RESEARCH ARTICLE

EMPHASIS ON LANGUAGE LEARNING AMONG THE ENGINEERING STUDENTS IN THE KHAMMAM DISRICT, TELANGANA

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ABSTRACT

English is an international language. English language has become the lingua-franca of the international business, transport, banking, computer, IT, medicine, engineering etc., Engineering is the biggest field of study which has world wide recognition. It is the medium that significantly affects engineering students in academic and professional life. Majority of the engineering students are from rural areas and most of them come from regional language medium schools thus making it difficult to communicate. The study attempts to bring awareness among the engineering students and the need for communication skills in the competitive and computerized world in the global market.

Keywords: Communication skills, Language learning, Engineering, ELCS Lab

Introduction

English is an international language. There has been a paradigm shift in the importance of English today in the computerized and competitive market today. The spread of British Empire introduced English in India, Africa, South Asia, Australia, New Zealand and America. It intruded into these countries as the language of business, travel and exploration and then became the sole medium of instruction. It started its journey as a link language, lingua-franca and then a killer language. Currently, it is the official language of international business, commerce, air traffic control, shipping, United Nations Diplomacy, world banking, science and technology, academic research, space travel and global computing. English is the medium of education, publishing and international negotiation. It is perhaps the most flexible of all languages. Therefore, people belonging to different parts of the world widely use English. As the world is developing in the field of science and technology, the need for communicating and making business with different countries has become immanent. Scientific inventions, science and technology in most powerful European countries such as Germany, France, and Russia cannot reach India through any language other than English. Therefore, development of IT, a scientific invention in Germany, China or Russia will have become outdated and obsolete by the time it reaches Indian scientists through translation. Education has multiplied the role of English language, because universities worldwide often use English as the common mode of learning and communication. English is an international language of the Constitution, the Supreme Court, the High Court, and official departments. English has spread far and wide and is firmly rooted in the soil of India. Thus, English is a link language and its role is dominant now. Communication is easy with one another with the global world with the help of English. It will get you anywhere in the globe. If you master English, you are competent in the global market or else you will be like a fish out of the water. Hence, engineers need to and have to communicate in English.

English language has become the current lingua-franca of the international business, technology, aviation, diplomacy, transport, banking, computer, IT, medicine, engineering and tourism.About one fifth of people all over the world know more or less about English.It is spoken by 1.8 billion people in the world and the number is still rapidly increasing. Almost every single university in the world are conducting social and scientific studies in English. Total 60% of radio programs across the globe are broadcasting in English ,more than 70% of the content or address of mailing letters are written in English. English plays a mediating role in the world. Most people in the world agree with what Alexander V.Sandoval claims in his essay, 'The Importance of English' on www.eagleforum.com, "English is becoming the world's language of the 21st century. Most of the world's population, about 70% speak English or know it .And more than 80%of all stored information in the world is written in English or translated into it. Foreign language skills, and in particular the English are a good tool at work place, school, on vacation, when building a career or promote one's own business. People who speak fluent English will not get lost in the world but would lead the world.

Engineering is the biggest field of study in the world. First, English is a tool/medium that significantly affects engineering students in academic and professional life. While most of the theories in engineering are taught in English, it requires having good English communication competence. In academic life, engineering students have to deal with the countless English lectures, tutorials, labs, project reports and papers. Most engineering professors in various universities are also conducting lectures in English. The most convenient source of information i.e. Internet provides most of the information in English. During the job seeking process in interviews, group discussions, it is but of greater importance to achieve mastery in English fluency, accuracy and proficiency. After securing the job they are required to work in groups since their task seldom be solved by an individual. Therefore, being an engineer requires co-operating and communicating with different people from different parts of the world. English is used as the working language on large extent. In order to co-ordinate with the colleagues, engineers have to speak fluent English. So, English communication competence plays an important role in the academic life and career of engineering students.

Setting of the Study

The present study was carried out in the engineering colleges at Khammam District, Telangana. The setting is located at semi urban set up. The college is affiliated to the Osmania University, Hyderabad. The college is co-educational and have different streams of engineering.

Description of Research Tools

As part of the data collection, three research tools were administered to both the students and the teachers. The three research tools that were administered were questionnaire, classroom observation and structured interviews.

Now, let us discuss each of these tools in detail.

As mentioned earlier, the following tools were used for data collection:
a. Questionnaires
b. Classroom Observation
c. Structured Interviews

Types of Research Tools and their Purpose

Type of Research Tools	Purpose
1. Questionnaires for teachers and students	-to know about attitudes and opinions towards English, materials used in the classroom and elicit required information about oral communication skills.
2. Classroom observation	-to get the actual information related to classroom situation.

3. Structured interviews with students and teachers	-to gain specific data pertaining to learners' culture-based materials from learners and teachers which were used for developing oral communication skills

Period of data collection

The data collection was conducted for six months to collect the require data through research tools such as questionnaire, classroom observation, and structured interviews with the engineering students and teachers. Four weeks were spent on collecting data through questionnaire and classroom observations. Five weeks were spent for collecting questionnaires and second phase of classroom observation. Fifty days were spent for structured interviews with the engineering students and teachers.

Students who are from regional medium background cannot express themselves meaningfully in the target language, and they feel out of place and inferior in many academic and formal situations though they have sound subject knowledge and expertise. Therefore, there is an imminent need to develop the proficiency skills of engineering students.

The present study attempts to identify the language needs of the engineering students and propose ways and means to develop communication skills in English. The following objectives have been set to achieve.

- The study attempts to identify the language needs of the engineering students particularly those coming from rural background

 The study attempts to bring awareness among the engineering students and the need for communication skills in the competitive and computerized world in the global market

Hypothesis

- It assumed that engineering students coming from rural background lack communication skills in English.
- Students coming from rural back lack basics in communication skills

Problems faced by Engineering Students from the Rural Areas

 Majority of the engineering students are from rural areas and most of them come from regional language medium schools. Undoubtedly, as they enter the technical education, engineering colleges, they do acquire technical knowledge and intelligence i.e. necessary qualification for higher education and bright future. Nevertheless, at every occupation and career English becomes an obstacle in his or her way of career. Therefore, it is significant to examine the reasons, which make English as a souring grape for rural students even today in this modern era.

 In the Indian context, an engineering student's success in the on-campus recruitment is mainly based on their demonstration of communication skills apart from subject knowledge. According to NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Services Company) president Karnik, only 25 percent of technical graduates are suitable for employment in the outsourcing industry because of their lack of abilities to speak or write well in English. (Karnik, 2007 as cited in P'Rayan 2008:1). Most students are not 'industry ready' because they lack communication skills. (Infosys, 2008).

 Although theoretical knowledge of engineering along with technical competency is what is sought and taught in the Engineering and technical education, it appears that this should be coupled with communication skills. Engineering students fairly do well in their core subjects but when it comes communicating in English, they utterly fail. There have been innumerable reasons for it. Most of them come from rural background. The rural area engineering students lack the exposure to the English communication in their families, society as well as in the colleges. As a result, even the most meritorious and intelligent students fail to achieve success during personal interviews due to lack of communication skills, soft skills, interpersonal skills and personality

development. During academics also lack of confidence of being unable to communicate in English leads to feeling of inferiority complex, as a result students keep themselves lonely and isolated.

English for Science and Technology

It aims to provide learners with the language basis to access and understand materials on Science and Technology. The EST Curriculum enables learners to:

- Obtain information by reading and understanding different text types in Science and Technology in English.
- Obtain information by listening to and viewing texts on Science and Technology in English.
- Access and understand information on the internet and other Electronic media.
- Present Information Science and Technology in an appropriate level in Written and Spoken English.
- Think critically and give points of view on issues pertaining to Science and Technology.

Need for English Course with Emphasis on Communication Skills

The first-year Engineering English course has not been effective as students are not trained in listening and speaking skills and their final examinations assess only their reading and writing skills. An engineering education is relevant for the graduate if it meets the needs of the industry. Even though English is the medium of instruction in the field of professional education, the language proficiency is far from satisfactory. They have acquired some rules of language and many manage to convey their ideas often in faulty English. Even though they are good at English, their stage fear and poor body language make them outside from the companies. Some people may be good at communicating through writing but they may have problems in speaking in front of an audience. Some may be good at interpersonal communication, but may not feel comfortable in making presentations. In this context, it was decided that students should be trained in the skills which recruiters look for in undergraduate engineering students who prepare for on-campus recruitment. This makes the stakeholders, conceive 'English Language Communication Skills Lab'.

English Language Communication Skills Lab in Elevating Communication Skills

An English language Communication Skills Lab (ELCS Lab) is a facility where a student can learn a language with the help and guidance of a teacher through a system, to improve his/her speaking and listening capacity. The Language Lab can receive inputs from recorded tapes, audios and videos, CDs, etc. A proficient teacher in the English language is the only external requirement to monitor the students during the learning process. Students will automatically receive pre-recorded lessons from the master source through the teacher while logging in and can use these lessons for practice. Students can be subdivided into small groups to either listen and respond to the instructor's program material or interact with each other in conversational exercises. remote monitoring facility, which enables the teacher to monitor all a master control.

Role of English Language Teachers in English Communication Lab

Some years ago, the role of an English teacher is to teach English lessons and explain the lessons in regional language. However, in the modern age, English language teachers are expected to play different roles:

- As an English teacher, he/she has to teach the lessons and grammar with full of examples.
- As a communication skills consultant, English teacher works out and plans for improvement of students communication skills by introducing new activities like group discussion, debates, situational dialogues or other activities.
- As a soft skills trainer, he must train the students to empower them.

Though, the teachers today have had students who are quite experienced with computers, they have also had some students who had seldom used a computer; lacked basic knowledge such as how to operate a mouse or open a folder; and lacked the vocabulary, reading, and listening skills to follow instructions for using the computer. Most of the students have the communication problem. Sometimes they do not have adequate language proficiency. Communication and soft skills and ability to learn on their own are very important for

those who join the company. Teachers of English have a responsibility to help the students in overcoming their fears about communicating and to assist students in developing more positive perceptions of communication activities.

Types of Communication Skills

According to Webster's Dictionary, the *definition of communication* is "the sending, giving, or exchanging information and ideas," expressed both verbally and non-verbally.
Communication can hurt or it can provide comfort. We use both verbal and non-verbal communication on a daily basis, so it's important to know how to get the most out of our communication.

Let's look at three of the most important types of communication skills.

I. Interpersonal Communication Skills

Interpersonal skills are critical to good communication.

Let's have a look at some great tips for better interpersonal communication skills.

i. First Listen
Communication is always two way. How well you get your message across depends a great deal, on how well you understand the other party.

ii. Questions
Asking questions is a good way to show your interest in the other party.

iii. Be Interested
Take a real interest in what the other party(s) is communicating. People are attracted to those that show an interest in them, and will watch more closely what they are wearing.

iv. Relax
Body language says a lot, and bad body language sends the wrong message, so relax, stop twirling your hair, and stop fidgeting.

v. Smile
Use eye contact and smile for a positive response.

vi. Different Points of View
If the other party has different point of view than you, ask questions to find out why their point of view differs. The more you understand the better your communication.

vii. Be Enthusiastic
When you are speaking show the appropriate enthusiasm in your tone, and when you are listening show the appropriate enthusiasm in your body language.

viii. Be Assertive
Value the other party's input, don't be pushy, but be assertive. There's a balance to be found.

II. Business Communication Skills

Communication is important in all aspects of business from management down through the chain of command. Proper training in business communication can play an integral role in improving company moral, higher production, increased sales, and improved customer satisfaction.

Communication training in the workplace

Commonly companies will spend significant money on communication training in workplace.

This training includes:

i. Communication Methods
Today's business environment provides a number of communication methods including in person, presentation chat, email, telephone, texts, video-conferencing, etc.
Determine the best method of communication and then move forward with that choice.

ii.   Understand the Audience
Quality business communication requires you to understand the audience and this is done by listening to both the verbal and non-verbal communication. It's also important to have an idea of the education level or training of the person you are communicating with to ensure appropriate communication.

iii.   Avoid Filters
An important communication skill is learning to avoid filters. For example, when communication travels through lines of communication many times information is added or omitted, and this can change the original message's intent.

III. Written Communication Skills

Along with verbal communication, written communication is also important and having the right written communication skills can make your message more effective.

What Type of Written Communication?
There are all kinds of written communication – letters, emails, memos, and newsletters to name just a few. Effective written communication begins with the right format.

Make the Communication's Purpose Clear
Clarity is key in your written communication.
For example, "I am writing to inform you of my interest in…"

Proper Grammar
Communication with poor grammar and spelling errors is never acceptable.

Tone
Your correspondence's tone goes a long way to making your communication effective. Match your tone appropriately to the recipient(s). An email from a boss to a worker is going to have a far different tone than a proposal to provide services.

The types of communication skills include verbal, non-verbal, and written. Make sure you are the best you can be in all areas of communication.

"Your type of communication skills is a bit like your type of personality – easy to describe but not so easy to duplicate."

VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Communication is a transfer of meaning from one person or group to another. It focuses on the nature of meaning and ways to maintain the integrity of meaning through the process of dissemination and reception of a message.

Verbal Communication

All forms of communication can be categorized as either verbal or nonverbal. In turn, both verbal and nonverbal communication can be subdivided into either vocal or non-vocal.

Much of the communication that takes place between people is verbal; that is, it is based on language.

- Verbal communication of the vocal category includes spoken language.
- Non-vocal verbal communication involves written communication as well as communication that is transmitted through sign language, finger spelling, Braille, or other similar alternatives to verbal language.

Communication has been called the transfer of meaning from one mind to another. Communication is a sharing of meaning through the transmission of information via mutually understood signs.

Because meanings exist in the human mind, they cannot be shared or communicated except through some external vehicle. The human body is capable of making sounds and movements which in turn can create a system of vehicles for sharing inner meanings and ideas with others. In general terms, such elements that codify meaning are called signs. The study of such signs is called semiotics.

Human communication is speech, a natural capability but one that requires learning in a cultural context to make it mutually understandable with others. During the course of human social interaction, people have found it useful to add to their inventory of vehicles to communicate. Particularly, they have tried to extend the possibility of communication beyond the limits of speech (which is restricted to words uttered and heard in the here and now; that is, with the hearer and listener in the same place at the same time). The way to communicate beyond speech is to communicate through signs.

- **Signs** are nonverbal units of expression. A natural sign is a physical indicator, such as smoke as an indication of the presence of fire. Signs also are called signals or cues. Semiotics identifies three types of signs: symbols, indices and icons.
- **A symbol** stands in place of an object. It may be a physical object such as a flag standing for patriotism and national pride, a cross with strong religious meaning for Christians, even the Nike swoosh or the McDonald's arches. Or it may be a word or phrase, such as the "Allaho Akbar" printed in Arabic on flags or head bands. Symbols often have a metaphorical quality, such as the symbol of water as a sign of life or purity, as in the ritual washing in religious ceremonies.

Likewise, people sometimes serve as symbolic signs, such as Adolph Hitler being considered as a face of hatred, Mother Teresa as a face of compassion, or Nelson Mandela or Malcolm X as faces of human struggle for dignity.

- **An index** points to something beyond itself. It is an indicator, such as words like "big" and arrows. An index also is sometimes called a natural sign because the relationship between the word and what it signifies is natural, such as smoke being an indexical sign of fire.
- **An icon** is a representation of an object that produces a mental image of the object represented.

For example, the word tree, arbre and ki evoke a mental image only if you understand English, French and Japanese respectively. But the picture of a tree conjures up "tree" in the brain regardless of language ability. For this reason, icons often are used by computers and by the transportation and travel industry where customers with many different language backgrounds can nevertheless understand restroom icons.

Nonverbal Communication

While verbal communication is much studied and is the focus of much applied attention in areas ranging from journalism to governance to entertainment, the fact is that human beings communicate more through nonverbal means. Some estimates are that so-called body language accounts for 65, 70, even 90 percent of human communication. Using the 70-percent figure for body language, the voice accounts for another 20 percent or so, and specific words only about 10 percent. Research conclusions may vary a bit, but the consensus is clear: Nonverbal communication is hugely important in human interaction.

Nonverbal communication also is bound to culture. In particular, there are differences among cultures and nationalities about the relative value of speech versus silence, the relative value of talk versus action, the social role of small talk or gossip, and the role of animation, rhyme and exaggeration in speech. Because of these differences, the study of verbal and nonverbal communication always must be done within a social or cultural context.

As noted above, nonverbal communication may be vocal (focusing on vocal characteristics such as pitch, rate, and so on) or non-vocal (focusing on body language, environment, attire and the like).

Some linguists identify an aspect of nonverbal communication called paralanguage. This refers to a range of non-linguistic elements of speech, such as facial expressions, gestures, the use of time and space, and

so on. However, most linguists adhere to stricter categorization. Commonly, the study of nonverbal communication is divided into several specific categories.

- **Kinesics** (simplistically called body language) deals with physical movement, sometimes called affective displays. This study applies traditional linguistic principles to the body as a whole or to specific parts, particularly the face, hands and arms. It also deals with posture in standing and sitting, as well as with eye and facial expressions, such as the arching of eyebrows or rolling of the eyes. Kinesics vary culturally. For example, a person of Mediterranean culture may use extensive hand movements and body gestures as an expression of anger, whereas a Japanese person may be apparently less excited, but perhaps no less angry. Kinesics also includes the use of smiling, frowning, giggling and so on, which also differs by culture. While universally, smiling reveals happiness, in some cultures it also is used to mask sadness or to hide embarrassment.

  Kinesics generally refers not to sign language that relies on gestures and expressions in a grammatical context as an alternative to spoken language. Some emblems seem to be universal, while others are cultural, with different interpretations in various cultures, or perhaps with different uses by men and women. An example of a universal emblem is the uplifted shoulders and upturned hands that indicate "I don't know" virtually everywhere in the world. An example of a culture-bound emblem is the encircled thumb and forefinger. That gesture can be interpreted as worthless in France, money in Japan, OK in the United States, a curse in Arab cultures, and an obscenity in Germany, Brazil and Australia.

- **Occulesics** is closely related to kinesics. Occulesics deals with eye behaviour as an element of communication. Some aspects of occulesics deal with a static or fixed gaze versus dynamic eye movement. This so-called eye contact is the subject of much interpretation by the observer, making it difficult to predict its exact communication impact. In the West, direct eye contact (looking into the eyes of the other person) is common about 40 per cent of the time while talking and 70 per cent while listening. In Japan, it is more common to look at the throat of the other person. In China and Indonesia, the practice is to lower the eyes because direct eye contact is considered bad manners, and in Hispanic culture direct eye contact is a form of challenge and disrespect. In Arab culture, it is common for both speakers and listeners to look directly into each others' eyes for long periods of time, indicating keen interest in the conversation.

- **Proxemics** involves the social use of space in a communication situation. One aspect of this is the closeness between and among people when they speak, and the significant role that culture plays in this. Distance is generally described on a continuum from intimate space (0-18 inches) to personal space or informal distance (18 inches to 4 feet) to social space or formal distance (4- 12 feet), and public space or distance (beyond 12 feet). Proxemics also deals with the effective use of space in social settings, such as businesses and homes, ranging and the arrangement of space to encourage or inhibit communication.

- **Haptics** focuses on touching as an element of communication, indicating both the type of touch as well as its frequency and intensity. Like many other elements of nonverbal communication, haptics is very much a function of culture. It has been noted, for example, that Mediterranean, Middle Eastern and Latin American cultures employ much social touching in conversation, including embraces and hand-holding; these are called high-contact (or high-touch) cultures. In moderate-touch cultures such as North America and Northern Europe, touching is used only occasionally, such as in handshakes and sporadic shoulder touching or back slapping. Even within a culture, haptics vary. For example, handshakes vary in length and strength of grip depending on the actual (or hoped for) degree of intimacy between the two people shaking hands.

- **Vocalics** (also called paralanguage) deals with vocal cues, more accurately referred to as the non-phonemic qualities of language. These include accent, loudness, tempo, pitch, cadence, rate of speech, nasality and tone, insofar as these convey meaning. Vocalics is sometimes subdivided into several categories. Vocal characterizers include laughing, crying, yawning, and so on. These can be associated with culture, such as the different ways various cultures accept the practice of belching.

Vocal qualifiers such as volume, pitch, rhythm and tempo also are associated with cultural distinctions. In Arab culture, for example, speaking loudly connotes sincerity, whereas in North America it often is interpreted as aggressive. Vocal segregates (sounds such as mmmm, uh-huh, oooo) likewise also differ among various cultures. Vocal rate deals with the speed at which people talk, another factor that offers various interpretations.

- **Chronemics** deals with the use of time as an element of communication. Formal time is measured in minutes, hours, days, and so on. Informal time is measured relative to seasons, social customs, lunar cycles, etc. Chronemics involves specifics such as punctuality (which can be monochronic or M-time and polychronic or P-time) along with patterns of dominance or deference within a communication situations. For example, studies show that men are more likely than women to dominate a conversation and interrupt another speaker. Chronemics also deals with time from the standpoint of social settings, such as the likelihood among Americans of arriving early for business meetings but being "fashionably late" for social activities, while in Latin American and Arab culture, business people often arrive at a time Westerns would consider "late," taking business meetings as occasions for hospitality and socializing. Chronemics also considers the use of monochronemics (doing one thing at a time, emphasis on schedules and promptness, getting to the point quickly) versus polychronemics (doing several things at a time, emphasis on people and the whole of a relationship).

- **Appearance** deals with the communication role played by a person's look or physical appearance (as compared with physical gestures associated with kinesics). It deals with physical aspects of body shape, hair color and skin tone, as well as grooming, dress (both clothing and jewellery) and use of appearance enhancements such as body piercings, brandings and tattoos. Consider, for example, how attire is an essential part of nonvocal communication among areas influenced by Arab culture. Among North and Western Africans, public speakers prefer long robes and big sleeves so that when they raise their hands, extra sleeve cloth slips through the arms and puffs up their shoulder, making them look bigger and more elegant. The Arab and North African head covering with different bands of cloth and the color of the robes (white in daytime, dark at night) are more than fashion statements.

- **Environment** involves the communicative value of the physical space, such as room size, colour, accessibility and location. Business people, for example, assume significant meaning about desk size, offices with (or without) windows, and so on. Generally it is assumed that the most important people in a company occupy the uppermost floor in a building.

- **Artifacts** similarly deals with the communicative aspect of apparent objects visible in the room – art, possessions and so on – in that these may be personal, indicative of status, and/or revealing of lifestyle. In some societies, much meaning is presumed by one's choice of automobile. Artifacts almost always have cultural significance. For example, in many Western countries, pets have great emotional significance; among many Arabs, rugs are prestigious.

- **Olfactics** is an aspect of nonverbal communication dealing with smells. Though not widely studied from a communication perspective, olfactics might include the use of perfumes and spices. It is associated with proxemics in that, the closer people are in communication, the more likely that the smell will be relevant. In some high-contact cultures such as Samoan or Arab, it is customary to get close enough in conversation to smell the other person. Indeed, Arabs and religious Muslims are known for using perfumes, according to the teaching the Prophet that it is a charity to smell nice for others.

- **Synchrony** focuses on the amount of coordination in people's behavior when their nonverbal cues are in sync with one another. Some examples include mirroring, mimicry, or behavioural meshing.

Outcome of the Study:

With the emphasis on language skills and the use of English in Language labs, there has been considerable changes in the Engineering students of the Khammam District. The following are some of the outcomes of the study.

- The results of the study reveal that the engineering students, particularly students from rural background lack communication skills in English.
- The students realised that if special focus was given to them during their B. Tech. course by giving them extra time and input they will improve their LSRW skills.
- From the results, it is evident that when special attention and materials are provided, engineering students coming from regional medium and rural background can improve their communication skills better and faster, thus helping them for better job opportunities

Conclusion:

An Engineering Education is relevant for the graduate only if it meets the needs of the industry. Even though English is the medium of instruction in the field of professional education, their language proficiency is far from satisfactory. Even though they are good at English, their stage fear and poor body language,wich can be attributed to their rural background, makes them unfit to face the competitive world. However with special interest and practice the language skills of the students can be enhanced thus making them corporate ready.

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