Strengthening English Proficiency among Engineering Students: Insights from the GEPT Program

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Abstract

Effective communication is essential for engineering students, enabling them to bridge the gap between technical knowledge and professional competence. To support first-year learners in strengthening their English proficiency, the ES&H Department introduced the General English Proficiency Training (GEPT) program. GEPT focuses on developing LSRW skills through practical and interactive activities such as role-plays, group discussions, simulations, and technology-enabled learning tools. An analysis of student participation and feedback from 2019–2024 indicates significant improvement in grammar, fluency, confidence, and overall professional communication. The program equips students with the skills required for interviews, presentations, and workplace interactions. While GEPT has shown notable success, certain challenges—such as technological limitations and varying levels of student engagement—were identified. Future enhancements include incorporating blended learning strategies, AI-driven feedback mechanisms, and industry-aligned certification modules. Overall, GEPT has proven to be an effective initiative that strengthens students' communication skills and supports their academic growth and career readiness.

Keywords: GEPT, English proficiency, LSRW skills, communication skills, engineering students, technology-enabled learning, soft skills, career readiness, blended learning.

1. Introduction

In today's globalized and technology-driven world, effective communication skills are as essential as technical expertise for engineering graduates. English, being the universal language of science, technology, and professional communication, plays a critical role in shaping the careers of engineers. Engineering students often face challenges in expressing their ideas clearly, whether in academic settings, workplace environments, or international collaborations. A strong command of English enhances their ability to comprehend technical literature, present research findings, and communicate effectively in professional scenarios.

Beyond academic excellence, communication skills are pivotal in an engineer's career progression. Employers seek professionals who can articulate technical concepts clearly, collaborate with multidisciplinary teams, and engage in meaningful discussions. Strong language proficiency enhances confidence, fosters teamwork, and prepares students for job interviews, industry presentations, and leadership roles. However, despite the growing emphasis on communication skills, many engineering students struggle with English proficiency due to limited exposure, lack of structured training, or inadequate focus on language development during their early education.

Recognizing these challenges, there is a pressing need for innovative pedagogical interventions that integrate language training with technical education. Traditional approaches to English language teaching often fail to address the specific communication needs of engineering students. To bridge this gap, institutions must implement structured programs that not only develop linguistic skills but also encourage interactive and application-based learning.

In response to this need, the General English Proficiency Training (GEPT) program was introduced by the Engineering Sciences & Humanities (ES&H) Department as an innovative practice to enhance the English language proficiency of first-year engineering students. The GEPT program is designed to provide a holistic learning experience, focusing on the four core language skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing (LSRW). Through interactive sessions, role-playing, group discussions, and real-life simulations, the program aims to develop students' confidence, fluency, and professional communication abilities. This paper explores the structure, implementation, and impact of the GEPT program, highlighting its role in equipping engineering students with essential communication skills for academic and professional success.

2. Literature Review

English proficiency is a key determinant of success in technical education, as it enables students to comprehend academic content, articulate their ideas effectively, and engage in professional communication. Several studies have emphasized the importance of integrating language skills with engineering education to bridge the gap between technical knowledge and real-world application. Research indicates that engineering students who possess strong communication skills have a higher likelihood of securing job placements, excelling in teamwork, and advancing in leadership roles (Riemer, 2007; Shrestha, 2018). However, despite its significance, English proficiency remains a challenge for many engineering students, particularly those from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

Challenges Faced by Engineering Students in Acquiring Communication Skills

One of the primary challenges faced by engineering students in acquiring effective communication skills is the lack of structured language training in their academic curriculum. Many students enter engineering programs with limited exposure to English, making it difficult for them to comprehend technical concepts, participate in discussions, and express their ideas clearly. Studies have highlighted that students often struggle with pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and fluency, which affects their confidence in both written and oral communication (Sundari & Wulandari, 2020). Additionally, engineering education primarily focuses on technical subjects, leaving little room for soft skills development, further widening the communication gap.

Best Practices in Language Training Programs

To address these challenges, various best practices have been proposed in language training programs. One effective approach is the integration of English language training with technical education, ensuring that students learn communication skills in context. Research suggests that activity-based learning methods, such as role-playing, group discussions, presentations, and case studies, significantly improve students' engagement and confidence (Mishra & Sharma, 2021). Moreover, a personalized feedback system helps students identify their weaknesses and track their progress over time.

Another successful strategy is the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, which focuses on real-life communication rather than rote memorization of grammar rules. Studies have shown that students perform better when they are actively involved in interactive and experiential learning activities rather than passive lectures (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

The Role of Technology in Language Learning

With advancements in digital learning, technology has played a crucial role in enhancing English language proficiency among engineering students. Research indicates that blended learning models, which combine face-to-face instruction with online resources, offer greater flexibility and accessibility (Garrison & Vaughan, 2017). The use of language learning software, speech recognition tools, and interactive applications has been found to improve pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension skills.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, online platforms became essential for language learning, leading to the development of virtual classrooms, AI-based pronunciation tools, and gamified learning modules. Studies suggest that students who engage with digital language learning tools, such as Oral Talk, Duolingo, and Google Voice Typing, demonstrate better retention and language acquisition than those who rely solely on traditional classroom methods (Al-Jarf, 2020).

Summary

The literature highlights the importance of English proficiency in technical education and the challenges faced by engineering students in acquiring effective communication skills. Best practices, including interactive learning methods and feedback-driven training, have shown promising results in language acquisition. Additionally, the integration of technology has further enhanced language learning by making it more engaging and accessible. The General English Proficiency Training (GEPT) program aligns with these research findings, as it combines interactive activities, technology-driven learning, and continuous feedback to improve students' communication skills. This study explores the implementation and outcomes of the GEPT program, assessing its impact on first-year engineering students.

3. Program Overview

The General English Proficiency Training (GEPT) program is an innovative initiative designed by the Engineering Sciences & Humanities (ES&H) Department to enhance the communication skills of first-year engineering students. Recognizing the growing importance of English proficiency in technical education and professional success, the program aims to bridge the gap between technical expertise and language skills. By focusing on holistic language development, the GEPT program prepares students for both academic and professional challenges.

Concept and Objectives

The primary objective of the GEPT program is to equip engineering students with effective communication skills necessary for academic learning, industry interactions, and career advancement. The program is designed to:

- Enhance English language proficiency by focusing on essential skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing (LSRW).
- Develop confidence and fluency in spoken and written communication.
- Improve students' ability to comprehend and interpret technical and professional content.
- Prepare students for interviews, presentations, and group discussions.
- Encourage continuous self-improvement through feedback and practical applications.

The GEPT program adopts a structured and interactive learning approach, ensuring that students not only gain theoretical knowledge but also apply their learning in real-life scenarios.

Target Audience: First-Year Engineering Students

The program specifically targets first-year engineering students, as this stage serves as a foundation for both technical and non-technical skill development. Many students entering engineering colleges struggle with English proficiency due to limited exposure or educational background constraints. By introducing structured language training in the first year, the GEPT program helps students overcome these challenges and build a strong communication skillset early in their academic journey.

Core Focus Areas: LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing)

The GEPT curriculum is centered around the four core language skills (LSRW):

- Listening: Training students to comprehend spoken English in various contexts, such as lectures, discussions, and professional interactions. Emphasis is placed on understanding accents, intonation, and non-verbal cues.
- Speaking: Improving fluency, pronunciation, and articulation through role-playing, debates, presentations, and group discussions. Students practice expressing their ideas clearly and confidently.
- Reading: Enhancing reading comprehension and vocabulary by exposing students to technical articles, professional documents, and literary texts.
- Writing: Developing clarity, coherence, and grammatical accuracy in academic writing, professional emails, and reports.

By balancing theory and practice, the program ensures that students internalize and apply these skills effectively.

Integration of Theoretical and Practical Learning Approaches

Unlike conventional English courses, the GEPT program emphasizes a blend of theoretical concepts and hands-on learning. The teaching methodology includes:

- Interactive Sessions: Activity-based classes incorporating role-playing, case studies, and real-world communication exercises.
- Collaborative Learning: Group discussions and teamwork to encourage peer learning and confidence-building.
- Continuous Feedback: Regular assessments and personalized feedback to help students track their progress and improve specific areas.
- Industry-Relevant Training: Simulations of interviews, presentations, and workplace communication scenarios to prepare students for professional success.

This practical and student-centric approach ensures that learning is engaging, effective, and aligned with real-world needs.

Online Transition and Continuity During the COVID-19 Pandemic

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the GEPT program successfully transitioned to an online learning model, ensuring that students continued to receive high-quality language training despite the challenges of remote education. Key strategies implemented during the online phase included:

- Virtual Classrooms: Conducting sessions via online platforms, allowing students to engage in discussions, presentations, and assessments.
- Technology Integration: Utilizing language learning software (e.g., Oral Talk) to facilitate interactive practice sessions.
- Recorded Lectures & Digital Resources: Providing students with access to pre-recorded lessons, reading materials, and self-paced exercises for flexibility in learning.
- Online Assessments & Feedback: Conducting regular evaluations and offering personalized feedback through digital platforms.

Despite the shift to remote learning, the GEPT program maintained high student engagement and effectiveness, proving its adaptability and relevance in different learning environments.

Curriculum Design

The General English Proficiency Training (GEPT) program is meticulously designed to address the diverse communication needs of first-year engineering students. The curriculum integrates theoretical foundations with hands-on practice, ensuring that students develop both linguistic competence and effective communication strategies. The syllabus is structured to provide a balanced approach to language learning, focusing on essential skills required for academic excellence and professional success.

Structure and Components of the Syllabus

The GEPT syllabus is built around the four core language skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing (LSRW), with a special emphasis on spoken English and professional communication. Each component of the curriculum is designed to be interactive, application-oriented, and industry-relevant, allowing students to internalize concepts and apply them in real-world scenarios.

- **Listening**:
  - Training in comprehending diverse accents, intonation, and speech patterns.
  - Exposure to academic lectures, technical discussions, and professional conversations.
  - Practice through audio materials, recorded speeches, and TED Talks.
- **Speaking**:
  - Focus on fluency, pronunciation, articulation, and clarity.
  - Training in public speaking, professional presentations, and group discussions.
  - Emphasis on interview techniques and workplace communication.
- **Reading**:
  - Development of reading comprehension and analytical skills.

  - Exposure to technical articles, reports, and professional correspondence**.**
  - Enhancement of vocabulary and critical thinking through structured exercises.
- **Writing**:
  - Training in academic writing, email etiquette, and report drafting**.**
  - Focus on grammatical accuracy, coherence, and formal communication**.**
  - Practice through real-world case studies and documentation exercises.

By integrating LSRW skills into a cohesive learning framework, the curriculum ensures that students develop comprehensive language proficiency suitable for both academic and professional settings.

4. Methodologies Used

To enhance student engagement and learning outcomes, the GEPT program employs a variety of interactive and experiential learning methods. These methodologies focus on active participation, collaboration, and real-world application.

- **Role-Playing**:
  - Students simulate real-life professional and social interactions.
  - Scenarios include job interviews, workplace meetings, and client interactions.
  - Helps in developing confidence, adaptability, and effective communication strategies.

- **Group Discussions**:
  - Encourages students to express opinions, argue logically, and listen actively.
  - Topics range from technical issues to general social and professional themes.
  - Enhances skills in critical thinking, teamwork, and persuasive communication.

- **Real-Life Simulations**:
  - Students participate in mock presentations, networking exercises, and industry-style discussions.
  - Exposure to email writing, technical documentation, and business communication formats.
  - Helps in bridging the gap between academic learning and professional expectations.

- **Feedback Mechanisms**:
  - Regular evaluations and progress tracking through structured assessments.
  - Personalized feedback sessions to address specific challenges in grammar, pronunciation, and fluency.
  - Self-reflection activities to encourage continuous improvement and independent learning.

These methodologies ensure that students are actively involved in their learning process, fostering confidence and competence in real-world communication scenarios**.**

Interactive Learning Approach

The GEPT program adopted an activity-based teaching methodology, which made learning engaging, practical, and application-oriented**.**

- Activity-Based Teaching: Traditional lecture-based methods were replaced with interactive and experiential learning techniques, enabling students to actively participate and practice communication skills. Activities included:

  - Role-playing real-world professional interactions.
  - Mock presentations and public speaking exercises to build confidence.
  - Debates and discussions to develop logical articulation and persuasion skills.
- Use of Real-World Scenarios and Case Studies: To make learning more relatable and practical, the program incorporated real-world case studies from engineering, business, and corporate environments. Students analyzed and discussed:
  - Technical reports and professional correspondence.
  - Recruitment interview scenarios and workplace communication challenges.
  - Crisis management and negotiation exercises.

These interactive learning strategies ensured that students internalized communication concepts and applied them effectively in real-life situations**.**

Feedback Mechanisms

A well-structured feedback system was implemented to track students' progress and provide continuous improvement opportunities**.**

- **Regular Assessments**:
  - Periodic oral and written evaluations were conducted to monitor student progress.
  - Tests focused on fluency, grammar, pronunciation, comprehension, and articulation.
  - Performance was measured through recorded speaking exercises, writing assignments, and mock interviews.

- **Personalized Feedback**:
  - Individual performance reviews were conducted, where instructors provided specific feedback on pronunciation, vocabulary, and sentence structure.
  - Students received customized improvement plans, helping them focus on their weak areas.
  - Peer feedback sessions were encouraged to create a collaborative learning atmosphere.

This structured feedback mechanism helped students identify their strengths and weaknesses**, ensuring** steady progress in their communication skills**.**

Technology Integration

The GEPT program leveraged technology and digital tools to enhance the learning experience, making it accessible, interactive, and flexible**.**

- **Online Tools**: Given the shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic**,** digital platforms were used to facilitate virtual classroom sessions, online discussions, and resource sharing**.**
- **Language Learning Software (Oral Talk)**:
  - Oral Talk, a specialized language learning tool, was integrated into the program to help students practice pronunciation, speech modulation, and real-time conversations.
  - AI-based feedback tools assisted students in improving fluency and grammar usage.

- **Recorded Sessions & Digital Resources**:
  - Students were provided with pre-recorded lectures, e-books, and online grammar exercises.
  - Self-paced learning options ensured that students could revisit lessons and reinforce their learning.

By combining traditional learning with technology-driven methods, the GEPT program ensured seamless learning experiences, even during remote education scenarios.

5. Outcomes and Achievements

The General English Proficiency Training (GEPT) program has demonstrated significant positive outcomes, enhancing the communication skills, language proficiency, and professional readiness of first-year engineering students. Through a structured curriculum and interactive learning methodologies, students have gained confidence and competence in using English effectively in academic and professional settings.

Improved Communication Skills

One of the most notable achievements of the GEPT program is the improvement in students' communication abilities. Participants have developed a better understanding of non-verbal cues, contextual appropriateness, and interpersonal communication strategies. Specific improvements include:

  - Enhanced interpretation of body language, gestures, and facial expressions, leading to more effective interactions.

- Improved articulation and coherence in conversations, enabling students to express their ideas clearly and confidently.
- Stronger listening skills, allowing students to comprehend lectures, discussions, and workplace interactions with greater ease.

These enhancements have translated into greater participation in academic discussions, group activities, and technical presentations, making students more engaged and proactive in their learning journey.

Enhanced Language Proficiency

The GEPT program has also played a vital role in strengthening students' linguistic skills, particularly in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary development. Key improvements include:

- Better grammatical accuracy, leading to coherent and structured communication in both speaking and writing.
- Refined pronunciation and speech clarity, helping students overcome hesitation and speak with confidence.
- Expanded vocabulary, enabling students to use industry-specific and academic terminology appropriately.

As a result, students are now more adept at drafting professional emails, preparing research reports, and engaging in technical discussions.

Professional Readiness

A key objective of the GEPT program was to prepare students for recruitment processes, workplace communication, and industry interactions. The program has been instrumental in equipping students with the necessary skills for job placements and professional success.

- **Preparation for Recruitment Group Discussions and Interviews**:
  - Students have gained hands-on experience in mock interviews, resume writing, and group discussions, boosting their confidence in placement activities.
  - They have learned techniques for structured responses, logical reasoning, and persuasive communication, essential for job selection processes.

- **Development of Negotiation and Strategic Communication Skills**:
  - Through role-playing exercises and business communication training, students have improved their ability to negotiate, articulate arguments, and present ideas effectively.
  - Exposure to real-world case studies has enabled them to adapt to corporate communication styles and handle professional discussions with confidence.

These enhancements ensure that students are not just technically proficient but also well-prepared for workplace interactions, making them industry-ready professionals.

Student Feedback

The success of the GEPT program is reflected in positive testimonials from students, who have highlighted notable improvements in their communication skills and confidence. Many students have credited the program for helping them overcome language barriers and perform better in academic and professional settings.

- **Testimonials from Students**:
  - "The GEPT program has transformed my confidence in speaking English. Earlier, I hesitated to participate in discussions, but now I can express my thoughts clearly in group discussions and interviews."
  - "I struggled with writing professional emails before, but after the program, I can draft emails confidently and structure my responses effectively."

- **Specific Skills Improved**:
  - Email Writing: Enhanced ability to draft professional emails with proper format and etiquette.
  - Public Speaking: Improved fluency and confidence in delivering presentations and participating in discussions.
  - Confidence Building: Increased willingness to engage in English-speaking environments without fear of judgment.

Overall, the GEPT program has had a transformational impact on students, enabling them to communicate effectively, perform well in professional settings, and achieve career success.

6. Discussion on the Sustainability and Scalability of the Program

The GEPT program has proven to be a sustainable initiative, given its consistent enrolment numbers and positive student outcomes. The following factors contribute to its long-term viability and potential for expansion:

- **Sustainability Factors:**
  - Institutional Commitment: The Engineering Sciences & Humanities (ES&H) Department has consistently supported the program, ensuring its integration into the academic curriculum.
  - Technology Integration: The use of digital platforms and language learning software has made the program flexible and accessible, allowing for scalability.
  - Student-Centric Approach: The interactive teaching methodologies and feedback mechanisms have enhanced student engagement and learning effectiveness.

- **Scalability Considerations:**
  - Expansion to Higher Semesters: While currently focused on first-year students, the program could be extended to second- and third-year students, incorporating advanced communication training.
  - Industry Collaboration: Partnering with corporate trainers, language experts, and industry professionals could provide real-world exposure and certification opportunities.
  - Blended Learning Model: A combination of offline and online modules would allow for greater flexibility, accommodating students with different learning preferences.

Given its proven success**,** the GEPT program has the potential to evolve into a certified language training module**,** further enhancing its impact on student employability and professional readiness**.**

Challenges and Lessons Learned

The General English Proficiency Training (GEPT) program has been a transformative initiative in enhancing communication skills among first-year engineering students. However, like any educational intervention, its implementation has faced challenges, particularly in adapting to different learning environments and student needs. These challenges provided valuable insights, leading to improvements in program delivery and effectiveness**.**

Difficulties in Implementation

Despite the program's success, several obstacles were encountered during its execution:

- **Technological Barriers:**
  - The shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges, as not all students had stable internet connectivity or access to digital devices.
  - Some students struggled with navigating online platforms, affecting their participation and engagement.
  - The lack of face-to-face interactions initially made it difficult to assess non-verbal communication skills effectively.
- **Engagement Levels and Participation:**

  - In an online setup, keeping students motivated and engaged was a challenge. Some students experienced screen fatigue, leading to reduced interaction in virtual discussions and activities.
  - Differences in language proficiency levels meant that some students hesitated to participate in role-playing and group discussions, affecting their learning progress.
  - Scheduling conflicts with core engineering courses and assignments made it challenging for students to allocate time for GEPT sessions consistently.

Adaptations Made for Online Learning

To address these challenges, several adaptations and innovative approaches were introduced to enhance student engagement and overcome technological limitations:

- **Blended Learning Approach:**
  - A mix of synchronous and asynchronous learning was implemented, allowing students to access recorded sessions and practice at their own pace.
  - Interactive online tools, such as Oral Talk and real-time discussion forums, were integrated to enhance engagement.

- **Personalized Support and Feedback:**
  - Instructors provided one-on-one virtual mentoring to help students struggling with specific language skills.
  - Regular small-group discussions were conducted to ensure every student had the opportunity to participate actively.

- **Gamification and Peer Learning:**
  - Interactive quizzes, polls, and language games were introduced to make learning more enjoyable.
  - Peer feedback sessions encouraged students to support and learn from one another, fostering a collaborative learning environment.

These adaptations ensured that learning outcomes were maintained despite the shift to remote education, proving the resilience and flexibility of the program.

Lessons for Future Iterations of the Program

The experiences from implementing the GEPT program have provided valuable lessons that will shape its future improvements and scalability:

- **Enhancing Technological Support:**
  - Future iterations should ensure greater access to digital learning tools, possibly through institutional support in providing necessary resources.
  - Exploring AI-driven language assessment tools can further enhance personalized feedback and pronunciation improvement.
- **Increasing Student Engagement in Virtual and Hybrid Modes:**
  - A more structured incentive system, such as certifications, micro-credentials, or industry endorsements, could motivate students to participate more actively.
  - Conducting live industry-based mock sessions, where students interact with professionals, can make learning more practical and career-oriented.
- **Refining Curriculum Delivery for Different Proficiency Levels:**
  - **A** tiered learning approach can be introduced, categorizing students into beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels to ensure more targeted learning experiences.
  - Providing optional specialization modules in areas like technical writing, business communication, or interview skills can allow students to tailor their learning based on their career goals.

The GEPT program has successfully evolved over the years by addressing challenges through adaptive strategies and student-centered improvements. Future iterations will continue to build on these insights, ensuring sustained effectiveness and broader impact on engineering students' professional communication skills.

7. Conclusion and Future Scope

The General English Proficiency Training (GEPT) program has proven to be an effective initiative in enhancing the communication skills of first-year engineering students**.** By focusing on Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing (LSRW) skills**,** the program has successfully addressed language barriers, improved students' confidence, and prepared them for academic and professional success**.** The integration of interactive teaching methodologies, real-world case studies, continuous feedback, and technology-driven learning tools has played a crucial role in the program's effectiveness. Student testimonials and consistent enrolment figures over the years indicate high engagement and positive learning outcomes**,** reinforcing the importance of structured language training for engineering students.

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