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TEACHING ENGLISH IN ENGINEERING COLLEGE

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ABSTRACT

English is the widely used language in the world. It plays a major role in all walks of life especially in the field of education, customer service and human resource. The demand for English is very vital in international relations, media, communication, travel and other walks of life. The language has more than ten million words yet every year hundreds of words are being added to the English Dictionary due to the advancements in Science and Technology. As these innovations are imported mostly from the English-speaking countries, learning English is essential for those who wish to update their knowledge. In the field of Technical Education, all the sources are available only in the English Language. This has forced the learners to learn the language compulsorily. In India all the universities both government and private have realized the significance of learning English and has framed the syllabus of English with specific objectives. Various researches have been done on the vitality of the syllabus and on the exact necessity of the students. Many researchers have an opinion that there is no logic in the prescribed contents of the syllabus since they don't help much towards the achievement of the objective of the syllabus. Apart of from this, the teachers also face many challenges in teaching English for several reasons. This paper makes a study on the challenges faced by the teachers in Teaching English in the Engineering Colleges.

Keywords: English Language Teaching, Communication, Objectives of the Syllabus.

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INTRODUCTION

The English language is a global language and it is indispensable to all the nations to teach and make their citizens to learn English. If not, it would be difficult to cope with the developments that are taking place in the world. English has become a world language because the number of the people who use English as a means of communication is higher than the number of the people who speak it as their mother tongue.

In India the scenario of English is entirely different from the rest of the world; the country has been experiencing the influence of the language for more than three centuries. "English earns you social status in our country, even after British rulers left India. No indigenous language, however, has come up to replace English, either as a medium of communication or as an official language in India under the influence of nationalistic feeling and emotional hostility English began to reassert its position." (Dr.Vijay Baburao Pande, 2013)

The language is unavoidable in the field such as education, science and technology, research, business, customer service and human resource. Books and sources related to all these domains of knowledge are available only in English. India adopted the English language in all its endeavors as there is no single language to unite the whole country. Since the country is known for its multifarious culture, values, beliefs and languages the non-availability of one common language has forced India to rely on a common language called English.

English as Employability Skill

The globalization after the year 1991, the Multinational Corporations (MNCs) and Information Technology (IT) companies in India recruit engineering candidates who have good English communication skills so students of engineering courses are forced to a condition that their communication skills in English and other soft skills should match with the expectations of the recruiters. Hence English is considered as employability skill in India. Sound technical knowledge in the chosen field of engineering without employability skills will not bring them a good job or help them excel in the workplace. Proficiency in English is considered as one of the important employability skills.

In reality most of the engineering students lack in the employability skill. To overcome or to balance this gap many Indian universities have focused on English language teaching to improve the employability skill of the students and framed the syllabus to bridge the gap.

English as a subject in various Universities in Tamil Nadu

Almost all the Universities in Tamil Nadu focus on the same outcome. Anna University, Chennai, has framed the syllabus of Technical English paper for the first year B.E./B.Tech. Students' with the following objectives

- To make learners acquire listening and speaking skills in both formal and informal contexts.
- To help them develop their reading skills by familiarizing them with different types of reading strategies.
- To equip them with writing skills needed for academic as well as workplace contexts.
- To make them acquire language skills at their own pace by using e-materials and language lab components. (www.annauniv.edu)

Aim of the Technical English Courses

The Anna University, Chennai, has framed the syllabus of the course with an aim to enable the engineering students to learn certain micro and macro skills in the English Language and use them effectively in all walks of life and to excel in the workplace. However, the Tamil Medium students who have undergone the courses are not able to communicate effectively in the language even after completing their degree. The reasons are many. Prakasam.V. (2011) explains the problems of learning English in India: "In India it is not the language of our being or identity. It has come to be the language of doing, language of academics and the language of recognition. It is learnt, not really 'acquired' from 'the days of being in the womb'. English is heard every day all around us, but English does not help us 'socialize' or 'mature' within our 'experience'. It helps us 'grow' outside our 'inner circle'. In spite of all our efforts, we cannot really get many 'coordinate bilinguals' with our academic or professional exposure to English. The point of reference will always be a native variety of English. That's why I call English National Foreign Language".

Teaching English

In India Teaching English has always been a difficult task because of the cultural and social diversities and the lack of human resources. Moreover, individual commitment of the learners in acquiring the language skills is widely lacking. They are distracted in so many ways when they join in the college, which drag them away from academics. In college they run behind the fun and folly and prepare for exams only at the eleventh hour; as a result, they don't learn anything worthy, apart from getting some aggregates and certificates.

At schools students memorize the answers for the questions and write in the examinations after

coming to college, they should at least try to change their learning style because answering in the same way as in school is not possible for all the subjects in engineering course especially English but this is not happening. According to Sharma R, "English language teaching in India, you will agree with me, has suffered a lot so much that our students who pass intermediate or degree examinations with English either as a compulsory or as an elective subject can neither speak nor write correct English, may be because the emphasis in our schools and colleges has always been on the conceptual content and the stylistic content has been neglected so far". This is one among the reason why the engineering college students lagging behind in accurate speaking and writing.

The Syllabus and Students' Need

In a professional institution, courses that are prescribed for the students should be realistic and relevant to their career expectations. Being professional Graduates, they always wish to get a job in the Multinational Corporate Sectors which demand communication skills a mandatory skill for their enrollment. There is the question often asked: "Will this Technical English help the students acquire the employability skills that are demanded by the corporate sectors? A professional institution should produce professionals, but they produce only students with aggregates. The teachers teach the contents only to help the students score marks in their semester examinations. Prakasam. V. (2011) speaks about the nature of the contents like "Adult learners learn better, if what they are presented is related to their experience and if they get the feeling that they are co-creators of knowledge along with the teacher and the book."

Other Medium Students

Many students were exposed only to their mother tongue in their schools. They did not get adequate opportunities either to listen or speak in English. They listened to English only in the English class. Other subjects were taught in their regional languages as the medium of instruction because of the social and economic background they did not get enough exposure to English. Some of the students are allowed for the first time to pursue college education and the government labeled them as first graduate students when such students come to Engineering colleges, they face a very tough time in their studies and with the teachers as well. Whatever the teacher attempts to say, they do not understand at the first attempt and so the teachers have to repeat again and again till they see some signs of understanding from them. However, most of the time their understanding is short lived. When they come back to the class again, the previous day's lessons are gone from their minds. Their passion to learn through the English medium needs to be strengthened and their knowledge of English needs to be strengthened through appropriate activities. Teachers need to equip themselves to meet the demands of students who studied through the regional language medium in higher secondary schools.

Heterogeneous Classrooms

The English language classroom offers heterogeneous background: English medium students and Non-English medium students bringing in a variety of factors into the classroom. Teachers should not ignore or neglect any part of their class. They should not cater to the needs of any one particular section of their class. So, they teach only in general tone and expressions. Focusing on one group of students will disturb the other set of students, which might result in developing complexes and jealousies among them. The English language teachers face many difficulties in maintaining the status-quo. Sometime the English medium students get bored when the teacher tries to explain the basics of grammar for the betterment of Non-English medium students, the teacher fails while assuming that all the students knows the basics. Since the students do not prefer English to converse with others they lack the vocabulary and speaking skills.

Evaluation system

The Anna University, Chennai which affiliates the self-financing engineering college does not give importance to evaluate how the English language is taught. The university frames the syllabus with a clear objective but it fails in the process of bringing out the outcome of the course. English Examination is not given importance they schedule the examination for the students without much gap for preparation as given to other subjects. This directly or indirectly conveys that English is an easy subject and does not need any extra

effort to pass the examination.

This is based on possible assumption that the contents in the syllabus are not challenging for the students and so they can come to the exam hall without any practice or preparation. The evaluation system is also responsible for this misconception. The syllabus is framed in LSRW method but the examination purely tests the writing skill of the student. This is one among the reason why the pass percentage in the English Paper is higher when compared to the other subjects.

Wrong Conception of the Placement Process

Students always have a feeling that their placement comes only in the final year and so they do not find any immediate need for improving English knowledge in the first year. Especially students of Civil and Mechanical Engineering students have a strong conviction that the English language is not essential for them as they are going to work with machines and construction workers.

Conclusion

Learning the English Language seems to be simple for the engineering students as they get good aggregates in the examination, but mastering the English communicative skills depend more on the curiosity and commitment of the learners. Teachers face many challenges such as irrelevant syllabus, heterogeneous medium of instruction and social backgrounds of students, varying levels of English language competition and lack of motivation. Teachers should not stop with teaching alone they also need to continuously improve their communicative skills in English. By motivating students continuously to learn the English language not for marks but to master the language they can create a new environment where Students involve themselves and thus learning English Language becomes feasible for all.

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