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TEACHING OF ENGLISH AT ZAKIR HUSSAIN COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING &
TECHNOLOGY (ZHCET), AMU, ALIGARH : AN EVALUATIVE SURVEY

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ABSTRACT

In the wake of globalisation, English has established itself as a language for professional success. Keeping in mind the status of India in the global market, engineering graduates must be proficient in English language. English language teaching has gained the central position in engineering education in India. Engineering graduates need to be industry ready and should acquire the skills and knowledge that are necessary for workplace. There is a great demand for talented Engineers in domestic as well as in multinational companies but they require a high level of communication skills. This paper explores whether English course prescribed at ZHCET are suitable for engineering students. It also suggests some remedial measures to make English language teaching and learning more effective for engineering students and to make them ready for the job market.

Key words: Professional Success, Engineering education, Industry ready, Communication skills, Job market, English Language Teaching.

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INTRODUCTION

In this age of globalisation, English has gained the status of an international language and it has become the predominant language of communication. Today's engineers are not confined only to the laboratory or going to work as an individual but as a team. They need to use English language in the larger context because they have to co-operate with their colleague from different countries and to cope with the latest and emerging trends in the field of science and technology.

Today's engineers need to be trained globally. The aim of teaching English to engineering students is to make them able to operate in the international context. There is a need to design an ELT program that can meet the requirements of domestic as well as multinational companies. Zakir Hussain College of Engineering and Technology, AMU, Aligarh shares a common standardised English syllabus for different branches of

engineering courses. Students are aware of the demand and importance of English in the professional world. We all know that the main reason of unemployability among engineering graduates is the lack of communication skills. Companies and employers often complain that the fresh engineering graduates from India lack industry specific knowledge. The present day engineering students are not giving enough importance to English language and they give preference to specialised subjects. As a result, they lack communication skills and are unable to satisfy the interviewers in job interview. The objective of this paper is to explore whether the English course for engineering students at ZHCET is suitable to meet the requirements of industries.

There are many reports and surveys that reveal the status of English communication skills among engineering graduates. Following is one of them that indicates the level of communication skills among engineering graduates of India.

“The study ‘*Employability Skills Index*’ was done by Purple Leap, a talent management institute, among 9000 students across 95 colleges in the country, including 600 students

from 15 engineering colleges in Andhra Pradesh. It tested three key employability skills-communication, problem solving and technical skills. When it comes to communication skills of engineering students, 80% of them did not meet the qualifying criteria. Only 20% of them were fine with communication skills. Proficiency in communication skills is considered more of a ‘qualifying criteria’ than selection criteria for technical roles in the industry” (The Hindu, February 11, 2009).

Neena Thacker quotes Azim Prem Ji in his unpublished PhD thesis “We are constantly in search of engineering graduates who possess good communication in English but fail to get the required number as many get screened at the HRD level itself. Opportunities are there but there are no employable engineering graduates in India. Among the engineering graduates who pass out every year not even 15 percent of them are good at English due to which they are unable to communicate the intended message” (Thacker 2015).

Objectives of the Study

This study has the following objectives:

- To analyse English syllabus prescribed at ZHCET for engineering students
- To find out the gap between the present English syllabus taught at ZHCET and the skills required by industries
- To suggest some possible remedial measures to bridge the gap and to make engineering students ready for the job market

Research Questions

This article will answer the following questions:

- Is the prescribed English syllabus at ZHCET relevant for engineering students?
- Is there any gap between the present English syllabus taught at ZHCET and the skills required by the industries?
- What could be the remedial measures to bridge the gap and make engineering students ready for the job market?

Description of Engineering English Course

The English course prescribed for engineering students at ZHCET is common for all branches of engineering course i.e., Chemical, Civil, Computer, Electrical, Electronics, Mechanical, Petro-Chemical and Architecture. English course is taught to engineering students for two years. Following is the detailed description of English course taught at ZHCET to engineering students.

EN-101 English

EN-101 English is taught in the first year of engineering course. In the second year of engineering course, language lab practice is provided to students to develop professional skills. This is the compulsory course for all students. The course emphasises on developing comprehension skills, interpretative skills and also scientific vocabulary.

'EN-101 English' has two sections. Section one covers reading and study skills including reference skills and note taking. It has two parts: The 1st part focuses on developing comprehension and interpretative skills, development of vocabulary drawn from scientific register. It has also supplementary reading for self study to develop students' independent reading ability and exposing them to the variety of English used in contemporary life through fiction or drama. Part two focuses on writing skills and includes how to express condition, causality, comparison, possibility, probability, preference, plan, invitation, request, promise, suggestion, paragraph writing, précis writing and composition of about 400 words on topics familiar to students.

Section 2 is based on grammatical items. It includes comprehension as well as written English, sentence types; declarative, imperative, question tenses. Form and function, simple present; present perfect; perfect continuous, future with temporal, conditionals, reported speech, active and passive voice, relatives, adverbs; adjectives; articles; prepositions; parasol verbs. It has also some phonetic parts i.e., consonants, vowels, word stress and sentence stress.

The total number of the lectures allotted for this course are 31 including lectures, tutorials and practical. It carries four credit and has total 100 marks. Marks are distributed into three examination programmes, 1. course work, it carries 15% marks. 2. Mid-semester, it carries 25% marks. 3. End-semester exam, it carries 60%.

To test comprehension, interpretative and vocabulary development, comprehension questions, summary type as well as short answer type and questions on vocabulary are set in the examination.

Analysis of EN-101 English

English taught for general purposes is different from the English taught for specific purposes. Engineering students' English should deal with English for Specific Purposes (ESP) or English for Science and Technology (EST). ESP/EST can be more effective to develop the communication skills of engineering students. 'EN-101 English' focuses more on English for General Purposes (EGP) and less on English for Specific Purposes (ESP). A teacher of engineering English should be very much aware of ESP. An ESP practitioner has multiple roles. Dudley-Evan and Maggie Jo (1998) elucidate different roles of ESP practitioners. They mention that an ESP practitioner has five key roles: teacher, course designer and materials provider, collaborator, researcher and evaluator.

Owing to the poor English course, a large number of engineering graduates are not fit for the job market. It is difficult to say that such kind of English syllabus can make technical students able to work in the global market. For success in the professional world at least one should be proficient in communication, should know how to work in a team and should also be a good decision maker. Such kind of skills can be expected from technical English syllabus only. Riemer (2002) cites a report published from Melbourne, Australia. Stating that now employers search engineering graduates with skills beyond the standard paper degree and demand the excellent level of skills in communication, decision making and team work.

EN-101 English has included a section on writing. But the topics addressed in this section are not geared towards the skills that are required at workplaces for engineering students. There are many technical documents and proposals that are necessary to learn for technical students. An engineering English syllabus should emphasise the skills that are expected by industries and the global market. Problem solving, communications, interpersonal skills, critical and independent thinking should be infused into engineering English course. Mahajan (2015) emphasises importance of business proposals in a professional life. He points out the need of writing skills at workplace with grammatically correctness, clarity, proper sentence construction, coherence between sentences, logicity and completeness all these factors are important while writing business reports, proposals, letters, notices, e-mails and research papers etc.

EZ-291 Communication Skills Lab

This is the language lab course taught in the second year (III & IV semester) of all branches of engineering course. It is a compulsory course for all engineering students. It has total 100 marks (60 marks for internal and 40 marks for external assessment). In the internal assessment, students are assigned by the

instructor to make PPT, GD and to do role plays and work also on the assignments and are evaluated on the basis of their performance. In external evaluation, the external examiner is invited to assess their oral proficiency in English language. It has no written prescribed syllabus. It is an open-ended and activity based course in which students are made to do different activities/tasks etc. The researcher came to know about the activities and tasks taught in language lab after having discussions with the language lab instructor. The activities used for language lab are role play, group discussions, debate, extempore, oral presentations, interviews, skit, practice on grammar, pronunciation and listening, speaking, reading and writing through different softwares installed in the lab computers.

Analysis of EZ-291 Communication Skills Lab

The role of a language lab cannot be ignored in the development of language skills. It has been always helpful to make teaching and learning more interesting and meaningful. ZHCET has an well equipped language lab for engineering students. A separate instructor for practising language skills in the lab is appointed. It has no written syllabus for language lab. We all know the importance of the syllabus. Syllabus plays the role of a guide for both teachers and students. So there is a need of a well designed syllabus that can fulfil the needs of students. The latest technological devices and softwares that can be helpful in teaching and learning of English language should be available in the language lab. Nowadays a lot of discussions, seminars, meetings and interviews are being held via Webinar and Skype. Language lab can be a very useful resource to train the students in such types of skills. There are a large number of resources available online that can enhance English communication skills of engineering students. Different kind of videos on interviews, presentations, discussions, English speaking etc. may be shown them to make them aware of the different types of English used in different countries. Class discussions, famous speeches, learning oral communication, experimental methods will be useful to develop the communication skills of engineering students.

Remedial Measures to make Engineering English Course more effective

Effective communication skills are needed for engineering students in the present globalised world. It is very difficult for an engineering graduate to get placed in domestic or multinational companies without having a good command over English language. Following are some remedial measures that may make engineering English course more effective and engineering graduates ready for the job market:

- English for Specific Purposes (ESP) will be more effective to enhance the communication skills of engineering students.
- Syllabus should be designed according to the needs of engineering students.
- Syllabus designers should consult with companies' HRs and TPO about the skills required by industries while designing the syllabus.
- Different kind of situations and roles can be assigned to engineering students to engage them in technical and non-technical communication.
- The latest technology and CALL resources should be utilised for teaching and learning of English.
- English teachers should review and update their teaching methodologies in view of the rapid advances in communication technology.
- English teachers should motivate engineering students towards learning English. The relevance of English language in their career must be very clear.
- The tasks and activities assigned by the teachers should be interesting. So students can enjoy doing and develop their interest.
- Testing and evaluation should be effective for English class. Direct and indirect feedback should be provided to students. It is also a good idea to ask students for self-assessment of their work and to identify their strengths and weaknesses in their communication skills.
- Colleges/universities should make engineering students aware of the skills required by industries.

- The textbooks that can deal with technical subjects should be prescribed for the development of comprehension skills of engineering students.
- Soft skills should be incorporated into engineering English syllabus.
- Needs analysis should be conducted at the beginning of each semester.

Conclusion

Good command over English language is necessary for success in the professional world. Training in communication skills as well as in soft skills is equally important for engineering students. A job of an English teacher is not only lecturing in the class but also to make the students ready for the job market. English for Science and Technology (EST) teacher should always keep in mind that the objectives of teaching English to engineering students is to make them operate in the international context. Skills that are used at workplaces should always be emphasised. College authorities, English teachers and syllabus designers should work collectively to make engineering English syllabus more effective and useful for engineering students.

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