

DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMPETENCE AMONG THE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN ENGINEERING STREAM

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Abstract

The process of liberalization in higher and technical education began in 1980's. It gathered momentum in 1990's in the era of globalization, owing to the worldwide demand for technically qualified manpower. The number of Indian technocrats going abroad for higher education and career development increased manifold. Those seeking admission in the foreign western universities had to clear qualifying text in technical area beside competence in English language. Those students seeking employment in the domestic market was required to undergo placement and campus interview for selection. Most students from the mofussil areas, appearing for IELTS and TOEFL for seeking admission in the Anglo-American universities and appearing for campus interviews found the going tough. This was attributed not to the lack of technical competence but to the low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence. The low self-esteem, also described as inferiority complex, was due to the lack of competence in English language and difficulty in communication. The lack of fluency in communication, in most cases, was due to the mofussil family background, schooling in vernacular medium and not much effort put in to acquire competence in English in foreign language for most of us in India.

Keywords : ENGLISH, IELTS, TOEFL, COMPETENCE.LANGUAGE.

1. INTRODUCTION

The process of liberalization in higher and technical education began in 1980's. It gathered momentum in 1990's in the era of globalization, owing to the worldwide demand for technically qualified manpower. The number of Indian technocrats going abroad for higher education and career development increased manifold. Those seeking admission in the foreign western universities had to clear qualifying text in technical area beside competence in English language. Those students seeking employment in the domestic market was required to undergo placement and campus interview for selection.

Most students from the mofussil areas, appearing for IELTS and TOEFL for seeking admission in the Anglo-American universities and appearing for campus interviews found the going tough. This was attributed not to the lack of technical competence but to the low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence. The low self-esteem, also described as inferiority complex, was due to the lack of competence in English language and difficulty in communication. The lack of fluency in communication, in most cases, was due to the mofussil family background, schooling in vernacular medium and not much effort put in to acquire competence in English in foreign language for most of us in India.

The language competence is an acquired trait. An individual can acquire this competence either by self-efforts or under the guidance of a suitably qualified trainer. Despite the fact University having introduced communication skill for the first year students to enable them to acquired English language competence, the record is not very encouraging. This is due to the fact that the focus of study for these students is technical subject and communication skill is a necessary evil which they somehow manage to pass. The cost of neglect of language skill is very dear, a fact that they realize only after completion of their graduation and when they seek admission or jobs.

Some benevolent and forward looking institutions have drawn the conclusion that the lack of competence in English is a hurdle in advancement of their mofussil student clientele. They are keen to overcome this crisis by developing competence in English language. They encourage their faculty members to devise ways and means to tackle this issue. This has motivated the researcher to venture into this research theme, which is an action-oriented and socially relevant research.

2. BACKGROUND

Technical education was in the domain of the state and there were less than ten government engineering colleges in Maharashtra till 1983. The decision of the government of Maharashtra to encourage privatization of technical education in 1983 led to a phenomenal increase in the number of unaided- private engineering colleges. There are engineering colleges in Maharashtra and many more will come up in near future. The number of government engineering colleges has remained stagnant and all engineering colleges, established after 1983, have been set up by the private trusts and societies.

There were only two engineering colleges in the jurisdiction of University University till 1983. At present there are twenty two engineering colleges and twenty one of these are private un-aided colleges.

Being a premier private Engineering college, specialization in the area of engineering, attracts student clientele from all over the state as well as the other states. However, most students come from the mofussil area and are the first generation learners. Most students from the mofussil area have undergone schooling in the vernacular medium and, as a result, their competence in English language is inadequate.

3. RESEARCH PROBLEM.

The research problem that the researcher proposes to dwell upon is in the area of 'Functional English', which has received recognition as relevant areas of research. Business communication, communication skills, mass media, journalism and translation studies are some of the manifestation of this applied research. The research problem that the researcher proposes to undertake involves:

- Assessment of English language competence at the entry point.
- Devising appropriate strategy to develop English language competence.
- Continuous evaluation and monitoring.
- Comparison of performance at the entry point and exit point and evaluation the achievement level.
- Based on the findings of the pilot study suggest 'action plan 'for future.

4. RESEARCH THEME STATEMENT

As already stated the competence in English a foreign language by the Indian students, more particularly from the mofussil areas and schooling in vernacular medium, can be acquired by the efforts of the learner and the guidance provided by the instructor. The role of instructor is not limited to imparting instructions but to motivate the learners to make additional efforts to overcome built in limitations and master a foreign language.

With a view to overcome the difficulties faced by their students in engineering stream, University has introduced 'communication skills' as a compulsory subject for F.E. students.

The contents of functional English is as follows:

Business correspondence, IPA alphabets, stress, intonation, basic grammar, pronunciation, listening skill, oral communication, reading skill, vocabulary, life skills and soft skills.

This well-structured course in **Functional English** proposes to develop the following skills- competence

1. This course has been included to enhance student's understanding in English language so that they are able to read, write and speak in English with ease and desired comprehension.
2. The students will be able to write & speak well along with ability to write correct English
3. To make the language learning more effective than regular classroom
4. teaching.

5. To provide good models of speech and to enable them to acquire fluency in written and spoken form.
6. To help the students to learn correct pronunciation of English.
7. To provide an opportunity to the individual student to progress at his own speed
8. To improve LSRW skills of language to develop the grammatical ability.
9. To develop communication skill.

Ways and means to develop competence in English language:

University has initiated the process of development of competence in English language. However the engineering colleges will have to put their foot forward to implement this curriculum. college at where the researcher is a faculty member, has suggested few techniques to develop the competence in English language.

1. Listening: To music –old or modern; the type you prefer, but pay attention to the lyrics.
2. To movies, TV shows, news, entertainments, the radio – try the classics. If you can watch DVD's you can watch the movie several times.
3. Watching with subtitles and then, when you feel more comfortable, without them. You can have English radio at home or on your mobile phone. Even if are not actually listening to it, your ears will be getting used to the sounds of the language.
- 4.. Attend plays, exhibitions, talks, etc. in English organized by English speaking schools
5. Speaking: Join voiced chats. Technology has advanced a lot in terms of social networks so, wherever you live, you'll find a chat-room to join.
6. Talk and record yourself. This may sound funny, but it will help you realize how you can improve by repeating the recording several times till you feel happy with the results.
7. Talk to your classmates in English when you are not in class. You can even make a group to play games, have a meal or just chat together.
8. Reading: Books in English and articles on the web.
9. Switch the operating system of your mobile phone, your PC or tablet into English.
10. Writing: Write down words or expressions you think useful with their meaning and examples
11. Write comments in English blogs.

The proposed research being action oriented research, the researcher will be actively involved in implementation of the work plan. She will be in a position to undertake monitoring of the plan and continuous evaluation of the performance of students which is a core component of the proposed research work.

The IELTS of the British council measures the following competence.

Listening ,speaking reading and writing skills.

Preparing for the test may seem like a huge task at first, but with enough practice and preparation it's possible to work towards the band score you're aiming for. Here are four top tips for your upcoming IELTS test.

1. Practice really does make one perfect
2. Timing is everything
3. Strategize for success
4. Watch more TV!

IELTS Academic measures English Language proficiency needed for an academic , higher learning environment .The tasks and tests accessible to all test takers, irrespective of their subject focus. IELTS General training measures English language proficiency in a practical, everyday context. The tasks and tests reflect both workplace and social situations.

The examinee is required to secure minimum score each competence and minimum aggregate score as qualifying score in competence in English language for foreign students.

The TOEFL of the American consulate is more or less identical to the IELTS of the British council. This competence is eligibility condition of admission in the USA and the commonwealth countries. In other words, an engineering and technology students is required to pass GMET and other equivalent tests in addition to IELTS/TOEFL and the failure to pass IELTS/TOEFL makes the student intelligible to seek admission in a western university.

A comparative analysis of the syllabus of communication skills prescribed by University University and the content of IELTS brings out the gaps.

With view to overcome the gaps that will become visible in the course of implementation of '**work plan**', further remedial action will be suggested in form of **Action plan**. The research feels confident that with the active involvement of the learners and commitment on the part of the teachers, the difficulties arising out of inadequate competence in English language could be overcome.

5. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the proposed research are as under:

1. To assess the present level of competence in English language of the engineering students at the entry point.
2. To find out the factors responsible for the inadequate competence.
3. to devise and implements ways and means to develop competence.
4. To assess the performance of the students at the exit points.
5. To compare the performance at the entry point and the exit point and evaluate the outcome the form of achievement analysis.
6. To review the implementation of the 'Work Plan' and suggest future course of action.

6. HYPOTHESIS

The proposed research work is based on the following hypothesis/assumptions:

1. Competence in English a foreign language for the Indian students is not a hereditary trait but an acquired skill.
2. The family and educational background determines the level of competence.
3. The level of competence can be improved by means of planned efforts.
4. Commitments of the teachers and the active participation of the students result in development of competence in English language.
5. Functional English is the need of the present time.

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The proposed research is in the area of Functional English i.e. an applied branch in the stream of language study. It involves theoretical study of competence in English language, which includes linguistics, phonetics and grammar. The manifestations of these are reading, writing, listening and conversational skills. For this purpose recourse will be made to library method. The researchers will visit libraries of institutions which store published literature. The researcher will also visit websites on internet to collect relevant information.

The proposed research being action oriented research, recourse will be made to sample survey method. College provides a representative sample of the engineering college in the mofussil areas. A questionnaire will be administered at the entry point to first year engineering students when their session begins. This questionnaire will seek information about the students, their family background, their educational background and the relevant competences by means of structured and graded questions.

The second phase will be imparting skills training during the course of the academic year. A continuous evaluation and monitoring will be undertaken. Their performance will be recorded periodically.

The third phase will be survey at the exit point by means of a questioner which will reflect the impact of skills training provided during the course of the year. Their scores in viva -voce tests, first and second semester exams will be the additional inputs for assessing the level of attainment.

On completion of the data collection, achievement analysis will be undertaken by comparing the assessment at the entry point and the exit point. For preparing tables, graphs and diagrams suitable statistical methods will be recourse to.

The evaluation of the entire scheme will be undertaken thereafter. Remedial actions for the effective implementation in future will be suggested in the form of Action plan.

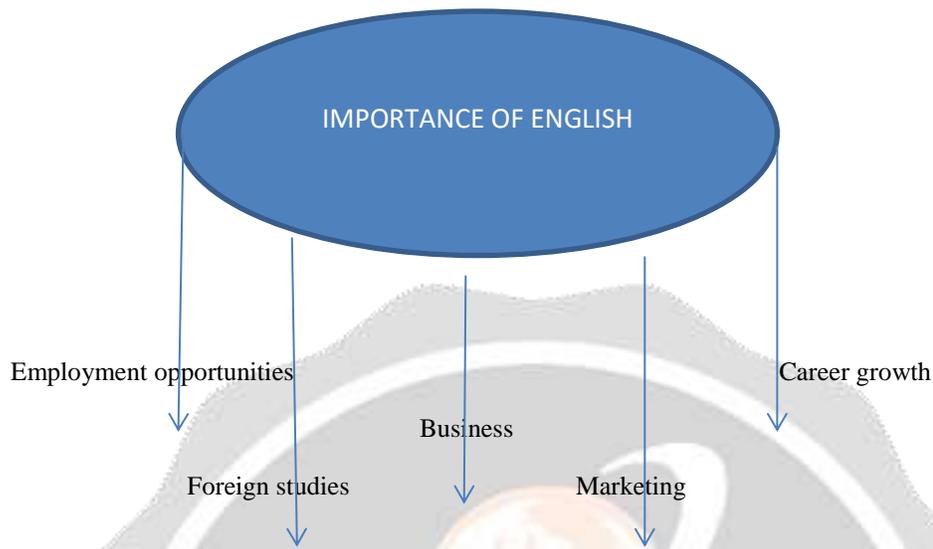
Data collection: The **primary data** will be collected by survey method, continuous evaluation and comparative analysis of details collected at the entry and continuous evaluation throughout the year.

The secondary data will be collected from the published sources- books, journal and websites and the unpublished sources ph. D thesis and research articles.

8. Conclusion:

The paper finally suggests:

- Revising teaching methodologies.
- Revamping syllabus.
- Giving more prominence to English as a subject in the Engineering Colleges.
- Empower the English Department.
- Competence in English language .
 - Assessment of competence at the entry point.
- Development of competence by institutional measures.
- Assessment of competence at the exit point.
- Evaluation of Achievement level.
- Findings, conclusions and suggestions.



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