

English Teaching to Engineering Students difficulties and Solutions

Shivani Thakur

(MA,M.Ed, Pursuing Phd), Lecturer (communication skill), Lovely Professional University
Email- shivani.15722@lpu.co.in

Shawaldeep Kaur

MA English, Lecturer (communication skill), Lovely Professional University
Email- shawaldeep.15917@lpu.co.in

Pankaj Vikas Thakur

(M.Sc, M.Phil, pursuing Ph.d), CT Group of Institutions
Email- pankajvikasthakur@yahoo.com

Deepali Rajat Nanda

CELTA certified, Lovely Professional University
Email- deepali.16037@lpu.co.in

Abstract

Being science student and wondering about robots, electrons, engineering students hardly bother about nouns, verbs and tenses. English no doubt has taken place as first language in the corporate world but heart of an engineering student still resist the panorama of English language in their lives. Subconsciously aware of the importance of communication skills in getting a job, they fail to realize its importance consciously in the class rooms. They fail to realize that the gateway to express their core knowledge is communication skill only. Maximum engineering students neglect this most important skill because of many reasons. Though there might be many argumentations which favor causing lack of interest in English learning process but its importance cannot be neglected. This research basically focus on the reasons ;why engineering /business students lack interest in learning of communication skills and what tentative pedagogies can be adopted to develop their interest in learning of communication skills.

This research paper aims to find out the difficulties in teaching, learning of English/communication skills to engineering students and tentative solutions to ease the process of learning.

Keywords: communication skills, practical learning, listening skill, improve expression, communication skills in present scenario, Non verbal communication

Introduction

English Training has become eloquently necessary in today's world and engineers are not exception for this fact. Corporate world need people not just with knowledge but with the expression of knowledge and it's just with language that one can be able to express. Though engineering students very well aware of the fact still lack efforts in learning communication

Being science student and wondering about robots, electrons, engineering students hardly bother about nouns, verbs and tenses. English no doubt has taken place as first language in the corporate world but heart of an engineering student still resist the panorama of English language in their lives. Subconsciously aware of the importance of communication skills in getting a job, they fail to realize its importance consciously in the class rooms. They fail to realize that the gateway to express their core knowledge is communication skill only. Maximum engineering students neglect this most important skill because of many reasons. Though there might be many argumentations which favor causing lack of interest in English learning process but its importance cannot be neglected. This research basically focus on the reasons ;why engineering /business students lack interest in learning of communication skills and what tentative pedagogies can be adopted to develop their interest in learning of communication skills. Next part of the paper deals with the reasons why English learning is difficult for students along with the solutions to make it effective and interesting.

1. Lack in understanding practical utility of the subject

One of the major issues which hinder learning of communication skills is the lack in collaboration of practical utility of the subject with the study material. Students are not able to cue up the knowledge the take in the class with the life experience. Where other engineering subjects give due stress on calculations, facts, figures and outer world observations; English gives stress to introspect language, expression and personality in total. Students find this subject not in legume with other subjects. It is very necessary to comprehend students about the practical utility of the course and the topics they study. For example if they study are studying tenses, then along with the grammatical structure they should be told about the practical usage of tenses in a particular context. If they are taught about letter writing then along with the format, contexts e.g. telephone complaint, ordering books and covering letters should be taught. To bring coherence between theory and practical is very important.

2. Realize importance of communication skills in corporate world

Failing to realize the importance of communication skills in the corporate world is another major factor which affects the learning of engineering students. Actually communication skill is like an insurance policy which does not have immediate returns but returns comes after a long time and investments. The students who fail to understand the utility of the subject actually lack vision which eventually can be developed through learning of soft skills only. Corporate these days do not want dummies but dynamic personalities who are efficient in multitasking, because when it comes to cost cutting in recession ; companies will throw those employees first who lack dynamic personality.

English is the only language which is internationally known. No other language is as widely accepted at social, economical and political level as English. In this era of liberalization, privatization and Globalization, good communication skills are the keys to open the door of success. Students realize its importance when in spite of good marks companies hesitate to absorb them because of their low communication skills or soft skills. People with excellent communication skills and dynamic personality are considered as an asset for any organization, just because of the fact that they can be utilized in any job any time. Students fail to realize that though technical knowledge is treasure but the key to unlock that treasure is communication skills only. Success of any idea, thought hinges on the ability to communicate effectively and the people who have mastered this skill are one prone to success.

Competition has risen to a level where everybody is asked to do more with least resources. Companies nowadays give due weightage to communication skills which is explicit in their job scrutiny test which sometimes include partial or full English/communication knowledge test. Any skill or knowledge is not of much use till the time it gets expressed. Students lack expression in not only spoken but written language but they cannot escape the fact that most of their time in job will be spent in inter or intra communication. More than that, being social a man has to be communicating most of the time; if not with anybody outside then with the self. If we see latest newsflashes and researches, it says that most of the fresher's get rejection in the interview not because they lack technical skill but because they lack the skill which expresses their technical skill. In this era of globalization, companies need employees who can deal with the international clients with an effective way which definitely calls for effective communication skills.

The first and foremost task of a language trainer is to realize the students about the importance of communication skills in personal life as well in professional life. Lack in communication skills can leave them in a situation where there is no destination ahead Before we start with the actual training on communication skills , it is important to make them realize why they need to lean it and what can be the aftermaths if they ignore the importance of these skills. Few methods which can be adopted for this are as follows:

1. They can be presented with actual data of the students with whom they have to compete for jobs after their qualification is complete. Students should be enlightened about the tough completion ahead which demands more than just technical knowledge.
2. They can be made aware of the industry needs with guest lectures by industry officials.
3. Students can be sent to field visit with soft skill projects where they can observe the importance of communication skills.
4. Can be motivated through movies which exhorts the need of communication skill
5. Practical utility of their course in relevance to life can be told.

3. Personality related problems

Students might have problem related to personality as well as language which create problem in their learning of communication skills. Few of the problems are as given below:

3.1Lack of confidence:

Where other practical and theory subjects can be learnt in isolation and individually; learning of communication skills demand a public platform and that is the first step students hesitate to take. There are two categories of students; one who are basically of shy nature and interact least with people and the others who hesitate to speak in public but talk to their friends in an effective way. The second category is of students who hold their fake ego, resulting hesitation for public speaking. The fears of committing mistakes build such a barrier which deters their success also. These students if channelized properly can very good public speakers also.

The performance of such students displays when they are given group tasks and activities. This will not only build their confidence but will bolster their public speaking skill. A small nudge to their speaking ability can cue their public speaking and communication abilities.

Now discussing about first category of students, who basically have shy nature, demands individual care and attention. Knowing the fact that every student has some or other talent, these students should be encouraged in the field of their own interest. Taking first step is the only difficult with such students. Once started, they sincerely follow the instructions and work hard upon themselves. Patience is the main requisite for these students because if teacher loses patience, these students will close their heart and mind for language learning. The will consider it as a hard nut to crack and will lose interest in learning. Sometimes small boosters of motivational

stories of some successful people who failed in the beginning of their career but eventually hard work bought them innumerable success. Purpose of all the activities with them should orient in building their confidence.

4. Bad listening skills

Listening, inspite of being most important activity for learning any language is the most neglected one especially when it comes to foreign language learning. Being in Indian atmosphere especially in rural culture, it is very difficult to inculcate habit of English listening. Family background and atmosphere sometimes becomes a big obstruction for imputing listening skills. English being second language in our country is not frequently used. Lack of listening skill causes problems with pronunciation and in understanding of native language. Moreover students lack patience in listening when they find it difficult to comprehend. Misconception of students' regarding English as an Easy subject becomes obstacle in language learning. Most of the time students consider it not as a tool for success but as a subject only. The misconception that English as a subject exam can be cleared with one day reading reduces their efforts which are actually required to learn English as a skill. They forget that English requires more hard work and continuous efforts than required for their regular subjects. Sometimes students have self induced fears, making English as a difficult language to learn. Without paying many efforts they start losing interest. This problem of listening skill can be treated well if students are given ample opportunity for participation in the class through role plays, group discussions, and games.

5. Lack of expression

Student lacks in giving right expression of their thoughts in both the communications i.e. spoken and written skills. Whenever it comes to express in spoken; they fumble and in written expression they lose coherence as well as proper answer to the question. Giving opinion on some topic in English is quite difficult for engineering students. Though they have to deal with wires, circuits but still they need to express themselves in the market. Here are few reasons due to which students lack expressing their feelings:sssss

- Unable to use long sentences (compound and complex)
- Limited vocabulary, not enough to express their feelings because of which they ramble
- Unable to comprehend a vivid experience in a vivid way
- Lack confidence in use of correct grammar

These are few reasons why student lack expression and hesitate in speaking in front of public. Solution though entirely does not depend solely on teacher but upon students' seriousness towards learning of subject too but with interactive classrooms topics can be made bit comprehensive to students. Solutions to the above said problems are as following:

Student should be given basic structure of simple compound and complex sentences followed by its usage in practical life. They can be asked to write some easy write ups e.g. one of their memorable moments or just the schedule of their previous day and then can be asked to change the structure of sentences to either complex or compound. Students will realize the importance of using different kind of sentences and how to use them to make their language more effective. The basic necessity is making student realize about the importance of language through practical usability of it.

Vocabulary is another area which demands constant focus and hard work. It demands regular learning and keen observation of the text as well as new words. Though there are not set rules through which we can embrace vocabulary easily but still few methods can be derived to ease the level of difficulty in learning of English vocabulary.

- They can be asked to learn phrasal verbs which enhance the vocabulary without much of ado and it gives ornamental effect to the language when used.
- Vocabulary cannot be retained if we try to learn new word daily but can be better learned if we take one word in two days but use it extensively in our communication for two-three days.
- Another method is to relate a story or joke with the new word so that students can retain it for longer.
- Student can be taught theme based vocabulary through role play or quiz. E.g. vocabulary used for cooking, travelling, medical, engineering can be taught. Registers and jargon of particular field can be taught to enhance their skill of field related vocabulary which will help them in interview tasks.

For learning communication skill, knowledge of tenses is one of the most important aspects. A student cannot build on confidence till he is not sure of his usage of tenses. Tenses are still taught in traditional way which does not serve the purpose of communication skill learning. Along with the grammar of tenses, students must be told about the practical usage. Using single sentence in isolation will hardly help students in learning practical usage of tenses. They should be taught about tenses with their practical utility in life, e.g. if we teach present indefinite tense then we shall discuss about the situation where present in definite tense can be used along with the grammatical structure. Once they learn the context, usage will become easier and interesting for them.

6. Body language

All successful relationships, whether personal and professional have its foundation on communication skills. But

we communicate with much more than words i.e. most of the messages we send other people are nonverbal. Nonverbal communication comprises of facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, posture, and tone of voice. The ability to use nonverbal communication, or body language, is a powerful tool that can help in expressing what you really mean, and in building better relationships.

Engineering students are good in using computer language but lack to express through body language in an effective way. Learning communication skill through body language is not a one day task but again needs continuous efforts. It's a part of communication skill which makes maximum of it. If we take reference from one of the theories of communication skill, it will come out to be 55% of overall communication we do. Being in engineering and dealing with straight statement students' lose the art of expressing through body language Postures, eye contact, tone , intonation etc are the factors which help in making clear cut communication but engineering students use least of them. For them only words matter but unfortunately on communication scale verbal has got just 7% importance and rest goes to vocal (38%) and visual (55%). Clearly visible that non verbal communication has significant role to play in communication skill. Employer today is very demanding and search for a dynamic personality. Rightly said that first impression is the last impression and first impression is always non verbal. It is at the moment when student enters the interview room; his destiny is half written, positive or negative depends on the first impression made. First impression works like a gatekeeper. If this goes well then all the information given by student will be accepted easily but if due to any reason first impression goes wrong then becomes hard for the student to convince the interviewer. Academic knowledge and high grades become secondary but personality and appearance, behavior, attitude becomes priority. Students fail to realize the utmost importance of body language skill for interview as well as for life.

This skill however cannot be exactly taught without demonstrating. If a teacher asks students to wear formals, he should be in formals first. If we train students to express through non verbal communications, use gestures, eye contact during communication then these skills can be taught only if teacher is using these skills in his teaching. Students should be make clear that the gap between what they say and what people understand comes from non verbal communication i.e. body language.

Non verbal communication is something which cannot be taught but suggested only. Students can be at the most advised on how to sit certain way, steeple your fingers or shake hands so that they appear confident but anything would not work until they are actually confident because you cannot control the non verbal signals sending off about what you are thinking or feeling.

6.1 How to manage Body language:

If you can manage stress, you can manage non verbal communication effectively and to learn how to manage stress, it is important to learn and practice it continuously. When you're stressed out, you're more likely to misread other people, send off confusing or off-putting nonverbal signals. Further on, like attracts like and unhealthy feelings attracts more unhealthy situations, making a bad situation worse.

If you're feeling some stress, it's best to take a time out, a moment to calm down before you jump back into the conversation. Once you've balanced your emotions, you'll be better equipped to deal with the situation in a positive way.

Conclusion

Communication skill is an unavoidable part of any learning process. It works as a supplement to core and technical education but according to Derrida (French philosopher), supplement is more important than the actual subject. Once realized about the actual necessarily and utility engineering students can be trained about communication skills. Why does it happen that students are ready to pay thousands of rupees for ILETS and not ready to learn college English? May be somewhere we lack to connect it to practical life. Communication skill should not be taught as a subject but as a skill, not to equip them for exams but to equip them for life.

References

- Borich, G.D. 2007. *Effective Teaching Methods: Research-Based practice*. 6th ed. New Jersey: pearson prentice Hall.
- Candline, C. and Murphy, D. 1987. *Language Learning Tasks*. Englewood cliffs, NJ: Presntice Hall .
- Cook, V.J. 2001. *Second Language Learning and Language Teaching* (3rd ed.). New York: Oxford University press Inc.
- Cottrell, S. 2001. *Teaching Study Skills and Supporting Learning*. New York: Palgrave, Metamorphous press.
- Crystal, D. 1987. *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Language*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Deckert, G. 1987. 'The Communicative Approach: Helping Students Adjust'. *English Teaching Forum* Vol. 25, No 3, pp 17-20.
- Dudley-Evans T. & M. J. St John (1998) *Developments in English for Specific Purposes: A multi-disciplinary approach*, Cambridge: CUP.
- Ellis, R. 1992. *Second Language Acquisition and Language pedagogy*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Harmer, J. 2001. *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (3rd ed.). London: Longman.

Koul, L. 1996. *Methodology of Educational Research* (2nd ed). Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt.Ltd.
The British Council (1980), *ELT Documents 106 – Team teaching in ESP*. London: ETIC.