

## **ENCOUNTER HITCHES IN TEACHING ENGLISH COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR THE RURAL ENGINEERING STUDENTS AND PRACTICAL REMEDIES**

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### **Abstract**

English, a tangentially used language of today, has often been mentioned as global language. In India, English is used not only for communication purpose but also for linking the nation with great ethnic and linguistic diversity. Though English Language and communication skills have started playing a considerable role in imparting and acquiring the language in schools colleges especially in small towns and rural areas, it is rather inadequate and unproductive. The students studying English as one of the subjects in engineering colleges in rural areas manage to get through the exams without making enough attempts to either understand the language or learn to appreciate the utility of language. This article attempts to highlight the tasks before educators in the usage of contemporary English communication skills, difficulties in teaching and remedies to overcome the difficulties keeping in view the problems faced by the rural students during academics as well as professional life. It is believed that the article serves the purpose because majority of the students in engineering colleges are from rural areas.

**Keywords:** English Language, Communication Competence.

### **Introduction**

English Language Communication Skills is apparent in India for the past three decades or so. People in general and students in particular have been passionate about speaking English. It is still surprise that the craze is increasingly high with the development of corporate industry and business in the era of scientific and technological innovations. No doubt, a large number of English Language Teaching Institutes in the name of Spoken English Institutes have been established, mostly private, only to ransack the hard earned money from the aspiring general public. Colleges and universities also organize seminars and conferences at regular intervals but nothing useful, reassuring or considerable has emerged out of the exercises. In addition, what is generally enthused at these organizations is spoken English only and they have very tiny

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to do with written English. In the words of R.K. Bansal and J.B. Harrison, "Several books are in the market for those who wish to improve their English pronunciation, correct patterns of accent, Rhythm, and intonation..."

### **1. Need Of Teaching English Language Communication Skills**

In this globalization era, there have been dire changes taking place all over the world. These fabulous changes occur when people have a strong aspiration to achieve the life targets. Learners of English Language desires are fulfilled when they clearly convey their ideas and opinions with others. Thus, they need to learn communication skills in order to fulfill their ambitions, desires, and goals. In this twenty first century communication skills play a crucial role and one must have mastery over these skills to get success in one's respective field. So, they are the most essential skills in order to communicate well in this world.

As English is widely used all over the world, there is a need for learners to acquire communication skills to get success in their respective fields. The teacher has to understand the difficulties of the students of engineering and try to execute a variety of teaching methods in the classrooms. This is possible for the teacher when he/she changes the techniques and materials. Therefore, the teacher should introduce some group and pair activities in his/her regular English classrooms.

English language is the current lingua franca of the international business, technology, aviation, diplomacy, banking computing medicines engineering and tourism. About one fifth of people all over the world know English. Almost every single university in the world is conducting scientific studies on teaching English. A total of 60% radio programs are broadcast in English; more than 70% of the content or address of mailing letters are written in English. English plays an important role in the world.

Majority of people agree with what Alexander V.Sandoval claims in his essay, 'The Importance of English on [www.eagleforum.com](http://www.eagleforum.com) i.e. "English is becoming the world's language of the 21st century. The man who speaks fluent in English will not get lost in the world where there are people."

### **2. Significance Of English Language Communication Skills**

Since medium of instructions is English for the engineering students, it is mandatory to have good English communication competence. In academic life, engineering students have to deal with countless English lectures, tutorials, labs, project reports and papers. Most engineering professors in various universities are also conducting lectures in English. The most convenient source of information i.e. Internet provides most of the information in English.

During the job seeking process in interviews, Group Discussion is a crucial activity where mastery over English proficiency is essential. After securing job these skills are further required to work in groups since their task seldom be solved by an individual. English is used as the working language on large extent. In order to co-ordinate with the

colleagues, engineers have to speak fluent English. So, English communication competence plays an important role in both academic and profession life of engineering students.

### **3. Problems Faced By Engineering Students From Rural Areas**

In our country, about 75% students of the engineering are from rural areas and most of them are coming through regional language medium schools. No doubt that as they have entered engineering colleges, they do possess subject knowledge and other skills for higher education and bright future. But, at every walk of life and career English becomes an obstacle in their way. So, let us examine the reasons why there is a souring grape between English and rural students even today in this modern era.

#### **3.1. Socio Economic Background Of Family**

Classroom contains students from different strata of the society who possess different grasping power and English communication competence. It is found that English communication competence of the students whose parents are literates and belong to higher middle class is better than those of the students whose parents are illiterates and belong to lower middle class.

The fact of this situation is the literate parents can provide more exposure to their wards for being aware of the importance of English competence. They consult the teachers about wards' progress and guide them at home to perform better. In fact it never happens with the second group as they lack parental supervision and guidance regarding higher education.

#### **3.2. Lack Of Skillful Teachers**

The other important factor is the education system and lack of skillful teachers. Most of the teachers at all the learning levels are untrained. They are unaware of the current trends and advanced techniques of English Language teaching (ELT). The condition is the same with the regional medium as well as the English medium in primary, secondary and higher secondary schools in rural or semi urban areas. Moreover, teaching –learning process is much exam and result oriented. And exams do test the memory power alone. Even the parents are craving for marks than skills or knowledge. So, teachers make students to habituate by heart method, as a result, English seems to be a dreadful demon for the students. In addition, this exam oriented students give more importance to technical subjects than communication competence.

#### **3.3. Education System**

Basically, language competence requires four skills i.e. Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing (LSRW). Our students are being trained in reading and writing for long ages and listening and speaking skills are neglected and ignored. Learning is one basic skill which makes speaking possible. Learning language is possible only through active listening. Let's take note of language acquisition of a baby. It starts speaking words which it listens to frequently. Our education system neglects the importance of listening resulting in poor speaking.

Lack of modern and advanced technology i.e. usage of computers, internet, projector, OHP etc. in the process of language learning also affects the language acquisition.

### **3.4. Controversy Over Learning Grammar Of English As A Second Language**

There is much controversy upon learning English as a second language. Researchers ask a question whether we learnt grammar of our mother tongue when we learnt it. So, grammar is learnt only for the sake of getting marks and not as a tool for learning a language. Nevertheless, the application of grammar in day to day life is being neglected.

### **3.5. Lack Of Exposure To English Communication**

The rural area students lack the exposure to English communication in the family, society as well as in the colleges. As a result of this even the meritorious fail to achieve success during personal interviews due to lack of communication skills, soft skills, interpersonal skills and personality development. During academics also lack of confidence because of poor communication skills leads to inferiority complex; as a result students keep themselves lonely and isolated.

### **3.6. Illiterate Parental Background**

To begin with, the primary and therefore the foremost factor is that the Socio-Cultural and financial background of the family. As most of the parents are illiterate, they are not able to guide their wards as educated parents do. Hence, the students' performance lacks parental supervision and guidance which is extremely necessary for education. The illiterate parents are unable to realize the importance of education and also they do not understand the importance of communication skills.

The students from rural areas who attend the school in their neighborhoods are not exposed to the same type of facilities and motivation as the city-bred children have. In cities, the students get motivated through two ways: Instrumental and Integrative motivation. Learning a language just for rewards is instrumental motivation, on the opposite hand integrative motivation includes the urge to be a part of the community which is so strong that drives them to pick up the language with perfection. Regarding the syllabus, the most important point is in most of the schools English is taught as one of the subjects but not as a language or as medium of instructions. The importance of English as a communicative tool is not realized. As there is an increase in the ratio of rural students preferring professional courses, the above facts should be considered and the students should be trained to meet the need of the hour.

## **4. Learning Effective Communication Skills**

In learning a language concentration should get on four main skills namely:

- Listening
- Speaking
- Reading
- Writing

The above order gains importance because gaining one skill results in subsequent then the order is extremely important.

### **Listening:**

Listening is one basic skill which makes speaking possible. Nobody can speak a language without taking note of it. Even an infant starts speaking during a particular language after taking note of it for several months. As we adapt a syllabus during which writing and reading of English is given much importance, our students are bereft of speaking abilities because they need not been properly guided in listening skills. This may be the basic reason why they have not been able to speak English in a proper manner. The syllabus should be redesigned to form the scholars listen tons . The following are the activities for Listening:

- Listening to recorded speeches, dialogues, interviews and discussions.
- Listening to news bulletins, chat shows, commentaries, weather reports and announcements on TV.
- Watching English movies and shows on Television.
- Listening to speeches of great statesmen & politicians.

The above said activities help students learn pronunciation, improve vocabulary, learn jargons associated with various fields, helps in better understanding and right usage of words and phrases.

### **Speaking:**

Creating and exposing students to English speaking environments should tend foremost importance when speaking exercises are designed.

### **Substitution:**

Substitution of a word, phrase, or sentence by another is an elementary method which helps students produce new utterances and to develop speaking skill. A sentence frame is practiced first, and then suitable slots in the frame are identified for substitution. When substitution is formed , variety of latest sentences are produced with ease by students. Besides these, role play, mime, debate on real life situations, eliciting vocabulary from pictures etc. provide wide scope for the students to enhance their speaking skills.

### **Reading:**

Reading exercises are very important since they help to widen and deepen the students' linguistic skills. Prolonged exposure to reading definitely yields good results.

- Separate assignments for reading should be given.
- At the initial stage students should be encouraged to read aloud so that the mistakes in pronunciation, stress and pause could be corrected.
- Students should be encouraged to read the phrases at a single stretch, not going from word to word.

The teacher shouldn't allow the scholars to ask a dictionary for every and each unfamiliar word since it decreases speed and leads to lack of interest. Allow them to guess. At the top

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of the session explain it with examples. This type of exercises and drill when given to students regularly makes them improve their reading skills.

**Writing:**

The following activities would help tons to enhance writing skills:

- Writing diary daily.
- Listing objects in pictures.
- Writing reviews on movies and popular books.
- Creating headlines from current affairs.

The above activities that tune the LSRW skills if conducted properly would definitely yield better results. Since learning may be a slow and continuous process, errors are inevitable. Without errors no true learning can take place. Students should be told that they need not worry for making mistakes. Everybody, including native speakers makes mistakes. The teacher shouldn't always plan to correct every error which can upset or discourage the scholars. Frequent interruptions, within the name of corrections destroy self-confidence of the scholars. It is the role of the teacher to create conducive climate in which the students can fearlessly exercise the language and acquire communicative competence.

**5. Remedies**

Knowing the importance and growing demand for English communication competence for engineering students of rural areas, there is a need for the teachers as well the students to make integrated efforts.

1. Faculty is expected to fulfill their assigned responsibilities. But apart from that they should think it as their moral responsibility to take more efforts to provide more exposure to students as to achieve communication competence. When students are forced to learn communication on their own, they find it difficult. So, they expect assistance from teachers. Now-a-days comprehensive courses which focus on writing and speaking skills are introduced in most of the universities. Let's advice the students to register for these courses.
2. Students have to build ability to participate in various activities such as paper presentations, GDs, mock interviews, role plays etc. to develop English communication competence. It is necessary that Students Talk Time (STT) should be above Teacher Talk Time (TTT).
3. Students from the secondary and higher secondary level should be given dictionary for knowing meanings of technical words in regional language. Technical teachers should help students in understanding the technical words in English and their equivalents in regional languages.
4. Grammar should be taught in the form of application. When we learnt a language first, it requires a lot of time .We get a lot of exposure to it as our entire communication deals take

place in the regional language. So, naturally it does not require learning grammar of regional language. However, grammar is essential for English being the second language.

5. In this modern era, new trends and methods of teaching are emerging in the learning of the English language competence which involves the use of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in the Language Labs. This system works more effectively when the ratio of computer and student is 1:1.

CALL mostly includes:

- Use of Audio/video clips.
- Inter-lingual method-Listen and see clippings in regional language and English.
- Language Learning-vocabulary-synonyms and antonyms.
- Etymology reading.
- Grammar.
- Translation.

### Conclusion

English communication skills are recognized as the important aspect in the academic life and career of the engineering students. The rural area engineering students are advised to effectively make use of the faculty, education system and the amenities along with self-efforts, to emerge as competent users of English language for effective communication.

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