

# Teaching English to Engineering Students in Andhra Pradesh and India

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**Abstract** - Andhra Pradesh has become prominent in many fields to day because its a new state. Andhra Pradesh is a place of assortment and creating new environment. Different people speak different language slangs and dialects. A person of Rayalaseema does not speak the same dialect. So he can't understand the slang of a person from West Godavari. However he can understand in English. Hence English is a bridge language. Different locality people can feel comfortable in communicating with one another in English. In fact all advanced knowledge in science, technology and medicine is accessible in English. The results of the latest researches come through the medium of English. If we renounce English, we will fall behind in the higher fields of study. Today the world has become a global village; it is all because of English. English is an international language. English is the primary source of the Constitution, the Supreme Court, the High Courts and official departments. English is now strongly rooted in the places of A.P. It has become a part of their life. Thus English has great significance for the reliability of A.P. It has to be second language in our country for the better growth of the country. In this paper I tried to cite the trouble faced by English language Teacher, in teaching students of Engineering and Technology, at the same time inconvenience faced by students in learning English .I also discussed some solutions and steps to develop all skills connected to English Language that would be practical for both-students and teachers.

**Key Words:** English, Engineering, Students, Communication, Job

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language is a means of communication through which we transfer our ideas, emotions, and thought; express love, anger and get understood by other persons. It is the language that distinguishes human being from other species. It has been the common experience of all human beings that language is acquired in proper surrounding or situation. Attainment of language is not like learning other subjects such as mathematics, sociology, history, economics, anatomy or electronic engineering. It is the language itself to be acquired and get the information about it. We know well that, for acquiring a language, just the consciousness of the grammatical competence is not sufficient; it requires the communicative ability as well. Psycholinguistics presents the theories of language acquisition and language use and, therefore, some psycholinguists argue that "learning is entirely the product of experience" while others suggest that man "has an innate language learning mechanism which determines learning or acquisition of language.(1) Language is a marker of identity and a tool for representing local values and culture. On the one hand, the right to study one's own language is now considered a basic human right. On the other hand, there is an urgent-felt need, particularly among the younger generation, to identify with the global world culture. The patterns of language use in Indian society point to the use of Hindi as the lingua franca in India. Hindi is used by most people in rural contexts mainly in addition to their local language. Similarly, while English is used for official written documentation and communication, Hindi and/or the local languages are mainly used for oral interaction in government offices. In the cities, only a small part of the population, the educated elite, uses English for their everyday communication, but, still as Prof. Jacob Tharu says, "English is no longer some remote but a powerful mystery, lying hidden in the world of textbooks and examination."(2) The challenge is to maintain an appropriate balance in the choice of language-in-education among individual, societal and national development needs. English is a compulsory subject for all the first-year students of Engineering and Technology studying at colleges in India. Candidates with good communication skills and soft skills taste success and those who lack such skills become depressed and get frustrated. Very often recruiters complain that about 50 % of students do not have employability skills. When they mention the word 'employability skills' what actually they mean is 'communication skills'. A number of educationists and HR managers have highlighted the importance of taking steps to enhance students' communication skills. The earliest engineering colleges were opened in India, in the late eighteenth century by the British Empire, whose sole motive was to train Indians to become Public Works Engineers. There is a remarkable increase in the number of engineering colleges in recent years to state support, as well as the entry of private players into the field of education, but there are no appreciable differences in curriculum between various educational and technical institutions teaching engineering related subjects. English syllabus for engineering students in India comprises of the four skills as below.

**a) Listening****b) Speaking****c) Reading****d) Writing**

The subject title is “Technical English” or “Professional Communication”, a theory subject and “Communication Skills Lab”, a practical subject. The Communication Skills Lab is conducted for the first year students of the four years engineering degree course and the Technical English is taught in first or second year to same students.

**2. ENGLISH TEACHERS AND THEIR HUDDLES**

The present day engineering students are not giving enough importance to English language and they give prior preference to their specialized subjects. So they lack basic language skills, in particular, vocabulary, spoken skills and usage of grammar. As a result, they are unable to satisfy the interviewers in job interviews. So, there is a need to develop their language through the most scientific methods of teaching especially through the newly advanced methods of using the multimedia and the Web. The English teachers of technical institutions face different and difficult problems either academically or non- academically.

First of all, the time duration for the completion of the given tasks is not sufficient .The teacher finds few students completing the given task, before the time set, while the slow learners find it difficult to complete it and so expect the teacher to provide answers. The slower students spend three times as much time as the faster students. This is not beneficial to learning. Secondly each class has a variety of levels of English proficiency, a variety of interests and a variety of paces of studying. So, it is impossible to lead the students through varied levels of learning, which make the students passive. For these reasons, we need to individualize the study of English in order to get more effective results. Further, the language background of a student is based not just on his/her mother-tongue, but also on whether s/he attended an English medium school. Proficiency in English has never been a criterion for admission to engineering programs. Engineering graduates in A.P. face the scene of considerable unemployment despite high corporate demand for their services despite the growth in international demand; A.P. is facing a significant level of unemployment among its engineers. While statistics show high levels of unemployment among engineers, many large companies complain of difficulties in finding qualified candidates—an “annoying irony”. This is increasing unemployment of engineers in A.P. has been attributed to their limited communication skills and consequently, the teaching of English in engineering education has been under the scanner.

English language proficiency in globalizing India is an essential component of one's cultural belongings it is also a resource, that can eventually open doors into the world of professional employment in India and abroad. Thus, English is immediately linked to employability. The English language courses at the tertiary level in India are excessively knowledge-based instead of being skill-based. Despite the focus on communication skills in some of the recent courses introduced in universities and colleges, the courses are handicapped because the objectives are not well defined, and consequently, the teaching methodology, testing and evaluation are sketchy. Engineering graduates produced by Indian universities suffer due to lack of communicative skills to study in the world-class institutions or work in a global atmosphere. Teaching-learning process in A.P. is affected by so many factors and thus causing a variety of levels of English proficiency. The students in A.P. can be categorized into two; the one is having the regional language as medium of study from the primary level and the other is having English as the medium of study.

Hence, the problem of teaching English as a second language, to the A.P. students starts from the pre-schooling. Further environment and family background play vital role in success of learning process. In A.P. where majority of the people are farmers, have the poor background in education. Moreover, the income of majority of the families is not adequate. Hence, the parents are not interested in giving good education background to their children. In contrast, they are willing to engage the children in some jobs in order to earn money. “There is an irony in the situation. English has been part of our education system for more than a century. Yet English is beyond the reach of most of our young people, which makes for highly unequal access. Indeed, even now, more than one percent of our people use it as a second language, let alone a first language.

**3. THE INCONVENIENCE OF TEACHING/LEARNING TENSES**

In the field of Technical English in Engineering Colleges, the teachers’ aim is to make the students acquire communication skills, listening skills, reading skills and for the use of English to meet the demands of business. This paper focuses on the

difficulties of teaching and learning Technical English especially tenses. Communicative language teaching enables students to perform spontaneously, but it cannot guarantee linguistic accuracy. "The learning of a language," Widdowson says, "involves acquiring the ability to compose correct sentences. This kind of ability of the learner depends upon knowledge of the grammatical rules of the language being learned". Tense errors are the commonest and are difficult to remedy. The students are also confused about the use of proper tenses and are demotivated. Teaching language is viewed as a more difficult task than teaching literature. In literature, one has the freedom to explore into any genre and interpret it according to literary Language.

But, when it comes to language, especially grammar, the instructor is expected to work within the rigid framework of the principles of grammar. The instructor always focuses on student attention on the basic forms of grammar. As a result, his enterprise gets drowned. When the students join the first year of technical courses, they are already exposed to the theoretical nuances of English grammar. Of course, there are also students from vernacular medium, who struggle to speak and write fairly good English. The syllabus of their first year course of subjects includes English. It is called Technical English and the major part of their study is grammar. Communicative language teaching enables students to perform spontaneously, but it cannot guarantee linguistic accuracy. In learning grammar, students face a dilemma. On the one hand, they need to know the rules as that is what they are tested in their exams.

On the other, there is a good need for effective communication in English. That is why; the instructors have to look out for the ways of combining form and meaning in teaching foreign language. Many of the students of technical courses are from vernacular medium and it is found difficult to explain the syntactic and semantic structural aspects of grammar. Out of curiosity, they usually raise a question, "How many tenses are there?" The instructor keeps counting his/her fingers and makes a mess of the class room. Tense errors are the commonest and are difficult to remedy. The students are also confused about the use of proper tenses and are demotivated. How can teachers of grammar facilitate learning in grammar and make the students discover on their own? Tenses are the jewels in the crown of grammar. Every sentence has a verb, without which, there is no sentence. The tense of the verb can be present, past and future, with other divisions in each tense. The use of tense depends on the time that the writer or the speaker wants to refer. The problem is that the students though know a great deal about the names of tenses, they find it difficult to understand the time aspect that each tense indicates. So, the focus is on the difficulties faced by an instructor and learner to understand the paradoxes involved in the study of tenses. It has been found that a number of technically-sound students have not been successful in job interviews just because of their lack of communication skills and there are cases of rank holders in engineering studies who could not go for higher studies to the United States and other English-speaking countries because of their lack of proficiency in English. Just because those students did not get score Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or International English Language Testing System (IELTS), they could not make their dream of going to the countries for studies come true

#### **4. TEXT CONCEPTION SKILLS**

Normally, at work engineers will read a variety of documents on technical subjects. Authentic documents written by native English speakers can be obtained upon request from local, national or international companies or from the Internet. Authentic documents as those mentioned previously will illustrate the use of vocabulary, sentence construction and lay out, and will give the students the opportunity to study how these elements are used in various types of documents. They may serve as 'models', but should rather – to my mind – serve as resources and examples that illustrate how English can be used in certain contexts and for certain purposes. Text comprehension will require knowledge of lay-out, vocabulary and sentence construction. But comprehension can also be extended by asking students about the context of the documents and their purpose. Authentic texts in national language or written in English by non-native English speakers can be used for language learning purposes. By comparing these texts with texts written by native English speakers, students may become aware of differences between the national language and English. Such a strategy will not merely extend their vocabulary, but may also enhance their awareness of the 'cultural' aspects and differences between the two languages. Moreover, if authentic texts written by native English speakers are used as examples, the students may acquire vocabulary and sentences construction that they may apply when they are writing their own texts on similar subjects and in similar contexts or situations. The differences between 'classroom' and 'workplace' activities may be reduced considerably which again may enhance the transfer of language skills from the classroom to the workplace

#### **5. LISTENING SKILLS**

Listening skill is an essential element in improving the language proficiency and understanding. The student listens to oral speeches in English, then separates them into segments the utterances s/he hears, groups them into words, phrases and sentences to understand the meaning. In the laboratory, students listen during various activities for two purposes: to repeat and to understand. While listening to repeat, students imitate and memorize linguistic items such as words, idioms and sentence patterns. This is an important task in initial listening exercises. However, it is listening to understand that is real listening in its own right.

## **6. SPEAKING SKILLS**

It has been felt that developing good oral skills is a complex activity and probably the most difficult part of foreign language learning. It involves not merely being able to pronounce words correctly, using appropriate vocabulary, and developing a good fluency and sentence construction. The simplest activity for developing oral skills is to ask students to practice reading out loud in pairs focusing on fluency. This activity can be applied to texts, but should also be applied to reading symbols, equations and formulae used in mathematics, physics and chemistry, for example. It is my impression that teachers of English do not always give students time to practise this skill, and lack of fluency in this respect may cause misunderstanding. Basic strategies such as asking and answering questions, imitation and repetition, substitution, question-answer dialogues, day-to-day expressions, eliciting, guess and speak, directed dialogues, descriptions and role-play can be used to improve speaking skills in the laboratory sessions. Teaching pronunciation involves internalization of the articulation of consonants, vowels and diphthongs used in English language. The techniques of imitation, explanation, practice, comparison and contrast are found effective for improving pronunciation in the language laboratory. Sounds of the language, accent and intonation are taught by drilling the words, phrases and sentences with their books or tape scripts open in the initial activities. This helps the students to develop sensitivity on their own correspondence between pronunciation and spelling.

## **7. THE WAY READING SKILLS CAN BE TAUGHT**

Reading can be done in four different ways, depending on the purpose of reading a text: Skimming, scanning, intensive reading and extensive reading. Reading is a developmental phenomenon. It has three phases in acquisition of the skill, they are 1. Primary Reading 2. Secondary stage Reading and 3. Advanced Reading. Various aspects of teaching-learning reading skill are illustrated under these three phases. The interactive nature and storage capabilities of the computer are the features that may serve as a foundation for the creation of unique electronic reading environments as it influences cognitive processing during the reading process

## **8. DEVELOPING ORAL COMPREHENSION SKILLS**

At the end, developing comprehension skills with respect to oral discourse is the most important part of foreign language learning. Oral communication is fast and will require not only a rich vocabulary and knowledge of sentence construction, but also some cultural knowledge about the people you are listening to. As spoken statements are very dependent on culture, situation and context, they should be understood or interpreted within the context they are spoken.

## **9. TEACHING WRITING SKILLS TO THE ENGINEERING PROFESSIONALS**

Most other professional activities is becoming increasingly vital, it is time to focus on developing the students' writing skills. Engineers will have to proofread, correct or edit documents written by others, and they will have to be able to write these types of documents themselves. Writing exercises and preferably short one should be given frequently and should be on relevant technological subjects. During the writing process, the groups write, revise and edit the documents several times in line with responses from teacher, peers or peer-response groups. Avoid giving long lectures or talks in class. Instead, allow the students to explore material and inquire or seek information with respect to the problems they have. If the students are working with documents (e.g. a user manual) written in their native language, they may be asked to render not to translate the contents of documents in English. This activity gives the students a bit more freedom to paraphrase than a 'word-by-word' translation. As a follow-up, they may be asked to use the rendered text to write a similar document as the original one in the national language using the appropriate writing conventions.

## **10. COMPUTER ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING (CALL) AND MULTIMEDIA**

No change can be brought without a change in the teaching methodology. Presently, our teachers seem to have exhausted with the methods and techniques of teaching. Today our teachers and students want a totally novel methodology. They want a methodology that is modern and effective. Considering these demands, the only way out seems to be the computer. Already, attempts have been made to teach language and literature through the computer. This new field is called Computer Assisted Language Learning and Computer Assisted Literature Learning. "The complexity of teaching and learning – is a systematic research. The technical details of the mouse are simple but the teaching principles are complicated; for that reason we need to consider the effectiveness of learning through multimedia. Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is a relatively new and rapidly evolving academic field that explores the role of information and communication technologies in language learning and teaching. It provides fertile ground for leading edge, innovative and highly creative thinking and scholarly work. Because of the multiplicities and changeability of the field which include the emergence of new theoretical, methodological and learning paradigms, special understanding and expertise is required to assess the quality and the depth of such scholarly activities. Today, CALL activities exploit improved technology to produce

highly interactive learning environments, providing effective support for the acquisition of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. High-speed networks allow access to authentic cultural materials and link learners to speakers around the world. When integrated into pedagogical plan, these new technologies enhance learning opportunities beyond anything previously possible. The number of variables associated with language learning and the difficulty in controlling those variables, in a second language learning setting is not so tedious, but it is to be designed according to the student's attitude. Multimedia computers have to be adopted as a better option, which are configured with the right software, permitting the students to view websites, to listen to T.V. or Radio programmes, to read the world's great literature, to facilitate person to person communication through e-mail, chat, internet phone, low-end video conferencing and many more. Voice recognition software allows the students to choose and to practice better idea of their accuracy. As most other 'classroom' activities, role play cannot replace a 'real life' situation, but it may give students an opportunity to prepare for such situations. The ideal authentic setting and context for learning activities within engineering would be to allocate students to a workplace that is relevant with respect to engineering area and to ask students to participate in some of the normal activities of the workplace.

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