

RESEARCH ARTICLE



ISSN

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

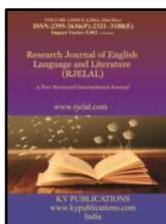
2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN ENGINEERING COLLEGES IN TAMIL NADU A PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to bring awareness among those who involve in teaching learning process the importance of English for an engineering graduate. If he acquires sufficient level of competence in English in first year, he will definitely develop confidence and concentrate on other subjects as well. The main problem among the regional medium students is to understand the lectures taught in English. This situation forces almost every teacher resort to traditional way, bilingual method of teaching leading to utter fiasco. As the saying goes: 'A bad pilot blamed the crooked river,' everyone blames the system not owning the individual's responsibility and not aware of his mistake. True to the saying: 'Many a mickle makes the muckle', if every teacher, including other subject teachers, interacts with the students in English even out of class hours, the student will become a good communicator, the need of the hour. Language teachers should be an example for this.

Introduction

Globalization and rapid development in science and technology necessitated the importance of learning English as a second language in countries where the first language is not English. Adds fuel to the fire, the amazing advancement in telecommunication and software industries created more number of career opportunities which attracted any graduates with high pay package. This is the prime reason why there is a mushroom growth of Engineering colleges. India being a multi-lingual country is another reason why people prefer English for inter and intra-state communication. There are about 563 engineering colleges, both government and self-financing, affiliated to Anna University besides nearly about 22 deemed universities offering engineering courses. Among the 563 engineering colleges, there are as many as 50 engineering colleges having autonomous status. The

primary objective in starting a whopping number technical institution all over India is placement. This positive ambience was good till 2010, and after that, due to decline of jobs, it started deteriorating slowly to an appalling situation. The main reason attributed to is lack of communication skills. Most of the students are unable to express the basic information in English.

Every college affiliated to Anna University offers English, a common curriculum, in first and second semester, and Communication & Soft Skills Lab in V & VI semesters wherein the four basic language skills LSRW are focused. The autonomous colleges have separate flexible curriculum. The curriculum, as per AICTE norms, both in University and in autonomous institutions, is revised periodically. The main intention behind the revision of syllabus is to fulfill the expectation of the industry or to fill the lacunae. Not satisfying with the quality

of communication and other skills, the students are specially trained for placement. The placement scenario, on the other hand, is shocking. Hardly 20 to 25 % of the students get jobs. It is an amazing truth that those could not come out with flying colours in placement studied English right from I standard to XII standard.

When the situation is analyzed, many facts are unearthed. Many institutions, setting aside the motto: 'service to the community', lack the required infrastructure as their aim is to make money. There is limited number of qualified staff; even they are terminated on flimsy reasons with the sole intention of recruiting less experienced or fresher for lesser salary. The Principal, who is instrumental in growth of the institution as well as the welfare of the staff and students, is forced to play second fiddle to the management ignoring the actual reality. Many Principals of reputed institutions are not given autonomy and they are kept as a puppet just to fulfill the norms. Most of the staff members have no peace of mind. The situation of the language teachers is worse due to the step motherly treatment by other department faculty. This unhealthy development will have direct impact on the students who also will not be happy. These factors tantamount to an un conducive learning environment.

The language teachers working in most of the self-financing engineering colleges are less paid compared to the engineering staff. Most of them are untrained and they don't keep abreast themselves of latest developments in the methodologies. They don't incorporate technology in their regular teaching. Their main objective is to get better result with which they can please the management. They don't even follow the prescribed text book; merely cover grammar portion and important part B questions (letter writing, instruction, recommendation etc.,) aiming to make every student score pass mark.

Almost 70 to 80 per cent of the students admitted to engineering are first graduates whose parents are illiterate, hailing from rural area. They don't prefer engineering out of passion or interest. A few of these students have negative attitude towards studies since they were taught rigorously

from class IX to XII. These students get demotivated about language learning as they were misguided with the idea that concentrating on mathematics, physics, chemistry or biology will only help them get into professional course. The remaining 20 to 30 % of the students studied in English medium from city find the language class boring since they are familiar with the content in school itself and no interaction, nor any other activity in the class.

The University framed the curriculum keeping in mind the 70-80 % of students. Though there are scopes for using technology and activities in the class room, most of the teachers don't follow the prescribed text books since their aim is result. The aim of Communication and Soft Skills Laboratory, prescribed in III year engineering, is to give the students an exposure to placement. Most of the colleges neither have the basic infrastructure nor even the required software. A few reputed engineering colleges don't allow students to this lab, instead, direct them to other engineering labs. Just before the university practical, the students are let in to Language lab to complete the record and have a hand-on practice. The method of evaluation is student-friendly, rather management-friendly. If a question, though they are familiar with it in school, is from the next or previous semester syllabus, it is considered out of syllabus and grace mark is given. Overall result of English is from 70-80 per cent.

Strategies to overcome the maladies:

Instilling trust and confidence: Subjects should not be taught for a few days/ week since the students come to class for the first time. Every subject teacher should engage the students developing a rapport, giving details about the course, recapitulating the important concepts in school and link it with present curriculum, clarifying doubts. This technique is just to accommodate them to the new environment, a chance for the teacher to understand the students. Language teachers could show them selective English movie, Ted talk, motivating talk of great speakers/leaders after which he can have a discussion. The management should also come forward to encourage the faculty to teach innovatively adopting some techniques convenient to them; give autonomy to the Principal so as to use his expertise.

FDP & Training: Faculty Development Programme or short term courses or training programmes must be made compulsory for the language faculty. University may arrange training programmes at zonal level on pedagogy / training students on group discussion, interview and soft skills. One faculty from every college may attend the training, and in turn, he can organize a programme locally so that everyone can equip himself. The trainers may be invited from the corporate to deliver the updated and current views. Online courses, training may be arranged for the benefit of the faculty members.

Flipped Activities: Language teachers should exploit the online resources and technology to make the class interesting and lively. The passage for reading either in the text book or in the form of hand-out may be given to the students the previous day of the class and the discussion may be kept in the class. Important vocabulary item can be selected and the students may be asked to frame sentences. The teachers can an ordinary word to a vernacular medium student and a difficult word to a student from English medium. A word which has different context usage may be given to a vernacular medium student to use in a normal context and an English medium student in a different context. In this technique both the bright and average students feel happy and comfortable. Selective comedy in English /ted talk/ still may be given to students and they may be asked to give a speech / review the next class.

Interactive class: As soon as the teacher enters the class, the teacher should interact with student as 'had your breakfast/ lunch' or 'how was the weekend?' Then he can start his class. Contrary to the traditional method of teaching grammar, for instance, the teacher can adopt structural or situational approach. When he teaches conditional clauses, he can show a chalk and ask students 'what will happen, if I drop the chalk'. The students, of course, will answer 'it will break'. He can reinforce it with different types of drilling. With a variety of activities like role-play, picture description, situational description, speaking skill can be developed. The teacher can follow any method in order the class to be interactive.

Use of Audio-visual aids: Language teachers should be familiar with the use of audio-visual aids. There should be some activities in every class. CD-ROMs can be used to improve the listening skills, listening comprehension and reading styles. English songs can be played with handouts containing the text of the songs with gaps where students can fill-up the words after listening to the songs.

Use of ICT : "What we learn with pleasure, we never forget" – Alfred Mercier. The use of Information Communication Technology in language class will make a tremendous progress in teaching learning English. It creates a lot of creative and novel ideas. The advent of computer revolutionized the teaching arena. Power point presentation is the best tool to teach grammar, letter writing and every part of English. It reduces the time, makes teaching effective and interesting and paves way for an interactive session. So, every language teacher should acquaint himself with the use of ICT. He should also be aware of the platforms where online resources are available free, blogs exclusive for language learning, web—based learning programmes, Wi-Ki, computer mediated communication programme and world wide web etc.,

Conclusion

It is obvious that the role of English language is indispensable for the development of any country no matter whether it is the native language or second language of a country. It is the responsibility of the management to provide a congenial ambience for successful learning; it is the responsibility of the teacher to make his class interesting and lively so that the learning environment is fruitful; it is the responsibility of the students to utilize the available opportunity in their favor and reach the higher echelons of life. If everything works out in the right direction, the learning atmosphere will be pleasant. By and large, everyone should contribute for a complete change. Let me conclude with Dr.APJ Abdul Kalam words: "Winners don't do different things but they do things differently."

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