

Communicative Approach, a Method to Improve Language Proficiency of Engineering Graduates

D. Vijaya Lakshmi*¹, Ch. Rupa Jhansi Rani²

¹Vishnu Institute of Technology, Bhimavaram, A.P, India

²SRKR Engg. College, Bhimavaram, A.P, India

*Corresponding author: E-Mail: vijayalakshmi.d@vishnu.edu.in

ABSTRACT

In ancient days, technical education is enjoyed by a few Indians who studied in foreign universities. But currently in an Indian context, it is a part and parcel of everybody's life. Engineering education becomes quiet common to the students of present scenario. Students are opting for it from increasingly diverse backgrounds. So, this research paper focuses on the communicative approach, a method to improve the language proficiency of engineering graduates. Through integrated skill development methodology, students develop the speech habits, functional language, skills four fold, linguistic skills and so on, has to be adopted with focus on individual language skills as per the given exercise/task in their prescribed text-book. In the current climate of psychological, economical and sociological changes, the trend is influenced by exponential technology growth and explosive knowledge creation. So the need to infuse and modify changes in the English language teaching is a necessary step in the up gradation and updation of existing engineering curriculum.

KEY WORDS: Engineering, Material, Challenge, Activities, Tasks, Communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

In ancient days, technical education is enjoyed by a few Indians who studied in foreign universities. But currently in an Indian context, it is a part and parcel of everybody's life.

Engineering education becomes quite common to the students of present scenario. Students are opting for it from increasingly diverse backgrounds. The nature of the student communities has been changed from year to year, so the nature of engineering learning and teaching requires insightful changes. Teaching to the blended group of students with a wide range of abilities in English always presents a considerable challenge to the English teaching fraternity. Teaching methodology and designing of material will pave the way for countering this challenge by providing special support and guidance to the average students. Task-based and skill-oriented material is useful for the students of the diverse situations. The relevance of the range of language is taken care in preparing the content for the students of engineering and technology. Students' practice has to be focused on the communicative way as in the future, it will be useful for different purposes. Improvement of the communicative capabilities of a student will be possible with encouragement and guidance of the teacher.

2. METHODS & MATERIALS

Methods of Student Centric Communicative Approach: Since the beginning of the last century, the phenomenon of the teaching methodologies has been drastically changing. At present, the quest for better methods of teaching becomes a preoccupation of the teachers. 20th century teachers and linguists thought that the old traditional lecture method, where the teacher is the centre of the class, should be replaced with some different method. The teacher teaches whilst the students listen passively (most of the times) with varying degrees of attention. Thus, the skills of the teacher only will be honed for an extended period of time rather than the student. It was therefore determined that it would be more rewarding and worthwhile for all the students if the methodology were changed to a student centric method, where the teacher assumed to be the facilitator, guide and motivator.

Teacher's preparation is given priority in the lecture method, but alongside the preparation, to motivate the students, teacher's feedback on their performance will promote active learning. So the obligation of the teacher is not merely assessing the students' language but to promote their learning. This is best done by changing the focus to steering the learning process through a series of carefully designed tasks or activities. Therefore, this student centric method is entirely appropriate and acceptable that teachers use an activity-based approach in the English classroom to develop the proficiency of engineering graduates. Thus, methodology is explained:

- In this student centric class where the students are to read the texts to get a comprehensive idea of the given text on their own with the help of the teacher or the peer group.
- Through integrated skill development methodology, students develop the speech habits, functional language, skills four fold, linguistic skills and so on, has to be adopted with focus on individual language skills as per the given exercise/task in their prescribed text-book.
- The exercises in the textbook at the end of each unit should be completed by the students only and the teacher's role is the facilitator and is permitted as per the complexity of the exercise.
- The teacher is instructed to use authentic supplementary material wherever necessary and also prepare activities as per the requirement.

- The teacher has to focus on student centred method but is permitted to use lecture method when a completely new concept is to be taught in the class.

Developing Speech Habits:

Some of the significant events for speaking are:

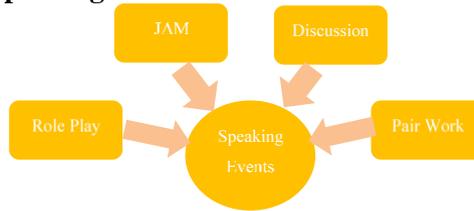


Figure.1. Speaking Events

Figure.1, explains Just a Minute sessions, Role Plays, Discussions and Oral Pair-Work exercise should be made dynamic by the teacher for motivating each student to participate in the given task. The teacher must not worry about the noise level in the classroom; indeed, this may signifies the degree of contribution, participation and involvement by the students in the given task. This method develops the speech habits of the students. Teacher’s monitoring, motivation, facilitation helps the student to be strengthened in his/her language acquisition. The below rubric is used for the assessment of the students speaking.

Table1. Rubric for feedback/evaluation

S.No.	Name of the Student	Body Language	Fluency & Audibility	Clarity In Speech	Content	Appropriate Expressions	Unity and Coherence	Total Marks
		(2)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(10)

Functional English: People use English to meet every day needs such as appointments, suggestions, filling out forms, thanking people, seeking information, following instructions and so on. Learning a functional language can allow students to communicate in an ample number of situations in their daily life. If they really learn functional English with concentration they speak confidently, independently and effectively. Pictorial representation of Functional English, which is relevant to the level of engineering graduates, is provided for comprehending quickly. The interactive functional English tools used by the teacher in the class are good instructions, elicitation, pair work and group work by giving them the real time situations to enact the given dialogues, role of plays of different celebrities and political leaders, activities and games, authentic materials and so on.

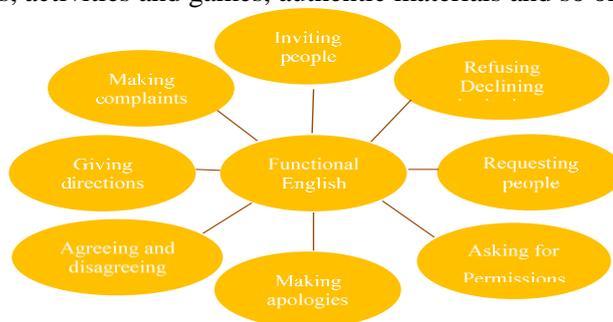


Figure.2. Functional English

Skills Fourfold: Language teachers have long used the perception of four basic language skills:



Figure.3. LSRW Skills

These four basic skills are related to each other by two parameters such as:



Figure.4. Skills Fourfold

These LSRW skills improve the language proficiency of the students in English. These skills enable the students to study and understand the prescribed lessons more effectively and make them evolve their communication skills in both formal and informal situations.

Teachers' encouragement in making the students practice listening tasks and taking notes plays a key role in student centred classes. Then, the students are motivated to give a small good presentation on their own based on the listening practice. It enables them to learn pronunciation and well-constructed structure of sentences, to comprehend the speech of people belonging to different backgrounds, to listen for general content to fill up the information and so on.

The students should be encouraged to do the reading tasks of their own. The teacher should monitor the progress and resist any temptation to explain the text. When they have completed their tasks, the teacher has to check the answers within the groups or individually. Monitoring of the teacher enables the students to understand a text through silent reading, to guess the meaning of the text, to skim and scan, to make intensive and extensive reading and so on.

The teacher has to monitor closely the writing skills as it is a daunting task. Students are encouraged to think directly rather than translating it from the original as English is a foreign language. The teacher should try to make them understand to write and rewrite drafts as much as necessary. The teacher has to create the context to learn different kinds of phrases or vocabulary for various purposes such as introducing a topic, comparing and contrasting, describing, writing conclusions and so on.

While these tasks are taking place in the class the teacher should move among the students. Slow learners should be closely monitored and more help will be given to them. By exchanging their books with their peers, they can be encouraged to correct their own books. Instead of correcting, the teacher should stimulate them to criticize, correct and edit their own work. This way can help them become independent and mature in their thinking. At first their thought process will be streamlined later their mistakes will be taken into consideration. If the teacher rigorously corrects their mistakes they will be discouraged. So allowing them to commit Himalayan blunders, gradually small mistakes will also be pointed out.

Linguistic Skills: Linguistics is interlinked with the nature of language and communication. The important areas focus under linguistics such as phonetics (the study of speech sounds), morphology (the structure of words), syntax (the structure of sentences), semantics (meaning), and pragmatics (contextual language). Graphical representation of the assessment of the linguistic skills is given (60 students with diverse backgrounds):

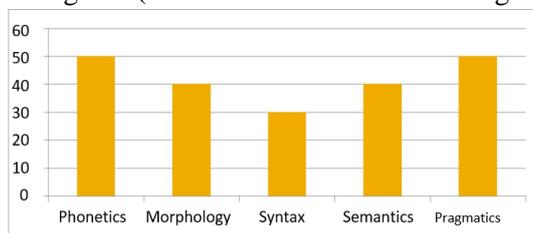


Figure.5. Bar graph on Linguistic Skills

Language focus activities can help the students to develop their awareness of the language. English teacher in engineering and technology class should provide the contexts to speak on technological topics since the students are likely to know more than the teacher. Students are very much interested to explain technical points in the class; the other students speak up if any wrong information is given. So it will be a good opportunity to the students to participate in activities when the teacher allows the students with less focus on grammatical analysis.

3. CONCLUSION

In the current climate of psychological, economical and sociological changes, the trend is influenced by the exponential technology growth and explosive knowledge creation. So the need to infuse and modify changes in the English language teaching is a necessary step in the up gradation and updation of existing engineering curriculum. The main objective is to bring it at par with other academic and competency and skills based disciplines in its rigor and content. If students are enjoyed and followed interestingly the said methods of the communicative approach, students, both fluent and less fluent should be able to improve their efficiency in using English language in their real life situations especially for their fascinated and selected professions.

REFERENCES

- Kharu P.N and Gandhi, Varinder, Communication Skills in English, Lakshmi Publications, 2009.
- Mishra, Sunita and Muralikrishna C, Communication Skills for Engineers, Pearson Education, 2009.
- Ravindran, Nalini, Functional English, Hyderabad, Orient Longman, 2004.