap can be filled with literature. Literature inspires, never expires. Students of engineering are going to live in two worlds; the World of Technology and the World of Reality. To shine well in the World of Technology, they need a sound knowledge of engineering and to shine well in the World of Reality, they need knowledge of literature. But to shine well in both the worlds, they require communicative competence in English.

Literature, the Door to Innovations

Reading fiction helps engineering students acquire vocabulary, learn expressions, study structures and shows the door to innovations. Literature helps one download another mind's into one's own. Literary works are the most refined, reformed and complex versions of our natural way of thinking which is essential for one to make innovations. Study of literature sharpens one's thinking and makes it more complex. Thomas Carlyle defines literature as the 'thought of thinking souls'. Creative crossover helps engineering students see patterns and connections in other fields.

Literature for insights and possibilities

Literature creates new insights and possibilities. Engineers and technologies who have left their foot prints on the sands of time honestly admit the fact that their love for literature has enabled them to become not only creative thinkers but also outstanding communicators in English. When Max Plank received the Nobel Prize for physics, he made the statement proudly that he had been vividly reminded of Goethe's saying that men will always be making mistakes as long as they are striving for something. Literature is centered to creativity, which develops out of expansion of our horizons. Expansion of horizons paves way for interactions the constant practice of which results in communication skills. Thinking is the basic requisite to good communication, besides the constant practice of all the language learning skills. New ways of thinking do not occur just by keeping the focus only on the disciplines of engineering, science and technology, but by studying different cultures as well. Those cultural differences bring about geographically distinct developments in engineering and technology.

Engineering and Literature

Engineering appeals to one's mind and Literature appeals to one's heart. The principles and theories on engineering and technology may result in intellectual development, but study of literature results in the expansion of the intellect, creation, innovations and inventions. In engineering and technology, there is no place for imagination, feelings and sentiments, but great literature is the outcome of the spontaneous overflow of human minds. Literature gives engineering students a great relief, sustains their interest, makes them analyze things from various perspectives and helps them communicate effectively. To have exposure to wider communication, our budding engineers need to go far beyond the principles, theories and all mathematical equations and calculations. Even the depressed and the disappointed minds heal through words that are quite consoling. Words of consolation are more powerful than even the most powerful tablets prescribed by physicians who cure fifty per cent of diseases through kind words. Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the dumb can speak.

Study of Literature

Study of literature is study of Life. Literature carries one to the creative world. Study of literature paves way for human relationships which cannot be built with brick and soil but with human integrity that is richly promoted by the study of literature. Knowledge of engineering offers solutions to technical problems and that of literature to human problems. "Only the very weak minded refuse to be influenced by literature." - Cassandra Clare.

Study of engineering empowers one with knowledge and that of literature with many skills and sub skills that are needed for promotion of values and traditions. An effective communicator has concern for the fellow human beings, understands people, situations and communicates appropriately. Study of literature helps the budding engineers view people and things from various perspectives and communicate well. Literature consists of an astonishing array of characters, from the noble to the despicable- representations of people from all walks of life engaged in all kinds of activities. Study of literature helps engineering students have their insights into human nature, and they may find that they can better understand people, interact with them and recognize their characteristics they encounter in literature. "..... every literature in its main lines, reflects the chief characteristics of the people for whom, and about whom, it is written." - Edith Wharton.

"To effectively communicate, we must realize the fact that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others."- Anthony Robins

Study of literature helps engineering students learn and use innumerable expressions, idioms, phrases and phrasal verbs in English. Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Charles Dickens and a number of great personalities have left innumerable expressions as linguistic assets, the use of which in oral and written communication makes a whale of difference in the use of language. The Bible has contributed a lot to the growth of English. John Milton himself says, "Before I die, I want to leave something which the posterity will not willingly let die". The valley of engineering students with the study of engineering and technology can be further expanded, covering the study of literature so as to enable them to express themselves with beautiful expressions and shine well in the global market as excellent communicators.

There, unlike in the study of other subjects, is many a process involved in the study of literature. When a learner studies other subjects, his /her focus will be only or mostly on the content, but when he/she studies literature, the focus will be on the content, use of words and expressions, style of writing and structure. As a result, the learner develops the habits of reading, comprehending, criticizing, appreciating and producing. Thus study of literature helps one acquire habits. Palmer observes that language learning is essentially a habit-forming process during which we acquire new habits. Formation of new habits helps learners develop their communication skills.

"All forms of madness, bizarre habits, awkwardness in society, general clumsiness are justified in the person who creates good art." – Roman Payne

Literature in the English Syllabus

Inclusion of literature in the text material in English for engineering students gives them a relief from their regular study of technical subjects. Teaching of technical English with focus on terminology, definitions of technical and grammar terms, descriptions of objects, rules of grammar and repeated exercises alone do not serve the ultimate purpose of developing the communicative competence of students. The process needs a number of steps and stages just beyond the prescribed text books in English. Study of literature gives engineering students a wide exposure. Leaving the engineering students without making them experience and enjoy the taste of literature is a great vacuum in their academic and professional journey. The fragrance of flowers should not be wasted in the desert land.

Conclusion

"Without literature, life is hell."- Charles Bukowski

Study of literature grants engineering students myriad possibilities; the possibility of change and the possibility of illumination. Illumination results in execution. Study of literature is one of the greatest pleasures that solitude can afford one. The ultimate purpose of developing the communicative competence in English of students of engineering can be very well served by the study of literature. Creating interest in literature is creating interest in leading a meaningful and tension-free life. "There is no surer foundation for a beautiful friendship than a mutual taste in literature."- P.G. Wodehouse. Mechanical and monotonous study of technical subjects may keep one under some mental stress and academic pressure. Study of literature gives one a great relief from stress and tension. A sound knowledge of any engineering discipline without good communication skills in English is of no use. Therefore study of literature is essential for all students of engineering courses.

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